

DANCING THE ARCHIVE: A STUDY IN REMEMBERING, RE-EMBODIMENT AND RE-ENACTMENT

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Master of Research

Dance and Performance

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Abstract

This thesis approaches André Lepecki's, 'Body as Archive', as a choreographic proposal where components of family history and dance lineage are explored, reimagined and repurposed. In particular I investigate my dance history and my family history: my grandparents' performance history whilst living on remote islands located in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and my family's connection to the Kamula People, located in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea.

This research adopts a practice based methodology, supported by a dance practice and a writing practice. Together they form a comprehensive structure to investigate two key questions that underpin the inquiry: what does the notion of 'Body as Archive' produce when exploring my family history and dance lineage? How can this research process translate into performance?

This approach produced three different choreographic studies, *Family Slideshow*, *Kamula* and *Round Solo*. Each creative response explores a remembering of a different aspect of my family history and dance practice. By combining aspects of my family and dance history and archive with my current performance practice I am able to re-imagine and re-activate parts of my 'Body as Archive'. Through placing the three studies in a performative context, I am able to share with others my 'Body as Archive'.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Dancing the Archive – a study in remembering, re-embodiment and re-enactment” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of 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 have been appropriately acknowledged.

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

Patricia Wood

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Introduction

The air was thick and full of nervous energy. I looked up and saw lots of faces watching me, anticipating my next move. I lunged forward, the crowd followed, together we shifted our bodies into positions that felt familiar to me, yet strange to others. In one swift move, we pushed through our hands and suddenly our orientation was flipped, everything we knew was upside down. People began to walk on their hands like flipped out bugs, collapsing in giggles around us. There was no music, just the sound of my voice calling out instructions that only a few could understand. Framing the edges of the wooden church more people gathered, curious to see what was causing the church to shake with laughter.

The above paragraph was written while visiting Kesegi in Papua New Guinea with my father. It offers an example of reflecting on and repositioning components of my embodied archive and dance history as a constantly evolving archive (Lepecki 2010). It also points to the expansionary entanglement of my archive with my kin and through them, to other worlds of meaning and memory. Any such archive is both productive and necessarily infinite, joining and disjoining different times and ways of expressing temporalities. The embodied archive is both essentially historical and a partially remembered act.

This research project adopts the notion of ‘Body as Archive’ from performance theorist, André Lepecki, specifically in response to his article ‘Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances’ (2010). Lepecki argues that ‘the archive does not store, but acts’ (2010, p.38). This is an evocative image and provides me with a generative framework to investigate the unique dance histories and family histories embedded in my body.

My aim is to investigate and expand on my family’s connections to life in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and to the Kamula people and how these connections impact me, in both my written and dance work. This research has also provided me with a focused time to develop further knowledge of my own choreographic interests and approaches. In response to Lepecki’s ‘Body as Archive’ this research has generated three choreographic studies: a *Family Slideshow*, *Kamula* and *Round Solo*, which combine components of my family and dance histories with my choreographic practice to re-imagine parts of my ‘Body as Archive’.

My methodology aligns with practice as research and acknowledges the complex and layered discourses within the body. The methodology is essentially qualitative, therefore I utilised the following interconnected methods to document the process: an embodied studio dance practice, a responsive and generative writing practice and a creative archival process.

The research questions underpinning my MRes project are,

- 1) What does the notion of 'Body as Archive' produce when exploring my family history and dance lineage?
- 2) How can this research process translate into performance?

From an embodied archival perspective, I locate my research in a broader landscape of dance practitioners and theorists working with historical investigations, embodied history and choreographic practice. Through my reading and embodied practice of Lepecki's 'Body as Archive', I contextualise my mode of knowing in Farnell and Verala's theory of 'dynamic embodiment'. I discuss how my process has grappled with and understood dance's relationship to the ephemeral. I also outline how my chosen methodology, practice based research, intertwines with these theoretical frameworks. Lepecki's framework supports my interest in creating an emergent historical landscape and performative structure, highlighting my own family histories and dance lineages.

My research belongs to the discipline of Dance Studies and more specifically the sub-disciplines of Creative Practice Research and Independent Dance Practice. From the late 1980s to the early 2000s marked a time of intense activity for dance scholarship, characterised by fundamental shifts in the field. Dance writers began to consider, not only the dance and the artist's biography but also how dances engage with their social, historical, political and economic contexts (Carter and O'Shea 2010, p.2).

These concerns positioned Dance Studies as an interdisciplinary field - dance theorists began to borrow approaches from other fields and in return informed other disciplines. Although my project has shifted me into an interest in anthropology and post-colonial and inter-cultural studies and this has influenced my reading, this thesis project positions itself in Dance Studies as the dance and the body are my primary research interests. In this, my research is similar to other examples of cross-disciplinary initiatives where creative

practice meets theory.

While Dance Studies in academia has a relatively short history in producing disciplinary knowledge, in the last decade there has been an emergence of professional creative practitioners working in the academy, predominantly engaging in practice as research. The term practice as research and its affiliates (practice-led research, practice based research) are employed to make two arguments about practice, which are often interlinked. Firstly, as just indicated, creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs. Secondly, creative practice – the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights (Smith and Dean 2009, p.5).

The two key family components for this research project are: my grandparents' performance history whilst living on remote islands and my family's connection to Papua New Guinea, in particular through my father's work as an anthropologist, with the Kamula people living in Kesegi, in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea.

My Nana and Poppa carved a colourful life by forming many connections to islands in the Pacific. It was my Poppa's work with the Overseas Telecommunications (OTC) that allowed my family (my Nana, Poppa, father and aunt) to live in remote locations on Fanning Island (also known as Tabuaeran), Cocos Keeling Islands and Guam. As a way of engaging and entertaining the local community my Poppa created lo-fi productions. Participants would often be dressed in pastiche costumes and create humorous plays and skits that frequently incorporated and appropriated components of the indigenous island cultures through traditional Western performance paradigms.

My family also has a long-time connection to Papua New Guinea. It was in Papua New Guinea that my great grandfather lived and died, my grandmother grew up, and where my father works as an anthropologist. My father, Michael Wood, has dedicated a large portion of his life to working with the Kamula people from Kesegi, located in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea. His connections and kinships to the Kamula community are across generations and have continued for almost forty years. My relationship with the Kamula people has been, until recently, mediated solely through my father. As I got older stories of kinship, custom and cultural respect began to impact me. For example, when I moved in with a boyfriend, the Kamula people saw this as a marriage where the family of

the woman, should receive a bridewealth payment. As my father is connected to the Kamula people they began negotiating as members of my family what their fair share would be of the bridewealth exchange; sugar, fishing line, money or a pig were all discussed as sufficient payments. As an independent woman this placed me in a slightly awkward position as I felt somewhat obliged to acknowledge this custom. This has acted as a catalyst for me to query my role within the Kamula community and some of my assumptions about multiculturalism and identity. It led me to wanting to learn more about the Kamula and my family's history and connections to Papua New Guinea.

In late December 2014, I travelled to Kesegi, where I lived, worked, sang and danced with the Kamula people for three weeks. An exchange developed where I taught dance and yoga exercises to interested Kamula people (mainly young women, children and members of the local rugby team) and the Kamula women shared with me some of their dances and songs. This was an exchange of dance, song, plus many other things, food, money and gifts. This experience redefined my sense of knowledge and obligation to the Kamula, within my own terms and agency. I was able to dance out my obligations by having received into my embodied archive some of the Kamula women's dances.

This thesis has five sections. Chapter One is a review of the literature, locating the project primarily in the field of dance and performance studies, supported by the anthropological framework of dynamic embodiment. The chapter also attends to the archive in relation to the history and embodied knowledge. Chapter Two outlines the methodology and the methods chosen for this project. It outlines the relationship between theory and practice, highlighting how I have utilised writing and dancing as modes of knowing to inform the creative works. Chapter Three discusses my creative practice and the performance outcome, with details of the three choreographic studies. It reflects on the processes and challenges of bringing the archive into dance and performance and highlights and discusses some of the ethical implications. In the conclusion I reflect on my findings and identify areas that require more research. The Afterword is a short essay where I reflect on my recent experience of learning and performing in Mette Edvardson's work *Time has Fallen Asleep in the Afternoon Sunshine* as this project was also about remembering, forgetting and engaging with my 'Body as Archive'.

Chapter One: Literature Review

“With my eyes turned to the past, I walk backwards into the future”.

Yohji Yamamoto

The quote above evokes the purpose of this literature review, which is to develop an understanding of the existing research on the subject of ‘Body as Archive’, covering both theoretical and choreographic research, as a way to further understand the positioning of my own research. This review will also highlight historical trends taking place in dance practice, most predominantly in the last decade. This review addresses key themes emerging from the concept of ‘Body as Archive’, including notions of the archive, re-enactment, ephemerality and embodiment. Although there is considerable overlap I will attempt to discuss each of these ideas separately.

As I am placing myself as the subject of this research I utilise a phenomenological perspective highlighting work on ‘dynamic embodiment’ to illustrate and contextualise the studio processes I enacted whilst creating my performance work. In this review I examine how articulating my experiences of the body, in particular, through the lens of Lepecki’s notion ‘Body as Archive’ and Farnell and Verala’s paradigm of ‘dynamic embodiment’, will have a productive engagement with these schemas when investigating my own family histories and dance lineages.

Body As Archive

In this project my explorations in the studio were responses to André Lepecki’s ‘The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances’ (2010). Lepecki draws from three performance works by choreographers Julie Tolentino, Martin Nachbar and Richard Move to demonstrate different approaches to the dancing body to archive past works. Lepecki is not interested in the ‘body as archivist’ instead he explores through a process of re-enactment the body *becoming* the archive. Lepecki argues that the archive does not store, but acts (p.38) and in doing so can produce transformation. Lepecki rejects Foster’s notion that dance is responding to an archival ‘impulse’ that is understood to be a response to a ‘a failure in cultural memory’ (Foster 2004, p.3) instead placing the dancer with a ‘will’ to re-enact (2010, p.29), which positions the dancers as authors as opposed to products of their embodied knowledge.

Lepecki proposes that in order for dance re-enactments to be an affective mode of history one needs to be experimental (2010, p.35). It is the dancer's *will* to experiment that creates a productive and agentful engagement with the body and history. Lepecki argues that any dancer's *will* to innovatively re-enact involves 'the choreographic activation' of the dancer's body as an 'endlessly creative, transformational archive' (2010, p.46).

This focus on transformation is what is useful to me. Positioning the body as a dynamic system that is responding to the myriad of experiences and references means that a range of possible histories and futures are suddenly present. While dancing the archive, the body in the action of doing selects some options from this range of possibilities. It is through such processes of transformation that the body enacts one form of its own agency (Lepecki 2010).

'Body as Archive' is a phrase that has been adopted by other scholars including Inge Baxmann in 'The Body as Archive: On the Difficult Relationship between Movement and History' (2007), Carrie Noland's 'Inheriting the Avant-Garde: Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp and the "Legacy Plan"' (2013) and Helen Nicholson's 'The Performance of Memory: Drama, Reminiscence and Autobiography' (2012).

Nicholson (2012) uses the term 'Body as Archive', to define how the aging archived body can be a positive transformation (p.62) arguing that:

The body archives our lives performatively, where emotions, experiences and expectations are (consciously or unconsciously) recorded and to which we can, or may, return.. As memories are recalled they are reinterpreted and, as they are performed, they are unfixed and may be archived in another's body.

She believes this invites a new way of thinking about the body in space and time, 'it is not about 'preserving', 'conserving' or fixing history, but of making it a part of a dynamic of lived experience' (p.73).

Baxmann outlines how experience (sensory, emotional and cognitive) is stored and intensified in dance movements, gestures and rhythm and that, as a result, makes the body a valuable mode of knowing and remembering (2007, p.207).

For Noland the process of retrieving or reproducing a movement does not produce a replica of the event, instead what occurs is a re-interpretation of the original. However verbal inscriptions and gestures belonging to a dance form, communicates an ethos or an approach to life that informs the interpretation (p.100). This presents the crucial paradox of the archive that ‘consists in the fact that by creating it one ends up altering that which one is attempting to preserve’ (2013, p.97).

The Archive

An archive is commonly thought of as a physical space where information is meticulously gathered, documented and saved. The information is thought to be important and therefore worth preserving. However within the set-up of this structure there are inherent hierarchies. Jacques Derrida (1996) and Michel Foucault (1972) both have written extensively on the limitations of the archive. Foucault suggests in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), that an archive is a system of transforming simultaneously past, present, and future—that is, a system for recreating a whole economy of the temporal. His argument at first glance is broadly compatible with Lepecki’s ‘constantly, evolving archive’, and the possibility of cultivating knowledge, through the body. Yet Foucault’s system simultaneously sits within notions of structural determination at the level of power/knowledge, discourse and the assemblage. Power here tends to emerge from outside the subject where I am more interested following Lepecki in positioning of knowledge/power/memory more directly in the body, exploring how its ephemeral presence as improvised embodied knowledge, models a space and a knowledge that has a more contingent relationship to power. This space is utopian, but still interesting as a site of a different kind of archival practice.

Lepecki’s argument of the ‘Body as Archive’ is in response to a line of study that evolved from performance studies scholars affiliated with New York University, who contributed significantly to discussions on the relationship between the archive and performance.

Authors Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2007) and Rebecca Schneider’s *Performance Remains* (2011) provide valuable insights. Schneider states that performance does leave a trace, but it is not detectable when engaging with the conventional logic of the archive, which fetishizes the ‘original’ material remains of history (2011, p.100).

Restricting the archive to material remains, such as written documents, severely constrains performance, which can become lost and forgotten. Schneider proposes the body ‘becomes

a kind of archive' (2011, p.101) when considering the body as a site for historical investigation. Amanda Card (2011) has also written about the limitations of historical documents in relation to conveying the integrity of the visceral experience of the performer and audience to the page.

Australian academic and artist Paul Dwyer, like me, also created work in response to his family archive. *The Bougainville Photoplay Project* (2009) situated in verbatim theatre similarly reflects on personal family connections to Papua New Guinea, specifically trips his father, Dr Allan Dwyer, world renowned orthopaedic surgeon, made to Bougainville in the 1960s to heal crippled children. Dwyer's work connects the familial with the larger narrative of Australian colonial influence.

Re-Enactment

Lepecki refers to the recent trend of returning to dances of the past as 'one of the most significant marks of contemporary experimental choreography' (2010, p.29). For Lepecki such re-enactment creates an opportunity for authorship and authority over the work to be rethought.

Da Laet observes a similar change in the development of contemporary dance resulting from historical inquiry (2012, p.102). He suggests this is a methodological change, as 'artists move away from the desire to undo performance conventions and established movement vocabularies, towards the interrogation of the transmission of dance heritage' (2012, p.102). One mode of transmission is Lepecki's 'Body as Archive'.

Sachsenmaier explains, there are various approaches to re-enactment that can be driven by a range of different artistic impulses, from aiming to replicate a work with a strong sense of the 'original' (a highly contested concept), or to create a 'new' work in response to the 'original' allowing the maker to incorporate their own artistic interests (2013, p.228-230). Methods for approaching re-enactments vary, from working closely with the keeper of a particular embodied knowledge (Nachbar 2012; Popkin 2013), to scuba diving (Walsh 2013) to observe sea creatures physicalities.

This is not only seen in choreographic practice but in the wider field of performance, where the practice of restaging performance artworks has become common, for example in Marina Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005); Rosemary Butcher's *18 Happenings in 6*

Parts – the first Happening of artist Allan Kaprow (2010); or Australian performance collective, Brown Council's *Making History* (2016).

The Ephemerality Debate

Since the 1960s dance and performance scholars have been debating over the potential of ephemerality. Peggy Phelan (1992, p.146) famously claimed:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be fully saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.

In response, Schneider questions this assertion by asking, 'in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering that might be situated precisely in the ways that which performance remains, but remains differently?' (2011, p.98).

Dance and its temporality have concerned academics for a long time, in Lepecki's book *Exhausting Dance* (2006, p.125), he claims that:

dance's melancholic framing of its temporality (of temporality in general) as aligned with the irrecoverable passing away of the 'now' left dance barely with a present, certainly without a past (no memory) and also without a future (no activation for the futurity of dance).

This presents a fairly gloomy view of the futures of dance but what Lepecki fails to consider is the perspective of the performer and what remains with them, the gestures, techniques and training that belong to a performance yet will re-emerge long after in the dancer's body, as discussed in Jennifer Roche's work on the dancer's 'moving identity' (2011). However as Phelan emphasises, a performance can never be repeated in its original form at a later time or be transferred to another medium such as video, photographs or documents (1992, p.148). Yet, to say that dance has no history, negates the body of the performer as an archive from the debate.

My research project proposes a practice driven response that questions dance's inherent ephemerality. I am interested in positioning the body as a constantly evolving archive that

is recalibrating and re-contextualising multiple futures and histories in relation to the present.

Into the Darkness with Vague Futures

Whilst writing this literature review I recently went to watch Lepecki speak about his embassy, The Embassy of Disappearance at the Sydney Biennale. He spoke of two of the artists he had curated as part of the embassy Mette Edvardsen and Ricardo Basbaum. His framing of his curatorial choices caused me to reflect upon Marcia Siegal's opening paragraph in her book *At the Vanishing Point*. She suggests, 'dancing exists at a perpetual vanishing point. At the moment of its creation it is gone' (1972, p.1). In this talk Lepecki offered another possibility for performance's inherent disappearance or at the least a next step. He suggested we consider the possible futures in darkness. Many artists utilise darkness in their work, Xavier Le Roy, Tino Seghal (2012) and Mette Edvardsen's 'No Title', which she performed recently at the Sydney Biennale. Throughout Edvardsen's performance she used the refrain "gone" and performed with her eyes closed. Lepecki proposes that only in this darkness is there the possibility for new futures to emerge. Lepecki (2016) asked us to consider the dystopias that reside from disappearance as a way to promise a future. I am not sure what happens next but it is an interesting proposal that with greater thought could potentially ask us to rethink the possibilities of performance.

Embodiment Paradigm

Anthropologist Tim Ingold claims, 'the world of our experience is a world suspended in movement that is continually coming into being as we—through our own movement—contribute to its formation' (2000, p.242). As I am situating this archive within my own experience it is important to outline how I am making sense of embodiment in my creative responses. To fully agree with Lepecki's argument that it is the dancer's *will* to experiment that creates a productive and agentful engagement with the body and history, it is important to discover how the body is defined in such a way to manifest its agentful properties.

Anthropologist Thomas Csordas (1993, p.135) summarises embodiment in the following way:

embodiment as a paradigm or methodological orientation requires that the body be understood as the existential ground of culture - not as an object that is 'good to think' but as a subject that is 'necessary to be'.

This definition is evocative yet it is important to understand and articulate, how this explains some of the corporeal processes I engaged in my creative responses. I first wish to reflect on an abbreviated version of a history of the body (as written by recent anthropologists).

Crucial in my thinking on the topic of dynamic embodiment, was Bourdieu's anthropology of the body. He built on and critiqued both the structural anthropology of Levi Strauss and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology that was explicitly concerned with embodiment. Bourdieu (1977) looked to dissolve the Cartesian mind body duality and shift an earlier anthropological focus on the body as the source of symbolism or means of expression to an awareness of the body as the locus of social practice. Due to the scope of this project I have refrained from contextualising my work in response to Bourdieu's notions of *practice* and his concept, *habitus*. Although I do think they are useful to consider when thinking through my interest in re-embodiment my family and dance history, specifically Bourdieu's habitus is seen to be a kind of embodied archive that has an 'endless capacity to engender products' including the capacity for its own transformation (1977, p.95). More importantly for this project, this new paradigm, developed by Bourdieu helped create a discourse of the feeling of the body, in anthropology represented in the work of Csordas (1990), Jackson (1983), Turner (1996), amongst others, and was inspired by Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology.

In the 1990s the third component, embodiment, was captured in part by Csordas's call for the adoption of a 'paradigm of embodiment' (Csordas 1990). He argued that human action is centered in, and constituted by, human physical being. Following Merleau Ponty, the term 'physical being', refers to the subjective (lived body) as opposed to the objective (mechanical) body. The 'lived body' also means the body each human being perceives which means felt, experienced, and sensed. These three perceptual processes exist together as the feeling of doing. This theoretical paradigm was conveyed by sociologists Turner (1984) and Shilling (1993) and psychologists Harré (1984, 1986, 1998) and Shotter (1993).

Dynamic Embodiment

To further develop a link between embodied archive and dance I also adopted Farnell and Veralla's paradigm of 'dynamic embodiment' (2008). They argue for a merging of the familiar dualisms and want to combine the semiotic with the somatic. Farnell and Veralla classify the

semiotic as representational and/or linguistic, whereas the somatic refers to a wide range of corporeal processes and practices that are assumed to be separated from mind, language and/or conscious thought (2008, p.215).

Farnell and Veralla seek to enhance the embodiment paradigm (Csordas 1990) arguing that the semiotic can be somatic and that this conception requires liberating the semiotic from its more usual identification with the representational. Instead Farnell and Veralla (2008, p.215) propose:

the semiotic can potentially be somatic when involved in dynamically embodied acts, and the somatic is necessarily semiotic when it involves the agentic, meaning-making practices of social persons.

My interests in my embodied history align closely with Farnell and Veralla's notion of 'dynamic embodiment' as I am working in relation to my own imagined and embodied histories within a studio context. By placing myself at the centre of this investigation and therefore as a productive agent, I am able to untangle myself from some of the circular power structures and use these concepts of my own embodiment to generate and produce my performative responses to my family.

Conclusion

This literature review reveals there are significant changes in dance practices and theories in response to the notion of 'Body as Archive' and the broader phenomenon of historical investigations. This literature review also discussed important bodies of work in relation to 'dynamic embodiment' that have the capacity to capture some of the corporeal processes in the studio practice. The literature reveals that dance and performance have the potential to expand on our understanding of remembered pasts, and in doing so, expand our knowledge of the present and the future. The next chapter will outline the methodology chosen and how the theoretical frameworks informed my studio practice.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Approaches

In this chapter I outline the methodology behind my creative practice, including the dancing and writing practices that informed the key research interest: from an embodied perspective, does Lepecki's 'Body as Archive' generate a productive response to memory and family history?

This thesis utilises practice as research as its methodology, primarily through a phenomenological engagement (as defined as dynamic embodiment in Chapter One). My experience of researching, practicing, performing and writing this thesis is fuelled by the retrieval and remembering of my family histories and a reimagining, re-embodiment and re-enactment of my dance history through studio-based dance enquiry and performance practice.

The value of creative practice as research is understood as an expansion and articulation of our capacity to discover new ways of demonstrating consciousness (Barrett and Bolt 2007; Smith and Dean 2009). Dance practice that utilises an embodied perspective as research, has the unique ability to access new knowledge made available about human experience through the body or proprioceptive awareness (Pakes 2003, p.131).

While working in the studio new questions arose from my dance practice as outlined in Carole Gray's (1996, p.3) definition of 'practice-led' research,

Research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice.

My research questions and methods were often generated by the requirements of my creative practice. Specific areas of interest emerged throughout the creative process of preparing the performance component. As well as a studio practice, other specific writing practices were employed: a daily reflection developed over two months in the lead up to presentation of the performance work, a studio journal and a Papua New Guinea daily paper.

This practice based approach generated a variety of inter-connected research methods. Research into the family archive involved reading family histories written by my grandmother and her brother Fred, conducting interviews with family members and searching through photographs and video footage provided by family members. I also explored some of the technologies used by my father and his father in their work and daily life, in particular specific note taking techniques and archival video techniques. As well I learnt how to use and look after my Poppa's AM radio, which he used every day of his life.

Defining the Dancing Ethnographer

Within the archival process it has been important to highlight and understand my own personal biases and beliefs and how they could influence me when creating work, in particular when responding to photographs of my family on the islands and my time with the Kamula at Kesigi. Anthropologists Errington and Gewertz (1987, p.1) argue:

Anthropologists necessarily must be conscious of their own personal and cultural identity when they do research... Their emotional and intellectual predispositions constitute perspectives which are sources of misinterpretation and of analytic clarity.

This claim is also applicable to an audience when experiencing a dance performance where each audience member shares the same space and witnesses the same event, yet experiences the work in response to his or her own preferences, inclinations and absolute truths. This approach also does not acknowledge the bodily sensations of each person¹. As my project is primarily situated in Dance Studies, I have allowed my anthropological reading to inform my methodological choices yet not be defined by them.

Writing as a Mode to Understanding

Alongside my dance practice, another a key component was a writing practice that took two distinct forms: a studio journal including daily written reflections and a Papua New Guinea journal. Each of the writing modes highlighted a different way of thinking, recording and being in the world. The act of writing revealed a process where key ideas and thoughts appeared through the process of writing. This action attempted to capture

¹ Diedre Sklar (2000) offers another approach of a "kinaesthetic trajectory", felt from the researcher's body and their bodily memory.

some of the embodied nature of the experience. The writing component also allowed the project to leave a trail that could be reflected upon and responded to. My interest is in allowing these two different modes of knowledge, dancing and writing, to coexist and inform each other.

Studio Journal

Throughout the entire research process I kept a studio diary. It acted as an idiosyncratic collection of reflective and responsive writings, notes and lists that were often illegible to others yet acted as a trigger for me to remember physicalities, pathways and connections through my body. The act of writing allowed the information to be stored more effectively and recalled more easily. It took the form of key words, half finished sentences and words in response to physicalities in the studio. In turn the writing often triggered an embodied response. This style of writing is different to other forms of dance notation, for example Labanotation (Gold 1972), as it was not written to aid transmission to other bodies.

Daily Writings

Over the course of the two months leading up to the performance, I set myself the task of writing reflectively for twenty-five minutes each day. This often took place after I had been in the studio. There were four questions that framed my writing in relation to my studio practice:

What worked?

What are the challenges?

How do I imagine approaching them?

What action needs to be taken?

By carving out this time each day to reflect and articulate my ideas, a refining process occurred. A trail of ideas was created, thoughts and manifestations were attempted: some were then built upon, others were discarded. It was a useful resource to reflect upon when I got stuck. I found that taking time to put my ideas onto paper made me clarify and name the processes happening in the studio. It compelled me to keep moving forward by reflecting on some of the challenges and by planning what action needed to be taken.

Papua New Guinea Journal

When I returned from Papua New Guinea I began to compile the various notes I had written throughout my experience into a more detailed compendium. This too was a daily practice where I wrote for approximately twenty-five minutes each day. The journal

entries aided my memory when creating and responding to the *Kamula* piece, as it made certain memories more vivid and people's names, places and stories easier to recall.

Dancing as a Mode of Knowing

As a dancer, most of my career has been spent embodying other people's ideas and their histories whilst engaging in their creative processes. Through these collaborative ventures my body has absorbed various people's visions, each with their own particular physicality and choreographic interests. Jennifer Roche (2011) defines this as the dancer's 'moving identity'. She sees this as 'accumulation of choreographic movement incorporations and training influences. The 'moving identity' holds traces of past embodiments that are also available to the dancer to re-embody' (Roche 2011, p.111). Through studio practice there is the potential to claim and shed some of this transmitted knowledge. Lepecki supports this possibility by arguing that it is the dancer's *will* to re-enact that generates 'the choreographic activation' of the dancer's body as an 'endlessly creative, transformational archive' (2010, p.46). This shift positions the dancer as author and authority over the work as opposed to simply being a vessel for others' past choreographic experimentation.

Improvisation

I have adopted improvisation as the choreographic methodology for this investigation. With links to the experimental Judson group in the 1960s (Banes 1987), dance improvisation has a long and varied history. Dance improvisation is determinedly ephemeral yet consistent in producing a residue that remains in the body. This way of working requires the performer to respond to prepared instructions or scores that produce a physical response. The dance may change each time it is practiced yet the structure will remain the same. As dance artist and improviser Jo Pollitt suggests, 'dance improvisation does not seek to avoid or escape previous experience but embodies historical evidence and memory in a non-linear evocation of the present' (Pollitt 2001, p.7).

My choreographic methodology is informed by my previous work with Australian dance artist Rosalind Crisp. In Crisp's work there is a constant dialogue between noticing the feedback from the body and responding to compositional tools. Movements are found by harnessing a practice that pays close attention to the body and what is already there. The term 'attention' is used to describe the internal focus and following of these happenings within a body, which could be seen as similar to 'awareness'. Social scientist Alfred Schutz describes awareness as 'full alertness and the sharpness of apperception connected

with consciously turning toward an object, combined with further considerations of its characteristics and uses' (1970). When talking of the nature of awareness it is useful, descriptively and methodologically, to think about the body and the consciousness as one. I found when I was improvising in the studio I was highly aware of the physical sensations manifesting in my body and the relationship to the scores and the environment I was moving in.

As Phillipa Rothfield observes: 'A phenomenology of bodies looks to the ways bodies feel in movement. Not only what muscles and bones are being utilised to move or to dance, but what that feels like. It represents a kind of kinaesthetic sensitivity' (Rothfield 1994, p.80). A phenomenal orientation to dancing suggests that the dancer's experience and internal understanding will manifest in a unique way particular to the individual. Improvisation has the potential to connect into these experiences. Dance improviser Shaun McLeod suggests in response to Rothfield's 'kinesthetic sensitivity', that 'improvisational dancing, then, provides a methodology for sifting through phenomenal perspectives on dancing and a way of moulding multiple contributions into an objectively constituted performance' (McLeod 2008, p.88).

Choreographic Studies

The three choreographic studies were generated from my improvisational studio practice. I utilised methods of observation and response; and self-reflective analysis to make decisions about how to share my research outcomes. In the following chapter, the discussion expands on the methods used to create three responses for performance: *Family Sideshow*, *Kamula*, and *Round Solo*.

Chapter Three: Creative Work- Performing the Archive

On the 29th February 2016, an informal showing of the creative outcomes of this thesis was performed for a small invited audience at the Dance Studio, Macquarie University. In response to the provocation 'Body as Archive' I presented three choreographic studies: *Family Slideshow*, *Kamula* and the *Round Solo* (see Appendix 3-5 for photo and video documentation). My approach to the performance provided an opportunity to reimagine my grandparents' amateur theatre nights for my own community of friends, colleagues and family - in particular family members who had travelled from Cairns, the Gold Coast and Wollongong. I carefully considered the music selection, refreshments, and the intended 'lo-fi' nature of the event. My intention was to create an atmosphere that reflected my imagining of my grandparents' performances on the islands. The sense of community I imagined they experienced also resonates for me with a community that I strongly identify with: the Sydney Independent Dance Sector. This community consists primarily of my professional colleagues and we are predominantly connected by our work as artists. It is my experience that the friendship and conviviality contribute to the success of our work. These important aspects are important for me to acknowledge and embrace. In this chapter I will discuss ideas and themes that evolved from the creative practice and how this research process, that predominantly exists within my own experience, translated into performance.

Family Slideshow

For *Family Slideshow*, I chose to re-enact a selection of family photographs by situating myself within the photograph, creating a contemporary photo essay. In addition to working with my family photographs I also looked to my dance history and played with inserting myself into archival dance footage to create additional layers in this investigation of embodied history.

I collected family photographs that traversed decades of my family history in Papua New Guinea, Guam, Fanning Island and the Cocos Keeling Islands. From when my grandmother was a baby in Papua New Guinea, to family portraits on Fanning and Cocos Island, to my grandparents' performance history on the islands. Important here were images from the 1960s taken in Guam of my father's parents, dressed up for fancy dress parties as jokers, school girls, Indigenous Australians and as members of the Spanish

inquisition (see Appendix 3, Figures 3.4 and 3.5). Such photographs highlighted my family's colonial past. My grandparents, dressed as members of the Spanish inquisition while living in Guam² in 1967 (Appendix 3, Figure 3.5) could be seen as an example edging towards mimicry or culturally inappropriate humour. I also used a photograph taken in Guam from the same period of my grandfather painted or blacked up, as an Aboriginal (Appendix Figure 3.4). Here my grandfather was not alone in his costuming choices, as in the 1950s, American dancer and choreographer Beth Dean created her critically acclaimed ballet *Corroboree* (1954). In *Corroboree* Dean danced the initiation rituals to manhood of an Aboriginal youth, whilst wearing a painted unitard, after spending a period of time with her husband, Victor Carell in Central Australia (Haskins 2011). I used this as an example in the slide show to highlight the possible parallels between the work I was creating, my grandparent's dressing up and the work of Dean.

Within *Family Slideshow* I spoke to what was in the photograph: who the people were; when it was taken; where they were located and why they were there. I decided not to address the things located just outside of the captured image that I could not see, particularly in the first few photographs of my grandmother as a child. I imagined that just outside the frame of the photograph there were other workers, servants, and a culture, that partially defines the details portrayed in the photo. I was more interested in the way whiteness was exhibited in everyday dressing and was drawn to the way some images showed indications of relationships that were not simply reducible to colonial domination or grandeur. Here I have in mind a photo of my grandmother warmly embracing her Papua New Guinea servant's knee as the maid angrily stares straight at the camera whilst the photograph is taken (Appendix 3, Figure 3.1). I was captivated by the idea that colonialism was never fully hegemonic but driven by tensions and contradictions that emerged in micro-events, such as taking a photograph of a European girl hugging her angry black maid.

In addition to working with my family photographs I also looked to my dance history and played with inserting myself into archival dance footage to create additional layers in this investigation of embodied history.

² Guam was a Spanish colony from 1668 to 1898 before becoming an American colony and most Guamanians in the 1960s were devout Catholics.

Dancing Martha

By positioning my body as a ‘constantly evolving archive’ during my studio practice, elements of my dance history began to reappear in my improvisations. A certain physicality, in particular a specific carriage of the head and arms became salient. After reflection, I realised this memory in my body was connected to my training in Graham Technique³. When reflecting on my time learning this seminal dance technique, I practiced re-embodying this history and particularity of my dance history. There was no re-contextualising of the Graham technique, my body either understood it as a totality or it did not; there was no in-between or liminal state of partial remembrance.

What was particular about this kind of embodied memory was similar to Steinman’s reflections, “memory is embedded in our very act of seeing and movement seems to be a particularly potent force in unlocking memory’s vivid detail” (Steinman 1986, p. 71). This type of memory is different to memories that are unlocked by the other bodily senses or archival material.

Night Journey (1947) is an example of a classic Martha Graham dance work where drama and theatricality are manifest in every physical shape. For the performance I learnt a short excerpt of *Night Journey*. The footage was projected onto the back curtain and I inserted myself into the image. When I first began learning the repertoire the shapes seemed comfortable and familiar. Once my pelvis began to initiate the shapes, the connection between the pelvis and spine felt full and articulate.

Though I know my grandparents were not overly familiar with American modern dance, Graham was creating works around the same time they were living on the islands. Because of this I decided to juxtapose found footage of *Night Journey* alongside a photograph of my grandparents and others watching a performance (see Appendix 3, Figure 3.6). During my performance I invited audience members into the space to occupy positions of the audience in the photograph, creating an array of people viewing and being viewed in different parts of the space. This was an attempt to bring the past into the present, re-enacting the performative act of watching and simultaneously being watched; and spatially

³ Martha Graham was a pioneer of modern dance and one of the great dance artists of the 20th century. Graham continued to dance into her mid 70s and choreographed until her death on April 1, 1991 at the age of 96, choreographing a total of 181 dance works (Martha Graham Organisation). She created Graham technique, a modern dance training that is taught all over the world. I learnt Graham technique for a semester in my first year at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts from company dancer and university lecturer, Reyes De Lara.

locating myself dancing, my audience watching - my dance history in relation to my grandparents' performance history.

Dancing Helen

During my improvisation practice, while working with the score *Dance / Speak / History*, there was one solo from my dance history, that kept reappearing. This was remembering a demi-character solo I performed when I was a fourteen, where I attempted to embody Helen Keller⁴. The demi-character solo is essentially a classical ballet solo from the waist down and a 'theatrical portrait' from the waist up. As a fourteen year old I did a lot of research about Helen before 'becoming' her. I wandered around the house for many hours with a blindfold tied around my head. I read about her and practiced my facial expressions when the water was splashed in my face. It was the first solo I ever won in an Eisteddfod. For this investigation I contacted my ballet teacher, Leticia Webb, hoping to access footage of myself performing the solo in 1999. Unfortunately the footage could not be found, however the solo has been passed down to various younger dancers. Leticia sent me footage of the current Helen Keller, a twelve year old student from her school. I then worked with this footage in the studio as a study of remembering. By acknowledging my 'moving identity' (Roch 2011) I was able to reflect and approach this solo as a structure to respond to with my embodied dance knowledge instead of replicating the solo step by step.

Techniques I have accumulated through my career that informed my approach in the studio include: Bodyweather, Contact Improvisation, Cunningham Technique, Release Technique, and Feldenkrais. I do not claim to be an expert in each of these practices. Instead I see my 'moving identity' as an amalgamation of my experiences as tools to draw from. As my Helen Keller practice developed I drew from my 'moving identity' to access and my *will* to re-embody parts of my archive, a process of remembering through doing.

For the performance I re-enacted the Helen Keller demi-character solo incorporating footage of the young dancer who currently dances it. Projecting 'the other Helen' in the space formed a point of reference for myself, and the audience. There were parts that I felt instantly connected to, struggling over certain steps, or remembering the discovery of how to spot and slow down in one part to stop myself from falling over. I remember practicing that blank stare and signing 'first' into the palm of my hand. These moments coincide with

⁴ Helen Keller was born in 1880. Before she turned two, she was struck by an illness that left her blind, deaf and mute. In 1887, Keller's teacher, Anne Sullivan, helped her to make immense progress with her ability to communicate. Keller went on to graduate from college, became a prolific author and human rights campaigner (Perkins Organisation).

steps I performed in the solo and chose to interpret as vital pieces of my archive.

I employed this method of ‘re-enactment’ to reposition my role within my performance history and to cultivate physicalities that relate closely to specific memories. This solo is one of my seminal dance experiences and I was curious to see how I would re-embody and remember it for others. I approached the solo with the same commitment and earnestness that I did as a young dancer. The piece became less about ‘becoming’ Helen or doing the steps as I did when I was fourteen, and more aligned with enacting the dancer’s *will* to archive (Lepecki 2010). In particular, how being in the act of remembering or archiving the body simultaneously imprints memories and re-enacts them with the knowledge stored in the body.

This manifested in the meeting of my fourteen year old self, with me now, as a thirty year old woman. The action performed by the current Helen in the video became the catalyst for me to remember, re-embody and replicate my past dancing self. Simultaneously I became aware of the many influences and repetitions of these steps I have done since in other rehearsal and performance contexts. As I reproduced these actions there was rewriting of the process where I became author of my experiences, holding onto what I thought was efficient and important and letting go of the other. This was quite a joyous and agentful experience. Somehow time became more spacious as my body knew the pathways and the beginnings of movements felt full of potential openings. At the same time there was a shedding taking place of unnecessary tension. Schneider proposes a similar phenomenon, prior to Lepecki, where the residue of the past sits in the flesh through a “network of body-to-body transmission of enactment – evidence, across generations, of impact” (Schneider 2001, p.102). This description resonates with my approach to remembering my Helen Keller solo and the experience of process of re-enacting and sharing it with others. While this attempt to perform Helen Keller might be regarded as an inappropriate mimicry of the blind, my primary interest was to re-appropriate myself both as I was ‘then’ and ‘now’. I did not actively explore such ‘misappropriation’ as a power effect and instead explored my own embodied dance memory and history.

Whiteness

As I developed *Family Slideshow* I noticed there was theme of white happening throughout: the white walls of the studio, the black and white photographs, the white clothing of my grandmother’s family in Papua New Guinea, my costume choices - my

white Helen Keller dress that reflected the fashion in the late 1800s and my white contemporary clothes. All of these objects in the room were chosen for practical reasons or reasons beyond my control, for example the white walls and dress were chosen because they offered the best surface for the projections to be seen by the audience, and I did not have the budget to make alterations to the white floors and white walls in the space I was rehearsing and performing in. However I am also aware of the dominant colour acting as a symbol for the colonial constructions of ‘whiteness’ (Moreton-Robinson 2004) represented in the photographs without any explicit comment or critique.

Whiteness became a point of tension for me. My concerns were motivated by my experience of being other (white), when travelling through Papua New Guinea after leaving Port Moresby, I never saw another white person (other than my father). Back in Australia, when I looked at photographs of myself from Kesegi, I was aghast at how strange I looked. I remember making lots of children cry because when they first saw me because they thought I was dead and as I couldn’t speak Kamula to calm them, they thought I was an evil spirit. I became ‘the monstrous other’ to these young Kamula and at the same time I was losing any reflexive presence of my own whiteness. The Kamula in the 1990s refer to themselves as ‘real’ people in contrast to ‘white skins’ (Wood 1995, 1998, 2006). White skins were often understood as the dead returned, and were sometimes positioned as reborn Kamula who had come back from Australia, which was Heaven, a place where the dead go. These themes and others closely related are evident in the ethnography of racial difference in Papua New Guinea (Bashkow 2006; BurrIDGE 1960; Lattas 1998).

As for myself, whilst in Papua New Guinea in 2014 I was destabilised as a coherent subject by these possibilities of redefinition. It was certainly no longer clear as to who was colonizing whom, or from what standpoint I could claim as a coherent subject.

Amplifying my lack of a coherent standpoint was that I did not have ethics clearance for my trip to Papua New Guinea and this prevented any real discussion of Kamula realities and understandings as somewhat unethical or immoral. I did not want to be reproached for making improper or unauthorised appropriation of any culturally specific logic evident in the Kamula approach to white Europeans and other strangers. On the other hand material on the Kamula understanding of Europeans and Chinese (associated with logging) was already published (Wood 1995, 1998, 2006). However even if I had ethical clearance to pursue this topic in 2014, I doubt I could have given my central focus on dancing.

Adequately representing a Kamula understanding of white skins such as myself takes time. Such understandings are complex and context specific and were not my topic. But they were part of my experience of dancing with Kamula and part of the Kamula's experience of dancing with me.

Placing myself within the photographs was overtly simpler than placing myself among the Kamula. By placing myself in the photos I was able to occupy an already familiar family history that enabled the past and present to fuse, and have this shared moment witnessed by family, friends and colleagues. This produced a conjunction of temporalities (past and present) that was achieved in the live performance where my presence of the immediate could convey the 'nowness' of the situation, as opposed to imposing photographs or footage of myself layered over the top.

However, I wanted to present myself enmeshed in this colonial history (Wolfers 1975) and highlight my continuities with this history. I was also aware of my great-grandparents 'doing whiteness' in how they dressed and how this was partly replicated in my own dress during the performance. These kinds of continuities were implicit or emergent affordances –for the audience and myself to reflect on. I was not fully prepared for the different reactions from the audience to the image of my grandfather dressed up as an Aborigine. This discomfort suggests an interesting site for more performance research as it places the audience in dialogue with their own moral codes and understandings of colonial and post-colonial representations. For this research, offering an explicit critique of my grandparents racism and colonialism seemed to me to position myself outside their worldview in way that was both difficult - after all I love them both - and unfairly anachronistic. I did not and still do not wish to claim political or moral superiority 60 years later even if I am uncomfortable with elements of their self presentation. Potentially I could claim that I was implicitly adopting an ethnographic perspective, one less interested in critique and more interested in understanding my grandfather's commitment to blacking up. But such an ethnographic understanding was never my project and nor may it have been technically feasible. My grandparents died before I ever talked to them about this topic and an ethnography where the subjects of that ethnography cannot speak is just another form of the colonial. Also to adopt an ethnographic mode of experiential engagement with others requires to some degree a commitment to cultural relativism. This can involve a complex and difficult negotiation of Western critical knowledge, especially with the currently

dominant liberal and neoliberal understandings of truth and morality that profoundly influences most but not all people today.

Within *Family Slideshow* I wanted to emphasise continuities with my family's various engagements with colonialism, rather than assume I had access to some clearly defined post-colonial standpoint that was somehow independent of persisting colonial relationships. My experience in Papua New Guinea involved a partial entanglement with Kamula ideas, which gave me new insight into about who a white person was. For example, to travel through Papua New Guinea I was completely reliant on the transport system of one of the most powerful and aggressive logging companies in the world (Gabriel and Wood 2015; Wood 2014, 1999, 1997; Filer and Wood 2014). Neither I, nor the Kamula were ever in a post-colonial space or time except perhaps for the utopian moments when we were dancing together. I was never outside my colonial legacies nor were the Kamula outside their understandings of their encounters with the power of the 'white skin' and racial difference. None of us were beyond the existing political economy of industrial logging in Papua New Guinea – in such a world there is no easy possibility for any one to claim post-colonial status without also acknowledging deep entanglement with on-going (colonial) projects that are variously understood as development, exploitation, industrial logging and the possibilities of being reborn a new Christian subject, of being reborn in Heaven a 'white skin'.

As indicated, one 'solution' is to treat colonial and post-colonial possibilities ethnographically as my father has done, but obviously this was only an option if I had the time and linguistic abilities to learn what the Kamula thought about me and my interest in dance. This was not an option since I was among the Kamula for just under three weeks. Long term participant observation and anthropological fieldwork is a respectful response to colonialism, but it cannot in itself create a post-colonial space for the Kamula or myself in my relations with the Kamula.

In *Family Slideshow* I instead chose to focus on a series of images that intersect my family history, our colonial past and my body as a site of ever-evolving history to sit with my brief experiences with the Kamula.

Kamula

This choreographic study approaches the ‘Body as Archive’ as an authority of knowledge yet removes the dancing body from the space. My experience of being with the Kamula and my father in Kesegi, was recreated and shared with the audience. People gathered around the edges of the dance studio and a small group, made up of myself, my father and a small cluster of audience members, traversed the dance studio floor.

I experimented with different modes of language. I named and mapped out my experiences from Papua New Guinea in the studio, identifying objects and places but rarely people. I also gave words a spatial place in the studio and allowed the naming to move the imaginary objects in space and in relation to each other. Here I was influenced by a Kamula mode of organising that appears in some of their own dance performances, where they use place names to create a path and movement along that path in songs. The aim of such songs can be to evoke memories of the dead and absent to create sorrow (Feld 1990; Schieffelin 1976; Wood 2004).

My aim here was not to replicate Kamula aesthetic but to give my ‘Western’ audience an agency to navigate their own experience and provide a framework not only for the individual’s imagination but also the group’s conjuring of a collective object. By naming what was not there, authorship was then stretched to include the audience. Together we were co-creating this experience. Through the repetition of returning to spaces and places, each audience member remembers that place/object slightly differently, perhaps remembering it in a different space or the object itself had transformed into a different shape in relation to what else has been said prior. This approach is influenced by choreographer Mette Edvardsen’s work *Black*. *Black* is a deceptively simple yet evocative premise where Edvardsen constructs a story using repetition to illustrate to the audience that within an empty space there is a room full of objects and people are interacting and weaving a narrative structure.

Reflecting on the performance, I realise how quickly memories that seemed solid can shift and dissolve and re-emerge as different ideas. Naming places as a way to connect to a person is a common attribute of Kamula songs (Wood, pers. comm.). By naming what is not there, I was drawing on a Kamula orientation that names the places of the dead (the absent) via names of places (the present). Utilising rhythm and tone my aim was to evoke the appearance of objects, then transform or disappear what had been conjured previously.

I also incorporated scale into the work by working from two different perspectives, ‘life size’ and looking down from above in an aerial shot. I worked with adjusting my gaze and using minimal gestures to suggest these different scales in the space.

It was important for me to place my father into the *Kamula* work as he was my constant travel companion in Papua New Guinea. Deciding to incorporate the small audience group to move with us reflected an important aspect of my time spent in Papua New Guinea, where for the entire three weeks I was never alone. This also allowed me to re-enact some of the gendered spaces I remembered, in particular when washing, dancing and going to church. As my father lives in Cairns his actions in the performance were not rehearsed, he was simply responding to the shared memories as I drew attention to them. His small reactions, whether they were small nods of agreement or slight disputes with my pronunciation of my Kamula speech, were an important yet accidental part of the work.

There were two different modes of talking in the space. The naming process, described above, was often interrupted by another mode of talking where I slipped into a colloquial more intimate way of speaking, akin to a friend sharing a story. These different deliveries of speech prompted a different kind of participation from the audience. In the naming mode I was calling upon objects and places that were separate and outside myself. This directed people to look out into the space. The story mode encouraged participants to focus more closely on me. These differences shifted my performance style. I became aware of how many people were in the space with me and handling that intimacy was challenging.

Kamula was my creative response to my experiences in Papua New Guinea and it originated from my considerations of how I could incorporate the Kamula without speaking about them explicitly.⁵ I am still left with unresolved questions regarding how the Kamula were represented in this piece. My concern is that by focusing on the objects and the places, despite my good intentions, have I made the Kamula disappear? At some level by omitting them in the space and by speaking only of my experience, do the Kamula then vanish? Does this then not only discredit both of our experiences and not honour my verbal agreement with the Kamula? This agreement was restated in Kamula during my performance, but was not translated. My statement in Kamula indicated that I would ‘obey’

⁵ This prohibition resulted from my failure to gain the research ethics committee’s approval for my trip prior to undertaking it. This failure emerged because funds through my father’s university only became available a couple of weeks before we travelled. In the rush to secure flights and get visas I did not lodge a formal ethics application for this field trip. A later rationalisation that my father’s ethics approval covered my research was not deemed acceptable.

any rules the Kamula wanted placed on my research with them. While they would have liked to be more fully represented, this was not possible given my obligations to the university to largely remove the Kamula's presence from my performance.

Round Solo

The practice of improvisation was the primary framework for the *Round Solo*. I engaged with notions of co-presence to extend not only to body and consciousness but also to how the external environments influence the individual. I adopted the approach of being in dialogue with the feedback from my body whilst responding to compositional scores built from distilling moments of my family and dance history. To generate the scores I conducted interviews with family members gaining insight into their memories and impressions of our shared past. From this material I selected moments of history that resonated with me and responded to them choreographically. I also added what I called 'base scores'. These were taught to me by other artists and practitioners and act as a supportive framework to fall back on if I felt I was flailing. They could also interrupt unconscious repetitions or 'habits' and make me aware of my environment. Lepecki's idea of 'Body as Archive' correlated with this physical practice, as it not only involved a re-embodiment of the task but a re-enactment of the past and of the present (see Appendix 4, Figure 4.7).

Whilst improvising, to stay 'in' the dance I relied on a stopwatch and set myself up to work within different time lengths. Longer periods of time meant I had to stay with what I was working with, invest deeper into understanding the physical response and then allow it to shift and amalgamate with other responses or distil into a more fully embodied response. Shorter periods, of one to two minutes for example, were used to drop into improvised dance physicalities quickly or to see how many responses I could make within a short period. The Helen Keller solo resulted from working in this way. These kinds of games and playful structures were important throughout my practice as a way to sustain myself whilst working in the studio alone.

When working with a score that I refer to as *the Grotto*, a physical manifestation of a place in Rabaul where my grandmother played as a child, I began to intertwine that physicality with some of the 'base scores', for example:

noticing the lines that are happening
noticing the space between the lines

noticing the beginnings, allow there to be space

The relationship between these base scores and *the Grotto* is a supportive one. I began by *noticing the space I am in, observing the energy and the architecture of the space, of the people I am sharing the space with* (see Appendix 1). As the Grotto is not my memory but my grandmother's the imagination became involved in physicalising movement.

Round Solo was an exploration in process, repetition and expelling histories from my body. I traversed the space in a circular motion. Scores were used to ground the work, to create performative landscapes for me to absorb into and affect. As discussed previously, the scores were developed in response to family stories and dance histories. From this physical investigation I allowed myself to move, to embody, to shed. I repeated what I found until the initial meaning of the movement was transformed into something else. There are things I did that were similar each time but never the same. Repetition is a commonly used device in contemporary dance used to delve more deeply, to stay with an idea or an embodied experience (Stein 1934; Ileto 2016). Repetition was used as a mode to more fully understand what it was for the body to do this specific movement, to grasp the subtle shifts and changes as the body simultaneously understood in more detail; yet the body would begin to fatigue and consequently shift the internal movement pathways. What this seems to create is a rhythm that is constantly moving and transforming. It is difficult to maintain the integrity of the movement whilst adhering to what the solo needs. The body was constantly evolving, simultaneously informing and disrupting the practice.

The decision to perform in a circle was in response to my desire to create a cohesive and inclusive space where as the dancer I was able to transform the space. The audience was welcome to watch from any point around the edges of the space. I was interested in developing a practice that allowed me to enter into different embodied states. This was a challenging proposal as a solo practitioner. Perhaps the difficulty lay in balancing, being absorbed in a score and simultaneously reflecting and responding to the overall research direction. Towards the end of the rehearsal process, I felt I had to prioritise what I was interested in sharing with an audience: the process of what was revealed whilst dancing in relation to the score or capturing and sharing specific images. I chose the first as this was a first development and the process of sharing this embodied memory was what was of interest to me at this point.

The sound track to the solo, aptly titled *WAVE SYSTEMS* was created and produced by electronic artist Corin Ileto. I was familiar with Ileto's work; her use of repetition and intricate polyrhythmic melodies I felt coincided well with my scores and decision making process. The sound was added fairly late in the process yet gave the solo a framework to sit within.

In this chapter I expanded upon some of the ideas that arose from the performance. The *Family Slideshow* highlighted some of my family histories and dance lineages in a productive engagement of my 'Body as Archive'. The *Kamula* explored issues around agency, memory and collective experience through the use of disappearance, repetition and language. In *Round Solo* I attempted to create a performative landscape to enter into, where the multiple influences in my body, the trainings, and the memories were visible. As the movement was repeated, what was highlighted were the differences from moment to moment resulting in a multitude of space, time, impetus, body memory variations. As dance scholar Laurence Louppe so eloquently said: 'The site of dance circulates through Time, it haunts both the real and the imaginary' (as cited in Lepecki 2010, p.46). These three choreographic studies once shared in this performance setting, transform once again, through my 'Body as Archive'.

Conclusion

The lights were bright and I felt dozens of eyes watching my every twitch and gesture. “Look, see, do.” I repeated this to my real and imagined audience. There was a heat that built on my right side as I remembered the sensation of lunging to the floor, the sun spilling through the window of the church, recollected now in a windowless studio. There was no music, just the sound of my voice calling out instructions that only a few could understand. I found my gaze drawing inwards as I paused, the memory of negotiating the time it took for the Kamula kids to land back on their backs. “We go” and my studio audience followed as I led them past the “church, airstrip, house, house, house, basketball court, jungle...”

The above paragraph was written to capture the experience of performing a portion of the *Kamula* piece. As Lepecki observes, ‘to disappear into memory is the first step to remain in the present’ (Exhausting Dance p.127). The reflective writing is in response to this thesis’ opening paragraph highlighting a re-embodiment of an experience with the *Kamula* performed with my community of family, colleagues and friends. It offers another example of repositioning components of my embodied archive and dance history as a ‘constantly evolving archive’ (Lepecki 2010). It also locates another side of the complex networks of my archive, with my kin in Sydney and joining together through me, to other realms of memory and meaning.

This research fused my performance practice with two key family histories: my grandparents’ performance history on remote islands and my family’s connection to Papua New Guinea, through my grandmother’s childhood and my father’s work as an anthropologist with the *Kamula*. Three choreographic studies were created and performed: a *Family Slideshow*, *Kamula* and *Round Solo*. These three solos connected aspects of my family and dance history with my choreographic practice thus re-activating parts of my ‘Body as Archive’.

Highly relevant here was Lepecki’s argument that it is the dancer’s *will* to re-enact that creates ‘the choreographic activation’ of the dancer’s body as an ‘endlessly creative, transformational archive’ (2010 p.46). This dynamic proved to be an affective mode of making history (2010 p.35). It was my *will* to experiment that was the catalyst for creating

a productive and agentful engagement with the body and history. My own agency was on display along with others selves and bodies that were present in the performance. What emerged were multiple agencies imbricated in the performance.

A practice as research methodology allowed me to make decisions that were informed by and in response to what was happening in the studio (Smith and Dean 2009 p.5). This dancing, writing and reflecting allowed me to trust my intuition and interpretations of how and what was to be performed. For example the decision to wear white in the *Family Slideshow* resonated not just with the technical demands of projecting my image onto other images, but also with the issue of colonial constructions of ‘whiteness’ exemplified in images of my grandmother and her parents where the dominant colour of dressing was white. The studio practice was developed in conjunction with a reflective and generative writing practice that served to create my own archive of this experience. This archive was also captured in documentation footage and photographs of both the creative process and the studio showing.

Farnell and Verala’s theory of ‘dynamic embodiment’ highlighted a way of thinking through the corporeal processes of transforming memory into movement when improvising. Joining the semiotic with the somatic is an important and productive development when communicating thoughts of embodiment to others. The linkage of the semiotics of memory and improvisation with their more embodied components was fundamental to my performance practice. The semiotic components were not just positioned to making present past memories as Lepecki’s work often implies, but they pointed, as does any act of semiosis or meaning making, to possible futures. These possible futures involve further interpretations of the performance and the future presence of other agents, particularly the Kamula, who might contribute to the performance’s further interpretation. Such agents and their interpretations have the capacity (in the futures opened by the performance) to become further present in my practice now and in this particular performance.

I addressed the possibility of new agents interacting with my performance, and thereby initiating such interpretative futures, when I invited audience members to engage with the work by collectively imagining and partially repeating some of my moves in the photographs of the *Family Slideshow* and moving through the space in the *Kamula*. This invitation asked the audience to follow me and at the same time to take the slot of those

absent such as the Kamula and members of my family. Neither option involved directly copying, as they had to improvise some of what they did, nor was it radically different to what I was doing. These moments generated a different mode of engagement to the sections of the audience that remained watching from the seating bank. I would like to think this watching involved a different kind of agency creating new enactments and interpretations of my memories. As such these invited co-performers were on the cusp of making a future present as much as remembering a past. Of course the difficulty in making a future present is that once this is done the future necessarily disappears fully into the present of the performance. At best one can point to or evoke the possibility of such a future. These are also potential futures residing in the objects that were involved in my process yet didn't make it into the performance, for example my Poppa's AM radio. This object has the potential to be enrolled in another future.

Another point for further exploration is a need for other non-Western and Indigenous views to be included. Lepecki argues that any dancer's will to re-enact involves 'the choreographic activation' of the dancer's body as an 'endlessly creative, transformational archive' (2010 p. 46). Perhaps his notion of creative transformation would need rethinking, as it currently implies that this creativity is based on prior experiences of dance that are archived in the body. His approach places considerable weight on 'creativity'. This accords with Western assumptions that 'creativity' is what is valuable in forms of artistic expression.

On the horizon of my performance was an implicit concern with a distinctly Kamula form of creativity evident in women's dances and songs. This was not explicitly addressed. Although the ethnographic literature of Papua New Guinea is saturated with accounts of song (Wood 2004, Feld 1990, Schieffelin 1976, Weiner 1991), there is relatively little written about dance especially women's dance. I see this MRes project as opening a space to understand my own positioning and Kamula women and their dances. At issue here is how to better represent my embodied experiences in Papua New Guinea given my interests in women's agency and the problems of inter-cultural appropriation in a post-colonial context (Cruz Banks 2009, 2011; Ram 2000; Mantero 1996; Ponifasio 2014).

As way of summarizing such points about future possibilities and the specific temporalities evoked by my performance I would like to close with a little vignette concerning audience reaction to my work. After the performance, a colleague came up and exclaimed how in

the *Round Solo* she could see the women and their dances in my body. This was quite startling as I made a conscious choice to not replicate any of the Kamula movements or rhythms on the grounds that this would involve a degree of direct and unethical cultural appropriation. Whether such Kamula movements came through my body as a subconscious layer wanting to be present or that this colleague saw what she wanted to see, imbued with her own personal experiences of inter-cultural dance, I am unsure. Her comments could be understood as a reflection on how my dancing had possibly transformed into her embodied archive. Or that the audience member's experience was now entwined with mine, which is precisely the hope and promise of any performance of dance.

Afterword

“Books are read to remember and written to forget”.

Mette Edvardsen

As well as working towards submitting my thesis, I performed in a work by Mette Edvardsen called *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*⁶. For this performance, a small group of us form a library collection consisting of living books. Edvardsen explained that the idea originated from the science fiction novel *Fahrenheit 451*, where books are forbidden because they are considered dangerous. As books are prohibited in this society, an underground community of people learn books by heart in order to preserve them for the future. We each chose a book to memorise by heart; I decided to learn Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.

The first time I picked up the book to learn, it disintegrated and metamorphosed in my fingers. This led me to look for a new copy and as I scanned the editions available to me, I began to realise how different each translation was. What slowly became apparent was that it is the translator's thoughts and experiences; their own histories, biases and values; and the context from which they are writing which subtly shift the reading of the narrative. This is especially evocative in the first paragraph of the first chapter.

When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed, right there in his bed, into some sort of monstrous insect. He was lying on his back which was hard like a carapace and when he raised his head a little he saw his curved brown belly segmented by rigid arches atop of which his blanket, already slipping, was barely managing to cling. His many legs, pitifully thin compared to the rest of him waved helplessly before his eyes (Kafka 1915 translated by Bernovsky 2014).

The above paragraph depicts an absurd predicament - both terrifying and humorous – where events are recalled in a matter-of-fact manner that leave the reader slightly confused about the severity or realness of the event. Paradox and contradiction are among Kafka's

⁶ *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* and Edvardsen's solo *No Title* were part of the 'Embassy of Disappearance' curated by André Lepecki for the 2016 Sydney Biennale.

favourite devices, as it suggests a limit to understanding yet simultaneously undermines it. Underlying themes of otherness, alienation or estrangement have been speculated, yet it is this ambiguity within Kafka's writing that allows for these different readings to occur. I have begun collecting these first paragraphs as a way to track historical variances, whereby each translation subtly shifts the meaning and accent. The following quote is from my father's copy (it was originally my Poppa's) that I borrowed originally,

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed, right there in his bed, into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as if it was armour plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed-quilt could hardly keep in position and was just about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes (Kafka 1915 translated by Willa and Edwin Muir 1933)

What struck me from reading this paragraph was the different feeling it evoked. The use of words "uneasy" dreams and "gigantic" insect, created a less horrific image than in the first version I shared. This somehow made Gregor more approachable and his future more hopeful, even though it doesn't change the outcome of the book.

One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking from anxious dreams, he discovered that in his bed he had been changed into a monstrous, verminous bug. He lay on his armour-hard back and saw, as he lifted his head up a little, his brown arched abdomen divided up into rigid bow-like sections. His blanket, perched high on his belly, could hardly keep in place; it seemed about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his circumference, flickered helplessly before his eyes (Kafka 1915 translated by Johnston 2016)

The above paragraph is the latest translation to be released. The use of the word "circumference" creates almost a mathematical approach to Gregor's disfigurement. I am also interested to find an original version in German, to see how the sentences approach replicating the syntax.

Edwardsen describes the process of learning a book by heart as a 'continuous process of remembering and forgetting' (Edwardsen n.d). This I feel corresponds with Lepecki's idea

of the archive ‘constantly evolving’ and my experiences of doing the *Round Solo*.

Edvardsen (Edvardsen n.d) writes, the process of learning a book by heart,

is in a way a rewriting of that book. In the process of memorising, the reader for a moment steps into the place of the *writer*, or rather he/ she *is becoming the book* ... Learning a book by heart is an ongoing activity and doing. There is nothing final or material to achieve, the practice of learning a book by heart is a continuous process of remembering and forgetting.

The embodiment of learning and reciting a book by heart, took on an almost choreographic quality. My learnt passage took place in one room, with one desk, one window and many doors. I knew the choreography of the space, who appeared behind which door and when. In my mind the view flicked between the perspective of Gregor Samsa and an aerial shot of the room. I knew the shifts in weight and effort and how many times his legs frantically scrabbled. I think it was different for each person and also dependent on the book they chose.

For me, the future of my book belongs in my body, with its ongoing potential to be enacted, remembered and forgotten. The exchange between the book (performer) and its reader (audience members) is often precarious, especially as a ‘new edition’. When reciting the book, I could feel a disturbance of memory about to happen, like a trail dissolving into blackness in front of me. To find my way again, I would look away from the person, this somehow felt like it delineated a private space to collect my thoughts and what I realised quite quickly was the words were never located in my head but came from somewhere lower, perhaps from the gut. I would go back a few lines and retrace my steps; the next chain of words would then appear. Since finishing the ‘book project’ and returning to writing my thesis my body has been altered, as Lepecki suggests is constantly forming and evolving. And now part of my body is embodied in this thesis as much as this text has been embodied in me.

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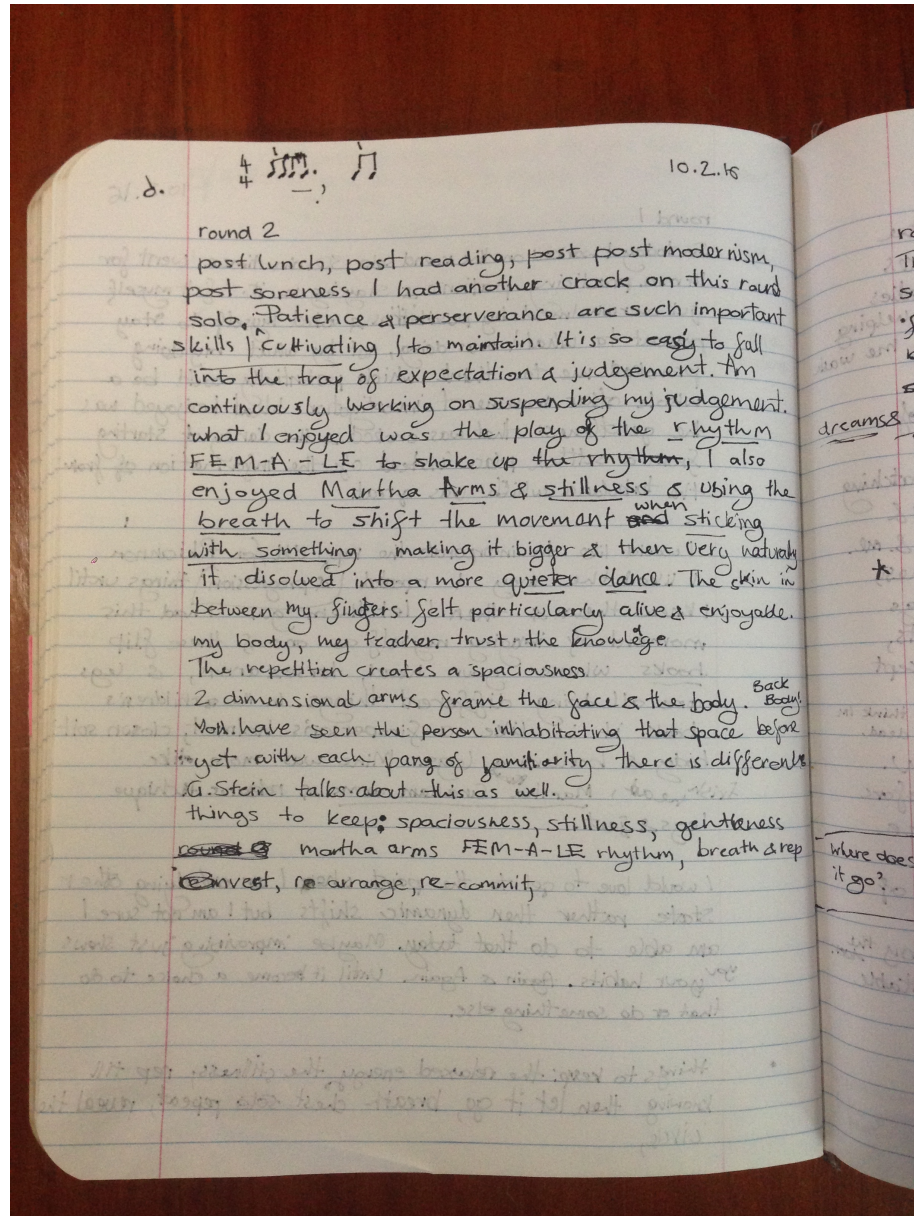
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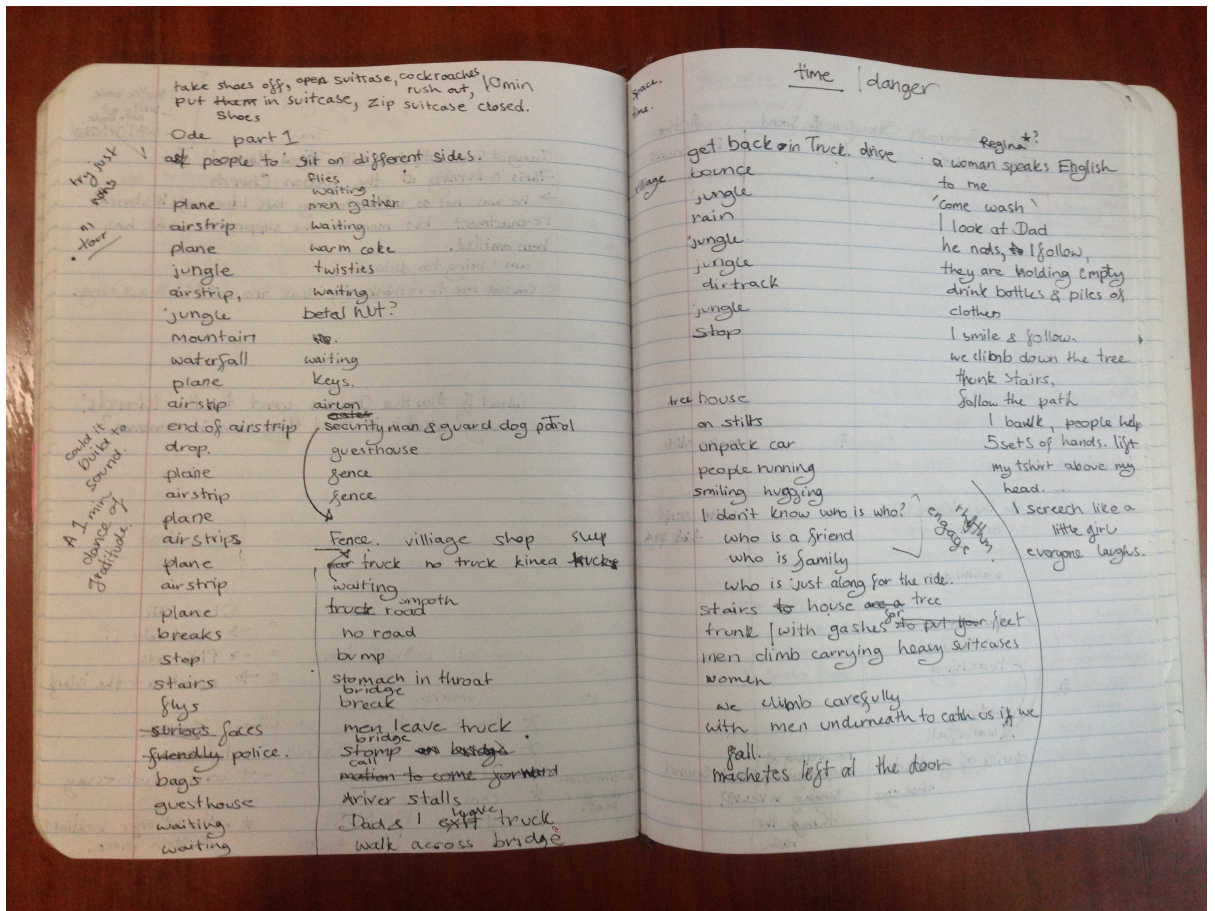
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Excerpts from Studio Journal



Appendix 2: Excerpts from PNG Writing



Appendix 3: Photographs from the Family Archive

Permission is granted by the Wood Family

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Figure 3.1 *The Children*. (1913) New Ireland.
From left to right: Unknown; my grandmother, Betty Holland; her brother, Fred Holland.

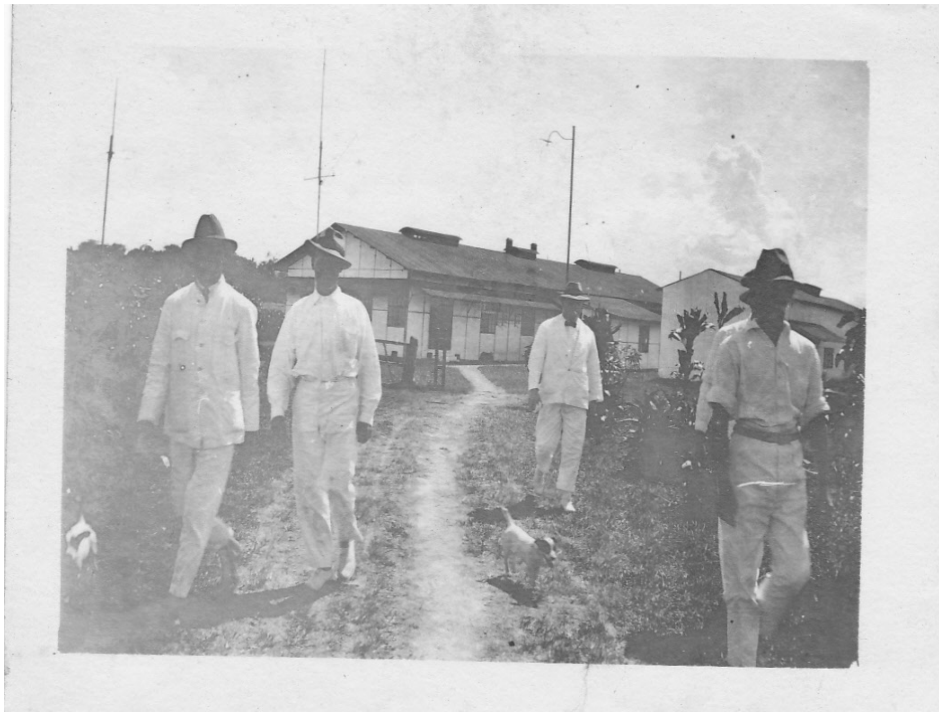


Figure 3.2 *The Men*. (1913) New Ireland.
One of the men is my great grandfather, John Holland. I don't know which one.



Figure 3.3 *The Women*. (1913) New Ireland.
One of the women is my great grandmother and namesake, Winifred Holland.
I don't know which one but I like to think I know.
From left to right: Unknown; my grandmother's brother, Fred Holland; my grandmother, Betty Holland; my great grandmother Winifred Holland; Unknown; Unknown.



Figure 3.4 *Painted*. Mick Wood (1961) Guam.



Figure 3.5 *The Spanish Inquisition*. Mick and Betty Wood (1967) Guam.



Figure 3.6. *Pirates, Slave Girls and Others.* (1968) Guam.

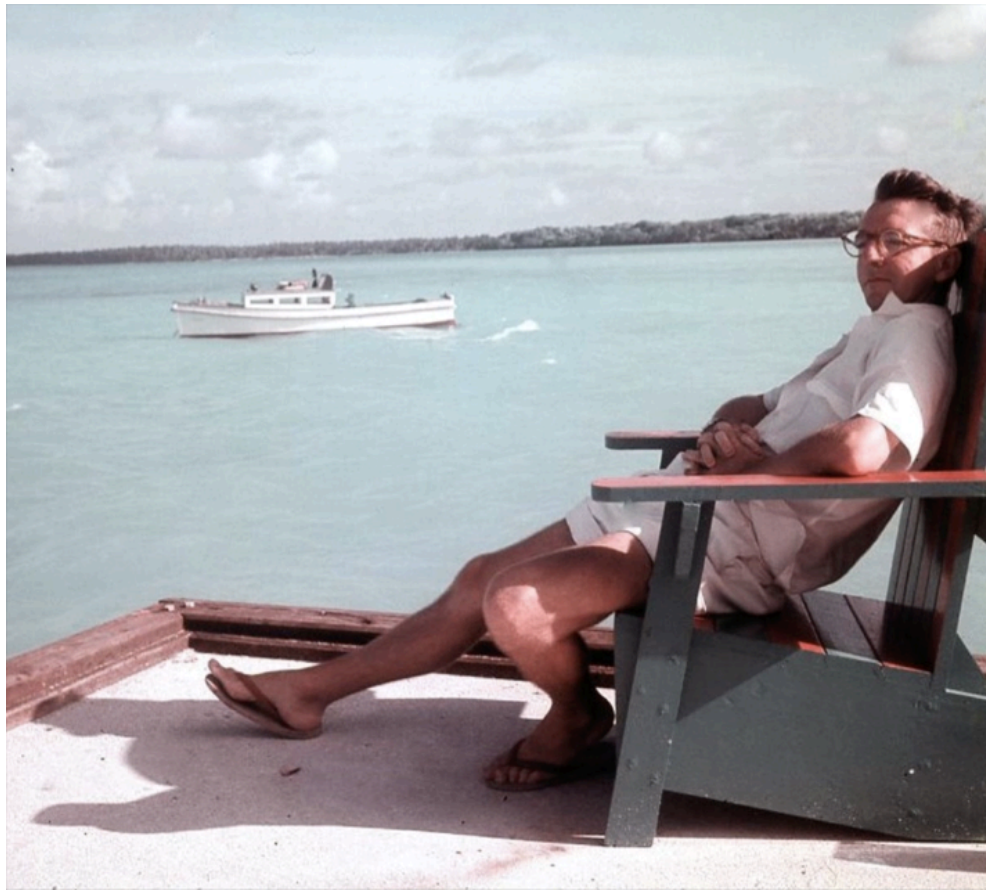


Figure 3.7 *Poppa*. (1962) Cocos Keeling Island.



Figure 3.8 *The Family*. (1959) Fanning Island.
From left to right: Mick Wood; Michael Wood; Helen Wood; Betty Wood.

Appendix 4: Photographs of the Creative Work Performance

Dancing my Archive

All photos were taken at Macquarie University, Dance Studio.

29th February 2016

Photographs by Matt Cornell



Figure 4.1 *With the Children*. 'Family Slideshow'. Patricia Wood (2016).



Figure 4.2 *With the Men*. 'Family Slideshow'. Patricia Wood (2016).



Figure 4.3 *Dancing Martha 1. 'Family Slideshow'*. Patricia Wood (2016).



Figure 4.4 *Dancing Martha 2. 'Family Slideshow'*. Patricia Wood (2016).



Figure 4.5 *Dancing Helen 1*. 'Family Slideshow'. Patricia Wood (2016).



Figure 4.6 *Dancing Helen 2*. 'Family Slideshow'. Patricia Wood (2016).



Figure 4.7 *Round Solo* Patricia Wood (2016).