

# Tent Embassy Dreaming And The Body Politic: Contemporary Urban Australian Indigenous Lexicons

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This thesis is presented as a partial fulfilment to the requirements for the degree  
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## Abstract

Through a process of empirical research and creative project exegesis, this thesis examines the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy as the site of a critical cultural juncture. Employing dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster's utilisation of Michel de Certeau's *tactics* in the examination of African American acts of resistance as choreographies of protest, I explore both the functional plurality and adaptability of Australian indigenous ways of being.

Anthropologist Michael Scott's wonder theories are utilised to articulate a constancy demonstrated through acts of reenactment, to accommodate each ideological iteration from the traditional forms reinforcing belief systems, to the entrance into the consumerist market and the appearance of the trickster as larrikin performance artist existing within the state.

My creative research is a 're-imagining' of National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Agency (NAISDA) Dance College's first work, *The Embassy, A New Challenge* (1972), which celebrates the political activist as a new performative genre and a new narrative - The Tent Embassy Dreaming. As an urban indigenous contemporary dance/arts maker, my role is articulated in this cultural continuum; to keep the song alive and to address outsider concerns from both the media and academia, of the validity and authenticity of certain urban indigenous public practices.

## Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled 'Tent Embassy Dreaming and The Body Politic: Contemporary Urban Indigenous Australian Lexicons' has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to Garry Lester who said it was possible. Thank you to Kaye van Hout for instilling in me a formidable work ethic. Thank you to Julie-Anne Long for your limitless inspiration and perseverance and by making hard yakka feel like good fun.



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## Introduction

In 2015 I was commissioned to re-imagine African American choreographer Carole Johnson's *The Embassy, A New Challenge*. My dance work, *Past* (2016) was presented for the 40th Anniversary of Australia's premier indigenous training institute, National Aboriginal/Islander Dance Association Dance College (NAISDA).<sup>1</sup> The first incarnation of Johnson's dance *Embassy* was performed in 1972, inspired by the first assembly of its namesake, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. At the time of the premiere, the full length *The Embassy, A New Challenge* was described by Redfern Aboriginal activist Lester Bostock as having, '...portrayed the whole history of the Aboriginal/European Conflict and [giving a] powerful expression to the emotions of that event.' (New Dawn 1972, p. 13).

In 1972 Carole Johnson was visiting Australia as a dancer in a touring company led by African American dancer choreographer Eleo Pomare.<sup>2</sup> Johnson recognized similarities of racial inequality in the treatment of Aboriginal people, in relation to those of the black community in America. In 2015 Australia's peak body for Indigenous dance advocacy Blakdance held a national conference bringing together indigenous choreographers and presenters to acknowledge the achievements in the Indigenous dance sector to date and to strategise for the future titled the *Dana Waranara Black Dance Convergence*<sup>3</sup>. As guest speaker Johnson recalled recognizing the magnitude of her participation at the Tent Embassy, whereupon fellow activist Steve Mann stated:

We knew we had dance covered because we had the Torres Strait Islander tradition and Aboriginal dance [is] coming back and now the urban people [have] a way of dancing that [is] meaningful as well. (Johnson in Van Hout 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> In 1976 Carole Johnson went on to become co-founder of Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme (AISDS), the first Aboriginal Dance College, which became what is now known as NAISDA Dance College.

<sup>2</sup> Eleo Pomare was an activist, known for his political modern dance productions, including organization of the Jazz Dance-mobile, travelling stage dedicated to bringing dance to the people of New York City.

<sup>3</sup> The forum was held at the Judith Wright Centre in Brisbane 'with a focus on dance as the pursuit of a way of being in the world, and arts practices as an intrinsic extension of a life practice.' (Van Hout RT 2016).

As an urban Indigenous contemporary dance/arts maker I see my role as an intrinsic part of the Aboriginal cultural continuum, directly linked and affected by the actions of early political leaders such as Carole Johnson along with Aboriginal activists Gary Foley, Bob Maza, Mum Shirl, Pat Eatock, Chicka Dixon, Paul and Isobel Coe and many others. I acknowledge that I have benefited from the improved living standards that these activists created through a movement that effected social and organisational change for Indigenous Australians. Furthermore, to make their voices heard, they integrated innovative performative modes and methodologies, and established a precedent for my own creative practice.

Forty years later, despite my professional work being a living example of the legacy of those Indigenous activists of the 1970s, I am often besieged by speculation surrounding the authenticity and validity of my art and that of my contemporary urban Indigenous peers. In effect, this can isolate our demographic from the wider indigenous community.<sup>4</sup> This situation precipitates the following questions, which form the foundation of this thesis:

- Why is the validity and authenticity of urban Indigenous cultural practices and products so highly contested?
- Can/how do urban contemporary Indigenous people attain access and agency to the Dreaming?

In considering these questions, I note that there are different motivating factors for the present scrutiny from those within the community, than by those who contest Aboriginal art and cultural practice outside of the Indigenous community.<sup>5</sup> In order to address the above provocation I will identify what role art expression plays in Aboriginal culture.

This research project addresses the historical, ontological and artistic aspects of contemporary indigenous cultural (arts) practices, by drawing upon my experience as an

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<sup>4</sup> I initially saw the theatre as a place to explore innovations in my craft to promote an indigenous aesthetic and ethos. I now feel the pressure to make increasingly decorative art to maintain funding and gain popularity from a predominantly European gaze not fully cognisant of indigenous performative tropes and therefore prone to dismiss them. My creative process remains an ongoing negotiation of these factors.

<sup>5</sup> From within the community this scrutiny is predominantly to ensure protocols are adhered to and from those outside the Indigenous community the argument is often about financial leverage.

Indigenous arts maker, dancer and choreographer, spanning the last thirty years: beginning with my engagement as student at NAISDA; then as dancer for both pioneering Aboriginal Australian dance companies Bangarra Dance Theatre and Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT); as teacher at Aboriginal institutions Eora, Redfern Dance Theatre; and as teacher/course coordinator at NAISDA. In addition to these contexts, my collaborative work in both inter- and cross-cultural situations, both domestically and internationally, is also highly relevant.<sup>6</sup>

The principal creative component of this research project, *Past*, my response to Johnson's *Embassy*, addresses the questions of this thesis through empirical research in dialogue with theories sourced primarily from anthropological and dance fields. I locate my thesis congruently in the realm of ethnographic and embodied arts disciplines.

Limited research has been done to address questions of the body politic within Australian Indigenous arts: articulating the ideological transition from an inward affirmation of perpetuity, whose foundations are determined by a relationship to the land; to an identity prioritized through extended familial networks or kin affiliations, emerging as the outward politically charged human rights activist, as spokesperson with a focus toward overarching improvements to the shared human condition for Indigenous people through performance. My project posits the Aboriginal Tent Embassy as an essential narrative representing a unifying political platform for all Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal Tent Embassy durational event linked the 'traditional'<sup>7</sup> communities by supporting their fight for continued governance of ancestral homelands, with the urban Aboriginal fighting for the right to be

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<sup>6</sup> As I get older my interest in cross-cultural experiences becomes more pertinent to my practice. I am interested in all that we share as Indigenous Australians and all that strengthens our specificity. Most recently I have been developing networks with First Nations American artist Emily Johnson from the Yup'ik peoples of Alaska. I have observed the American First Nations heightened academic presence. There are extensive documents recording their performance as first-hand accounts whereas much of the information I have been working with from an Australian Indigenous perspective is deciphered through western analysis. At a conference in New York earlier this year (See Appendix 1: Umviquak) I was pleased and surprised to learn that the everyday Australian Aboriginal presence in a demonstrative sense, through for example *Welcome to Country* ceremonies, is more prevalent in everyday Australia than comparable ceremonies in America.

<sup>7</sup> 'Traditional' referring to an unbroken lineage with The Dreaming including the enactment of songline narratives at the original Dreaming sites.

acknowledged as part of the Australian Indigenous community. The Aboriginal Tent Embassy event exists as part of what Anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt describe as 'memory culture' to describe a continuity of culture demonstrated as initial memory acts of dislocation from tradition. These memory acts are regenerated through the same embodied reiterations as that of its original 'traditional' Dreaming narratives, which are representative of the inception of the world, its lands and the journeys undertaken by the first entities that inhabited it (Berndt 1988, p. xiv). My research aims to articulate why the Aboriginal Tent Embassy is deserving of a place in the cosmological canon.

### **Outline of the thesis**

This thesis is organised in two parts. Part One provides a description of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, including the key people involved and what has been achieved throughout this durational theatrical and ritual event. This will be followed by an historical chronology charting the Australian Aboriginal ontology or lived reality and correlating shifts in artistic manifestation pre and post colonisation. Beginning from the Dreaming, this includes the transition to displaced acts of memory and an emergent plurality of purpose in Aboriginal arts coinciding with the entrance into the market system in the lead up to the birth of the political activist.

To examine the significance of the Aboriginal protest movement as the pivotal social development which facilitated a path for urban Aboriginal people to demonstrate their diverse cultural lived realities, I will draw on American dancer and theorist, Susan Leigh Foster and her articulation of philosopher Michel de Certeau's 'tactics' of opportunity, utilised as a choreographic element in staged protests of the African American resistance movement (2003).

I will draw attention to perceptions attributed to the contemporary urban Aboriginal lived experience, enforced in and by the media and reinforced through certain anthropological perspectives. I will conduct an ethnographic analysis comparing Sydney-based anthropologist

Gillian Cowlshaw's reasons for the discrediting of certain contemporary urban Indigenous public practices, specifically Western Sydney and Greater NSW (2009) with Anthropologist of Ontology specialist, Michael Scott's wonder theories (2014). In conjunction with Mary-Jane Rubenstein's philosophical theories on wounding (2006), this will offer a hypothesis for the existence of fundamental differences between Western European and Aboriginal ideologies, beginning from the first contact between Aboriginal people and the colonising settler communities, leading to the generation of new ontological hybridities. Manifestations of ontological hybridities to be explored include those characterised by anthropologist Morten Pedersen as the 'actualisations' of a symbiotic relationship with the state, posited in his research into the resurgence of the occult in Mongolia' (2011). I will propose Pedersen's theory to counter the current debate surrounding the validity and authenticity of urban Indigenous practices supported by Aboriginal arts examples, from a variety of geographic, economic and interdisciplinary arts demographics and sites, including 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies operating within the tourist and corporate markets, to the academic as 'heritage maker' whose works are mediated through display in museums, galleries, festivals and forums.

Part One concludes with a focus on Performance theorist, André Lepecki's theory of the assignation of self. Sourced through the body's compulsion to move, Lepecki utilises Heidegger's theory describing presence as a continual process of 'oscillating to find the essent' (2004, p. 48), in discourse with Frantz Fanon's theory of the colonialist perspectivist gaze. I will employ Lepecki's methodology to initiate a similar discursive space to reflect the 'critical frictions' caused by ideological difference within the original Tent Embassy event. This section will act as an intermediary between the theoretical and creative project components by extending this discursive methodology as an inclusive component in the artistic process.



Part Two will contain an exegesis of my dance performance work *Past* and companion work: film installation *Redfern as Refuge*.<sup>8</sup> I will articulate the process of cyclic integration of the empirical research conducted in Part One, the hypothetical component of this thesis, into the creative component. I will examine how this research serves as contributing drivers of the problem based task-work processes of both interdisciplinary artworks. The resulting outcomes will become part of the empirical chain of evidence, illustrating how they might also operate as demonstrations of culture. Subsequently I will be able to test the efficacy of the Tent Embassy through the engagement with the Aboriginal community in the form of audience members acting as cultural witnesses and therefore gauge the feasibility of the resultant work as a product of heritage and its thematic driver; the re-embodiment of the Tent Embassy, transformed into an Australian Indigenous song cycle.

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<sup>8</sup> *Redfern As Refuge* was a short film installation made in collaboration with media artist Marian Abboud. The film drew on Abboud's experiences as a second generation Australian, born from Lebanese migrant parents who lived in Redfern before moving to Auburn. It also drew comparisons with my own relationship to Redfern, as a second generation protest performer. My goal was to create a work that placed the Aboriginal presence within a wider context. *Redfern As Refuge* was commissioned by Carriageworks and presented in Bay 20 as part of NAISDA's 40<sup>th</sup> year Retrospective Exhibition: *Naya Wa Yugali- We Dance*.

# Part One

## I. The Tent Embassy

Early in the morning of January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1972 four Aboriginal men; Michael Anderson, Tony Coorey, Billie Cragie and Bertie Williams staked their claim to land on the lawns of what is now known as Old Parliament House (Foley, Shaap, & Howell 2014, p. 5). *Tribune* newspaper photographer Noel Hazzard provided transport for the trek from Sydney to Canberra, to ensure media coverage, with cash supplied by the Communist Party of Australia. Armed with a donated beach umbrella and a few placards, one of which was to boldly announce ABORIGINAL EMBASSY, they had arrived in response to an ill-timed national address on the eve of Australia Day by Prime Minister William McMahon — a day that has always been recognised by Aboriginal people as ‘Invasion Day’ (Marlow 2017). The address served as a firm indictment against the future existence of Aboriginal people, by promoting assimilation through a five point plan. This system included a clause, which would grant fifty year leases to Aboriginal people so long as they made “...reasonable economic and social use of the land...” as “...separate development as a long term aim is utterly alien...” (McMahon 1972 in Foley, Shaap, & Howell 2014, p. 25). The goal of the incumbent conservative government was to create a nationalist identity whereby all Australian citizens would adhere to the same principles. Importantly, a year previously McMahon had agreed to the mining of bauxite in the Northern Territory, thereby negating Yolngu prior land relationships and revealing his future agenda, which was clarified within the five points (Foley 2001).

Surprisingly, no immediate efforts were made to remove the protestors. Due to an unexpected loophole in the law, camping was legal on the lawns of Parliament House, as long as no more than twelve tents were pitched at any given time (Foley 2001). This afforded the activists the opportunity to gather support and strategise ways to make a greater impact,

including the consolidation of media coverage. The newly formed Aboriginal Embassy focused on the immediacy of the relatively burgeoning television industry to stage rallies in coordination with daily news coverage (Foley, Shaap, & Howell 2014, p. 37). A definite performative element had emerged.

The element of theatricality was extended to accommodate more conventional forms of artistic expression. This included the first Aboriginal contemporary dance performance, comprised of an adapted version of African American Rod Roger's choreography, specifically modified for untrained dancers by Carole Johnson. This performance focused on 'anger, sadness and loss' to a song by Bernice Reagon<sup>9</sup> of which the opening line was, 'Oh there's grieving in the plum grove and anger in the land.' This choreography would become a featured segment in the first full length Aboriginal dance theatre work titled *Embassy*, performed by the first student intake of AISDS<sup>10</sup> (Vaughan 1972, pp. 13, 14). These performances operated in tandem with the conceptually driven 'Shadow Embassy', on-site at the Aboriginal Embassy, which had developed from a mere slogan, coined by Coorey, to a semi tongue-in-cheek shadow ministry, from an office consisting of a hand operated paper copier, a telephone and a post box receiving and sending constant communication (Foley; Shaap, & Howel 2014, p. 32). The Tent Embassy occupation acted as the precipitator for the politically motivated satirical tropes featured in the *Black Theatre of Redfern* and the *Basically Black* theatre revues. These revues were comprised of short sketches that acted as provocations to the white community. Led by actor/activists Bob Maza and Gary Foley, they were reminiscent of French director's Jean Genet's play *The Blacks (1958)* which featured an all-black cast playing their oppressors by donning white masks (Webb 1979, p. 455).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dr Bernice Reagon was an African American scholar performer and activist famous for her music career as part of the group Sweet Honey In The Rock. In email correspondence between myself and Carole Johnson, she infers that the accompanying track was a private arrangement made for the earlier project in which she was original performer. (See Appendix 2; Genesis of Embassy Dance, NAISDA Program Director Emeritas Carole Y Johnson) This is a poem titled *Anger in the Land* featured in a book titled *The Road is Rocky* written by civil rights activist Don West in 1951. The song was recorded by Peter Paul and Mary in 1968 as a track on their album *Late Again*.

<sup>10</sup> Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme, an early incarnation of NAISDA.

<sup>11</sup> This can be traced to the Ghanaian cultural ritual called the Hauka, whereby the colonially oppressed re-enact their familiar degradation, playing both the masters and the persecuted in order to endure and overcome their daily reality. This re-enactment featured in a 1955 documentary titled, *Les Maîtres Fous*. Similarly the U.S. saw

The original Tent Embassy was eventually torn down in the winter of 1972, after special laws were passed to recategorise the purpose for the lawns, only to be resurrected soon after (Foley, Shaap, & Howell 2014, pp. 11, 12). Early comparisons were made by the Aboriginal activists between the treatment of Aboriginal people and South Africa's apartheid system (Foley 2001). The Embassy had become a powerful political entity attracting an organised visit from the Shadow Labour Leader Gough Whitlam who met with the Embassy's caucus and subsequently made a promise to honour Aboriginal Land Rights if his government succeeded in the upcoming elections<sup>12</sup> (Foley, Shaap, & Howell 2014, p. 140). The systematic dismantling and resurrection of the Embassy would occur several times until Whitlam's appointment as Australia's 21<sup>st</sup> Prime Minister, in late 1972, whereupon it was disbanded, only to be resurrected again after Whitlam's initial promises weren't honoured (Foley, Shaap, & Howell 2014, p. 41). The Tent Embassy has served as an enduring presence since.

The Tent Embassy event set a precedent, serving as a unifying platform for all Aboriginal people, to both 'traditional' remote community dwellers and to those on the urban fringes considered disenfranchised from their 'traditional' cultural practices and homelands and simultaneously from the urban community which they now inhabit. However, Aboriginal people had been mobilising for better living conditions since the early 1920s, through the trade unions (Foley 2001) and later with Christian lobbyist groups, for the right to vote (The Canberra Times 1967). In 1965 Arrernte man Charlie Perkins led freedom rides in outback NSW in solidarity with and emulating the U.S. Black Freedom rides. These rides were in protest of segregation laws between the white and African American community, held in America's southern states (History 2017). Although segregation experienced by Aboriginal people in Australia was also initially sanctioned, more often it was unlawfully enforced in remote NSW (National Museum of Australia, 2007-2014). This followed a more aggressive approach with the creation of the Australian arm of the Black Panther movement; known as

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the inception of the original Cakewalk where "The dandified black was a parody of hifalutin' whites, dancing in stiff promenade whilst dressed in finery, which was later to be adopted by whites dancing in blackface." (The Origins of the Cakewalk 2002 p. 134).

<sup>12</sup> 'It's Time' Whitlam's 1972 Election Policy speech: [whitlamdismissal.com/1972/11/13/Whitlam-1972-election-policy-speech.html](http://whitlamdismissal.com/1972/11/13/Whitlam-1972-election-policy-speech.html)

The Black Caucus, also modeled on its American counterpart. The Aboriginal members of the Black Caucus would eventually orchestrate the Embassy (Foley 2001). But it was members of the Yolngu, who sent messages of support, and visiting members of the Gurindji, who had walked off the Wave Hill cattle outstation in demand for better living conditions (Foley, Shaap, & Howell 2014, p. 8) who would, by their show of unity, represent an unprecedented validation of the identity of urban half-caste Aboriginals and their equal right to sovereignty (Foley, Shaap, & Howell 2014, p. 36).

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy was a durational theatrical and ritual event, emulating and carnivalising the modern state whilst subverting its power through extensive media coverage. It exemplified a progressive shift in Aboriginal cultural practice, from an inward affirmation of perpetuity, to an outward politically charged activist declaration for Aboriginal self-determination and a rejection of assimilation (Lothian 2007). Performance art and politics converged with consummate potency to leave an enduring impact for Aboriginal historians and artists, eventually leading to its iteration, reiteration, reenactment and reimagining.<sup>13</sup>

### **How Did We Arrive At This Point? - an historical account**

In order to fully apprehend the magnitude of Tent Embassy and its diverse legacy I will outline a brief chronology of Aboriginal people, adopting an artistic lens to chart the ontological shifts, in relation and response to the impact of British colonisation. I will begin by supplying a definition of 'The Dreaming' as the primary underpinning Australian Indigenous ideology, supplying examples from several communities, from sources that demonstrate a relatively unchanged connection extending before the advent of colonisation. I will then articulate the methods of manifestation and invocation for each subsequent permutation.

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<sup>13</sup> Satellite Embassies have appeared in Musgrave Park in Brisbane, Victoria Park Sydney, in Perth and at the Block in Redfern. See Appendix 3: Creative non-fiction *The Embassy* by Vicki Van Hout.

## II. The Dreaming

The Australian Aboriginal ontology, or way of being in the world, is inextricably bound to a fluid, non-linear concept of chronology called 'The Dreaming'. Also known as the Alcheringa by the Arrernte people, first coined in the western lexicon by Anthropologists Spencer and Gillen at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1899, p. 100). The Dreaming is considered almost universal amongst all tribes: known as the Tjukurrpa time by the Pitjantjatjara (McGrath and Jebb 2015, p. 33); described as the long ago (baman) time of the Wangarr ancestor beings by the Yolngu people of NE Arnhem land (Keen 2006, p. 520); and the Nyitting or cold time by the Nyoongar of WA (Robertson et al 2016). The Dreaming is characterised as the realisation of the Aboriginal cosmology; whereby the proto-types of all beings existed as hybrid human and nonhuman forms attributed with human behaviour, which travelled the continent and disappeared into it, becoming part of the present landscape (Spencer and Gillen 1899, pp. 94-107).

In the North West and Central Kimberley region of the Northern Territory, Worrorra, Ngarinyin and Woonambul peoples trace their descent from the owl-like Wandjina spirit ancestors who originate from the clouds (Ryan 1993, p. 12). Anthropologist A.W. Howitt cites a Wiradjuri belief, of a long ago dreaming incident, whereby a boy threw the bone of a Kangaroo he had eaten up into the sky, to become the moon (Howitt 1996, p. 429). Access to these 'Dream Beings' is primarily conducted through cultural expression in combination with a continued relationship with the sites where they originally came to rest.

### **A personal introduction to the Dreaming**

As a dance student of NAISDA I gained initial rudimentary knowledge of these Dream Beings, referred to as spirits, through dance both in situ as a student on cultural residency visiting the places where it is believed they reside, and from afar, as part of my training at the college.<sup>14</sup> I was taught that while dancing I was in direct communication with the celestial, as

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<sup>14</sup>NAISDA Dance College was then located in the inner city suburb of Glebe, Sydney.

well as the earthly Dreamings, which featured plants and animals (belonging to nearly every community). They included the origins of fresh and salt water and the 'cold rain' of Mornington Island; the relatively intangible forces of the Sager or South East wind from the Torres Strait Islands; and celestial environment of the Banumbirr<sup>15</sup> or Yolngu Morning Star belonging to the Dhuwa moiety<sup>16</sup> (Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation).

In her book *Aboriginal Art and Spirituality*, Rosemary Crumlin<sup>17</sup> describes the *Tjipari* song cycle as translated to her, whilst conducting field work in the small Aboriginal community of Balgo, in Western Australia. Tjipari depicts two girls who journey through puberty to eventually disappear underground upon discovering 'living water'. Crumlin quotes, "and today they are still there" inferring they have become part of a living landscape (Crumlin 1991, p. 13). This reveals immanence in Aboriginal ontologies, where the past and present are endowed with the ability to converge, enabling the Ancestral Dreaming Beings to exist in the everyday present, as opposed to a linear chronology indicative of a singular trajectory in time and space.

Indigenous art curator and author Judith Ryan<sup>18</sup> describes a performed agency with the dreaming demonstrated through her observations of Fitzroy Crossing artist Paji Honeychild Yankarr's physical interactions and process of sharing information embedded in her painting.

When explaining her works, Paji uses the full palm of her hand and covers the whole canvas with expansive movements. This shows that the paintings are haptic - closely related to touch - but there is also a connection between image, gesture, word and song, all of which are associated with the transmission of symbolic meaning. When Paji discussed *Paliya* 1991, she used the narrative method of repetition, both of Walmajarri word and hand movement... In her mind's eye she is transported back there... (1993, p. 67).

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<sup>15</sup> Banumbirr refers to the planet Venus.

<sup>16</sup> Moiety is an organisational term, which constitutes one half of the overarching dichotomy applying to most kin groups.

<sup>17</sup> Sister Rosemary Crumlin is a nun in the Parramatta congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia.

<sup>18</sup> Currently holds the position of Senior Curator of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Victoria.

There is an immediacy in relation to the Dreaming expressed through the repetitious interdisciplinary embodiment deployed in relationship to the narrative being depicted in the painting. This facilitates Yankarr's transportation 'back there' to the time and space of the original Dreaming act.

Anthropologist, Phillipe Descola<sup>19</sup> articulates repeated actions related to the Dreaming as 'successive embodiments', which serve two purposes: to animate the entities the cultural actors are in communication with; and to clarify those actors' understanding of their place in the world (Descola 2013, p. 147). He describes the types of reflexive physical behaviours belonging to specific groups or communities by utilising Bourdieu's 'habitus' as consisting of a range of embodied collective schemas or social knowledge structures (2013, pp. 91-111). Often the knowledges being expressed are considered so internalised they are not readily articulated or recognised by those who possess them (2013, p. 92).

Warlpiri woman Punayi (Jeannie) Herbert Nungarrayi conveys the comprehensive role the Dreaming plays in the lives of her people, in the process of describing its significance to the art of fellow painter Dorothy Napangardi. [It is an:]

all embracing concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as the rules for interacting with the natural environment. The philosophy behind it is holistic—the Tjukurrpa provides for a total, integrated way of life. It is important to understand that for Warlpiri and other Aboriginal people living in remote Aboriginal settlements the dreaming isn't just something that has been consigned to the past, but it is a lived daily reality (2006, p. 5).

Napangardi is articulating an omnipresence extending to kin relations, marriage rites, initiation rites, behaviour in relation to gender and to organisation of camps and food distribution. I have learned the establishment of kin relations is of paramount importance before going on cultural residency. As NAISDA students we were adopted, given a skin classification so we were equipped to behave according to our assigned relationship terms,

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<sup>19</sup> Descola's ethnographic studies focus on the structural relationships pertaining to the inward self and physical world.



which included protocols such as avoidance procedures, which may include not saying someone's language name or not communicating directly.

### **Finding my kin through dance**

In 2006 I was inspired to learn how the Wiradjuri kinship system operated and began choreographing *Wiradjourni* utilising my knowledge of the Yolngu gurrutu<sup>20</sup> (Christie, Greatorex 2006, p. 4). I combined this with empirical research from A. W. Howitt's *The Native Tribes Of South East Australia* (1996) and my own field studies conducted in and around Euabalong and Lake Cargelico in far western NSW, the ancestral homelands of my mother and grandmother. I utilised this information to explore kinship categories musically through increasingly augmented rhythmic patterns, expressed as gesture vocabularies, while the machinations were expressed spatially through a combination of dedicated interactive partnerships.

### **Cultural expression from direct demonstration to collective representations of memory**

Coinciding with the advent of the industrial revolution, British colonial settler populations prospered globally (Gott 2011, p. 147). Many Indigenous communities experienced a widespread dislocation from ancestral homelands, with the need for more land to accommodate increased manufacturing within the free market system. The most expedient option for the colonial occupation was to declare the land 'terra nullius',<sup>21</sup> a land without a prior population (Australian Museum of Democracy 2011). This signified a blatant disregard for the value of Aboriginal people as a race and an indifference to their alternative systems for existence on alien terrain.

Aboriginal people continued to carry out rituals connected to the lands from which they had become removed, either through being supplanted or forcibly relocated onto reserves. As late as the 1960s—1980s people in outlying areas in and around Turkey Creek were relocated

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<sup>20</sup> Gurrutu meaning kinship. It is a Yolngu term for approximately 20 terms assigned for individual classification

<sup>21</sup> In 1770 Lt James Cook declared Australia 'terra nullius' (no one's land). In 1835 Sir Richard Burke reaffirmed Cook's declaration claiming the land 'void' in official correspondence.

to an outstation where they experienced extreme conditions of poverty (Crumlin 1991, p. 34). Many resorted to living in corrugated iron sheds and old cars, still preferring to paint ancestral Dreaming sites, using old fly screens found from the dump and painted with match sticks. These paintings were held on their shoulders during corroborees (ibid). Rather than paint their reality they performed acts of memory in lieu of direct demonstrations in situ, on ancestral homelands. This is an example of one of the initial acts of dislocation, which prompted Anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt to coin the term 'memory culture' (1988, p. xiv).

Gradual displacement continued as Aboriginal people lost their languages and their ability to remain connected as part of a kinship system. Later still, as part of the Stolen Generations, in children's homes where many were indentured as farmhands and domestic servants, the relationship to homelands would become almost certainly completely severed (National Sorry Day Committee (NSDC) 2015).<sup>22</sup>

### **Art as an industry - Entering the market system**

Where once Aboriginal people may have learned hunting dances in order to hone their technique for the kill, in the current market economy hunting dances may also be taught in return for cash to buy food. The reenactment of rituals and ceremonies and replication of artefacts have become commodities that serve a dual purpose: as part of an ongoing oral practice transmitting of knowledge through the generations for the maintenance of cultural perpetuity; and as a unit of currency to barter.

Through mediated conversations with Kimberly Aboriginal Artists, Judith Ryan articulates her observations of their awareness to seek and exploit multiple outcomes for their art making.

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<sup>22</sup> This would eventually become the thematic driver for Carole Johnson's first choreographies leading to my ethnographic research into the impact of lost languages and practices with focus on the living conditions of Urban Aboriginal communities.

Art is a means of empowerment for its makers, a political tool in the fight to regain sovereignty over land and to be themselves. The politics of the message, however, remains implicit, as Niyigina artist Butcher Joe Nangan (deceased) put it; 'that dreaming gave me my living.' ... Produced both to ensure an income and to record his culture (1993, p. 2).

Ryan's statement indicates an early resistance to assimilation by reasserting the Dreaming as a continued source of documented self-determination, whilst acknowledging the potential value of Aboriginal intellectual property and its bi-products as commodities in the market system.

This act of utilising the Dreaming in a capacity other than its original religious context, as documentary proof of identity and sovereignty, was ultimately realised in the Yolngu bark painting petitions. Consisting of three documents bordered by iconography the paintings served as emblematic evidence of an unbroken relationship to their homelands in the fight to claim land rights in 1963 (Corn 2010: 96). Yolngu musicology specialist Aaron Corn cites reference to these paintings and the ongoing battle for land sovereignty by prominent popular music band Yothu Yindi<sup>23</sup> in their song *Treaty* (1991). Corn documents the practice of embedding 'traditional' knowledge references into their contemporary songs (Corn 2010, p. 99).

### **(Finding the) sacred shimmer in urban topography**

In 2010 I created a work titled *Briwyant*, which involved research into the physical characteristics of the various expressive forms indicating specific clan connections between people and place.<sup>24</sup> *Briwyant* was a reference to the Yolngu word Bir'yun; to shimmer, to imbue with ancestral magic (Yolngu- marr) conducted when referring to the Wangarr ancestral spirits. I had learned of the term 'likan' which means elbow or conjunction and an element referring to the highly nuanced characteristics embedded in the painting method of

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<sup>23</sup> Yothu Yindi means mother and child and refers to a complete kin system comprised of two moieties Dhuwa and Yirritja that represent the patrilineal line.

<sup>24</sup> This research was conducted in part by an invitation for me to audit Corn's seminars titled 'The Yolngu Way' at Sydney University in 2005.

raarking or cross hatching (Corn 2010, p. 100). These fine crosshatched designs directly correlate to people and place by the angle at which the fine lines intersect and are similarly demonstrated in the angle at which the knees and elbows are held in the correlating dance (Corn 2010, p. 100). I utilised this research to create a topographic map representing a river consisting of a similar shimmer premise and effect produced in desert dot painting, consisting of 2,000 playing cards stuck to the floor, transforming the stage into a sacred contemporary dreaming environment for the dancers to inhabit.<sup>25</sup>

### **The birth of the cultural spectacle - ideological constructs informing perceptions of value**

One of the earliest and most successful cultural cross over ventures was the corroboree ceremony, which continued to hold significance for people as a connection to kinship and place. Aboriginal people have been performing staged corroborees as part of a burgeoning cultural tourism industry since the early 1840s (Parsons 1997, pp. 46-47; Casey, 2013, p. 59). These corroborees were described as large, predominately outdoor, spectacles involving up to 200 participants performing as a form of entertainment for the white settlers and for visiting gentry (Casey 2013, p. 59). Indigenous theatre scholar Maryrose Casey cites these performances as one of the most visible instigators of a perceived dichotomised value creating a binary distinction in relation to culture and the commodity market (2013, p. 57) Casey infers that the general perception of cultural worth in terms of authenticity was challenged when the interdisciplinary indigenous performative practices, originally associated with 'traditional' ceremony and ritual, were executed for a non-indigenous audience (Casey 2013, p. 57).

Casey refutes the largely held assumption that cultural value inversely diminished with the introduction of commercial application. She states that ideas of authenticity work in correlation to the cultural framing of the respective participants; Aboriginals participating cultural enactments, and settler audience members in the act of entertainment consumerism. For the local Aboriginals, cultural tourism afforded an opportunity to maintain

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 4: *Briwyant* (2011) image of the card river.

a relationship to the land, to continue practicing the skills needed to survive off the land, and an adherence to practices that affirm the knowledge systems and uphold the cultural beliefs associated with those specific acts (Casey 2013, pp. 59, 63-65).

However, while these performances enabled Aboriginal people an opportunity to participate in the 'act of being Aboriginal', for the settlers they represented an affirmation of suppression and supremacy (Casey 2013, p. 64). This is not to say that the settler audiences were not cognisant of an underlying purpose in relation to the outdoor spectacle, but it was likely they were conscious there was an Indigenous significance not known to them.

Casey goes further to state that the corroborees were initially an attempted demonstration of intercultural reciprocity for Aboriginal participants, while they represented a proprietary status for the early settlers and explorers.

On one side there are the choices and exchanges made and offered by the Indigenous Australians involved. Counter to these performances, there are also the performances of white possession by the Euro-Australians and Europeans in their behaviour and attitude to the performances and in the accounts of the performances (2011, p. 42).

Casey intimates a lack of effective communication was due to the fundamental ideological differences between Aboriginal performers and settler audiences. She interprets these performances as an attempt by the Aboriginal community to initiate a relationship on equal terms with the settlers, through demonstrations of life practice. Whereas, the settlers demonstrated their ideological imperative, which was to commodify and consume. This act of quantifying the corroborees, reduced them in significance to acts of decoration, as entertainment in their failure to fully appreciate a functional plurality.

### **My culture - my career**

As an Indigenous performer I have only ever operated within this multi-purpose framework, performing across many cultural platforms, as both my primary source of income and as a way of affirming my Aboriginal identity. I have danced in 'traditional' contexts representing

NAISDA Dance College and later for the Munyaryun family<sup>26</sup> from Darlingbuy and Kathy Marika from Yirrkala in NE Arnhem Land. As a contemporary dancer/choreographer I have danced on mainstage theatres and in a corporate (market and tourist) context including performing as a part of 'Welcome to Country' proceedings, the most notable being part of the first official Aboriginal Opening of Parliament in 2008, and as choreographer for the 40th Anniversary of the 1967 referendum for the Aboriginal right to vote.<sup>27</sup>

### **III. Framing indigenous culture - the current debate**

From those first commercial corroborees, fast forward two centuries to the present day where debates over the validity and authenticity of Aboriginal modes of existence have continued to be expressed. Enduring themes of identity and agency have been challenged in the media by the likes of conservative political commentator Andrew Bolt who equates skin colour (darkness) and geographical location (related to remoteness from the nearest major city) with racial/cultural authenticity (2009). Similarly art critic Nicolas Rothwell has very publicly voiced concerns for the lack of critical appraisal for Aboriginal Art, leading to a glut in what he describes as an overcrowded market with correlating low financial returns on product (The Australian, 2015). Rothwell's opinion reinforces the sustained populist sentiment Casey observes regarding the apprehension of an inverse relationship between market value verses cultural value.

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<sup>26</sup> Primarily Janet, who was a Yolngu dance teacher at NAISDA, followed by her younger sister Gawitika and brother Djakapurra, known for his role in the 2000 Sydney Olympics and as cultural consultant and songman for Bangarra Dance Theatre.

<sup>27</sup> Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's first official act was to invite local Ngunnawal custodian Matilda House to officially welcome him onto her ancestral lands. I was part of a dance contingent invited to choreograph and perform for the occasion. We performed a section of a dance titled *Welcome to* which featured Aboriginal acknowledgement practices upon entering another's land. For example: a call, a spit, the throwing of a stone and offering your sweat as a symbol of your essence or identity. At old Parliament House a Gala performance was organised featuring a line-up of Indigenous talent to celebrate the passing of the referendum for the Aboriginal right to vote in 1967. I had choreographed on a mixture of primary school students from Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Waterloo with a mixture of Aboriginal students from neighbouring high schools. The dance featured an oversized ballot box made of clear perspex whereby each dancer placed a rock or piece of earth inside as a symbol of the potential future impact the decision might serve.

However, it is anthropologist Gillian Cowlshaw's argument that negates the indigenous belief systems, which determine their content and modality of delivery, which moves beyond discrediting the mechanical specifics of an urban outward cultural expression performed in a non-exclusively indigenous context. Cowlshaw has spent approximately forty years studying Australian Aboriginal people, thirty of those unpacking the urbanised indigenous lived experience (Australian Women's Register, 2014). She has critiqued the methodologies employed by previous academics, remarking that even in relatively recent times interest and concerns in the areas of Aboriginal studies have neglected the modern Aborigine (2009, pp. 20, 24). Cowlshaw labels the emergence of recent urban cultural practices, including the nationally adopted 'Welcome to Country' procedures, along with the formation of grassroots indigenous dance groups, as components of the misguided enforcement of a damaging 'reified mythopoeia' or fabricated myth (2010, p. 208). She claims these constructions have little or no bearing on actual living conditions and are merely sustained by acts reflective of a residual guilt of the state (2010, pp. 208-227; 2011, pp. 170-188).

Cowlshaw's conjectures concerning the validity and authenticity of contemporary urban Aboriginal cultural practices operate in direct opposition to the Australia Council for the Arts *National Indigenous Arts Protocols*, which by its very inception, acknowledges a cultural significance in relation to Aboriginal art making. This is evident in their adoption of the 2006 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states:

...Indigenous people have the right to practice and revitalise their cultural traditions and customs. —'This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature'<sup>28</sup> (Australia Council 2007).

In order to address the opinions of Bolt, Rothwell and Cowlshaw, I will utilise theories from philosopher Michel de Certeau adopted by dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster in an embodied

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<sup>28</sup> United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, United Nations Documents, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/1/I/3 29 June 2006.

choreographic perspective, focusing on staged acts of resistance and the post-modernist movement in combination with anthropological studies on the effects of chaos and wonder in the emergence of indigenous hybrid ontologies conducted by anthropologists Michael Scott in conjunction with Mary Jane Rubenstein. I will examine the symbiotic role of the state in the development of these ontologies and the characteristics by which they may be identified utilizing anthropologist Morten Peterson's field studies in Mongolia in answer to Cowlishaw's arguments which convey overt skepticism in regards to the social and cultural value of current urban indigenous community practices. Lastly I will draw on the application of André Lepecki's methodology of discursive analysis defining choreo-politics in the process of movement synthesis as one of the overall elemental structures in the realisation of my creative work.

### **Choreographies of Protest - defiant acts of permeation**

The Aboriginal Australian resistance movement of the 1960s and 1970s is representative of a continued lineage of multi-faceted indigenous operation in flux with the Australian nation as a post-colonialist social construct. Precedent was established with cultural knowledge systems acting as simultaneous expressions of art and as units of currency. The sale of paintings, as subsequent proof of proprietary land ownership in the Yolngu Bark Petitions, then as embodied activities of entertainment in the Corroboree Spectacle, which finally developed into the finely honed performative bodies of intervention and infiltration to gain visibility and operation within various socio-political structures, the most prominent and enduring legacy of which is the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. The Aboriginal resistance movement drew its inspiration from the civil rights movement of the United States, which brought issues of inequality to the forefront of a complacent and complicit society by presenting them in innovative immersive contexts of uncomfortable proximity. American choreographer and dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster describes the immediacy and efficacy of the body as an instrument of protest. Foster forges a direct link between embodied arts practices in the process of social organisation describing these events as 'choreographies of social agency' (2003, p. 395). In her paper, *Choreographies of Protest*, Foster targets three



different incidents, one of which is the African American lunch counter sit-ins, as demonstrations of passive resistance against racial segregation. Foster recounts the incident that instigated a southern US movement whereby four African American students entered a local Woolworths in Nth Carolina in 1960 and sat down to be served in the 'whites-only' dining area of the department store (2003, p. 397). Her enquiry centres on the motivating factors involved in the act of mobilization, asking, "...what are these [protestor] bodies doing?; what and how do their motions signify?; what choreography, whether spontaneous or pre-determined, do they enact?" (2003, p. 397). She considers the level of conscious decision making involved in these protests and alternatively the possibility of the body acting in a reflexive capacity to or in a particular situation. Foster acknowledges a similar reliance on the ability to assess and seize a momentary physical opportunity in the processes for improvisation in a theatrical dance context (2002, p. 135).

Foster introduces sociologist James Jasper's definition of 'tactics', as a means of further contextualising acts of protest. Jasper describes tactics, "...as important routines emotionally and morally salient in these people's lives" (Jasper in Foster 2003, p. 396). Jasper is locating the primary intent for action as indicative of a compulsion to uphold pertinent social practices in order to perpetuate specific ontological characteristics. Foster identifies the importance of this pedestrian connection to spatial and temporal opportunity as determining factors in the choreography of physical protest in her analysis of the dinner sit-ins by asking: "What kinds of connections can be traced between their daily routines and the special moments of their protest?" (2003, p. 297). The factors pertaining to the dinner sit-ins consist of, the everyday routine of eating lunch, while simultaneously capitalising on the fallibility of the spatial confines of segregation by dismissing them (2003, pp. 398-399).

Susan Leigh Foster builds upon her acknowledgement of Jasper's adoption of theorist Michel de Certeau's 'tactics', used to describe the coalescence of the site specific within the framework of the pedestrian in the resistance movement, to examine the early post modernists. It is in de Certeau's *The Practices of Everyday Life* that Foster discovers the

significance in the transportation of dance from the proscenium stage to other locales and the post-modernist ideological intent of the concurrent street choreographies in New York (2002, p. 128).

### **Working the system from within**

De Certeau's 'tactics' was used in conjunction with 'strategies' to describe the mechanics of power structures. Using the spatial analogy of navigating city streets, those in dominance employ strategies of intent to control traffic flow through the ordering of space, while the tacticians (also referred to as users or consumers) utilise temporal opportunities to subvert that power by finding alternative routes via back alleys, unmarked passages and across paddocks etc., in order to arrive at their destination more expediently (1984, p. 38). This power structure was posed in opposition to Foucault's absolute 'panoptic' power theory consisting of an asymmetrical hierarchical system, which also utilizes spatial strategies by metering discipline in a controlled enclosed environment through an operational mechanism comprised of numerous controlled procedures, whereby consumers are passive with little or no recourse to act (1984, pp. 45-49). The organisations adopting this hierarchical model as identified by Foucault include the penal, medical, education and manufacturing bodies.

Although de Certeau maintains:

Beneath what one might call the "monotheistic" privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a "polytheism" of scattered practices survives, dominated but not erased by the triumphal success of one of their number (1984, p. 48).

This 'polytheism' de Certeau refers to is the existence for numerous minor procedures or 'scattered practices' which escape organisational scrutiny or amalgamation and which provide a possible opportunity for influence or eventual dominance over the existing power structure. In effect de Certeau is likening the scattered practices to the temporal opportunities seized by 'consumers' within his theory (1984, p. 49). Therefore de Certeau's interpretation of organisational weakness can be applied in Foster's theatrical context, as performative agency is gained by exploiting the inherent fallibility of man-made structures

whereby in this instance the theatre is deemed an exclusive location of arts activity and the street as a place primarily for transport therefore presumably excluding or ignoring the possibility for certain types of arts activity.

In her investigation of site specific performance Foster examined the work of Lucinda Childs' *Street Dance* in lower Manhattan in 1964 whereby dancers infiltrated the street to perform an enhanced pedestrian interaction with each other, using the verticality of the surrounding buildings to spatially extend their performance. The incidental traffic acted as both complicit partners and as spontaneous audience members by the choices afforded them in passing Childs' choreography. Foster focused on the shift in perception related to spatial and gravity norms In Trisha Brown's 1971 rooftop choreographies *Rummage Sale* and the *Floor of the Forest*, conducted through the everyday task of sorting and trying on clothing, while suspended above the pavement by a sheet of mesh. (2002, p. 126). However it is of Meredith Monk's street theatre work *Vessel 3* (1971) that Foster observes a commonality by stating:

[it] does not shun the artifices of the theatre so as to probe the pedestrian. Rather it utilizes the pedestrian allowing it to permeate the vocabulary and setting of the action, so as to frame a new look for the theatre (2002, p. 127).

In removing dance from traditional theatrical settings, the relationship to economic exclusivity is weakened. A specific generative process is initiated, dependent upon inherent contextual differences determined by each location. Subsequent thematic and artistic changes become necessary considerations including the possibility of "alternative constructions of theatricality that address the histories of oppression..." (2002, p. 129).

Therefore, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy could also be identified as one of de Certeau's "surviving scattered practices", as a working component of the political system. By inadvertently mimicking the existing government frameworks, the 'Shadow Embassy' was able to operate within its confines, while simultaneously setting precedent as an authored artwork or "alternative construction of theatricality" as a 'choreography of resistance' simultaneously operating within the paradigms of western theatre. In the case of the

corroboree, de Certeau's description outlining an inherent fallibility within the dominant strategic power can be located in the failure to extend to the exact locality and content executed within the event's form, giving rise for the opportunity to maintain the custodial connection to the land, by continuing to practice meaningful pre-existing site specific ceremonies. This was evident in the Aboriginal led staging of these corroboree performances which were predominately outdoor affairs that attracted a larger sector of the Aboriginal community as opposed to the smaller events organised by the settlers within western spatial confines (Casey 2013, p. 59).

### **Questions of Interiority**

From Susan Leigh Foster's identification of the resistance movement as an outward expression of subversive manipulation imbued with an embodied element of theatrical artifice, I will now address Gillian Cowlshaw's assertions. I will examine Cowlshaw's opinion that the current urban Aboriginal existence should be interpreted as the result of self-imposed separatist actions located in the role play conducted as part of Reconciliation meetings dividing indigenous and non-indigenous participants and in 'bureaucratic procedures' which ensure Aboriginal exclusivity within Aboriginal organisations such as the Aboriginal Land Council (2010, pp. 209, 2014). Cowlshaw proposes the creation of a new and false indigenous identity designed in the past twenty years, detected in the transformation of local Aboriginal Elders into 'revered awe inspiring symbols of indigeneity' within the context of Reconciliation meeting proceedings (2010, p. 216) and in the case of one Western Sydney Aboriginal Dance Group, of dancers who fashioned themselves after rappers and televangelists (2012, p. 404). Additionally Cowlshaw's argument maintains current Urban Aboriginal cultural activities which romanticises and valorises Aboriginal people in actuality masks a marginalised reality in which Aboriginal people are usually met "familiar displays of ignorance, suspicion and indifference" (2010, p. 210), which is sanctioned and enforced through a process of systematic institutionalisation taking place amongst the education system and within local governments and which is enabled through government funding

(2010, p. 211), as a symptom of the sentimentality and residual guilt in reparation past injustices against Aboriginal people.

This leads/begins with a fundamental question: How do we measure belief? The following examination of this proposition, in relation to the oppositional views of public urban Aboriginal community activities, epitomises the core differences between colonial Australian and Aboriginal ontologies.

### **Wonder - in reaction to the unknown and the unknowable**

Anthropologist, Michael Scott specialises in the study of diverse lived realities that shape social practice in diverse historical, geographic, and cultural contexts. Scott's core research examines 'wonder' as one of the driving characteristics of ontological study; how we acquire, perceive and react to it (2016). He seeks to distinguish the difference between curiosity and awe and the attributes that contribute to their distinction and manifestation, "...whereas science seeks to banish wonder by replacing it with knowledge, religion remains open to wonder in the face of the unknowable" (2013, p. 859). Scott credits his theoretical hypotheses as being informed by the writings of Terry Evens, Martin Holbraad, Tim Ingold, Bruno Latour, Axel Morten Pedersen, Deborah Bird Rose, Marilyn Strathern, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Roy Wagner, and Rane Willerslev (2013, p. 862). Scott concludes that this oppositional relationship to wonder has its foundations based in the Cartesian dualist verses non-dualist animist/totemist philosophies of which he includes Australian Aboriginal people (2013, p. 864).

Scott defines the dualist ontology as possessing, 'two absolutely distinct ontological categories: the material and the immaterial', therefore creating a binary relationship of opposition (2014, p. 34). It is upon the extension of this dualist premise that the scaffolding of an associative hierarchical system of dominance and weakness occurs. Furthermore Scott states that the weakened 'other' is then regarded as something 'to be seized, known, dominated and digested' as a commodity (2013, p. 863). In reference to wonder, dualism is

perceived by Scott as the instigator of scientific curiosity and an attempt to objectify or commodify the unknowable. In contrast Scott lists the characteristics of relational non-dualism operating in wonder-sustaining relationships of reciprocity, balance and immanence (2013, p. 862). The operation of these two opposing ideological perspectives, dualist and non-dualist ontologies, are demonstrated in Gillian Cowlshaw's following interpretation of the Aboriginal Reconciliation meetings.

### **Stolen Generation Dreaming - a reenactment of wounding**

Reconciliation meetings are focused on bringing people together, to reconcile differences in a grassroots atmosphere. They are attended by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Cowlshaw is disgruntled that the Reconciliation meetings begin with a statement whereby both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people read 'a statement of commitment' consisting of dedicated text according to ethnographic archetypes around colonisation and the Stolen Generation, whereby the 'elders were injured and the reconciliators were apologetic' (2010, p. 214). She states,

As one woman put it during an interview conducted later 'There was a great need to do something about our ignorance of Aboriginal History and Culture'. Yet, the meetings were not devoted to acquiring knowledge (2010, p. 214).

Considering the Aboriginal ontological premise as based on these (non-dualist) non-hierarchical totemist beliefs and practices stemming from the Dreamtime, might we also then interpret the act of reenactment, of revisiting in the reconciliation meetings as a cultural act of sustaining wonder through the presencing of the stolen generations as ancestral characters within a contemporary dreaming narrative in the attempt to maintain the integrity of cultural practice and the space for belief ajar? Scott utilises Anthropologist Terry Even's articulation of action in a non-dualist context, which "...re-describes reality as opposed to the dualist motive which seeks an explanation for it" (Evens 2008, p. xi). This re-describing of reality has foundations in the Judith Ryan's description of Paji's repetitious engagement with her artwork which crosses over from the original painted medium to include her haptic

tracing to the resultant image and accompanying chant (1993, p. 67).<sup>30</sup> Therefore is it possible that Cowlshaw dismisses the Reconciliation meetings because she is in pursuit of an incompatible dualist agenda of resolution in lieu of the Aboriginal re-description of the past?

Scott (2014, p. 44) cites religious philosopher Mary Jane Rubenstein (2006, pp. 16, 19) in making a correlation between 'wounding' and 'wonder-making'. In *Hybridity Vacuity and Blockage* (2005) Scott utilises a case study of the Arosi from Melanesia to support the proposition that the 'alienable situations' of instability arising out of crisis, are moments imbued with potential wonder and 'ontological transformation' (2014, p. 44). He describes the Arosi's original connection to the island of Makira through autochthonous<sup>31</sup> matrilineal bloodlines of ancestry (*auhenua*) (2005, p. 198). As a result of colonisation they lost this connection, creating a cultural emptiness or 'vacuity', due to a combination of relocation and a decimation in the number of women migrating overseas. He cites a cultural synthesis of new ties beginning to appear through a subsequent process of assigning naming rites to the next generations in conjunction with the relocation of shrines to their new environment. By assuming these places into existing matrilineal narratives they were providing an avenue to reconcile and maintain their ontological schematic framework (2005, p. 208).

How do we then define the work of Red Ochre award winning Anangu artist Hector Tjupuru Burton who created new non-sacred tree Dreamings designed to encourage young community members to tell their own stories while simultaneously generating an income by making commercially viable art? (Eccles 2014). What of the songman practices of NAISDA graduate Matthew Doyle, who after being mentored by songmen from the Tiwi Island and Christmas Creek (WA) communities began creating and performing 'traditional' songs to revitalise the local Sydney Dharug language? Doyle's dances, which Cowlshaw may consider dubious cultural urban practices, are regularly performed in conjunction with another

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<sup>30</sup> Originally referenced under the section titled 'A personal introduction to the Dreaming'

<sup>31</sup> Formed in the place where found.

NAISDA alumni and local Dhurug dancer Peta Strachan.<sup>32</sup> Out of this primary speculation there looms another: How do we define the work of leading Indigenous contemporary dance company Bangarra Dance Theatre who amalgamate their hybrid contemporary vocabularies with traditional dances and epistemologies from the Yolngu through their close relationship to the Munyarian family<sup>33</sup> as well as drawing on those of Matthew Doyle in relation to Cowlshaw's critiques?<sup>34</sup>

Events which have altered the lifestyle habits in Australian pre and post British colonialism have regularly been incorporated into Aboriginal ceremonies and art practices. Their inclusion serves as documentary evidence of ongoing cultural maintenance and ontological adaptation. Prominent depictions of trepang (sea cucumber) and tobacco, with telescope and flag gestures, in Yolngu dances (bunggul) and songs (manikay) depict trading with the Macassan's, which began in the 1700s predating English colonialism (Clark 2013, p. 4). The Tiwi people of Bathurst Island were the first to see the Japanese war planes fly overhead in WWII and their song (and dance) cycle *The Bombing of Darwin* features the bombers, radio communication and falling planes (Kuipers, 2013). These two communities still have very tangible ties to land and language, yet their amalgamation of contemporary events does not challenge the authenticity of their belief system, as do Cowlshaw's assertions about the seemingly disjointed Western Sydney urban practices.

### **The emergence of the academic as heritage maker**

Anthropologist, Dr Marzea Varutti's area of research focuses on the role of museums and other public spaces in relation to contemporary and revitalized indigenous cultures. By facilitating community interaction and mediation these spaces act as self-determined sites of interaction, validation and authentication by facilitating a space for community interaction and mediation whereby,

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<sup>32</sup> I too have performed Mathew Doyle's song cycle over a period of 15 years, first at the inaugural Dreaming Festival held at Olympic Park and later at several corporate and tourist events.

<sup>33</sup> Including *Praying Mantis Dreaming* (1992), *Ochres* (1995), *Fish* (1997), *Corroboree* (2001), *Gathering* with the Australian Ballet (2006), *Fire* (2009)

<sup>34</sup> *Patyegarang* 2016



...[they] have become prominent contexts where indigenous cultures and identities are being displayed and performed, and in the process, transformed and reinterpreted (2015, p. 1039).

Varutti examines the current resurgence of indigenous artists in Taiwan making works they frame as evidence of cultural heritage (2015, p. 1037). She identifies the way in which contemporary indigenous artists consequently frame themselves as part of the cultural continuum. She cites their integration of empirical research as integral to the process of reviving traditional practices and in the development of new products from these traditional practices stating,

...they mediate understandings of indigenous heritage between different times and different kinds of knowledge, as well as between indigenous and non-indigenous communities and institutions (2015, p. 1045).

Varutti paraphrases Cowlshaw's sentiments in regards to this process of cultural synthesis to highlight possible pathways allowing for growth as part of a positive process of creative and adaptive interaction:

One way to make sense of this is to think that the revived cultural traditions are creating a space within which indigenous groups can reimagine themselves and reorientate their indigeneity (Cowlshaw 2012, p. 402 in Varutti 2015).

However, Cowlshaw's original sentiment is used to describe activities she claims, "...have given rise to some banal absurdities" (2012, p. 397). This is a negative sentiment operating in definite contrast to Varutti's framing of Cowlshaw's text.

### **Manifestations of the Trickster**

Subsequently what Cowlshaw defines as an unhealthy relationship between the Urban Aboriginal communities with and propped up by the government or state, may alternatively be defined as a precipitating actor in the development of a hybrid ontology in order to ensure the presence and maintenance of it. Anthropologist, Axel Morten Pedersen (2011),

whose work Scott utilised to inform his wonder theory, observed a similar phenomenon as the result of a social, financial and cultural upheaval, creating a 'state of total rupture' after the dramatic fall of socialism in Mongolia in the 1990s (2011, p. 9). He documented the resurgence of entities of the occult in the guise of drunken males considered 'not quite shamans', which gained agency after years of lying dormant under the long term economic stability of the former communist state rule (2011, p. 36). Like notorious Aboriginal political activist and prankster Gary Foley and his ilk, these shamans were considered notorious jokers and liars. Although, what at first seems like merely a pedestrian mode of political motivation from Aboriginal people in the 1970s, was perceived as a transformative transcendent power in Mongolia (2011, p. 38).

Structural Anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss identifies a universality in the role of the trickster, endowed with a contradictory and unpredictable personality in mythologies, acting as a 'mediator' projecting and existing within states of ambiguity (1955, p. 441). The mediating reemergence of the trickster in the guise of subversive political prankster has precedence in 'traditional' Dreaming sites and histories and is known as the Quinkins who travel in pairs to the Yatanji people of Queensland. One Quinkin is represented as a wicked spirit who steals children while the other, although considered mischievous acts as a saviour to them (Trezise, Roughsey 1978).<sup>37</sup> Maryrose Casey's research into the use of mimicry and carnivalisation as potent tools by Aboriginal people dates back to the mid 1800's, to Bungaree, known as "the first black king" for utilising similar subversive tactics in his mediation between 'blacks and whites' (2012, pp. 190, 191).

With the advent of colonialism the type of subversive humour associated with the trickster has and continues to play, a pivotal role in asserting an Australian Aboriginal agenda by circumventing a bleak apprehension of the present. The current ABC television program *Black Comedy* starring playwright and activist Nikia Lui, carries on the legacy of employing

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<sup>37</sup> I was first introduced to the Quinkin through peer Kukuyalanji Marilyn Miller's work, also titled *Quinkin* of which I was a cast member.

irreverent humour that began with the early activist revues such as *Basically Black* (1973).<sup>38</sup> This was followed by comedy *Babakiueria* (1986),<sup>39</sup> a thirty-minute film, which featured the reversal of power structures whereby the white population were the subject of anthropological scrutiny and oppression by the black characters. Contemporary indigenous dance theatre company Djuki Mala<sup>40</sup> rose to international notoriety through their humorous YouTube video clip which utilised a techno version of *Zorba the Greek* (2007)<sup>41</sup> as accompanying soundtrack to choreography juxtaposing traditional Yolngu vocabulary with hip hop dance hall and Bollywood styles.

### **My introduction to Eggy**

In my experience as an Aboriginal dancer I have learnt that humour plays an important role in a social/ceremonial context. In the Yolngu boys Dhapi ceremony humour is performed through gender reversal to alleviate fear and reframe the event by the inclusion of a celebratory element (The Mulka Project 2009).<sup>42</sup> As part of the NAISDA contingent I travelled to Saibai Island in the Torres Strait in 1988 and again in 2015 on cultural residency, where we danced into the night. Although the dances performed were not sacred, our performance was considered an important event to maintain and share cultural knowledge. This performance was bookended by humorous improvised acts, which including mimicry of the dances and or protocols involved. Referred to as 'Eggy', these often outrageous acts served as a social lubricant between curious members of the larger community who came to witness the city blackfellas from down south.<sup>43</sup>

Lastly, the topic of humour was raised during the process of making my full length choreography *Long Grass* (2015) based on the local homeless Aboriginal population, found in

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<sup>38</sup> Australian Visions, *Basically Black* (1973), *Vimeo*, <https://vimeo.com/201243373>

<sup>39</sup> Screen Australia (2017) *Babakiuekia* 1986 Editors Notes NFSA.  
<http://aso.gov.au/titles/shorts/babakiueria/notes/>

<sup>40</sup> Formerly Chooky Dancers.

<sup>41</sup> Cotajoka, 2007, *Zorba the Greek Yolngu Style*, video, YouTube, 20 Oct, last viewed 5 April 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-MucVWo-Pw>

<sup>42</sup> Boys are usually around 11 years old when they are circumcised.

<sup>43</sup> (Sagigi 2014) features an example of Eggy enacted as part of a performance event.

and around the greater Darwin area in the Northern Territory, many migrating from smaller remote communities in response to the intervention.<sup>44</sup> After a showing in progress for the local Larrakia<sup>45</sup> elders, community workers and Long Grassers before our opening season for Sydney festival, we received overwhelming feedback that more humour was needed in order to do justice in the representation of them. It was as if we were missing a fundamental aspect of being an Aboriginal person (from up there) without it. I had initially shared Cowlshaw's opinion that by implementing humour I was endorsing a disjointed representation of these urban Aboriginals. I couldn't see how they would benefit considering how dire the long Grasser reality is, until I realised how many people had corroborated the Long Grasser observation.

### **A symbiosis of art and state**

However in regards to the relationship between the state and changing socio-political conditions, including the resurgence of the Shamans in Mongolia, Pederson claims that they have become indivisible, as opposed to two separate and reactive entities,

... for certain people in the Ulaan-Uul, post-socialist transition is what shamanism *is* (as opposed to *is about*) ... in Northern Mongolia after socialism shamanism potentially embraced every possible and impossible actualisation of this transition... (2011, p. 41).

This symbiotic 'actualisation of transition' bears resemblance to the Australian Aboriginal interdependent relationship with the state. By adopting Pederson's theory, a hypothesis can be drawn whereby at the time of colonization, symbols of the state came into existence as part of a hybrid Aboriginal ontology as the dominant antagonist in the determination of the subject/object of the original Dreaming creationist narrative—the land. Subsequently the Aboriginal body politic, which emerged through the Aboriginal Tent Embassy performative

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<sup>44</sup> Referred to as the Northern Territory Emergency Response after a report stating children were being abused in Aboriginal communities on reserves and launched as the Stronger Futures Policy in 2003. Measures were implemented to address child abuse assertions including the withholding of social security payments and the introduction of the Basic card, which controlled location and content of welfare purchases.

<sup>45</sup> Aboriginal custodians of the Darwin area.

event and its legacy, became part of the cosmological cannon as a contemporary narrative, which includes the trickster activist as protagonist for change. The trickster manifested in the body politic is a part of a new ontology that has agency in government and the community not merely a reaction to it. The body politic is the state and the body politic is the community. Welcome to country is a part of a state ritual and a part of a community ritual and has become animated equally through the state and community. This hypothesis challenges Cowlshaw's negative assertions regarding the authenticity of certain contemporary urban Aboriginal practices in which the state represents merely sentimentalist role of guilty appeasement when in actuality they are inseparable. This is epitomised in the reemergence of the 'trickster' who gained agency equally within the community and the state and in the 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies, which have become recognized state rituals and simultaneously urban Aboriginal ceremonies.

Through the utilisation of Michel de Certeau by Susan Leigh Foster in combination with a diverse anthropological voice initiated by Michael Scott in conjunction with Mary Jane Rubenstein and Morten Peterson I was able to propose a hypothesis for the continuance of a multi-faceted Aboriginal urban lived reality expressed through diverse modes of creative interdisciplinary. Focused on reenactment, the use of repetition is indicative of an indigenous treatment in relation to the unknown and unknowable, whereby information is revealed over time through an embodied mediation with a subject or narrative. This is the fundamental aspect which hindered the ability by Cowlshaw to recognise and accept the ways in which Aboriginal culture has and continues to evolve.

### **Transition to dance as research**

However, it is within performance theorist André Lepecki's paper 'Stumble Dance' that I locate my inspiration. Lepecki adopts philosopher, Martin Heidegger's term 'oscillating to find the essent' whereby being is defined as existing in a constant state of instability (Lepecki 2004, p. 49). This is used in juxtaposition to Frantz Fanon's perspectivist ontological framing

whereby presence is categorised in accordance to a hierarchical subjective agenda imposed by a colonising power (Lepecki 2004, p. 56).

The discourse or 'critical friction' (2004, p. 47) generated between Lepecki's juxtaposition of Heidegger and Fanon's theories has a congruency in content to the dialogue I have generated in the search for a theory to articulate the authenticity of urban indigenous beliefs and practices. In regards to the articulation of indigenous practices it is located between Michael Scott's wonder theories as a proponent for the existence of emergent hybrid ontologies, in connection to Cowlshaw's failure to recognise the structural consistencies between the 'traditional' and urban indigenous practices including the accumulation of contemporary dreaming narratives through nonlinear chronological presencing of past acts/events through reiterations and reenactments in preference to preoccupation for resolution found within her description of reconciliation meetings and lastly to Cowlshaw's failure to recognise the symbiotic role of the state in the emergence of new Australian Aboriginal cultural hybridities. In this context Cowlshaw's stance represents an active example of Fanon's coloniser perspective.

Further to this, Lepecki's utilisation of Fanon's theory, originally used to describe the body's compulsion to move and conveyed through an anecdote whereby Fanon unconsciously stumbles and falls upon hearing an association of fear in relation to the colour of his skin (blackness), (Fanon in Lepecki 2004, p. 54) is analogous to the aftermath of Rubenstein's wounding, as the instigator of cultural synthesis.

However it is in Lepecki's 'Body as Archive' (2010) paper where he articulates reenactment as an source for unlimited creative synthesis, in "... the capacity to identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields of "impalpable possibility" (Sontone 2008, p. 147) (Lepecki 2010, p. 31) that a comparison can be made to the generative aspect of open wonder in relation to the unknowable proposed by Scott. It is Lepecki's articulation of the body's compulsion to mediate information as a "will to archive" which corresponds to Even's

description of the preferred process for non-dualist interaction conducted through redescribings (Evens 2008, p. xi).

In the process of transitioning to the creative component and writing its exegesis I intend to utilise Lepecki's discursive methodology to generate my own 'critical frictions' both as a mode of artistic synthesis and as a method to embed my work with cause for further debate. My aim is to create moments of rupture or wounding ripe for 'non-exhausted' contemplation.

## Part Two

### IV. A Conceptual and Embodied Partnership

Through (this) ongoing empirical research into the evolutionary nature of cultures in conjunction with the opportunity to re imagine Carole Johnson's Embassy dance, as part of the NAISDA 40th Anniversary celebrations, I am able to test my theory that the Tent Embassy act of 1972 and each subsequent iteration, are the enactments of a contemporary song cycle. This will be determined as a live dance performance, with the addition of a commission by Carriageworks to create a video instillation, based on the legacy of Black Theatre in Redfern.

This part consists of a record of the creative process including rehearsals, inspirations, treatment and acknowledgement of cultural material and people. The empirical research constituted part of the creative process and was utilised to inform structural composition and conceptual content of the dance works. It was written from a first person perspective and included subjective considerations, negotiations, choices and perceptions from myself as driver of the project.

#### **My introduction to Black Theatre - locating my link/place in the continuum**

As an auditionee for NAISDA in 1986 I performed a monologue from Bernard Shaw's St Joan and was subsequently invited to participate as an actor in the inaugural Black Playwrights Conference in Canberra (January 1987). Here I was introduced, observed and took part in workshops with Bob Maza, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Justine Saunders, Ernie Dingo and many more pioneers of both Black Theatre and the Black activist movements. I wasn't aware at the time that I was to become a part of this cultural continuum.



Over the next four years I travelled to many remote communities learning dances from Christmas and Turkey Creeks, Roper River, Elcho Island and Saibai, Murray and Boigu Torres Strait Islands while learning additional dances from the Tiwi (Bathurst) and Mornington Islands and the communities of Saint Paul from Moa and Badu from the Torres Strait. This was in conjunction to learning western styles of Jazz and Afro Jazz, tap, Horton and Graham based Modern Dance techniques<sup>46</sup> as well as Laban notation, music, dance history and African American dance history.

I distinctly remember Australia/Survival Day in 1988 when the NAISDA students were told to march from Redfern to Belmore Park, opposite Central Station in Sydney; ironically as my mother and my Aunty were watching the tall ships sail in through the heads of Sydney Harbour. That memory forms part of a fertile ground of cultural incongruence, which beckoned for the type of creative attention that I couldn't appreciate until recently. It is the reason why I was and continue to be compelled to make dance works championing the irreverent humour of my activist forebears.

### **Performing Protocol - the original master(s) plan**

As part of this Masters research project I was initially going to make a solo work titled *The Body Politic*.<sup>47</sup> I was inspired by American First Nations artist and academic Mique'l Dangeli's adoption of the term 'transmotion' used to describe the practice of enacting and negotiating protocols through dance (Dangeli 2015, p. 43).<sup>48</sup> In making *The Body Politic* my aim was that this would act as a document to expose the vitality of urban aboriginal theatrical works as evolutionary vehicles for the perpetuation of culture. This project was designed to reveal explicitly within the work itself, the implicit acts of reciprocity and accountability within the

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<sup>46</sup> I would later study and graduate from the Martha Graham School in New York in 1993.

<sup>47</sup> *The Body Politic* has been funded by Arts NSW through the NSW Dance Fellowship formerly known as the Helpman Fellowship of which I am the first indigenous recipient. I am currently in development and the work is due to be presented in early 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Dangeli identified the term transmotion as originally coined by Canadian indigenous scholar Gerald Vizenor's as part of his concepts of 'survivance' and 'transmotion'. Vizenor created these concepts to describe his location of the source of sovereignty as being found in the execution of embodied practices, which cannot be colonized (Dangeli 2015, p. 43).

aboriginal community, through dance, film and text, as verse performed by myself and in vox pops from Aboriginal community members. My motivation was to address Cowlshaw's negative comments about a 'state sponsored culture' (2011, p. 170) propping up a 'regressive separatist construction' (2010, p. 208) by utilising the Australia Council for the Arts implementation of the *Working With Indigenous Peoples Protocols* (2007, p. 7)<sup>50</sup> which proposes any and all indigenous material is acknowledged and mediated with the appropriate indigenous consultants.

When I was engaged to choreograph a component of the NAISDA end of year show I realised that the creative component would still address the same arguments as *The Body Politic* concerning the validity and authenticity and significance of contemporary Indigenous creative cultural works/material. However, the format had shifted from a creative documentary highlighting a working hypothesis focused on cultural protocols when dealing with intergenerational communication and the passing down of information to a working example/outcome of this process through the Aboriginal Tent Embassy narrative. In accepting the NAISDA engagement I decided to treat *PAST* as a development phase as well as a stand-alone piece incorporating some of the provocations originally intended for *The Body Politic* into *PAST*. Therefore I would be able to test some of the parameters in regards to cultural sensitivity and specificity and receive feedback, which would inform the next development phase of my original piece.

### **The conditions under which this work was produced**

I hadn't originally considered making the work for this thesis on a student body although this would have benefits, as teacher it placed me conveniently in the position of elder in this context. It is through the process of making work, primarily as a teacher at NAISDA and Aboriginal Dance Theatre of Redfern and at the Eora Centre where I have had to articulate my artistic intentions and that I have also developed a growing awareness of the cultural responsibility attached to my position. This project placed me directly in the cultural

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<sup>50</sup> The Australia Council for the Arts 2007, *Protocols for producing Indigenous Australian Performing Arts* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

continuum I constantly refer to, via the mediation from the generation before me through conversations with NAISDA's founder Carole Johnson and former dancer as part of the first student intakes and current CEO Kim Walker, to the subsequent passing of the information onto the current student body. I was able to locate NAISDA as the community, which grew from the seminal Tent Embassy event, proving pivotal to this thesis.

For *Past* I worked with random collections of students during the second semester, and for the video instillation, *Redfern as Refuge*, which only one student Kassidy Waters, was featured. My responsibilities were re-prioritised as I had inherited an imposed pedagogical agenda, including the preferred modes and methods of the institution's delivery.<sup>51</sup> I have developed a distinct movement vocabulary, including gestural language developed from my 'traditional' training. These gestures have been manipulated or treated with western dance physical virtuositities including the application of an extended range of motion and the transposing of coordinations, for example: locomotion re-expressed as a series of syncopated head and arm gestures; or rhythms originally expressed through the use of hand percussion, transposed to foot/leg perambulations. This level of reframing of 'traditional' language, which is often delivered separately whilst training, proved challenging for the students to reconcile in a contemporary context.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> I realised that the students had developed preferences, which included movement vocabulary and extended to the engagement with conceptual material. These attitudes superseded the original aim which was to honour the legacy of the Tent Embassy and the legacy of the institution. These attitudes were surprising considering the general lack of exposure to prior formal training and initially proved challenging to negotiate.

<sup>52</sup> Inversely the incorporation of sickled feet and hunched shoulders and shunted locomotion steps form part of a hybrid contemporary dance language born from a direct physical relationship to this country's topography and which are embedded with clues denoting how to engage with the environment while also reflecting the cultural hybridities the student body comprised as well as those first Embassy dancer. This attitude extended to the students resistance to generating dance material. I was determined to implement a practice of treating material as a malleable form, preferring to foster an open-ended process to encourage the development of individual physical nuance indicative of the community dance demonstrations I have witnessed and experienced. As a result, this fluid aspect of my work was misconstrued as lacking in preparation on my part, with the students favouring more prescribed material. Many of the students wanted neat resolutions for where and how the material would be utilised before I was sure if the material was relevant. From this I gleaned the students were not fully cognizant of their role and scope as contemporary indigenous heritage makers. Choreographer Elma Kris' work, which also featured in the NAISDA production melded Torres Strait Islander dance vocabularies which were juxtaposed with western vocabularies.

### The original Embassy theatrical re-imagining

At first I thought *The Embassy, A New Challenge* dance that Carole had directed consisted of the short performance she re-developed on the Redfern workshop participants for Canberra. I was later given a video link to the performance in a hall in Surry Hills which ran for fifty-seven minutes. The footage didn't capture the whole stage, nor was I able to discern the spoken text. I was able to recognise some of the sections including those containing traditional Lardil dances from Mornington Island and the contemporary dance *Brown Skin Baby*, which was inserted into my work *Past*.<sup>53</sup> Carole passed her choreographic notes to me and I discovered choreographic contributions by Filipino modernist choreographer Lucy Jumawan (one of the co-founders of the school). The work was presented in six parts and although it featured the Tent Embassy act, it encompassed more than the Embassy act alone (see Appendix 2: Genesis of Embassy Dance, for running order and content).

### Locating the song

In order to treat *Past*<sup>54</sup> as a song cycle I had to identify the components of a song cycle. I embedded the work with Aboriginal knowledge, both recognised and undisclosed, which was to be interpreted according to the levels of knowledge possessed by those witnessing it. This is part of the pedagogy I have experienced on country in communities whereby information is released when ready and is realised when one is able to correctly apprehend or decipher embedded knowledges. This is one of the reasons age and experience are valued within aboriginal communities. I endeavored to transform the audience members from passive observers to witnesses (see appendix 5: Stolen song ). The work was performed as an re-described memory act (Evans 2008) incorporating dance, spoken text, song and film,

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<sup>53</sup> Both *Brown Skin Baby* for the girls and *Mangy Ol' Dog* for the boys were considered rites of passage entries into the college in the 1980s. I distinctly remember being given the option to wail at the end of my audition rendition, which was very confronting at the time. I didn't think I had much choice given that I was auditioning on the premise of being an actor. The sadness of enacting those cries is still palpable. Although now I appreciate the significance of the wailing as a performative practice often enacted as a component of mourning scenes or songs. I have danced at Garma while two women cried as they touched a wooden pole placed in the middle of the dancing ground. We were crouched over kneeling and as we inched forward we would strike the back/side of our heads with our fists.

<sup>54</sup> *Past* was the first section of three in the end of year show titled *From Sand To Stage*.

employing the identified ontological elements Cowlshaw utilises, to invalidate the events she witnesses, as evidence of a culturally disjointed people.<sup>55</sup>

Due to the overall time constriction and scheduling I had decided to create four short dances modelled on the format I have experienced learning from the Yolngu. Each short dance or episode is used interchangeably, dependent on the dreaming narrative, or in relation to a person referred to/for in a dance ceremony. For example Banumbirr (Morning Star) might indicate a birth or beginning of something and Djapana (Farewell Sunset) death or an ending.

Before commencing this creative project I had been commissioned by the newly formed National Theatre of Parramatta to direct Jane Harrison's *Stolen*<sup>56</sup>, a play chronicling the lives of five characters as part of the enforced removal and institutionalisation of Aboriginal children. It was Harrison's initial depiction of a nonlinear chronology unfolding in short vignettes which continually jumped back and forth in time and place, which led me to treat *Stolen* as a song cycle, narrative of future ancestral import.

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<sup>55</sup> These include re-enactments and embodiments of victimhood whereby resolutions are not sought.

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix 5: *Stolen* Song Cycle.

## V. *PAST* – a ceremonial song re-embodying the Tent Embassy<sup>57</sup>

My contribution to the end of year student performance – *Past*, existed as part one of three including, *Present*, choreographed by Elma Kris and *Future*, which was the result of mixed NAISDA student and staff input. The umbrella event was titled, *From Sand to Stage*. *Past* was depicted through four sections: the time before the dreaming titled *Time before Time*, the intrusion of a capitalist agenda, *The Office*, the resistance movement, *The Tents* and the cultural continuum, *The Birds*.

### Insider and outsider knowledge - engagement with wonder

In the *Time Before Time* section I was inspired to refer to a Yolngu practice I had witnessed and call ‘crying for country’. I have experienced this twice before, once at the Garma festival as the outdoor gallery was being opened and on Elcho Island. At Garma we were led down a dirt path lit by tea candles and we all assembled and sat down in the darkness. When our bodies grew calm and the silence could be felt, the sound of a yidarki<sup>58</sup> played and was accompanied by women crying. It was powerful. After it stopped one of the women told us that their tears made the reality we were inhabiting, they cried the trees, they cried the stars, they cried the land and the animals on it. With this creation sharing, the area flooded with light and we were treated to the colourful spectacle of contemporary prints in lurid colours that weren't meant to go together, but in this context worked magic upon the eyes. On Elcho Island we were woken before sun-up and seated huddled together with the elasticised waists of our skirt at our necks, acting as makeshift blankets to keep us warm. About ten or 15 minutes before the sun appeared over the horizon the local women amongst us cried the sun and Morningstar into being.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 6: *Past* Video Link and Program.

<sup>58</sup> This is the Yolngu term for the digeridoo. The yidarki is considered to have originated in Arnhem Land.

<sup>59</sup> I had been inspired to utilise information from this experience before, one with Digital media collaborator Marian Abboud for a workshop development in Blacktown whereby we recorded vox pops from the community about what they found quintessentially summed up their experienced as Australians. From cigarettes to Aussie flags, I placed each item in my mouth (the seat of my voice) in homage to the Yolngu women's practice in acknowledgement of the first peoples who made all else possible. The other time I shared this experience it was in remembrance of the versatility of the skirts and relative modesty in regards to the female body on Elcho

As part of the first rehearsal I asked the NAISDA students what they mourn and what makes them cry for other reasons, including the comical. I asked them to contemplate the original context, crying into existence or acknowledgement, and crying as a performative element. One dancer, Shana O'Brien's contribution, particularly resonated, "I cry that my grandmother, after a lifetime of denying it, is almost ready to say that she's Aboriginal" bookended with "I cry when I step on a Lego". From then onward I asked O'Brien to make the list that I would eventually use as part of the sound score.<sup>60</sup> This was augmented with a recording of anthropologist Ted Strehlow's interpretation of the beginning of the Tjukurrpa (1978, pp. 14, 15).

By positioning these two representations together I was creating a space for reflection, emulating Lepecki's 'critical friction', between two perspectives/ideologies at work. Strehlow's academic text represented a dualist interpretation of the dreaming by naming and categorising its characteristics, which is in effect to occlude wonder—Cowlshaw's goal. Whereby the 'I cries' were a symbol of a relational non-dualist reciprocal engagement with the environment and an example of the cosmological belief that fosters awe in the face of the unknown, by meditating on it rather than quantifying it.

The dance began with a mass of bodies clumped together, moving in stilted increments as if in time-lapse. The bodies mimicked the activities described in the text, emulating the amorphous structure that would realise the beginning of the Dreaming chronology, before dispersing to become features of the land. The dance was built upon two core sequences which were transposed in level and dynamic. The base phrases grew out of a language of gestures and stomps, first developed using the rhythm of Morse code.<sup>61</sup> The language was

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Island compared to down here in Sydney for a previous NAISDA end of year performance titled *Community Phone*.

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix 7: I Cry typed text. I was initially conflicted about utilising so much of one student's contribution but this was symbolic of the shift in my role from artist to teacher, in control of facilitating and showcasing the student's abilities.

<sup>61</sup> Although a manipulation of English, I was initially inspired to begin using Morse code as it was no longer officially used as a the universal distress signal since 1997.

interrupted with small reverberations or ‘oscillations’ at points determined by the students, suggesting something struggling to come to life.

### **Finding/Locating the trickster - hidden within organisational construct**

The Office was the most challenging section, yet the most significant in the work. In this section I had hoped to represent the trickster, to recapture a similar irreverent attitude toward the state inspired by Gary Foley’s notorious subversive engagement with authority, from his threats to bomb the tall ship Endeavour, to his donning of a South African Springboks’ football Jersey to rile the white team under the Apartheid System (Persons Of Interest: 2014).

I was inspired to find a way of mimicking the operations of the state and had decided to create a surrealist policy document highlighting the materialist agenda of capitalism. This became *The 2016 Cultural Contribution Act* (see Appendix 8). It was former mentor Barbara Kernick who had helped me research the machinations of Wiradjuri kinship systems who informed me she had been following former Prime Minister Paul Keating's speech writer Don Watson. Watson has written numerous texts about modes of speech employed in organisational operations. In *Death Sentence* he writes of speaking in codes of exclusivity designed to confuse and exert power by rendering the recipient disenfranchised (Watson 2003, pp. 2, 3). In one passage he illustrates the propensity for these systems to commodify and quantify the immaterial, for example personality traits (2003, p. 20). From this I asked peers and students to suggest an outlandish or surrealist purpose for ancestral power. There had been suggestions of the forms for a new virtual reality game. This was a difficult conceptual goal to articulate and initially even more difficult to inspire participation from the students, as for many this involved little kinaesthetic engagement. The surrealist element was realised through the idea of ancestral dreaming power operating within the telecommunications sector of the ‘real-world’; symbolic of the merging of the imaginary or virtual with the ridiculous.



*The 2016 Cultural Contribution Act* document was further enhanced by a member of the academic staff, Jane Austen who shaped the text to make it resemble a piece of legalese. The text was distributed in object form to the audience and was manipulated through the text as speech program to be recorded as part of sound track. The text also served as a link to the video installation on exhibit in the next bay, where excerpts ran in ticker tape across the bottom of approximately thirty placards. The placards were suspended from the ceiling to represent the faceless bodies uniting in acts of resistance. Copies were placed by the tent and distributed by the attendant. I was hoping to elicit some feedback as it was my intention for the audience to read the document in full afterward.<sup>62</sup>

### **Reframing - placing the punk in the conservatorium/theatre**

The office section was designed to inversely reframe the theatrical space, by bringing the punk concert ethos to the 'proscenium'. The aesthetic was messy and dangerous, emulating the enduring clash of ideologies between Aboriginal culture and the state, serving as a portent for the Embassy event to come.<sup>63</sup>

The Office symbolised the first wave of chaos or wounding. The sharp tight relatively square angular choreography of the office zealot, oscillated in alternation with the moments of disruption consisting of the walk-ons<sup>64</sup> causing minor collisions, to culminate in the aggressive body slamming of the mosh pit in the corner. These were offered in contrast to

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<sup>62</sup> In hindsight I am not sure whether this performance was the right platform. I was aiming to capitalise (no pun intended) on the readymade audience of peers in the visiting Alumni student body and prominent Aboriginal community invitees. However there were two inhibiting factors at work. First, that this was primarily a celebratory event and people were preoccupied with re acquainting themselves. Second, this interdisciplinary performative component, the harnessing of politics as an interactive medium within this type of theatrical presentation, does not normally occur. Aboriginal dance, using the company Bangarra Dance Theatre as the most visible example, is relatively conservative in its approach to audience engagement in comparison to visual artists. Vernon Ah Kee's observational text based *If I Was White* (1999) series and Tracy Moffatt's repertoire including *Nice Coloured Girls* (1987) featuring three Aboriginal women picking up and fleecing an unsuspecting male dupe in the Kings Cross are highly provocative. In a contemporary dance theatre context audience members show their appreciation and don't necessarily use the dance as an invitation for discourse. Elements like *Eggy* are virtually non-existent in a contemporary danced context.

<sup>63</sup> The Office was also influenced by Susan Leigh Foster's illustration of de Certeau in regards to the post-modernist movement of reframing of engagement by audience and artists alike by taking the theatre to site specific spaces.

<sup>64</sup> As if on the street.

the fatigued couple holding themselves up as the lights faded. The three danced dynamics were placed against one another to infer instability.<sup>65</sup>

### **Eggy - summoning the trickster**

On the last night's performance the students seemed to understand my intent for their engagement with the work, which was to channel the subversive energy of the 'trickster'. Together they had conspired to make small changes. This began with the two narrators of the first section, who usually make their way from the seating bank to the stage whilst critiquing the performance and making observational comments about the audience. On this night they swapped roles, surprising me and the rehearsal director/contemporary teacher, who asked me whether he ought to run backstage and caution them.<sup>66</sup> Dancers inserted themselves into other sections and the mosh pit finally looked like a mosh pit and not a heavily manicured corner of controlled jumps.

### **The act of (re-)enactment - singing<sup>67</sup> the body politic**

To introduce the concept for the Tents section I began by playing the 1970 track *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* by Gil Scott Heron. By playing Heron's pioneering spoken text rap I was aiming to reinforce the influence of the African American human rights movement on the Australian Aboriginal resistance movement. Scott Heron's text encapsulates the urgency to take self-determined action by stating, 'The revolution puts you in the drivers seat.' Heron humorously describes the stereotypical white gaze on the black man who is, 'trying to slide that color television into a stolen ambulance'. Heron is capitalising on preconceived perceptions of fear and distrust whilst promising or threatening future change encapsulated in his closing stanza:

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<sup>65</sup> Reminiscent of the film *They Shoot Horses Don't They* (1969) referencing the desperate measures people will go to during the depression where they held durational competitions, sometimes lasting for days and causing occasional death for prizemoney. The couple are a symbol of the alienable situation that Rubenstein refers to initiating ontological change.

<sup>66</sup> I did not. I was pleased that the dancers were finally treating the material as a vehicle to facilitate their own mediation with culture and identity. To reflect how we engage with dance in a 'traditional' context whereby the individual voices have greater input within cultural ceremonial structures.

<sup>67</sup> Singing-magic powers.

The revolution will not be televised, will not be televised,  
 Will not be televised, will not be televised.  
 The revolution will be no re-run brothers,  
 The revolution will be live'.

Following consultative sessions with independent artist Kay Armstrong<sup>68</sup> I crafted text while maintaining mindfulness of Heron's song. Together Kay and I generated phrases substituting the vocabulary of danced action in lieu of English terms. One of which alluded to civil rights leader and pacifist Dr Martin Luther King's historic '*I Have a Dream*'<sup>69</sup> speech which was substituted with, '*I Have a Spear*' (see appendix 9)." This section utilised aboriginal terms to replace English terms and inserted an Aboriginal agenda of land relationships whilst re-affirming the link to the American human rights movement.

The Tents dance began with the performers entering from different corners of the stage after a re-enactment of Carole's work *Brown Skin Baby*. Throughout the first half of this section the dancers moved in separate stop start processions under tents made from stretch fabric. There were eight tents in total, a group of two to four under each represented separate clans coming to a meeting place as they would when participating in ceremonies<sup>70</sup>, stopping at different places of importance. Repeatedly moving and stopping and moving and stopping. The dancers were re-describing the mobilisation of bodies to the live recitation of the spoken text as a rap through a bullhorn. Each episodic verse of movement and dance was representative of another human rights reason for the journey to Canberra. The dancers then made a circle from the tents in reference to the circling of arms by the original protesters and reenacted in Carole's dance. This was a symbolic of the attempt to forge an impenetrable human barrier between the police trying to dismantle the Tent Embassy within.

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<sup>68</sup> Kay had worked as a dramaturg on *Briwiyant* and I have choreographed on her former youth company YouMove over the course of 5 years.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Luther King, 1963, *I Have A Dream*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smEqnnklfYs> (SullenToys.com)

<sup>70</sup> I have experienced this in a predominately Yolngu context.

In rehearsal we had discussed how groups currently mobilise in protest, acknowledging the predominance of social media. I was interested in the hashtag system of high-impact, short-form online advertising and encouraged the dancers to create tags, which addressed current aboriginal issues<sup>71</sup>. During this time period I was also asked to co facilitate a workshop with at risk Lebanese Muslim students in for Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) in Parramatta. From this, sensitive issues were raised<sup>72</sup>. Not all material generated in my creative process is used in the final draft for many reasons, one being that it may not be appropriate for an audience. I encourage a space that promotes free association upon the assurance that only material deemed safe in relation to the context of final exposure be publicized, for example "#mymotherlandisastamponmypassport" refers to the first generation Australians from immigrant parents who regard their parents' homelands as their own. This was considered outside knowledge and appropriate for publication.<sup>73</sup> In the Aboriginal context one hashtag read: "#juveniledetention #riteofpassage" which came up during a workshop but was not deemed appropriate for the 40th anniversary's celebratory platform. Accepted hashtags became t-shirt slogans and were used for costuming. By creating a space for free association in combination with the utilisation of Aboriginal withholding practices<sup>74</sup> as a creative tactic, I was acknowledging how I could employ de Certeau's theory to maximise the rehearsal space as a place for cultural activity and contemporary synthesis.

In the *Redfern as Refuge*<sup>75</sup> video component we revisited the now empty site of the most recent and now defunct Redfern Tent Embassy, of which I have also written a short creative non-fiction story (see Appendix 3: The Embassy). The film featured a scene of myself pitching a tent on the roundabout- A tongue in cheek staking of my land rights.

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<sup>71</sup> See Appendix 11: NAISDA Hash Tags.

<sup>72</sup> See Appendix 10: Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) Hash Tags.

<sup>73</sup> Whilst #howtomakeabomwithascarf&acouplahairpins even though we acknowledged it was ridiculous, would never appear in a performance of any kind.

<sup>74</sup> This relates to my experience of insider and outsider knowledge which I also refer to as inward and outward focused communication, whereby information is revealed according to status within a community. Status may be predicated on age, kinship affiliation and marriage status.

<sup>75</sup> See Appendix 12: *Redfern As Refuge* Video Link and Images.

### **Wounding for a new beginning**

The final section *The Birds* featured two dancers performing as birds whilst casting a shadow on a projection of a close up of my fingers weaving a Torres Strait Islander zazi (coconut leaf skirt). An a Capella version of the first NAISDA anthem created by Jimmy Gagai, Percy Jackonia and Dujon Nuie, (two of who have since passed away), was sung in accompaniment by Ena Illume as a solo jazz lament. The birds<sup>77</sup> represent death whilst simultaneously the repetitious weaving fingers served as a metaphor for an ancestral continuum. This section symbolised the role of the artist as a mediator of culture in a contemporary context. The narrative being mediated - 'The Tent Embassy Dreaming'.

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<sup>77</sup> I was initially informed about a connection between birds and death through anecdotal conversations of the Yolngu Mokuy spirit, which is performed with the hands making birdlike gestures. The belief that birds are the harbingers of death is voiced often amongst various Aboriginal people I have come in contact with. This is a reference, that while is not corroborated in my empirical research, is understood when watching the work.

## Conclusion

This thesis was written to strengthen an Australian Indigenous arts, specifically contemporary dance presence, from a self-determined academic perspective. It was designed to address the active speculation concerning authenticity and validity of the contemporary modes of expression, from community based dance groups, to the dance theatre performances designed for the proscenium, to the official 'welcome to country' proceedings, by making public the epistemologies that are normally earned and learned through repetitious embodied cogitations over a lifetime in an Australian Indigenous cultural context.

Ironically I was searching for theories that didn't offer resolution based hypotheses, in my aim to articulate a rationale for the conduct of culture. The underpinning commonality between Michael Scott's wonder theory on how to appreciate the world, with an awe that is self-generating and Lepecki's embodiment theory, described as a 'will to archive', whereby the act of re-enactment generates the same endless immersive engagement principle, where I found both my creative inspiration and ontological explanation.

The original Tent Embassy act demonstrated and reaffirmed a cultural constancy. Through a show of unity from traditional communities to the urban Aboriginals from down south, the perception of self shifted from identity bound in relationships defined by land territory, to include identity traced through ancestral lineage. By utilising Susan Leigh Foster I was able to identify the parallel shift in performative intent, away from spatial demonstrations on and about the creation of landforms, to the ways Aboriginal people utilized their bodies as political agents in the mobilisation against state forces and the fight for better living conditions.

Although the Aboriginal Tent Embassy did not adhere to the cultural conventions, which began with the birth of the Dreaming, it entered folklore. The Embassy has become an elevated narrative, which successive urban embodied demonstrations animate. By dancing

the Embassy event through the body politic narrative as *Past*, in re-imaging, a re-embodiment, of an act which began forty-five years ago, we transcended linear conventions of time to gain agency with the Dreaming space. The Embassy act continues to inspire people to mobilise and find their cause by existing in a form that lends itself to inhabitation.

As a contemporary indigenous artist whose identity is affirmed through work, this thesis has personal relevance. I see my role as negotiator between cultural protocol and contemporary best practice by integrating current trends in the arts, including the integration of technologies. I also generate new vocabularies and new accountabilities through my contribution as an emergent academic. I am prompted to mediate these knowledges with the aid of progressive peak arts bodies that recognise the imperative collaborative function of indigenous art making. My aim is to instigate and locate significant indigenous narratives as they emerge, animating them and potentially facilitating an ongoing maintenance of Australian Indigenous culture.

Through the expansion of a collaborative ethos, achieved by working with those outside the Australian indigenous community, the possibilities for growth, diversity and security of the Indigenous lived realities is strengthened. In my ongoing creative practice I recognize the need to generate different platforms for the apprehension of cultural practices other than the relatively limited presentation stage of an arts product.

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## **Appendices: Creative Portfolio**

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## Appendix 1: Umviquak



*[Home](#) | [Blog](#) | COIL 2017 FESTIVAL – PS122 – NEW YORK CITY*

# COIL 2017 FESTIVAL – PS122 – NEW YORK CITY

Well, hello, and Happy New Year. No, not from the sunny climes of Sydney’s inner western suburbs, but from the biting, frigid temperatures of New York City.

What am I doing here? (Aside from freezing my proverbial off.)

Umyuangvigkaq!\*

What does this mean (I can almost hear you ask)?

Firstly, I will inform you of the umbrella event in which this uniquely-spelt durational installation sits. Coil Festival, run by PS122, doesn’t seek to package itself in one neat compartment, instead

the current (and departing) director Vallejo Gantner seeks “living, breathing, complicated, flawed and wonderful experiences. Profound and unpredictable. Difficult”. (see link below).

Now in its 12th year, Coil regularly showcases Australian artists, including this year’s Antony Hamilton & Alisdair Macindoe and Nicola Gunn, whose virtuosic solo Piece for Person and Ghetto Blaster I caught in between one of my own as part of the same lineup on Performance Space’s 2016 Liveworks festival.

Back to the real purpose of my visit.

I am in the midst of a momentous occasion for First Nations people here in Mannahatta, the original Lenape place name for this significant island. Over the past two days a small selected team of speakers (see below) gathered together over a meal of smoked salmon and tundra tea (plus the usual New York bagels, goats cheese, wine and baklava of course) to discuss the importance of acknowledging, of honouring the original inhabitants of the land.

We realised the task ahead was ambitious and that the proposed topics up for debate were going to be challenging for an island that was once the major port for newcomers settlers to this country. The well known catch call, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...”\*\* summing up this city’s narrative as the gateway to refuge for the world’s needy, would be difficult to shift.

The day of Umyuangvigkak Long Table and Sewing Bee began with a welcome to country... of sorts. Yup’ik choreographer Emily Johnson, curator and director, let slip that the Lenape elder she contacted may not be present or may actually phone in his welcome in lieu of turning up in person. What the hell?

This was a new concept, which initially felt like being granted entry to someone’s abode via telecom, only to find the house empty. For myself, having conducted many such acknowledgements, it is an honour to speak the original language name of country and to share the sound of a place that comes directly from it, emanating from its contours.

When the Elders did finally speak my uneasiness was allayed. The Elders chose to direct their address to more pressing matters. Instead of welcoming us specifically, they referred to the state of crisis the land is currently experiencing, due to exhaustive mining practices and general human

overconsumption. They referred to Standing Rock, which has garnered international exposure and support from the world's indigenous populations and environmentalists alike. The import and gravity with which they spoke, coupled with the knowledge of the sheer numbers who have actually gone to Standing Rock, leads me to believe that this movement of continued resistance somehow encapsulates a turning point in regards to the crucial place for indigenous processes and knowledges for the future well being of the planet.

The ensuing event was advertised as a long table discussion broken up into four parts. Each segment commenced with a provocation around a theme concerning First Nations American people. These included: the notion of perceived invisibility and the second titled Indigenising the Future, focussed on the continuance of specificity in aesthetic, processes of invention and ceremony. The third was given a unique title, My Dad Gives Blue Berries to Caribou He Hunts and the fourth and final Radical Love, referred to the capacity for love after atrocity and its associated generative effects. (For which Nelson Mandela and Bishop Dr Desmond Tutu immediately came to mind.)

It is the curious title about berries and caribou which encapsulated the day. It began with Emily retelling a poignant personal history about “a good kill” and led to a conversation that encompassed the custom of demand sharing, of reciprocity or the current general lack thereof within a fundamental capitalist system. It was at this moment the talk turned to the importance of process in hand – of the dual action at hand, our hands busy at work, busy making a quilt.

The talk talking was all about finding the right rhetoric, finding the same page, to describe, accept and find the ways and means to make a considered space for a more conscious indigenous presence within the greater urban social fabric. The act of sewing together, placed us there, together.

While my blind eyes floundered, persisted and finally intuited the eye of the needle, I meditated on the subtle differences between American First Nations and myself as an Australian Aboriginal woman. My mouth self-censored unnecessary banter, as my needle bound the fabric squares together in progressively neater back-stitches. It's just harder to talk rubbish.

While constructing my patch I thought of its meditative effect. I was reminded of Briwyant, the work I made inspired by and paying homage to the act of painting. In the research in the lead up to



making Briwyant I discovered that the busier the painting, made more dazzling and intricate with numerous painstaking dots or crosshatched lines, the more powerful and sacred it became; imbued with ancestral magic.

I aspired to recreate this transformative process and each night a river was constructed, made from thousands of playing cards, each individually glued to resemble a three dimensional painting. Its scale almost overwhelming in execution (not dissimilar to Emily's overall quilt design). I was caught unawares and ultimately dismayed when somebody asked me what was more important, the dance or the river? I had failed to clearly demonstrate the crucial importance of both aspects of the work in equal measure.

Umyuangvigkaq was such a day dedicated to doing. Doing as being and as a means of subtle transformation. I am in awe of Emily's ability to weave the best practices of both cultures together to generate a new platform. As our collective hands worked the cloth I realised we had all become simultaneous performers and witnesses. Emily had managed to inject a working contemporary indigenous agenda, inspired by past instillations consisting of traditional customs of feasting, skinning, sewing and performing with fish skins, but on a much larger scale. This was and is multi arts at its best.

As I walked the streets from the Ace Hotel on West 29th Street back to my old (and new temporary) digs on the Lower East Side, contemplating the Lenape stomping grounds beneath me, the other more familiar choreography of the Australia Council-hosted Red and White party rolled onwards.

Leadership Council and Provocateurs chosen by Emily Johnson:

Sm Loodm 'Nüüsm (Dr.Mique'l Dangeli), Lee-Ann Tjunypa Buckskin, Karyn Recollet, Vicki Van Hout

\*Place to develop ideas

\*\*Emma Lazarus' famous poem The New Colossus is graven on a tablet within the pedestal on which the Liberty statue stands.

[www.ps122.org/coil-2017](http://www.ps122.org/coil-2017)

Vicki Van Hout

FORM Dance Projects BLOG

Appendix 1 (cont.): PS122 Long Table Program p. 1

The protocols for UMYUANGVIGKAO are:

- By entering this space you acknowledge you are on Mamehatcha in Lenapehoking and you pay respect to Lenape ancestors past, present, and future
- This is an Indigenous led conversation and process
- You are here to be an active part of discussion and change and in so you will listen more than you speak

Schedule for the day:

UMYUANGVIGKAO is open to all Indigenous people, artists, and allies. Come all day or for a stitch. Come with ready hearts. Come.

- 11:30am Breakfast and Acknowledgement of Country
- 12:00pm This is Lenapehoking: Confronting perceived invisibility
- 1:30pm Indigenizing the Future: The continuance of Aesthetic, Invention, Ceremony
- 3:00pm My Dad Gives Blueberries to Caribou He Hunts: Indigenous process and Research as Ceremony
- 4:30pm Radical Love: Indigenous Artists and our Allies

This durational Sewing Bee and conversation is part of our ongoing work, *Then a Cunning Voice and A Night We Spend Gazing at Stars*, an all night, outdoor performance project taking place on and near 84-community made, hand-stitched quilts designed by Maggie Thompson.

The Leadership Council and Provocateurs of UMYUANGVIGKAO:

Born and raised on the Annette Island Indian Reserve, Sm loodn Nltsim (Dr. Miquel Dangel) is of the Tsimshian Nation of Metlakatla, Alaska. She is a dancer, choreographer, curator, activist, and Assistant Professor of Alaska Native Studies at the University of Alaska Southeast. Her work focuses on Northwest Coast First Nations and Alaska Native visual and performing arts, art history, protocol, politics, sovereignty, language revitalization, and decolonization. Miquel served for eight years as the Director of her community's museum in Metlakatla. For the past thirteen years, she and her husband artist and carver Mike Dangel (Nisga'a, Tsimshian Tlingit, and Tseksat Nations) have share the leadership of Git Hayestk, an internationally renowned Northwest Coast dance group who was recently featured performers at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. She is an artist-in-residence at the Scotiabank Dance Centre in Vancouver and a Protocol Consultant for the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance in Toronto.

Lee-Ann Tjunpa Buckskin is a Narungga, Wirangu, Woiboluk woman. Lee-Ann is well known throughout the Australian Indigenous and arts communities and has worked across many major Festivals and events within Australia including Adelaide Fringe, Adelaide and Brisbane Festivals. She has produced Blak Nite South Australia's leading Indigenous Youth Arts Festival as part of the 2005, 07, 09 and 11 Come Out Festivals. The Australian Festival for Young People, Lee-Ann's held a position for more than ten years with Carlewee Youth Arts in Adelaide as Manager of the Community Program as well as the Aboriginal Arts Development Program. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the University of South Australia. In 2005, she was awarded the prestigious internationally recognised Sidney Myer Facilitator Prize. The Prize recognises Lee-Ann's tremendous contribution to Indigenous arts in this country. She is the recipient of two Ruby Awards in South Australia. She designed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander War Memorial for South Australia which was opened by the Governor-General Quentin Bryce in Adelaide 10 November 2013. The project won the Ruby Award for Best Work. In 2016 she won the Geoff Grounust Memorial Ruby Award for her sustained contribution to the arts and community cultural development in South Australia. Lee-Ann is the newly appointed Deputy Chair of the Australia Council for the Arts. She is the Co-chair of Tarnanthi the Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts Festival, Adelaide. Lee-Ann currently is the Executive for Aboriginal Strategic for the South Australian Film Corporation. Furthermore, she is also a member of the National Museum of Australia's Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

Emily Johnson is an artist who makes body-based work. A Bessie Award winning choreographer and Guggenheim Fellow, she is based in New York City. Originally from Alaska, she is of Yup'ik descent and since 1998 has created work that considers the experience of sensing and seeing performance. Her dances function as installations, engaging audiences within and through a space and environment — interacting with a place's architecture, history, and role in community. Emily received a 2014 Doris Duke Artist Award; her work is supported by Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, Creative Capital, Map Fund, a Joyce Award, the McKnight Foundation, and The Doris Duke Residency to Build Demand for the Arts. Emily's written work has been published and commissioned by Dance Research Journal (University of Cambridge Press), SFMOA: Transmotion Journal, University of Kent; Movement Research Journal; Pew Center for Arts and Heritage; and the forthcoming compilation, Imagined Theaters (Routledge), by Daniel Sack. With her collaborators she recently completed the third in a trilogy of works: *The Thank-you Bar, Nicugn!*, and *SHORE*. She is in the process of making *Then a Cunning Voice and a Night We Spend Gazing at Stars* - an all night outdoor performance gathering taking place on and near eighty four community-hand-made quilts - which will premiere in 2017 and tour to Williamstown, VIC, New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, and Melbourne, Australia.

Karyn Recollet is an Assistant professor in the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Karyn is an urban Cree, residing in the traditional territories of the Petun, Wendat, Mississauga's of the New Credit. Dish with One Spoon treaty territory. Karyn's research explores the various intersections of Indigenous artistic activations rooted in the multiple layered Indigenous territories that are urban spaces. Karyn's focal points are choreographic fugitivity, Indigenous futurities, and decolonial love. Karyn's publications include articles Glyphing Decolonial love, Gesturing Indigenous futurities, and has coedited alongside Eve Tuck, Native Feminist texts (a special edition of English Journal). Karyn is currently working on a manuscript entitled Urban glyphs: fugitives, futurities, and radical decolonial love.

Vicki Van Hout is of Dutch and Wiradjuri descent (with a few other cultures mixed in for good measure) and is a graduate of NAISDA Dance College (Australia's premier Indigenous tertiary training institution) and the Marjita Graham School of Contemporary Dance NYC. Van Hout returned to Australia after an invitation by Director Stephen Page to perform with Bangarra Dance Theatre, for the New Horizons Asian Tour of the groundbreaking ballet, Ochres (1996/7). Since returning from New York (almost 20 years to this day) Vicki has utilized her dance as a vehicle to explore other art forms including film and set design, as seen in her major works. Briwanti where she created a river of over 2,000 playing cards to emulate both her ancestral homeland country and the art of repetitious dot painting. Long Grass whereby Van Hout created another intricate set environment emulating the quick growing tall grasses of the Northern Territory, utilizing large scale live indigenous weaving techniques, crafted from contemporary materials and as Director/co designer of playwright Jane Harrison's well-trodden Stolen, creating a ready-made morphing Dreaming-scape from scraps of recycled cardboard. After over 30 years as a performer Vicki regards her inclusion in the historic Aboriginal opening of parliament, preceding the National Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2007, one of the most memorable highlights.

Performance Space 122 pays respect to Lenape peoples and ancestors past, present, and future. We acknowledge that the Coil Festival and this work presented by PS122 is situated on the Lenape island of Mamehatcha (Mamehatcha) and more broadly in Lenapehoking, the Lenape homeland.

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## PS122 Long Table and Durational Sewing Bee

Hosted &amp; Curated by Emily Johnson / Catalyst

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**Emily Johnson**

## Karyn Recollet

Vicki Van Hout

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**Yumi Tamashiro**

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**Special Thanks: Ace Hotel New York, and to all of our volunteers!**

**#thenacunningvoice**



## Appendix 2: The Genesis of Embassy Dance by Carole Y Johnson

For me the Embassy Dance is especially momentous because it marks the beginning of Australian Indigenous Contemporary Dance. In 1972 Sydney Urban Aboriginal dance workshop students performed in Canberra at a political demonstration that was a critical turning point in Australian Indigenous Affairs. In putting up the tent embassy Indigenous Australians visibly confronted the Australian government power structure and brought the attention of the world to Aboriginal issues. The dance performed at the rally was later developed to become a theatre piece. The later work, a choreographed reflection/enactment of the event, is a social panorama pointing out some underlying concerns striking the heart of the Aboriginal community. Despite the tent embassy's physical destruction in 1972, it lives forever in the minds of Indigenous Australians. Performing the dance from time to time helps keep the memory alive and can remind Indigenous dancers that their theatrical dance form grew out of political action.

The modern dance at the event was performed by untrained dancers. I was asked by Indigenous leaders (probably Paul Coe) if the group I was teaching could produce something for the following Sunday's demonstration. The group returned to Sydney from the 1<sup>st</sup> demonstration and worked on ideas. Confusion, outrage, resentment, lost, mourning, death - I was already teaching the girls a dance, by African-American choreographer Rod Rodgers that I adapted for untrained-dancers. The words of the song fit so aptly what was happening and how people felt - anger, sadness at loss. *"Oh, there's grieving in the Plum grove and anger in the land"* were the first words of the song by I believe Bernice Reagon.

After the first Demonstration we went back to Redfern to work out exactly what we would do. I especially recall conferring with Wayne Nicol. I choose music of three American composers: Sun Ra, Herbie Hancock to add to the Bernice Reagon Song. The Sun Ra piece reflected a sense of **confusion, dissonance, discord**; Herbie Hancock (Probably **confrontation - Anger**); Bernice Reagon continued anger into a **grieving and lamentation**. The images of me being carried aloft by Michael Anderson and Bob Maza were to music of Herbie Hancock and the position was to subliminally call to mind Jesus being carries on the cross.

The dance, without the uplifted figure on the cross, was performed in the ANU hall the night before the demonstration and then again out-of-doors at the demonstration with the dramatic addition of the dead body. I don't remember if I danced with the women in the hall. I kind of think I didn't. Because they were in a proscenium type situation they remembered it. The out-of-doors performance in front of the tent embassy is what everyone remembers and was seen by numerous Aboriginal people coming from all over Australia to support the rally. This moment is the beginning of modern dance becoming a prominent part of 20th century urban Aboriginal culture. In the performance at the demonstration, I had to get up and lead them. As inexperienced non-dancers who were just learning the work they became confused by the intensity of the large crowd and their directions in space.

For the performers and the audience, the dance had deep meaning and they were energized by this performance. A half hour later the demonstration continued as living theatre and turned into a violent confrontation with government authority as represented by the police. To protect the tent embassy the people stood circling the tent with arms locked as police determined to pull the tent down plowed into the crowd. Images I remember in the actual aftermath of the violent commotion

were: the sign, bits and pieces of cloth, a few of the people jeering at the police and the crowd slowly moving away while a few police remained cleaning up as the crowd dispersed. The workshop performers, not yet truly dancers, left the event motivated to keep dancing. They knew that they had done something important and dance was another way to communicate.

### **Surry HILLS Performance – September 1972**

For this performance, I work with the dance group to flush out a few more the ideas from what we experienced at the demonstration. This is when the theatrical work, *The Embassy, A New Challenge*, is first created. I don't remember much of what we did and how the sections intersected. It's about 5-7 minutes in length. A cloth is thrown over a tripod to represent the tent. I do distinctly remember having a section of sliding movements in wide 2<sup>nd</sup> position with arms in bent 2<sup>nd</sup> and finger spread with maybe a shake-a-leg from time to time. They were to move like traditional dancers moving back and forth across the stage. The Rod Rodgers' Lament is further perfected. The group would have stood confronting the audience. Thancoupie had given me her words. I use throwing the spear with Wayne turning his back on the audience as the end of the dance. An officer from the Arts Council of Australia sees the workshop performance and writes a comment.

### **From 1973 to 1978**

A year later I am back in Australia. I begin to think about finding music written by Aboriginal musicians. There is not a big resource of Aboriginal recorded music between 1972 and 1975. It is only some years after the formation of the Aboriginal Arts Board (1973) that Aboriginal groups begin to record their music and resources start to appear. I actively look for and start creating dances to music written by Aboriginal musicians. As I find music I create solos. The solos created over a period of years to music written by Aboriginal musicians become the next stage of development. The following are the dances.

#### **MANGEY OL' DOG - Male Solo - Dancer: Wayne Nicol Music: Bobby Mcleod**

In 1972 Bobby McLeod had given me a homemade recording of some of his music. His music is the first music written and sung by an Aboriginal singer that we dance to. In about 1974 I started teaching Wayne Nicol a solo to one of Bobby's songs. This is first performed at a dance show the Urban Aboriginal Theatre Committee give at Black Theatre in early 1975 primarily so that the newly formed Aboriginal Arts Board members can see what is happening in urban performing arts. This is before the Six Week Performing Arts Workshop. In this dance Wayne starts with his back to audience, turns and confronts audience and then indicates hanging himself.

#### **BROWN SKIN BABY - Female Solo - Dancer: Dorothea Randall Music: Bob Randall**

I'm thinking that Dorothea Randall gave me music, *Brown Skin Baby* in the 1975 three month experimental course that started in October 1975. We work on this dance during this time. Now there is a female dance and a male dance with Aboriginal content and music to perform as part of the January 1976 dance tour to three NSW Aboriginal communities: Walgett, Brewarrina and Moree.

#### **NULLARBOR PRAYER - Male Solo - Dancer: Michael Leslie Poetry: Bert Williams and Music: Harry Williams and Country Music Outcasts**

Towards the end of 1976, the first year of AIDS, I start working on the dance, **Nullarbor Prayer**, with I believe both Michael Leslie and Kim Walker (*check this out*). Michael Leslie is going to be part of the team that will go to Nigeria for the International Black World Festival. The course is being delivered at Bodenweiser Dance Studio by this time.

These three pieces are then put together as a **Social Comment Dance Suite** and taken in 1977 to the Black World Festival in Nigeria. As a suite of 3 solos the order is then: Nullarbor Prayer, Brown Skin Baby and Mangy Ol' Dog. These dances continue to be performed as a suite for AIDT performances beyond 1988. They become technically less simplistic as dancers become more proficient. They are also taught in all the auditions so that all students up to about 1989 knew some version Brown Skin Baby or Mangy Ol' Dog.

### **The 1978 Recording Hall – First Performance of Fully Choreographed Work**

1978 - AISDS (Aboriginal/Islander Skills Development Scheme) puts on its first End of Year Show (EOYS) at the Recording Hall of the Opera House, an established theatre. This is when the Dance takes form as a full length Work of about 20-24 minutes utilizing slides and adds connections to the solos, and incorporates other dance images within the solos. The solos are the core with other images moving through them. The work is performed on two stage levels. The upper level is spirit and the lower human. Also each section had different slide images. The following details the sections as I remember – Need music to be sure of certain transitions especially sections with police.

First Section	Traditional- Before the White Man	In this section – either Lardill or Yirrkala traditional dance was done - (Can be any traditional dance –but must have kangaroo dance with Kangaroo killed at end) <i>Not sure if Kangaroo dance done in this section or the next section</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Section	Words of Wandjuk Marika- <i>If we lose our culture what future do our children have</i> Voices at varying times: Gerry Bostock, Chicka Dixon, Bob Maza, Wandjuk Marika	(This is possibly where Kangaroo dance done) Dancers change into mission type costumes – come out walking over stage in sense of desolation and lost - Have a burial ceremony with 2 men holding dancer and lowering him 3 times toward ground and up. Girls mourn Aboriginal style and follow lifted body off stage as one female remains to do Brown Skin Baby
		2 figures in traditional costume end up higher above floor for entire dance – don't start moving until End brown Skin Baby & into Nullarbor Prayer (Basically like this to be behind a scrim so they are shadow like.) In Recording House was not behind scrim, but very high up.
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Brown Skin Baby (Spirit figures move slow motion)	Solo is done – starting off doing traditional woman's kicking up sand: In this dance the Preacher comes through. Also a young boy doing childlike skips to land laying on floor downstage left.
4 <sup>th</sup> Section	Nullarbor Prayer  (Spirit figures move slow motion)	Solo - While done - Have image of old fellows in chains – neck and arms against wall with authority person with gun marching them across the stage. Not sure if Sydney policemen come on to upstage left and stand towards the end of this dance or at the beginning of the next section.
5 <sup>th</sup> Section	Kath Walker Poem	Row of Urban dancers stand at rear of stage (not sure if back to audience and then one by one turn to confront or start facing audience. They walk forward in solemn confronting

		manner just staring at audience. Then walk back to protect the Embassy.
6 <sup>th</sup> Section	Mangy Ol' Dog (Spirit figures move slow motion)	Becomes a group dance with one figure standing out.
7 <sup>th</sup> Section	Ending	March holding rag of tent shouting –What do we Want Land Rights When to we want it - Now.  Throwing of spear. - Might have turned into planting of flag that is on a spear at ANU performance.

Need to hear the music - because not sure if Mangy Ol' Dog comes before or after Kath Walker Poem.

Then also there is sound track of Marching of Police and sounds of Embassy being destroyed. - Dancers representing police move to stand in front of tent embassy on marching sounds and then plow into dancers around the Embassy when sounds begin.

I think I have a scenario and technical requirements written so that details relating to lighting, slides, music would be available for stage managers.

The above is the full length work that I believe is entitled – The Embassy – A New Challenge. It is only performed in its entirety at specific times when full theatre conditions are available. Otherwise, AIDT continued to perform the three solos as a suite,

I think the next full performance of *The Embassy* is done for the First Australians Concert at the Opera House. It is also re-mounted for the ANU performance that is done in Canberra. The last reconstruction was done for the 1988 European Tour and Spoleto-Melbourne Performances.

I believe that AIATSIS should have more still images and a video of the entire concert done at the ANU concert. That was around 1983 or 84. I need to look that up.



## Appendix 2 (cont.): NAISDA Program Director by Carole Y Johnson

### THE BEGINNING

More amazing than NAISDA's achievements over four decades is how it came to be born from a dance performed in protest of the government's determination to destroy the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns of Parliament House during the turbulent times of 1972. From this event rose a 40-year-old dance college that produces professional dancers and paved the way for a contemporary Indigenous dance company to share its dance globally.

The idea of an urban Indigenous dance form started from the arrival of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company in Australia for the 1972 Adelaide Arts Festival. I was a principal dancer, and I've vivid memories of our performances and of televised news about political activities of Australian Blacks as many Indigenous Australians were then identifying. About a month before our arrival they had established an Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra.

Land Rights! Human Rights! Change was being demanded and we came with a repertoire of dances filled with social comment. Many of Eleo's works were especially pertinent to Aboriginal issues: the Viet Nam War, Black American issues, drugs and Native Peoples' land rights. Sydney's Indigenous audience, mostly political activists, was excited by the possibilities of dance as a way to emotionally challenge entrenched thought, a tool for communicating social issues. Later, some realized and worked towards dance becoming a career possibility.

I remained in Sydney when the company left. I was welcomed as the Black sister from America and stimulated by the exciting political energy and social organization building. Maintaining the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra, working with the recently formed medical and legal services and preparing for a major national demonstration for NAIDOC day in July was the order of business.

In this politically charged atmosphere in Redfern where Aboriginal people mostly lived, continuity of performing arts started from a single dance workshop. Important to NAISDA's story is that the participants wanted more. Intrigued by its possibility in political demonstrations, the activists saw it as a non-threatening way to reach the mainstream audience. So the dance workshop continued with twice weekly classes and dance became embedded in urban political activity. Then Bob Maza travelled up from Melbourne and used the momentum and energy of the Workshop participants to begin his National Black Theatre concept.

In the dance classes I used popular music of the day and traditional "Aboriginal ethnographic" recordings. Significantly, I had been adapting a piece with a social message by Rod Rodgers, another esteemed African-American choreographer. Significant because soon I was asked to lead Indigenous Australians with limited dance training in a performance at perhaps the most violent political demonstration Aboriginal people had ever experienced.

*Ohhhh... there's grieving in the plum grove and anger in the land! There's been another lynching...*

The words of his song seemed translatable to the Aboriginal situation, and four members of the embryonic 6-week-old Sydney Dance Workshop are dancing the dance of their lives before thousands of people on the lawn in front of Parliament House. Confidently! Their workshop training had prepared them for this seminal performance.



At this moment in history Aboriginal people are dancing for the first time a cultural dance, not in a religious ceremony but in a very secular political demonstration. They perform, with contemporary dance movement vocabulary, a piece that is totally relevant to the current Aboriginal experiences and emotions. Indigenous participants in the demonstration who come from all over Australia feel the power of this dance. Later I realized they dispersed to their home cities knowing that Sydney had started a cultural dance form that can run parallel with the traditional forms.

Decades later Cultural Elders of Aboriginal traditional dance told me that the 'Sydney' performance gave them hope for the future. They knew now that urban Aboriginal people would not be 'lost' because they had a cultural dance form. It did not matter that the movement style was different from their 40,000 year ceremonial dance heritage. I was also told by Cultural owners committed to teaching at NAISDA that they were sharing their dance so urban people would have a model for creating their own style.

Finally, by performing at the Demonstration a dance that had such meaning to them and all the demonstrators, the performers knew that they had done something very important. They experienced a 'high' that committed them to continue to study and strengthen this new dance expression.

Dance workshop members continued working on the themes that we started for the Tent Embassy Demonstration for a culminating performance at Surry Hills Friends Meeting House. Though the workshop under my leadership would be ending, its legacy was a political demonstration piece that was turned into a theatre piece. Over years it has been developed. Patterned after Eleo's "Blues for the Jungle", we now know it as Embassy Dance The Challenge.

**CAROLE Y JOHNSON**  
October 2016



### **Appendix 3: ‘The Embassy’, creative non-fiction by Vicki Van Hout**

I hesitate at the top of the hill. I am on my pushbike at the apex of Caroline and the infamous Eveleigh Streets of Redfern, also known as The Block, about 50 metres from the main entrance of the railway station on Lawson. As I tilt my head to peer down at the more immediate view before me, I am reminded that this is prime real estate and that one of the rental properties further down the hill is listed for over \$1100 per week. It’s owned by a savvy Greek businessman who bought the three remaining attached terrace houses on Eveleigh. He understood their value regardless of the blackened brick exterior and volatile reputation of the neighbourhood.

There are several hand painted slogans and a ceremonial fire surrounded by a fence of plasterboard giprock declaring: SOVEREIGNTY NEVER CEDED. The fire has no flames, just a small plume of smoke to announce the presence of combustion.

Behind it, over a dozen semi water resistant polyester igloos are tethered to the dirt, some covered with extra tarpaulins, to ward off the elements. There is movement behind a wall of grey-green shade cloth, where I hear muffled laughter.

This is the site of the current Redfern Tent Embassy, erected in protest to a development proposal by the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC) in partnership with DeiCorp, a multi-million dollar construction developer, to build Pemulwuy: a multipurpose complex, housing an aboriginal gallery, retail space, an elder care facility and affordable housing for Aboriginal people and low income earners. Comprising of 10,370 square metres of land, this equates to 98 allotments, designed to attract wealth and prosperity to The Block. The project will cost upward of sixty million dollars. No funds have been secured for the actual Aboriginal housing component. Mickey Mundine, current CEO of the AHC, is confident of finding the extra finances, even though the local Aboriginal Land Council refused to loan them two million dollars, which led to the initial partnership with DeiCorp who bailed them out of \$786,000 of debt with a loan of half a million.

I tentatively venture down. This is a last minute decision. I dismount and walk toward a makeshift outdoor lounge area, initiating and maintaining unwavering eye contact. I sense blatant taking of visual inventory will be seen as suspicious behaviour. Within my peripheral vision there’s a large makeshift hob, with a blackened oversized tea kettle perched atop it.

“Hi”, I say. The small talk ceases and all eyes are on me. I hastily count two saggy stuffed couches and imagine being swallowed whole by the stuffing.

I was initially addressed by a woman who was slight of build and slightly aggressive, wary of me as I was polite and hesitant around her. “Hello”, she replies. Another furtive glance reveals three chairs and a wooden outdoor dining bench set.

“Nice day.” I say, to no one and everyone. “I was wondering if Eric Avery has been around. He’s a dancer and musician. Plays the violin. He’s making an album with Lorna Munro. I taught him at NAISDA.” The acronym for the National Aboriginal/Islander Skills Association; College of Dance. “We

were together last week and he said to stop by.” This is way too much information, but I am imagining all kinds of disastrous scenarios, so my mouth is working faster than my ability to strategize. There is a protocol whereby it has to be established who knows who and how, through what avenues, be they marriage or blood, before you can ever really be trusted. Someone has to vouch for me, so I play the game.

“He hasn’t been here for a few weeks.” This from a man who calls himself Felon, as in F E L O N, like felony. Hahaha. He’s tall, slim and barefoot and everyone sits facing him.

“Well if you see him, say I came round.” I supply my name and enquire how long they’d been camped there?

“Come back another time when I’ve had my morning coffee and I’ll tell you. Mind you, I’m only speaking to you because you know Eric.”

I understand. I was sure it was because I mentioned Lorna, who is the daughter of Jenny Munro, the founder of this Embassy and directly related by marriage and bloodline to Paul and Isabel Coe, who along with other Aboriginal activists Gary Foley, Chika Dixon, Roberta Sykes, Dennis Walker and Shirley Smith (Mum Shirl) joined the original four; Michael Anderson, Billie Cragie, Tony Coorie and Bertie Williams, in erecting the original Tent Embassy in Canberra on January 26<sup>th</sup> 1972. What began by planting a makeshift beach umbrella, grew into a fully operational shadow ministry: An alternative organisation with its own ministerial delegation and a post box receiving correspondence from around the globe. It was a clever tongue-in-cheek durational protest performance in line with the Black Theatre, whose politically motivated satirical performances were gaining momentum in Redfern.

I get up to leave.

“Do you want to sign the visitor’s book?” This from Slightly Aggressive Woman. It consisted of a green plastic coated clip board, opened out and folded back on itself, with several pages attached. It was really a petition with hundreds of signatures.

(Note to self, read the petition more thoroughly and try to photograph it.)

“Is it OK if I take some photos of the banners?”

“Yeah.” From Slightly Aggressive Woman.

With that, I take out my camera and proceed to snap.

There are several white plastic corflute ordinance posters stating that the property is privately owned by the Aboriginal Housing Co-op placed prominently around the camp and the immediate vicinity. They state that Jenny Munro and the Tent Embassy are trespassing. I keep taking photos as I walk away, the other arm awkwardly steering the bike.

My next visit to the embassy occurs just after the state elections. It was feared that an early morning raid might take place, so a call out for a boost in numbers is made via a dedicated Facebook page, which mainly includes constant requests for firewood. There's a sense of anticlimax on this quiet morning. My presence is still met with mild suspicion as I go to pick up the "visitor" folder which is dusty from disuse. There's a small black pocket-book, seldom left unattended, propped up near a box of musty fruit. It has small silver embossed lettering spelling S E C U R I T Y, which is used to record any significant events, including numerous helicopter fly-overs and police surveillance drive-byes. A cherubic young man with a soft rosy complexion and incongruously hairy legs copied my name from the visitor's book last time I introduced myself.

The Small Aggressive Woman has a name; Jamila. She says that I should speak to Jenny (Munro) who hasn't been around much since getting back from Tunisia, where she gave a talk on women's rights.

The sister of a woman who married a former dancer I know, points to the houses that are used for the popular ABC TV series Redfern Now. "See those three or four houses down there, next to the one with all the solar panels on it, that's where they do most of their location shots." She states with barely concealed pride that the latest episode is a telemovie and the Embassy's featured in it. The location includes the pricey house for let.

"I guess there won't be any more series after this one", I say. "Redfern isn't anything like the one they portray in the show."

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A young Aboriginal woman, who lives above the swanky hole-in-the-wall coffee shop on Little Eveleigh, favoured by Felon, informs me that Sonny Dallas Law is couch surfing at Jenny Munro's. He used to be project coordinator at the Redfern Neighbourhood Centre, situated directly adjacent to the current Tent Embassy, which extends its opening hours for the Embassy residents to shower. He is currently contracted by local experimental arts organisation Performance Space. I cold-call a co-worker and send a string of emails to meet up. He is almost mythically elusive, so I venture to his place of business at Carriageworks; a five minute walk from The Block.

I need to see Jenny.

Sonny calls Jenny from his office extension and I overhear, "She's a dancer. She wants to meet you." and "Don't worry, she's legit." I might have mentioned an intent to make a dance solo about the legacy of the Tent Embassy. This is a ploy. He hands me her number and suggests I call or text to meet up. I punch in the numbers to save to my phone and accidentally dumb dial. I immediately hang up and text that it was me. We plan to meet in an hours' time at the embassy.

I ask him what he thinks about the overall situation.

"I really have no one sided opinion, with what's going on," he says. "I do understand that the Aboriginal Housing Company want to bring business and jobs into the community but we also need to bring economic growth."

"Yep," I reply.

"Having the student housing there, we'll keep on bringing money in and making a profit...to keep it sustainable. However, there are so many families that I know and friends, including myself, [that] the rent is just way too pricey in this city. I just can't afford to live by myself and I think that's my right."

"You get to a certain age," I say.

"This is why I understand what Auntie Jenny and the rest of the mob are doing down at the Embassy. We need affordable Aboriginal Housing. That is our land. We were given that land from the Whitlam government for Aboriginal Housing. I think this is also a protest against corrupt Aboriginal corporations and organisations and management as well. You know our organisations have come from fighting and protesting..."

"Yeah."

He continues more passionately, "...and our heart and soul. You know that's why we do have medical centres and Aboriginal Housing Corporations in the country."

"However we do need to have the proper people managing those organisations and companies," he adds as almost an afterthought.

I change the subject, "What does it mean, you know, the new big buildings being named after Aboriginal resistance fighters and warriors? Commercialism. Does it make any difference?"

"Doesn't make any difference to me." He pauses, "And you know what's funny too?" He continues, "Why have Aboriginal consultants for these big projects like Barangaroo? There was a whole advisory committee." He informs me. "They are [still] building casinos and everything, so I don't think they have much of a say really."

I change the subject again. "I looked on DeiCorp's website as well." DeiCorp has been painted as the lynchpin in a conspiracy to oust blackfellas from The Block, so I throw this in to see what he knows.

"Yeah," he replies.

I can't detect whether I've made him uncomfortable, "And nowhere is the Pemulwuy project written."

"Anymore, really?"

I plough on, "I can't see it."

"Unless, because you know how they did that racist slant thingy? DeiCorp."

*What?*

I lean in, “Nooooo!”

“This was last year. Ask people about it. Mickey got into a lot of trouble for that, because DeiCorp said, “It’s OK you can move in cause all the aboriginals are moving out.” “

“HAAAHAAAHAAAHAAA” in unison.

“Like; not if we can help it,” I joke. “We going to earn big money and we’re coming back in.”

“That’s it,” he agrees.

“De- gentrification of the community,” I laugh.

“Yeah that’s right, I’m quitting the arts and I’m going into business so I can move back into Redfern.”

Silence.

“Well I’m going to go have lunch,” he finishes.

---

“You just missed Jenny by twenty minutes.” Jamila states.

I rest my bike by the lounge area and exchange brief greetings with Redfern local Gavin, who is heating fish fingers on the hob, from a caterer’s carton he pilfered from the Neighbourhood Centre. I follow Jamila over to a seriously illustrated woman marking out a slogan on the underside of a recycled banner. She is being directed by another woman in a grey jersey maternity dress, with an official workplace lanyard hanging from her neck. I haven’t seen either before.

“You are coming to the rally on Friday?” Jamila has a way of asking which sounds like an accusation and an order all rolled into one.

“Which rally?”

“The protest against the government about the closing of the West Australian aboriginal outstations. It’s this Friday at 5.30.” I am taking photos of the piles of wood covered by tarps as she speaks. She suddenly takes my arm to show me the progress made with the garden. This new confidence was a pretence to illicit my dancing skills for the rally.

I promise to meet up tomorrow, but I don’t. The weather is miserable, so I glean what I can from the Facebook page and online print media. I view the dancing I never performed and listen to Jenny speak. She modulates her voice differently for each oratory; at once the knowledgeable protesting politician quoting data for NITV and then the impassioned woman of the people inciting the crowd to action, posted and reposted as a twitter feed.

---

Thomas Kelly and his girlfriend Taree Sansbury are graduates of NAISDA and taking part in a choreographic workshop I am facilitating. They were both at the rally so I get them to supply me with more details.

Tom is eager to replay the events of the night before, "The protest begun at Belmore Park at 5.30 in the City Central."

"So it went from Belmore Park to where?" I ask.

"Belmore Park to the Redfern Tent Embassy."

"Did Jenny Munro talk?" I cut to the chase.

"She did speak, but not at Belmore park. We had three pit stops and people spoke at different points." He informs me.

"So," I am trying to keep the impatience out of my voice. Tom enjoys the attention and tries to drag things out.

"And then we stopped at the intersection of Cleveland Street and we did like a little Corroboree." He points to Taree who is sitting quietly beside him and continues, "My girlfriend and Glen jumped in, and danced in and stuff and sung songs. Actually the guy that was singing the songs was from Stradbroke Island, so he was singing songs that I sing. So I was singing with him."

The guy from Stradbroke's name is Frank. He has fine dreadlocks and no front teeth and has been staying at the Embassy. Every time I've seen him he's been tending to the fire.

"Then we listened to another uncle, who is of Yamadji and Noongar descent speak."

"So what did he speak about?" I ask.

"To thank us for support and, you know; "It's our land, always will be.... Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land."

"And so, he was from Western Australia?"

"Noongar and Yamadji. Yeah," Tom confirms. "Then we continued walking up. Then we stopped ah and just as you passed Rails, the pub there in Redfern. It's called The Heritage now, Redfern. Just opposite, directly opposite the train station, on the Redfern Street side, there's a building called DeiCorp."

"So what did they do at DeiCorp?"

"That's where Jenny Munro got up and spoke. So first we danced. We did Gurindunami, which I know very well." Tom sings the song with the calls times three at the end and Taree does the cadence actions at the end with him.

"What did Jenny Say?"

"Pretty much informing us who DeicCorp is. That they're responsible, in a part of what's happening over in WA. Of..."

"Deicorp had nothing to do with..."

Tom interrupts, "That's what I thought. I said the Block first and someone else was like, 'Nah it's all about W.A.'"

"So you didn't hear what Jenny had to say?"

"She did get up and she was talking about how we aren't defined by them [Deicorp], we will fight them and all this..."

"And what was the next stop?"

"Then the next stop was at the Redfern Tent Embassy. So we walked around, past the station to the Embassy." He pauses to think for a while and I wait.

"The march was initially about the Western Australian closure of Aboriginal communities and it's just interesting. It didn't click until we got to the Redfern Tent Embassy that it's kind of the same thing. Like the closing of the Block, the moving and gentrification of that."

The current extended episode of *Redfern Now* features graphic scenes depicting two women being raped. They say they haven't seen it yet, which prompts me to ask, "When you walk down Redfern....You" I point to Taree, "not you." I point to Tom. "When you walk down Redfern at night, are you frightened to walk by yourself?"

"Only through dark streets. But that's just like everywhere." Taree replies.

"Do you consider Redfern to be a dangerous place?"

"No."

"Anywhere could be dangerous. That's just my thoughts."

"So how did you feel when you were living just near the train station? How did you find it?" I ask Tom.

"I loved living in Redfern. I walked around that place the whole time. I was only there for like a month and a half but I thought it was a great location. The only reason I moved was 'cause I just couldn't stay with the creepy Italian guy. I thought it was great living in Redfern. I really liked it. You know it's got this community. The aboriginal vibe of Sydney, like this huge vibe."

"I want to live in Redfern." Taree says.

"We both do" in Tom and Taree in unison.

"Why do you want to live in Redfern?"

Taree is the more pragmatic of the two, "Well my Gym's there. And there's so many black people there, that I'll like it.

"Are there a lot?"

"A lot more than you see in the city," Taree asserts.

"I read that there's only a hundred and twenty something families. Black families that live in Redfern." As I say it I make a note to check the statistics.

"Maybe they're all over in Waterloo. Maybe they've all moved."

---

It transpires that I had misquoted the figures and that in the 2011 official census: of the 12,304 people living in Redfern only 289 *people* identified as indigenous, 10,186 were not indigenous and 1,559 didn't identify.

The Tent Embassy has become synonymous with the Urban Aboriginal Experience, symbolising a rite of passage and self-determination for the Australian indigenous identity. It stands in Canberra today as a reminder of the struggle for basic human rights; the right to vote, the right to an education and the right to self-determination. The Redfern Tent Embassy has a unique place in history as it symbolises the fight for Sovereignty for its own people, from its own people. But at what cost? Will the Redfern Tent Embassy herald the end of an era? The end of protest performance? As the neighbourhood gets its inevitable facelift will the Embassy be reduced to a shadow of its former self? A fetish, or a fancy of history? Does it even really matter if the Aboriginal presence in Redfern seems to have become one of perception rather than reality?

It's late and I ride past The Block on my way home. The fire burns a fierce red glow against the dark streets at the bottom of the hill. The plasterboard is backlit like the elaborate signage of cinemas of a bygone era. A little bush oasis amongst industry.



#### Appendix 4: *Briwyant* (2011)



Image: Jeff Busby

## Appendix 5: *Stolen* Song Cycle

To treat *Stolen* (2016) as one continuous episodic song cycle I integrated references to as many of the elements I associate with my experiences of dancing in a 'traditional' context. I co-designed an interactive set with designer Imogen Ross, consisting of multipurpose pieces of cardboard which the performers manipulated to emulate my interaction with properties including, feather strings and headpieces, when dancing to access or inhabit the Dreaming. I had first witnessed specific interaction with paintings, propped on the shoulders of the men from Turkey creek in the late 1980's which Rosemary Crumlin refers to (Crumlin 1991: 34). I remember first hearing about the belief of the ability to be in two places simultaneously; the place where the ceremony was taking place and at the place depicted in the painting being held, whilst attending an outdoor 'Bush University' forum at the Garma Festival in 2004.

A large yarn bombed<sup>78</sup> tree dominated the stage inspired by the contemporary developments made in the craftwork as seen in the work of the Tjanpi desert weavers<sup>79</sup> which also paralleled movements in the urban practice of covering structures in the city with hand knitted fabric. This incidental convergence of the Aboriginal traditional and western contemporary paradigms has been an enduring interest/focus of my work. The tree was also a personal reminder of the Yolngu totemic ancestral trees on the important site known as Gulkula<sup>80</sup>. It while dancing with on the bunggul ground at the annual Garma Festival site, where I came to understand that all aspects of the environment were regarded as living relatives.

At one point I had directed one performer to move outside the stage space to create another, more personalised relationship with the audience with the intent to act as a conduit

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<sup>78</sup> McGovern, A, 2014, Knit one, purl one: the mysteries of yarn bombing unravelled, 2014, The Conversation Media Group LTD 2010-2017, March 6, 2014 6.25am AEDT <http://theconversation.com/knit-one-purl-one-the-mysteries-of-yarn-bombing-unravelling-23461> last accessed 29/03/2017

<sup>79</sup> The Tjanpi desert weavers is a not for profit organization whose award winning works combine traditional weaving practices and materials to make contemporary sculptures <https://tjanpi.com.au/about/>

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.yyf.com.au/pages/?ParentPageID=2&PageID=109>

to the world on stage and to allow the audience members to become an active part of a Stolen Generation community ceremonial event. This is indicative of the way in which I have experienced dance ceremony whereby the demarcation between performers and the rest of the community is more fluid than a western proscenium setting and both roles that of dancer and witness exist in a reciprocal relationship of equal participation, often moving from one role to the other.

Finally I had I implemented a rhythmic component to parts of the script which was accompanied by intermittent periods of dance and a call, repeated at intervals to act as a cadence, marking the beginning of each new life dreaming track and identifying the urban clan it belonged to.



## Appendix 5: *Stolen* (2016)



Image: Amanda James

## **Appendix 6: *Past* (2016)**

**FROM SAND TO STAGE**

***PAST***

**Video Link:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bT5qgPU34Bo&t=314s>



## Appendix 6 (cont.): Past

### GUEST CHOREOGRAPHERS



#### VICKI VAN HOUT

When I was approached to come on board to re-imagine Carole Y Johnson's *Embassy*, I jumped at the chance. The 1970s was an exciting time for Aboriginal people because we were finding our voice and gaining political momentum. I am proud to be a direct part

of what has become a significant legacy.

The first Tent Embassy was a vital symbol of a strong and united people, but it was also a damn good work of art. This was perhaps Australia's most successful happening. Originally a tongue in cheek initiative, it is still one of the longest pieces of durational performance art, with satellite movements emerging from, spreading and continuing throughout the country to this day.

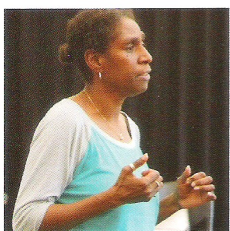
The 1970s heralded the emergence of a new type of activist who utilised the immediacy and reach of the media. They realised that the traditional practices of song, dance and storytelling were valuable tools and could be harnessed to affect social change.

But it was the special brand of daring and irreverence for those who wielded power without proper care or consequence that I strive to honour and capture, not only in this, but all of my works. It's a special brand of fighting spirit that began with the Tent Embassy and the Black Theatre Workshops in Redfern that spawned AIDT, which is now NAISDA, along with television satire programs *Basically Black* and now *Black Comedy*, and the growing number of first peoples theatre companies and cooperatives including Ilbiji and Moogahlin.

For me and many other urban Indigenous people I affirm my identity through the practice of dance, including learning other blackfella traditions, gaining and sharing tools to ensure the longevity of a practice of speaking country. Celebrating this Country.

My work practice is increasingly collaborative. My dance is used to start a conversation. I begin with an idea, be it conceptual, physical or verbal and it ignites a back and forth process of clarification until together we have created a thing.

We tell stories, the room becomes chaotic, there are expressed frustrations as limits are pushed and the evidence of every seemingly frivolous act in and outside the studio is present in the work that culminates.



#### ELMA KRIS

I joined NAISDA in 1994. The knowledge and guidance I gained from my years at NAISDA encouraged me to form my own dance group, Bibir. I also danced with The Aboriginal Dance Theatre Company before finally joining Bangarra full time in 1999.

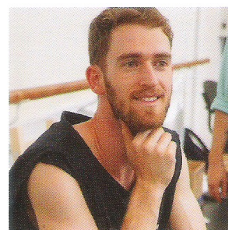
My time studying at NAISDA made me look back to my culture, which is inspired by the land, sea, and sky, that we are surrounded by in the islands of the Torres Strait. I realised my training gave me the respect and understanding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures to see the importance of our songs and dances as they have been passed down from generation to generation. Cultural dance was most significant to me because it enabled me to embrace my cultural connections, which made me want to explore my culture more.

As part of NAISDA's 40th Anniversary, I chose to remount two works that I choreographed with Bangarra Dance Theatre in 2007 *Emeret Lu*, as a part of *True Stories*, and *About* in 2011. The reason I chose these pieces was because they connect with the land, sea, and sky. These elements embrace more of the songs and dances which have been reflected in my mind. Seeing the cultural aspects of our people and how they are related to these elements.

I want to acknowledge and celebrate everything NAISDA has done for me. I have learned that I must share and pass on what

I discover. I love exploring the relationship between culture and how it continues to connect my journey as a storyteller. The only way I know how to express this is as an artist.

Explore the stories our people tell you; they are valuable and an important resource to us as a surviving culture.



#### OMER BACKLEY-ASTRACHAN

A driving horse wears blinders on his headstall to keep him from being distracted from outside interference. If you can keep his mind occupied with one thing, you can usually keep him from reacting to something else.

The work *Blinders* was developed as part of a Physical Theatre class assignment. The process started with the viewing and discussion of the movie *Samson and Delilah* directed by Warwick Thornton. The film tells the story of two Aboriginal teenagers trying to escape their hard community lives into the harsh realities of a modern city.

The students shared their own views and experiences of facing the difficulties of being an Aboriginal person in today's world, and together with their teacher Omer Backley-Astrachan, they created a work that discusses the misconceptions and the narrow mindedness of the mainstream. Through this development the students were empowered as they gained tools to express a clear and beautiful voice of protest.

## Appendix 6 (cont.): Past

### FROM SAND TO STAGE

#### *past*

##### TIME BEFORE TIME

**Dialogue:** Johnathon Brown, Shana O'Brien

##### OFFICE

**Cast:** Lydia Gebadi, Michaela Jeffries, Natasha Rogers, Jye Uren, Brad Smith, Kassidy Waters

(Bronson Morris, Shana O'Brien, Ena Illume, Pieta Hawke, Kallum Goolagong, Gusta Mara, Jacinta Janik, Kaitlyn O'Leary)

##### BROWN SKIN BABY

**Cast:** Coleen Jerrard

**Choreographer:** Carole Y Johnson

**Music:** Bob Randall

##### TENTS

**Cast:** Aroha Pehi, Neville Williams-Boney, Zita Mueller, Karwin Knox, Coleen Jerrard, Edan Porter, Kaitlyn O'Leary, Shana O'Brien, Brad Smith, Ena Illume, Gusta Mara, Bronson Morris, Aliya Chalmers, Kiara Malcolm-Bodle, Jacinta Janik, Lillian Banks, Madalanne Taylor, Pieta Hawke, Elyse Lenehan, Emily Flannery, Joan Atkinson, Amy Flannery

##### BIRDS

**Cast:** Kassidy Waters, Ryan Pearson

**Choreographer:** Vicki Van Hout

**Music:** Phil Downing

**Set concept and design:** Vicki Van Hout

#### *present*

##### HARVESTING

**Cast:** Lydia Gebadi, Kassidy Waters, Natasha Rogers, Michaela Jeffries, Lillian Banks, Coleen Jerrard, Shana O'Brien, Mendia Kermond

##### GATHERING

**Cast:** Johnathon Brown, Glen Thomas, Ryan Pearson, Brad Smith, Karwin Knox, Jye Uren, Neville Williams Boney, Kallum Goolagong, Edan Porter

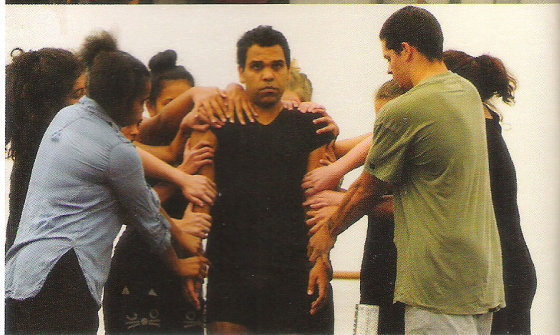
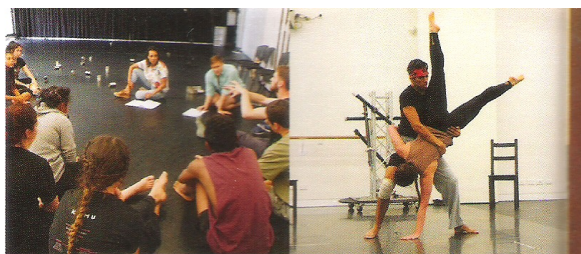
**Choreographer:** Elma Kris – excerpts Emeret Lu 'Very Old Things' (Bangarra True Stories)

**Music:** Steve Francis

**Original Set Design:** Genevieve Dugard

##### NAYGAY

**Cast:** Lydia Gebadi, Kassidy Waters, Natasha Rogers, Lillian Banks, Mendia Kermond, Johnathon Brown, Glen Thomas, Ryan Pearson, Karwin Knox, Brad Smith, Thomas Kelly



##### SAGER

**Cast:** Lydia Gebadi, Glen Thomas

**Choreographer:** Elma Kris – excerpts *About (Bangarra Belong)*

**Music:** David Page and Steve Francis

##### MANGEY OL' DOG

**Cast:** Neville Williams Boney, Kallum Goolagong, Bronson Morris, Edan Porter, Thomas Kelly, Gusta Mara

**Choreographer:** Carole Y Johnson

**Remount:** Raymond D Blanco

**Music:** *Floating / Sinking*, Peter Broderick

#### *future*

##### BLINDERS

**Cast:** Joan Atkinson, Amy Flannery, Emily Flannery, Kallum Goolagong, Pieta Hawke, Zita Mueller, Aroha Pehi, Keanah Scholes, Neville Williams Boney, Gusta Mara, Kaitlyn O'Leary

**Choreographer:** Omer Backley-Astrachan in collaboration with Certificate III

**Music:** *Cant Help Falling in Love*, Elvis Presley

##### DARK SIDE OF ME

**Choreographer/dancer:** Jonathon Brown

**Music:** Johnathon Brown

##### PERIMETER

*I feel our generation is stuck and unwilling to think outside the box... This piece represents being caught and how we need to come together to help each other to achieve a positive future.*

**Cast:** Ryan Pearson, Jacinta Janik, Mendia Kermond, Edan Porter, Michaela Jeffries, Brad Smith, Jye Uren, Amy Flannery, Kallum Goolagong, Lillian Banks (Emily Flannery, Gusta Mara, Zita Mueller, Pieta Hawke, Aroha Pehi, Neville Williams Boney)

**Choreographer:** Mendia Kermond

**Music:** *Hold Your Line*, Raime



## Appendix 6 (cont.): Past

### INSTITUTION

*Inspired by Natasha's Grandmother and her experience as one of the Stolen Generation growing up in Sister Kate's home for Children.*

**Cast:** Kassidy Waters, Lydia Gebadi, Coleen Jerrard, Amy Flannery, Ena Illumi, Madalanne Taylor, Kiara Malcom-Bodle, Kaitlyn O'Leary, Joany Atkinson, Aroha Pehi, Pieta Hawke, Shana O'Brian, Emily Flannery

(Elyse Lenehan, Aliya Chalmers, Keanah Scholes, Zita Mueller, Michaela Jeffries, Menda Kermond)

**Choreographer:** Natasha Rogers

**Music:** Composed by Natasha Rogers

### PILE UP

*Pile up is a representation of all the weight and burdens we carry as young indigenous people and how too much of today's society can be toxic for our spirits. To free ourselves of this burden we have to begin deconstructing, decolonizing our minds and spirits so that we can begin our journey as young indigenous people in our own journey through life.*

**Choreographer/dancer:** Glen Thomas

**Music:** Glen Thomas

### EMPOWER

*The Inspiration for this piece came from discussions amongst the male cohort of NAISDA, who spoke about the challenges and conflicts they faced not only from their community but from each other. Ownership of our future and a shift into a more positive space to ensure the next generation can be confident of optimistic pathway into the FUTURE.*

**Cast:** All male developing artists. Kassidy Waters, Natasha Rogers, Lydia Gebadi, Michaela Jeffries

**Choreographers:** Karwin Knox, Jye Uren, Brad Smith, Ryan Pearson, Johnathon Brown

**Music:** Kassidy Waters

### FRESHWATER DANCES OF THE DATIWUY CLAN

#### BANUMBIRR – Morning Star

*Banumbirr (Morning Star) has deep cultural and spiritual significance to the Yolngu people of North East Arnhem Land. The Morning Star rises in the east just before dawn. The Morning Star is also a ceremonial pole and an essential part of ceremony of the Yolngu people of the Dhuwa moiety.*

*The story and the Manikay (song) and Bunggul (dance) cycle enact the first rising of the star, its travelling across the country to different Dhuwa clan homelands and its return to the place of the spirits. Like many aspects of the Aboriginal culture there are many different levels of meaning attributed to the Morning Star with different stories owned by different clans and told from different perspectives.*

*This Bunggul is celebrating the spirit of the Morning Star and the gathering at the special place called Bukudal in Djapu clan country. The dancers are showing the Morning Star to the other clan groups connected under the path of the Morning Star, from sunrise to sunset, east to west.*

#### MOKUY – Spirit

*The Mokuy comes out and sees the Morning Star and all its colours. He runs around and gathers coloured feathers from all the birds: Brolga, lindarrilj(rainbow lorikeet) and the Magpie Goose to take all the colours and make the Morning Star pole.*

#### BIRRK' BIRRK – Masked Plover

*Birrk'birrk tells the way to the ceremonial ground where the Mokuy spirit will come out of the Banumbirr ceremony.*

#### DHURR'DHURR – Tawny Frogmouth Owl

*This bird calls to the animals that they are nearly at the Freshwater land where the Mokuy Spirit is and tells them which way to go. He also tells the Brolga which way to go.*

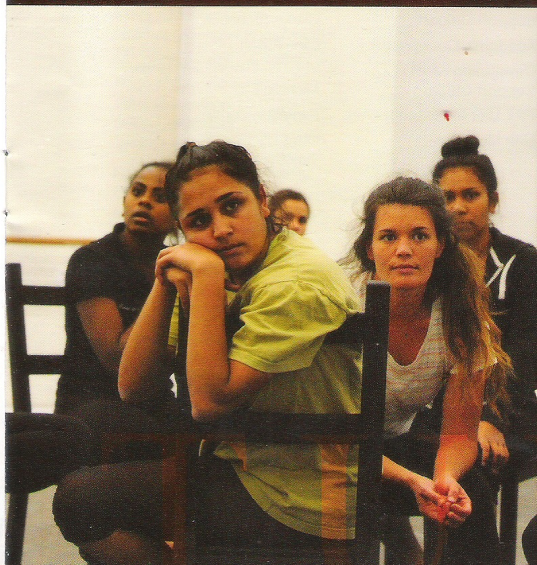
#### BONBA – Butterfly

*Bonba is moving reflecting the the movement of Banumbirr, the Morning Star in the distance. He is drawing power from the Banumbirr. He is collecting all the colours from the Banumbirr and spreading and sharing his colours with the other animals. In the beginning, the Bonba had no colour.*

#### GUDURRKU – Brolga

*Brolga travels to Gundalmirri, the first Garma (ceremonial meeting place) in Freshwater Country. There, they have a big ceremony with all the animals and the Mokuy spirits dancing.*

A special thank you and acknowledgment to our Cultural Tutors Heather Mitjanga and Mudalyun Ganambarr for allowing us to perform the sacred dances and songs of the Datiwuy Clan from NE Arnhem Land.





## Appendix 7: *I Cry* Typed text (from *Past*)

### Shana's **I CRIES** in running order

5 **I cry** for after a lifetime of denying it my grandmother is nearly ready to say she's Aboriginal

- 1. **I cry** for the heartbeat of the earth I feel as I float in the ocean

16- **I cry** for the footprints that wash away as the tide comes in

8 after j- **I cry** when I step on a lego

9 after j- **I cry** when I finish a good book only to find out that the sequel is yet to have a release date

10 after j- **I cry** again when the sequel is pathetic

One after j- **I cry** for the dust that forms clouds around our ankles as stories are told through Bungal

11- **I cry** for the strength of communities that have maintained culture for their young ones to learn

10- **I cry** for those who have had to fight to maintain and learn their culture

4- **I cry** for the rivers being choked by plastic bottles

2 after J- **I cry** for this land that so desperately wants to be loved, for our people who know how to love it, and all the factors that are preventing this unity x2

7- **I cry** for untold stories

6- **I cry** for families that never found their way home

2- **I cry** for the messages sent by birds that I can't decipher

Number 1 before Johnny- **I cry** to the night sky, full of stars I can't read

Number 2 before Johnny- **I cry** for the gravity that keeps us weighted to the ground

3- **I cry** for the rain that gives us all life

8- **I cry** for the children abused in detention for crimes they were conditioned to commit

Number 3 before Jonny- **I cry** for my children, my grandchildren and their children's children

15- **I cry** for the first green leaves that grow after a bushfire

3 after j- **I cry** for the rare moment the clouds open up after rain after rain, just enough for a few rays of sun to create a rainbow

14- **I cry** for the badly recorded classical music I know off by heart on Abstudy hold

17- **I cry** for my ancestors

4 after J- **I cry** for the kookaburras laughter outside when you stub your toe or tell a bad joke

5 after j- **I cry**

13- **I cry** for the last biscuit, the last page, the last piece of toilet paper

9- **I cry** for lost conversations taken by screens

6 after j- **I cry** for all the young blackfellas doing deadly things

12- **I cry** that the media would rather focus on everything that's going badly for our people

7 after j- **I cry** for country.

## Appendix 8: 2016 Cultural Contribution Act

### **‘Short Provocation’** for Tent Embassy dance

A message from your sponsor.

This is a public message from your sponsor.  
The powers that be.

We're just issuing  
a preliminary notification  
to notify you  
your cultural contribution is  
in arears.

# Cultural Contribution Act 2016

## Part 1 – PRELIMINARY

### 1 Preamble

- (1) Have you actually  
activated  
your cultural heritage yet?
- (2) What  
is the quantifiable measurement?

Is it authenticated stock?  
or a recent discovery  
of inferior quality?

- (3) Can it be traced back  
to a reliable primary source?  
or  
is it some dubious  
Background product  
with a broken lineage?  
full of excuses,  
no doubt,  
for which our  
management  
bares no responsibility.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 2 Definitions

- (1) We have been conducting an online survey  
and it has come to our notice  
that no activity  
has been forthcoming  
forthwith.

Of course this can be easily rectified.

We can begin with a few  
preliminary questions  
to ascertain  
whether your future activities  
align  
with our  
key performance indicators.

- (2) No need to be alarmed,  
we are flexible,  
our bottom line is on  
the frontline –

## Part 2 – CONDUCT OF CUSTODIALS

### 1 Notice of conduct

- (1) Although while we do expect  
all of our residential custodial  
custodians  
to toe the line -
  - (a) We will not stop  
we are not afraid  
(we will not hesitate)  
to cross any line necessary  
as we are committed  
to the enhanced facilitation  
of all dots  
on the line.
  - (b) We are prepared to draw a  
line in the sand  
because  
it's definitely not an merely  
a mindless exercise,  
consisting of a mindful repetition  
of dots and lines.

- (c) We are prepared to  
fully endorse  
the outlined venture  
and all we need now  
is your signature  
on the dotted line.
- (d) Assuming you have provided the  
necessary preliminaries.  
We will now move forward.

## **2 Interpretation and usage of Non Negotiable Intangibles**

How do you intend to utilise your value added intangibles?

- (1) We are in the process of developing the  
next generation  
in telecommunications,  
maximising speed and delivery and  
are calling on volunteers  
and donors  
to -
  - (a) bequeath their ancestry  
in full  
or  
in part thereof  
for a reasonable remuneration  
including –  
(and on the condition  
we retain the right)  
to issue limited access in  
off peak allotments.

## **3 Planning and forecasting**

- (1) This new venture is forecast to be  
*the premier*  
predicted consumer choice  
for accessing information  
for all past  
present  
and future generations  
(all requirements).

## **Part 3 – CUSTODIAL SYSTEM**

### **1 Parameters**

- (1) We here at ???? believe  
it is currently an  
undervalued

(under performing)  
 resource  
 but with the right marketing  
 (circumstances/environmental conditions)  
 we could turn things around.

## 2 Function

- (2) If we assume control  
 we can ensure a  
 smooth running  
 vertically integrated system  
 with less hazardous input  
 from smaller,  
 potentially more volatile,  
 dare I say,  
 minority sources –

## 3 Definitions

- (a) Are you a custodian?
- (b) Where are your lands?
- (c) Where is your country?
- (d) Are you one of the last to come into the fold?
- (e) Are you making a viable lifestyle choice?
- (f) Are you doing your bit for the country?
- (g) Are you one of the highest  
 global consumers of fossil fuels; or  
 are you slacking in your duty to  
 uphold our official recorded  
 national  
 environmental commitment.

## 4 Disclosures and declarations of interest

### Division 1

- (1) Do you (*please check if this is applicable*)
- (a) Surround yourself in plastic- bags.
  - (b) Only buy from sources  
 using the very best  
 reputable child  
 and slave-like labour.
  - (c) Do you leave the lights on?  
 The tap dripping  
 for its soothing,  
 rainforest-like  
 aural quality.
  - (d) Have tv  
 and in every room  
 of the house.

**Division 2**

(2) Or do you;

*Check here for applicable -*

- (a) Have a Meat or Totem,
  - 1. Please list,  
therefore ensuring responsibility  
for the continued existence  
of the aforementioned item.
- (b) Only take from the land  
as much as you need.
- (c) Listen and negotiate with those  
you consider  
and officially brand  
your elders.
- (d) Dance outdoors  
without shoes.
- (e) Tell dreaming stories
- (f) Believe in ghosts  
and spirits;  
and -
  - 1. Listen to ghosts and spirits.
  - 2. Seek communication  
with ghosts and spirits.
  - 3. Wish you were able to communicate with  
said ghosts and spirits.
  - 4. Are saddened by a prospect of  
not communicating with  
clan ghosts or spirits.
- (g) Do said ghosts or spirits communicate with  
/ in our nations' language.
- (h) Do you speak in  
another language,  
beside that of our nations'?
- (i) Do you have  
or do you hail from  
a certain mob?
- (j) Do you understand  
who you are  
in relation to your....  
Sister's daughter's  
partner's cousin's  
mother's mother's  
brother's cousin?
- (k) Or are you part of the slow,  
closer to zero-population  
growing demographic?

## **5 Review of limits and ranges**

(3) Lastly-

- (1) when you claim recognition  
and land rights  
from those of the generation  
before you –  
what does that mean  
and does it really matter?

*In this day and age – this day of our lady, our sovereign queen Elizabeth. In the year.....*



## Appendix 9: 'I Have A Spear' Rap

Short writing for class.

~~Black birding term.~~

### I HAVE A SPEAR

What do we want? Land rights. What don't/ we/ want? A double back stamp on your promises.... a mixed message that.... Takes an age to fix.....sticks to the mess....ticks/ *over salt licks for cattle, the predominate symbol of/ in colonialist capitalist tricks, followed by land marks pocked with mortar that *sti ck s* and *sta ys* to tick, in linear time- tick*

*.. tock* ~~-(with Wiley coyote tactics ?)~~

There now, we were promised a closing of the gap. Instead.. we were *jackey/ jack* knifed in the back. ~~Living conditions are worse than ever. Where's my free house?~~ Someone going to complain I get hand outs? Then I'd appreciate a set of keys with a door and either a decent kitchen or accelerator attached.

Don't get kub karried away with yourself! Recognition don't mean you get a house! Your own *digs, to sit, to conduct your own shit, without being pitted against the good meaning pastoral wit, of those that care and care to divide and conquer still, all these years after the discovery of the shell/..... middens proving proof of life fell upon these shores.*

What does it mean then?

Means we might change history and therefore change our futures.

What that? better futures? That's a load of buffalo.

That was stronger futures, and that was a poor invention, an intervening measure, full of intimate interrogations.. An unnecessary interjection from the self righteous sectors. Intersecting with what they know not, and ultimately injecting- more than bad blood...more trouble than a poison uncle. More than a bite from a snake in the grass. More than a devil stare from a hairy with feathers.... A foot.

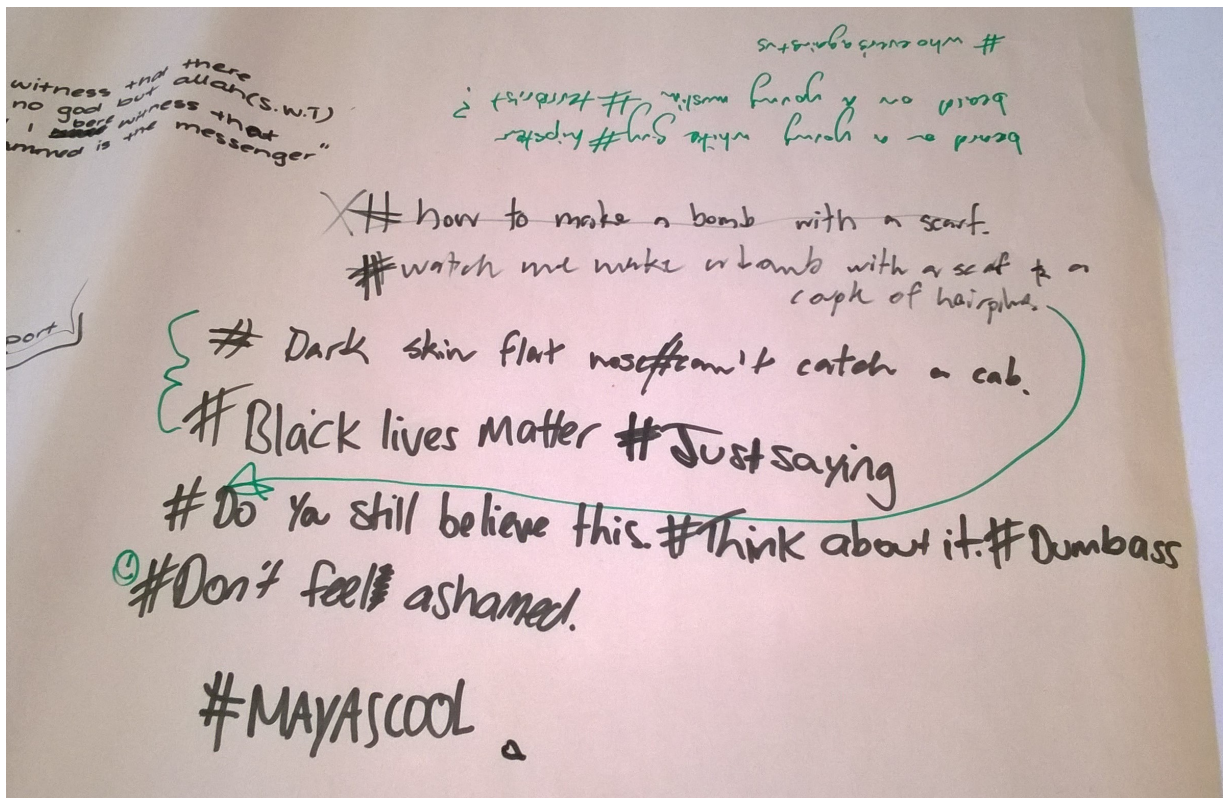
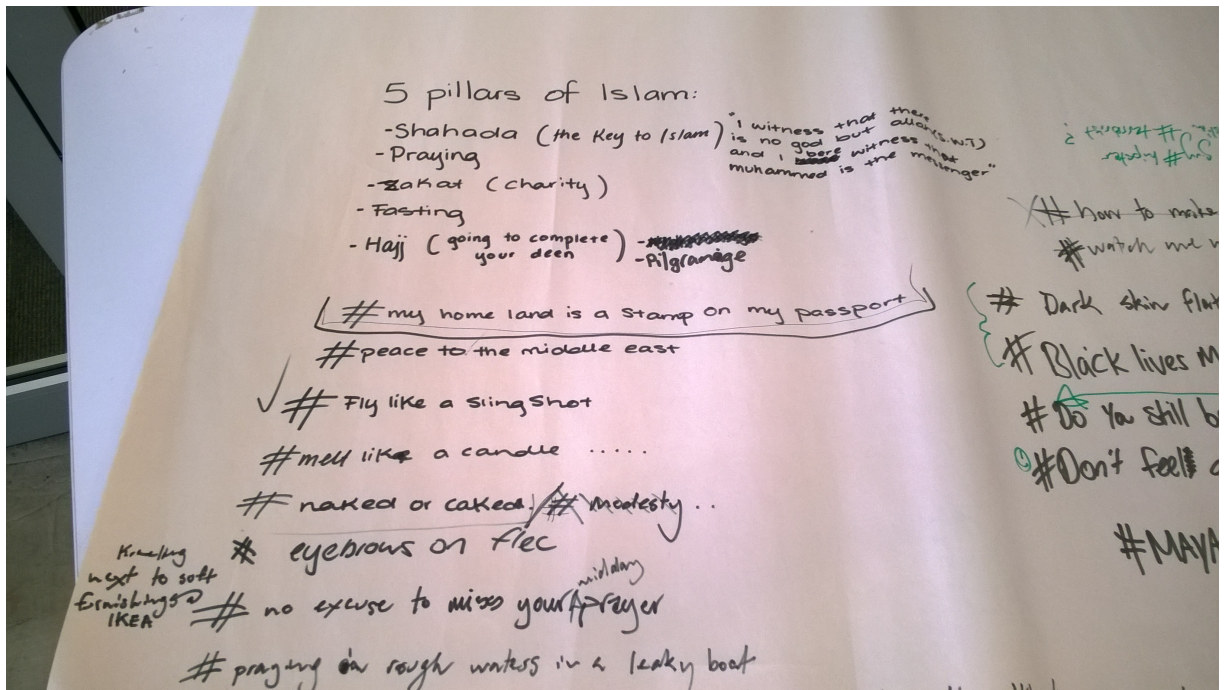
That was then... but this.... is the *dreaming*,

I have a spear/ headed /we are spears headed... in one direction, direct action, through dance as moving agents, we speak in tangents, our power is intangible, it *defies patrols of trolls trolling for oil. We are trackers tracking fracking government control/ leaving scars in the soil, shaking foundations almost as fast as we can shake a leg-. I said, almost.*

*Cool a Mon down with your bad self!* I'm just marking time before my hips go down. I'll call to let you know. I'll give you a shout out followed by a jump that will make the Brolgas fly in concentric circles/.. feeding. No need to be picking a berry fad pight. Waa. Nah. Leave it for three days in still waters after you've tied the bag tight.

Sorry. (I) I wasn't paying attention. I wasn't properly concentrating. My mind... it was wandering.... it was on walkabout in some distant place,.. some kind of outstation, (~~far from the Madding crowd.~~). On remote area tour.. With strangers on residency. Strangers to me. A densely habituated habitat from which I sought solace. A place in the past. Passed away and a wash of regret, from which I know not, passed over me..... A lament..... A cry performed. A wail as symbol of those responsible for the teeming life before me.

## Appendix 10: ICE Hashtags



## Appendix 11: NAISDA Hashtags

### NAISDA- Hashtags in progress

#smokingtheinternet **yes**  
 #lostmyland  
 #ginwinning **yes**  
 #flogginfordays  
 #dingostolemybaby  
 #livingoffwhatland  
 #granddesigns #livingonamattressoutdoors  
 #spearmydinnerwithabasiccard  
 #learninghowtomemorisetheadreaming  
 #blackcloud #cantlearnaculture  
 #mymobgotnojob  
 #kickingupdustatcentrelink  
 #wheresmyhouse  
 #hellyeahitsalifestyle  
 #collect #kooribank #pressforrent  
 #forcedtorelyonoffweek  
 #justsayin  
 #pricecheckvegemitesydney\$2.80community\$7.00  
 #hunger #billyteaplentysugar#noteeth  
 #whichwei #sameway  
 #myeyesneedadoseoffredhollows  
 #buttheirgoodatsport  
 #cameinonthelastboat  
 #refugeeinmyowncountry  
 #shakealeg #notonmyland  
 #beingsafenotsorry  
 #bullybeef #paleo  
 #whatsyourpercentage  
 #sousou #pixelate  
 #ochreorink **yes**  
 #lessfacebookmoreyarntime  
 #blackfella #badseed  
 #holidayindetention #riteofpassage

## **Appendix 12: *Redfern As Refuge* (2016)**

**NAYA WA YUGALI**

**REDFERN AS REFUGE (2016)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScCUwQ2VjWA>



## Appendix 12 (cont.): Redfern As Refuge

### NAYA WA YUGALI (WE DANCE)

*This year, NAISDA Dance College celebrates its 40th anniversary.*

Born from workshops during the beginning of the movement for Indigenous self-determination, NAISDA is a College that has created its own model for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and contemporary dance.

It has contributed to the cultural and artistic development of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, many of whom have contributed to performing, teaching and mentoring across the country and all over the world. Pulling together images, interviews and moving images, *Naya Wa Yugali (We Dance)* explores NAISDA's unique and extensive history, and its ongoing legacy.

NAISDA Dance College saw its beginnings against a backdrop of burgeoning cultural, artistic and political activity in Sydney's inner-city communities of Redfern and Glebe in the mid 1970s. The College began with the dance workshops led by Carole Y Johnson of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company and convened by Euphemia "Phemie" Bostock at the St James Church Hall on Bridge Road, Glebe. Funded by the newly formed Australia Council for the Arts, these workshops were aimed at developing Indigenous theatre and were the first of their kind.

The pioneers of NAISDA were its first students who left their footprints for others to follow. These were Wayne Nicol, Cheryl Stone, Lillian Crombie, Daryl Williams, Dorathea Randall and Michael Leslie. Following the great struggle that lasted from 1972 to 1976, through the efforts of the founding students and members, NAISDA opened its doors for the course which became the formal year-long 'Careers in Dance' training course. The performance arm of this program became known as the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT). The students received invitations to perform at political rallies in Sydney and Canberra, and then at festivals across the world. The training side evolved into the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association – now known as NAISDA Dance College.

Across these 40 years, the activities of NAISDA and AIDT have been captured by some of Australia's most celebrated Indigenous visual artists including Tracey Moffatt and the late Michael Riley. Their portraits challenge the colonial gaze, empowering their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects through the self-image. Through a different lens, Elaine Kitchener and Juno Gemes capture the daily life of the NAISDA community, providing historical documentation of the some of the College's key events and performances, annual cultural residencies and classes in the studios in NAISDA's former campuses in Glebe and The Rocks. Their images transcend time and demonstrate the strength of the College's community and the role it has played in developing some of our Indigenous arts and cultural leaders of today.



One of the most important legacies NAISDA has created, is the notion that Indigenous dance in Australia can encompass various styles and can be used as a political tool. It has played a crucial role in the development of a contemporary Indigenous style of dance that fuses traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dances with contemporary dance.

This became a mode of expression that had the ability to communicate the social and cultural needs of Indigenous people, which continues today. This is due in part to its connection to the movement for self-determination, which in the 1970s saw the establishment of the Aboriginal Medical Service, Aboriginal Legal Service, and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra.

This legacy is explored in the commissioned work of Vicki Van Hout and Marian Abboud in *Redfern as Refuge*, which responds to the legacy of Black Theatre protest movement and the site of Redfern as a significant site for political and artistic activity.

Since its beginnings in the 1970s, NAISDA has become much more than a professional training college. It is a place which many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share or have shared connection, whether through a niece, cousin, grandson, aunty, parent, friend or colleague who are NAISDA alumni. It is an important institution for the continuity of Indigenous dance and cultural expression.

*Naya Wa Yugali (We Dance)* and the individuals who have contributed to this exhibition are testament to the College's importance and ongoing contribution to the Indigenous community and to the arts community today.

**TANJEE MOAR**

*Curator*

## Appendix 12 (cont.): Redfern As Refuge, money on boards



**Appendix 12 (cont.): Redfern As Refuge, hand from installation**





**Appendix 12 (cont.): Redfern As Refuge, hand gripping installation**

## Appendix 13: BOLD Blog



Anca Frankenhaeuser. BOLD Festival, 2017. National Portrait Gallery. Image: Michelle Potter.

[Home](#) | [Blog](#) | *BOLD Festival Musings*

# BOLD FESTIVAL MUSINGS

Shhhhh.

Don't tell anyone I'm here- with you.

I'm out on the lam. Holed up in my house writing a thesis. About dance.

Yes, the thing I hold dear, is being held hostage. I am forced to find the verbal equations for my creative process, because...

What is all this scientific pontificating over dance going to achieve anyway? Isn't the beauty of it, that there within lies a mystery? The doing of it. That thing you're doing. That, that thing you're

doing leads to the next doing. And that while you're doing it, you're nowhere else but there, doing it.

Let me tell you, I'm not doing it, because I'm writing about doing it. I wish I were doing it but I'm planning for my future.

I ask myself if that future will be BOLD.

No seriously. I wasn't present for all of the BOLD festival proceedings a couple of weeks back, but I was excited and exhausted at the same time. Someone, no everyone was saying it meant; Be. Old. And that Liz Lea, who did a marvelous job of putting it together on a virtually no-string budget, maybe made some typo and left out a letter and some wiggle room.

I can't be sure if it was about being older in dance, but it was about transitioning. No. Maybe about moving sideways, instead of buying into the hype that only has one trajectory if it were ever going to be considered successful.

I remember telling my mother that dance isn't something you go into to be famous. To this day she still thinks I had a chance of making it on Broadway when I studied in New York.

I got up at three (AM!) on the Friday morning so I could catch the five am Murrays bus and make it for the first talk. I made it, but there was no way anything of import was going to pass my lips after I'd lived half the day already, in darkness.

Good thing I didn't have to because Liz corralled and caroused a whole slew of American talent online, one of which was Mark Morris dancer David Levanthal, face of the Dance for Parkinson's Disease program which has gone global. The woman who organises the Australian arm of the program was seated somewhere in the auditorium (sorry I didn't catch you). He said that he looked to the UK as the pioneers for this kind of activity. Where dance has value in other places than the stuffy theatres, where only a small part of the population gets to see/feel what its all about. (I think that last bit's mine, Levanthal was way more diplomatic and way more positive considering he's coming from the country who's rumoured to lose their entire National Endowment For The Arts budget. No wait, that hadn't been announced yet.)

Dr Lester followed with a key note address with an opening line featuring prostitutes in the carers profession. We were all laughing and curious as to where it/this could go. It went to Gertrud Bodenweiser and her roundabout entrance into the world of dance via the Vienesese waltz and Delcroise danced dramas. Sadly, not on ice but it did make a cameo- the ice dance and her experience of it.

The next day at the National Film and Sound Archive I caught the Patrick Harding-Irmer film “Das Modell, The Dancer and Lola” about him, his mother and estranged father. About her fleeing one part of Germany as she was pushed through the window into a train carriage on the wrong side of the tracks. (No that bit was revealed in the interview afterward.)

Then I had to chew the fat about Aboriginal dance with two fellow New South Welshmen blackfellas. Garry Lester began with a slide show of his family. He told us who begat who, when and where, demonstrating kin.

I practiced my thesis. Nothing like a captive audience. Except that they weren’t. Captive. I’ve got to hand that thing in (the thesis) so I needed all the practice I could get. Getting it out. That’s the thing with dance, there’s very little joy in writing about it unless you can dance on the page. I read my marking criteria and it would not bode well to unpack the emergence of The Body Politic into the Aboriginal cultural lexicon, with specific focus on proposing the original 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy as a modern day dreaming or song cycle, in poetry form. I will not lie, I had contemplated this, albeit pretty briefly.

Back to the NFSA.

After my spiel that didn’t leave much time left to Tammi Gissell, but her dance later that night spoke for itself. I think she came up to me afterward and confessed that maybe she’d done her best job the year before (when she had a kinder opinion of her body). I had never seen her dance better. She was stunning as much as her character was hopeless. She was not in earnest, but there was an earnest honesty and a gutsy maturity in her performance as a broken woman dancing the blues.

I did so enjoy Michelle Potter’s talk on the early Australian ballets, many of which featured Aboriginal Dreaming narratives. I enjoyed looking at the sets and costumes which depicted decent facsimiles of a variety of artefacts, from backdrops with Wandjina spirits painted on them, to

replica conical hair hats from Mornington Island. I say- maybe somebody should've gathered up the artful (and maybe not so artful) homages as proof against Terra Nullius.

I came away thinking- Whatever happened to the can-do attitude of the past generation? Listening to Dr Lester's talk on Gertrud, hearing the story of Mr Harding-Irmer and knowing so many people (yes I concede mainly men) fell into dance as if fated, was genuinely inspiring.

I thought about writing this blog in poetry form because I love that it was not talking that brought us all together to talk. I had a deep desire to just dwell in the memories without the need to make sense, to quantify my experience. I possessed a sneaking desire to pass on some generative baton.

If this is what Be-ing OLD does to people, then bring it on I say.

Special mention goes to the Golden Oldies performing on the forecourt of the NLA. A good day for a 'brella behaving like a parasol.

I'm delirious. Sorry, better get back to my wretched writing. Not this.

That.

Vicki Van Hout

FORM Dance Projects BLOG



## Appendix 14: 'The Legacy' by Vicki Van Hout

In our 40th year NAISDA pays homage to all who have passed through its walls – from Students, Cultural Tutors, Communities, Teachers, Artists, Board Members, Staff, Political Activists, Children. Our thoughts and homage to all are reflected in the poem below by NAISDA graduate and artist Vicki Van Hout!

*Yaama NAISDA*

When we pierce this ground, we make them, the Darkinjung ancestors, bare witness to the fertile nexus, this one, now, in the present tense. A product of many a past tense. Past people have passed this down to us. In this moment we stand on the precipice of continuing greatness. A lineage whose foundations consisted of much more than this. More than mere concrete, mortar, pillars, walls & ceilings. But tears, courage and a vision to score –

**A PLACE ON THE MAP FOR US. A PLACE TO MAKE IT...  
A NAME FOR OURSELVES.  
TOLD BY US WITH OUR VOICES. USING OUR OWN BODIES.  
WITH OUR OWN WAYS. WITH OUR OWN SPIRITS TO GUIDE US.**

The first of us fought so that we could soar. They battled politics, ignorance, were pioneers and much more than that. They brought Blackfella talent to the fore... Front... and... centre. They were firebreathers. Shape shifters. Their bodies burning... formed from unbridled will. Bright new. Their feet like thunder. Announcing that we too are here. Have always been here... And will always be here. They used their dance to make the world stand up... and take notice.

**THEY DANCED THE NULLABOUR PRAYER,  
TO SPEAK OF THIS LAND AND OUR CUSTODIAL CONNECTION  
TO IT. THEY DANCED THE 'BROWN SKIN BABY' TO SPEAK OF  
STOLEN CHILDREN. THEY DANCED THE MANGY OLD DOG TO  
SPEAK OF IN-EX-PLIC-A-BLE IN-EQUALITY. THEY DANCED.**

Black Deaths in Custody, where she wailed over his spent body. And they cried too in quiet. Private wet tears that no-body would hear because no-body was left untouched. All hearts were in attendance, wounded equally... to witness it. They danced. The 88s Tall Ships' dispatch. To dispel to the notion of one... true... history. Called 'Survival'... for survival of cultural perpetuity and the theatre god's grace did they engross. Their bodies knew nought but that they had to do it. Whether a calling or a whim or a free taxi ride to it, by a woman with a car, sat trawling the streets... searching... for eager bodies to bend to an ancient rhythmical beat to the beat of this land and that of no other. This woman of inspiration, a hard task master. A mother of contemporary idiom. In an urban setting,

**REPRESENTING A TRADITION OF THE FIRST  
AND LONGEST, CONTINUOUS NATIONS.**

The names are too many, like the stars in the galaxy. The beat of one heart over a lifetime. Every fibre of one being... Like dots on a painting. They leave a brilliant legacy... From humble beginnings in a dusty run down church, to these here foundations, where we will make fire from this dirt. Just before we finish, so that I am not remiss, I'd like to acknowledge the miners, the illiterate, the queers, the queer of nature, that is quirky, that is brave, that were here, and are here to seek refuge from small minds, in smaller places. To the cross-dressers, the crazy, the colorful, the flamboyant, you know who you are, you are with your people. You are the talent whose shoulders prop up this place. You are the unique voice who sees from the other side. You can now be counted amongst singers, actors, choreographers, TV and movies stars. You are leaders.

**IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT SHAPE OR COLOUR YOU COME IN,  
AS LONG AS YOU CONTINUE TO OPEN AND DAZZLE  
THE MINDS OF THE MASSES WITH YOUR BODIES.**

VICKI VAN HOUT

THE LEGACY

