

MASTER OF CREATIVE ARTS RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

Liza-Mare Syron

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Liza-Mare Syron
c/Eora College for Aboriginal Studies
Centre for Visual and Performing Arts
333 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale NSW 2008

EPHEMERA

Aboriginality, Reconciliation, Urban perspectives.

Written by Liza-Mare Syron

Master of Creative Arts Research 2004.
University of Wollongong NSW

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EPHEMERA.

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Introduction

Ephemera is a performance primarily inspired by two diverse propositions put forward by leading academics on Australian Aboriginal performance. I was interested in exploring the ideas and theories by writers on Contemporary Indigenous Theatre and in creating the possibility for the practical application of these theories in performance. To explore these ideas theatrically I have utilised information gathered from a number of theatre practitioners, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, on key elements of Aboriginal theatre production. Ephemera is a theatrical exploration of two key theories on Aboriginality in performance that will be produced using key elements of Aboriginal theatre.

The first proposition explored in Ephemera is that 'Aboriginality' is a notion created from the subjective experiences of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people engaged in intercultural dialogue. Marcia Langton in Well I heard it on the Radio (93), suggests that Aboriginality is a shifting experience that is made and remade repeatedly through a process of dialogue, imagination, representation, and interpretation (p33). Although Langton explores this proposition through analysis of the film medium, these ideas can translate to performance mediums and in this case to theatre. Langton suggests that 'Aboriginality' has more meaning and is more easily understood when it is discussed intersubjectively by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (p32). By this, Langton proposes that Aboriginality has meaning when it is a very personal experience created from actual dialogue, exchanges, and social interactions. These exchanges can take place at any time yet the crucial feature of these exchanges are the very real presence of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people closely interconnected. Aboriginality is however also constructed from cultural and textual exchanges where dialogue is absent. These intercultural experiences create one sided dialogues dominated by societal constructions, political aspirations, mythologies and stereotypes. Ephemera primarily explores the subjective experience, but will also incorporate the social, cultural and textual constructions of

‘Aboriginality’. It investigates the imagined, the representational, and the interpretation of these intersubjective, intercultural experiences and presents these reflections theatrically.

The second idea explored in Ephemera is the notion that Aboriginal theatre is an act of reconciliation. Helen Gilbert proposes this point of reference in Reconciliation, Aboriginality and Australian Theatre in the 1990’s (98). In her article, Gilbert suggests that theatre provides a space for multiple expressions of Aboriginality to emerge (p75). A theatrical experience is a complexed interface where both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, performers, actors, writers directors and audiences unite to contribute towards creating that experience. The Aboriginal theatre experience is therefore an interconnected, intercultural, and intersubjective experience. Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre provides the place where ideas, notions, assumptions, and many other forms of Aboriginality can be discussed, explored, and experienced. It is also the space where non-Aboriginal audiences connect with Aboriginal culture, society, customs, and experience. Non-Aboriginal people will generally witness an Aboriginal theatre production more so than an Aboriginal audience will. This situation is generated primarily from the mainstreaming of Contemporary Aboriginal theatre where venues, locations, and price often preclude its availability to an Aboriginal audience.

The notion of Reconciliation has been added to this project due to its expectations as an intercultural experience between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Reconciliation is a political response from representatives of governmental and community groups to the need for greater understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia. For over two hundred years since colonisation, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians have continually sought to clarify and define their relationship with each other through political and social struggles. Government after Government policy has sought to regulate the lives of Aboriginal Australians during this time against a backdrop of resistance and a refusal to be controlled. In 1975 the Federal parliament of Australia passed the Racial Discrimination Act, a commitment to a more tolerant society. Then in 1988 the year of the Bicentenary celebrations in Australia, the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke announced the Barunga Statement that featured the need for more consultation and

discussion with Aboriginal people towards a sense of reconciliation. Another three years later and a parliamentary discussion paper on the strategy for achieving reconciliation and social justice for the Aboriginal Australian was tabled and in 1991 the council for reconciliation was established. The idea behind the formation of the council came from the 1988 investigation into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the subsequent report in 1991 which recommended the need for the formation of a council to address the lack of knowledge, understanding and education on Aboriginal Australia amongst the wider Australian public.

The notion of reconciliation seeks to promote intercultural understanding, I was not sure that it achieved an intersubjective experience. By this I mean that engaging in political, social or cultural acts or organised activities don't necessarily mean that there is an interface going on. I needed to know more about the interpersonal experience happening. To achieve this it became apparent that I needed to explore the very personal experiences of connectedness to Aboriginality. These experiences needed to come from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people if I was to create something meaningful. The more subjective the experience the more Aboriginality becomes a multidimensional experience, elusive and shifting.

The inclusion of Aboriginal/Indigenous elements in production is a difficult task due to notions of authenticity. According to Langton (93), the classification, definition, characterisation, and representation of Aboriginality is a process of a cultural construct (p28). However, as discussed earlier, Aboriginality is also a subjective experience where the type of experience and meaning shifts when in contact with different contexts. The types of contexts, which effect experience, include location, history, and connection. In contemporary realities, location defines the experience of Aboriginality. The experience of people who live in urban cities is very different to that of Aboriginal people who live in rural, isolated or mission landscapes. These experiences can be made more complexed by a history of abduction and separation from traditional cultures. Some experiences begin with a close connection to traditional Aboriginal culture and knowledge but which can change with a move or shift away from these connections. The opposite can also be true where the experience of isolation and confusion can shift toward the experience of culture and belonging. Therefore, the simplistic stereotype of the Aboriginal experience can no longer suffice. Authenticity is itself is a shifting notion which is constantly contested

by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Authenticity becomes a complexed issue for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people subjectively, socially and culturally and therefore textually and theatrically.

Gilbert (98) removes the writers' function as an authenticating locus for Aboriginality in performance and instead focuses on aesthetic representations. Gilbert proposes four 'markers' that signify Aboriginality in performance. The physical performing presence of an Aboriginal/Indigenous actor or performer on stage is the first 'marker' suggested by Gilbert. Here Aboriginality is constructed from physical attributes including facial features, color of skin, gestures and the vocal register (accent) of the performer. This marker although comfortable for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences is simplistic and outdated. As mentioned earlier, an Aboriginal person may have many of the physical attributes identified as Aboriginal, but have no physical or historical connection to Aboriginal society or culture. The opposite can also be true, a person who identifies as Aboriginal but who displays no obvious physical markers may have very strong social, cultural and historical connections to their Aboriginality. Aboriginality on stage cannot be confined to a physical presence but is best represented by the experience of Aboriginality.

The second 'marker' of Aboriginality on stage proposed by Gilbert is the inclusion of language. The use of Indigenous dialects in productions signifies an Aboriginal presence on stage as well as identifying locations of Aboriginality. Language is an important signifier for Aboriginal society and culture, the depiction in production can either be traditional or pigeon dialects. This is one element of Aboriginality where authentication is necessary. If the use of language in production is not appropriately used, it could confuse both the performer and audience because it could signal the wrong location or identity of a character. The use of language therefore must be carefully researched and or explored before it is used as a marker of Aboriginality on stage.

According to Gilbert (98), the third marker is music, tone, and sound, which are frequently used to signify the presence of Aboriginality on stage (p84). Traditional ceremonial instruments such as the didgeridoo and clap sticks commonly resonate to

create the Aboriginal experience atmospherically. The appropriate use of the didgeridoo has not always been carefully researched; historically this ceremonial instrument from the northern areas of Australia was not traditionally played in the southern states. Its use theatrically contradicts its traditional significance as a ceremonial instrument. The didgeridoo has been contemporised globally, and consequently it has become a generic symbol of Aboriginality both globally and locally in many theatre productions that contain Aboriginal themes or content.

Traditional motifs and references to relationship to land form the last markers suggested by Gilbert (98) of Aboriginality in performance (p84). Traditional dot, line, and animal paintings used in scenery costume or design can convey meaning and location of story and character. Traditionally Aboriginal figures and patterns are the cultural property of particular areas or country. The technical way in which a pattern is drawn belongs to an area and is that area's cultural property. Dots and lines are not random motifs placed on a piece of canvases or bark; they are a complex structure of patterns handed down from generation to generation depicting culturally significant places and cultural heritage. The use of particular patterns or designs should be sort from traditional painters or they should be the cultural property of the set designer or painter. When Aboriginality is signified by design it is important that discussing the use of culturally specific designs or material with research and consultation becomes part of the process of pre production

According to Adam Shoemaker in, Aboriginality and Black Australian Drama, (89) Aboriginality is the legacy of a long tradition of performance (p1). Its existence implies movement towards a contemporary experience situated away from the past. However the contemporary Aboriginal theatre experience contains many aspects of past traditions. The contemporary performance interfaces with traditional cultural aspects in all aspects of theatre including the process of writing, rehearsal and in production. Gilbert proposes that audiences expect the use of traditional material to be present in productions that have Aboriginal themes or content (p74). The presence of traditional material serves to authenticate the experience of Aboriginality on stage for mainstream audiences. However, the use of traditional material in production is the duty of the Indigenous theatre practitioner. The contemporary Aboriginal performer becomes the custodian for transforming the past into the present.

Indigenous writers, actors and directors all acknowledge that this is an essential process of creating Aboriginality in contemporary theatrical contexts. Indigenous writer director and actor Wesley Enoch acknowledges the connection to traditional culture when discussing the Contemporary Aboriginal theatre experience.

“Every Aboriginal play by definition needs to have cultural material being discussed, dealt with, referred to and enacted”. Enoch (04).

In ‘Kinship and Creativity’ (03) Steven Page, Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre also discusses his position to traditional forms of culture. Page states that,

“The idea of linking urban Aboriginal experiences with traditional culture was at the heart of the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre.” Page (p115)

Both Enoch and Page propose that a Contemporary Aboriginal performance will essentially intersect with traditional culture in some form. Page elaborates on the collaborative history and the links made to traditional cultural owners and their stories, acknowledging his custodial role as a contemporary Aboriginal performer. The process of integrating traditional material with the contemporary theatre experience requires research, a close connection to or knowledge of cultural material being discussed, dealt with, or referred to in production. This process applies to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal performers, plays and productions because as explained earlier traditional Aboriginal culture is cultural property. The use of which requires ownership, connection, consultation, or permission.

Ephemera includes aesthetic elements proposed by Gilbert, Enoch and Page primarily because Ephemera explores notions of ‘Aboriginality’ in performance. It challenges the assumptions of societal, cultural and subjective constructs of Aboriginality. Ephemera contains identified Indigenous performers, it contains the language of the Gadigal people, it contains images of Aboriginality both urban and traditional, it contains the composed sound of music played by contemporary Indigenous musicians as well as traditional instruments and sounds, lastly it contains traditional material being discussed or presented in performance. Ephemera is conceived, devised and directed by myself a descendant of Aboriginal Australia. However

Ephemera is written by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers. Ephemera is essentially an Indigenous work but its development relied on the contribution, performance and participation of non-Indigenous performers, writers and audience. Ephemera is an intercultural, intersubjective experience where multiple expressions of Aboriginality emerge due to the complexed interfaces experienced by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants.

Process

Ephemera is a devised theatre presentation. Devising theatre according to Alison Oddey in Devising Theatre (94) is a process that allows for the sharing, shaping, assembling and reshaping of individual contradictory experiences (p1).

It is about the relationship of a group of people to their culture, the socio political, artistic and economic climate, as well as issues or events surrounding them (p23)

As the project aims to test, contest and explore the constantly shifting positions of Aboriginality and notions of reconciliation, it seemed appropriate to apply this process to its development. Ephemera is a performance created from the personal experience of Aboriginality and reconciliation. It transforms research, debate, ideas, and concepts into monologues, images, movement, and performance. Performance making is a form of theatre that allows the abstract, the unpredictable and the personal to be explored theatrically. It also allows the political, social and cultural to be investigated and transformed through artistic reflection. It is not confined to the textual but is multidimensional and interconnecting with a myriad of mediums.

Devising theatre has no formal or traditional structure that it adheres itself to in order to validate its presence. It is a live and kicking process accommodating new and emerging ideas through performance. Because Ephemera aspires to provide a space for the previously untested, it has no predecessor. It seeks a particular form of expression that allows for the exploration of new ideas, concepts and information to be presented theatrically.

The development of the project required participants from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal backgrounds and secondly participants who were willing to explore very personal issues. The participants involved in this production are theatre students of

the Eora College of Aboriginal Studies, Center for Visual and Performing Arts, Redfern, Sydney Australia. The theatre students at Eora were approached and invited to participate in the project because of the diversity of the students' heritage. The non-Aboriginal participants in this project come from a variety of backgrounds including Chinese, New Zealand, and Australian. The Aboriginal participants also come from a variety of backgrounds including Queensland (Murri), Torres Strait and NSW (Koori). All this variety adds to the depth of experiences explored on the subject. The first stage of development required participants to write a personal history and to describe their connections to Aboriginality socially, culturally, or personally. The second phase of development demanded a broader investigation of mainstream attitudes and experiences of Aboriginality and reconciliation. This second phase addresses the need for wider consultation to contrast with the personal experiences.

Phase one

The first phase of the project development required participants to research their own personal histories and then to describe any connections to 'Aboriginality'.

Participants were given the following questions to assist them with composing a personal narrative.

1. Explore your family history in Australia.
2. Identify any historically significant events in Australian history that affected yourself or family in some way.
3. Describe your first experience/contact with Aboriginal culture or people.
4. Describe your perception of what an Aboriginal person is or what is Aboriginal culture.
5. Compare these perceptions to your own historical narrative.

Participants were required to investigate any significant events in Australian history that may have affected or influenced the participant or their family in any way. The inclusion of significant events in Australian history creates political, social and cultural contexts to the individual experiences. Next, a discussion on and a description of initial impressions of Aboriginality. Initial impressions are significant to this project as they allow for shifting positions of knowledge to be explored while

providing a space for interpretations, assumptions, and constructs of Aboriginality to emerge. These initial impressions were then compared to their own personal histories. If the participant had no historical connection or experience with Aboriginality, the participant was required to imagine the notion and explore that interpretation.

Participants were then asked to explore the following question;

6. What does reconciliation mean to you?

Finally, project participants were directed to discuss what reconciliation means to them. The exploration of reconciliation and its meaning to the individual provides a personal point of discussion on an imposed political intercultural experience and explores its relevance to the individual.

Phase Two

To create a societal context it was necessary to go out and interview a cross section of people to understand what the wider community thought of Aboriginal people, culture, and history. How other members of society have interpreted, a politically imposed intercultural experience was interesting to me. As mentioned earlier I was not convinced that Australian society had personalised the experience of reconciliation, so the interviews were integral to demonstrating this suggestion. Project participants filmed 'Vox Pop' type interviews from a cross section of Sydney, which included the North Sydney business district, Bankstown shopping center, Circular Quay and Redfern. The questions put to the general public were similar to those asked of the participants but did not include the personal history narratives.

Questions.

1. What do you know about Aboriginal Australians?
2. Do you personally know an Aboriginal Australian?
3. Where do you come into contact with Aboriginal Australians?
4. What do you know of Aboriginal Australian history?
5. What is your understanding of reconciliation?

The personal narratives along with the interview responses form much of the structure of the production. The dialogue gathered guided much of the action explored on stage. The contribution from the actors hinged on their personal narratives inspired from family heritage and also their relationship to Australian Indigenous history, culture and people. However, not all non-Aboriginal participants were able to construct a personal narrative or discuss a personal connection to the project ideas. In these cases the participants made composite characters and stories from interviewed participants and their own histories. For example, one participant felt that their own history was not good enough to be presented; instead the participant created a character taken from a relative whom they felt had a more interesting connection to Aboriginal society. So the character and story was created from the participant's own history but dressed by a different context. Another participant wanted to create a character from one of the interviewees. All of the Aboriginal participants however were able to construct personal narratives and explore connections to Aboriginality; the non-Aboriginal participants could or would not do the same.

The unusual outcome of the developmental process reflects the experience of mainstream theatrical processes and practices. In an interview with Wesley Enoch I questioned the way in which Aboriginal actors approach theatrical processes in rehearsal. His response was that he felt that Aboriginal actors generally have a closer connection to the characters and the story in plays that deal with Aboriginal themes and content (04). The Aboriginal actor is more usually engaged in (re) creating a lived experience on stage. Given that Aboriginal actors are often employed because they have similar life experiences to the characters and stories told, there is often little or no temporal distance from the experience. An Aboriginal actor is employed to play an Aboriginal character. The non-Indigenous actor on the other hand is generally engaged in character development and transformative acting techniques. This highlights the different processes at work in the rehearsal room where both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal actors are engaged in character development. In the process of devising a performance that deals with Aboriginal themes and or content the same processes are apparent.

Performance description

The following is a description of Ephemera the production. I have outlined each scene and monologue to describe the relevance and meaning of each to the overall aims of the project. In the attachments is a copy of all the text developed for Ephemera scene by scene.

Scene One

Scene one begins with a mound of sandstone rocks representing land, property, estate, country, and nation. The piece starts with country because what links all Australians, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, is country. Our relationship to country has different perspectives, historically, economically, spiritually, and physically. I felt that the beginning between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people started with these multidimensional relationships to land. The landing of Europeans inaugurated the relationship with Aboriginal Australians, land became the center of conflict between the two people, and land rights grew to be the major issue of the twentieth century for Indigenous Australians.

An Aboriginal man walks on to the stage area and hears the sound of people discussing Aboriginality. The discussion centers on the question, **'What do you know about Aboriginal people?'** As mentioned earlier the interviews presented throughout the performance are an integral element in providing dialogue on the subject of Aboriginality. Throughout the performance, the interviews create structural element in which to expand and explore dialogues theatrically. The Aboriginal character listens to the responses to the question similar to a person listening to what other people have to say about another. Throughout this time, other performers have joined him on the stage and placed themselves around the bank of stones in reverence. This reverence is in respect for the past, respect for ancestors, who once roamed on, arrived to, built on, lived, and died on Australian soil.

The interviews finish and the man moves towards the group of stones and the actors. He joins the remembrance ceremony; he then takes a rock from the pile and begins a movement piece inspired by a line, which the actor has chosen. The lines used were workshopped, each participant was asked to express in one sentence a described relationship to land and what that meant to them. Interestingly, the Aboriginal

participants came up with lines that were subjective, intimate, and personal whilst the non-Aboriginal participants spoke in reference to land as a more objective and a physical presence. For example, one participant whose parents arrived in Australia some twenty years ago described the rock as a new life, a new beginning. Whilst some of the indigenous responses described the rock as female and related their connections to mother earth as provider of culture, history and beliefs. Throughout the scene words describing the history of non-indigenous occupation and the Government policies that sought to regulate the lives of Aboriginal Australians, move across the stage. (Ephemera script, scene 1))

Each actor after taking a piece of rock from the pile enacts a movement generated from these chosen lines. After the section is completed, the actor then says the line aloud before completing the sequence and taking the rock off stage. The actor returns, repeats the sequence using a different line and subsequent interpretation in movement. When all participants have completed two rounds of these statements about land and their relationship to it, they begin to grab the remaining rocks and take them off stage until one piece is left. The lone rocks' significance is in its relationship to the many; the question it begs by its existence is that Australia is one country, so how is it divided up once all have claimed ownership of it. It is the struggle of one in relation to many conflicting ideologies of property, land, and economics. It is the final piece that will one day be contested. Everyone stands encircling the one whilst maintaining some civility, much like the good manners of always leaving the last piece for someone else, it is the politeness of not seeming too needy or desperate and leaving some remains for those who may come later.

Finally, one will contest its place and justify its possession. The stone then becomes like a soapbox, an opportunity to claim rights of its possession. All are involved in what I have described as the land grab where participants vie for the rocks' ownership. Ultimately one actor will take the rock away from the action and out of the sight of the contesters, who are bewildered by its disappearance. All have been so passionately engaged its possession that no one was witness to its disappearance, which inevitability seems anti-climactic, so much so that its disappearance numbs the outcome. All now stand-alone facing each other, realising the equality of loss.

Scene Two

The next question flashes across the back of the stage, “**Do you know any Aboriginal people?**” A couple ponders the question firstly as they describe the neighborhood in which they both spent much of their childhood. Neither of the participants have ventured far from the comfort, security and familiarity of their past as they reminisce on their relationship to their local Aboriginal community. The couple is non-Indigenous, yet their association is a long and close one with community members and their extended families. The Indigenous man on stage turns and listens to their testimony, moving onto the raised stage. As the couple finishes, he turns and walks away contemplating the couple’s remarks. From the other end of the stage enters a woman and her stroller, she is joined by another woman and her stroller. The two women perform a short dance with their baby equipment. This dance is a short statement on the suburban realities of mothers with young babies who connect daily to discuss personal insecurities of survival and the future.

The women become representations of the suburban realities previously screened. A small baby pool filled with sand is brought on stage. In the sand pool two babies are placed, one is Aboriginal the other is non-Aboriginal. The two women finish their stroller dance, place themselves on either side of the pool, and begin a dialogue centered on issues of security, survival, and the future. The two children in the pool represent the absence of prejudice and discrimination that participants identified with when discussing their memories of childhood. The children are the recreated utopia of interconnectedness where the past becomes the time where difference had no power or meaning over individuals. The children are also a vehicle for exposing assumptions of parenting in recent times. It is a consequence of neat, tidy, and comfortable realities that we assume sameness in relation to mother child relatedness. We might assume the Aboriginal child belongs to the Aboriginal woman and that the non-Indigenous child belongs to the non-Indigenous woman. In fact, this is not always the snug and cozy magazine reality of parenting. What this scene briefly touches on is the assumption of identity by challenging superficial and idle constructions based on color.

Scene Three

A man walks on stage, sits in the sand pit, and begins the first monologue of the performance. It is a soliloquy based on personal childhood memories. This piece explores that transition from the utopia of childhood to the realities of societal and cultural initiations. The actor explores his own experience of stepping outside of the comfortable reality of youth and the protection of the family. The man describes how his innocence was attacked and ridiculed until his identity construction was demolished by society's intervention, which seeks to instruct and mold your perception of yourself. The actor then explores the position of nonidentity, where the individual begins the journey towards a community or societal identity. This is an area that the project participants have described as their experience of identity formation. The man's journey takes many pathways but for many the lure of the city seems to hold the imagined key to the conundrum of community and individual identity. The pilgrimage provides a test of the limits of the new burgeoning self, and how it will meet up to the challenge of wider society.

So, the man's tale takes him to the city where he meets the force of industry head on. A dance piece based on notions of time and place is enacted where the power of progress, trade, traffic, and commerce intersects with the personal, traditional, and intimate realities of civility. Time is used as a symbol for the difference in the experience of urban and rural life as well as a reminder of ancient Indigenous notions of time. As a backdrop, time becomes a defining feature of urban life.

Scene Four

As the dance finishes, the interviews taken from the city and business districts are played. An actor takes on the character of a person who works in the city area and begins the scene with an introduction to herself. The city character describes the history of her family, her life experience, and where these experiences intersect with Indigenous people. The scene is the second in relation to the question, "**Do you know any Aboriginal people?**" The question this piece examines is how people who have no contact with Indigenous people construct the notion of Aboriginality. More than often people go about their daily routines with little or no realisation that a whole section of society is absent from their everyday lives. Then suddenly society expects you to engage in socio political activism or self reflection on issues that have no reality to your everyday existence. Society in general does not go out of routine in

order to address an issue like the absence of Aboriginal people or culture in their lives. Instead, they surround themselves with Indigenous paintings that line the hallways of office buildings and read about Aboriginality at school or through media representations. In this way, they maintain some connection to Aboriginality, although a very distant connection from a personal experience.

Scene Five

Scene five begins with the question, **‘Where do you come in contact with Aboriginal people?’** Most people, who were interviewed, from all of the targeted areas, the City, Blacktown, Circular Quay and North Sydney, all identified where they felt they were likely to run into or where they believed many Indigenous Australian’s lived. Most people identified Redfern and The Block as places one might meet Indigenous people. Both of the areas identified are places where many Indigenous people live and hang out in Sydney. Redfern has historically been a place where Indigenous people from all over Australia identify as a meeting place. For non-Aboriginal people an area with a high Indigenous population becomes a threatening idea and creates fear in the imagination of many people.

The Vaughan monologue is an example of how others perceive these areas where high concentration of indigenous people live. Vaughan is a character created from the personal experience of one of the participants. He is in fact an uncle of the performer who wanted to recreate his persona in order to highlight the hypocritical nature of prejudice and fear. Vaughan is a man who is visiting ‘The block’ to score illicit drugs. He is a petty criminal himself who constructs the reality of his surroundings. He sees everything from his own criminal perspective where the whole world is engaged in illicit behavior. The Block is just one section of his constructed illicit reality. Yet, this reality is also a construct of media representation of the area, as a place of criminal activity. Yet, no one really knows what actually goes on except those who live and engage socially there.

Whilst Vaughan talks about his experience with Aboriginal people, in the background some locals are engaged in what seems to be criminal activity. It could very well be perceived as such from an outside perspective. When Vaughan has

finished his monologue and leaves the stage the background activity is revealed to the audience, it has in fact been a group of people organizing a secret birthday party.

Scene Six

Scene six addresses the previous question yet here we are presented with a 'new Australian' perspective. What most interested us was what migrant or children of migrant cultures knew or understood about Australian Indigenous history and people. One of the project participants is Chinese from Laos and wanted to explore what coming to Australia meant to his parents and where they might intersect with Australia's Indigenous people. This scene explores the connections of immigrant societies to Indigenous society.

Scene Seven

Scene seven begins with the question, '**What do you know about Aboriginal history?**' Many of the responses to this question revealed that school lectures played an important role in developing and articulating perspectives of Australia's Indigenous history. The type of school experience varied and this can be attributed to the changing nature of knowledge. For example before the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report (91) release Indigenous history, society and culture was delivered in a very colonialist way. Indigenous people were presented as primitive and uncultured, their society disregarded as childlike and spiritual. Whereas since the Deaths in Custody Report, Indigenous culture has been delivered in a more respectful and knowledgeable way. Yet this was as far as most people had explored Indigenous culture unless they went on to study at a higher level. Most interviewees responded with simplistic traditional images and perceptions that connected Indigenous people and culture to hunters and gatherers roaming around the country in Lap Laps performing corrobberies. So we decided to present this traditional image and provide a piece that gave solace and comfort to these constructions. Two men, one Aboriginal dressed in a lap lap and traditional body pain, the other a Torres Strait Islander in traditional gear enter the stage and perform traditional movements and dance.

When the two performers have finished, the Torres Strait Islander man begins a lesson for the audience on how to perform a traditional exercise. In this section, the audience is invited to participate in the performance. This scene is an example of

traditional Indigenous performance elements where audience participation is a requirement of performance. It is also a great way to make sure the audience has not gone to sleep and if they have, this section of the performance will certainly wake them up before the show moves into the final scenes. The actor after finishing his traditional demonstration begins his monologue of his experience as a Torres Strait Islander. His story is about change and how he sees himself as the journeyman who also seeks identity. The actor's story begins in a time of change and reveals the experience of change from a personal perspective. From this exploration of personal experience we are able to enter the world of the Indigenous experience and follow the journey that takes place in the body, the journey from traditional to contemporary realities and identities.

Scene Eight.

Scene eight begins with the question, **'What is your understanding of reconciliation?'** This scene begins with a flurry of activity and debate where the opinions of society contend for a voice on the platform of reconciliation. Here politicians call for the adoption and continuation of the ideals of reconciliation to the parliament of NSW. These statements are taken directly from the NSW Hansard. The NSW premier of 1991 spoke to the house accompanied by responses from the opposition and the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. All of these statements are presented as the political chorus to the biblical source of reconciliation. Joining the politicians on stage is an Aboriginal catholic priest. One of the participants was in fact studying for the clergy at one time in his life. He wanted to give a mass on reconciliation. Reconciliation is an idea taken from the bible, where atonement of ones sins can be achieved by acknowledging them by confession. There is a very strong connection between politics and religion in this notion. It is a space where church and state are interconnected. The priest begins with a short mass of reconciliation. During this mass, the politicians also speak out on the issue of reconciliation. On finishing the mass, the priest reads from the Gospel, Mathew 26:47-55. This reading describes the fate of Jesus descended from the politics of the time. An Aboriginal man carries a cross on stage to signify the burden of Aboriginality that politics and society impose. It is the black Jesus. The sermon, which follows, continues the story of the fate of Jesus and how he forgave those that wronged him. The sermon is about forgiveness. The one who is wronged has the

power to forgive. Black Jesus dies and is carried to the front of the stage as a choir softly sings, 'Jesus was a soul man'. This section is a reflection on the parallels between the Aboriginal man and the story of Jesus. Governments and people in power crucified both. Both gave their bodies in the name of reconciliation and both seek reconciliation and forgiveness.

The priest then dons an indigenous cloak and begins a traditional cleansing ceremony. The priest becomes the black priest and cleanses the body of the fallen man. He then blesses and breaks bread, sharing it with the audience. This symbolizes the body of the black man whose blood was spilt in the name of progress. At the ending of the mass, the priest takes the cross, the burden, and lifts it from the fallen man. He carries it off stage whilst appealing for reconciliation in the prayer of thanksgiving.

Scene nine

The fallen man begins to laugh as he rises to find the wine and bread left by the priest. On the screen appears the image of his traditional past. He drinks a toast in recognition and faces the audience. He articulates his confusion using a passage from Richard Frankin's, Conversations with the Dead. (See attachment). His words are echoed by the other participants as they return the stones previously taken away. As they lay the stones on the ground, the shape of Australia emerges. This is the rebuilding of the understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. As the confusion finishes, the country is reformed. The participants stand on stage and repeat one line from their speeches. The Aboriginal man walks through them and explains that the past is gone, the present is here and the future is still unknown but as long as we all work towards understanding, we can build a better Australian society. A society where we are all part of each other.

Summary

Ephemera came about because I wanted to explore the personal subjective experience of what it means to be Aboriginal, theatrically. But more importantly I wanted to explore the idea that Aboriginality was a shifting notion constructed from many interfaces. I wanted to investigate these interfaces, the cultural, the social and the personal through artistic reflection and to create a performance that allowed a space

for these ideas and notions to be presented. I also wanted to discuss the personal experience of reconciliation to find out more about what influence this political movement had on the individual. I wanted to provide a space where participants were invited to make sense of their world through artistic reflection and to articulate their experiences theatrically. I wanted the audience to think more about what Aboriginality and reconciliation meant to them by witnessing and participating in Ephemera.

Ultimately I believe that Ephemera is a show about Aboriginality and reconciliation because it provides a space for multiple expressions of Aboriginality to emerge. It has the physical presence of identified Aboriginal people on stage, it includes the use of traditional material in a contemporary context and it does these things in a way that is culturally sensitive and respectful. All of the ideas explored in Ephemera were discussed at length with the participants to clarify and identify any culturally specific issues with using traditional material. Ephemera was created from the subjective experiences of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people engaged in a process of intercultural dialogue from imagination, representation, and interpretation. It is a theatrical experience of complexed interfaces where both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, performers, writers, directors and audiences unite to contribute towards creating that experience.

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EPHEMERA

Aboriginality, Reconciliation, Urban Identities.

(The Reconciliation Monologues)

I don't know.
I am confused even now.
I don't know how I feel.
I don't know who I am.
Or even what I am
I think,
Sometimes I think that I am going crazy.
And that the whole world is watching
and waiting for me to fall down.
I think that somewhere in it all,
I became part of you,
or you became part of me.

Conversations with the Dead by Richard Franklin

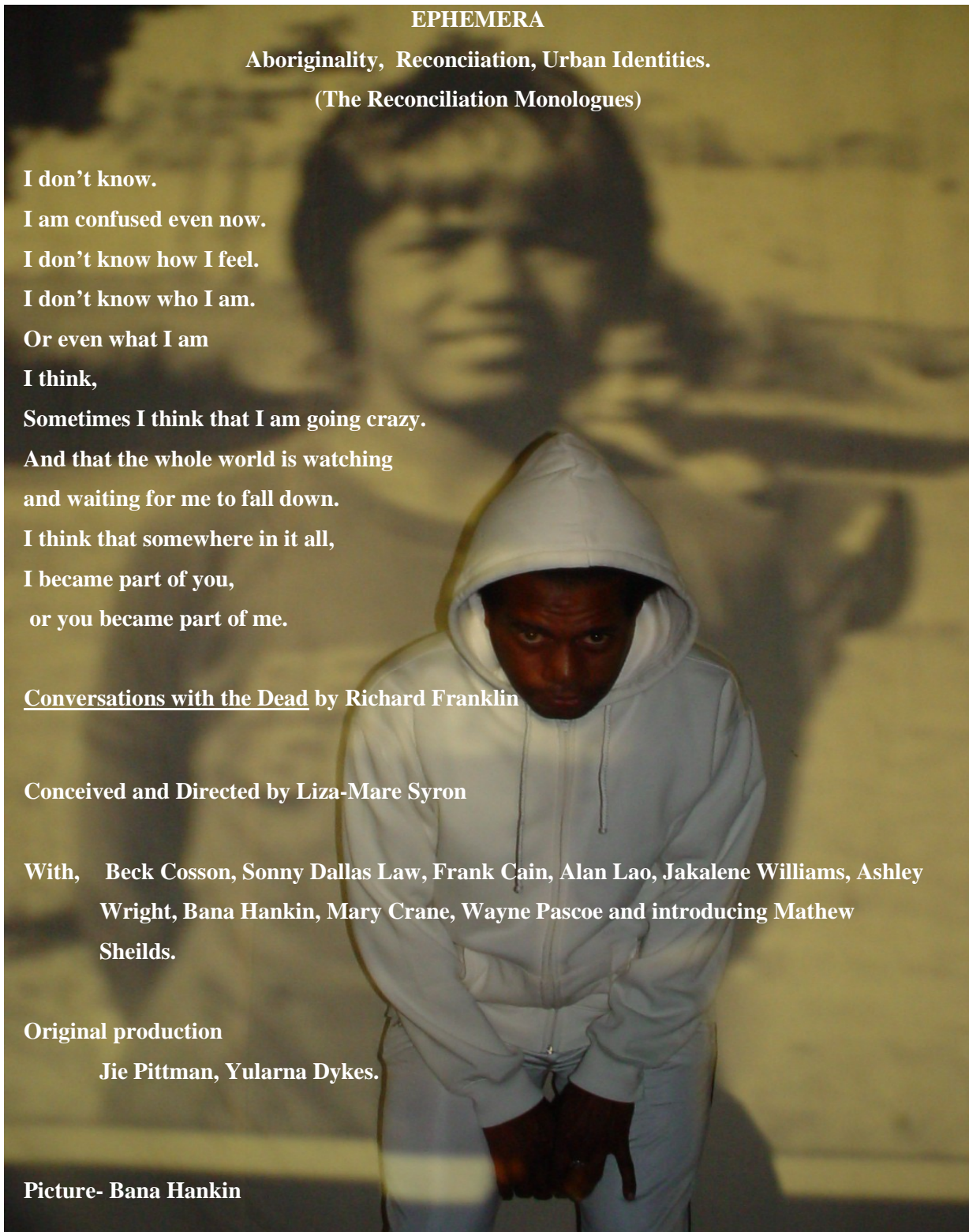
Conceived and Directed by Liza-Mare Syron

With, Beck Cosson, Sonny Dallas Law, Frank Cain, Alan Lao, Jakalene Williams, Ashley Wright, Bana Hankin, Mary Crane, Wayne Pascoe and introducing Mathew Shields.

Original production

Jie Pittman, Yularna Dykes.

Picture- Bana Hankin



Scene 1 Eulogy

Lights go down to reveal a mound of rocks lit center stage.

An Aboriginal man walks on to the stage area and hears the sound of people discussing Aboriginality. The discussion centers on the question,

(AV): 'What do you know about Aboriginal people?'

The Aboriginal character listens to the responses to the question

Throughout this time, other performers have joined him on the stage and placed themselves around the bank of stones in reverence.

The interviews finish and the man moves towards the group of stones and the actors. He joins the remembrance ceremony.

(Music). White. By David Page. Ochres,

(Images)

Throughout the scene words describing the history of non-indigenous occupation and the Government policies that sought to regulate the lives of Aboriginal Australians, move across the screen.

Invasion, Colonisation, Dispossession, Intimidation, Decimation, Eradication, Solution, Legislation, Administration, Protection, Segregation, Discrimination, Alienation, Education, Institution, Detention, Reaction, Progression, Revolution, Provocation, Self determination, Reconciliation, Recrimination, Stolen generation, Compensation, Remuneration, Restitution, Recognition, Lamentation, Convolution, Association, Connection, Representation, Repatriation.

He takes a rock from the pile and begins a movement piece. Each actor after taking a piece of rock from the pile enacts a movement generated from the following lines.

CH1	She was our mother
CH2	This gave me freedom and a new life
CH3	We don't know how old she is.
CH4	She gives us life.
CH5	This is my home.
CH6	Her past lives within us.
CH7	This is my conquest.
CH8	This is my harvest.

The actors return and repeat the sequence using a different line and subsequent interpretation in movement.

CH1	I can still hear her.
CH2	I came a long way for this.
CH3	She was never bought or sold.
CH4	I unconditionally love her.
CH5	It has a lot of potential.
CH6	. She gave me my identity
CH7	It is what we built this great civilisation upon.
CH8	This is rich and so am I.

When all participants have completed two rounds of these statements, they begin to grab the remaining rocks, they take them off stage until one piece is left. . Everyone stands encircling the one remaining stone whilst maintaining some civility. Claiming their right to the last remaining rock. They repeat the lines

CH1	She was our mother
CH2	This gave me freedom and a new life
CH3	We don't know how old she is.
CH4	She gives us life.
CH5	This is my home.
CH6	Her past lives within us.
CH7	This is my conquest.

CH8	This is my harvest.
CH1	I can still hear her.
CH2	I came a long way for this.
CH3	She was never bought or sold.
CH4	I unconditionally love her.
CH5	It has a lot of potential.
CH6	. She gave me my identity
CH7	It is what we built this great civilisation upon.
CH8	This is rich and so am I.

The last actor takes the rock away from the action and out of the sight of the contesters. All now stand-alone facing each other, realising the equality of loss. The Indigenous man remains.

The next question flashes across the back of the stage,

(AV) Do you know any Aboriginal people?)

The Indigenous man on stage turns and listens to their testimonies, he then turns and walks away contemplating.

(Music) Baby Talk 1. Quinlan. All You Mob. Shopfront Theatre for Young People & Organics

A baby pool is brought onto the stage with two babies in it, one black, and one white.

Two women enter with strollers. The two women perform a short dance with their baby equipment.

The two women finish their stroller dance, place themselves on either side of the pool, and begin a dialogue centered on issues of security, survival, and the future.

Scene 2 Proof Of Identity

Star So how are you feeling about Rick?

Moon Well it has been hard, you know, its not easy dealing with loss, even if you knew it was coming, you know.

Star Oh, I know.

Moon Like, being prepared does not always help you deal with it when it finally comes. It is like a slap, you know, in the face.

Star Oh, I know.

Moon And it hurts, a lot, it does, hurts just like when he went missing that time and no one knew where he was for days until they found him, almost dead he was. I don't know what I am going to do with myself. It just wont be the same, you know.

Star Oh, I know.

Moon He was such an influence, a guiding force in my life. He was the reason I got up every morning, you know.

Star Oh, I know.

Moon Do you Star Gazer? Do you really know?

Star Oh, I know.

Moon Anyway, I find it hard to get motivated now, everyday is like a giant mountain of emptiness, feeding, nappies, sloppy smelly poo, stained jumpers. When I get home from a walk in the park with little (name), I know he won't be there. I turn on the TV and

flick through the channels, but it is not the same. Without (name) the Bold and the Beautiful is just not worth watching.

Star Days of our Lives.

Moon Took the kids to visit their dad last week.

Star True, how's he doin'?

Moon The anger management is going well. Back on the done program too. The kids love it when we go for a visit. They get to see their uncles and grandfather all in the one day. Killing birds with stones. I think its good for the kids to see their dad on a regular basis.

Star Yeah, kids need routine.

Moon Yeah, He gets out soon, I guess that throws routine out the window.

Star I've got somethin to tell ya.

Moon What?

Star Well.

Moon Well?

Star Oh yeah, I am pregnant.

Moon Oh not again, you having trouble with Cayle?

Star What do you mean by that/?

Moon Well every time you two start fighting, you go and get knocked up again.

Star That's not true. I really want another baby. Little Georgy needs a little playmate-and I need a new fridge.

Moon What's nine divided by six hundred?

Star Why?

Moon 66, and 66 divided by 4 is 16. That's 16, 16 whole dollars a week you get Paid to have this baby for our proud nation.

Star How come you're so good at maths then?

Moon I watch Sesame Street.

Star Well six hundred can get me a bloody good fridge. Does everyone get that baby bonus?

Moon What do you mean?

Star Well do you have to be Australian to get it?

Moon I suppose so. Well of course. What are you getting at?

Star Well how do you prove you are Australian anyways?

Moon Well, if you were born here.

Star Noooo, see, just cause you are born here doesn't make you Australian, I heard it on Lawsy.

They got those kids locked up kids in detention right /and the government says that just cause they were born here doesn't make em Australian.

Moon Really?

Star Yep. So, if you were born here don't make you automatic Australian.

Moon Then you have to have Australian parents.

Star Yeah but how do you prove then that your parents are Australian?

Moon My parents were bon here and their parents.

Star Yeah but at some point back, someone in your family was a refugee or convict or came from somewhere else and well that makes your right to be an Australian in real doubt / what with these new laws and shit. /Any one whose family lived here at some point came from somewhere else and had children here/ so it doesn't make that child Australian, can you see that.

Moon Shit.

Star Shit all right. Because that makes the only real Australian us Aborigines. /Because we was always here right?

Moon Right.

Star So one day someone will ask you to prove you are Australian and if you cant prove it I recon they will just put you in one of em boats and set youse on your way. In fact you might have to carry one of those cards of proof of identity with you. Like we

have ta. You know a certificate of Aboriginality. Yours will be a certificate of Austraionality.

Moon Oh, don't be ridiculous Star Gazer that will never happen.
Anyway, its Barry's first birthday next month and I want to put a party on.

Star True?

Moon Yeah. I will get the alcohol, I am seen the fella from the bottle shop.

Star Are ya?

Moon Yeah don't tell anyone. Want a drink?

Star Alright, beer thanks.

Moon Only got breazers, is that Ok?

Star Sure.

Moon I want to have one of those fellas who come out with balloons you know and blows up the things at the party. Yeah buggar if I am goin to blow any more balloons by hand.
Are you gonna feed first?

Star Nah / Ill wait until I finish me drink first.
Are helium balloons bad for kids?

Moon Only if they inhale. Well I got to go,

(Music) Baby Talk 1. Quinlan. All You Mob. Shopfront Theatre for Young People & Morganics

An Aboriginal man walks on stage, sits in the sand pit, and begins a soliloquy based on personal childhood memories.

Scene 3.1 Sand Pit

Murri Boy (Guran-in-anami Song) Welcoming Song

Mum and dad taught me that, They say it's a welcoming song they told me I belong to a tribe named Wakka Wakka and that's our song. My cousins and I sing it all the time. Ive got a lot of cousins; they live next to me across the road and all down my streets. We play with each other everyday. Mum and dad only see me in the morning and late afternoon because we go playing all around town, and sometimes we go playing in the bush up in the hills right behind my house.

It's not as fun as when my dad and my uncles take us to the bush though; we go hunting for goanna, porky pine, snake and kangaroo. They use a massive gun bang! bang! bang! Dad told me the old blackfellows never used t a gun though; they use a spear and a boomerang.

I took my friend Ben to the bush one time, one day he got really scared because a goanna chased us and we had to jump up onto the boot of the car. I like Ben his different from my cousins his from the otherside town. Those people are real different .They've got real big flash houses, real big fences and real big dogs. I used to go to Bens house all the time, he always had the latest toys and newest Atari games.

And then one day he told me he had to leave, His mum and dad told him he had to go to go to a bigger town and a better school.

And now mum and dad are saying we have to move too. I can't wait maybe I might even see Ben .Wow it's going to be so fun a bigger town and a better school.

Sonny Dallas Law 06/05/04

He rises from the pool and steps out into the school ground where a group of boys is playing with a basketball.

(Music) Dali Mana Gamarada. By Deborah Cheetham and Wicked Beat Sound System.

Corroboration. Sputnik

They suddenly stop and begin to taunt the actor with the following statements.

Scene 3.2 School Yard

School Boys

SB1 You're not Aboriginal.

SB2 Jacky. Jacky.

SB3 Your not full blood.

SB4 Half cast.

SB5 Coon.

SB1 Do you eat witchetty grubs?

SB2 You got no culture.

SB3 They cook Goannas.

SB4 What's the block, a TV show?

SB5 Coconut.

SB1 They are all drunks.

SB2 The sniff petrol.

SB3 Up town black.

SB4 Aren't black people dangerous?

SB5 Never fight back.

SB1 Gubbarigine.

SB2 Why should we say sorry?

SB3 Ernie Dingo is the only one that works.

The actor is finally taunted to the ground where he lays until the boys retire from stage. The Aboriginal schoolboys remain on stage and watch the actor.

The actor begins to laugh and slowly rises to join the Aboriginal boys. He speaks to them. They in turn engage in dialogue with him.

Scene 3.3 I Don't Know

Murri Boy	I don't know
Aboriginal boy	Duffa
Murri Boy	I am confused even now
Aboriginal boy	Confused?
Murri Boy	I don't know how I feel
Aboriginal boy	He doesn't have a clue.
Murri Boy	I don't know who I am
Aboriginal boy	Where you from?
Aboriginal boy	Who your mob?
Murri Boy	Or even what I am
Aboriginal boy	What are you?
Murri Boy	I think, Sometimes I think that I am going crazy
Aboriginal boy	Narabung
Aboriginal boy	Doi
Murri Boy	And that the whole world is waiting
(All)	Again?
Murri Boy	And watching me to fall down. I think that somewhere in it all, I became part of you/ or you became part of me.

(Conversations with the Dead Richard Franklin)

He dresses himself in a hooded jumper and the others join him. He begins a speech about what is expected of him as an aboriginal man in an urban setting.

Scene 3.4 Because I'm A Murri

Murri Boy	Just because I'm Murri Do I Have To Stay With My Family
-----------	--

Just because I am Murri Do, I Have
To Stay in This Town

I Want To Be By Myself
Want To Travel
Want To Live In a Big City,
Do Other Murri's Understand
Is It Just Me, Are Other Murri's
Thinking the Same

I Want To Have My Own House
With Only Me Living In It
Want Friends over For Parties
Eat Olives and Sun dried Tomatoes
Drink Wine and Champagne
Is That Strange
Do Murri's Do That?
I Don't Know if They Do
But I am Going To Do It
I am a Murri, and I am
Going To Do Everything
I am Going To Move to the Big City

Sonny Dallas Law 03/04/04

(Music) Are You Connected? By Kev Carmody. Mirrors.

Scene 3.5 Dance

A movement piece begins that explores the power of progress, trade, traffic, and commerce, which intersects with the personal, traditional, and intimate realities of civility.

As the dance finishes, the interviews taken from the city and business districts are played.

(AV) **“Do you know any Aboriginal people?”**

An actor takes on the character of a person who works in the city area and performs the following monologue.

Scene 4.1 City Clique

Lawyer Well, I have never really met an Aboriginal. I mean, not a real one. I do not really move in those circles. Well, I have met a few through our new program, but then, they are criminals. They do not really count, do they?

So yes, our new program! It's quite innovative for a large reputable firm such as ours. I mean the money we would usually get for our services, well... but we wanted to help you know? We wanted to lend our services to those... less fortunate, disadvantaged, in need, a bit down on their luck. So, we've allowed a couple of our new young lawyers, straight out of university, to take on a few 'legal aid' cases. Of course, as I overlook the program I do get to meet with some of the cases. They're not all Aboriginal people, just most of them.

The charges are usually reasonably minor – theft, drug possession, assault, stolen goods, resisting arrest. And we have been quite successful. Most of our cases we have nearly got off! Well, with maybe a lesser charge or a few months off their sentence. It seems to be quite difficult to have a black man found innocent.

And most of them are quite nice people really. You know, well spoken, even quite educated sometimes. I mean, not that I thought they wouldn't be of course, oh no, nothing like that, its just, you know what you hear, well, I thought they might've been a bit more like simple people.

I had never really met a black person before you see. I am from the North Shore. Castle Crag. My family is a good, Christian family. We go to church on Sundays and say our prayers each night. My father is in Commercial Law and my mother is a doctor – she has her own practice in Ryde. My sister is away studying at university. Arts. She did take me

to see an Aboriginal play one time. Yes, it was about this Aboriginal family. The writer, he's quite famous, Jack...Jack... Jack Daniels no, no, Jack...Jack Somebody. Anyway, yes it was all about his family. Quite interesting you know. I did not know Aboriginal people did real theatre.

When I was a child, I thought everyone must have been like our friends and us. You know, white. Even Jesus was white in my Bible storybooks. I remember seeing a black man at the beach when I was about six and asking my mother, "Mummy, why is that man colored in?" My mother said that he must have been playing in the mud.

Then when I went to school we learnt about the Aborigines. You know, that they lived in the bush, and threw the boomerang, and didn't wear many clothes. I think I thought that they were these mythical creatures that still only lived in the bush somewhere. I certainly didn't know that there were any here.

Oh, look at the time. I'm due in court. This poor, young Aboriginal boy, it is his third time in front of the judge this year. Not much, chance he will get off this time. His first offence was petty theft – he stole a game boy from a computer shop. The next time it was malicious damage – he was caught doing graffiti. And now it's resisting arrest. He's only twelve. His parents are so worried he will be incarcerated this time – juvenile detention. He really is a good kid – it's just a little ADHD. Mm that's good...*(writing)* suffers from ADHD...recommend counseling and medication program. Well, it works for sportsmen!

Rebecca Cosson

Scene 4.2 Dance Rap

Scene five begins with the question,

(AV) **'Where do you come in contact with Aboriginal people?'**

(Music) The Block. By Jesse and the Clevo Boys. All You Mob. Shopfront Theatre for Young People & Organics

(Images of the block)

A movement piece begins as a man walks onto stage.

The Vaughan monologue begins. Whilst Vaughan talks about his experience with Aboriginal people, in the background some locals are engaged in what seems to be criminal activity.

Scene 5.1 Vaughan

Vaughan Yeah, I can tell you something about them.
 Not al bad, used to be friends with one of them.
 Choco, his name was. Good bloke.
 Used to have this old shack of a thing in Colli that we would stay at for a
 few days every so often.
 We would both go out on the truck and shoot roos. Don't do that much
 any more, only shoot them for sale now.
 But yeah, don't know where he came from, you know how they al have
 their different tribes and what not, or so he said, Queensland I think, up
 near Harvey Bay.

 Didn't trust him for a dime though.
 Always bludging money and being shifty, he was, but always had a
 dollar for a schooner of beer.
 Had a sister too, I went with her for a while.
 Wasn't a bad looker, but I tell you lazy as al hell.
 She also had a kid to some other bloke who had left her, little mongrel.
 Always up to some shit, taking the bills out of my wallet mainly.
 Didn't really work out. Plus Choco started getting jealous coz I was
 spending all my time with his sister rather than him.

Anyway I eventually got fed up, what with me working all the time and her just spending all my money. So I called it quits. Fuck she wasn't happy about that. They don't take things lightly you know.

So, I started hanging around Chocco again.

Used to go down to that place, you know the block.

Fuckin scary. Wouldn't go down there on my own, you get rocks thrown at you.

And all the windows in them houses were smashed, and everyone looked like they wanted to kill you.

I wouldn't go down there now, I used to smoke a bit of pot see, and a couple of other things, and well that was the best place to get the gear from.

Wouldn't hang around there long though. Some one them weren't just black, they were dead set purple. Wouldn't trust them either; probably give me a hot shot or something.

Anyway, eventually got busted and half of them got off lightly with suspended sentences.

Fucking hell soft judges, like I wouldn't want people like that walking around the streets.

Scary. Don't know what goes through their minds, Could get up to anything next.

Anyway, I can't stand around her chatting all day.

I am late.

For a meeting.

With my parole officer.

Ashley Wright.

Scene 5.2

When Vaughan has finished his monologue and leaves the stage the background activity is revealed to the audience, it has in fact been a group of people organizing a secret birthday party.

Woman walks on with pram.

Woman Got any money for some smokes?
 Man Yeah here you are.
 Woman Oh, don't forget it is you're mothers birthday.

Man Hay Cous,
 Cousin Hay Cous
 Man Have you got any money for mum's birthday present?
 Cousin Yep, here you are.

Man Hay Uncle
 Uncle Yeh what
 Man You got those beads ready for mum's birthday?
 Uncle Another 10.

Uncle Hay Cousin, you got the money for those beads man?
 Cousin Nah Uncle, Cous got that.

Man Uncle, are the beads ready yet?
 Uncle Yeh, here you go. Say hello to ya mother for me.

They finish these transactions, which earlier seem sinister and turn to face the audience with their truth

An interview is played of a Chinese woman describing her experience of Aboriginal people.

(Image)

A Chinese man walks on stage with a wheel burrow full of oranges. Throughout the monologue two Aboriginal people are rolling oranges around the stage.

Scene 6.1 Five dollar Fruit Store

MR Y Five dollar! Five dollar! Oranges five dollar! Come in buy some fruit, good for you. No MSG in this fruit, I swear, no MSG...Ok maybe a little.

I don't know any Aborigine, but a lot of them come to my store, I have to keep my eye open. There is this one Aborigine he have one eye and tattoos, always walk around my store looking at the fruit but never buy anything. I think I am going to call police. But they all not that bad, this little Aborigine kid, his name Timmy, he help me carry the heavy boxes even my own son won't help me. But he good boy get himself in a lot of trouble, I always see him with policeman but every time he help I give him lolly.

I member first time I come Australia. I come on boat. Smuggle that what everyone say. But EVERY ASIAN comes from boat. But boat ride to Australia was ok. I see beautiful girl on boat. I talk to her every night outside boat. Look at start and moon. I could of marry her, but when we get off boat, we get separate and I no see her again

Watermelon! Eight-dollar kilo! I just get today! Actually I get a week ago but they never know, they stupid.

I have four brother and two sister, there seven of us I was still teenager when I come to Australia with my family 9 people! When we come, we have no money, no business. In China, we have ok money. My father own noodle shop. My daddy made the best noodle in town. At night we very busy. But back then even the kids help mama and pa in business, but now day don't even "chit-ka-chung"... oh sorry you not Chinese. They don't even wipe their bum. All they want to do is watch TV or Play station. Never help at all. Even the "Abugine" kid help more then my son. This how the family help in China, Ma, Pa in charge cooking, I take order, 2 of my brother help cook, the other 2 collect plates and bowl and clean up with my two sister.

In boat I come from, was very small but we on the sea for a long time. Some time when we on the water, the pirate come on our boat and they take our possession you know. But when leave they feel sorry for us, and

they give us some bread and water and that would last us till the next time the pirate come on our boat

But I like my shop, I have my own business. Just like Pauline Hanson with fish and chip shop. I love my fruit store. It's my baby, it put food on the table, it give me peace, also it let me get out of house, cause my mother-in-law live with us.

Abugine? I don't know much about Abugine, they very "daark", they use the boomerang. I see on Crocodile Dundee they get the kangaroo, very smart ah? Even though I don't know any Abugine, a lot come to my store, some ok, but the other oh, "Joi-sere-tat"... Oh, you no Chinese, they a lot of trouble.

One time, Abugine couple comes in my store, they talk very loud, they start arguing, the woman say, "fuck this, fuck that, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck." I no understand what she says, and then they start fighting in my shop! They start throw orange at each other and I say "Hey! Hey! What's wrong? You no like my orange? What's wrong with my orange?" And the Abugine lady comes up to me and says, "Shut the fuck up you Asian fuck." I no understand what she means; all I know she says fuck, so I say, "fuck you back!" The Abugine man and lady laugh in front my face, and they walk out of my store. After that, business very slow everyone too scare to come my shop.

A lot of people scare of Abugine people. But Timmy I know he good boy, in here, he just a kid, sometime I see him walk home from school, I see the police looking at him as if he is going to do something, some time they follow! That no good, some people look at Timmy and then they say "trouble maker going to be drug dealer, like the police, well they wrong. Just like people how people look at me and say immigrant, come to this country to get gold from gold rush, greedy money. Well they wrong! We come here because we want freedom, we don't want money, I own a small fruit shop in Redfern! I wouldn't mind be rich, who wouldn't, win

lotto, everything a lot easier. But we didn't come to Australia for money. My parent didn't want us brought up in a communist country.

... Oops, I've lost my accent haven't I? How awkward. I know I give out the wrong impression, but it does wonders for my business. You don't understand how well it works. Well I've blown my cover so I better be off now, but not all people are what they appear to be. I see you later,

Fresh fruit! Five Dollar! Five Dollar! Fresh orange! 5 Dollar!

Alan Lao

(AV) What do you know of Aboriginal History)

Scene 6.2 Dance Traditional

(Music) Traditional Roo (Dhum Dhum) By David Page and Steve Francis. Corroboree & Skin. Bangarra Dance Theatre

(Image)

An Aboriginal man dressed in a lap lap and traditional body paint enters and performs a traditional dance.

(Music) TSI Play Dance (Kasa Kab). By David Page and Steve Francis. Corroboree & Skin. Bangarra Dance Theatre

(Image)

A Torres Strait Islander man then enters in traditional gear and performs traditional movements and dance from the TSI.

Scene 6,3 Dance Sa Sa

When the two performers have finished, they shake hands. The Torres Strait Islander man then begins a lesson for the audience on how to perform a traditional exercise.

In this section, the audience is invited to participate in the performance.

After finishing his traditional demonstration The TSI actor begins his monologue

Scene 7 Times Have Changed

TSI Man Times have changed.
 These days' kids have play stations, game
 boys, Sony Discmans or MP3's and mobile phones, Ipods.

Simple games like these, the entertainment of my childhood, we had string games, skipping rope for double dutch, paper scissors Rock, Red Rover and go carts we made ourselves from dodgy planks of wood and wheels from the old Victor Lawnmower.

But before my time things were a little different.

My parents were the children of the Torres Straights. My mother was born on Yam Island and my dad was born on St Paul Island.

They met by going to Island Dancing competitions, where different troupes from other Islands would come together and see who was the best. My dad would ask my mums younger sister (Silly Butterfly), if she would set them up. She was the messenger running back and forth for them.

After doing they're schooling with chalk and slate for five years, there relationship bloomed.

Six children they both had. They were all born on Thursday Island except for the youngest son, me. I was born in MacKay, Central Queensland. That's because Dad moved down for work on the railways like many other Uncles, and then the families moved after.

I grew up in Sarina, just 32 Kilometers south of Mackay. A small, quiet town, in a valley, where the smell of molasses from the mil seeps into your house, early hours of the still mornings.

Sarina Primary School was a change for me, standing at assembly, singing,

(Sung)

God save our gracious Queen,

Long live our noble Queen

God save the Queen

With things on my feet called shoes. I had special remedial classes because I couldn't speak English very well and my punctuation and grammar was atrocious and in serious bad form. I knew in my head what I was talking about. But they called it **Cross Cultural Differences**.

I was there for seven years.

I returned to the island when I was eight years old. It was then I discovered my place in my culture.

The children there looked at me differently because my English was well pronounced. Yah for remedial classes. I had to break it down, speak broken English now.

I go go ya for kaikai pas, meaning I am going over there to eat first.

Even my brother used to tease me about it, because I was born on the mainland. He said that I was adopted, Said they found me in a shopping trolley in Woolworth's.

If he were to say that to me now it would be like water off a ducks back. It doesn't faze me man. But back then when I was a kid. Man it hurt! But it is cool. They are my family and they love me.

But Times have changed.

Nowadays I talk to my brother by mobile phone and he sends me pictures via SMS of his five-year-old son. My other siblings live in Tully, Far North Queensland. And me, I live in the city. Hail, buses, and taxis, take trains and planes, go to the movies, and see shows.

So times have changed.

I live in the present now.
 Still questioning, still learning.
 My community life tells me what I am.
 You tell me what I am.
 But I still need to know who I am.
 So, my journey continues in these times.
 And this is coming with me.
 Because it was with me from the beginning.

Bana Hankin

Scene 8 Reconciliation Mass and Hansard

(AV) **‘What is your understanding of reconciliation?’**

(Music) Who made me who I am? Magic Dirt and Richard Franklin. Corroboration. Sputnik

(Image)

An image sequence of the Sydney Harbor bridge walk for reconciliation is played as an Aboriginal actor watches and joins in the march.

Three politicians enter holding the hands of reconciliation.

An Aboriginal catholic priest also enters followed by a church choir.

(Image)

The priest begins with a short mass of reconciliation. During this mass, the politicians also speak out on the issue of reconciliation.

Priest In Nomine Patris
 Et Filie
 Et Spiritus Sancta
 Amen.

Lord we gather here today on this special occasion, on the eve of Reconciliation, to celebrate the diversity of people in coming to together to honour each others cultures in our beautiful country called Australia. We are here to honour the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. To honour the act of forgiveness in a World that often does not know how to say sorry.

Politician 1 Mr Speaker, I move that this house note that in 1991 the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia unanimously enacted the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to promote a process of reconciliation between the indigenous and wider Australian communities.

Politician 2 Mr Speaker, The opposition joins wholeheartedly with the premier in support of this motion. We seek to reconcile the values we profess as a nation with the **darker reality** not only of the past but also of the present and the future.

Politician 3 Mr Speaker, As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I am honored to support the motion moved by the Premier,
 That is, that this house shares the vision statement of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation

On finishing the mass, the priest reads from the Gospel, Mathew 26:47-55. This reading describes the fate of Jesus descended from the politics of the time.

An Aboriginal man carries a cross on stage

Priest Gospel Reading Mathew 26: 47-55

And suddenly while he was still speaking, Judas one off the twelve appeared with a band of men sent by the Chief Priests. And they arrested Jesus and led him to the High Priests house where he was to stand trial. And they blind folded Him then spat at Him and belted Him saying prophesise to us Christ! Who hit you then?

And it was night.

Sermon

Men of absolute power arrested Jesus. They played on the weakness of Judas Iscariot to betray his brother and friend for thirty pieces of silver.

Jesus aware of the weakness of Judas, reached out to Judas by sharing a meal with him in company with their friends. The meal of the Eucharist. The Body and Blood of Jesus. Perhaps Judas was the beloved disciple closer to Jesus than John - the one presumed. Because Judas was reconciled. He accepted responsibility for his weakness. What was done was wrong. However, Judas returned the silver to the priests and in his own suicidal death – Judas Iscariot expressed sincere regret.

This would have been a huge challenge for both Jesus and Judas to work at. For both were human and shared our frail humanity. Let us not forget that. And it takes time to forgive.

Therefore, let those of us in positions of power and authority search our hearts and acknowledge the importance of our roles. With truthfulness, through the practice of loving-kindness, through the respecting of others, becoming more culturally sensitive, and the establishment of an intimate

trust between one another. This will work and will make all of us a united and freer people.

During the sermon the man carrying the cross falls onto the stage and is carried to the front of the stage as a choir softly sings, 'Jesus was a soul man'.

The priest then dons an indigenous cloak and begins a traditional cleansing ceremony.

Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony

*Yunda Yunda Thara Koora – Cora Ba Na
Kononda, Moruya, Nackara, Yunga”*

Sacred Spirit of my ancestors you came from time immemorial in the form of “*Dinawan*” the Emu. On the eve of the Great convergence of stars in the constellation of “*Moruya Inderwong*”. The Great Southern Cross.

You brought “*Kianga Nackara*”. Light from the east. And scattered the chaos of darkness and calmed the waters of confusion. You then gave birth to the primordial egg of life “*Awahba*” or “*Terra Firma*”- Dry Land.

From this you drew all living things.

Sacred Spirit of my ancestors. You moved across the Face of the Earth and gave us the gift of Fire and the gift of Trees to help sustain life.

Come now to this “*Bora*”. We call on You *Biamie Kianga* to “*Warrawee*” to come from the direction of the four winds and make sacred this union between the life of Fire and the life of Trees.

That through the element of “*Pothana*” this sacred and living smoke. May all living things and ourselves receive your blessings of Happiness, Healing, Protection and Peace.

“Komburra Kiama Pothana

Bah Orana Allawah”

The priest then performs the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the wine.

Blessing of Bread and Wine

On the night before He died
He took the Bread, Broke it,
Gave it to His Friends and said
“Take this all of you and eat it, this is my body which will be broken for you”

After the supper, He took the Cup
Again, He gave you thanks and praise
Gave the cup to His friends and said
“Take this all of you and drink from it.
For this is the cup of my Blood,
The Blood of the new and everlasting covenant,
It will be shared for you and for all people.
Do this in memory of me.”

At the ending of the mass, the priest takes the cross and lifts it from the fallen man. He carries it off stage.

Reconciliation Prayer of Thanksgiving

O Lord we pray for the ability to say sorry to those that we offend so that we can all live fully together in peace. And harmony.

Amen

By Frank Cain

Scene 9

The fallen man begins to laugh as he rises to find the wine and bread left by the priest.

(Image)

On the screen appears the image of his traditional past. He drinks a toast in recognition and faces the audience.

(Image)

The reconciliation statement appears, He then walks back up to the back of the stage to read the reconciliation statement.

The other actors then join him in reading the statement.

(The map of Australia)

He states his confusion. The actors repeat the lines as in agreement and return the original stones previously taken away. As they lay the stones on the ground, the shape of Australia emerges.

Scene 8 Epilogue1

Mathew	I don't know I am confused even now I don't know how I feel I don't know who I am Or even what I am I think Sometimes I think that I am going crazy And that the whole world is watching And waiting me to fall down. I think that somewhere in it all, I became part of you/ or you became part of me.
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Conversations with the Dead by Richard Franklin

As the stones form the imagery of Australia, The participants stand on stage and repeat one line from their speeches.

(Flashing images)

Epilogue 2

Not all people are what they appear to be.

Just because I am Murri.

They aren't all bad

Why should we say sorry

Certificate of Aboriginality.

They are quite nice people really.

What's the magic word?

But it takes time to forgive.

The Aboriginal man then states his revelation.

I am not worried about how happy we have been.

I am not worried about how happy we will be.

All As long as we are happy today.

(Music) Who made me who I am? Magic Dirt and Richard Franklin. Corroboration. Sputnik.

(End)

List of Music

Solid Rock. By Shane Howard. Our Home Our Land. Various Artists. CAAMA 253.

White. By David Page. Ochres, the Music.

Baby Talk 1. Quinlan. All You Mob. Shopfront Theatre for Young People & Organics.

Dali Mana Gamarada. By Deborah Cheetham and Wicked Beat Sound System. Corroboration.
Sputnik.

Are You Connected? By Kev Carmody. Mirrors.

The Block. By Jesse and the Clevo Boys. All You Mob. Shopfront Theatre for Young People &
Organics.

Traditional Roo (Dhum Dhum) By David Page and Steve Francis. Corroboree & Skin. Bangarra
Dance Theatre.

TSI Play Dance (Kasa Kab). By David Page and Steve Francis. Corroboree & Skin. Bangarra
Dance Theatre

Who made me who I am? Magic Dirt and Richard Franklin. Corroboration. Sputnik.

References

Franklin, Richard. J. Conversations with the Dead. Black inside. Currency House. 2002.

Writers

Proof Of Identity- Written by Liza-Mare Syron

City Clique-Written and performed by Beck Cosson

Murri Boy-Written and performed by Sonny Dallas Law

Vaughan-Written and performed by Ashley Wright.

Five Dollar Fruit Stall-Written and performed by Alan Lao

Sa Sa/Times Have Changed-Written and performed by Bana Hankin

Mass Of Reconciliation -Written and performed by Frank Cain

Interview coordinator Sarah Splillane

Original images Joel Sheely.

Costume Consultant Elody Perin.

Dance Consultant Vicki Van Hout

Eora College of Aboriginal Studies

Center for Visual and Performing Arts.

333 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale. 2008.

Ph. 02 9217 4878.

ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL THEATRE.

Written by y Liza-Mare Syron

Master of Creative Arts Research 2004.

University of Wollongong NSW

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 Katharine Brisbane
 Wesley Enoch
 Justine Saunders

Liza-Mare Syron

c/Eora College of Aboriginal Studies

Center for Visual and Performance Studies

333 Abercrombie Street Chippendale NSW 2008.

*“I want to stand alone in a sea of words
Pluck out the phrases soar like a bird
I want to stand on a mountain
Wait for the dawn
Yet be aware of
The approach of a storm”*

Jack Davis (Black Life Poems)

ABSTRACT

At the forefront of cultural, social and political change Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre appeared on the horizon of Australian Theatre in 1968, just one year after the Australian government awarded citizenship rights for Aboriginal Australians. Historically Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre was a catalyst for cultural, political and social change in Australia, challenging existing assumptions of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture, politics and theatre. Negotiating change became a consequence of a creating and developing this new theatre experience in Australia. Contact with a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience creates a space where both intercultural and intersubjective experiences take place. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre performance practitioners are required to negotiate these cultural and social differences as well as allowing artistic process for Aboriginal actors and writers to develop. The overall consideration for working with Aboriginal themes or content in a play is respect. Respect for difference in process, respect for differences in training and experience, respect for the social and cultural exchange taking place and lastly acknowledgment of these processes.

ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL THEATRE.

The goal of this research project is to discover what new knowledge can be generated in the area of artistic practice when discussing Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre in Australia. The reason behind this research project is a need to find out more about the individual artistic processes associated with a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience. In Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre there is a point of contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners, a space where intercultural and intersubjective artistic processes are taking place. It is the intersubjective point of contact that is the study area of this paper. When it comes to exploring Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre previous research primarily explore intercultural processes at play between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal performance practice. What has not been explored in research on Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre are the individual processes of intersubjective experiences in performance practice. It is not the intention of this paper to define or authenticate any type of performance process but to provide discussions on the experiences of this contact and to discuss the findings.

This paper begins with an introduction on the types of investigative methods available to research in the performing arts especially when investigating Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre in Australia. This discussion will help outline the need for new approaches in exploring artistic practice and to explain the method chosen for this paper. This will be followed by an explanation of the methodology employed and the framework applied in this research. The main body of the paper will be to present major areas of discussion raised by the research and finally, this paper will recap and make summary of the individual processes identified in the research followed by a discussion on the interconnections taking place between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners in Australia.

INTRODUCTION

Performance studies are a discipline that began in America in the 1980's and before this date this study area was known as Performance Theory. Performance Theory primarily covered the analysis of performance history and literature, but it later expanded to include social and cultural elements of performance. The work of Victor Turner influenced the inclusion of cultural and social practices into Performance Theory, Turner an anthropologist, wrote From Ritual to Performance (82) where he claimed that the discipline

of anthropology, where cultural and social practices are explored, also includes the study of performance practices. Turner writes,

“For the anthropologist’s work is deeply involved in what we might call “tales,” “stories,” “folk tales,” “histories,” “gossip,” and “informants accounts,” types of narratives for which there may be many narrative names, not all of which coincide with our terms.”
(Turner. 1982. p66).

Here Turner describes the interdependent relationships at work between social drama and cultural performance where the everyday life experiences are re-enacted to create histories and rituals of these cultural and societal experiences. For Turner the anthropologist and performance theorist Richard Schechner, the study of performance encompasses many aspects of social life including rites and ceremonies, eruptions of crises, everyday life performances such as sport, play, art making processes and ritualisations. Critical theory in performance has adopted Turners’ claims and redefined the ways in which performance and theatre are currently researched. According to Gay McAuley (01), research into artistic practice takes place where social, cultural and aesthetic performance practices are explored (p5). Peggy Phelan in The Ends of Performance (98) adds that research into performance has come to combine new work in the areas of critical theory, literary studies, folklore, anthropology, post colonial theory, feminist and queer studies (p4). Richard Schechner (98) describes performance studies as ‘inter’ disciplined, located between these areas of investigation where theories collide to create new methods of investigation (p361). In Performance studies, an introduction (02) Schechner identifies seven types of human performance that can be studied and presents them in a ‘fan’ of categories, they are, ceremonies, revolution, everyday life such as sport, play, the art-making process and ritualisation (p11). Schechner also outlines the interdependent relationship between these categories of performance by the use of a diagrammatical ‘web’ of interconnections affirming the ‘inter’ relatedness of investigations in performance theory (p11). According to Schechner research into artistic practice is an interdisciplinary, interconnected and in-between area of study.

However, Gay McAuley (01) argues that this interdisciplinary approach can be highly problematic because in some instances performance becomes the vehicle through which something else is explored (p6). McAuley’s claim is that ‘too many cooks spoil the broth’

and that performance studies have become a vehicle for countless grand theories, ideologies, and methodologies that have highjacked research into the performing arts. Phelan (98) is also suspicious of this inter-disciplined approach to researching performance practice, for her performance studies has become a small minded version of cultural studies and not really the study of performance practice at all (p5). In recent research on artistic practice there are areas of performance practice that are not being explored and McAuley (95) identifies these areas as essential for performance research. McAuley claims that research into artistic practice needs to include analysis from a 'hands on' or 'lived' experience. He explains,

"...But the skills I think are essential for performance research today also include hands on experience with documentation of both processes and performance, the detailed analysis of performance (both lived and recorded), case book writing and reportage". (McAuley. 1995. p56).

Both Phelan and McAuley recognise that research into artistic practice has become a study area dominated by social and cultural research methods. These research methods are observational and objective in practice. What is essential to performance research is the exploration of a 'lived' experience where the subjective experience is the focus of investigation. It is the intension of this paper to explore the intersubjective connections in performance process where the 'lived' experience of artistic practice will be discussed.

Past and present research on artistic practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre employ many theoretical frameworks and research methods and these including, post-colonial, anti-colonial, historical investigations, analysis of aesthetic practice, educational, and textual analysis. There is one other area where Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre is discussed publicly and this takes place in the forwards and introduction of printed plays. In this space, theatre practitioners such as, writers, actors and directors discuss the play and the connecting issues of Aboriginal themes, content, character, or history. Although not a research area, these forwards and introductions offer a testament to the way in which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners negotiate an intercultural and intersubjective performance practice. The areas of investigation into artistic practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre would look something like this;

CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL THEATRE

RESEARCH

Post-colonial/anti colonial.
 Historical investigations.
 Textual analysis.
 Artistic process.
 Educational.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Forwards and introductions of printed
 texts.

How these areas interconnect within the study of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre will be discussed later and in relation to the research findings. At this point, I would like to briefly outline each area including major authors and researchers.

Post-colonial theory.

Post-colonial theory in performance study is mainly influenced by the post-colonial social theorist, Edward Said author of the seminal work Culture and Imperialism (93). This work establishes a settler/invader discourse in investigating culture and performance. Said's work is based on the work of post-modernist advocate, Michael Foucault. In Foucault's The Archeology of Knowledge (72) Foucault claims that there are multiple relationships of power and force at every level of discursive formation. Said's work takes this proposition when exploring culture and identifies and explores settler/invader power relationships at play in modern society. Helen Gilbert is a prominent writer on Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre from a post-colonial perspective and her works include, Reconciliation? Aboriginality and Australian theatre in the 1990's (98), and, Sightlines. Race, Gender and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre (98). Gilbert recognises that Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre is an intercultural experience and explores the connections between social, cultural, and aesthetic performance practices from a settler/invader discourse. These studies are observational in viewpoint and literal in analysis. In the first work Gilbert (98) explores many exiting areas of the settler/invader interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colonial descendants and what this means for Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. Gilbert also provides a very informative investigation of aesthetic performance practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre where Gilbert identifies what she describes as aesthetic 'markers' of 'Aboriginality' in performance. These markers are described firstly, as a physical presence of an Aboriginal person on stage, secondly the presence of

traditional language, thirdly the use of soundscapes, traditional or contemporary music production in performance and fourthly the way in which scenery is designed to consolidate ownership of the performing space (p80-85).

These four markers signify the existence of an Aboriginal artistic practice at work in performance. There are many problems associated with these claims, one, which I will address, is the proposition of an identifiable Aboriginal physical presence on stage. Identifying an Aboriginal person is problematic due to the subjective nature of identity construction. The notion of identity construction is a very personal experience. Construction of 'Aboriginality' is a different process for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia. As a teacher of performance studies at an Aboriginal college, I am constantly confronted by these problems. For example I have many students whose complexion and features are not overtly Aboriginal and yet they are members of an identifiable Aboriginal family. Their presence on stage will not necessarily be identified as Aboriginal. This can be quite insulting to that person's family and heritage to not be identified as Aboriginal.

Marcia Langton's (93) "Well I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television..." An Essay for the Australian Film Commission is a paper discussing the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people. Langton's work in this area is an example of anti-colonial investigation. This is not a study on Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre but her analysis of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal films, television presentations and scripts proposes that 'Aboriginality' is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, imagination, representational and interpretation (p77). In the process of acting and playwriting, the same is true. There is no one fixed notion of 'Aboriginality' in theatre. Langton explores the intersubjective and intercultural experience of identity formation through the medium of film and television.

Historical

Maryrose Casey's, Nindethana and the National Black Theatre: Interrogating the mythology of the New Wave (00) and her later work also published in the same year From the wings to the stage: A production chronology of theatre and drama texts by Indigenous Australian writers (00), explores the history of Indigenous theatre and texts in Australia. Other work from a historical context is Glen Shea's thesis, The History of Black Theatre.

As yet, this paper has not been published but its release is widely anticipated. These two writers present discussions on Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre primarily from a historical perspective. It is not to say that other writers do not include a historical overview in their work just that these two researchers frame their work primarily from this position. Both of Casey's papers are important historical works. In the first paper, Casey exposes the lack of historical representation of Aboriginal people and plays in the early days of Australian Theatre, and presents a good argument for historical documentation of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. Casey claims selectivity in historical representation of indigenous contributions to an Australian theatre history and acknowledges a lack historical attention given to the Contemporary Aboriginal theatre movement (p20). Casey's later work is a comprehensive chronological document of productions and performances of Indigenous texts and productions in Australia and is excellent reference material.

Textual analysis

A great deal of research has been produced on the textual analysis of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. Early publications include the works of, Mudooroo Narogon (90), Adam Shoemaker (89), Archie Weller (87) and Bob Hodge (85). Later textual explorations include Gerry Turcotte (94), Katherine Brisbane (95) and Mudooroo Narogon (97). All of these publications are informative and provide an exploration of meaning to the textual experience. This meaning is discussed by way of social, cultural, political, and historical implications of representations of 'Aboriginality' in both Contemporary Aboriginal plays and plays by Non Aboriginal writers.

Education

Educational research on Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre primarily centers on reports and surveys produced by government departments which seek to identify educational resources available for teaching the subject area. These reports recommend texts that explore the subject and offer little in the way of research on the education of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. I have included education as an area of research firstly because of its societal function in creating awareness of Aboriginal culture and secondly for its role in developing future research directions. Another reason for its inclusion is that I feel there is a lack of research into the training and education of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners in Australian institutions. There are many questions for me about the way in which Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre is delivered in tertiary, secondary, and primary

training organisations. This need is connected to Recommendation 290, in The Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendations (92). Recommendation 290 refers to curricula in schools, at all levels, that reflect the fact that Australia has an Aboriginal history and viewpoint on social, cultural and historical matters. In the area of theatre and performing arts this recommendation has yet to be fully implemented and monitored in tertiary level theatre performance training and research.

Artistic process.

When it comes to researching artistic process or Schechner (00) describes it, the art making process, there is little published work. One book that attempts to provide a study in this area is The Mudrooroo/ Muller Project. A theatrical casebook by Gerhard Fisher (93). The Mudrooroo/ Muller Project is a cross-cultural collaboration where an Aboriginal theatre company rehearses and produces the post-Brechtian German play, The Commission (29) by Heiner Muller. This is a case study of the project, which provides autobiographical reflections from both the German dramaturge Gerhard Fischer and Aboriginal Australian writer Mudrooroo Narongin. Fisher's book explores the project history, artistic process, and structure in performance practice. The project is an intercultural experience discussed from intersubjective experiences.

Public dialogue

In the past the forum for discussions on artistic practice by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners took place in the introductions and forwards in recently published plays by Aboriginal Playwrights, or Australian plays with Aboriginal themes or content. Participation in these 'dialogues' was encouraged in, *An Invitation to Debate* by H.C Coombs, in Jack Davis's play Kullark (82). In this forward Coombs proposes that Jack Davis wrote not only for Aboriginal people but also for non-Aboriginal people. Coombs sees the contribution of Aboriginal artists to Australian culture as an invitation to debate, he explains;

"It is an invitation as well as a contribution to a debate, a discourse, a mutual search for understanding and respect: a search from which some sense of shared identity may someday come" (H C Coombs 1982. p x).

This sentence is the seed of present and future directions in research and an ideology that has continued today and that is that there is a continued dialogue on the experiences of artistic practice. This tradition continues today and the following are testament to this, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Brumby Innes (27), Mervyn Rutherford in Another World in Robert J. Merritt, The Cake Man (78), Wendy Blacklock, in Jack Davis, No Sugar. (86), May-Brit. Akerholt, in, David Malouf's, Blood Relations.(88), Mudrooroo Narogin, Black Reality in Jack Davis, Barungin, (89), Saunders, Justine. Introduction in Plays from Black Australia. (89), Lynette Narkle, A Poignant Moment in Jack Davis, In Our Town. (92) and Wesley Enoch's, Why Do We Applaud? in the 7 Stages of Grieving. (96).

And so the list goes on. The discussions taking place in these forwards and introductions were generally historical and socio-political in context. Due to the political developments of human rights issues for Aboriginal people in Australia during this time, it became an integral act to discuss these issues at any opportunity. Public dialogue from practicing artist on these socio political issues took place in these forwards and introductions. It can be said that Contemporary Aboriginal performance is a political act, this may be true but it can also can be critiqued and studied as an artistic act. Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre is also an act of artistic expression. What all contributors to these forwards and introductions accord with is the need for continued dialogue on artistic practice and for a growing debate to happen between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners.

Wesley Enoch in the article, Judge Aboriginal works only on merit, 2002, resonates the necessity for analyzing artistic practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. Peter Fray the author of this article quotes Wesley Enoch,

“He said audiences in France and Britain tended to judge Aboriginal work on its merit, a leap he hoped the Australians were ready to take. “We would actually appreciate in depth critique of indigenous work,” he says.

What I believe Wesley is referring to in this quote is the need to explore performance practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre, where the socio, political and cultural references to Aboriginality take a secondary seat in the analysis of performance practice.

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier the discipline of performance studies allows for an interdisciplinary approach to research on artistic practice. This research project will employ qualitative techniques for the collection and analysis of interviews. According to Tom Wengraf in Qualitative Research Interviewing (01), we use interviewing to discover more about a topic/subject's discursive practice, as well as discovering references to the topic/subject, and illuminating subjectivity (p7). In other words, we interview to know more about another's experience of the topic/subject. As this research project will explore artistic practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre through the 'lived' experiences of theatre practitioners, it is necessary to interview in order to explore a subjective experience.

According to sociologists, Glaser and Strauss in, The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Strategies for qualitative research (79) a Grounded Theory approach to the analysis of evidence centers on the generation of concepts in qualitative research (p23). Evidence or testimonials can be used to illustrate emerging concepts. A concept according to Glaser and Strauss (79) is a theoretical abstraction of what is going on in a studied area (p23). What they mean is that we can begin to speculate on what is going on in an area of study by generating qualitative evidence on the subject. Derek Layder explains in New Strategies in social research (93) that Grounded Theory is 'theory construction' not 'theory testing', it creates starting points for further research as it exists from the generated evidence of experience (p39). The theory tested in this research project is that some new knowledge on artistic practice can be derived from qualitative research techniques. There are problems employing sociological investigative techniques to investigating artistic practice, firstly there is little in the way of helpful examples. And secondly most application of social research addresses a perceived social problem, the analysis of a perceived social condition or the discovery of a social problem. Artistic practice is not a social problem.

Data collection

Before collecting data from interviews, Glaser and Strauss (67) propose the possibility of framing the context of the data collected (p45). Since this study is to generate information from research on artistic practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theater, it is logical to frame the interviews in a performance context. In What is Performance Studies Anyway? (98). Richard Schechner proposes that the investigation of artistic practice should not lose sight of a performance's particularity of experience, structure, history, and process (p361). This

framework hinges on 'experience' whilst incorporating a discussion on the structure, history, and process of that experience. I look back at the way in which the Muller Project () was constructed and I see that it too was based on the reflections of performance practitioners who wrote of their experiences including a historical overview of the project, a discussion on the artistic processes involved and a presentation of the structure of the project. This research project will also employ a similar framework to collect information on artistic practice. When approaching research participants I have framed a question that hinges on participants experience of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. I have asked participants to discuss their 'experience' of working with Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. I also requested that participants include a historical overview of that experience, as well as providing a reflection of the artistic processes associated with this experience and to finally discuss the structural attributes associated with constructing a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience.

The selection of participants for this project demanded specific criteria, primarily a connection to the subject of inquiry. Experience with Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre implies more than just attending a performance, although this experience could do with more research. A criteria for participation in this research project is that participants have a professional or artistic connection to the subject. This professional and artistic eligibility can be seen as an 'expert' inquiry and in some ways it is. It is important that the participants firstly have a historical connection, then have experienced some type of artistic process and finally have had enough contact to articulate form or structure. It is essential that participants have some connection to these concepts.

Another condition in identifying research participants for this project has been to provide a variety of viewpoints. Providing differences in experiences provides differences in opinions and viewpoints. To address these criteria I have selected participants from different areas of theatre practice such as, actors, directors, publishers, and producers. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal viewpoints have been considered in data collection. If this research project is to contribute to a continued dialogue as proposed by H C Coombs (82), between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people then it is important to include both of these perspectives of experience. This criteria ensures diverse experiences of the subject from both subjective and cultural viewpoints.

Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre is a national and international subject. Aboriginal Theatre historically has involved many different groups of performing artists from various states of Australia and around the world. To contact both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners both locally and internationally can be a very time intensive exercise. Due to the nature of performance practice, people rarely get to be in one place all the time, so it has become a consequence of this research that participants live locally or be in Sydney at the time of this research. It has not been within the limits of this research project to contact all those historically connected to Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. Ultimately the scope of this project is a localised one. I believe that the participants that I have managed to secure for this project are unique because of their close personal connections to the subject. I believe that this closeness reflects a depth and quality to the research participant's, which compensates for the lack of quantity of participants in this research project. The following is a brief introduction to the participants, including short biographies, which provide evidence of their professional and artistic connections to Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre.

The Participants

All participants in this research project gave permission to be mentioned. One participant requested that her interview not be available for reading, although the participant did give permission to be mentioned and quoted from her transcript for the purposes of this project. Permission to read this transcript must be sort from the participant and contact details have been provided in the appendix. Research participants include;

Wendy Blacklock O.A

Wendy has worked extensively in theatre, television, and radio in both Australia and the United Kingdom. From 1981 to 1991 Wendy worked for the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. In 1991 Wendy moved to the new Australia Council funded Performing Lines commissioning, producing and touring Australian plays both nationally and internationally. Wendy can be attributed to raising the profile of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre as early as 1982 when Wendy produced Bobby Merritt's, The Cake Man (78) at the NIDA Parade Theatre. Wendy also took this play to the World Theatre Festival in Colorado USA. During these early years, Wendy was responsible for commissioning No Sugar (86) by Aboriginal writer, poet, and social activist Jack Davis. Performing Lines toured No Sugar both nationally and internationally. In 2003 Wendy is still in charge of

Performing Lines and is still touring many other Contemporary Aboriginal works locally and overseas

Wesley Enoch

Wesley began his connections with Aboriginal Theatre in the early 1990's as a founding member of the Kooemba Jdarra Theatre Company in Queensland. Since graduating with honors from Queensland University of Technology, Wesley has been a prolific contributor to theatre by writing, producing and directing Aboriginal plays onto the main stage of Australian Theatre. He has also been artistic director for two major state Aboriginal Theatre companies, Kooemba Jdarra. And the Ilbiggerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre cooperative. Wesley in collaboration with Deborah Mailman wrote, directed and produced, The Seven Stages of Grieving (94). Wesley has just completed a director's residency at Sydney Theatre Company where he directed The Cherry Pickers (88) by Kevin Gilbert. Other directorial credits include, No Sugar by Jack Davis and Stolen (98) by Jan Harrison.

Katharine Brisbane

Katharine, AM Hon. D. Litt. (UNSW) is the co-founder of publishing company, Currency Press Australia and editor from 1997-2001. Katharine has been a theatre critic for 21 years, including a period as national critic of the Australian Newspaper from 1967-1974. She has written widely on Australian theatre and in 1991 published Entertaining Australia, a social history. She was founder of the Australian National Playwrights conference and its chair from 1985-1990. In 2001, Katharine established Currency House a resource center for the performing arts. Katharine has been publishing Aboriginal plays from the very first publication of The Cake Man by Bobby Merritt in 1978 to Jan Harrison's Stolen in 1998. Her essay entitled, The Future in Black and White, Aboriginality in Recent Australian Drama (95) offers a broad overview of the development and rise of Aboriginal Theatre over the past 30 years.

Justine Saunders O.A.M (returned)

Justine is an actress and a former member of the Black Theatre in Redfern where she played the role of 'Ruby' in Bobby Merritt's The Cake Man in the 1975 production. In this role, Justine toured with the play locally, nationally and internationally. Since then, Justine has appeared in over 40 theatre productions for both community and state theatre

companies. In television, Justine is most famous for her role as Nerida in Women of the Sun (83). In films, Justine has worked with both local and international filmmakers. Aunty Justine was there from the beginning of Black Theatre and has made a successful career in the performing arts as a performer and as a pioneer for female roles written for Aboriginal women in Australian theatre, film, and television.

Data analysis

After collecting evidence of lived experiences, I realised that in order to make sense of this raw material a reading technique would need to be employed. Tom Wengraf in Qualitative Research Interviewing (01) proposes the technique of dividing the written transcripts into two columns. One column contains the transcript and the other identifies units of meaning (p111). This approach is similar to the artistic practice of creating ‘beats’ or ‘units’ when analysing text for performance. Similar to each new subject raised in relation to a participant's experience of Contemporary Aboriginal Theater, was identified, and noted. Below is an extract from a transcript provided in this project and I have provided an example of this ‘uniting’.

i.	Early Aboriginal Plays and their dramatic structure.	<p><i>The Aboriginal plays that we knew, we thought weren't always good plays. They felt good and they told interesting stories but they weren't always well shaped. I felt I had to pull them apart or try to shift things and really not knowing why they weren't working for me. Maybe I didn't have the craft yet, I was operating off instinct. Sometimes I feel that the earlier work was much better than what I am doing now because I was working from instinct then whereas now I am working from a more intellectual perspective. On the other hand, maybe it was because you are learning and discovering things, the discovery is always bigger. I grew very quickly in those first few</i></p>
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		<i>years I think.</i>
ii.	Discussion n the changes taking place in recent Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. Issues of Character, intention, and viewpoints.	<i>I think plays have changed. I think that there is a swing back to the overtly political in what we have less trust in character, less trust in dialogue or debate. There are more telling people what to think, which I think is dangerous. It becomes didactic in the negative sense of didactic. That is it is rear to find two or three perspectives engaged in debate, arguing with each other on stage. So, people feel like they can become part of the discussion as opposed to being told what to feel. I think plays have shifted in response to our political situation. When you have the government talking about stolen generation then Indigenous theatre has to take the other point of view, it has to become the information dissemination point as opposed to the discussion point. You can't be seen to weaken the stance. It becomes propeganderist a little.</i>

Once this uniting and listing was complete it was then necessary to identify common areas of discussion especially where there existed differences of opinions.

In analysing data, Wengraf (01) suggests to look for differences in opinions as well as common features discussed by participants (p335). This listing of differences and commonalities in discussion reveals emerging concepts of importance to all participants and creates areas of discussion. In this research, not all participants kept to the contextual framework of **history**, **process** and **structure**. Several participants discussed some areas more than others did and usually according to the importance given by each participant to each context. This did not greatly affect the outcome of the interviews as participants were

guided by these contexts and generally kept to the themes of discussion. What follows is a discussion in each of these areas of emerging categories.

Emerging Categories

History

Historically all participants discussed their first connection to Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre as either an important or memorable event. The biographical testaments of the participants reflect a common experience of negotiation and change. Katherine Brisbane describes an experience of inclusiveness when observing a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre performance. Wendy Blacklock reveals a feeling of having done something different and a sense of developing something important. Wesley Enoch describes his first experience of artistic practice in theatre as unfulfilling. Whilst Justine Saunders recalls her first contact as something unique and deadly. Historically it seems, Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre has had to negotiate change in artistic practice by challenging assumptions of what Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre is. The collaborative nature of artistic development lends itself to these junctures of intersubjective and intercultural artistic exchanges. Historically Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners have had to negotiate social, cultural and political change. This explains the types of discussions taking place in forwards and introductions of published plays and the reason why most theory has been generated from these sociological areas.

Katharine's first contact with the subject transpired whilst attending a reading of an act from the first recorded Contemporary Aboriginal play, The Cherry Pickers by Kevin Gilbert. The reading took place at the Muse, a small performance space at the back of Justice McGrath's home in Sydney. Katharine reflects on her first experience of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre,

“The opening scene was set under a cherry tree with a big fat woman sitting on top of a tub and the tub is jumping up and down. So you realize there is a child underneath being punished. There was a great deal of that practical joke type humor in the play and I released for the first time I was seeing Aboriginals as they talk to each other. This was different to the way they talk to white people and I felt privileged to enter into that society, which was a memorable moment for me.” Brisbane (i)

Wendy Blacklock's recollection of her first contact with the subject came not long after she was appointed head of the Australian Content Department of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. This department was set up, according to Blacklock, to respond to the need for more concentration on emerging Australian work, independent artists and small companies. It was at this time that Wendy was visited by, what she describes as an extremely persistent person asking for assistance in developing a new show. The name of that person was Brian Syron and the name of the show was The Cake Man by Robert Merritt. Wendy discusses her concerns at the time about finding an audience for and the viability of a new theatre movement. Fortunately, at that time, Wendy was involved in negotiations with a Canadian Festival director. The original festival negotiation fell through and Wendy suggested that the festival director consider The Cake Man. Wendy describes this event as something unexpected which implies a change in Wendy's assumptions about the subject;

"He wrote back and said he would take it. Well no one was more surprised than I was."
Blacklock (xiv)

Wesley Enoch describes his move into Aboriginal theatre as an important necessity. Wesley began his contact with Aboriginal Theater after some unpleasant experiences with directors whom he felt were either intimidated or uncomfortable working with Aboriginality. He recalls these experiences whilst trying his hand at acting,

"I acted in a couple of shows and this was where I experienced many bad directors who were telling me what to do. Literally demeaning and non-trusting of actors and were intimidated by Aboriginality, maybe because they did not have a lot of experience with Aboriginal people or that they did not understand us but they did not listen when we had things to offer". Enoch (IV)

This experience propelled Wesley into exploring Aboriginal Theatre and all its peculiarities of experience. He and a number of other Aboriginal actors and performers formed a small company to address these issues. Some of the people involved in the formation of that company include, Leigh Charlton, Roxanne McDonald and Deborah Mailman. Wesley's initial contact with artistic practice as an Aboriginal actor launched him into further exploration and change.

Justine Saunders's first experience came as a young woman having just arrived in Sydney from Queensland. Not knowing what she was going to do with herself, she headed for Redfern. Justine describes what happened next.

“Strangely I went trotting off up near where the Black Theatre was at the time in Redfern. So I trotted into the place and, as Bob Mazza and Brian Syron says, I was struggling up there in my platform shoes. I was a skinny thing with long legs and I said I was interested in doing something. That was when they were putting together The Cake Man”. Saunders (iii).

Justine's acting career took off with her first acting role as Ruby in The Cake Man, the first Aboriginal play to be produced and staged locally, nationally and internationally. Justine's new experiences were challenging. As a child, Justine was raised in various welfare institutions and her ability to present certification for international travel became problematic. She reflects,

“The first tour was like this, little black duck from Queensland gets on a big plane to go overseas. The funny thing was I didn't have a birth certificate for my passport. Little black duck that was born next to a railway line didn't own a birth certificate.” Saunders (xxv)

Problems associated with these initial encounters were eventually overcome. However, Justine's experience of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre propelled her into a completely new way of experiencing the world.

The significance of these first experiences with Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre is that it changed the perceptions of both Aboriginal Theatre and Aboriginal people in some way. All participants note their first experience as transformative, equally felt by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theater practitioners. Wendy Blacklock when referring to the perceptions of Aboriginal Theatre by some Australia government departments in 1986, comments on her experience. Wendy had commissioned Jack Davis to write No Sugar, which received an invitation to be staged at a festival in Vancouver.

“It was difficult to convince them about the show because they thought it was a cooroberee. They said, why was a cooroberee representing Australia?” They didn’t realize the play was a touching, humorous, wonderful true life story that was cleverly staged.” Blacklock (xxv)

Process

When discussing their respective experiences of artistic process in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre participants generated quite an amount of substantive data. When collecting and reading all the interviews, it became apparent that this was where participants began to reflect and articulate on their experience of artistic practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. The emerging concepts of significance generated by these interviews reflect the depth of theoretical and practical knowledge of participants. Most participants felt, in their experience, that artistic process in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre was a substantially different to that in non -Aboriginal or Australian Theatre. Participants in the areas of acting and writing mainly discussed these Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal differences in artistic practices and processes.

Acting

In the area of acting, Wesley Enoch spoke at length on a perceived difference in artistic process for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal actors. Wesley proposes that an Aboriginal actor has a closer historical and personal connection to character and story than non-Aboriginal actors do. Wesley proposes that Aboriginal actors have real life connections to the story and characters portrayed in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal plays. This closeness allows Aboriginal actors to make strong emotional connections to character and story. An example of this close connection to story and character takes place in the play Stolen by Jane Harrison. Stolen is a play depicting stories from Aboriginal children in state custody. For the Belvoir street production of Stolen, Wesley included a section after the play’s ending an epilogue where actors come out and tell their own or another’s personal experience of being in state custody as a child. Wesley believed quite strongly that these strong emotional connections can influence an actor’s process in rehearsal and in production, but more often, it adds to a strong emotional connection to story and the characters portrayed.

“The potential for an Indigenous actor to have had a personal experience close to what is being played on stage is greater than that of non-Aboriginal actor.” Enoch (xvi)

Enoch then cites an example from the play Wonderlands by Katherine Thompson performed at the Stables Theatre in Sydney. In Wonderlands, a story about Australia and its relationship to its Aboriginal past, Aboriginal actress Pauline Whyman plays the character of 'Edie' an Aboriginal woman who has to deal with issues of racism and Indigenous politics in the play. Pauline's own real life experience is very close to that of her character. A non-Aboriginal actor identified as Roger, plays the character of 'Lon' who in the play engages in racist acts and who also is about to experience Indigenous politics. The actor, Roger, has no personal experiences of either of these scenarios.

When rehearsing the play Conversations with the Dead by Richard J Franklin, a play about Aboriginal Deaths in Custody for Belvoir Street, Enoch discusses one particular Aboriginal actor's process;

"The young Aboriginal actor Kirk Page who is in the play, lost his own brother only a year ago to suicide. Now he found it quite difficult to perform the action of a making and setting a noose." Enoch (xv)

Enoch remarks that these close connections to story and character are significant to working with an Aboriginal play and cast.

"Dealing and working through these connections are part of the process in Aboriginal Theatre." Enoch (xv)

Another feature of the acting process involved when working with Aboriginal actors is the presence of a variety in training and experience. Training became a significant discussion from all participants in some way. Either when discussing their own history or in relation to artistic practice. It was the experience of Wesley Enoch that this diverse level of experience and training in no way effected the final production, but it was mentioned as a feature of working with Aboriginal actors. When discussing the rehearsal process for the play Conversations with the Dead, Wesley illustrates this type of experience;

“Sometimes I had to slow down for Uncle Vick and acquaint him with theatre language. He also had trouble learning his lines. However he was a sixty year old man, his first time on stage, he was nervous as all hell. It was about encouraging respect.” Enoch (xx)

It is often the case that Aboriginal actors will be employed to play characters close to their own experience and this lends itself to a representational theatre. By this, I mean that actors are either playing themselves or playing someone very close to their own experience. Transformation into a character according to Enoch is not a feature of the Aboriginal actor’s process in Aboriginal Theatre. In his experience, Enoch feels that non-Aboriginal actors tend to use a transformative acting technique more than Aboriginal actors do. This in no way implies the lack of skill of Aboriginal actors it implies difference in process. In the case of Uncle Vick in Conversations with the Dead, the actor was encouraged to play himself. Wesley accounts this instruction to Uncle Vick;

“Sometimes you have to ask performers to transform and be something else, and sometimes you have to ask people to be just themselves and in this case, I asked Uncle Vick to just be himself.” Enoch (xx)

Wesley remarks another example of this perceived difference in rehearsing The Cherry Pickers by Kevin Gilbert for the Sydney Theatre Company.

“During Cherry Pickers Robin Nevin once said to me that she felt that she knew what she was seeing when observing rehearsals and said to me, I know what I am looking at, I am not looking at actors, I am looking at storytellers.” Enoch (xx)

Wesley’s response to Robin’s observations was that these actors were indeed good storytellers, for Enoch acting is good storytelling. Aboriginal actors it seems are good actors, have a close emotional and historical connection to character and story, and are often engaged in representation of themselves or someone they know on stage.

Writing

Most participants discussed a perceived difference in the process of writing for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal playwrights. There is a perception that Aboriginal writers engage in a process of recording personal and historical experiences of Aboriginal life.

Enoch proposes that Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre has been predominantly verbatim and biographical, taken from true stories. Katharine agrees with this but acknowledges a change in the position of the writer from community concerns to individual concerns. Wendy Blacklock comments that Aboriginal plays reflect real life experience and reflects on Richard J Franklin's play, Conversations from the Dead.

"He had written what had come from his experience; he had written what he had gone through." Blacklock (lix).

When discussing Jack Davis's play No Sugar Wendy again elaborates on the significance of the lived experience in the process of writing;

"No Sugar is the story of an Aboriginal family being moved. It was the true story of his family." Blacklock (xix)

Enoch tries to distinguish the different types of biographical writing at work in these processes. He proposes that there is firstly a verbatim or oral type of writing process at play. These oral types of writing are influenced by traditional Aboriginal performance. Oral tradition in Aboriginal culture is explained by Enoch in Why do we applaud? (96), as a way in which individuals in a clan would explain to their community notions of culture, land and spirituality. These stories were performed through dance, song and ritual (p15). What Enoch refers to here is the individual interpretation of experience and the creation of story from this experience. Wesley offers Richard J Franklin's Conversations with the Dead as an example of a story created from personal experience. He explains,

"There is also an argument for encouraging different processes of writing because you have the oral, verbatim theatre work, that Conversations of the Dead is a little like." Enoch (ix).

Other biographical writings identified by Enoch in his interview include, Box The Pony by Leah Purcell, Nigalli by Ningalli Lawford, and White Baptist Abba Fan by Deb Cheetham.

The second type of writing process at work in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre is the biographical story put into a dramatic form. The Dreamers and No Sugar by Jack Davis are

cited as examples of this where one families experience is told in a traditional European dramatic form. Yet Enoch explains this as the way in which Aboriginal writers have engaged in recording and documenting their own historical events. He explains'

"I think that a lot of Aboriginal Theatre is also about documenting the past and documenting our history, to counter balance the absence of it out there in the public sphere." Enoch (xi)

This recording and presentation of Aboriginal experience on stage was considered by some to be a political act. A political act in response to a perceived invisibility in Australia of an Aboriginal experience. Katherine attributes a whole new era in political theatre to Jack Davis and his play Kullark. When discussing her experience of this play Katherine reflects,

"He really introduced a whole new era in writing politically." Brisbane (x)

Both Brisbane and Enoch agree with the political origins of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. However, they also point out that the process in writing a Contemporary Aboriginal play has changed in some way. There is a perception amongst participants of a change a focus in the writing on towards the future rather than exploring the past. Wesley explains,

"Aboriginal Theatre was at the beginning about getting a big stick and about having big political comments and it was all about the anger of that. Now we are more about tempering that anger and asking, what is he future?" Enoch (xi)

Brisbane describes the play Conversations with the Dead as a change toward a different type of biographical expression. According to Brisbane, preceding work was concerned with presenting the dilemma of community on individuals.

"Most of the plays up until now have been about the community and the effects of acts on the community, on family and on ones responsibility towards community." Brisbane (xxiv)

For Brisbane, Richard Franklin's Conversations with the Dead is a play that explores the dilemma of community actions on the individual, whereas previous works explore

primarily the community/family dilemma. Bobby Merritt's The Cake Man is the story of one family and how they respond to changes in community. The First Born Trilogy by Jack Davis also explores the family/community dilemma at the center of the story, not the individual. There is a perception from Brisbane that the position of the writer in Contemporary Aboriginal playwriting has changed.

Structure

When discussing structure/form in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre it became apparent that this is where participants began to define what makes a piece of theatre 'contemporary' and 'Aboriginal'. All research participants identified elements they believed contributed to a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience. When trying to define the notion of a 'contemporary' performance, participants positioned this concept in contrast to and in relation to a 'traditional' Aboriginal performance. Common statements on structure centered firstly on defining the differences between traditional and contemporary performance and secondly on the way in which traditional performance influences a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience. Before presenting the major areas of discussion, I have briefly outlined what is meant by 'traditional' and 'contemporary' in an Australian context.

In Australian Aboriginal societies traditional culture/performance can date back 40,000 years. Traditional Aboriginal stories and performances were told through the oral cultural practices such as storytelling, song, dance, art and craft. These stories were told and retold over generations until recently when they were recorded by sound or in texts. In traditional Aboriginal societies, members of a 'clan' district would be endowed with spiritual, societal, or hunting knowledge of that area, and some of that knowledge became 'sacred knowledge' over time. Over thousands of years, these clan groups became the traditional owners or 'keepers' of these stories and traditions. The area in which the clan lived defined the content and nature of the stories being told. There are different categories of stories according to Pauline McLeod (98), an Aboriginal storyteller, who describes these as, public stories, sacred stories, sacred secret stories, men's and women's stories. In the interview with Helen McKay, McLeod explains the role of the storyteller in traditional Aboriginal Society,

Traditionally, the storyteller was born to the role. There was also the opportunity to earn their position-learning and telling stories-this was the traditional way stories were passed on". McLeod 1998.

Oral storytelling in traditional Aboriginal society took place in social and cultural rituals, and ceremonies. These rituals and ceremonies reflect the 'tree' of ritualisation proposed by Victor Turners (p11 fig 2) in Schechners book, By Means of Performance (90). Turner identifies three branches of human ritualisation in traditional societies. Traditional Australian Aboriginal culture includes these tribal branches described as social, religious, and aesthetic ritual categories. In Australia, the evolution from traditional to contemporary performance transpired with the eruption and crisis of colonial intervention.

Contemporary Aboriginal theatre performance is debated to have originated around 1968. Mary Rose Casey in From the wings to center stage A production chronology of theatre and drama texts by Indigenous Australian writers (00) proposes that the play The Cherry Pickers by Kevin Gilbert is the 'first' written Aboriginal drama text and this play is reported to have been written in 1968 (p85). There is an obvious gap between traditional stories and written dramatic texts and this gap takes the form of colonisation, which occurred here in Australia in 1788. The leap from traditional stories to dramatic texts is widely discussed in post-colonial research on and textual analysis of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. In this research, participants explore the way in which traditional material has been reintegrated into contemporary theatre performance production. This use of traditional Aboriginal materials in production requires research, consultation with, and permission from the traditional keepers of that knowledge. For more information on the use of traditional material in contemporary performance, it is best to consult Our Culture Our Future (97), a report on Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights.

The use of traditional Aboriginal material requires a connection to, or consultation with, Indigenous culture. For Enoch the same is true and he makes it clear that a Contemporary Aboriginal performance has close connections to traditional cultural practices.

"Every Aboriginal play by definition needs to have cultural material being discussed, dealt with, referred to and enacted". Enoch (xxiii)

Enoch gives an example of cultural material used in the Belvoir St production of Conversations with the Dead. Enoch discusses the use of birds to signify and support the story within an Aboriginal context, he explains,

“The crows from the writer’s country are a signifier of death and grieving, He told this fantastic story of going out into his back yard and there being over forty crows on the lawn, which freaked him out, this was how much grieve he was carrying”. Enoch (xxiii)

Other cultural material Enoch has utilised in production includes ocher, smoke, and the use of direct address to the audience. Enoch explains the practice of direct address as a form of performance that originates in traditional culture. He explains that in traditional storytelling a member can stop and address participants or just walk away from a performance mid way through only to return to complete the address some time later during the performance.

“The story telling tradition is used where the audiences are given address, and a character will step and say; now I am going to tell you a story.” Enoch (xxiii).

He compares this action to the European convention of the soliloquy,

“In a lot of non-Aboriginal plays this becomes a soliloquy. It becomes a character talking to themselves aloud.” Enoch (xxiii).

Enoch goes on to describe the effect he hopes to make on the audience by the use of traditional story telling techniques. His intention is to bring the audience closer, to create a closer connection for the audience to the story and characters. The response of the audience is often a feeling of watching a ‘lived’ experience rather than a constructed or artificial one. In the production of Stolen, Enoch employed this traditional technique of stopping and addressing the audience at the end of the show to bring the audience closer to the experience. Enoch elaborates,

“Challenging the audience not to think of themselves in the comfort of a theatre, but to imagine the world of the play and how close it is. The realness of this experience is often the first time the audience has imagined the experiences of being Aboriginal” Enoch (xxiii)

When Katharine Brisbane discusses her experience of an Aboriginal Theatre production she remarks on the use of dual realities at play on stage. Katharine refers to the use of visitation by ancestral spirits.

“The earlier plays what was interesting, certainly in Jack Davis’s plays, that in a domestic scene someone will get up and dance, or some body’s ghost will turn up in feathers and have a conversation. This was a revelation to us.” Brisbane (xiii).

Traditional Aboriginal spirituality centers on the belief of ancestral spirits who return to deliver messages in spirit, animal or human form. In No Sugar the character Uncle Worru is visited by an initiated elder, in The Cake Man Sweet William is visited by a Eurie-woman and in Conversations with the Dead the spirits of his dead clients haunts Jack. In all of these plays, a cultural tradition is being discussed, dealt with, referred to or enacted.

When it comes to the staging of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre there seems to be the experience of participants of having to conform Contemporary Aboriginal plays to Australia theatre conventions. Accommodating the needs of a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience became a condition of early plays written by Aboriginal playwrights. Early Aboriginal plays contained elements that proved to be challenging for producers, publishers, and directors alike. For example, Wendy Blacklock describes her experience of trying to produce No Sugar for a major presentation both locally and internationally. The original production was staged in Perth where the needs of the play were accommodated but when it came to touring in other major city problems arose. Blacklock reflects,

“Sometime later Andrew and I tried to sign venues for the show to go on in other cities. We looked at spaces down near the wharves in Sydney and tried to see if we could convert one of the wharves into a performance space for the show.” Blacklock (xxii)

Blacklock goes on to explain that there were too many restrictions to mount the show as it was originally written. No Sugar is a play about the removal of an Aboriginal family from their traditional and local areas. Scene one in No Sugar begins on an Aboriginal reserve, the play then shifts between this location, a town jail, a railway line, and a city area. In Act two, the play has moved to another settlement including a pine forest, the railway, and the

city location. These stage directions were intended by the writer to create the experience of relocation for the audience. An international festival then took responsibility of trying to stage the production in Canada. In Vancouver, they tried to solve the production problems of No Sugar by staging it in a basketball court filled with sand. On its return to Australia, it was then mounted at the Fitzroy Town Hall in Melbourne where the audiences were moved up and down stairs to create the experience of promenade. However, the play we read today is not the play as it was originally written. Originally written as a promenade play its publication saw this aspect removed to accommodate it to Australian theatre conditions. Published as four acts the setting of No Sugar is described as an open stage divided into two localities (p14). Brisbane comments on her regret of the use of conventional staging in publication,

“When we came to publish it we divided it into four acts for the four places, so we actually interfered with the shape of it a bit. It made it easier to read and understand” Brisbane (xx)

However, Brisbane later acknowledges that this process in publishing is not necessarily about wanting to make it easier for audiences but more about negotiating traditional theatrical conventions. The last paragraph of Brisbane’s interview raises the specter of the conventional and traditional nature of Australian Theatre. Her concerns center on the likelihood of main staging contemporary performances outside of our current institutionalized theatre context. Having experienced the difficulties of presenting Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre to a wider Australian audience, Brisbane reflects on why change in Australia theatre is problematic.

“Theatres used to burn down in the olden days every ten years or so, but nowadays they are built from concrete and so we are stuck with them forever. It is the antithesis to a stimulating theatre.” Brisbane (xli)

SUMMARY

In discussion, I would firstly like to briefly summarise the major findings of this paper and to secondly discuss some of the implications for research on Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre.

At the forefront of cultural, social and political change Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre appeared on the horizon of Australian Theatre in 1968, just one year after the Australian government awarded citizenship rights for Aboriginal Australians. Historically Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre was a catalyst for cultural, political and social change in Australia, challenging existing assumptions of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture, politics and theatre. Negotiating change became a consequence of a creating and developing this new theatre experience in Australia. Contact with a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience created a space where both intercultural and intersubjective experiences take place. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre performance practitioners are required to negotiate cultural and social differences as well as allowing differences in artistic process to develop.

Artistic process is a very subjective experience and as such, it is difficult to sometimes generate claims in this area. However there are common areas of experience from participants that emerged in this research. Firstly, there is a perceived difference in the process of acting between Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal actors. The process of character and story development in the rehearsal process for an Aboriginal actor can be marked by an unusually close connection to history or experience of the story and or characters being explored. This occurs in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal plays that contain Aboriginal characters or themes. What this means is that in rehearsal consideration must be given to the actors negotiation of this process. At the end of the day, a non-Aboriginal actor can leave a rehearsal room and walk away from a constructed character or story. But an Aboriginal actor cannot. An Aboriginal actor firstly cannot walk away from his or her Aboriginality and secondly cannot walk away from that experience both historically and presently. This doesn't allow the Aboriginal actor to 'escape' to either a different character or story in rehearsal. Instead, they are often required to explore their own lived experience or explore a one closely connected to their own history. Often this close association to character and story leads to a representational presentation. The actor creates a representation of a character rather than transforming into a character. A consequence perhaps of the writer's process where stories and characters are created from lived personal experiences. Historically Aboriginal plays have been written to document and record a lived history and this was in response to the invisibility of Aboriginal people in Australian society. Through theatre, Aboriginal writers have brought to life their experiences and history in stories and true to life characters.

One of the most significant findings from these interviews is the proposition that a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience by definition needs to have cultural material being discussed, dealt with, referred to, or enacted in some way in both the rehearsal and writing process and in production. It requires that someone in the rehearsal process and in production have a close connection or knowledge of cultural material being discussed, dealt with, or referred to. For this reason the necessity for an Aboriginal dramaturge to be present in the rehearsal process can be argued where 'Aboriginality' is being discussed. This would apply to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal plays and productions because as explained earlier traditional Aboriginal culture is area or site specific and not all actors, writers, producers and publishers will have access to all Aboriginal culture. In The Parsons Lectures (2002) Steven Page, Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre, in his lecture 'Kinship and Creativity' discusses his experience of negotiating relationships with traditional forms of culture. Essentially this element is important in the staging of a Contemporary Aboriginal performance. Page elaborates,

"The idea of linking urban Aboriginal experiences with traditional culture was at the heart of the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre." Page (p115)

His lecture goes on to discuss the history of these collaborations with tradition owners and their stories. If Aboriginal performance practitioners engaged in developing Contemporary work need to negotiate cultural material then so too do non-Aboriginal theatre practitioners in consideration of this process.

Staging a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience both locally and internationally has been problematic for conventional theatre's structures. This has been largely due to the fixidity and inflexible nature of mainstream theatres and companies. When mounting main stage productions accommodating the needs of this new Australian theatre movement has been challenging. Often the concessions made have come more from Aboriginal writers and directors than from mainstream non-Aboriginal companies, theatres, publishers, and production companies. Main staging Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience is of great importance for a number of reasons. Primarily, it is often the only context in which mainstream Australian audiences can get close to an Aboriginal experience. Secondly, this experience challenges social, cultural, and performative notions for both Aboriginal and

non-Aboriginal audiences and lastly mainstaging creates the opportunity to engage in a dialogue on Aboriginality.

DISCUSSION

What this research project set out to do was to explore what new knowledge could be generated in the area of artistic practice in Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. To do this it had to be acknowledged that so far there has been little discussion on the art-making process when researching Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. It is not the intention of this paper to discredit previous research only to highlight the lack of discussion on artistic process. Artistic process is a very subjective experience and as such, it became apparent that in order to record subjective experiences a qualitative research methodology needed to be employed. Through the course of interviewing research participants, I became aware of the closeness of this type of research to the traditional Aboriginal process of passing on knowledge through an oral history. Interviewing associated theatre performance practitioners allowed for a close historical connection to a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience.

The outcomes of this research have both reinforced Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre as a social and cultural phenomenon as well as acknowledge its place as a new movement in Australian Theatre. In Ritual to Theatre (82) Turner describes all performance as the enactment of social drama. He explains this as a process of four developments. Social drama begins with a breach or *crisis*, followed by *redress* then *reconciliation* and finally the consensual recognition of *separateness* (p193). Contemporary Aboriginal culture began with the *crisis* of colonisation in Australia and the *breach* of traditional societies, ceremonies and rituals. This crisis was dealt with by redress with the 1967 referendum and one year later with the first Contemporary Aboriginal play written to readdress this breach and crisis. The move to *reconciliation* began with main staging Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre productions, which brings us the point of accepting difference and separateness. The acknowledgment of *separateness* allows for the acceptance of different processes at work in acting, writing, producing, and publishing. That is what I believe this research project accomplished the acknowledgment of specific needs in the artistic processes of a Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre experience.

In performance studies discovering what is going on in a subject, area is a challenging task, but not an impossible one. It can be compared to asking the question, what came first the

chicken or the egg? What I mean by this is that most research has dealt with the social and cultural constructs and their impact on the development of Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre. However, the question of creating culture from the imagination of the individual has not been explored. Acknowledging individual practice sheds light of how culture is constructed.

Lastly, I would like to come back to training and education of Aboriginal actors, writers, producers, and publishers. As mentioned earlier I find this area in need of more understanding and exploration. Primarily I wanted to do this project because as an educator of theatre in an Aboriginal college, and member of an Aboriginal theatre family I needed to know more about what, how and to whom Contemporary Aboriginal Theatre should be taught to in Australia. I could not find this information in a book and so I set out to collect information from people who have had both experience and contact with the subject. Exploring artistic practice through a subjective experience has been enlightening and confirming of a process at work for Aboriginal actors and writers, which acts on the processes of non-Aboriginal theatre performance practitioners. The overall consideration for working with Aboriginal themes or contact in a play is respect. Respect for difference in processes at work, respect for differences in training and experience, respect for the social and cultural exchange taking place and lastly acknowledgment of these processes.

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TRANSCRIPTS

Wendy Blacklock/ Producer.

- i. I started my career as a performer. In the days when I was training, you went overseas to England to learn your trade. I left as soon as I finished drama school here in Australia and did some work at the Independent Theatre and amateur theatre in Kallara called the Kuring-gai Drama Guild, which later became Marion Street Theater.
- ii. I went to England, I worked in weekly repertory, and that was considered very good training in those days because you were doing a play a week. You would be rehearsing one in the morning whilst you were performing another one at night. In the afternoons, you would be learning your lines.
- iii. So, it was very full on, but it was a very good training ground. I then came back to Australia. In those days the theatres, the touring theatres, were JC Williamson's and if you got into those tours you were very lucky. One show I did for JC Williamson's took eighteen months to get around Australia and New Zealand. We did six months in Melbourne doing eight shows a week, six months in Sydney doing eight shows a week and then went to Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane, and then over to New Zealand. So you see that it was very long runs. They would move one play on and then the next one of their shows would follow.
- iv. But they were all copies of what was currently successful in the West End or on Broadway, usually with important stars, and the Australians would get the smaller parts. But I was lucky enough because I was a comedian. I got into the Phillip Street Reviews. I worked with people like Gordon Shatter, Reg Livermore and Barry Humphries. They were all working in these reviews and they were all very successful but we would still keep up our day jobs. Our day jobs were on radio and you would do an enormous amount of radio work, this was before television came in.
- v. I went back to England after some years, worked in television in London, and did quite a lot of variety work.

- vi. I had a broad background but there was very little Australian work. There were tiny pockets of Australian Theatre starting, there were some Australian writers, not a lot, and well you were lucky if you got a production. I remember Summer of the Seventeenth Doll was around at that time. Ray Lawler wrote it and one of my friends was in it, playing 'Bubba'. On my second trip back to England I went via New York where they were just finishing their run in New York.
- vii. This was really the first time that I had any connection at all with an Australian story. It was a great success in London and this was the beginnings of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. It had been decided that Australia should have its own theatrical scene, and not just have these imported shows from overseas. We were starting to think about how we would have an Opera Company and a Ballet Company, and possibly a theatrical touring company.
- viii. Anyway, I worked for many many years in the theatre and in television. I started to be involved in some early Australian work, in the early days of the Old Tote and The Jane Street Theatre; I was in the Sydney production of Dons Party by David Williamson. I was in a Tom Keneally play, a Dorothy Hewitt musical, and things like this. So, I started to have some exposure to Australian work. But after some years on television on a soap and working the clubs for another eighteen months with the character from the show, I was Mummy in Number Ninety Six. With Mike Dawsey who played Daddy, we worked the club scene as a double act and this was a lucrative way of making money.
- ix. But by this time I had really done everything I really wanted to do. What I really was interested in was to be a producer, to work on the other side of the business. So I walked in off the street to the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and asked them if I could work for nothing and would they teach me to do contracts and budgets. I did this for five months but I never really got to learn much about contracts and budgets because I was too busy making decisions about whether they should do this show or whether they should do that show. I had problems with their choice of work. After five months, I had to leave because I had two children to look after and I was still working for nothing.
- x. But they had got so used to me being around that they offered me a job. John Frost the coordinator of the Entrepreneurial department was leaving and they asked me to take

- over his position. The trust had a subsidy from the Arts Council to do Australian work, but the Australia Council was not really pleased with the Australian work they were doing. I found a lot of people came to me because I was a performer, to tell me about their shows. These were Australian performers with small shows that needed help touring or just getting their show on. Before very long the board of the ETT set me up in my own department to do Australian work.
- xi. It was called The Australian Content Department. I had one assistant and I was to look at what work there was in Australia and what might be toured. The Entrepreneurial Department was usually bringing the very big shows to Australia like the Peaking Opera, Orchestras and so on. What was missing in Australia was the lack of concentration on emerging Australian work, the new work, the independent artists and small theatre companies.
 - xii. One of the first people I ever remember coming to see me was Brian Syron who came with Robert Merrit. They wanted to do another production of The Cake Man. They would come and sit in my office. I hadn't seen the original production of the show it had been on at the Black Theatre in Redfern. I hadn't seen it, but they were very persistent, well Brian was extremely persistent. And he would say, "Well you should help us Wendy, you should help us" I wasn't sure how I was to go about this.
 - xiii. Because at that particular time in the eighties, there was pockets of emerging work around the country but they weren't actually linked. Very rarely did they manage to get out of their own state so there was no infrastructure at this time for touring this work. I found that there were people in Western Australia who were doing wonderful work who had no idea of what other companies were doing in say Tasmania and visa versa.
 - xiv. So, Brian and Robert wanted to remount the Cake Man. At the time the Trust was negotiating with a world festival in Denver Colorado, to put on an Australian work and I was asked to manage this. I looked at the budgets for the work they were negotiating with and I thought it was very expensive. I wrote to the gentleman who was running the festival and I said I felt the work was too expensive to bring over to the festival, and I suggested he take on an Aboriginal show and that I had one called, The Cake Man. He wrote back and said he would take it. Well no one was more surprised than I was.

- xv. We decided we should do a few shows here in Sydney before we toured overseas. We decided on the old Parade Theatre on the NIDA grounds. It was just three performances but it was extremely successful. Everybody came, local Indigenous people, politicians, and people interested in Indigenous affairs. So, it got a great send off and went overseas and I thought well I should take it to some other places. I took it to Melbourne and Queensland. I was able to write to the minister for Aboriginal Affairs and ask them for money to do this. And they did, mainly because I don't think people used to write to them for money in those days, I am sure that is all changed now.
- xvi. Because of this plays success, I thought well there probably is some Aboriginal Theatre in other places in Australia. I heard about a director called Andrew Ross who was directing works by Jack Davis and I rang Andrew and asked about the play he was working on and it was called The Dreamers. I asked Andrew and he said the script wasn't ready yet and he sent me the script of another play called Kullark. It was a theatre in education show. Andrew had a history in theatre in education. He was working for the Western Australian state theatre company and he met Jack Davis and asked him to write a play. And Jack said, "Well it just so happens that I have one in my bottom draw". That's how they started their relationship.
- xvii. Kullark had worked very well and they were now working on The Dreamers, which was the second part of what was finally to become a trilogy. The ETT sent people to look at it in Perth and they said it was wonderful and we must tour it. The Dreamers did a seventeen-week tour around Australia. That was a really amazing tour because to my knowledge an Aboriginal play had never been toured before that and certainly not for seventeen weeks. There was Ernie Dingo, John Moore, Kelton Pell and Lynette Narkle was in it, it was a very good cast.
- xviii. It was interesting because we put it into the Ensemble Theatre season at the Playhouse. I watched it at the Opera House with the children, because they had school shows and I was amazed that the young people all knew where the humor was and they laughed. The original production of The Dreamers was performed almost in a type of Pigeon English. The young people understood it and laughed but the adults at night didn't laugh because they didn't know they were allowed to. They didn't want to appear to be laughing in the

- wrong places. They were much more reserved about it. Because they had never seen a story about an Aboriginal family.
- xix. The outcome of all of this was that Andrew said that we had to commission Jack's next show which was actually part one of the trilogy, No Sugar. No Sugar is the story of an Aboriginal family being moved. It was the true story of his family.
- xx. When I went to Perth Andrew took me on a journey to show me where and how far they had been moved. And he told me I had to find the money to commission this. And I did, I got enough money to work on it for six months part time and I also brought them a typewriter. And I asked Jack that if he was going to write this story would he also write me a children's story at the same time. And he did, he wrote The Honey Spot at the same time. So he delivered No Sugar and Honey Spot.
- xxi. No Sugar went on at the Perth Festival with the State Theatre. I went across to see it in February and it was very very hot. It was on in a funny old building and quite stifling, a promenade play with sand everywhere and a lot of standing around watching. But it was a wonderful, wonderful show.
- xxii. Sometime later Andrew and I tried to sign venues for the show to go on in other cities. We looked at spaces down near the wharves in Sydney and tried to see if we could convert one of the wharves in a performing space for the show. But there was too many building restrictions, fire regulations and so forth that we despaired of ever being able to tour this show.
- xxiii. At this time, another world theatre director was visiting Australia and they always came to the ETT because the Trust had the reputation of being the major organisation for new Australian work. And she was in charge of a World Theatre Festival in Vancouver in 1986. So she came in 1984 and was looking for Australian work. She went to Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne but she never got to Perth. Maybe she came in January 1985, she came here and said, "I can't see anything that is uniquely Australian and I need something that represents Australian Theatre". I said that she should go to Perth and see No Sugar.

- xxiv. I give her due credit, she changed all her travel plans and flew back across the country and saw it. She said, "That's what I want". But I had to find the money for airfares, pre production and freight costs. She was to find a venue to promenade and to construct the set.
- xxv. I had to raise one hundred thousand dollars in one year. Luckily, there was an Australian Pavilion in Vancouver for an Australian Expo at the same time. It was difficult to convince them about the show because they thought it was a Corroboree. They said why was a Corroboree representing Australian Theatre?
- xxvi. They didn't realize the play was a touching, humorous, wonderful true life story that was cleverly staged. It was different; you had to follow the action and the story of the play. It was also a lovely love story. Jack was in it and Jack's sister, Dotty. Anyway, in the end I got the money and set off.
- xxvii. Andrew rehearsed in Perth and we flew everyone to Sydney and were to put them up overnight and then fly out to Vancouver. We had a baby, because Jeddah Cole was in the show, we had Dotty's sister and grandmother. And some had never left Perth; Dotty had never flown in an airplane. So it was a huge journey for everyone.
- xxviii. It was a great success because it was absolutely unlike anything else. There was the Beijing Peoples Theatre, the Heidelberg State Theatre, and the Ballet from where ever. They were enormous prestigious companies and the cast of No Sugar were having the best time. The Canadians did us proud. They had covered a basket ball/ ice skating rink with sand, and they had a film designer who had found all the things we sent in pictures. But because he was a film designer, he had dressed everything as though it was a film set. We always laughed at this. There was enormous detail in the set, little bottles and stuff.
- xxix. What was interesting was that the cast went to visit the settlements, to visit the Indigenous Canadian people. The Canadians would say to them that Australia must be a wonderful country to be able to present your stories. This of course was a joke.
- xxx. This was the Beginning of Aboriginal Theatre. The fact that Jack was in it and all the people came from Western Australia, well they were like family. This united them all.

- They looked up to Jack and were related to each other or to Jack this created a very strong bond and strong kinship. This I believe is why the shows worked so well. They were all there for each other and that telling the story was the most important thing.
- xxxii. This is what I discovered previously after an American came out here to Australia to program a subscription series in New Haven. He had decided that he wanted to see Tom Keneally's, Bullies House. He wanted to cast the white roles with Americans and the Aboriginal roles with Aboriginal Australians. Once again, he came to the trust for assistance and I was given the job to help him. By then I had some idea about who was available and suitable for the roles. I suggested various people, but it became difficult because the actors were spread out across the country.
- xxxiii. He left and left the casting to me. I cast Ernie Dingo in the lead; I cast Tommie Lewis in the second lead. Justine Saunders was in it, Richard Walley played the Didgeridoo and Paul Prior who at that time was living in Albury. They all came from different places except for Richard and Ernie who both came from Western Australia. But Tommie wasn't happy because he just starred in the film, The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith and he thought that he should be playing the lead. He wasn't happy that Ernie was playing the lead. I realized then that it was difficult putting people together from different communities into a show. They traveled unaccompanied to America and I think ultimately that this was a big ask. I learnt a lot from that experience.
- xxxiiii. Some years later Andrew Ross asked me if I would commission the third work of the trilogy and that was, Burrigin. He did this but it was never that successful. Partly because Andrew had left Western Australia and wasn't available to assist in the dramaturgy of the play and also the play was a very sad and depressing play. It didn't have the warmth and humor of the previous two.
- xxxv. In 1988, Roger Hodgman at the Melbourne Theatre Company decided he would like to do the trilogy. It was 1988 and the Australian Bicentennial year. No Sugar had also been invited to London to perform at the Riverside Theatre. Because Roger was mounting the trilogy I was able to take the No Sugar section and take it to London. Once again, I had a company of twenty-two traveling to the other side of the world.

- xxxv. But what it proved, and I should have mentioned this earlier, was that when No Sugar went to the World Theatre Festival at Expo 86 in Vancouver, it received a lot of publicity. A Western Australian journalist traveled with the company because she was so proud of the work and she had written back home articles of the tour.
- xxxvi. As part of the deal I agreed to put on a season in Melbourne on its return. I had the Handspan Theatre Company to help me because I only had one assistant at the time. They organized a season at the Fitzroy Town Hall and the hall had an upstairs and a down stairs. So we were able to promenade both up and down the stairs. But because it received so much publicity overseas, everybody wanted to come and see it. It's that old thing, when you are successful overseas then it must be good. Suddenly there was an audience for Aboriginal work.
- xxxvii. Melbourne is more interested in the theatre of issues and challenges. More so than Sydney so I think that they were generally interested in it. And even though, The Dreamers had been in Melbourne some years before, not many people had seen it. But now it had represented Australia along side all these famous companies and they were curious. Of course, the word spread like wild fire and the show did really well.
- xxxviii. There is no use putting on the best show in the world if you haven't got the audience for it. We wanted to prove to all those people who previously wouldn't support the show that they were wrong.
- xxxix. I remember stories like arriving in LA and we didn't have our visas. They would not let us even go outside for a cigarette. They put us under police guard. Richard Walley had traveled a great deal, he always traveled with his Didgeridoo because he played with orchestras all over the world, and well he just walked through. But the others all looked a bit tentative with their Didgeridoos and customs stopped them and confiscated them. They thought they were guided missiles. I am still trying to get the didgeridoos back.
- xl. Next time I wrote a letter to inform them that the didgeridoos were a sacred instrument and not threatening. They were exiting times. But when you think about up-ending people and moving them to the other side of the world, well there were always little problems.

- xli. Some years later Neil Arnfield put on a Sydney production of No Sugar at Belvoir Street Theatre. It wasn't a promenade piece but it was a very good production. So Sydney did get to see it.

- xlii. We toured Honey Spot in many countries across the world. This was a period of time that was very special because you were doing something that hadn't been done before so it was very exiting. Jack was very well respected and spoke very sensitively about Aboriginal issues. Having been an activist in his earlier life, he felt that he could tell the stories better through performance. He did that. It made more of an impact. It was interesting to watch the audience through this time.

- xliii. Later Andrew Ross worked with Jimmy Chi in Broome on Bran Nue Dae. So of course he rang me up and wanted to get it over to the East. So I got it into Brisbane and the Sydney Festival. The show started out at Parrammatta and moved into the Seymour Center in Sydney. That was great fun because the audience responded to the music and the story and it wasn't too challenging for them. They could have a good laugh and it was a fun musical. Andrew went on to direct Corrugation Road by Jimmy Chi.

- xliv. I stopped presenting Aboriginal work around this time because I felt that there was enough interest from other companies to present Indigenous work. I felt that really it was time that Aboriginal people had their own directors and producers. There had been white directors, producers and lighting designers until now.

- xlv. Some years later, I saw a show at the Metro theatre. It is only an eighty or ninety seater. There I saw Wesley Enoch's and Deborah Mailman's Seven Stages of Grieving. I had been watching Deborah Mailman for a number of years. I had seen her in shows at the La Boit in Queensland, and there was a school show that they wanted to tour, but it wasn't quite right, I didn't know where to place it, but I remembered how good she was. So I was interested in seeing this Seven Stages of Grieving. The outcome of that was that we helped them come to a festival in Sydney and a festival in Melbourne and then we set them off around the country on the biggest tour we have ever done.

- xlvi. We went right across the top of Australia, right down through Western Australia to Perth, across from Perth to Tasmania, then a tour of Tasmania, and then we brought them up to Canberra. This was during the Australian Theatre festival. This was like the beginning of the Australian arts market and there were people there from overseas. The outcome of this was that we got to take Deborah to London and then to Zurich.
- xlvii. After that tour, Rhoda Roberts asked me if I would produce the solo women's program at the Festival of the Dreaming. This was a Sydney Olympic Games arts event. Rhoda said that she had chosen a New Zealand show, an American show and Nigali Lawford's one-woman show. She said that there were two new shows that she wanted me to produce from scratch and a few matinees of Deb Mailman in Seven Stages of Grieving. These shows were to be performed in the Playhouse at the Sydney Opera House.
- xlviii. So, we produced Box the Pony by Leah Purcell and White Baptist Abba Fan by Deb Cheetham from scratch. The outcome of that of course was that they became quite famous. Deb went on to Manchester and then to Zurich. We took Leah to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. In the year of federation, there was a federation celebration in London called Heads Up. We took the two of them to that at the Barbican.
- xlix. It's amazing that if the pieces are timely, and special then they have legs, people are interested in seeing them. Like all new work you sort of build on a few performances, you start off with flaws and problems. It can't suddenly be created. If you give it time, rehearsal periods and creative development then you give it enough love and attention and it is amazing how far it can travel.
1. I try to stay away from Aboriginal Theatre now to give people the opportunity to take over their own companies as Wesley has so successfully done with Kooemba Jjarra and now with Ilbijiri. Like David Millroy's work with Yirri Yarkin they have both made it their own.
 - li. What was so powerful in the beginning was that I was in a position to give people a voice to say the things that they have never been able to say. That makes you feel very proud, not that you think of it at the time, but you think of it afterwards, you feel proud that our have been able to do something. It isn't that I just feel like this with Aboriginal work,

- because I have felt this with a lot of so called multicultural work. Where there have been shows that I felt were really important and gave a different aspect to Australian life. We weren't seeing them and it was important for somebody be able to get them out and to find an audience for them.
- lii. What I did feel after a while was that I had seen the stories and the stories were being repeated and I wanted to see different stories. I have always disliked intensely white people writing about Aboriginal issues. And I don't know why because I shouldn't be like that but I have always felt that it was superficial, that it didn't have heart. No matter how carefully they tried to translate things that were important, it lacked the depth. Writers would send me stories about Aboriginal themes and I would say, no I don't like it. But then I got really tired of seeing the same stories and I felt that they were just copying what had come before. So I thought that we have to wait, we had to wait to see something new, something different, and I think in a way I am still waiting.
- liii. I go to a lot of work and I feel that it is directed by white directors and they are almost making it palatable for their audiences. They are making it so that the white people will laugh, the white people will find the humor in it, and it misses the depth. I mean Aboriginal humor is wonderful, I love it; having been a comedian I love people with a sense of humor. I love it that they have a wonderful laugh, that they have this wonderful way of laughing at things. But there are also a lot of other things that need to be presented and are sometimes glossed over because they are too violent, too brutal or too aggressive.
- liv. In the last fortnight, I have seen three Aboriginal pieces or either about Aboriginal issues. Conversations with the Dead by Richard J Franklin, Yarning Up in Brisbane and Wonderlands by Kath Thompson. Conversations with Dead is the most interesting, compelling and horrific. One would like to tour that but sometimes audiences can't take anymore. They want to go to the theatre to be entertained, to laugh; there are too many problems in the world.
- lv. It is all a matter of timing. But the timing works itself out you just have to be ready for it. I think having the first Olympic Arts Festival made a big difference, to have an entirely Indigenous Arts Festival. I think that was terrific. I saw Rhoda Roberts at this big awards dinner, The Australian Business Arts Foundation (ABAF) dinner, and she was looking

- after these wonderful dances, they were ex-Bangarra dancers. It was wonderful to see them performing there along with all this other work like Sondheim, Opera and acrobats. I suppose you have to distance yourself before you can see what's growing and what's happening. I think that I really didn't understand in the early days what I was doing, it just seemed important to do it. After a time you look back and you see the people you gave a start to and that is tremendous.
- lvi. I think Australian Theatre is in a flat period at the moment and that I think affects Aboriginal Theatre. There is insufficient money for training. I mean I should have some one in here. I think there should be someone here in at Performing Lines because we are touring all the time and traveling overseas all the time. The ATSIC Arts Board should place someone in here so they could be learning about touring. When they are ready and when the right show comes along then they can take the initiative and tour that work.
- lvii. I believe that an Aboriginal director is the best person to direct an Aboriginal work. But there are so few Aboriginal directors, that I feel that they are overloaded, over extended and over committed. If we could train more then they could have more opportunities. I don't think there is a problem with being placed within white organisations if that organisation is doing the work that they could learn from. I would be happy to have somebody in here as I would for any specialised art form that needed to learn the nuts and bolts of getting around Australia.
- lviii. When Justine Saunders started, she says she was treated like the bare breasted native girl. It has taken her a long time to gain the respect and knowledge and she has that now. I remember Brian Syron saying to me when they asked him to do some publicity for the Cake Man, he said we don't want our photos taken half naked holding a spear. And that is what people did wanted in those days. People did want someone standing on one leg and holding a spear.
- lix. I think it also important to also encourage writers because I thought it wonderful to see Richard Franklins play. He had written what had come from his experience, he had written down what he had gone through. As horrifying as it was, it was very powerful. You see someone had rung us just a matter of weeks before and said that they were told to ring Performing Lines because Richard really wanted to tour his music show through

the communities in the Northern Territory and they didn't know how to do it. They were wondering if I could help them. We are looking into the possibilities of touring in communities. We actually have another show that we toured, Pinjarra Pinjarra with Kelton Pell, a Western Australian show. We toured that up from Tandanya in Adelaide into the Northern Territory communities and that was very very hard.

- ix. I think that it is hard; I mean it is hard for any performer to maintain a career in the performing arts, but I often wonder about people I have known and how they are going. There seems to be very few that are still going. Deb Mailman when she won that award said that there are very few of us that have continuity of work and are known. I think it is wonderful that they cast Deb in that show because she is a very good role model and a very good actress. But there aren't many that have continued or who are continually supported by the arts.

Katharine Brisbane/ Publisher, Currency Press.

- i. My first connections with black theatre was meeting Kevin Gilbert and Brian Syron bringing his play The Cherry Pickers, or one act of it, to the Muse Playhouse which was a funny little place at the back of the home of Justice McGrath and his wife. They were doing workshops and developing stuff, and we had a reading of it. The opening scene was set under the cherry tree with a big fat woman sitting on top of a tub, and the tub is jumping up and down. So, you realize that there is a child underneath who is being punished. There was a great deal of that practical joke type humor in the play and I realized for the first time I was seeing Aboriginals as they talk to each other. This was different to the way they talk to white people and I felt privileged to enter into that society that was a memorable moment for me.
- ii. The same kind of question of allowing us in came when I saw a Corroboree performed as a theatrical performance at Parkerville auditorium outside Perth in 1971. That was the beginnings for me.
- iii. I also got to know Brian Syron quite well. I was then reviewing for the Australian, and when he came back, I got to know him. Also he was the inspirer and founder of the Playwrights Conference and we worked together on that in the seventies. It was not until I got to know him quite well that he came out and admitted to me that he was Aboriginal. Once he had done that he became quite involved in civil rights and creative expression. He became a very important figure.
- iv. Previously he had had a pretty unhappy time after a big success of play called Fortune in Men's Eyes in 1968. The Old Tote theatre that just had money to become the first state subsidized theatre company in Sydney then took him up. He was given all sorts of improbable plays to direct. Things like a Shakespeare and I realized with his background that he would have no possibility of understanding how to do this. I mean he was trained; he trained first at the Ensemble and then in New York but very much in the Strasburg method of realism. I do not think he had any training in the presentational style that Shakespeare was, at all. He suffered terribly for that type of mismanagement. I mean he eventually recovered from that with a production of the Story of Yours, a very violent realist piece, an American play, which he did very well.

- v. However, after that he became a teacher and spent most of his energy's on that. He became very influential on that new style of theatre, transformational exercises and things. That fragmentary, socialist and socially orientated theatre that came out of America in the late sixties. He really brought that to Australia. He was quite influential.
- vi. The next connection was with Bobby Merritt and The Cake Man in 1974 at the second Playwrights Conference in Newcastle. I got to know Jim McNeal whilst he was working in Bathurst Jail; he helped Bobby to write that play through the education officer. He sent me a copy of the play to Newcastle. I remember there were three overseas visitors. Lloyd Richards who was a black American and head of the American Playwrights Conference and he was visiting. I gave it to him to read. I also gave it to others who read scripts for a living; they were very impressed with it. They were more impressed that I was because I did not understand the dialect too well. I thought it was American, or derived from American television. But then Malcolm Vaughn, an actor, organized a play reading with Bob Mazza and Justine Saunders and as soon as I heard them read it I realized how wrong I had been.
- vii. They did it first at the Black Theatre in Redfern and then it was taken up. Brian was very good in that, they all were. It was the first play that had a professional production and looked like it might go into the mainstream, which was very good.
- viii. I haven't mentioned Basically Black, which was done at the Nimrod. It was pretty rough and crude but it was good to see them having a go it was a very political time, and it was a satire. It was the politics of the McMahon period; everyone was throwing off at the government in the most scurrilous manner. Basically Black was part of that and it was a great success. It gave Bob Mazza and his troupe the courage to keep going and that was important. He set up a radio program that he worked on for a while.
- ix. The next person was Jack Davis. I saw his first play Kullark, which was really a theatre in education play and I went to talk to him afterwards to try to persuade him to let me to publish it, it was a good little piece. He was very suspicious because I think I was white. He said no, that there was an Aboriginal publishing company who would do it. However

- we did get hold of it eventually and after a while we came to trust each other. After that he let us do what ever we liked with his plays.
- x. He really introduced a whole new era in writing politically. I have been quoting this for quite some time, and I don't know where I got it from, to write is a political act. He wrote this somewhere or told me and I thought this is absolutely true; this is what the Black Theatre is about. Somebody who really needed to say something and has found the theatre as a platform to use for the purpose. This is necessary theatre, which we call it.
 - xi. So his plays were very important and are still good plays. Because of his writing a lot of young people began to writ to. We had a lot of polemical plays, most of them had no lasting influence, but they crated a climate that was important.
 - xii. As part of all that was the actors. Because until you had actors who could project the meaning of the play beyond the footlights, the writers influence was limited. It wasn't until the late eighties that Black actors started to be trained at places like NIDA and now they are up there with the best of them. It has been important to watch that development.
 - xiii. Dance is very important too. Dance is a more natural form of expression than words for Aboriginal culture. The earlier plays what was interesting, certainly in some of Jack Davis's plays that in a domestic scene someone will get up and dance, or somebody's ghost will turn up in feathers and have a conversation. That was a revelation to us. I began to understand through Jack's plays the idea of a dual reality. That they live in that. I found that interesting.
 - xiv. The last scene in the Cake Man that Brian use to deliver so well, about the Eurie woman visiting the man at his camp at Killarah station. He ends up saying, we have two dualities and I have lost one and I want it back. I think that there was a real message for me about what it was to be an Aboriginal.
 - xv. I suppose what I know about Aborigines is largely been learnt through the theatre. This is probably true of a lot of people. I have made some good friends with actors because we had something in common to talk about and they taught me a lot.

- xvi. The philosophy of Currency Press has always been to present aspects of Australian society in theatre to understand ourselves. This was a new aspect of ourselves that was not recorded before, so I thought it was important to publish these stories. It began with the Cake Man, which I thought was really good. We haven't published every black play by any means, but if they are good and of interest.
- xvii. Our basic income comes from the study of drama and anything that gives an insight or argues on issues of social insight, has a place in the curriculum. Finally our decision is, can we find a market for this that will cover the printing costs? The black plays have done quite well from that point of view. I hope they have done some good in the classroom, which I think they have.
- xviii. In the process of publishing plays we talk to authors about the structure of the play whilst they are writing it. Before publishing a play we discuss things if we think are not quite right, we ask them to look at it, but they have the last word of course. But mostly the editing is done in the theatre. We don't publish plays that haven't had a production. In the rehearsal period most things are ironed out. But when the author says that they have gone as far as they can go, that's it as far as we are concerned.
- xix. We don't change any of dialogue but we do often change the descriptions. We have a house style for stage directions that is fairly standard. This is less important today; I mean there was a time endless stage directions were put in because the author didn't trust the actors or the director. They wanted them to know exactly what they were supposed to do. It isn't so necessary now. We don't have the well structured three act plays any more; it is all so much more fluid.
- xx. I have had a few fights with authors about stage directions. One of the things, which I am sorry about now with one of Jack's play, was with No Sugar. It was a walkabout play in its original form. It was performed I think first of all in Melbourne in a big town hall and you went from place to place for each scene. The audience did the walking. When we came to publish it we divided it into four acts for the four places, so we did actually interfere with the shape of it a bit. It made it easier to read and to understand.

- xxi. I once had a conversation with Bob Adamson the poet who was talking about Kevin Gilbert. How they had both had a book of poetry published at the same time by the same publisher and they had a joint launch. After the event he and Kevin went for a walk by a lake on a wharf and they were talking about poetry. Kevin was furious about his book and threw it in the water; he said that they had destroyed it. The reason was that they had put the correct punctuation into the poems, which is something an editor would automatically do. We do it because some of our playwrights are not all that well educated. But it really made me stop and think about the appearance on the page of things and how it affects ones thinking about publication.
- xxii. I know that anthropologists had some trouble with this in the early days. They would take a story and print it in what we would regard as a correct way. So I have been pretty careful about this. We take it straight from the script from the page. There are other ways of spelling some words in translation, but all we do is make hem consistent. We put a glossary in the back. Since we published some of these terms there now are a standard dictionary published. We just did it the way Jack wanted the words to be done.
- xxiii. His later plays became very political about history and bringing out past injustices and that sort of thing.
- xxiv. I was interested in seeing Conversations with the Dead because it takes it into a new form, the state of mind of the individual. Most of the plays up until now have been about the community and the effects of acts on the community on family and ones responsibility to community. This one is the effect of the community on an individual. So I am interested in where we go from here.
- xxv. On the whole Australian white drama is about the individual, the dilemma of the individual in the community. Up until now the Black theatre has been different to that. It is an interesting dilemma that is becoming apparent now, for creative artists who want to go their own way. Stephen Page informs us that Meryl Tankard doesn't have to get permission from Hans Christian Anderson's estate in order to do an interpretation of one of his stories. Stephen wanted to have Aboriginal motifs in his work, but he is representing traditional Aboriginal ideas and not stories. He had to consult community on that. The problem of the creative individual is something we will probably see more of.

- xxvi. Some of the plays, one I recall has a middle class character; it has a middle class character going back home to visit the family. It actually introduces the black middle class, but we haven't got very far with that theme. We are still with the stolen generation.
- xxvii. I look to our immigrants; I want them to have immigrant writers giving us a different perspective on Australian life. I have been looking for that for years. But I think the first and even the second generations are too busy coming to terms with the country to want to sit down and interpret it. What we are getting now is second and third generation Greeks and Italians writing about going back to their home country and finding it different from what they were expecting.
- xxviii. For me what makes an Aboriginal play is a play written by an Aboriginal. They are all about an Aboriginal society. I don't think that there has been an Aboriginal play written about a white society. I recall in the earlier plays that the white characters were petty culpable characters. The Keepers was one play where I felt that there were real white characters on stage.
- xxix. Aboriginal plays are looser, more like stories. Take a play like Stolen in which the actors at the end stop everything and tell their own stories. So that moving in and out of fiction is part of it, like stopping and having a dance. It tends to be a bit like having a party really. They seem to have this ability to be natural actors. Maybe because they are more outgoing or that storytelling is a big part of their lives.
- xxx. I remember Barbara Wilson who was in Sister Girl. She was terrific, she had no training or anything, and she just did it. It was just her, that's all there was to it, it was just as natural as breathing. I think this is true for a lot of the older actors who take on a job for a lark, I think that maybe we are a little more self-conscious. It really is a generous outgoing that comes across the footlights that is attractive to us because we feel included. Sally wouldn't publish Sister Girl because Barbara actually passed away during the season and so she withdrew it from publication. She never allowed the play to be performed again.

- xxxii. The practical joke style is again like a party and sometimes they don't know how to end a play so that sometimes they just sing a song at the end. But again you feel somehow you are contributing to what is happening on stage. But that is not true when you get to something like Conversations with the Dead where the central character has pretty much control of the play.
- xxxiii. I think they have a lot to contribute to our white theatre because they have a need to tell us things. I think that white theatre has become quite institutionalized. We have got these large companies and large theatres and they have to keep filling them so they are just churning them out. The organization is so large that they have to arrange everything so far ahead; it is really hard to be spontaneous. So I really look forward to seeing a black play because it really has arrived much more quickly and have something to say about what is happening now and not what the author was thinking about five years ago.
- xxxiiii. Aboriginal Dance is very interesting too. They have a similar dilemma; I mean it came out of a need to express themselves. There were the Australian white dance forms, and then the American modern Black theatre influence and it took a while to get something that was really Australian. But when they found it they found themselves being ambassadors abroad. So you have all the big pressures as well, so it is hard when you are split between community and international fame, it must be very hard to deal with. I don't know how they do it. Something that white people hasn't really had to deal with, this international pressure.
- xxxv. The argument about appropriation has settled a bit. But there is a need to consult and as long as white people continue to learn do this, I mean there was quite a bit of ignorance in the past. Sometimes I look back on my writing and think it a bit patronizing, although I did try to avoid at the time. I still think it is hard not to if you don't know enough.
- xxxvi. Non-Aboriginal writer only choose their themes because they really want to write about them. It is very hard and they have to do a lot of research. I think they have a right to try and investigate an area that they don't understand, just as Black writers have a right to write a middle class comedy set in Woollarah if they chose to. They just have to do the research.

- xxxvi. We have very strong copyright, privacy and libels laws in the country to prevent people putting on stage things that people don't want to be there. We don't have this problem that the blacks have of a lot of people saying they own something. We have group creations that sometimes lead to problems but these are isolated problems. I don't think the law can really solve anything in relation to who owns what story. It is just a matter of consultation.
- xxxvii. My professional relationships with Aboriginal artists have been quite good. Most conflict comes from fear. Fear that we are going to take everything away from them, so it is just a matter of sitting down and being patient until the situation is understood. Even the changing of stage directions can be difficult to negotiate, but no more than white writers. I knew Bobby Merritt very well and I have got to know actors quite well to I would consider myself a friend of Kevin Smith, but there is always a reserve there. Most of the relationships are confined to public places, Justine Saunders I have known for many years and Bobby Mazza. I would call these relationships ones of goodwill. I don't think I have ever offended anyone and I hope that they might have told me if I had.
- xxxviii. Richard Franklin wrote a short play that we wanted to publish and he kept refusing to sign his contract. It was to be included in a collection of plays that was to go on at the Playhouse in Melbourne and it needed to be published to accompany the season. I think that was more that he didn't really know who we were at the time; we have since published some of his work.
- xxxix. I have said many times that I believe this to be the most important development in Australian theater in the last 30 years because it is something that really belongs to us and is not influenced by anything overseas at all. These are voices from people who really want to tell us something. It is all very political. A lot of people have come to the theatre because it is a useful forum, then they move on. They said what they wanted and have moved on to other aspects of public life.
- xl. There will come a time when the theatre may not be the best forum and this is when people will stop writing plays for a while. Maybe things will change and start again.

- xli. I think the white theatre is trapped by the fact that we have all these retched buildings. They are purpose built and we have to keep them open. I don't think that theatre was ever intended for that. Theatres used to burn down in the olden days every en years or so, but now days they are build from concrete and so we are stuck with them forever. It is antipathetic to a stimulating theatre.

Wesley Enoch/ Australian Indigenous director and writer.

History

- i. Contact youth theatre was it all began. I was a choreographer first, and then I did some writing, and then directing work. The company was very collaborative, where you could not always draw the lines between who was doing this and who was doing that.
- ii. Deb Mailman was there, Bradley Barkwa, and my sister was at University with me. Margaret Harvey and Wayne Blair were there even though Wayne was a couple of years below me. It was a community where we would question each other and support each other and we were all hard on each other to be the best artist that we could be, not just the best Aboriginal artists.
- iii. At Contact Youth Theatre after I graduated I was volunteering there and then they offered me a trainee-ship for a year and a half, going to conferences and being asked to speak.
- iv. I then decided to take some time out and I went and did some acting. I acted in a couple of shows and this is where I experienced many bad directors who were telling me what to do. Literally demeaning and non-trusting of actors and were intimidated by Aboriginality, maybe because they did not have a lot of experience with Aboriginal people or because they did not really understand us. They did not listen when we had things to offer. They got very defensive.
- v. I knew then that I could do better than this and this was when I really started directing. At the same time Liegh Charlton who had also gone through Contact Youth Theatre was setting up a company, he was setting up Kooemba Jdarra with Roxanne Macdonald, Deborah Mailman, Glennys Charles, Helena Goulash and a whole range of people. I came in and began to direct shows and I became the first Artistic Director of the company. This all happened by accident, as we wanted to do a good script but could not find one. We decided to write one of our own and out of this came The Seven Stages of Grieving.

- vi. The Aboriginal plays that we knew we thought weren't always good plays, they felt good and they told interesting stories but they weren't always well shaped. I felt I had to pull them apart or try to shift things and really not knowing why they weren't working for me. Maybe I didn't have the craft yet, I was operating off instinct. Sometimes I feel that the earlier work was much better than what I am doing now because I was working from instinct then whereas now I am working from a more intellectual perspective. On the other hand, maybe it was because you are learning and discovering things, the discovery is always bigger. I grew very quickly in those first few years I think.
- vii. I think plays have changed. I think that there is a swing back to the overtly political in what we have less trust in character, less trust in dialogue or debate. There are more telling people what to think, which I think is dangerous. It becomes didactic in the negative sense of didactic. That is it is rarer to find two or three perspectives engaged in debate, arguing with each other on stage. So people feel like they can become part of the discussion as opposed to being told what to feel. I think plays have shifted in response to our political situation. When you have the government talking about stolen generation then Indigenous theatre has to take the other point of view, it has to become the information dissemination point as opposed to the discussion point. You can't be seen to weaken the stance. It becomes propeganderist a little.
- viii. My connections have changed. I feel that the writing isn't as strong as it needs to be. Many playwrights are writing from an autobiographical perspective. They have only one play in them because once they tell their life story they can't write the second or third or fourth. And this is difficult. We need to create a theatre-making culture and tradition. When you think about the number of writers that have written one play, you see there are lots of writers that have written one good play, but when you think of the number of writers that have written two plays the number shrinks. When you think of those that have written five plays, well this is something very very rare. One would think of Jack Davis and Eva Johnson and Roger Bennett. These works are very hard to find. Most of these important works are now over ten years old. I don't know if there has been such writing over the last ten years.
- ix. I think we lack skills, or a place to store those skills. I think the lack of skills development with writers could be attributed to economics and resources. There is

- nowhere to house our skills. So, we say for example that Kooemba Jdarra is the keeper of scripts because most of the major Aboriginal Companies around the country are too busy putting up productions and rehearsing to invest time in writing a script. Perhaps we need a writer's development organisation a little like Playworks. There is also an argument for encouraging different processes of writing because you have the oral, verbatim theatre work, that Conversations of the Dead is a little like. Stolen is also like that, it is based on real life interviews taken and transformed into something else. Nevertheless it is verbatim theatre as it is taken from interviews.
- x. Whereas something like a Jack Davis play like The Dreamers is a recollection of his family experience put into a dramatic form. The one-woman shows of Deb Cheetham and Leah Purcell are an extension of the biographical form. Where they can tell it but they can't tell anything else. Other works like this are Ningali, The Fostering with Lillian Sainsbury in Adelaide and The Seven Stages of Grieving. I might put The Seven Stages of Grieving just outside of this because there were changes in form happening in the work, its visuals, its poetry and performance art elements. Also Box the Pony had that element where it plays with metaphor and tried to do bigger things and used the music to shape it a little bit differently.
- xi. Aboriginal Theatre was at the very beginning about getting a big stick and about having big political comments and it was all about the anger of that. Now we are more about tempering that anger and asking, what is the future? A lot of Indigenous theatre focuses on the past. I think that a lot of Aboriginal Theatre is also about documenting the past and documenting our history, to counter balance the absence of it out there in the public sphere. And so that now we need to look to the future. The stories being told by our women are often more hopeful. There is a sense of looking to future generations in a different way. The male story predominantly is about being angry at the here and now. It is about the loss of things. The women's stories are about saying, "Where am I going to? Even though I am going through pain, I am going to something else."
- Process**
- xii. On talking about process I would like to talk about the process of making The Seven Stages of Grieving. This project was extremely collaborative. In the writing process we would all talk, talk about family, talk about ideas and talk about our experiences. Themes

start to arrive from these discussions. We would talk about something and I would go, “Oh that’s an interesting idea”. Then I would go away and write up that idea and the next day I would bring it back and read it out and say, “Oh that’s interesting isn’t it and what about?” So then, we would improvise around it and then go back again and rewrite it and then edit it all out, chuck it all out and start again. Here there was a real sense of exploration because it had to be true. It wasn’t about taking a script and rehearsing it, it was more a sense of following through a relationship with people. I remember once someone told me that theatre needed to be about excellence, that theatre should be all about excellence and I realised that my work is about building relationships with people. Relationships between artists, relationships between artist and audience, and story and how it all works together. If you develop relationships in the long term then the work gets better. I have been developing relationships over time that now work more collaboratively because of these relationships. This means that when you are in the rehearsal room anyone can have a good idea. There isn’t a dictatorship where people tell you what to do. I mean I do a bit of that like when I draft up material and the actors say they don’t want to do it, and then we try something else. I don’t have to become the expert, here everyone shares the responsibility.

- xiii. A collaborative relationship is what works with Aboriginal actors one based on mutual respect. It certainly isn’t a love fest but it is a trust that people know what they are doing. In me we are all about to put this in front of an audience so lets make it good. In all the Aboriginal theatre I have seen or been part of there was always an element of the actors really owning it, investing in it, really believing in it and having it close to their heart. You can’t direct it by remote control and have it all happen over there you all have to believe in the work to make it happen.
- xiv. Indigenous Actors in non-Indigenous productions often have trouble because they want to treat the actor like everyone else. What happens is they are not, they are Indigenous actors and therefore a play where an Indigenous woman hangs herself and a young girl who gets her tongue cut out, here they are carrying a representation. It isn’t like A Midsummer’s Night Dream and an Aboriginal actor is playing the character of Hyppolyta, instead it’s where their ‘Aboriginality’ is at it’s fore. These are not stories of ‘Aboriginality’. They are stories of ‘Aboriginality’ told by non-Aboriginals. Stories like Holy Day by Andrew Bovell and Wonderlands by Katherine Thomson, are not

Aboriginal stories but they have to have Aboriginal characters in order to tell the story. They are stories about identity, stories of metaphor for country and place, so you can't have a story about place truthfully without including Aboriginal characters. These plays are fine as long as they aren't seen as an alternative to an Aboriginal voice to our theatre. They have to be seen in partnership where we can tell our stories about us with them, and they can tell their stories about them with us.

- xv. Let's talk about the close connections of Aboriginal actors to story using Conversations with the Dead by Richard J Franklin. The young Aboriginal actor Kirk Page who is in the play lost his own brother only a year ago to suicide. Now he found it quite difficult in rehearsals to perform the action of making and setting a noose. In fact he told me that he didn't think he could do it. However, we talked through it and he was very professional about it. His connection to the work is strong because of this. Dealing and working through these connections are part of the process in Aboriginal Theatre. My job is to make the bridges between the characters, the actors, the actions and the connections to the subject matter. This type of process can often be quite daunting for a non-Aboriginal director. Because it is all about cultural sensitivity. Not all directors can incorporate this into their directing techniques.
- xvi. The potential for an Indigenous actor to have had a personal experience close to what is being playing out on stage is greater than that of a non-Indigenous actor. The play Wonderlands is a perfect example of this. Pauline Whyman who plays the character of 'Edie' has had close experiences with land business and the racist taunts that her character experiences. Whereas the actor who plays "Lon", Roger Oakley has had no experience of giving the racist taunts that his character engages in, or the experience of being a farmer or having his land threatened. The connection that Aboriginal people make to the work is usually very close. Whereas the non-Indigenous actor often enough searches for these connections. The memory of these events is still very close to a lived Aboriginal history. This means that Aboriginal actors don't hide behind a character. The story is what is told. This close connection can be very exiting because it is so accessible but there is a lot of danger in this also. The danger is that because it is so accessible they don't know how to put it away and live their life. Sometimes you have to serve the actor.

- xvii. Aboriginal actors are very raw. The connections to story are strong as is the emotional connections to character. Aboriginal actors also enjoy an incredible sense of camaraderie. I haven't experienced a rehearsal that suffered because of an argument or estrangement. Everyone usually just gets on with the job. However, I will say that Indigenous actors will always know what everyone is being paid. Whereas non-Indigenous actors usually don't ask those questions. They don't talk about money in the same way as Aboriginal people do. I find this funny. When working with non-Indigenous actors I am asked, "Why do they know how much everyone is being paid?" Well they all talk, we all talk.
- xviii. A sense of self-importance is absent in process whereas confidence is not. A lot of talking and listening happens about the story of a play. The talking is very important to prepare for the scene that we might be working on. Not an intellectual talking but more discussing what the action means to the character and to the actor. I am not interested in traumatizing an actor. Even if the actor thinks they are ready for it, you need to slow it down and wait until everyone in the room is ready for it. You sometimes need to read the silences in rehearsal and go at the pace of the most silent.
- xix. On the training and experience of Aboriginal actors, I always think there are many different roads to the top of the hill. We look at someone like Lillian Crombie, well she did one year at NIDA I think. She went to NIDA for a couple of years and to Eora. and ballet training. She has a lot of experience that she brings to the room. Where as someone like Luke Carroll hasn't trained but a lot of his experience comes through stage and film. Elaine Crombie graduated from ACTFA in Brisbane and Uncle Vick who is a trained performer but not in theatre. Here we try to find common ground for everyone whilst trying to find a common language. I have worked with all of those performers before except for Uncle Vick. Sometimes I had to slow things down for uncle Vick and acquaint him with theatre language. He also had trouble learning his lines. Sometimes the other actors would get impatient with him. However, he was a sixty-year-old man, his first time on stag and he is nervous as all hell. It was about encouraging respect.
- xx. Sometimes you have to ask performers to transform and be something else and sometimes you have to ask people to just be themselves and in this case I asked Uncle Vick to just be himself. I had to ask him to just take part of himself and put that on stage. There are actors who transform, who transform their whole being; Transformance in

Aboriginal theatre doesn't play a great part in performance. Non-Indigenous actors do tend to use transformation physically or vocally to feel like they are acting. However, indigenous actors don't feel like that. During the Cherry Pickers Robin Nevin once said to me that she felt that she knew what she was seeing when observing rehearsals and said to me, 'I know what I am looking at, I am not looking at actors, I am looking at story tellers'. I had to think about that and I thought to myself, "No you are looking at actors, but actors that are good storytellers". That is what acting is, acting is good storytelling.

- xxi. In relation to recognition of Aboriginal actors, I think that it all comes down to economics. When you have a high profile actors like Deb Mailman or Leah Purcell audiences will come and pay to see you and you are paid more. However, it isn't about money it is about recognition and support, it has something to do with artistic status and that is more important than money.
- xxii. All the main companies want to do Indigenous work but they are still reluctant to put it as a main stage show. Belvoir does on regular bases and should be praised for that. However, Sydney Theatre Company (STC) still does a little thing over there or an education program over here. Sunshine Club that I wrote was produced on the main stage at the STC but as a one off special occasion. There is this sense that it has to be something special not something that is done every year, but why not? Why not do something every year and begin to build an audience for Aboriginal Theatre. Why can't you build a non-Indigenous audience for Indigenous work? They say there is not enough work, not enough writing, but there is not enough Australian work anywhere so why not commission something, be more proactive. Because it is hard to do they shy away from it. They want a sure fire hit, a sure fire thing. I say go and have a go, fail if it needs to fail and trust that the processes will work themselves out. They don't allow for failure.

Structure

- xxiii. Structure for me is about delineating cultural material. Like the ocher in Conversations with the Dead was that for us. And the crow sounds being connected to the actor doing a dance. The crows from the writer's country are a signifier of death and grieving for him. He told this fantastic story of going out to his back yard and there being forty crows on the lawn, which freaked him out. This was how much grief he was carrying. Those

elements found themselves in to the play because of their cultural connections. Every Aboriginal play by definition needs to have cultural material being discussed, dealt with, referred to and enacted. The use of smoke as a cleansing of space can be both comforting and dangerous. Smoke can be a warm fire or a ragging bush fire, or a burning house. Smoke is cultural material. The story telling tradition is used where the audiences are given direct address, and a character will step and say; now I am going to tell you a story. Sometimes that is in the form of poetry, song or a story about something or bolding telling people information. Throwing information out there and asking the audience to think about that. In A lot of non-Aboriginal plays these become soliloquies. It becomes a character talking to themselves aloud. The play Wonderlands is like that, there is a forth wall. Where as in Aboriginal Theatre there is no forth wall and you break it to invite the audience to be part of the play. In the end when you exit you can't escape the story, as the story has to go with you. The play, Stolen is like that. At the very end of the play the actors walk out through the audience as a way of saying these stories are not about illusion they are about the real world and they will go out into the real world. Like the production I did of The Dreamers at Belvoir when I had the back door open onto the street outside, I am asking the audience to look out to the reality of the government flats outside. Challenging the audience not to think of themselves in the comfort of a theatre, but to imagine the world of the play and how close it is. The realness of this experience is often the first time the audience has imagined the experience of being Aboriginal. Someone said to me after opening night that they felt that they were watching people living out their real lives. I think they expected some type of artifice or a sense of construction. Often the structures I use in Aboriginal Theatre are about opening out to an audience not about an audience being passive and observing something. I also use a lot of alienation like the Brechtian idea of; I want to tell you that this is theatre. This is where an actor on stage might be in the middle of something then drop it completely and walk away. This is similar to traditional dance, where once the dance is finished they just stop and walk away. They go back either to begin again or move onto to another dance. We can jump in and out of the realities of the actors and the characters. It is not about artifice.

- xxiv. Aboriginal Theatre is an eclectic collection of elements that we have begged borrowed and stolen. Anything that works best for us. We can use traditional culture, contemporary culture, and pick up anything we want and stir it all up and see what comes out. We can do this because we are not stuck in a tradition; we are not stuck in traditional storytelling

or performance because we live in a very contemporary world. We don't feel hemmed in by our own history, or other people's history. When I look at the play Wonderlands and the writer talks about the structure of the play, I really ask myself, "But does it really work?" The work doesn't become contemporary because of its fixation on structure. The Seven Stages of Grieving owes itself to post-modernism in a way because you can move it around and transform it as a piece. The words being told are only a fraction of the story being told. I remember when I first sent it off to a playwriting competition and they wrote back and said I didn't win because they didn't think it was a play, they thought it was a blue print for performance. Isn't every play supposed to belike that? I realised then that it was just a different form. I mean the play is now published and read and studied all over the world. It has become a reference point for Aboriginal Theatre. That's our evolution of form. It's our storytelling in our way both our personal stories and or personal politics, it is our traditional and our contemporary existence. We are not hemmed in by our history. Just because we have a history doesn't mean we are a prisoner to it.

- xxv. In Australian theatre we feel that there are two different processes of writing, the anally retentive and the openly inclusive. Interesting writers who have a more open approach to process to the work are far more interesting. I think that an audience will come if the work is important or grabs them. It doesn't have to create a passive audience because in the end you want them to go out there and do something about what they have just seen. Someone like Steven Sewell will tackle big issues and fail and try again and fail. He is reckless and sometimes we need that in Australian writing.
- xxvi. I don't know what the definition of Aboriginal Theatre is but for me it is about telling Indigenous stories from an Indigenous perspective. That often means a director and a writer being Indigenous. Collaborations sometimes end up becoming white fella stories. Even if it is verbatim stories ultimately who makes the final choices? From my experience with working with non-Indigenous people there are places they just won't go in relation to Indigenous stories. For example Neil Arnfield saw the play Alliwa as a beautiful story about family and trying to stay together against all the odds. He told me that he couldn't direct Conversations with the Dead because he felt that he might not be able to take it where it had to go. This was because of his personal feelings associated with the subject matter, he felt they would interfere. Ultimately it is not his story to tell. Eventually I hope there will many ways to approach the work from all perspectives. You

- can't define Aboriginal Theater because once you do that we tell people who can be and who isn't, how does that work? It is about the story. I don't believe definitions are useful.
- xxvii. Aboriginal Theatre has at its core a story to tell. Some directors layer things over the top because they don't have a need to tell a story, they have a need to make it sexy and interesting. This makes people want to talk about the production not the story. Sexiness should become infectious. Sexiness is about attraction and there is an attraction to Aboriginal Theatre. Now companies are programming and making money from Aboriginal plays. But think about how money is given to Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people to make these shows. Large state companies are given large amounts of government money and can put these shows on at a regular basis. At some stage they have to give the money to Indigenous people to produce their own plays. We need a nationally funded theatre company that focuses on theatre. I am calling for a keeping place for skills, for knowledge, a place of employment, a place we can explore our dramatic history and explore new work. I have been working and developing an ensemble of Aboriginal actors and this should be encouraged financially. We need senior artists, artists just out of training, an apprenticeship and mid career actors. Most of the time a rehearsal period is too small to incorporate training. But with a working ensemble I get to assist in acting careers. Sometimes I lack confidence because I don't have a company structure that assists me.
- xxviii. Coming back to structures, there is an incredible sense of comedy and humor in Aboriginal work. Aboriginal actors can go deep into an issue and then jump to high comedy within a beat without a problem. Rhythmically this is important. Disassociation happens regularly by the delivery of a deep issue. Separating the emotion of the story in order to serve the story happens quite a bit also. Aboriginal Theatre is based on sorry and sadness but also a sense of survival and hope. Aboriginal Theatre has a lot of death and funerals in them, which is a metaphor really for the passing of traditional culture. But the whole nation is losing something. Metaphorically, when Uncle Worru dies in Jack Davis's The Dreamers. You feel that the whole world has lost a connection to something important. It is change.

Justine Saunders/ Actor

(Not for publication outside of University of Wollongong)

- i. Way way back in the dream time, I mean a long time ago, I was a product of the assimilation policy. I went through three different homes. The first one was a Salvation Army home. The second was a psycho ward. I was only about thirteen and fourteen. I put in there and that is where the nuns from the Good Shepard Home found me. When I was taken away, nobody told my mum where I was and so she spent seven to eight years looking for me. She found me at the Good Shepard Home in Milton. I spent time there where I went through a lot of shit.
- ii. I eventually found myself in Sydney. The place that I found myself in Sydney was Redfern. Why I found myself there I don't know, but someone told me that was where all the black fellas were and I was living in a flat in George Street in Redfern. I lived there with my boyfriend.
- iii. Strangely I went trotting off up near where the Black Theatre was at the time in Redfern. So I trotted into the place and as Bob Mazza and Brian Syron says, I was struggling up there in my platform shoes. I was a skinny thing with long legs and I said I was interested in doing something. That was when they were putting together the Cake Man. They were auditioning other black kids to play a woman, which was the most wonderful, amazing role that I have ever done. I hadn't thought about acting, but I went in there and I went for the role. The character, Ruby, grew me up and I grew up with her. Despite all the other guys who played my husband I would have to say that Brian played my most favorite husband.
- iv. Brian was an amazing person and I spent a lot of time with him. Not just as a teacher and a friend but the only reason I stayed in theatre was because of him. I used to say to myself, 'what is a little black girl from Queensland doing? How could you think about being on stage at the Opera House, which I have done with two shows. The Last Cab to Darwin was the last show I did there. I thought, yep I know I can do it. Brian always told me to remember where I came from.

- v. Black Theatre is something that continues today, it is in everyone, it is in me it is you and that is what it is. It is about our history and we have to remember. It isn't just about the color of our skin, it is we come from; it is something that reminds me of where I come from. I always ask mother earth to remind me where I come from so I don't get to big for my boots. You know I have been to Germany, England, I have stood on stage in New York, I have been given an award (which I gave back) but Black Theatre reminds me of a wonderful culture of where I come from and support. That's what it is to me. Being a black woman, people would have a go at me about where I come from. I come from Queensland, a Worronee, and it teaches you to be proud of where you come from.
- vi. The first trip/tour was like this, little black duck from Queensland gets on a big plane to go overseas. The funny thing was that I didn't have a birth certificate for my passport. Little black duck that was born next to a railway line did not have a birth certificate, like a lot of black fellas at that time in Queensland. We had to find it, and we managed to find it and the funny thing was that my birth certificate was registered five years after I was born. It was my first time on a plane and the first time overseas and it was amazing. A wonderful collection of actors likes John Clayton who sadly passed away last week, Michael and Max Cullen. Brian was there and he was fantastic. A very special time. We were showing this play at a festival, the International Festival of Theatre. You had people from all over the country and world celebrating in Denver, Colorado. Receiving the applause from people all over the world is something you never forget.
- vii. After the Cake Man, I started getting into television and film but I stuck to stage as I love the stage. At that time things started to change to television and film in regards to a black woman working in that area. Like women working as directors, writers and producers but I stuck to the stage. I remember once, John Clark came to see me when I was performing at Belvoir Street doing 'Bullies House'. He asked me if I wanted to spend a year at NIDA studying acting. I said yes and I did the last year at NIDA developing works like Chekhov and Shakespeare. I thought I was the first Aboriginal person to go there, but I wasn't, Vivian Walker went there, the son of Nana Walker. I just had a wonderful time there and I could say, yeah I am not just a black woman running around with my sousou's saying, 'please big white man don't grab me'. I could also sprout Shakespeare and Chekhov. It was special for its time. I could speak all that as well as well as my language

- written by people like Jack Davis, Mudooroo Narogin and Sally Riley. Brian Syron could do that also and he was good at it.
- viii. To begin with it was bloody hard for me but now it is fantastic. Recently in the 'Last Cab to Darwin', I am sharing the lead with Jacky Weaver and Barry Otto. Fifteen to twenty five years ago I would never have dreamed that I could be at the same level as these guys. Sharing a dressing room with Jacky Weaver is great and having the chance to kiss Barry Otto on stage is fun. Barry is lovely. So that's where I am at the moment. But I am also moving into producing. Working on stage makes you extend yourself.
- ix. I still get pissed off about black people being represented in locally produced productions. During the Olympics I always had to explain to overseas visitors why the representation was so poor. I mean in other countries round the world they have addressed this, now we watch overseas television and we see Black, Asian and whatever where ever second or third person is black or Asian. We never see black people on television on our commercial stations, except for one or two productions.
- x. I spent a lot of time getting to know people. I have to say that the television and film acting fraternity were all very supportive of me. My agent was also and sadly we have just buried June Cann. She was one of the only agents to take on Aboriginal people at that time, she also signed on David Gulpulill. God it was bloody hard, but I loved acting. It was special, it wasn't about the money, it wasn't about the kudos, and it was something I enjoyed. I have been fortunate enough to work overseas, but here we have a special community. We are a family and this was shown at June's funeral. All those people there it was like family, a community. Like our black community. From the time I started as a young Aboriginal kid from Queensland, It wasn't just about getting to know the Redfern community or the Black Theatre community, it was about extending that.
- xi. The two people who worked in that area was Brian Brown and Jack Thomson. They were part of that extended community, it went both ways. This is what supported what is developing into Australian Theatre now. Brian Brown started his career in Black Theatre along with Max Cullen and Danny Encott. They were working there at Black Theatre. They were part of that thing where people were working in little enclaves. Belvoir was just happening, it was still the Nimrod. So everyone was working with different people

- and such, but Jack and Brian wanted to work with the black fellas. That finished in the late sixties early seventies.
- xii. Black theatre is not black theatre, it is part of a culture and history, and it is a rhythm, the rhythm of people. The rhythm of the people and what they bring to the creation of the history of black theatre. The rhythm of productions, the rhythms of what the people bring to the history. It was a little tin shed in Redfern and it was a place where kids would drop in and spend time writing music and talking to people. I strode up there in my high heels and auditioned for this play written by a bloke who was still in jail. So I read for the part of Ruby and later Bob Mazza who directed told me I got the part. What that meant for me was that I grew up from this character. Black Theater is a rhythm that started then with those people and it keeps playing today through people like Aaron Pederson, Tom Lewis and Deb Mailman and a whole heap o people. It all started in that tin shed.
- xiii. I would like to read to you now a paper given in 1993 by Brian Syron to include his voice to this discussion.
- xiv. *'Since the last Black Playwrights conference, precious little of Aboriginal playwrights works have been presented by mainstream theatres of Australia, with the exception of Western Australia. There has however been a plethora of non-Aboriginal playwrights about Aboriginal issues produced in various theatres around the country. These plays of course present wonderful opportunities for our Aboriginal actors but not for our Aboriginal playwrights and directors. It seems that we are still writing from the fringe. This paper I have been asked to speak on concerns Aboriginal Theatre in the nineteen nineties. The black theatre was Fringe Theater. And like all good fringe theatre we have gained an enormously from this landmark in our theatre history. It was the first and has given to many of you the opportunity to be among the first generation of professional Aboriginal artists in all areas of the arts. The names of those who have worked hard for your right to do what you are doing are long and illustrious. And include such people as, Betty Fisher, Kevin Gilbert, Oodooroo Noonuckle (Nana Walker), Jack Davis, Gary Foley and Gullpillil. We must never forget the struggle that came before, that is our arts history. However we must move into the mainstream of theatre and our playwrights must be allowed to make this move. They are our voice and are saying what we Aboriginals feel about the world as we see it. But the load must be shared it can no longer be carried*

by non-Aboriginals. The nineties should prove to be a watershed decade for Aboriginal Playwrights. Let us show our joy of life, our traditions and our respect for our elders, our love and our sharing. Let us learn from our elders with their lack of greed, their generosity of spirit and their lack of judging. As you are all aware, non-Aboriginal people have always had a problem with the tall poppy syndrome. Let us not adopt this attitude. We judge ourselves from our own traditions. This will become increasingly important as our playwrights and artists become successful and more critics come into the arena to discuss the works of their people. We must be sure that we are not bringing to our discourse the white attitude that has cut down any person who dares to put forward a perspective that is not accessible to non-Aboriginal Australians. Finally let us not forget that Aboriginal art has always sprung from the community and that has been the community organizations that have supported the Aboriginal artists from the late sixties and onwards. Community organizations have always been a core and many of our present organization's leaders began their careers in the arts. Aboriginal success has come from the work of national community organizations"

- xv. I read that for him at the last playwright's conference. That was his last letter. Brian Syron died on the 14th October 1993 at the age of 59.
- xvi. There is no difference for me when working with black actors or white actors or black directors or white actors. There is a slight difference, like when I was working with Wesley Enoch on Black Medea. This was a work with black actors and a black director developing a very classic piece, a seventeenth century story about a woman who kills her own children. I thought; how is Wesley going to adapt that to the twentieth century. And he did, by placing it in our communities where there is a lot of domestic violence. Working with an Aboriginal director is fantastic but and I hope this doesn't sound wrong, working with a female director is much more fun.
- xvii. The most fun thing I ever did was, Women of the Sun, the Nerida Anderson episode. The director and I worked closely on developing Nerida, and at times it was really difficult, but he did sit down and listen, he really did listened and that's what it is all about.
- xviii. The best time I ever had was with the film director, Vim Vendas, the Dutch film director who initiated the DOGMA of film. That's where I met Max Von Stedown. I was raised

- by the good Shepard nuns, where I was made to wake at 5.30 every morning, that's why I get up so early now. I was a product of assimilation. I was taken away from my mother who was never told where I was taken. She searched the streets of Brisbane for ten years looking for me. She found out I was in the convent at Milton. Well at the convent we would sometimes watch movies and one of those movies was, The Greatest Story ever Told with Max Von Sidon who played JC. And here I was 38 years later walking and talking with Max Von Siddon. I would never have imagined such a thing as that little girl sitting there watching that film that I would one day be doing a scene in a movie with Max Von Siddon. What a thing.
- xix. Three years ago I was asked to give a teaching workshop at NIDA. I was on the board of Studies for NIDA at the time. Anyway, these were teachers who were teaching drama in different schools around NSW. I asked why they asked me. They were going to teach black drama as Uncle Jacks plays were now on the study list. I went to meet and spend three days with these teachers from drama schools and they were all white. I spent these days working with them as a black actor. The interesting thing I found was that when I asked them, what it was they saw in the plays? What were the major themes of Jacks play, No Sugar? Their reply was, Oh it's a story about you blackfellas moving from one place to another. The fact that they used the term, you blackfellas, I felt I had to swallow my pride. I said to them that it wasn't us blackfellas it was human beings who had to be moved. It felt like when people say, you Jews or you refugees. It was difficult but fascinating to educate teachers about these plays.
- xx. I remember having to go to Melbourne to perform with one day's rehearsal of Sally Morgan's, Sistergirl. Aunty Dot wasn't well and Aunty Barb had to go back to Western Australia. I did the show book in hand in front of 700 people. It was the most beautiful play I have ever performed. She wrote it for Aunt Dot and Aunty Barb. The style and language of Sistergirl was an acknowledgement to Uncle Jack. It kept with the story of language and history of Aboriginal people. Sally Morgan's play was a matriarchal story of Western Australian Aboriginal women. Women are still kicking butt, women like Nigalli Lawford, Deb Mailman, Deb Cheetham and Leah Purcell. They just get out here and do it. What Australia doesn't understand is that just because we are all blackfellas doesn't mean we have the same politics. We all have something to contribute in our own unique human way.