Chapter 1

tjunguringanyi
coming together

otherness is maintained in the relation between self and the other, otherness does not reside in the thing itself, in its attributes or its essence
(Cixous/Muecke: 1997, 182)
1

tjunguringanyi
coming together

1.1 Childhood memories and a search

In my childhood, my Nana, my father’s mother, would hum snatches of song that were comforting and rhythmic, starting high and sliding down to a warm murmur. It wasn’t until many years later that I realised they were bits of ‘Aboriginal singing’ she remembered from her childhood. She was removed in the last decade of the nineteenth century, a girl with an Aboriginal mother and a white father, from her home country somewhere around Balranald or maybe north to Lake Mungo on the Murrumbidgee. Nana was fostered out to a European family when she was maybe six or seven. This might have been her father’s family but records are extremely difficult to come by. ‘Re-educated’ at Cootamundra Girls’ Home in her early teens, she ended up ‘in service’ in Bombala, where she met and married my grandfather, Charlie Marshall, an Anglo-Irish Catholic timber-dray driver, sometime during World War 1.

Nana seemed to have few clear memories of her very early life and had no family contact with her people, so she said, since leaving her original home. My father's family wasn't (and still isn't) a bit interested in its Aboriginal heritage, but one cousin went to some lengths to ‘prove’ Nana was the child of English immigrants. In fact, her Aboriginal origins were treated with virtual denial. Nana, who had ‘assimilated’, was faintly amused by the situation. “Your Great-gran,” she said to me once, ”was black as the ace of spades,” with one of her conspiratorial giggles, “And bald as a bandicoot. She used to wear a tea-cosy to keep her head warm and hop over the back fence when the welfare bloke came round.” From this I worked out that Nana and her birth family had lived in the outskirts of Balranald at least some of the time before she was adopted out to a white family and later sent to Cootamundra. Government and mission workers weren't called ‘welfare blokes’ then, but that's how she referred to them.
in the mid 1950's. Her father had been white, but she rarely spoke of him and maybe never knew him well. Maybe he was also her 'foster father'. She never spoke of brothers and sisters in particular and an old photograph shows her to be the only Aboriginal child in the family group. She also said very little about her life in Bankstown after she settled there with my Grandfather but it seems it was very much focused on their own family and included few outsiders. Grandfather's people came from Bourke, but he traveled widely throughout NSW in his line of work and had clearly had a lot of contact with Aboriginal people.

Nana and Grandfather owned three contiguous blocks of land on the edge of the Bankstown aerodrome where they raised children, chooks, vegetables and luscious mulberries. Their children attended local Catholic primary and high schools and 'did well'. My father won several Boys Own Book prizes for 'General Proficiency', the stories in which remain paradigms of rampant colonialism and racism. They still sit on my bookshelf and were probably very powerful in forming his attitudes to the 'black' side of his family. My many Catholic cousins who remained in that general geographic location a generation later fared likewise. There was very little overt racial discrimination amongst the multi-cultural mix in Sydney's south-western suburbs in the twenties and thirties (or in our childhoods in the forties and fifties) and some male cousins of my generation (who really could sing!) were 'selected' to attend St Mary's Cathedral School in Sydney on day scholarships, where they took part in a wide range of Christian rituals and celebrations on a daily basis as altar boys and in the choir. My younger sister and I (Protestant in upbringing) were likewise 'selected' to attend Hurstville Opportunity Classes in years 5 and 6 and subsequently St George Girls High School at Kogarah. As these were highly competitive processes, it did much to confirm the paradox that an elitist 'education' was a democratic process that could overcome many types of discrimination, including racial.

It wasn't wise to be known as Aboriginal at that time, however, because of widespread stigmas of 'primitivism', 'racial inferiority', 'intellectual retardation' or just plain 'dirty'. Children were often at risk and keeping a low profile was considered wise. Nonetheless, we all grew up knowing about our Aboriginality and dealing with it in our various ways. I often wonder how Nana felt about it and wish now that I talked to her more while she was alive. However, she had a stroke in the mid 1960s and I didn't start to become politically motivated until after the heady protests in the lead-up to, and success of, the 1967 Referendum. Nana died in 1976.
My father married my mother in 1943 and their respective parents met for the first time just before the wedding. The story goes that my strictly Protestant maternal Grandma sighted Nana and fainted on the spot, crying, "She's Aboriginal!" "You don't know the half of it," said Grandpa, fanning her with his ubiquitous felt hat (he was wearing a similar hat when he died in bed at our place in 1960). "She's also Catholic!" Grandma never recovered from the trauma though she was very fond of Dad, who played a fine hand of 500, Canasta or Cribbage, and knocked back the odd Sheaf Stout with her whenever she had a mind for it. As far as I know she never met my father's parents again, as she and Grandpa died just before our generation started on the inevitable round of weddings and christenings.

My maternal Grandma's people were agriculturalists, dairy farmers and graziers who started as convicts in Parramatta in 1814, then settled in Castlereagh (outside Penrith) in 1818, before spreading to Windsor and up the Hunter Valley by way of Putty in the mid-nineteenth century. Their experience of Aboriginal people in that region would have been very different to my paternal grandfather's in Bourke or the Riverina. My maternal Grandpa's people were very English indeed - the Bartleys of Vaucluse (a Lord Mayor of Sydney, The Reg Bartley Oval at Rushcutters Bay and the Florence Bartley Library in Kings Cross were vestiges). They hailed originally from the Isle of Wight with claims of distant (very) connections with Shakespeare's family (my Grandpa's middle name was Shakespeare). To them, Aborigines were savages.

My peaceful old Dad has traveled through his life avoiding issues of both racism and religion. He asked me one day (I being 'educated' member of the family, having been to University and studied Aboriginal music) whether Aboriginal people weren't inherently 'stupid' or 'primitive'? I told him that neither was the case (Look at us, Dad!), but that it was true that many Aboriginal people were barred from education and were socially discriminated against; were very poor and sick; and had very few opportunities in terms of access and equity under the law. He pressed me further and said, "Yes, but there are lots of things blackfellas can't do, aren't there, like mathematics and ... you know ... they bust up their houses and are a bit ... well ... well ... immoral, like, aren't they?" I gave him one of my soapbox speeches. My mother said to me on the quiet, "Your poor father feels very upset about all this. Maybe you'd better not go on about it." The topic was excised thereafter from Christmas dinners and other family gatherings to spare Dad's feelings. My non-Aboriginal mother was keenly interested, however, and fostered her children's learning about Aboriginal culture while the most of my paternal uncles, aunts and cousins were trying to pretend it wasn't relevant. The
family photo of me (the blue-clad blonde) with some of my many cousins taken in the early 1970s will demonstrate why this exercise in denial was a complete waste of time.

In 1964, pre-Referendum, while Nana was still alive and well, I went back to Balranald and tried to find some relatives. It was hardly timely and I found no one. In fact, ‘white’ locals - some of whom had excellent suntans - vehemently denied the presence of any ‘real’ Aboriginal people in the area. "Died out," they said. When I told Nana, she said, "Yeah. The old people would be gone by now. I wouldn't know anyone." In the late 1970s, after Nana's death, I made a similar trip to Balranald and talked to one very old woman who remembered when girls were sent away to Cootamundra. The few Aboriginal people in the township were shy and unwilling to accept a pushy young theatre director who didn't look Aboriginal and who didn't know her true name, and the rest of them were 'out bush'. I never contacted the foster family, but a cousin did and they swore Alice Johnson was the daughter of an English immigrant, even though they conceded she was remembered as being "dark" and "adopted". No doubt they were referring to her father when they talked of her English background, while her Aboriginal mother got the usual disappearance treatment. There is no birth certificate at all. Small Alice 'appears' at about age six or seven. Nana's marriage certificate simply says Johnson and gives her birth date as 'about 1898'.

In 1995 things had changed considerably and there were now many people in the area identifying as Aboriginal. I located three Mutthi Mutthi people who were involved in a cultural exchange involving performance in and around Balranald and Lake Mungo, people who were now very political and not at all interested in meeting yet another potential relative who might claim land rights to Lake Mungo. My efforts to find relatives were again unsuccessful.

### 1.2 A university education

**Meetings**

While I was a mature-age BA Music student at the University of New England in 1977, working with Professor Gordon Anderson (who unfortunately died in 1981) the world of traditional Aboriginal music became accessible to me in the form of Dr Alice Moyle’s wide-ranging collections. After completing my Bachelor’s degree in 1980 and a Master of Letters in comparative musicology (including Aboriginal Music) in 1983, I resolved to continue with doctoral studies in Aboriginal music and dramatic performance. The new professorial appointment to the UNE Music Department was Dr Catherine Ellis, perhaps Australia's
foremost non-Aboriginal Aboriginal music scholar. Cath, and her New England colleague, Dr David Goldsworthy, were among the very few people I had met up to that time who had empathy with, and understanding of, the performance genres of Other cultures although their area of academic expertise at the time was primarily music. I acknowledge with deep appreciation the doors they opened and the standards of scholarship and intercultural respect they set. After three years of a happy association working on the initial research for my thesis, it seemed to me that I would be more appropriately located in an anthropology faculty. I had discovered that while music had been approached with sensitivity, understanding and thoroughness by a number of scholars, the same could not be said for dance, ritual or other kinds of dramatic performance with which I saw music being inextricably interlinked. The notion of Aboriginal ceremonies as ‘performance’ and comparative performance studies between Australian European and Aboriginal cultures were almost non-existent.

In 1984 I joined, as one of the foundation lecturers of the first BA in Theatre Performance in Australia at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean (then Nepean College of Advanced Education). Gordon Beattie initially headed the Theatre Department, as he did on a number of occasions subsequently until his retirement from the University (but not from Theatre) in 2002. His performance interests and teaching thrust have always actively linked theatre making with the community from which it emerges. He explores theatres of image and metaphor as well as the generation and exchange of performance which crosses cultural boundaries, while at the same time addressing the theoretical issues associated with such exchanges using the many non-verbal languages of performance rather than spoken and written text and discourse. This influence created an atmosphere receptive to paradigm shifts at almost every level, including this exchange. It was an atmosphere not without random lightning strikes, willy-willies and earth tremors, however.

1.3 The Mimili - Nepean exchange

Connections
The exchange specific to this thesis, beginning in late 1985 and ending in late 1990, came about within unusual circumstances. Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara speaking Anangu elders from Mimili and Indulkana in Central Australia, through their community adviser, Hugh Lovesy (whose sister, Sarah Lovesy, was a second year student in the BA in Theatre at the time) asked to make contact with the Theatre Department at Nepean. The Mimili elders knew
there were schools and universities in Sydney and Adelaide that taught young people musical performance and dance of various kinds through their previous, quite extensive collaboration experiences during the 1970s and early 1980s. They had worked with musicologists such as Dr Catherine Ellis, Dr Guy Tunstill and Ian Knowles, teaching and learning at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music at Adelaide University (CASM). As well, they had recorded ceremonies in the field, some of which had been made 'commercially' available on tape with booklets of literal translations and illustrations by the song owners. For many Aboriginal people from the Western and Central Desert regions, 'first contact' was in the mid twentieth century and a great deal of the cultural practice was unbroken, although not unchanged. People from that region had experienced and performed with, and for, numerous musicians, anthropologists and ethnographers of various kinds in their own lands, and had traveled to Alice Springs and to Adelaide to work with Dr Ellis and her colleagues. They also had contact with Peter Brook in 1981 in his remarkable Adelaide Festival performances of The Ik, The Conference of the Birds, and Ubu Roi in a disused Adelaide quarry.6

They also had increasing access to video technology. Close associates operated within CAAMA (Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association) and Impartja Television (Michaels: 1986). These groups were already involved with the filming and broadcasting of their own ritual performances7 by means of new satellite technology throughout the homelands and outstations in the south of the Northern Territory and in the Western and Central Desert areas of Western and South Australia - the so called 'dead heart'.8

The Mimili people asked us to assist them with a project to encourage their young people to take a fresh interest in their traditional inma. Inma are the key ceremonies that bind communities and their beliefs to country by means of performance of complex bodies of knowledge linking every aspect of Aboriginal ontology.9 Inma attendance among ‘teenagers’ and young ‘adults’ (referring to European life stages rather than Aboriginal, which are defined by these very ceremonies rather than age in years) was dwindling in the general breakup of ‘traditional’ Aboriginal society, a long-term result of colonisation. A couple of generations of Christian missionaries, pro-Christian, patriarchal, government-run, education systems, as well as the incursions of ‘western’ mass media and ‘white’ music on transistor radios were other significant factors which had affected initiation numbers and therefore the whole fabric of society. Allied to this was dislocation from traditional lands, very poor economic and health conditions affecting all Aboriginal people (especially children). Governments and missionaries resisted the teaching of traditional culture through the school system (thus
questioning its credibility). Triple health threats to young people's wellbeing also comprised substance abuse (rampant alcoholism and petrol sniffing), psychotic dysfunction and sexually transmitted diseases. Many young people had left Mimili altogether and drifted to the fringes of the towns like Alice Springs to which they were claiming ever-increasing permanent residency. The elders hoped that, if a group of young 'city' students came to Mimili and took part in the inma, their own young people would be impressed by this interest and turn away to some extent from the popular and 'trashy' aspects of urban culture.

The Mimili people wished, firstly, to record and preserve their ceremonies and other aspects of their culture by means of European technology (film, video, photography, sound recording, books, notation, etc.) for their young people in the future. Secondly, they wished to communicate the depth of their culture to Europeans and others who have previously dismissed it, but were now showing signs of having developed the wherewithal to understand and appreciate it. Thirdly, they wished to exploit their 'cultural capital assets' to earn money for their communities by means of the tourist and international dollar, hopefully not at the expense of their cultural integrity. Fourthly, they wanted to use their arts increasingly as a political weapon to spread 'positive propaganda' throughout their own lands and broadcast it by means of the media stations. Lastly, they hoped to generate Australian Government direct funding for Aboriginal cultural (and other) activities.

Sharing an understanding of their culture with not only white Australian but other indigenous people was also an expressed desire, for example, North American Indians, Inuit, traditional African groups, South East Asian rural communities and South America's original peoples. Opportunities for international exchanges were emerging with the establishment and maintenance of large-scale local, national and international festivals of indigenous performance, worldwide conferences on indigenous cultural and educational issues, and growing contacts with indigenous people right around the Pacific Rim. The articulated levels of political and economic acumen generated within Mimili and associated communities must be constantly kept in mind. They were setting the agenda.

We agreed to explore the possibilities of their proposal together and, in early 1986, six Mimili elders - three men and three women - (Sam Pumani, David and Lily Umala, Pompi and Molly Everard, and Kathleen Tjamali) flew to Sydney for eight days, subsidised by the then Nepean College of Advanced Education. Also in the party were Hugh Lovesy and an old friend of the Mimili people's, Ian Knowles, a musician who shared with me a mutual friendship and professional relationship with Dr Catherine Ellis. I consulted with Cath at length over the
best way to approach this impending visit as she had spent many years learning music from and performing with these very people and their close friends and relatives. Both Ian and Hugh spoke good Pitjantjatjara and the closely related Yankunytjatjara and were familiar with the Mimili inma as well as those from other local centres. The immediate objective of the Mimili people was clear from their point of view. From the Nepean point of view it was a rare opportunity to make contact with performers from an Aboriginal community in a project where shared performance and extended social contact was the intention rather than the usual anthropological field trip which resulted in catalogues of data focused on demonstrating difference. These two sets of agendas needed to be reconciled.

My personal longings to be more knowledgeable about 'traditional' Aboriginal performance - and indeed 'traditional' Aboriginal social and family life - were about to be fulfilled in ways, which, eighteen years ago, I could not even have imagined.

Arrivals and meetings in Penrith, 1986
Ian Knowles arrived first with his new wife Helen and Ben, his eight year old son, to conduct initial vocabulary and 'cultural sensitivity' classes prior to the arrival of the elders. He began teaching some of the verses of the inma maku (the witchetty grub increase ceremony) chosen by the Mimili people for us to learn because it was largely 'open', a children's inma, and because it was an important Mimili ceremony in which all Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (and other Central and Western Desert people) took part at one time or another. Ian also concentrated on teaching us some social language and some specific performance vocabulary (a significant vocabulary which will be referred to later) as well as answering the many questions we had about 'how to behave' with our guests.

The plane from Alice Springs arrived late one afternoon a week later. In the Nepean College bus (to which we were to have almost unfettered access, accompanied by a College driver, during every visit) we met the Mimili people and Hugh Lovesy (an community development officer from England with experience in working also with oppressed rural communities in India). Hugh was very pro-active in the early Aboriginal self-determination battle, much to the disgust of many of his superiors in the various welfare agencies and government departments for whom 'looking after the Abos' was a career option. There were seats on the bus for all the Mimili people but otherwise it was packed with students and lecturers. The students had a smattering of polite phrases in Pitjantjatjara and the Mimili people spoke some English so we managed to keep the conversation going with Ian's help, recognising that after a fourteen-hour journey the old people were too tired to talk much. On the way home, at
Ian's suggestion, we also sang some of the songs we were offering in exchange. This was a pretty usual practice - students sing in buses the world over. So, we found later, do Aboriginal people and our mini-buses, ringing with song, rattled at regular intervals all over Sydney for the next five years.

**Domestic arrangements for the first visit**

The six Mimili elders stayed in Gordon Beattie’s and my house in Penrith, together with Hugh Lovesy and Ian Knowles and his family. Gordon and I moved out to the old Log Cabin pub on the Nepean River, across the road, returning as hosts and organising the daily food. Special sleeping arrangements were organised compatible with Mimili social relationships and protocol. The Mimili people always let us know who could share rooms and beds in Penrith each time they came down, as the groups varied considerably. The strict relationship system of the past, they said, was greatly relaxed but not completely obsolete. The women indicated that, frankly, they would love to be together sometimes and so space and time was made, just as it was made for the men to be together if they wished. In Mimili there were men and women's camps and it was desirable to keep that possibility open. We ourselves solved problems of social embarrassment in the short term by sleeping away from the house or in gender groups outdoors. We kept overt personal relationships between male and female to a minimum in both Sydney and Mimili, although there were obviously relationships between some of the students in Penrith, and in Central Australia the young Mimili women rattled about in utes and Toyotas with their current boyfriends. The older women clicked their tongues in disapproval and said things would change when they all got married. They were also very concerned that, within the Nepean student body of clear physical maturity, no one was married or had children. This situation was to change over the years, much to their delight, as some Mimili people became 'godparents' and the Mimili women named at least one child.

Our back yard was converted into two spaces - an *inma* ground and an eating/social place (see diagram), both with fire pits, excavated under the direction of the Mimili people after they arrived. The back yard was not big enough to do both in the same space, they said, so we would need two sections. This was, they said, the same way things often were done in Mimili. It seemed sensible to us but at the time we had no concept of what Mimili was like.

Food shopping, cooking and eating was communal and paid for by the University for our guests and by a collective fund for the University people. Initially, meals were prepared by Nepean lecturers and students. On later visits, some of the Mimili men and women got

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
involved. *Kuka* (meat) was essential. Local Aboriginal bushies were co-opted to hunt and supply the occasional *waru* (wallaby)\(^{16}\) to cook at home and other local people offered hospitality that included barbecues and spit roasts. Large quantities of *tii* (tea) were consumed, with hot *pinpatja* (breakfast) of *kuka*, *ngampu* (eggs), tomatoes and toasted *mai* (bread) each morning. Cereal was not popular. Lunches of sandwiches with *mai* and *kuka* were prepared each day and evening meals were *pauntja* (barbecued) on a *waya* (griller) as part of the *inma* proceedings every night. The Mimili people were otherwise very diet-conscious and were involved in a new health program in their community to help combat obesity and diabetes. They had given up sugar in their *kapati* (cuppa tea), and forsworn sweet biscuits and soft drinks. Now they were tucking into *wangara* (juice) and *mai* (the generic term for fruit, bread and all non-meat foods) as well as *kuka*. On Saturday morning we served croissants with ham, tomato and melted cheese, our own ritual weekend breakfast. Interesting, they said.

The students were encouraged to come and go whenever they liked, to share in the work and to help create an extended community. The Mimili elders owned the space for the time of their visit and it was their camp. All in all, around twenty to thirty people shared breakfast, sixty rolled up for lunch and up to eighty or even a hundred came to dinner on any given day. The Mimili people made it clear they thought they were being well looked-after and expressed their appreciation, especially for the unusually large amounts and variety of *kuka*. In retrospect, we did overdo it a bit, but our own nutritionally challenged students were completely in favour of the excess.

The hot water ran out frequently (we changed the 'off peak' setting to 'instant', but it didn't help much). The three Mimili women appropriated litres of shampoo and body lotion during their extended showers as well as several items of my clothing that I had left in my bedroom wardrobe. This was not in any sense theft but a communal sharing of resources, which I admit I wasn't quite ready for at the time. I was also given several gifts or they were simply left for me to use. New headbands were woven and newly purchased clothes worn, especially new joggers. On the list of priorities for this and subsequent visits were excursions to as many second-hand clothing places as possible for some serious shopping. Nepean CAE presented College logo tee-shirts, jerseys and hats to all the Mimili people which were very popular and appeared on various other transient owners in Mimili over the next few years. Theatre people are also great clothes-swappers and costume-changers so the practice was quite a comfortable one for all of us, once we knew the rules.
The social situation was relaxed. We were to be each other’s ‘house guests’ a number of times over the next five years and there gradually developed a familiar informality which was very pleasant, while allowing each other the courtesies and protocols which apply in both cultures. Theatre people are very used to taking on board new social protocols, as they do on stage, so it was only a couple of days before the students and staff had ‘sussed out’ the basics and in fact had discussed their own behaviours amongst themselves. One key issue was respect to the elders. The Mimili women spoke about this on many occasions and some of our more interesting ‘women only’ sessions revolved around the curiosity we had for each other’s social customs and the ability of our two groups to ‘fit in’ - ngapartji-ngapartji. It gave the women great pleasure and they thought our students had very good manners. They also asked what was required of them and I said that as long as they accommodated us, we could accommodate them - and we'd talk about things that were a problem.

I do not know if the men did likewise but they might have. When I asked them they were vague and Gordon downright uncommunicative. Men’s and women’s ‘business’ is a reality in all cultures.

Other differences, connected with food, social relationships, customs and so-called ‘standards of living’, rubbish disposal, hygiene and medical health were tackled as they arose. As minyma mayatja, a senior woman in charge of ‘a community’ in Pitjantjatjara terms (a title awarded me by the Mimili people after three days of ‘looking after them’), I found myself running a morning clinic for the women and their female disorders, including quelling an outbreak of ringworm and dealing with a large boil on a bottom. Pompi Everard, who used Aboriginal healing methods instead of Panadol, treated Nepean students with migraine and fatigue much more successfully. The Mimili people all chewed tobacco and students had to learn to duck the warm squirts quickly. But, then again, the students’ tendency to dive off to the nearby pub drew tongue clicks of Mimili disapproval. The lack of formal respect shown by the students to the Nepean lecturers was clearly a problem at first for the Mimili elders too, but they also responded positively to the convivial atmosphere it encouraged. Once or twice we ’pulled rank' with the students but only when absolutely necessary and to demonstrate just how far it was permissible to go. Overall, social adjustments were made on a minute-by-minute basis. One of the funniest occasions was on the second Mimili visit to Sydney when Bruce Umala pretended he had done the washing as he had seen our male students do, which had the Mimili women shrieking with laughter. The Nepean men shared the housework and cooking and frequently did such chores and, while by no means serious in his claim, Bruce was determined to get in on the act and did eventually learn to use the

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
washing machine. Our men tried to weasle out of domestic chores by citing the 'real' Mimili men as an example. The two groups of men bonded over a number of things, in fact.

No one got much sleep, but there was a good deal of lolling around and dozing each afternoon, which seemed to keep us all going. There were many opportunities for a nice kapati and a good lie down but there was absolutely no alcohol at the house as most traditionally living Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people are teetotalers. This was a bit of a tough ask for European performers who are used to partying on with a few beers or bourbon-and-cokes after a show. The students were as much companions and guides to the Mimili elders as was the staff. We all went to the movies or off to the club to play the pokies when boredom set in at home - a dubious part of the exchange. One rainy afternoon Crocodile Dundee happened to be playing locally (a great success). Penrith Leagues Club offered disco dancing and temporary membership to the Mimili people but we mostly just enjoyed sitting around gossiping in our big, old Penrith garden full of crepe myrtles, cosmos, oleanders, dahlias, peppercorn trees, roses and a big mulberry tree at the back. Because it was on the Nepean River, there was a lot of bird life, which was safe, but we feared for the fate of the big, juicy water rats that cruised the area, hitherto fearlessly. Our guests were most disappointed that the river had no fish, which led to a long discussion on pollution.

Country
When asked, I was truthfully able to say to the Mimili elders that Penrith and the South Coast were 'my country' - or two of them. I was born in Harris Park in Sydney's western suburbs and my mother had lived all her unmarried life in Merrylands, attending Parramatta Girls High School. My great, great, great grandparents on my mother's side had settled just outside of Penrith, at Castlereagh, after arriving in Parramatta off two separate convict ships in 1814 and 1818. While the family mainly spread up through the Hunter to breed horses (including the famous Todman), beef cattle and to run dairy farms, many still remain in the Penrith and Hawkesbury areas and in the Blue Mountains (Taylor: 1992). I had also spent twenty three years in Cronulla after my parents moved from the Western Suburbs in 1947 and knew the Royal National Park waterfalls and beaches like the back of my hand. Gordon, too, was connected to Penrith and Sydney's southern waterways. He was related to the Coxes, early European explorers and settlers in the Penrith area, and his grandfather had kept a hardware shop in Penrith in the 1920s, so his father and aunt had also lived in Penrith as children before moving to the Riverina - where my Nana originally came from. His school holidays had been spent on the Georges or Port Hacking Rivers and on Cronulla Beach. This piece of information was very surprising to many of our students and friends, very few of whom were
in any sense 'locals'. Gordon and I got a kick out of it too, because we had never really thought about our interconnected geographicality in that way before.

Tours to places of interest to the Mimili people were a high priority, and especially they wanted to see 'important country'. The Glenbrook and Blue Mountains National Parks, South Coast rainforests and the ocean beach at Wattamolla, the Zoo and Sydney Harbour were starting points and there were plenty of stories to tell. On one occasion, a group of our students were working with the National Parks and Wildlife Service people down the South Coast, performing an environmentally-based, site-specific, theatre-in-education piece in the rainforest to teach groups of children the perils of over-logging and clearing in old growth forests. The Mimili visitors were most impressed by this as it demonstrated the kind of dramatic presentation they related to very closely - actual performance on a 'sacred site'. The costumes of the lyrebirds were particularly interesting to them and in hindsight it was the point at which they started to take us seriously. The subsequent visit to Wattamolla Beach became a legend also: it was the first time they had been in an ocean and it took some time before the reality sank in. This was similar to the effect the desert had on some of our people.

1.4 The first performances

An unsuitable teaching place
The first Sydney visit of eight days was exhausting for everyone. It included a lot of talking and listening and some focused teaching and learning. There were performances of sections of the inma maku, several performances of European theatre, music and dance pieces by Nepean students and staff, many late nights and highly focused ‘getting to know you’ personal exchanges. The main objective for the elders, however, was to teach us to perform the inma properly. The teaching process in Penrith was simple, or so it seemed. They started simply enough: singing us single verses and showing us segments of dance, which we learnt by rote. The ‘simple’ version of the maku narrative was explained in brief:

*Wati tjalku* (the kangaroo rat ancestor) tracks the *maku* (witchetty grub ancestor) from Mintabi to Antara, following (a trail of) *kumpu* (urine) and *kuna* (faeces). This is our country. This is a big inma. *Inma pulka!* (Sam Pumani: 1986)
New song verses were taught every day to everyone by Sam with other Elders helping. Dance steps were demonstrated to groups - men to men, women to women.

The first *inma* performance took place at the University in a semi-formal garden on a big lawn outside the gymnasium. We were floored by the ease with which the Mimili elders slipped into performance mode in such a confronting public environment, surrounded by imposing brick and concrete buildings, divested of their everyday clothing and decorated with intricately painted patterns, applied behind the Orange Jessamine hedges. The sense of 'presence' was overpowering to all of us, the performance focus intense and the 'real' time and 'real' space frameworks completely shattered. Minutely articulated movement and gesture, completely synchronised with complex *tempi* and rhythms were fluidly interspersed with periods of relaxed, social interaction, light-hearted conversation, jokes and discussion about what would come next. Very soon, however, they required us to take our clothes off, paint up, take the plunge and dance. There were some hurried exits.

They then dropped their bombshell and said flatly that the University environment was a totally unsound one in which to teach. They couldn't teach us anything bounded by brick and concrete, especially in the air-conditioned studios we had fought many so political battles to obtain. Did we have a nice bit of real country, good country, suitable for proper learning, country that related to the dance and song? The Mimili people felt they could not separate the *inma* from a natural environment of some kind.

This was our first lesson in performance ecology.

The Glenbrook National Park was nearby and we moved the daytime teaching to there or, later, to the heavily wooded parkland down near the bird-song filled, mammal inhabited, snake-infested, bindi-studded billabongs and swamps at the far end of the University’s Kingswood campus.\(^{18}\) Certainly, at other times while in Sydney, we did perform in traditional, European theatre spaces and the Mimili people would do so to oblige us. But it never felt as comfortable as it did surrounded by the sky, the earth and the trees, nostrils filled with wood smoke and the feel of the bare earth and grass (and more bindis!) under bare feet.\(^{19}\) We continued to concentrate the evening teaching in the campsite in our backyard, to the astonishment of the neighbours, the motel next door and the big pub across the road. For six nights in a row we danced and sang in the evenings from teatime until after midnight.
Sometimes the Mimili people danced for us - demonstrations of particular sections of the inma that could not be done by us for religious or seniority reasons, or verses which required a soloist or a particular dancing skill past our knowledge and ability. Mostly, they included some of us in each verse, dancing with us and correcting us as we went. We were expected to practice in between times and know the words of any song taught on one night by the next. Afternoons involved long sessions of sitting around in circles, instructed by Sam, just singing new and old verses and beating rhythms over and over, drinking tea, and gossiping. At the request of the Mimili people, song words were notated by Ian Knowles and me, recorded on tape and, where possible, the dances were captured on video, despite the often poor light and the pressure to perform at the same time.

Copies of all new verses, words, music and translations from each evening were distributed to everyone the next day which meant someone had to sit up very late with our brand new MacPlus, typing in Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara poetry and rough 'translations' and having them printed out by ten the next morning on our equally virgin Imagewriter. As the students had already sung the verses, they used the song texts as aides memoirs for the dance rhythms and the variations on the melodic line. Together with the video 'rushes', which were watched by everyone after the dancing had finished late at night, they helped us come up to Sam’s expectations. These early translations formed the basis of our documentation.

Dances were also scribed in Labanotation to begin with (courtesy of Jacqui Simmonds, the head of the Dance Department, who joined us for several of the sessions), a time-consuming practice which was very soon abandoned as physical inscription proved more accurate and much faster than written notation. New people joining in had to be shown physically, as very little of the movement followed European dance style, rhythms, balance or use of muscles. For new people, even experienced dancers, the Labanotation eventually proved absolutely useless. Whole new 'body memories' were being created. We began to have grave doubts about the usefulness of any documentation since so many people tossed it aside and opted for the face-to-face experience. As the Mimili people pointed out to us, dance documentation is all very fine for recording something, but in all probability it wouldn't be exactly like that in Mimili next month (or indeed in Penrith tomorrow) and so you couldn't use it to teach and learn anything reliably. There was much flexibility in their notions of "exactly like that" and we eventually gathered that what they really meant was that we would need broad physical mnemonics but not pedantic exactitudes for inma dance performance.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
because it changed a “little bit” all the time, while retaining some clear constants. So much for European arguments about ‘authentic’ versions.

At the same time, Sam wanted something recorded and was happy with the song words being written down and the dance videoed. However, he believed that a recording was a completely different thing to the performance itself. For instance, live performance of the dance and song of each verse had an efficacious and spiritual role which, he made very clear, the video did not fulfill.

### 1.5 Teaching and learning

#### A role reversal

The Mimili people's decision to teach us was a serious one. To learn the *inma*, we had to place ourselves entirely in their hands and to expel any preconceptions and judgements while still retaining our original purpose, that of being involved in a performance exchange. On both sides there was an initial expectation that each would learn and take part to some extent in the other’s performance but this did not prove to be as easy in practice because of the differences in what we meant by that. There was never any real question of us teaching the elders anything: they were just as ethnocentric as we were. They were, however, very interested in everything we presented and wanted to see as much as possible. They had no serious intention of ever 'doing it', whereas they were very serious about us doing the *inma*. Initially a bit upset by this, we finally came to understand that they believed so strongly in their ceremony and its need to be maintained that never had they entertained the thought of being anything more than better informed about our performances in an 'academic' way. This was a reversal of historical positions in which we were the 'subjects', the recipients of enculturation. Even after five years, there were very few occasions in which Mimili people physically joined in our performances. They were an enthusiastic audience for our live performances and our films, however. This opened up many topics for discussion between us and highlighted a series of tacit assumptions about our own diverse culture. In other words, the performances themselves revealed aspects of our culture which could never be 'told' about verbally but needed 'telling' in non-verbal ways for the meaning to be clear.

This complex dilemma was never completely resolved. We were aware that the problem lay largely with us and the way we created performances as 'objects'. The Mimili people believed that their very soul and essence, their being and identity, is expressed through their
performances, which do not exist as 'objects' and are not separable from 'real life'. Taking part in performances in Mimili terms meant something very different to doing it in Sydney: all such activity is significant, marked by whole-community recognition of ongoing connections with spirituality, place and family relationships. With more time we know we would have been able to encourage more performance participation, particularly interacting with the young Mimili people, because we were changing our ways of thinking and working as a result of our contacts.

All of the Mimili elders had long-term performance connections with a few Europeans in various settlements - Ernabella (Pukatja), Fregon, Amata and Indulkana - and had sporadic experience since the 1960s in teaching inma to, and performing inma for, missionaries, government workers, university music students, urban Aboriginal people, film crews, anthropologists and assorted others. They were accustomed to combining European teaching methods effectively with traditional Aboriginal teaching methods. One or two elders had been visiting lecturers in Aboriginal Music at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) at Adelaide University) and at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra, both teaching and performing. None had been to Sydney before.

All of the Nepean people had significant experience in European performance and/or their and most were engaged in serious study at tertiary level. Few of the Nepean people had any prior, long-term contact with Aboriginal people living traditional lives although some had brief contacts or family relationships with Aboriginal urban or rural townspeople. Some individuals, such as Ian Knowles and Hugh Lovesy and a few Penrith/Blue Mountains locals, such as ex-flying doctor and Jungian analyst Leon Petchkovsky and his colleague Craig San Roque, had made earlier contact with communities in Central Australia and had previously attended inma or other kinds of ceremonies, mostly as observers. The 'significant expert' was Ian Knowles whose personal standing in the Mimili community was very high, having been built up over a long period of interaction and whose musical and etymological knowledge of the inma was considerable. Ian had been adopted into the Mimili community (as indeed we all were, eventually). Some of the Nepean students had heard recordings of Pitjantjatjara inma in class as part of their studies of ritual performance. Most students had seen the video made by Anbarra elders with Kim McKenzie of a funeral ceremony, Waiting for Harry (1980). Some, especially some of the lecturers, had read accounts and descriptions of ceremonies and seen many of the extant archival films, recordings, photographs, maps and diaries - including those of Sir Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, Norman Tindale, T.G.H. Strehlow, John Elkin,
Ronald and Catherine Berndt and, most importantly for us, Dr Catherine Ellis (see Bibliography). They were also familiar with the long-term research by the AIATSIS/Sydney University team of ethnographers and anthropologists that included Les Hiatt, Margaret Clunies-Ross and Stephen Wild. None of the students or lecturers had been to Mimili before, although some had visited and/or worked in Central and Northern Australia for brief periods. None had ever been involved in performing inma - or other 'traditional' Aboriginal ceremonies in their original environments.

All of the Mimili people were skilled practitioners. They performed regularly in local ceremonies in several centres and some had attended big festivals, such as those held at Laura in North Queensland. They had also some experience of European music in the form of Christian hymns, country and western and pop music. The young people listened to Aboriginal and other rock bands, as well as Black music generally. They had all watched television, videos and films - that is, most popular forms of European mass media. Many of their young people had guitars and radios and there were a couple of video players in the community. Few had witnessed what might be generally termed European 'high art' in the form of 'classical' dance, plays, music or opera. Exceptions were those who had been involved with CASM or with other performances such as those which occurred during Peter Brook's visit to Australia. None, even though Christianity was widespread, had been to an Anglican or Catholic High Mass in a cathedral where the full ceremonial effect of European religion is palpable.

Nepean people had no experience in this situation - ngapartji-ngapartji (you give, we give) - where performance was 'traded' for performance, consciously and seriously over a long period of time with a view to learning and understanding, each party being equal. It soon became clear that the Mimili people (as the instigators) considered themselves the master teachers and were being pretty polite about it.

Communication
Our initial knowledge of Pitjantjatjara and the closely related Yankunytjatjara languages was very poor to non-existent but improved with regular contact in varying contexts. Some students undertook to become involved in the exchange as a serious personal project and began intensive language-learning sessions with Ian, with the help of sets of Pitjantjatjara language tapes that we ordered from the South Australian College of Advanced Education (Wangka Kulintjaku SACAE: 1985). We bought four sets of tapes and booklets for loan but eventually they disappeared forever into student residences. All involved staff and students...
attended daily *inma* teaching sessions and sang and danced for several hours each evening. In the early stages we just memorised the words of a few verses that had been translated literally for us by Ian in the week before the Mimili people arrived. Later Sam Pumani and David Umala worked with more detail in similar daily classes on new verses every day. It was like learning English by memorising Shakespeare. *Everyday Pitjantjatjara* seemed to be a pretty easy language to learn but, once we had a great deal more experience with the *inma*, we began to appreciate its richness and capacity for metaphor and imagery and the thick layers of allusion and *double entendre* in performance and storytelling.

Many Mimili people spoke some English, a few of them fluently. The middle-aged people were of great assistance when we got stuck in everyday conversation but the older people were much more knowledgeable about the *inma* language and also told stories of the 'old days' in a mixture of English, *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara*. They made us aware of sign languages and talked to us about other ways of communication, like lucid dreaming and travelling - a form of 'astral' communication that occurs in trance and sleep states. They also used modern technology and maintained daily phone contact with Mimili, as the village had recently acquired its first public phone box. Our phone bills for that quarter were enormous, something we had not budgeted for. At the same time, another invisible communication link with Mimili was there, one that we were unable to understand at first but which surfaced again and again over the next ten years. This was a kind of extra-sensory perception that is denied in urban cultures.

Performance-wise, we found communication no problem at all. Verbal languages are not used much in teaching performance anywhere, unless it involves intellectual arguments and technical protocols that are themselves literacy based. Mimili elders had a great appreciation of proxemic and kinesic languages just as did the dancers, actors and musicians from the University. All performers need to be very physical in their relationships with each other (leading to accusations, in European Christian circles, of professional promiscuity which are quite unfounded). Physical actions, emotions and subtle nuances of meaning were able to be transmitted through body language, gesture, sound, rhythms and visual symbols while learning and performing *inma* with no more confusion than when we were performing our own work. Much relevant performance 'information' is transmitted by touch and is never spoken about at all and we became physically very close in both our everyday and performance interchanges. A couple of years later, one of the women said that performing with us was "*wirunya*" (just great) because we were easy about touching - and didn't ask questions while we were dancing. Previous experiences had shown that the *walypala* wasn't
very keen on being close to, let alone touching or being touched by Aboriginal people and that, they said, had made teaching performance a bit hard. Also, white people could never just 'let themselves go' and were always trying to 'understand' while they were dancing and stopping the sensory flow and physical action for intellectual questions and, even more irritating, for photo opportunities. We all knew from our own experience how counter-productive that was.

On the third evening, the Nepean women were performing for the first time fully painted up in the backyard - the initial reservations about undress having been either overcome or accommodated. A remark in Pitjantjatjara from one of the Mimili men singing in the front row aroused gales of laughter from them, Ian and Hugh. The Mimili women (who were dancing with us) smiled thinly and turned away. When we asked what had been said, explanations were made sotto voce to the Nepean men who didn't speak Pitjantjatjara. All the men laughed louder this time and Hugh said they were complimenting our dancing. We didn't think so. The Mimili women got a bit cross and told the men to shut up. Later Hugh told me that David Umala had said appreciatively, "Those Sydney girls have great tits!" I didn't tell the students at that time as I didn't want a mass reaction to such 'sexist' comments when we had only just broken the nudity barrier\(^{22}\) although I gave in a couple of days later when sensitivities had somewhat diminished and a degree of good humour was restored. It was one of the things that first put the exchange on a basis of (dubious) equality, with acceptance of each group by the other based on gendered behaviour rather than performance skills, age, intellect, or racial harmony. So much for the rhetoric! The Nepean blokes thoroughly agreed with the Mimili blokes and all the women looked exasperated and complained to each other about men in general.

**Is what we are doing any good?**

We often asked ourselves. The *inma* singing of some male students was remarked upon with approval but they were rarely complimented for their dancing: a European upbringing and poor role models had ill-equipped them to learn the dance of another culture when they rarely danced in their own. The women were rarely complimented on their singing of the *inma*, which required a vocal style that broke all of the 'rules' of European female vocal training but their 'grace' and 'style' was noted in dancing. Thus, questions of gender roles, aesthetics and performance standards were first raised, to be explored later in Mimili.
Learning music
As we didn’t speak the language at all well, and few read music, we were worried how we would learn Anangu music, dance and performance styles and conventions, except by rote? Would the methods by which we passed on our own performing arts be appropriate or would Aboriginal teaching differ? What were the standards? What if we failed? In Penrith we were on home ground and we initially coped with the learning situation head-on as though it was another part of the BA course, so eager were we to acquire some ‘finite knowledge’ and ‘demonstrable skills’ with a view to ‘getting it right’. We were surrounded day and night with singing, explanation, notation, translation, the teaching of dance steps and actual performance, moment to moment. We had tutors on tap; if not the elders, then Ian or Hugh.

We went into information overload.

Then, really frustrated with lack of progress, we were given some advice by Sam Pumani: “You don’t sing the inma - it sings you. Kulila! Kulila!” (Listen to it! Feel the music!) This was an entirely different way of going about it. European performers are used to believing themselves to be so talented, creative and unbelievably significant that the idea of the performance having ‘a life of its own’ is anathema. This is despite twenty years of research by scholars like Victor Turner and Richard Schechner into the nature of ‘liminality’ and the wide acceptance of shamanism in many cultures. Teachers, directors and actors assume that they are controlling a given performance situation but the Mimili people recognised and flowed with other dimensions of the process.

As performers, many of us felt this ‘liminality’ instinctively but it certainly isn’t part of modern, formal, European teaching and learning approaches until one has mastered sophisticated technical skills and is judged capable (supposedly) of appreciating the emotional, metaphysical, symbolic and expressive content of a piece at a ‘higher level’. The problem is discussed by Catherine Ellis, in Aboriginal Music: An Education for Living (1985). ‘Non-quantifiable’ aspects of performance were tackled right from the start by the Mimili people who considered it vital that we could do more than technically perform the songs and dances. We were forced to confront some of our deepest concerns about emotional and physical responses to performance, managing the odd psychic transformation while also ‘learning the notes’.

Accuracy requirements for people of our age were waived at first and we were treated like tjitji tjuta - a group of children. Errors were corrected but not punished as they might have been
were the ceremony a secret and sacred one, or our performance of it important to the survival of the community. In the old days some errors were punished by death, the women told us. “My God!” one student exclaimed, “That’s a whole lot worse than being failed in acting!” Yet, gradually, guided by praise and repetition and by seeing sections of the *inma* performed over a number of occasions, we gradually gained the confidence to ‘let it all hang out’ and ‘go with the flow’, which is when we ’got it right’.

While we were learning the first songs and dances, the body painting was demonstrated on both sets of bodies. Various meanings and styles of iconographic symbols were explained as well as the basic protocols associated with the ‘paint-up’ sessions. Paint-up sessions also had their own verses and functions in the *inma*, which we did not appreciate until we got to Mimili. The elders had brought some white gypsum and other ochres with them and we learned how to grind it down to a paste and apply it carefully with fingers (and later other, finer tools such as leaves, thin, hardened stems, and chewed and softened green twig ends).

There were so many of us on the first night that it was obvious that the precious ochres would run out. We had no locally occurring gypsum or other ochres that we were aware of then (there are, but we didn’t find out where till much later) but non-toxic Derivan finger paint is used by kindergartens without adverse reactions and the next day we bought two-litre plastic containers of it in ochre colours chosen at the art shop by the Mimili people. Problem solved.

**Differences**
Some teaching sessions began to be separate. Some of the Mimili women then started to communicate to Nepean women about some ‘different meanings’ for the songs and dances and the way they varied for men and women at different times of their lives. It became clear during the first exchange that it was quite likely our knowledge of the *inma* would vary accordingly and that our teaching and learning sessions might become increasingly separate. Some of the young radical feminists took this very hard at first and talked about their ‘rights’ to know everything. It was some years before the most militant of them accepted the reality of the situation and, ironically, it was she who first had her new baby named by the Mimili women. This is also why, in many respects, this story is told from a woman’s point of view: It is the view I experienced.
1.6 Cultural identities

Finding ourselves

The feeling of the whole group directly involved in the exchange was initially underpinned by extreme apprehension, a feeling which was admitted to by students and staff to each other and, later, by some of the Mimili women to the Nepean women. We were taken aback to find that the Mimili people, in common with many other Aboriginal people, were under the general impression that walypala indeed had no ‘dreaming’, no cultural identity and was not even aware of this lack. That is, unless we had read Stanner’s Boyer Lectures After the Dreaming (1968, and his paper White Man Got No Dreaming: 1979). There was, initially, considerable doubt in some Nepean staff and student minds whether Aboriginal culture was in any way comparable to their own, views that they openly expressed. In addition, there were distinct attitudinal and emotional uncertainties amongst both students and lecturers related to issues of value, access and ownership of their own performances from their different cultures of origin, marginalised as it already is in urban Australia.

It emerged that some non-Western European Nepean students faced similar problems in that, as well as being ‘re-programmed’ by a white Australian education system, they were culturally displaced to begin with. At least one third of the student body and some of the staff came from non-English speaking backgrounds at the grandparent level, the parent level or were themselves first generation migrants. Some came from Asian, Arabic or Southern European families and some from families where a language other than English was still the ‘home language’, although English was spoken outside the home by the younger generation and the (inevitably) male breadwinner. Social practices from the ‘old country’ were often maintained in the home: young women of twenty-three or twenty-four were still living with their parents and not allowed ‘out’ with a man unless chaperoned, despite their attendance at a university. Festivals and religious feast days were observed, food restrictions applied and respect for elders were a ‘given’ within extended families. A mix of Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Buddhist, atheist and assorted ethnic and philosophical backgrounds indicated very different ontologies and social ecologies amongst the theatre students. These colleagues also lived with ‘a foot in both camps’.

I put myself in this group, too. I didn’t fit into the ‘Anglo’ or migrant groups. Nor did I fit into an ‘identifiable’ Aboriginal community from a rural or remote area, or into an urban Koori community: our family just ‘was’ Aboriginal and mixed with a few other Aboriginal people in a
middle class mainstream. There are a very, very large number of Aboriginal people who identify (or people of Aboriginal heritage who don’t identify) in urban Australia who have lived all their lives in this way and many of them do not carry any political banner or behave in a radical way. It's a very interesting position because the extremists of neither group are keen to accept these ‘middle roaders’. As it turned out, I received absolute acceptance and respect from ultra ‘traditional’ Mimili people, whereas my experiences with urban Aborigines (no ‘Blacker’ than me) have been, at times, appallingly racist. While I understand their militant ‘politics of oppression’ and their resentful ‘welfare mentality’, I couldn’t help feeling that they could do with some of the powerfully assertive ‘politics of identity’ I experienced in Mimili. No compromise or time-wasting resentment here, just a steady movement forward to take control of their own lives in their own terms within the worst possible scenarios of social, economic and educational deprivation.

**Enculturation**

There was a perceived pressure on young people of immigrant families to become educated 'Australians' (whatever that means) especially within Theatre Nepean (which was staffed by a majority of extremely narrow-minded Anglophiles) and to ‘forget’ or ‘put aside’ their birth heritage, at least in public and on stage. This posed challenges and caused oppression to several of the students because of their personal need to retain their cultural identity while still acknowledging the value of the Other which was, for them, European-Australian. Now, alarmingly, they were being asked to appreciate an Aboriginal Australian ‘world view’ as well. To make it more difficult, almost all the students from migrant families admitted that, even though they might be themselves marginalised within mainstream society, they almost all had been taught that their various societies and cultures were superior to that of Aborigines.

It was also one of the main dilemmas facing the elders at Mimili as their young people started to drift away from the traditional teachings, rituals and life-style associated with their land and their Dreaming. Serious disruption was occurring and it was obvious to the elders that, unless they were particularly tenacious in preserving the heart of their own beliefs, they and their children increasingly would belong in neither one camp nor the other but would be absorbed eventually by a European-dominated white culture. The action to come to Sydney was one of many positive steps they took to assert their cultural independence and to form equal partnerships with European Australians. But, while the Mimili people had come to terms with colonisation and were implementing ever more purposeful plans to redress the situation from their perspective, they were also dubious of their chances of success. Even though they wanted their ceremonies to be learned and recorded, they remained suspicious.
of European cultural imperialism, which had in the past appropriated and exploited their visual arts and performances. They had been victims of cultural theft on many occasions and 'partnerships' had often turned out to be very one-sided.

As Nepean people, we were wary of the clear focus of the Mimili people (whatever their current state of societal flux) and knew we faced a challenge in deciding what to offer in exchange which would give an equally clear idea of what we were about. The diversity of backgrounds within the Nepean student body itself contributed to the difficulty of finding common ground. While the Mimili people had a body of performance that affirmed their identity as a people, we were in confusion. Some extremely heated rehearsals resulted in Nepean people walking out because their ideas were rejected by the group or because they felt the performances being devised by the group did not 'speak' for them. While the European performance 'tradition' might seem at first to be a monolithic entity it was, in fact, fractured along lines of aesthetics, style, class, gender, race and age.

Some European Australian students admitted to feelings of transferred guilt for the 1788 invasion and thought we should be performing work about that guilt to show how 'sorry' we all were. Then in the same voice they would claim racial superiority in terms of the alleged sophistication of European theatre performance compared with Aboriginal ceremonies. Some evangelical Christian students were seized with the notion that they could 'right all the European wrongs' single-handedly by some form of compensation in terms of a socio-religious performance and appropriate missionary zeal. They were highly offended when the Mimili people made it clear that these attitudes were inappropriate, unwelcome and racist.25

Many of the tacit myths about European cultural supremacy were seriously challenged for some students and staff the more they got to know the Mimili people. In coming to terms with those challenges, many assumptions about racial 'superiority' and 'inferiority' were questioned, causing confrontations between students and students, students and staff, and staff and staff. Some expressed additional (uninformed) fears about some of the reported 'dangers' associated with Aboriginal rituals - shamanism and magic, liminal states and transformations, ritual disfigurement, scarification and bloodletting. Many had read historical literature which talked about 'disgusting practices', 'lack of morality', 'outright cruelty' and 'sexual depravity'. In most cases they were unaware of the racist attitudes implicit in the literature. People didn't know what to do, how to behave, what the guidelines were. There was a disquieting feeling that 'we' wouldn't be 'in control'. Later, the Mimili people admitted they had grave doubts about us too, along very similar lines.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
Paradigm shifts

Both parties began to adjust their thinking, however, and it was the great willingness at times by almost everyone to put aside their cultural baggage (without denying their cultural heritage) that made the exchange so enjoyable. Although many differences were negotiated as they arose and, despite all the mutual concessions and not a few fantasies about switching cultures, most members of both groups were and remain healthily ethnocentric while gaining an appreciation of the relationship between 'self' and 'Other'. This they managed by means of shared performance.

Some never managed to make that perceptual leap. In early 1987, some non-participating staff members of the Theatre Department recommended that the whole project should be dropped because it was clearly "dangerous" for all concerned, was "upsetting people" and had "nothing to do with our magnificent theatre, based in centuries of European tradition". We were accused of diverting valuable funds to "worthless leapings about in the desert" when they could have been "used so much more productively to defray the costs of our expensive mainstream productions." The fact that our funds were gained from our own special Australia Council Grant in partnership with the Mimili people and were therefore not available to the Theatre Department eluded these critics. 26

Finally, the two lecturers leading the exchange from the Nepean side (us) were pressed by a group of staff to resign from the Theatre Department "in the best interests of all concerned". We were shocked. It was outright racism and the first we had ever experienced.

Of course we did not. It was obvious to us that we would never begin to understand the nature of performance unless we understood, without prejudice and without presumption, the diversity of societal beliefs, structures, values and forms which informed and shaped its practice, in both Aboriginal and European Australian contexts. It is significant that both the Faculty's Dean and the Principal of Nepean CAE backed our decision to continue thereby demonstrating leadership rather than management but our treatment (persecution, actually) within the Department by some colleagues was, not to put too fine a point on it, scandalous, and ended in civil litigation and formal disciplinary action. The bitterness it caused between some staff members remains to this day.
1.7 ngapartji-ngapartji

Our performances in exchange

In the spirit of ngapartji-ngapartji, we were committed to perform some of our theatre, dance and music. Our artistic definitions were eclectic, our usual teaching methods unsuitable to this situation and our common values and cultural roots so varied that it had been difficult to find a starting point. We needed to devise content and ways of communicating that were accessible to both the theatre students and staff and to the Mimili people, both as participants and audiences. Much European ‘high art’ performance in the twentieth century (like opera) is so class-based and so diversified in its symbolism and style that it appeals only to ‘niche’ markets or certain social classes - although it is theatrically thrilling to witness. Multi-media pop performance is hi-tech dependant and therefore was financially (and logistically) out of reach. Naturalistic theatre with its focus on domesticity and the materialistic concerns of a middle-class, capitalist society seemed irrelevant and dull to the Mimili people who were intimately connected to a spiritual ontology based in the land. Someone suggested we "do the greatest play in the English language - Hamlet." It got one vote. There were ideas for ‘folk’, 'rock', country' and 'popular' music, and Countdown-style video clips which some of the young Mimili people favoured over the inma. Most types of dance required a higher level of skill and strength, the result of years of specialised training. Many 'traditional' European dance forms, like ballet and tap, are framed and expressed along class lines and extreme stylistic protocols prevail - interesting but impractical. Contemporary dance and performance art were less demanding in terms of technique, but were often abstract, obscure and solipsistic. Religious performances seemed inappropriate, as did all the forms of scripted or stand-up comedy we could think of. This dilemma taxed our creative resources for the first two years: it seemed such a simple task initially, but when we tried to do it ...

First, we sang popular folk songs in the bus on the way back from Sydney airport. We continued to sing these because we liked them, they acted as social ‘glue’ and the Mimili people eventually joined in, as we did with their songs. A couple of days later we performed an original, ‘modern’ dance piece with a strong social message choreographed and rehearsed with students by our then movement lecturer, Ken Granneman, based on the need to recycle industrial waste. Mimili elders responded with some interest, but it wasn't performable outside the studio. There was a consensus that spoken word plays, the scripted plays for which we trained our students, were not suitable either. They comprised only one kind of performance and one that would impose spoken language barriers for both
groups. Two years later, some Mimili men did attend a ‘spoken word’ drama at the University (Peter Shaffer’s Equus) and found most of it very dull. The women didn’t attend at all but that is another story. None of this material seemed strong or clearly focused enough to us - nor did some of it offer any chance of Mimili participation, a problem with most of our performance. Catherine Ellis’s words of advice to me lingered: "Nepean is training performance professionals for a commercial market while to the Mimili people performance training is an education for living." (Personal conversation, 1986)

We tried action songs, lullabies, rap and ballads. We devised dances and sketches, performed acrobatics, magic, walked on stilts, juggled and clowned. Folk dances were added, children's games and songs, African-American spirituals with audience-response refrains and some abstract soundscapes using a synthesiser, percussion and a range of other instruments, for example, a bassoon played by one of the theatre students. While all were fun and caused comment and laughter, we were always being asked:

"Is this inma mulapa (true performance)"
"Yes ... and no," was the answer.

In a quest for a solution, Gordon Beattie eventually led us back to the beginning, the ‘universal’ elements of performance. We began to devise material which did not depend on ‘psychological realism’, spoken word and complex literary and historical references, did not need complex technology, nor use conventions of highly coded, socio-political behaviours. Our performances needed to reflect the ‘deep meanings’ of our individual backgrounds while at the same time tapping into our shared human experiences. The ‘search for truth’ continued through the first four exchanges, both in Sydney and Mimili. Short, non-scripted stories using epic narrative and episodic structure, based on the collective experiences of the Nepean group, with masks, imagery, mime, vocal sound, dance and music were what we eventually developed. ‘Episodes’ or ‘verses’ formed open-ended, interlinked narrative sequences that could be interpreted freely by the audience. These eventually built up into an extensive repertoire now known as the Desert Verses which can still be performed by those who were originally involved or people who have been trained by them. There is no way we could impart the information and tacit knowledge needed for others to perform our pieces by means of script, notation, documentation or even video and film. Any new people would have to be gradually incorporated into the ‘community’. We all agreed: you simply had to know too much about the context, the places, the people - and the performance ecology. You had to have been there and you had to know things other than the movements and the
words out of context - or the meaning was clouded, reduced. There is no doubt our new pieces were heavily influenced by our contact with the Mimili people and their emphasis on episodic narrative, context and physical environment. Nonetheless, they were wholly European in their performance style and content and proved very satisfying to perform.

**We pass the test**

After eight days of the first visit, we had learned a little about *inma* and our assumptions about our own performance practice had been deeply questioned. We were well into an ongoing spiral of reflective self-critique. The first trial period was over and Hugh said we had passed the first 'test' with flying colours. "Yes, you are going OK," they said, "but to do it properly you have to come to Mimili."

This led to a number of other concerns. In European society much emphasis is placed on the validity of gaining cognitive skills that can be taught in any classroom and performed in any theatre. However, we had begun to appreciate the challenges the Mimili people faced in Penrith in learning and accepting our ways of life and forms of performance and we knew just how important it was that we all shared parts of each other's 'lived life'. We were keen to accept the invitation but were apprehensive about leaving our own camp. Later conversations with the Mimili women revealed that they, too, had had these feelings before coming to Sydney and they took special pains to assure us we would be welcome in Mimili. We put potential problems aside for the moment and accepted the invitation.

**Funding**

It was agreed at the outset that no money would change hands, that payment for a performance would be a performance, plus the attendant hospitality - *ngapartji-ngapartji* (you give, we give) - a custom already practiced by both sides. One objective would be the sharing of skills and performance content and experience and another would be revelations of meaning about our respective cultures, taking the position that high standards of scholarship, levels of commitment and interest existed in both cultures and that we could share our performance experiences at those levels. This was all very altruistic but the whole project was shaping up to be a very expensive exercise and we had some doubts about whether we could afford it. The then Dean, Professor Ron Dunsire, agreed to underwrite us in terms of food, transport and accommodation in Penrith for the Mimili people who, at that time, had no funds for expenses at all. Nepean staff and students funded themselves on their trips to Mimili. When the exchange began, airfares were quite reasonable and we negotiated some good deals for students who could just manage with Student Union loans.
For future exchanges, we successfully invoked the Great Cultural Ancestor, the Touring and Access Board of the Australia Council on behalf of the Mimili community. The new Mimili Community Council later received and controlled a grant of $27,000, which took care of Mimili airfares to Sydney and back plus the incidental *inma* expenses in Mimili for five years, with one very moving exception. At the time, we had only the vaguest notion that what we were about to embark on what would be a wide-ranging and significant experience, occupying eighteen years of many of the participants’ lives.

**What did we do in Mimili?**

We painted up. We danced. We sang. We listened, watched and learned. We bumped about in the backs of four-wheel drive utes and trucks for short distances and we traveled in planes and buses for long distances. We walked from sacred site to sacred site, up and down mountains, across plateaus, along riverbeds, through scrub and desert. We sat round fires and drank tea. We painted up. We danced. We sang. We talked together and told jokes. We got bogged in the mud. We waited around - for the rain to stop, for the men to come back, for night to fall, for our turn to dance. We lay on the grass and slept and went swimming in waterholes and bores on hot days. We made costumes and masks. We hunted and ate bush tucker. We minded children. We avoided snakes and wild horses. We listened to Mimili stories and told our stories. We dissolved in the heat. We jammed with young musicians. We did ceremony with their parents. We cooked and ate and shared food. We took photos and shot videos. We lived and let live. We went shopping at the Mimili store and gossiped. We made up our own stories and created performances and mythologies. We painted up and danced and sang. We began to think that life in Mimili was more real than life in Penrith.
NOTES:

1. Or indeed any singing. All songs Nana sang descended the scale, even nursery rhymes, although I don’t think she was aware of that. The explanation is, of course, that her ear was ‘tuned’ to a different set of aural protocols. Ellis: 1963-1996 (passim).

2. Tindale’s map would place her people in Mutthi Mutthi (Madi Madi) country ranging from the Murrumbidgee to Lake Mungo with people to the west and people to the east. Check map.

3. The film Lousy Little Sixpence describes in some detail the lives of some of these young women and their respective fates. Whether or not Nana’s life in a working-class marriage, with five children, was hard during the First World War and the Depression in Bankstown, it can hardly have been worse than indentured ‘service’ in Bombala. There are no records at Cootamundra of an Alice Johnson at that time, but many of the early records ‘went missing’ when the place was closed.

4. My initial contact with Mutthi Mutthi people was very pleasant. We arranged to visit with a group of students, through contact with an ex-student of mine, Russell Newitt. The Mutthi Mutthi group were planning ‘cultural experience’ treks and camps to Lake Mungo and I naively thought it would be a good idea to link up with family rather than go to Central Australia again. When I told them about my Nana and her associations with the area, however, the attitude changed abruptly. I was not, it appeared, a ‘connected’ person.

5. Alice Moyle (passim – see Bibliography)

6. See the film Stages: 1981 and Brook’s book, The Shifting Point: 1987 and the tours by Midnight Oil. What was so important about these contacts was that they were virtually ‘anthropology-free’ and put performers of an equivalent ‘professional’ level in both cultures in direct contact with each other.

7. An unpublished paper by Francesca Cathie (UWS, 1999) explores the methodology and scope of these cultural and educational videos. Also the video Minyma Kutjarra Tjukurpa (1999) produced by Irurrnyu Media.

8. Aboriginal people in other parts of Australia also had sporadic contact with European-Australian literature, performance and visual arts. Links were developed with Aboriginal playwrights in Western Australia, in Sydney with the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre and later Bangarra, and visual artists from Northern Australia with art dealers, music with a number of individual artists and recording companies in Adelaide and Melbourne (Breen et al, 1989; Ellis: 1985). Aboriginal performance soloists, groups, choirs, and bands like No Fixed Address, Coloured Stone and Warumpi have become very well known. Yothu Yindi’s founder Mandawuy Yunupingu has won numerous awards throughout the nineties including Australian of the Year in 1996 and Coloured Stone’s founder, Bunna Lawrie won the Don Burrows Award in 1999. After the 1997 Referendum, during the seventies and eighties, contact increased remarkably, with Aboriginal performance culture becoming a hot commercial property, culminating in the Festival of the Dreaming in 1997. This was much to the disgust of anthropologists, who consequently started to lose their grip on their ‘ownership’ of Aboriginal culture. The final insult, I was told by a very prominent anthropologist, was Bruce Chatwin’s Songlines (1985) selling millions when their educated tomes were lucky to break even on a run of two thousand. Articles on Aboriginal arts are now common ‘feature article’ topics in newspapers and magazines, such as The Weekend Australian and The Good Weekend. In the years after 1990-1999, there were over three hundred substantial articles published in popular newspaper and magazine sources alone. Due to the length of the list, they are not all included in the Bibliography.

9. An inma is a traditional, Central Australian, Anangu ceremony that has both open and secret levels and many ways of being ‘performed’. The inma maku (the particular ceremony which is central to this work) is an increase ceremony, the focus of which is the maku, the edible grub
The 1980s saw a large number of research reports on Aboriginal health and education in the Northern Territory and South Australia, including Honari (passim). Many of these reports were never published and it is clear from the present state of affairs that few were acted upon.

10. The 1980s saw a large number of research reports on Aboriginal health and education in the Northern Territory and South Australia, including Honari (passim). Many of these reports were never published and it is clear from the present state of affairs that few were acted upon.

11. Sam Pumani (a Pitjantjatjara elder) was a ‘traditional’ owner (by marriage) and leading song man of the inma maku, the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara witchetty grub ceremonies in Mimili during the five years of our exchange. He died, well into his eighties, in 1993, still in charge. He was our chief teacher and mentor and it was he (supported by the community) who ultimately gave permission for material from the inma to be used in this thesis, provided that I observed the protocols and did not reveal secrets. He was a strong believer in documentation and recording, but only as a valuable record. For Sam, nothing compared with the necessity to DO the protocols never.


13. Ian had permission from the elders, and had indeed been requested to teach us these verses.

14. It turned out to be one of the most important ceremonies in Central Australia, ranging across the whole of the Central and Western Deserts.

15. How sensible! In urban white culture this civilised practice has gone out of fashion!

16. Penrith is semi-rural and is very close to the Glenbrook and Blue Mountains National Parks and it turned out that local Aboriginal hunters have a range of rights, even in those parks. Or so they said.

17. This was a co-production with The National Parks and Wildlife service that explored the adverse effects of logging old growth forests. It took place in a cool-zone forest and used the natural environment. The audience followed the performers around through a number of ‘spaces’ and experienced the terrain and the wildlife. The Mimili people construct nearly all their relationships.

18. The swamp area offered a range of very interesting sheltered spaces for dance and communal fires. The grounds workers at the University went out of their way to clear away weeds for us, to stack brush and logs for fires and to patrol the area late at night. It is overlooked by half of the University buildings on that campus also, and the distant sights and sounds emanating from the trees drew a large audience over the years, some of which stayed to join in.

19. This area has now become a regular performance space for Nepean students and is acquiring some vibrations of performances past, well on the way to a ‘sacred site’ of sorts.

20. Leon was one of a group of Jungian psychoanalysts interested in the connections between Aboriginal religion, dreaming, iconography and the impacts of European colonisation on social cohesion, and the increase in schizophrenia among Aboriginal people. The interest of Jungians in Aboriginal culture has been noted elsewhere, and it was in fact his colleague, Craig San Roque, who later became more closely involved with our exchange. He then moved to another and quite different collaborative project connected constructing a dreaming to deal with the ravages of alcohol and the West. (San Roque: 1998)

21. Inma Nyi Nyi. (Zebra Finch Ceremony), recorded at Indulkana in 1975 by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music in Adelaide, and Anbarra Manikay, Djamidji, an Aboriginal song cycle from Northern Australia, a recording of which was published in 1981, by the AIATSIS (Hatt, Clunies-Ross, Wild, et al) were the most available at the time. To my knowledge, there have been comparatively few such recordings made since by non-Aboriginal people, and certainly none so thoroughly documented as the Anbarra performances. On the other hand, there has been a significant increase in recordings made by Aboriginal people themselves since the early 1980’s.
22. This was very interesting. A process of attrition occurred. No-one was pressured to take their clothes off unless they felt comfortable, and as the senior female staff member, I said I would keep company with the women who were not comfortable, my art student co-career as an ‘exotic dancer’ in Kings Cross in the sixties notwithstanding. One by one, they gave in to the desire to participate with the Mimili women who were very matter-of-fact and supportive. There was never a hint of impatience. Eventually the women all flung European middle class morality to the winds and gave themselves up to what proved to be an extremely pleasurable and not at all embarrassing experience. Many of the men, also, were initially embarrassed even to remove their shirts in front of other people and this was a great surprise to the women who had assumed it would be ‘easy’ for them. Students coming after this knew about it and their willingness to undress often decided whether they would become involved in the first place.

23. In 1998, I was facilitating a project in Aboriginal story telling for non-Aboriginal Theatre students at Nepean with two very experienced Aboriginal teachers - Pauline McCloud and Sandra Hickey - who said the same thing. "But", they assured me, very kindly, "when they get stuck, we talk culture with them and give them a bit of an idea, eh?"

24. As recently as 1997 a young Aboriginal student in first year BA Performance at Nepean was advised by a staff member that he must "put aside his Aboriginality" if he wanted to succeed in mainstream theatre in Australia. This led to very strong action by the Aboriginal Centre and the EEO Office and a request that some Theatre staff undertake training in intercultural relations in education. The young man concerned left before he graduated, and has a very successful professional career with, among other mainstream groups, the Sydney Theatre Company who, despite their conservatism, value his abilities as an actor.

25. The Mimili people always decided who would be invited back to Mimili each time they came to Penrith. Some of these students did not believe that this was so, or that it should be so and took offence. It was noticeable that the ‘do-gooder’ students were never invited to Mimili, much to their astonishment and, in some cases, sheer disbelief, which in one instance escalated into acrimony and retaliation, ending in formal complaints against the lecturers for imagined favoritism, personal slights and religious discrimination.

26. One man was personally deeply threatened by the project. He was completing a thesis on Australian Aboriginal sacred performance space but had minimal contact with any such space, such performance, or indeed with Aboriginal people. Most of his work was based on secondary source studies by European and American published scholars of a previous romantic and racist generation, some of whom had never even been to Australia. During the entire exchange he never attended a single innma or interacted with any of the Mimili people and, although he finished his theoretical degree (examined wholly in America), he remained opposed to an exploration of its very subject matter at the experiential level.

27. Ten years later, this is undoubtedly true. These verses may never be performed again.

28. This was an extraordinary experience for us. On one occasion our friends rang to invite us to a big ceremony. We could not afford it at that time, and the Mimili people sent us a cheque for $6000 to pay for the airfares and the bus travel. The roles were well and truly reversed and we were speechless at both their gesture and our immediate confusion. We accepted with great happiness and went immediately.
Chapter 2

*pantini*

casting about for the scent

Tapping his stick on the ground, and dancing all the while, Wati Tjalku tested the ground to hear where the Maku Ancestor was burrowing. Sniffing the trails of urine and faeces, the Bilby tracked the Grub from Mintubi to Antara

Inma Maku verse
2

*pantini*

*casting about for the scent*

2.1 Performance and new research contexts

Words. I have grown suspicious of them. The irony is that I am paid handsomely to use them. And use them I do, mostly in delivering windy lectures to hundreds of university students every year, trying to convey an understanding of the history of the North American continent both before and after the European arrival. I have been holding forth on the subject for years and am growing increasingly distrustful of what I have been saying. Partly because I use the language of the Anglo-American; they are the words of a Western-trained, Western-oriented intellect as it seeks to wrap itself around this place, this landscape, and to convey what has transpired here in the affairs of humankind. Yet all the while I am mocked by the knowledge that my words are not the words of the people whom my ancestors encountered on this continent. Those earlier residents pronounced the place, and described the affairs of people very differently from the way I do now ... our differing sets of words have yielded profoundly variant stories. (Martin: 1992)

**My research interest**

My keen research interest comes from a lifetime as a performer, a visual artist, a director, a musician, an administrator, a writer and a designer in the European Australian mainstream, commercial, arts industry. I have worked in the 'high art' spheres of theatre, ballet and opera, in the 'alternative' arts scene of experimentation and innovation, and in the 'low art' hustle of nightclubs, theatre restaurants, media, advertising and television. I trained and worked as a scholar and teacher in primary, secondary and tertiary arts education and have been a facilitator and participant in a range of activities with youth, and community festivals and celebrations. I have coordinated a University Performance Research Centre for 6 years and I have received my share of arts grants, awards and commissions. I am, in my way, very successful at what I do.
But, there is also my Other self - being 'of two cultures', each of which have a profoundly different way of thinking about the arts, especially performance. I was, from 1998 to 2001, Coordinator of Aboriginal Studies at the University of Western Sydney. Which gave me great uneasiness of body and spirit. And despite my attempts to ensure that traditional knowledges are maintained, translating them to contemporary pedagogy causes me considerable unease, still.

When I joined the staff of Theatre Nepean as the first 'theory' lecturer in the BA Theatre, sporting a Master of Letters in Comparative Musicology from the University of New England, I was faced with a challenge. It was to translate the performance experience into written discourse that could be assessed as 'knowledge' within a university framework, thereby validating the practical aspects of the new BA course. To most of the performance staff, some of them alarmingly inexperienced in the professions of both performance and teaching despite their various 'degrees', this meant mainstream European theatre history. I covered an area dating from the Greeks BCE, through Medieval church drama and Shakespeare, by way of Jacobean Tragedy and Comedy of Manners to the naturalist theatre of Ibsen, Chekov and Shaw, and the twentieth century iconoclasts Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook. I was expected also to teach techniques of literary analysis of play scripts in English and the history of theatrical adjuncts such as costumes, set design, theatre architecture and stage technology. Another portfolio was the aesthetic evaluation of performance using a narrow set of 'class-related' standards and dramatic structural analysis based on the theories of either Aristotle or Brecht.

In 'The Industry' (or 'The Profession', as it is called when we are feeling up-market) for which we were training our students, practitioners in each type of performance were, and still continue to be, separated in terms of categories and sub-categories. People are firstly writers, dancers, actors, musicians, filmmakers or visual artists, and then they fit into the genres they 'profess'. Practitioners and administrators (there are very few theorists in The Industry!) train in the Studio, the Conservatorium, the Company or, since the early 1980s, the University, isolated from each other's disciplines and genres unless some form of cross-disciplinary collaboration is deliberately planned. This is then called 'innovation' or 'hybrid arts' and is almost always an occasion for self-congratulation and Australia Council blessings (and money) but, in real terms, roles and genres continue to be characterised by clear and jealously guarded demarcations of territory: specialised training regimes, roles, practices, responsibilities, and remuneration levels. A cult of 'fame equals excellence' operates throughout. It is a profit-driven Industry, exhibiting all the worst excesses of an individualistic, rational, capitalist society. Aboriginal performance hardly ever fits this paradigm of an 'Industry', a mainstream 'Profession' or even an 'Art'.

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
Many respected academics and theatre practitioners in a multi-cultural Australia still believe that what performance students should be fed are culturally sanctioned historical, technical and literary 'facts' and 'skills' which support an unquestioning hegemony of mainstream, middle class, European theatre. No place here for Aboriginal performance! However, I set about inserting Aboriginal and other intercultural content and approaches as much as I could into the core subjects I was hired to teach, such as 'Ritual and Performance' and 'Australian Theatre and Cultural Contexts'. It was another ten years before I was 'permitted' to write and offer a subject in 'Australian Aboriginal Performance' and even then it was marginalised as a specialisation offered once every two years. This was a key factor in my leaving the Faculty of Visual and Performing Arts in 1997 to write and facilitate the introduction of Aboriginal Studies.

In the mid-1980s, another group of colleagues in the Humanities Faculty directed me to the twentieth century French body of feminist, literary and linguistics theory - Saussure, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, Cixous & Co. and their formalist and structuralist antecedents and successors in the Russian and Frankfurt Schools. A timid entrant into the academic jousting lists in Australia in the late 1970s, semiotic analysis of literature was based in the general principles of linguistic structuralism and deconstruction, concepts I had already touched on in my music studies. (Nattiez: 1980) It was being explored by a small number of universities in Australia and in several new performance research centres in Europe and America, based on earlier work by a group known as 'the Prague School.\(^2\) Approaches were certainly ahistorical and analytical yet still they were written-text based. In their post-structural guise, they were prepared to include individual cultural and expressive practices and to contemplate the existence of a post-colonial, non-male, even a non-Anglo 'subject'. But, they continued to regard experience and phenomenology as unreliable and 'unscientific' and were reluctant to come to terms with spirituality, the senses, with the corporeal body or with performances/visual arts of the non-European Other. In their post-modern guise, any talk of tradition was virtually impossible and I could not accept that the social and physical environments of performance events were constructed or appropriated only in the service of the mise en scène. While cultural studies scholars certainly admitted multiple 'texts', and acknowledged the primary role of the onlooker/reader in meaning-making, they eliminated the 'author' as signifier, which was a bit tough on all the writers, designers, directors, directors of photography, choreographers, composers and - performers. Besides, semiotic deconstruction/text analysis is a methodology, not a theory and, when we looked closely, it was what all we creative artists did anyway as an everyday process in the devising and critique of our creative works. Now we found it was 'allowed' to write about this 'everyday process' and call it research, so some advance had been made, I suppose. Most of us got a bit annoyed at

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
the appropriation of our basic working practices by theorists who then dismissed us as irrelevant. Even more irritating, it was, and still is, hard to write about any area of cultural studies with engaging with ‘that language’, because it is the one that has been valorised as the ‘official discourse’.

**Anthropology**

My interest in intercultural performance, and Aboriginal performance in particular, meant that I was a rather lonely voice in this intellectual crowd where words like ‘ecology’, ‘creativity’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘performer’ were anathema. And, as ethno-musicological analysis, theatre history and cultural studies had offered me so little satisfaction, I reluctantly moved my PhD to an anthropology department hoping to find some answers. Aboriginal performance up until the mid 1980s was, after all, the province of anthropology. However, I soon found out that on one hand anthropology pretended to be an ‘objective’ science and on the other hand, it, too, operated in accordance with whatever European cultural theories and philosophies were current. Each time the paradigm shifted, everyone rushed to the other side of the ship. I remained at a loss about how to bridge the gaps because I was unable to accept that scientific fieldwork, ‘objective’ observation, data collection and analysis of behaviour, (and the European ‘cultural studies’ interpretations that went with them) necessarily made sense, especially to Australia’s indigenous people. Essentially, the academic processes involved were the very antithesis of the performance processes and the published results more often than not at variance with the experiences of the participants!

And not all the discarded cultural theories are entirely wrong simply because they are ‘out of fashion’. Aspects of all of them have a place, somewhere. The discredited functionalist approach, for instance, certainly had limitations as an over-arching framework but also some virtues in that, from one point of view, Aboriginal people themselves see their ceremonies as being highly ‘functional’. Likewise, old-fashioned structuralism had its problems when taken to extremes. But, aspects of Van Gennep’s and Levi-Strauss’ structural thinking were extremely useful to me in understanding and interpreting the notion of ‘songlines’. Some of the other ideas demanded a gendered, post-structuralist reframing (Breitling: 1985) - more appropriate when considering individual groups of people and the meaning of their ceremonies in their own terms. However, an over-use of European some cultural theories (gender and post-colonialism in particular) problematised Aboriginal communities since they perceived gender and power differently. To analyse the *inma maku* using (say) a radical feminist model is to draw an extremely stretched bowstring if Aboriginal women themselves do not perceive themselves to be in need of that particular reframing. Post-colonialism has encouraged a level of evangelism which at times is often little different from the colonialism being ‘redressed’ - neo-colonialism - unless the voices are diverse and Aboriginal and there

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
is very little of that. Psycho-analytic, Marxist and post-modern models also might be interesting excursions in terms of European intellectual game-playing and might help Europeans understand the European world but they are an imposition of frightening proportions when used on re-framing Aboriginal psyches, sociologies and ontological dissonances unless parallels are drawn very carefully. Psychoanalysis imposes self-indulgent Freudian readings on Aboriginal cosmologies but demonstrates (to Europeans!) that the culture has depths potentially unrealised (to Europeans!). Marxism plays havoc with the traditional social structures that go hand in hand with the performances but it provides some ammunition for European social justice agendas. Post-modernism throws the traditional baby out with the bathwater and offends everyone - but in Black urban culture it is a source of creativity and provides a much-needed ironic viewpoint on cultural disintegration.

What really annoyed me was the widespread assumption that each of these serially emerging (evolutionary?) European theoretical positions during the twentieth century was supposedly 'more correct' than the last one. What? All of them? Where were the Aboriginal viewpoints, I asked? What about Aboriginal cultural theory? "Ah", I was told, very patronisingly, "They don't really think like that." Oh? "Well, if 'they' don't think like that', what do 'they' think like? When was the last time a European anthropologist sat down with an Aboriginal elder to share views on post-modernism?" I asked. That earned me a reputation of being 'difficult' - and I hadn't even broached the topic of phenomenology yet!

It has been argued that European cultural imperialism comes in many guises and anthropology turned out to be no different. Articles of agreement in the Code of Ethics for Professional Anthropologists in Australia (Sutton: 1986) read like the rules of an exclusive white club. "Helping anthropologists" (Cowlishaw: 1990) have ably kept their 'subjects' powerless. A contentious article in the Weekend Australian interrogated the role of anthropologists in Aboriginal land claims actions (Hills: 1999), making some very cynical remarks about 'experts' without local knowledge and Aboriginal people's manipulation of people who 'wanted to believe'. What was being overlooked by anthropologists, semioticians, cultural studies researchers and performance scholars - even the post structural, post-colonial, feminist radicals - was that, within traditional 'religious' ceremonies and 'aesthetic' performances, and also in their contemporary social practice of everyday life, Aboriginal people themselves 'speak', put forward theories about their own culture and have their own discourses. If Aboriginal voices weren't being heard in something as vital as land claims actions, the plight of Aboriginal performance research was very serious.
Early Aboriginal performance research in Australia

Aboriginal performance as a significant 'category' for contemporary research was first focused on in a public forum (if briefly) by Australian academics during a 1961 conference on the 'progress' of Aboriginal anthropology and ethnography thus far. This resulted in Stanner and Sheils' editing of a symposium of papers, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (1963). The conference highlighted an unsatisfactory situation: while the area of music (able to be notated) was receiving enough attention to write a survey of "research to date" (Jones: 1961), along with a briefer report reviewing research into Aboriginal visual arts, there had been virtually no systematic research and analysis into dance or dramatic representation, despite the rich archives of descriptions of whole or parts of rituals and ceremonies. Moreover, there was very little recognition that myths and performance were inextricably inter-connected, or that performance in itself was a vital factor in understanding many other aspects of Aboriginal "being in the world" (Heidegger: 1962). Nor was there any sign that Aboriginal people might be considered experts in the field.

Catherine Berndt's comments reveal that there was a growing consciousness in some quarters, but not nearly enough to swing the research away from the grip of the functionalists and the structuralists and their earnest search for scientific facts and universal truths. Their stated objectives sprang from a philanthropic concern to save a "dying Aboriginal culture" from complete extinction by documenting as much tangible evidence as possible before it went (Elkin: 1938).

Berndt's words had a great deal of resonance for me and for the Mimili experience.

There is a paradox here. On one hand, it is sometimes assumed that where emotions and feelings are concerned human beings can understand each other more readily and more directly than where intellectual factors intervene: that fundamental human responses underlie local differences, and that 'art speaks all languages'. On the other hand it is the claim that symbolic statements made by any people are by far the hardest for an outsider to comprehend, let alone appreciate: that the more prosaic and practical the point at issue, the less ambiguity there is likely to be. Cutting across both of these is the view that the art and literature of any people, its range of aesthetic and artistic expression, provides a better index to that people's essential quality of soul than any analysis of their performance in other spheres. It is doubtful whether this standpoint would meet with majority approval today, when so much more prestige is accorded to achievements in the reals of technology and of the physical-natural sciences.

(Berndt, C. in Stanner & Sheils, eds.: 1963, 257), my emphasis)
There is a second paradox Catherine Berndt did not identify: the research approach being used by anthropologists was completely different from the phenomena being studied. A few ethnographers with training in some aspect of the arts fared better, but there remained a massive gap between what was recorded and written about, and what actually happened. Ethnographers and anthropologists seemed unaware of ‘performance’ as a phenomenon connected to being-in-the-world, or its role in culture-making or maintenance. There is, for instance, almost no reference in Aboriginal ethnography until the 1980s to anything that could be recognised as ‘performance theory’. Issues of sensory perception or emotional experience are virtually avoided and little research at all into performance ecologies takes place. As John von Sturmer says at the end of his article "Aboriginal singing and notions of power":

This paper represents an appeal for proper weight and attention to be paid to performances. This goes beyond a conventional sociological style analysis of the sort: XI (from Clan X) danced the Y dance with his MB-S (Y3) from the Clan Y which owns the neighbouring estate; or D held her breast to mark her relationship with Z, her son, who danced the A3 dance. Such information is indispensable. However, the meaning of performances cannot be reduced to the mechanical playing out or enactment of sign systems. One could exhaust all the signs and yet know that there is an "over and above". When they succeed, performances communicate directly. When they fail, then we read them as elements which somehow "failed to gel". All performances no doubt embody "statements" about being-in-the-world; rituals are the most determinative of "discourses". Here the body speaks -directly, and in its totality. It is an essential task to develop a methodology for examining performances in themselves - and in relation to other performances (both of the same and other sorts), and as engaged in and played out in different social/material conditions.

The hazard otherwise is that we are likely to re-assert the artifactualising of Aboriginal social and cultural life; invite Aborigines to participate in illegitimate - from their point of view - performance contexts; make the spirit subservient to the (recording) machine; and deny ourselves the opportunity of ever understanding how the techniques and content of the song, and the techniques and content of the dance, come together for the creation of such intense meaning, overflowing with conviction. (von Sturmer: 1987a, 63-76; my emphasis)

It is evident that, generally speaking, anthropologists were virtually ignorant of specialised contemporary performance research until very, very recently. As Professor Annette Hamilton suggested to me in a written note in 1994:
...Anthropologists have never seen "performance" as a concept or an analysis on its own with deep relevance to their own concerns. It would certainly be legitimate to ask why this is so, but the answer's pretty obvious - it's hard to know how to do it without specialist training..."  Hamilton: July 1994

The treatment of non-European (and particularly Australian Aboriginal) cultural performance in Australia by both the arts and the social sciences fields was then, and remains, of particular concern. This is not just because of the invisibility of the 'authors' and the reductive methodologies used by anthropologists and ethnographers but because of how the discourse on indigenous live performance has been conducted according to European paradigms.

However, in an anthropology department I did discover that there was something called 'interpretive' anthropology. Represented to begin with by early structuralists, post-structuralists, psychologists and phenomenologists Van Gennep, Huizinga, Levi-Strauss, Levi-Bruhl, Merleau-Ponty and Bateson (with whom I was reasonably familiar), the debate had moved anthropology towards the study of the meaning of cultural representations and social behaviours: myths, rituals, narratives, play and 'art', thence the field of phenomenological perception and its association with human spiritual beliefs. Not a whole answer, but at last here was some theory with which to make a beginning. A few social scientists and performers seemed to have some enthusiasm for the field, and it started to ring bells for me too. Victor Turner, Geertz, Peacock, Turnbull and the later Bateson were among the first I read, followed later by Marcus and Fischer, and Clifford. I should have been warned, however, when I discovered that their ethnography was termed 'radical' by conservative anthropologists.

Things began to look up, especially when I found the work of Layton, Muecke and Morphy on intersubjectivity and ... surprise! surprise! ... Australian Aboriginal culture! Even Aboriginal voices, like Langton! But that was well after 1985 when I was already immersed in the experience of learning directly from Aboriginal performance teachers.³

**Knowledge sharing is a two-way process**

Because both sides were both interested in a 'translation of culture', it was as necessary for the Mimili people to understand how we 'framed' our performances as it was that we understood how they 'framed' theirs - and that our knowledges were shared on an intersubjective basis. This opportunity is closed to both European and Aboriginal performers while European academics maintain control over fields of knowledge that they hardly ever communicate freely amongst each other, let alone with their 'subjects' and 'informants'. Notwithstanding an overwhelming body of accumulated ethnographic data in anthropological

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
archives and well-developed performance theories and writings in published theatre research, very little work has gone into intersubjective explorations.

The ways in which the languages and voices of culture are constructed, performed, experienced and interpreted, relevant to both parties, are concealed, although Indigenous people the world over have consistently demonstrated themselves willing to share their knowledges. There has been very little co-theorising in Aboriginal and European Australian communities about the relationships between people's 'art-making' and their 'being-in-the-world' and little mutual exchange between people concerned with different religious and artistic social systems. Very little collaborative performance analysis and ethnography has been written, although some Aboriginal people have been 'consultants'.

Translation of culture
What should have been explored all along is what Robert Layton in "Relating to the country" calls

"... a fundamental issue in anthropology, that of whether the translation of culture is possible, or whether cultures are closed to one another. " (1995, 212)

Although he is speaking of the difficulties that arose in representing Aboriginal land rights claims before an Australian court, which had an entirely different understanding of the matters at hand, the same kinds of epistemological issues are likely to (and did) arise in sharing ideas and knowledge about performance. It was while performing in Mimili and Penrith, living together in day-to-day situations in which our collective ceremonies had contemporary relevance, that we inscribed forever into our respective and mutual "being-in-the-world" many of the physical, emotional, intellectual and psychic experiences which most certainly allowed us a significant degree of "translation of culture". We cannot be sure exactly in what ways it was 'the same'.

An invitation to the ball
When the Mimili people invited us back to their place to dance, it suddenly became possible to explore intercultural, intersubjective performance exchanges by taking part in a real one. I had several personal aims: to look at new ways of creating performance and performance 'discourse'; to enrich the teaching and learning experiences; to provide resources for me and my students; to explore my own Aboriginality; to spend a lot of time in Central Australia; and to engage in fieldwork for my PhD thesis (an awful academic de rigeur) based on something worthwhile. And all this with my best friend. And with an Australia Council grant. Bargain.

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
As the Mimi-Nepean exchange was initiated by a 'corporation of performers' rather than by an 'authority of anthropologists', we all had hopes that we would find ways by which we could achieve this goal together - a practical exercise in intersubjectivity. Reflecting on it now, we are very mindful of Marcia Langton's "Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television" (1993, 32) also referred to by Stephen Muecke in No Road.

In her account of Aboriginality as intersubjectivity, identities are constantly renegotiated in three ways: One: Aboriginal people negotiating with each other in the context of Aboriginal cultures. Two: the stereotyping and mythologising of Aboriginal people by unknowledgable whites. Three: a dialogue situation in which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people participate in a mutual construction of identities. These three intersubjective relations work to different extents in different times and places, and the implication is that in the ongoing construction of these relations there is always an effect and a consequence for the movement.

In the Hegelian dialect of otherness, the other always falls victim in the encounter, where the mastering self has an appropriative movement towards the other. ... Hélène Cixous yearns for "type of exchange in which each one would keep the other alive and different". ... Accordingly she talks of "lightly touching" (she uses the verb effleurer, with 'flower' in it). This touch must somehow produce a strange feeling, since the aim is not to reduce the strangeness of the other to the same, but to maintain the strangeness.

This does not contradict Langton's notion of a productive intersubjective space. Intersubjective relations cannot, however, be ideally equal and 'otherless'. Rather, the negotiations take place in the context of an overarching State power, within which individual and small-group potencies are built up and forces exchanged. The task of contemporary thought is to attribute a value to the strangeness of others, and to provide occasions for giving this value a force and usefulness. (1997, 181-185)

We opted for "Three".
2.2 An 'ecology' of performance

Definitions
'Ecology' does not simply mean 'environment' in the physical sense. A social ecology depends on how all people, phenomena or available raw materials 'sit' with each other, how they interrelate and how they are perceived to interrelate in social contexts. Performance is a social act, so the performance ecology automatically is part of (or the same as?) the social ecology. Some social ecologies include more than just people and their physical environment, especially if the natural environment and other living things are perceived to be active participants in people's lives and cosmologies. If there is a religious or supernatural aspect to the society, that also will become part of the scenario. A performance ecology, therefore, is one constructed by humans from all aspects of their "being-in-the-world" in order to consciously show and tell how "being in the world" is for them. This varies enormously and, when we come to look at how performance is different for each culture, a very wide range of factors needs to be considered.

Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism
A feature of the Greco-Judaic-European approach to dramatic performance is a concern with 'protagonists', 'antagonists', 'actors', 'audiences' and 'authors' - usually male. This is a reflection of an anthropocentric, phallocentric, individualistic and monotheistic ontology which constructs performance as being part of a society's cultural capital, or even its social capital, but not as existing first of all within a broad cultural, social, spiritual and environmental cultural and social ecology. It is therefore understandable that the potential for active contribution of (for instance) non-human, environmental and spiritual factors to contemporary urban European Australian performance is not considered at all, or is, at best, tacit. It is also why performance is not seen as a central activity and source of community interchange in Australian urban social and spiritual life but, rather, as a consumption item. European performance discourse tends to construct all actors, acts and artefacts as 'objects'. For example, Strehlow called his book The Songs of Central Australia (1971) rather than Singing Central Australia, which is how an indigenous person would frame the notion. The 'professionalisation' of the 'entertainment industry', the dominance of the published and purveyed text, script or score, or the dissemination of electronically mass-produced video or sound recordings has further accentuated the obsession with 'objects'. These objectifications detach performances from their ecologies and universalise them in terms of 'the human condition' and the commercial marketplace.
Performance itself is not an 'object' at all, but a narrative and embodied discourse medium which straddles the often uneasy and fluctuating gaps between people and their social beliefs and practices. These include rituals and social customs (and their subversions); human relationships and formal kinship systems; institutional, jural and control systems; economic and subsistence practices; physical environments; myths and religions; æsthetics and politics. Performance itself (or any art-making for that matter) does not belong in the taxonomy of cultural 'objects' at all. It is a communication activity or process by which each and every aspect of changing inter-human and extra-human behaviours and interrelations, and their relations with their environmental ecologies, are negotiated and 'voiced' in a number of languages, genres, forms and styles.

The objective of embodied narrative and performed discourse is to connect people with their own and each other's lived lives directly and immediately and allow the external expression of 'the human condition'. European performers (except in some experimental works) strive for the 'human' but often pass over very important aspects of the 'condition'. In Aboriginal performance, humans remain in a balance with their environmental and spiritual ecologies and in many cases people are not the main 'players' at all. Myriad configurations of the above are revealed in the taxonomies, values and æsthetics attached to performances in different cultures and subcultures, each of which develops its own languages, genres, types, forms, and ranges of performance skills and styles. This means that the task of defining a 'performance ecology' is both an easy and difficult one, since performance can attempt to reflect, in some cases, a very isolated sector of human experience and, in others, the whole of a lived world.

As Morteza Honari, a human ecologist, writes:

> The holistic view of human ecology ensures that dynamism, continuity, totality, harmony and productivity of human ecosystems are maintained. In this approach, human ecosystems refer to the flow of cultures, and cover all human activities through natural interactions. Human ecologists are specialists in non-specialisation and integration for the advancement of health and the quality of life. It would seem important to capture the essence of human ecology, and to list its dimensions, rather than to attempt to establish acceptable definitions. In summary, human ecology:

- is concerned with causes and effects, events and impacts and relationships and interdependence of humans and their environments;
- is concerned with global, spatial, temporal dimensions and their interplay;

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
focuses on people, their material, cultural and spiritual needs and their interactions;

- emphasises that development must be appropriate, not only to the environment and resources but also to the culture, history, institutions and social systems of the place in which it occurs

- integrates knowledge, experience and wisdom from all disciplines, sciences and theories in order to link the past, present and future together. (Honari: 1993, 22)

This is a view that accommodates both Aboriginal Australian and European Australian performers but the distinction between ‘human ecology’ and ‘social ecology’ is important. A further link needs to be made to accommodate the Aboriginal worldview of the equal importance of the environmental, spiritual and non-human in the social matrix.

### 2.3 A methodology for performance research

What actually happens when two groups of people (one a monocultural, traditionally coherent but colonised, desert-dwelling, indigenous Aboriginal community and the other a multicultural, post modern, urban-dwelling group) decide to conduct a mutual exploration of their performances under particular research conditions over a period of time. What happens when they continue to meet for several years to perform for and with each other - ngapartji- ngapartji - for the sheer pleasure of it? What happens if and when circumstances and agendas change? And, as each is ‘Somebody’s Other’ (Bharucha: 1994), can two sets of balancing acts be maintained and integrated?

Therefore, for us, performance was our participatory action research methodology, a cultural process not just a cultural activity. This process is not one that an anthropologist or a cultural studies scholar would adopt. Ngapartji-ngapartji would blur the boundaries needed to conduct objective analysis that seeks to identify and understand ‘difference’. Our ‘results’ were then likely to be phenomenological and hermeneutic in nature and difficult to put into words.

**A phenomenological, action-based, human science research methodology**

Performance, in fact, researches and analyses itself. Long before the written word, performance was used to explore a hermeneutics of culture - consciously and unconsciously. All performance participants - actors and onlookers - say to each other:
"This is how it was for us. Remember."

or,

"This is how this aspect of our world seems now. Recognise yourself?"

or,

"This is how it must be for all of us. Maintain our traditions."

or,

"This is an extremity to which we could be pushed. Experience the limits!"

or,

"How could things be different? Let's try it this way."

Or

"We need to mark this occasion. Celebrate."

Only in relatively recent times, with the popularisation of print media, have live performances and narratives in European societies ceased to be valued as a primary means by which societal values, history and human experience - tacit and explicit - are affirmed and debated. Some schools of thought say that with the explosion of visual and auditory mass media and film that the pendulum is swinging back the other way (Yiacoumi: 2001). In some oral societies, such as Aboriginal Australia, performance is still where much important information is stored and where representations of social transition and transformation are consciously negotiated through performances, using a kind of ongoing 'action research' model.

**Action research**

In 1985, none of the people in the exchange had ever heard of Kurt Lewin (1946). **Action research** is the way our exchange developed because it proved to be the most effective way and the articulation and refinement of the method came later when we started to tangle with the 'theory' of research methodologies and asked each other: "What are we doing here?"

**Participatory** action research best suited the management of the project because the making of all performance, far from being simply a cultural phenomenon, a peripheral aesthetic expression or an economic outcome is a **process** in which reflecting, change and subsequent action is an integral part of performance practice. It is also a paradigm of the reflexive stages referred to in theories of **systemic action research** and **collaborative action research**, a research approach that has found significant support in Australia in the areas of education, social ecology and extension learning. (Reason and Rowan: 1981; Kemmis and McTaggart: 1982; Frère: 1982; Kolb: 1984; Reason: 1994, 1988; Bawden: 1995)

Performances reveal people continually re-thinking and re-constructing their own statements about their changing concepts of reality. We see the full spectrum of performance practice

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
as societies represent, in a constant state of flux, in a variety of ‘texts’ and in a series of recursive, accumulative and progressive spirals, what people in those societies believe, experience and re-experience about themselves as they change. People use performance as a familiar means of both monitoring and articulating those changes and, perhaps more importantly, exploring other possibilities of change by giving themselves up to experiences within a framework which is controlled by the negotiable rules of "What if"? in a way 'real life' or 'objective science' rarely does. Not only that, participatory action research is also the methodology by which a great deal of performance is created in the first place. It follows a pattern of idea, reflection, consultation, reflection, planning, reflection, improvisation, reflection, evaluation, reflection, rehearsal, new idea, reflection, change, performance, reflection, evaluation, reflection, da capo - all in a cooperative and collaborative situation.

In performance (and that means all performance, sacred or secular, amateur or professional, mainstream or alternative, playhouse theatre or street festival, ritual or play), the research outcome is enacted, both the performers and their audiences interact and a lively and very public dialogue takes place. After each performance, and between performance sessions, it is common practice to sit around conducting 'post mortems' (internal analyses after the event) or getting notes from the director. Changes are then made in the next rehearsal or performance, and the process spirals. In between, the audiences and the critics have their say. This process applies to all performance making in a constant search for the 'definitive' performance. What scientist is ever so publicly accountable and scrutinised? The process is common practice for all performers and audiences the world over and therefore was familiar to both parties in this exchange.6

**Phenomenology and ethnography**

Max van Manen, in his *Researching Lived Experience* (1990), describes his approach to "human science research" as "phenomenological, hermeneutic, and semiotic and language oriented" (2), which, also, is what all performances are. What he then describes as the qualities of such research correspond exactly with what performance achieves in a much more sophisticated way: "systematic, explicit, self-critical and intersubjective" (11). Van Manen emphasises the value of immersion, intersubjectivity and dialogue, as well as the existentials of "lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality) and lived human relation (relationality or communality)" (102, and see also Merleau-Ponty: 1962). Performance making always addresses these "essentials".

In asserting that "hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity" (p7) however, van Manen doesn't go far enough, although he hints at other forms of

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
representation. The same is true for all the other performatative and visually based expressive modes, as well as other creative areas like product design, cuisine and landscaping. All forms of symbolic representation offer the same potential as writing for the kinds of in-depth reflective praxis he advocates. If this is extended into the broad spectrum of society, it could be said that all symbolic representation is "the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to the consciousness" (p9). There is no need to privilege writing.

There is a great need, however, to educate people once again in reading the other forms and genres of explicit communication such as dance, plays, films, operas, religious ceremonies, songs and instrumental music. How often has it been said after a significant event or a widespread social change: "I wonder how long it will take them to make the movie/ write the novel/ stage the play/ compose the song?" or, indeed, choreograph the dance/ paint the picture/ mould the clay/ chisel the marble/ design the dress, as indeed 'they' have done since people were able to reflect their inner lives by outward symbols. In other words, performance is its own ethnography and arguments that it is not as 'thick' a text as ethnographic writing are not supportable. Performed 'ethnography' is infinitely collaborative and detailed, and is presented in a synchronic and diachronic fashion with many layers of meaning and a full range of sensory experiences - often, it must be emphasised, without any writing at all.

**Grounded theory**

Performances also evaluate aspects of culture for 'truth' and 'fit' in a paradigm of the grounded theory methodology suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1992). While the actual theory might not always be 'grounded' for the performers (who are re/constructing from the data), it aptly describes the process authors and directors follow when creating a performance and what audiences go through when watching a performance. Information is 'collected' and 'decoded' from microcosmic sections of life (as 'art imitates life' or, maybe, as 'life imitates art') and a conclusion is reached once all the data is reviewed and recoded into the matrix of personal knowledge. Intellectual information and sensory experience is subjected to severe review by audiences, which will accept or reject all information and experience presented in this way. One of the most interesting things about grounded theory models is how closely they resemble the processes of dramaturgy, musicology or choreology in which specialist analysis skills are required to deal with the full range of structural and semantic information in a play text, music score or choreographic notation. In respect of ourselves in the Mimili/Penrith exchange, we were all operating in a loose 'grounded theory' model, allowing the data to 'speak' for itself - once we had enough of it to deal with.
New paradigms
In terms of being able to 'deal with the data', however, I am particularly attracted to Geoffrey Samuels' approach to "new paradigms and modal states" based in the study of social and cultural anthropology through 'interpretive' or 'symbolic' approaches (he cites Levi-Strauss, Geertz and Turner as exemplars). With modifications, this would allow a more consistent approach to performance research.

(i) deliberate dissolving of individual-society, subject-object and body-mind dichotomies;
(ii) explicitly anti-empiricist position that goes along with the pluralisms mentioned above with regard to systems of knowledge;
(iii) willingness to make use of concepts that are, in Western terms at least, not particularly 'experience near' (cf Geertz, 1985); and
(iv) readiness to treat established social scientific vocabulary as radically open to question (1990, p5)

His rejection of the mind-body dichotomy is particularly important (p7) but even more interesting is the critique of the Weber/Geertz notion of man (sic) being "an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun" (Geertz: 1973: 5).

We may accept the 'webs of significance' as a reasonable image for what interpretive anthropology centrally deals with. We note that these webs are neither purely individual (once spun they take on a life of their own) nor are they purely social (they have spinners). This suggests that it might be worth looking for some conceptual space, itself neither individual nor social, within which the webs have their existence.

These processes of spinning and being caught happen in time (through history), and if we are to describe them adequately, we should give time an explicit place within our image. Rather than speaking of 'webs of significance', therefore, I suggest that we view the structures of meaning and feeling in which and through which we live as patterns in the course of a vast stream or river. the direction of the stream is the flow of time. (Ibid, p11)

This allows us to conceptualise the two separate 'webs' (Penrith and Mimili) in which we were all working while being swept together in the current. This, of course, is a western notion of time moving ever forward.

We need to remember, however, that the currents cannot ultimately be separated from the individuals who both constitute them and are constituted by them.

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
We might describe the 'substance' within which this flow takes place as something like 'relatedness' or 'connectedness'. The currents within the flow are concerned with the patterning of relationships between human beings. They also describe the patterning of relationships between human beings and other animals and plant species, and relationships between human beings and physical environment (natural and man made) within which they exist. (Ibid, p12)

This also fits with Turner's analysis of processual 'social dramas' (Turner, passim; Schechner and Apel: 1990) in which a great deal more personal and interpersonal creativity is implied than suits the rational science model. In performances of all kinds, people are equipped to both cope with and effect change in response to such 'relatedness' and 'connectedness' at various points in the flow. This maintains a sense of personal and group identity while they are telling their stories to each other, but by no means requires a 'fixed in time' set of symbols, or rules locked into a preconceived 'system'.

It is this lack of system that often confused early investigators of the religious and philosophical ideas of small-scale preliterate societies. An absence of formal doctrine does not imply an absence of philosophic thought. On the contrary, one often finds that members of such societies are constantly playing with the analogic resources of myth, ritual, proverb and everyday life in order to make sense of their world [Wagner: 1978]. It is precisely the lack of prescribed doctrine, of pregiven explanations, which makes such 'play' possible and necessary. (Samuels, Ibid, p90)

And it is precisely this 'play' and 'interplay' that all performances in all societies continue to be engaged in. The old notion that it is only religion and religious ritual in performance that maintains this role is untenable. As Samuels says about the maintenance of the model state:

I see no reason to reject the idea that what we refer to as 'religion' is in many societies largely concerned with maintaining such states. In literate and technological societies like those of the modern Western world, where 'religion' in the traditional sense is a marginal activity, other practices such as literature, sport, theatre, cinema and advertising may be more central to the generation and maintenance of typical model states. (Ibid, 75)

This being the case, to seek to make connections between two different cultures each through their own forms of performance, seems entirely appropriate. Samuels says, with some regret, that for him "the project is not one that can be attempted here in any detail" (p75) but it will be attempted in many respects in this thesis.
All people experience difficulties when abandoning long held ontological, contextual and ecological frameworks in trying to understand the performances and, by extension, the ontologies, social contexts and performance ecologies of Others. However, despite their liminality, their fugitive spatial location, their lack of physical substance, their unstable temporality, their subjectivity of embodiment and their negotiable constructions and deconstructions, performances are perhaps the most powerfully ‘present’ social phenomena of all and a most appropriate form of discourse for researching, reflecting on and translating culture. The process is complicated and the methodologies needed to manage such projects could be described as ‘mixed protocols’ rather than ‘fixed paradigms’.

**Interiority and embodied learning**

Interior methodology was also a concern to the exchange. Experiences over many years with our own students learning and making performance by doing, have frequently revealed in them an inability to ‘translate’ written or spoken description of action into action, even if the drama/song/dance is in a notation form they could read. Students inevitably needed the additional guidance of live, embodied communication and an actual performance context and ecology. One-to-one or group music sessions, physical dance or drama teaching and rehearsal but, more significantly, actual performance in an audienced situation, produced better results that studying a score or script so as to be ‘note perfect’ or ‘word perfect’. In fact, we didn’t need the notation at all in dance, not in drama if it was being improvised and not in music if they could play ‘by ear’. Even when students were shown a film of a live performance, or were played recorded music, we noticed that they tended to imitate the film or the tape so that they were ‘picture perfect’ - unless they had an experiential basis for comparison and had become independent learners. However much we all read, looked and listened, when it came to the point of performing, almost all of the existing ‘literature’ was comparatively useless except as background material. This was especially true of literature about traditional Aboriginal performance where our direct cultural knowledge and experience was very limited, especially if information had been filtered by a non-Aboriginal ‘editor’. In other words, we already related to and were able to analyse, ‘translate’ and perform a non-verbal and a corporeal text more readily than we could a written text.

When we were learning *inma* performance in Mimili, this was taken a step further. Mimili elders were of the opinion that it was impossible for people to ‘know’ a performance unless they knew also the real-life circumstances upon which the performance was based and had experienced it. We agreed with that too, especially since we spent so many hours researching and recreating ‘real life’ circumstances on stages. As neither group faced the technical task of teaching each other to act, dance or sing as such, the main focus of our

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
exchange could be on sharing our real lives, as far as was possible. So, we opted for an overall methodology of largely undocumented 'social osmosis' and synaesthetic learning based on tacit and sensory experiences and with as little formality as possible. We agreed that all experiences - pleasant and unpleasant, predictable and surprising, safe and dangerous - were to be met and coped with as they arose. We put aside the books.

As our research 'outcomes' would be the performances themselves, another methodology was needed for the Nepean people to make performances to trade - ngapartji-ngapartji. Group devised material with Gordon as director/facilitator was finally decided upon, meaning that he would have an overall 'eye' but members were expected to offer suggestions, develop new material themselves and rehearse regularly in a collaborative manner (participatory action research) where every suggestion was considered. This is discussed in brief in Chapter 9.

**Specific performance terminology**

We concluded very early that we needed to learn Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara language and dialects to at least the level where everyday exchange was possible. Our greatest concern was, however, the language we needed to talk about performance. Some specialised European research had recorded valuable knowledge that did assist this exchange. Catherine Ellis' list of performance terms used by Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara speaking Anangu people proved invaluable (Ellis et al: 1978, reproduced in Appendix A).

We found all terms to be in active use and have added a few more. Because many terms we use in European performance had Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara correlatives, it was a basis with which to communicate immediately at a knowledgeable level. This greatly facilitated the speed at which we all traveled. At times we all found ourselves using English and Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara performance vocabulary interchangeably, and so did the Mimili people.

The briefness, simplicity and utilitarianism of specific performance terminology found in Aboriginal language dictionaries is not necessarily due to a lack of vocabulary or a capacity to theorise or communicate performance experiences. The same situation exists in most cultures. Until three quarters of the way through the last century the situation was the same in respect of European performance: those who knew the full range of 'right' terms were those who performed. This is still the case for general English dictionaries and 'specialised field' editions are now available for many disciplines. While the Oxford English Dictionary in its full glory is the place where all English words reside, new words are invented faster than they can be added and old ones are always being re-discovered. Linguists 'collecting'
Aboriginal vocabulary had in the past (and have now) such limited knowledge of their own performance vocabulary they simply didn't ask the right questions. Also, in Aboriginal dictionaries, such as the *Pitjantjatjara* dictionary edited by Cliff Goddard (1992), the editor makes it clear that some words connected with ceremony are not included. *Anangu* colleagues had decided their inclusion wasn't appropriate because of the sensitive nature of ceremonial knowledge transference in Aboriginal communities. One research task was, then, to familiarise ourselves with a broader range of spoken terminology associated with performance in practice. In that, we also agreed not to publish vocabulary that was designated as 'secret' in inappropriate places, such as this thesis.

**Narrative theory**

Intrinsic in all is a belief that performance is, essentially, narrative. Whether that narrative is told in words, viewed by spectators, performed or experienced in action, or present in iconography, whether by means of accumulated semiotics or experiences of a non-verbal kind, is irrelevant: an exploration of theories of narrative underpinned, consciously or unconsciously, everything we did (Ricoeur: 1984/5/9; Jameson: 1981; Muecke: 1982; Bailey: 1985; Hercus and Sutton: 1986; Waterman: 1987; McLean: 1988; Cataldi: 1990; Cixous & Calle-Gruber: 1997). After all, both sides were telling our stories to each other. The voices and registers we used varied from situation to situation and it wasn't long before we realised that there were many more voices in this narrative, not the least that of the country itself.

**Documentation**

As part of our exchange and at the request of the Mimili people, however, we did undertake to document the shared exchange process - Nepean's creative work, the shared exchange process and the *Pitjantjatjara/ Yankunytjatjara inma* in so far as it was appropriate and it has proved to be a time-consuming and not altogether satisfactory aspect of the project. The creation of academic discourse was not (and still is not) our aim. However, since we were devising ways of doing it with integrity, it seemed sensible to examine past approaches and to assess whether existing methods of observing, recording, notating, documenting and writing about performance were useful, valid and ethical. We also wanted to test our own 'grounded theory' arising from years of praxis: that experiencing and sharing performance itself provided the best way of conducting performance research and some kinds of social research. Learning by doing and recording in and by the body is the best method of conserving performance and face-to-face performing; showing and talking is the best way of disseminating it and keeping a performance culture alive.

Anne Marshall: PhD Thesis
A degree of formal documentation satisfied the Mimili people's desire to have a record 'for posterity'. What we documented of the *inma* and our own creative work will be, in time, a version of the *Mimili Inma Maku* and the *Nepean Desert Verses* preserved in static literary or electronic forms. In other words, we were about to create some 'stopped-in-time' performance discourse of our own, articulating experiences, making meanings, comparing traditions and performance practices of two groups of Australians working together. Ironically, as time has passed and some of the older (and younger) people have died, our videos cannot be played in Mimili. It might be another generation of two before people in the community will be interested in seeing them again, if at all. And by then they will be 'history'.

Since this is not a musicological thesis, I have kept notation to a minimum. Complex theoretical paradigms and analytic musicological jargon in respect of the *inma* are eliminated except where they assist in understanding the process and unless I have tried the idea out with the Mimili people to verify my interpretation. The melodic line, the original distinctive *inma mayu* (flavour, taste - the *inma* melody on which all verses are based) is not notated (and not immutable) because the endless variations in the verses are dependant on performance practice and the interweaving of the dance, the singing, the clapping and the musical accompaniment. Therefore, the melody changes a little with each performance and each verse. Which is the 'real version'? I don't know.

Individually recorded verses can be analysed musicologically, but there is no point in my wasting time on demonstrating repetitive microanalysis skills - a computer can do that these day, and this is not an exercise in European analysis. Reading separate transcriptions of the music, the dance and the word won't help anyone perform Inma. They have evolved together and do not exist as separate entities without also the 'silent' components of iconography, movement, space, place and time. There is no European notation that encompasses 'whole' performance: performance must be done in order to be understood. Musicologists might cry, "Just give me the dots!" However, the only 'dots' here are those used in painting bodies, carving wood and making maps and point/counterpoint should be experienced aurally and kinaesthetically.
Notes:

1. Until the early 1990s in Australia, despite their obvious lack of individual industrial muscle, the various branches of the arts had separate trades unions (the best known of which was Actors' Equity), all quite ineffectual. They banded together under the Media Industries and Arts Alliance (MIAA). (Winter: 1996)

2. Australia was very late to pick up on this and barely coped with Levi-Strauss by the late sixties. Almost none of it reached University performance circles here until the early nineteen eighties. (in France, Pavis: 1976; and, in America, Elam: 1980). This body of work still remains on the edge of the anthropological and sociological mainstream and is marginalised further by the continuing hegemony of 'science based' research. Such research claims precedence because it 'solves the world's problems' in terms of providing basic access to 'essential services' and 'equality of opportunity' for all humans. In whose terms and for whose benefit, one is led to ask somewhat cynically.

3. Catherine Ellis' masterworks on ethnography and music (passim) are well before her time. Marcus Breen's editing of Our Place/Our Music (1989) from interviews by Aboriginal people is a particularly useful example of an attempt to bridge the gaps, and Buried Country (2000), the co-publications by Clinton Walker (ed.) - book and video - on Aboriginal Country and Western music, but it happens infrequently. See also Hockey & Dawson (eds.:1997), After Writing Culture.

4. Non human European protagonists (animal and phenomenological) are found only in science fiction, cartoons, designated children's performances or archaic genres like 18th and 19th century ballet. This would be a fascinating research topic in itself.

5. The making of any performance requires this approach, particularly in the rehearsal process. While there are some grounds for the assertion that in many performance practices styles, actions, techniques and protocols are taught by rote and perfected by repetitive practice, or that directors/priests/elders dictate the process, the action research approach still holds true. (Systems of Rehearsal: ; From Ritual to Theatre: Turner: 1982b)


7. It should be said that Catherine Ellis was seeking to understand the 'whole' of Aboriginal culture in all of her musicological research, however she focused mainly on what the music itself reveals. In a conversation with her at New England University in 1986, she said she regretted that time and circumstances had not allowed her to become more involved with visual arts, dance, drama and ritual practice. She said also that this was the way to go, that a holistic approach to performance and culture was needed. Terms in use for visual arts in particular do not appear in her vocabulary list.
Chapter 3

ati

sorting through the ideas

By their performances shall ye know them
3

atini

sorting through the ideas

3.1 Performance of culture

We need to ask ourselves whether the bios of an actor from a particular culture can be separated from his or her ethos. Can the expressivities of particular performance traditions be divested of the narratives in which they are placed and the emotional registers by which they are perceived? (...) More problematically, can the 'pre-expressivity' of theatre cultures, say of tribal societies, which is grounded in the rituals, rhythms, and gestures of everyday life, be decontextualised and 'restored' into techniques of performance? *Somebody's Other: Disorientations in the cultural politics of our times.* (Bharucha: 1994, 8)

Many kinds of performance
Performances in Other cultures have most often critiqued on the basis of what they are not in respect of performance genres in the dominant culture (the one doing the analysis). A brief perusal of comments about non-European performance by European anthropologists betrays an alarming narrowness of perception even of what mainstream, middle class European performance comprises, without acknowledging all the alternative types, forms, genres, styles, conditions and contexts. 'Texts' are what much ethnography has focused on because such features can be described and deconstructed. This usually includes spoken/written/played/danced 'texts' (scripts, scores and choreology) and structural analyses of dramaturgical, musicological and choreological components: visual symbols, actions, sounds and movements.
European performance includes the creation, maintenance, participation in and presentation of seemingly numberless combinations of visual symbols, actions, sounds and movements (Bauman: 1992). This includes dance in all its forms; all theatre; all music - both vocal and instrumental (Sadie, ed.: 1980; new edition 2001); and rituals and ceremonies of all kinds (Turner, V.: 1969, 1974, 1982b, 1988; Macaloon, ed.: 1984). It includes street theatre and busking; puppetry; lecturing, public speaking and oratory; soundscapes and soundtracks; cartoons; board games, video games and live games; theatre in education; guerilla theatre and invisible theatre (where the audience is not even aware that it is theatre); storytelling; 'social dramas' acted out within community frameworks; expressive therapies (Courtney: 1988); performance competitions and examinations; performance art; fashion parades; rallies and protests; parties; concerts; bands; operas and musicals; lectures and classes; spectator and participatory sports; broadcast news; job interviews; theme parks; stand-up comedy; ritualised combat; festivals, carnivales and mardi gras; spectacles (including fireworks); civic events; panel conversations; circuses; framed social transactions, especially in public arenas such as the courtroom or parliament (Bauman: 1992). In some respects, design and implementation of structures for performed social interaction, like architectural design, town planning and landscape are also 'performative' (Morphy: 1995; Layton: 1995). In more esoteric discourses (which are not often spoken of in the public domain and are far less easily reduced to descriptive data) performance is now understood to encompass the free association of ideas, and various forms of 'play' (Huizinga: 1955); symbol making of all kinds (Gombrich: 1971); dreams (MacDougall: 1986); the written word itself 'performing' in the act of writing and of being silently read (Maclean: 1988). Innovative research by Kenneth Burke (Burke: 1959 and 1961), Irving Goffman (Goffman: 1967; 1974; 1976 and 1981) and psychologists such as Eric Berne (Berne: 1975) explored the proposition that many if not all live, face-to-face 'focused encounters' in the lived world; rehearsals for situations in real life; 'acting out' societal roles; the "presentation of self in everyday life"; and all human social interactions other than theatre are 'done' or performed and are not simply 'happenstances'. This includes the practice of everyday social life itself (de Certeau: 1988; Parker and Sedgewick: 1995; Read: 1993) and the construction of life as performance (Bollen: 1999) and society as a performative communication system (Hawkes: 1988). Performances also include recorded and electronic media of all kinds (Pavis: 1992): radio, film, tape or disc, analog and digital technology, including 'virtual' performance. Recorded and electronic media used in cultures vary widely: they are not restricted to one or even a few types. People in many places in the world now have many more thousands of ways of performing simply by virtue of the myriad technologies at their disposal.
Deeper differences
A fascination with this infinite diversity of types, forms, genres and styles of performance sometimes masks more important elements - their different conditions, contexts and functions. This includes the role of performances in the reflexive and reflective processes of people's social being and their functions as political statements and dialectic. It includes performances as rites of passage; as forums for public discussion of societal issues such as power, gender, class and age; as agents for intercultural relations; as expressions of and battlefields for hierarchies, authenticities and ownerships (Arnold: 1991). Performances are vehicles for theoretical discourse and concepts of history, geography, space and time. They are archives of knowledge and experiences not able to be 'talked about' in any other way (Feld: 1992). Performances act as channels for transpositions of ideas from time to time, context to context, culture to culture. (Scolonicov & Holland, eds: 1989) They provide sites for explorations of ideas and the very nature of 'creativity'. They can be both aesthetic exercises and technical experimentations.

Other 'deep differences' include relations between personal performance 'wholeness' and community 'wholeness' by means of performance; levels of community participation and community cohesion; and expressions of personal and communal spirituality. Societal structures and practices are revealed and maintained by performances, as well as through actor/audience relations, ownership of stories, places, assets and ideas through performances and by means of the protocols of performance (Brock, ed.: 1989). They reveal concepts of leisure and work, and performance as a "way of life" or an industry. (Lynch & Veal: 1996)

Physical conditions for performances also vary a great deal: venues, places, sites and environments for performance; performance creation and rehearsal processes; production methods; levels and uses of technologies, skills and crafts; the selection and training of performers; performance management; costume, scenery and 'props' making; safety practices; management and various types of funding and sponsorship; special social concessions or constrictions for performers, etc. These 'physical conditions' also relate performance practice to the broader economic and technological ecology.

Universals of performance
If there are so many different types, forms, genres and styles in European culture, it might seem sensible to ask whether this might not be true for other cultures, for example, Aboriginal culture, and to be alive to the possibility that such a widespread social and aesthetic practice might not be of far greater importance than is indicated in the ethnography.

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
It then would be sensible to ask whether, if performance is such a widespread practice with so many possibilities, there are not also some **commonalities** across all cultures?

Difference and diversity is certainly the outcome of a wide range of types and conditions but there are indeed commonalities between all performance-making activities in all cultures. These commonalities are structural, processual and conditional rather than typological. The theories of Levi-Strauss have proven in practice to have a great deal of value here, provided interpretation of meaning is mutually negotiated, not imposed or assumed. Victor Turner (1982, 1990) and Schechner (1988), Schechner and Apel (eds: 1990) proposed that there were similarities between a number of areas even in seemingly diverse performances, such as sport and theatre. This included the manipulation of diegetic and liminal space and time; the existence and use of special performance 'places'; the need for rules; the transfer of value to objects used in performance which far exceeded their 'everyday' value; a concept of 'role' in which a person 'plays' an Other, and the imperative of 'play' itself.

They also identified a number of commonalities in the various phases of performance making in all cultures (the weighting of attention given to each phase differing among different or even the same groups of people). They called these "universals of performance".

1. Transformation of being and/or consciousness
2. Intensity of performance
3. Audience performer interactions
4. The whole performance sequence
5. Transmission of performance knowledge
6. Performance evaluation (Schechner and Apel: 1990, 4-6)

In other words, they proposed, all performances in all cultures share a number of processual and conditional characteristics no matter what their types, forms, genres and styles. Awareness of these 'universals' offers ways in which to manage intercultural performance research and exchanges, at least on one level - that of actual performance practice.

**Value: cultural and social capital**

Performances are indicators of community values, and of cultural and social capital. The ways performance is valued in a community deeply affect performance ecologies. An obvious comparison in Australia is that almost all Aboriginal Australian people perform (or aspire to perform) and that performance is absolutely vital to the practice and maintenance of Aboriginal culture. In pre-invasion times it was the main storehouse of indigenous knowledge and its practice was the major focus of teaching and learning. Performance (together with all
forms of symbolic representation including iconography) is therefore a major consideration in Aboriginal daily life. It remains a vital activity for regular expressions of identity for many urban Aboriginal people as well as people in remote regions for whom its practice in the maintenance of 'traditional' culture is still a dominating activity.

On the other hand, European Australians rarely consciously 'perform' or 'make art' as part of everyday life unless it is clearly defined as a professional or leisure (amateur) activity. Theatre, ballet, opera, circus, film and television need to be 'done well' by talented, trained and specialised professionals and not so well by enthusiastic amateurs. Many European performances are also associated with notions of class and refinement of taste and indicate affluence (Bourdieu: 1984; Nelson & Grosberg, eds: 1988). Performance then is constructed as something separate from real life; non-essential, superfluous, even frivolous and potentially personally embarrassing if not up to scratch. Despite the attempts of a few scholars to look at notions of the ongoing 'performativity' of daily life (Goffmann (passim); de Certeau: 1988; Parker and Sedgewick: 1995), only a few Australian scholars have done so (Fiske, Hodge and Turner: 1987; Fensham: 1991; Morris, ed.: 1993; Grosz: 1999; Bollen: 1999) and most people in the broader community would have difficulty understanding the concept.

In the broader Australian, both European Australian and Aboriginal Australian performances have been commodified as 'cultural capital' for different reasons. In this thesis I am drawing the specific parallel between European and Aboriginal Australians, not the multitude of immigrant peoples who have contributed to the richness of Australia's multicultural society, similarly without equity of representation. The associated value systems (attached to commodification and the capitalist economy) tend to obliterate other value systems that might be operating (Flores: 1985; Lynch and Veal: 1996; Berleant: 1997). Rarely officially recognised as essential elements of European Australian culture, 'performances' and 'cultural productions' have been dis-empowered, reduced to 'objets d'art', fascinating but adjunct phenomena to the earnest business of 'real life', serving interesting and perhaps even important cultural functions and but mainly contributing to 'capital' (Bourdieu: 1986). Predominantly secular, mono-ideological societies of the late twentieth century, the industrialised, urban era has commodified all forms of symbolic representation with the intention of controlling them - a far more effective suppressant than the political and religious proscriptions of the past. Their earning power has been harnessed into the capitalist economy and the GDP ("selling their dreaming", according to Sam Pumani and others). European Australian practitioners are often said to be 'in it for the money'; the audiences (the 'non-performers') are there to buy what is on offer, as they would any other commodity.
There is a terrible paradox here: while ‘leisure’ and ‘the arts’ are seen as economically important in the market place, practitioners frequently are asked why they don't get a ‘real job’. If and when they do become rich and famous (that is, performance becomes a ‘real job’), they are accused of prostituting their art at the same time as being elevated to near-God status. European Australian performances, by means of economic filters and invisible epistemological barriers, are most often separated from their primary functions in society, devalued and consigned to the emasculated role of ‘entertainment’.

In this commercialised context 'the arts' find it difficult to be perceived by European Australians as being important speaking parts of the life-scripts of their society. They do not seem integral to participants' experiences, perceptions and representations of their society or linking into and reflecting changing social and environmental ecologies (Lynch and Veal: 1996). Many might indeed claim that Pavis is correct in saying that contemporary Europeans have "a purely æsthetic and consumerist vision of cultures" (1992, p1). This is very unsettling for Australian performance practice and works against intercultural exchanges.

The issue of social capital, however, is one which seems to be happily associated with both European and Aboriginal performance by the participants, at least, although the perceived level of social capital differs. Social capital might encompass any number of things, often simultaneously. It might mean shared values; shared vision; affirmation of shared histories; communication through sensory stimulus and satisfaction; appreciation of mutual skills; interaction between social groups; acknowledgement of shared emotional and spiritual experiences; recognition and integration of new knowledge’s; feelings of completeness and belonging; smooth movements from one stage of life to another - the possibilities are numerous (Putnam: 1976; Leonard: 2000).

This is particularly true of television and films, which many people consciously or unconsciously accept as a yardstick for social norms. In reflection, audiences re-sort and re-evaluate their experiences of, and satisfaction with, their society and weigh the results in terms of ‘social capital’ against which added ‘cultural value’ is matched. This then forms part of a shared consciousness of what society 'is' in terms of human relations rather than simply goods and services. This shared consciousness, however, is constructed by writers, directors, advertising clients and media moguls and – despite ‘reality TV’ – is moderated by audience acceptance rather than audience input. As societies rely more on technology, production and profit, performances start to reflect different obsessions and values. Nonetheless, dissenting sub-cultures within even the most mono-cultural, technically dictated, urban societies tend to express individual visions of 'social capital' through a variety
of performative modes - from fashion, to dance styles, to songs, to spoken language, to drama and movies. (Hebdige:1979; Fiske, Hodge and Turner: 1987).

Non-capitalist, technologically simple societies however have great 'stores' of social capital in live performances because it is the key to their very survival and their performances reflect this strongly, involving everyone in expressions of its many facets. This was once so in European societies. (Pegg: 1981) In societies where there is a strong sense of social capital to which members of the society contribute directly, performances tend to be much valued by the broader community. The field of community theatre and dance in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s (Fotheringham: 1984; Hawkins: 1997) presented these old models once again to a twentieth century European Australia. However, European Australian community theatre and dance practice was disparaged by 'mainstream' and 'elitist' cultural engineers, government funding bodies and corporate patrons. It is still under-funded on the grounds that it isn't 'high art' although it is recognised as having community development value (that is, social capital) and supported to some extent on those grounds by various community art development units. (Australia Council and NSW Ministry for the Arts Documents) The 'class distinction' tag remains current, although the rhetoric disparaging minority interest groups is more careful in times of political correctness.

Aboriginal performance and visual arts are theoretically admired for having the very same 'community' values disparaged in European Australian arts. In Aboriginal culture the cultural and social values are both high for the very same performance. However, government funding is still inadequate, meaning that while the social capital is seen as high, the cultural capital is considered low in comparison to, say, the Australian Opera. Most Aboriginal Australian performance arts remain ‘community linked’ in the best possible sense, despite the emergence in the last few years of a competitive ‘mainstream’ sector (Marshall: 1997d) which is at the same time envied and disparaged by the mainstream (Scott: 1990). In the 1997 Festival of the Dreaming and the 2000 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony, it was demonstrated that both were inextricably related when the national voice became louder than the corporate.

**Popular culture**
The fields of media and electronic technology have opened up a can of worms for the culture vultures to feed on. Television and movies are palpably not 'high art' in most people’s minds, but it isn’t all bad news. Television and movies – despite the questionable worth of a great deal of it - are as integral to the whole-of-life experiences of urban Aboriginal and European Australians as the most secret and significant ceremonies. As George Miller (Miller: 1998)
points out, movies are the new urban ‘dreaming’ ceremonies and have been embraced by both black and white Australians.

There has been a lot of propaganda about the democratising and interculturalising of performance through the various genres of electronic media and IT and, to an extent, it is true: almost anyone can buy and operate the technology and use it as a creative medium. This has had a great effect on the dissemination of Aboriginal performance into mainstream Australian society. What is not clear yet is whether the new medium has obscured the old messages and whether a completely new group of Aboriginal voices have started to speak.

**Performer/audience relations**

Traditional Aboriginal performances are (according to much of the early ethnography) for initiates/participants only; the ceremonies create situations where people do things, where they experience things. Here everyone is physically, intellectually and emotionally involved and transformed in some way and the implication is that the process is wholly experiential and non-reflective. In addition, there is, supposedly, no audience ‘gaze’ or critical analysis unless the viewer is a European-trained ethnographer.

One of the most common ways to begin to deconstruct performance in European culture is to split the roles and activities of ‘actors’ and ‘onlookers’. Throughout the European literature there is a sense that theatres are for audiences (the Greek *theatron* denotes a place where people see things and an *auditorium* is where they hear things). This places all those involved in creating performance in a sociologically, as well as a physically, binary position, making performance a divisive rather than holistic act. One group shows and tells, the other gets shown and told. Associated are the closed and specialised training of European performers and the omission of any formal arts training for the majority of the population, past primary school. This encourages not only a form of consumerism by spectators and ‘readers’ but, in contemporary societies, a concept of separateness which is strengthened by post modern theories of the text that exclude authors as ‘subjects’ and the performers as ‘signifiers’ while privileging consumers as ‘readers’. This is emphasised by film, video and television. It is supported by academic discourse and analysis techniques and practices.

European Australian performance - with its reflective, separated, gazing audiences and written intellectual analysis - is, by inference, superior to the supposedly wholly participatory and non reflective performance of Aboriginal Australians. These distinctions are myths of difference constructed by cultural theorists rather than by participants. In all communities people are both actors and onlookers simultaneously, and connect by means of the same inter-active communication cycle (Bennett: 1990; Blau: 1990). Although they sometimes
occupy different dimensions of the performance ecology, all people in all societies experience a process of saying, "This is who we are and this is what this aspect of our lived life is like".

**Read our bodies**

In a variety of empty stages all over the world, meaning is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed for all to read, while performers and their audiences go through mutual transformations of role and identity. Performances in all cultures present aspects of the myriad ways people understand and represent themselves as well as providing ways of managing sometimes quite terrifying aspects of their lives in a fast-changing world and their beliefs about their being in that world. If performance is re-enactment of "lived life" then any aspect of "restored behaviour" is a performance, deliberately or unwittingly (Schechner: 1985). If "lived life" is performance, then the whole post modern notion of the "death of the author" must be reassessed and the post structural affirmation of the individual likewise. One thing Aboriginal and European Australian performers agree on is, that any "little room" becomes a world by virtue of the "great reckonings" there (States: 1985). Their respective notions of that world, however, must be understood if any "translation of culture" is to occur. While in Australia one group privileges "the reckoning" – the agon, the other privileges "the room" - the ecology.

### 3.2 Ontologies

**Deep belief systems**

All societies have deep belief systems that underpin their notions of being in the world, and therefore their performances. There are probably no more different ontologies on earth that those which create meaning for European and Aboriginal people in Australia.

**Spirituality and phenomenology: sacred and secular**

There is no real distinction made between 'sacred' and 'secular' in contemporary European performance discourse. Unfortunately, however, the old sacred/secular dichotomy was often the basis on which performances by non-Europeans were categorised, setting up paradigms that have proved irrelevant and misleading for both performance analysis and intercultural exchange for many years. Saddled with the hard-to-shift-epithet of 'primitive' for so long, Aboriginal performances were elevated very early to the pedestal of religious ceremonies, which posed problems of participation and interpretation by Europeans who had been separating everyday and religious life for two millennia.
Is it proper for a Christian even to take part in an Aboriginal ceremony? Carl Strehlow, ethnographer and Protestant minister in Central Australia, did not think so and wrote tomes about Aranda (sic) performances from information gleaned second-hand (Strehlow, C.: 1907, 1908, 1910, 1913). He never participated, yet he became a world authority on the topic. Could and should 'sacred' rituals be subject to analysis and criticism in the same way an opera is, for instance? The answer in early anthropological circles was, generally, no, although the analogy was tentatively drawn on more than one occasion by even the earliest ethnographers (Eyre: 1845). On the other hand, European performers were declared by law to be involved in a peculiarly 'secular' profession or hobby: sacred ceremonies were kept in a completely different basket. Since the Reformation, there has been little or no 'religion' or 'spirituality' involved in mainstream European theatre performances, only in those ceremonies conducted by specifically religious or spiritual groups. The old comment that "white man got no Dreaming" (Stanner: 1979) was applied directly to Europeans' conduct of their visual and performing arts, the very place where Aboriginal people express their spirituality. This phenomenon is explained in European scientific theory by 'para-psychology', which still attempts to justify its position by experiments using ECGs and other sophisticated electronic scanners. More contemporary European thinking has recognised the links between the two kinds of ontologies in the field of phenomenology.¹

This kind of semantic argument would never make sense to a traditional Aboriginal performer whose capacity to transform from animate to inanimate, from human to animal, from human to spirit and any combination of the above in any direction is a 'given'. There is no hard line drawn between 'real' and 'fake', or 'sacred' and 'secular'. What early anthropologists and performance theorists (and psychologists!) did not understand was that all people continue to experience both the real and symbolic worlds individually, simultaneously, phenomenologically and, on occasions, together in groups (Orloff: 1981; Pegg: 1981; Coult and Kershaw: 1990; Da Matta: 1991; McDonnell, Allen and O'Toole: 1999). People in many societies do not consciously distinguish between 'real' and 'symbolic' because they do not need to, or wish to, and are very comfortable with a life which is conducted in multiple realities. Aboriginal people can conduct discourses about the 'seen' and the 'unseen', the physical and the spiritual, in ways that Europeans in general cannot because of a basic ontological and cultural difference, not a genetic difference, or because of the possession of special powers.

It is the same for European performers but Europeans in general have long been cut off from the great metaphysical function of performance - dis/engagement of the rational from the so-called 'irrational' self. A practice of separating the 'civilized' human condition from the 'savage' natural world thwarted attempts up until the last half of the twentieth century to explore and

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
share performances in non-European cultures. Running counter to this were the experimentations by early twentieth century visionaries like Artaud (1958 and 1976) and the Symbolists, Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists during the first three decades of the twentieth century (Goldberg: 1992). In an attempt to regain this 'forbidden territory', some of the late twentieth century performance genres became deliberately ever more Other: physically dangerous, sensually seductive, morally confronting, socially outrageous, Absurdist, anti-linear, inter-cultural, trans-gender and extra-human in terms of who or what is performing.² Performance here does not simply reflect civilised life but explores its darkest irrational and spiritual underbelly. (Grotowsky: 1968; Brook: 1968 & 1988; Innes: 1981; Muecke: 1999)

This more nearly approaches Aboriginal ideas about performance than a TV ‘soap’, a classical ballet, the opera or a ‘well-made’ play.

A sharing of ontologies/belief systems/worldviews must take place (at least to some extent) within conscious education (the teaching/learning matrix) before any dialogue can occur between people of differing performance backgrounds. In doing this, differing worldviews can be negotiated. While there is no opportunity in this thesis to explore the ontologies operating in many cultures, a brief definition of the basic tenets of the two cultures in question - one with a rational world view and the other with an aesthetic world view - will further demonstrate the point.

**Rationalism**

In *Living in the Landscape: Towards an æsthetics of environment* (1997), Arnold Berleant makes some extremely interesting comparisons between rational and æsthetic world views in categorising different kinds of ‘communities’:

> The rational community is a community of individuals that sees a society as an artificial construct and the state, as Hobbes characterised it, as a leviathan, a monster to be feared, opposed and tolerated as an unwelcome necessity at best. The philosophy of this kind of community is generally utilitarianism in one form or another (...) Central in the rational community is the individual, motivated by self interest, guided by reason, and protected by rights. (...) What guides individual action in the rational community are prudential motives, a careful calculation of costs and benefits in which nothing is done spontaneously or gratuitously. (...) Although the rational model is best known for its political and economic expressions, it pervades the social order. The rational ideal informs the idea that we exist as persons separate and apart from society (...) With a belief in free will, which endows each person with moral autonomy, the rational model stands at the centre of conventional morality.
(...) Going well beyond utilitarian philosophy, the preeminent concept of the ego appears in various forms of subjectivism and intersubjectivity, and in the correlative "problem" of the Other. (141-146)

Berleant's preferred model of æsthetics, however, is "a unity of the individual and the social in which neither dominates but each enhances the possibilities of the other", which he denotes as "the æsthetic community" (147-8):

This (...) form of community moves beyond customary (Western) ways of thinking (...) The æsthetic community is not an order of individuals (...) nor is it a community whose participants relinquish their individuality and deliver themselves into the hands of a leader or become absorbed in a corporate identity. (...) Mutualities and reciprocities among the participants replace the barriers and separations that mark other social modes. Continuity allows for differences (...) but (...) is not vacuous. It denotes a merging that joins things already bound together rather than a combination of distinct and separate elements.

One sense of continuity is both perceptual and material: the understanding of our body as incorporating the food we ingest, the air we breathe, the clothes we wear, the objects we use, the place we inhabit and the experiences that we have. Consciousness is also part of this perceptual continuity, for whether we describe ourselves as embodied consciousnesses or reflective organisms, multidimensional continuities unite our cognitive, volitional, and physical dimensions. Human beings have continuity too with nature (...) environment, not external surroundings but the matrix of physical features and their order of meanings in which we are contributing, synergetic participants. It is in these continuities that unify people and environment that community arises that unify people.

(...) The æsthetic community is a community in and of experience. Its resemblance to the situation in which we experience art lends it its name. In art, when the potential of the æsthetic field is fulfilled, a rich reciprocity develops amongst the artist's creative force, the art object, its appreciator, and the performer or activator in the work. (148-155)

Aboriginal ontologies are often spoken of as 'religious' but Berleant's definition places them as 'æsthetic' when he locates 'spirituality' within the æsthetic community (153).

The effort to establish the fundamental relatedness of things has come from different philosophical sources and taken different directions, but its enormous significance has yet to be realised. (...) this development is not an extension of the main course of Western philosophy but the emergence of an entirely new grasp of the human world, one that recognises connections rather than differences, continuity rather than separation,
and the embeddedness of the human presence as knower and actor in the natural world.

(6)

Berleant’s experience of American life leads him to see this as a happy convergence of Western and Eastern discourse, however many non-industrialised cultures have the kind of awareness of relatedness and continuity he champions. In Australia, the fusion of the Aboriginal aestheticism with European rationalism and utilitarianism is producing at some subtle levels a new, particularly Australian ontology, although the process is slow and at times the discourses are in dangerous conflict. Another fear is that Aboriginal forms of representation will gradually become commodified in the same way European forms have.

**Rational thought**

Speculations on ‘the nature of the Other’ have been occurring in Europe for millennia. Mediaeval and Renaissance re-interpretations of Athenian ideas about humanism, ethics, logic, science, art, aesthetics and the Ideal State have continued to underpin modern European cultural framing, post-Plato, through to Descartes and La Place. This includes a predilection for masculinist binary thinking. (Ecker, ed: 1985; Cixous: 1996; Plumwood: 1993) Binary thinking places every aspect of human epistemology in implicit opposition to some other aspect, the two positions representing extremes, or poles, requiring a ‘right-minded’ citizen to make the ‘right-minded’ differentiation: the head and the heart; the body and the mind; reason and irrationality; right and left; state and religion; light and dark; science and faith; male and female; real and unreal; civilized and savage … European and foreign. This way of looking at the world encourages positivist, ‘black and white’ approaches to people’s relations with each other; it discourages the exploration of the "textual spaces" (Muecke: 1992) where "Taceti!" actually speaks volumes (Cage: 1961, 1979), and unseen, “liminal spaces” (Turnbull: 1990) or real places (Tacey: 1995) where change and transformation take place. Implicit in a binary approach for early European anthropologists is a belief that races, cultures, societies, religions and individuals not of the European tradition were ‘savage’, ‘barbaric’ or perhaps just ‘less civilised’ (Morgan: 1873/1985: Ancient Society). They therefore deserved to be the recipients of imperialist expansion and colonial economic, cultural and environmental ‘management’ and ‘development’ to bring them to a state of ‘civilization’. Associated with this is a characteristic Christian missionary zeal for cultural engineering, particularly of language and religion, with the goal of assimilation of Others into the European Christian mainstream. Such was, and generally remains, the case in Australia from the late eighteenth century in respect of Aboriginal culture.

But it gets more confusing. In a reversal of the argument, based on the concept of the 'noble savage', European culture and society itself is often represented as far from ideal: ‘decadent’,

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
'depraved', 'old' and 'tired'. Non-European cultures (to a greater or lesser degree) have been constructed as 'innocent', 'new', 'fresh', 'noble' and 'close to nature'. This last categorisation often also credits non-European peoples with possessing rare and valuable qualities: traditional skills, deep wisdom and extra-human powers, especially in the areas of arts and religion, qualities that Europeans somehow 'lost' over their (d)evolution to civilisation. It seems ironic that these mutually exclusive views, despite the proliferation of supposedly more 'enlightened' theories of humanity, are still held very widely. The epithet 'primitive' in any advertising (explicit or implicit) guarantees voyeurism (that is, it sells postcards, books, exhibitions and tickets to dance spectaculars) but the attributes that earn a people or practice that appellation are denied existence in the discourse. These paradoxes are also perpetuated in the general community where racism is a fact of life in both town and country in Australia.\(^3\)

Morgan's early categorisation of human development into stages of 'savagery', 'barbarism' and 'civilization' applied down the line to ethnographers who asserted that the performances of non-European peoples lacked aesthetic qualities, were crude (if complex), uncivilised, driven by madness and irrationality and were not (in the 'real' sense) 'art' (Layton: 1991). While the ethnocentrism was perhaps unavoidable for the time, and a dependency on the theories of Darwin and Spencer understandable in the circumstances, it has muddied the waters for performance ever since.

**Rational 'truth' and performance**

So-called rational communities carry over their ontologies into arts practice in general. The search for 'truth' in this context is not based narrowly in religion but in an ontologically driven, broad-based set of *a priori* precepts and values that employ logic as a mode of thinking. This search for 'truth' is reflected in the modern performance style of 'naturalism'; it is sometimes the only kind of performance Europeans ever experience (for instance, television and movies). Contemporary European stage and film performances mostly reconstruct their anthropocentric, rational discourses in terms of superficial 'lived life', also known as 'psychological realism'. This developed in Europe mainly in Germany, Norway and Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century and emigrated to England, North America and Western Europe by means of the teachings of Stanislavsky and his disciples. (Stanislavsky: *passim*; Zarilli, ed: 1995) 'Realism', or its more usual manifestation, 'naturalism', was made popular in the plays of Chekov, Ibsen and Shaw, and is now the convention for most stage plays, television drama and movies. Examples of realism are 'invisible' and 'guerilla' theatre, where the performance is so life-like that even audiences are not aware of a performance, and the penchant for 'reality TV' entertainment, such as *Sylvania Waters*, *Castaway* and *Australian*
Idol. The teaching of acting as a profession in modern Europe\(^4\) began perhaps with Stanislavsky's explorations of the realism of 'being' rather than 'representing', and more recent teachers such as Cohen (1978 and 1984) and Benedetti (1986). In addition, comments by actors themselves over two and a half millennia collected in the formidable tome *Actors on Acting* (Cole and Chinoy, eds: 1978) offer personal thoughts and experiences over the struggle to be 'truthful' on stage. The most recent NSW Board of Studies *K-6 Drama Syllabus* is fraught with an obsession with naturalism and human role play, and displays an avoidance of forms of performance which might allow any Other exploration, activity or frame of mind to develop. In a chapter I wrote for a Drama in Education support text recently I was asked to edit out anything that smacked of such heresies – and that was the chapter on Indigenous Performance!

European 'mainstream' anthropocentric performance conventions concentrate on rational discourses of individual human interaction in society and have done so since Æschylean Greek drama, post Hesiod.\(^5\) There are not many social issues that Shakespeare didn't tackle in his plays, for instance. Relevant here is the much-quoted comment by Jacques, the Clown from *As You Like It*, which reflects, in the late sixteenth century, the human-centred perspectives of performance operating from 500BC until the mid twentieth century:

> All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances: and one man in his time plays many parts,
> 
> Shakespeare: *As You Like It*, 2. vii. 139

Jacques' community is a very rational one, even in the first ten years of the seventeenth century, individualistic and state-controlled, distilled by and reflected in Shakespeare's script (Berleant, Op. Cit. 135-148). His frame is a stage play in a theatre where urban audiences of mixed classes watch, hear and respond to actors conducting a comic dialectic that explores familiar social and moral issues relevant to religion-divided London where Catholics and Protestants alternately banned and encouraged public performances, and actors were in fact "thieves and vagabonds" under the law unless they had a royal patron to sponsor and protect them.

In European epistemology in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, theatre was often called "a mirror to life" and up to the end of the eighteenth century people were said to go to the theatre to see themselves "behaving in society" (Goldsmith: 1773), a double reflection which is thought to be not only 'true' but to have a beneficial effect on society in general (Dennis: 1698). It is known that acting styles were conventionalised and urban
middle and upper class society itself was what was on the stage. Religion and spirituality were mocked in the theatre. Outside the cities, only 'folk' festivals and seasonal celebrations kept alive the links with a less rational past.

With the nineteenth century came an even greater concern with rationalism, as industrialization and scientism became global. European naturalistic performances were characterised by human power conflicts, middle class morality, sequential narrative, recognisable character types and quotidien dialogue which tend to duplicate human behavior and psychology in a re-constructed, realistic mise en scène, while permitting the exploration of non-human (irrational) aspects of society only at the subliminal level or in 'alternative' performance late in the period. Post industrial European performance, from the end of the 19th century, splits and fractures into a thousand different genres and styles and there is a reaction against realism in a healthy range of 'alternative' performances. However, the overriding mainstream concern of 20th /21st century performance is naturalism and psychological realism: art imitates life.

Æsthetics and the Greek model
In terms of mainstream society, most European performances categorised as 'art' are part of a broad field known as 'æsthetics'. By this is meant ‘theatre’, ‘dance’ and ‘music’ performed in elite venues and for elite audiences under a selection of elite pre-conditions that do not include the broad list cited at the beginning of this chapter. For nearly two and a half thousand years, European views on performance have been coloured by ancient Greek writings and views about 'art'. But, although they were responsible for coming up with the earliest well-documented dramatic performances, play scripts and intellectual performance discourses, the Greeks and Romans by no means had clear theories about the nature of 'art'. In their epistemology, the arts represented a three-way conflict between crafts and skills (techne - Greek, or ars - Latin); the creative, embodied spirit (physio - Greek, or animus - Latin) and 'real life'. ‘Real’ was placed in binary opposition with 'false' (that is, by extension, within a Judeo-Graeco-Christian ontology, 'untruthful', or 'inauthentic').

Plato's oft-quoted example of the couch illustrates the idea. His concept was largely based on a notion of 'art' as mimesis, an imitation of nature and reality, which percolates down into post-pagan European epistemology as something less than reality and therefore lacking in real worth other than skill in counterfeit and, by extrapolation, in early Medieval times it was construed as 'of the Devil'. This problem with 'falseness' was taken very seriously by early Christian theologians who related the representational performing arts to the second commandment and 'graven images', as did Muslims. It was a matter of religious æsthetics as much as anything else. In 457 AD the Roman Emperor, Justinian, outlawed every form of
embodied performance other than that in direct service of the Christian church – the echoes of which could still be heard in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Practicing performers (such as Molière) were not permitted to be buried in consecrated ground and actors could be prosecuted as felons under the laws of many European countries. Islamic law went further and even today representational performances or visual art by humans of humans (such as the gigantic Buddhist statues carved into hillside in Afghanistan), or representations of God in books, are unacceptable to not only fundamentalist Islamic but some Jewish and Christian worshippers (Barish: 1981; Marshall: 1983).

7

In European mainstream culture, æsthetics are most often associated with visual 'beauty', and a degree of social refinement but that is a very narrow interpretation of a term that can equally apply to geometry, dog breeding, cuisine or hydraulics.

The artist ... seems likely to imitate what appears beautiful to the ignorant majority.


And just what does Plato mean by 'beautiful'? Further, Plato denigrates the artist's intellect, although there is a good point in his argument (which he fails to follow up) about the æsthetics of reception theory, notions of class and dis-engaged audiences. (Radway: 1988; Schmitt: 1990; Bennett: 1990; Grace, ed:1996)

Aristotle makes somewhat more knowledgeable comments on the 'art' of theatre (he trained as a singer and dancer) in his treatise on poetry and shows a better understanding of the dramatic process, misinterpreted though his writings may have been. Nevertheless, he still calls 'acting' an imitation of reality and emphasises the craft aspects, the techniques, (Aristotle: Poetics: (trans. Rostagni), in Jones: 1962) and says nothing about autopoeisis which is where æsthetics are practiced on the factory floor. (Maturana & Varela: 1987)

Aristotle's treatise on tragic dramatic poetry (he did not call it 'theatre', which for him was a place) became the paradigm for the post-Medieval restoration of secular performance in the Greek tragic tradition, and for secular, rationalist and decorative 'Art' from the early European Renaissance, thus perpetuating his notions. Aristotle's theories of drama are still taught today and remain relevant because people have written plays according to those rules for twenty five centuries and continue to do so. (Walton: 1980, 1984; Schechner: 1988; Barasch: 1985; Cook: 1995) The structural thinking that underpins his theories is part of the European ontology: sequential narrative; sequential and linear time; conflict-complication-resolution-closure plot structures; winners and losers; historical/mythical/believable characters; unities of time, place and action – all reflecting and representing 'real life'. But at

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
the same time, it is not real life. Of course people over the centuries have broken ‘the rules’, but it was always recognised (and noted) that ‘the rules’ were being broken. Not until the 20th century did we see Other ‘rules’ or ‘æsthetics’ being accepted as possible and, within this paradigm shift, Other cultures and their æsthetics have claimed a small place.

Many Other cultures do not share the European concept of ‘art’ and ‘æsthetics’ in performance or their approach to rational structuring of events in linear time. A sense of ‘æsthetics’, however, exists within all humans (and perhaps animals). All communities establish ‘ideals’, ‘rules’ and ‘balances’, and the patterns by which they are implemented and monitored. The danger of applying the performance æsthetics of one culture when speaking of another is ever present and all such judgements must be seriously interrogated (Bourdieu: 1984). For whom and by who are ‘æsthetics’ constructed? Under what conditions? In what contexts? Are there similarities across cultures? Experiences in comparing cultures by experiential immersion, discussions about æsthetics with many different peoples and readings from a wide range of comment, have indicated that they are not necessarily similar at all. The ways in which different peoples categorise and understand æsthetics is essentially dissimilar, and it is necessary to ask instead: “What is the specific æsthetic operating here?” The æsthetics of some peoples’ performances do not include what contemporary Europeans would call ‘art’.

Æsthetics and anthropology

In ‘classical’ European anthropology, æsthetics is usually read within the European canon. Things to do with symbolic representation are usually categorised as ‘esthetic’, to do with ‘high culture’, something for which the European ontology has had little ‘use’ in the past and, it might be argued (but not here) they still don’t. What a European taxonomy classifies as ‘art’ is in many Other societies ‘worship’, ‘work’, or ‘business’ (Layton: 1991). Geertz’s two essays “Common Sense as a Cultural System” and “Art as a Cultural System” (1975/1993a and 1976/1993b) cut through the some of the waffle that fogged the spectacles of æsthetics in typical Geertzian fashion and are as practical as they are entertaining in framing alternatives to the European gaze. Adrienne Kæppler, with a thirty-year career as a dance ethnologist in the Pacific region behind her, points out:

It is commonplace to separate dance, along with music, from other forms of human behaviour and label it ‘art’. Once it has been so separated, it is often felt that it need not be dealt with. This ethnocentric view does not take into consideration the possibility that dance may not be ‘art’ (whatever that is) to people of the culture concerned, or that there may not even be a cultural category comparable to what Westerners call ‘dance’.

(Kaeppler: 1978, 46)
The misconception is a double-edged sword. Firstly, an analyst is likely to translate everything through the ‘aesthetic’ filter, applying the same value judgements for ‘art’ in his or her own culture. Secondly, the failure to understand the aesthetics of a performance can lead to misunderstandings about the culture itself. Appreciating the way in which people value and categorise their own performances without a binary opposition is being set up is absolutely essential. It isn’t easy for people to define aesthetics in performance but listening to the way language is used in relation to performance can give some clues. The way performance is discussed, critiqued and passed on and the language used by performers to describe what they do is an indicator of their aesthetics. Ethnographers often have said there was ‘no significant performance vocabulary’ in a culture they were observing. Perhaps they weren’t listening but were busy applying their own aesthetics. Complex performance vocabulary to do with aesthetics can be seen in almost every culture, but they are not all burdened with the Greek passion for taxonomies to show difference.

Toni Flores’ article “The Anthropology of Aesthetics” (Flores, in Dialectical Anthropology: 1985) is enlightening. She claims, as Kaeppler did in 1978, that very few ethnographers have been aware of the aesthetics of the people they are observing, as can be attested by the lack of discussion in the literature.

Since anthropology’s forte has been ethnography, induction and the embedding of middle-range theory in a body of descriptive detail, it is interesting but hardly surprising that there are relatively few attempts at extensive theorising about aesthetics. (Flores: 1985: 27)

Her subsequent review and examination of the literature throws up some vital points: particularly, that there are dangers of separating text and context and/or privileging one to the detriment of the other; that there are differences between cultural knowledge (and knowing) and cultural performance (or doing) and finally that the real focus of any study of symbolic representation should be of the interrelationship of the people involved:

... it might lead us to re-think the question of tradition altogether. If we were to focus on the persons who do the performing, learning teaching, expressing, communicating etc., I think we would come to recognise afresh that our real subject is not process, or society or even culture, but persons, and that tradition is not and never was a matter of the past but a matter of present persons who say or do things with other persons. (Flores: 1985, 31)
Aboriginal traditional performance takes an æsthetic worldview where human and non-human agencies interrelate and interact in a symbolic image-action-tapestry. This worldview makes no attempt to reconstruct ‘reality’ and is not particularly concerned with individual human histories but rather the connections between people, the environment and their beliefs and experiences in an anti-hegemonic timelessness. Very few ‘characters’ have only one ‘identity’ and their ‘actors’ are numerous in any given performance. Constant reference is made to the connectedness of the body both to the seen and unseen world (Merleau-Ponty: 1968) and the transience of form (for Pitjantjatjara inma: personal experience, Mimili community members. (see also Munn: 1973; Payne: 1978, 1989)

In several verses of the inma maku, reference is made to performers ‘painting up’ for the inma different ways of performing in the inma, and actors performing indicating an awareness of the theatrical process of performance itself (just as Shakespeare does in his plays such as Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2). Reference is also made in the inma to the need to teach the community certain things about performance, which is a clear recognition of the role of didactics in the passing on of performance. In essence, however, the concerns are those of æsthetics, not rationalism. Information is embedded, not separated (see Chapter 7: Paluni; and also Ellis, C. et al: 1974; Morphy: 1989 and 1994; Myers: 1989; and Layton: 1990 and 1997).

Social dramas
Both European and Aboriginal cultures have rich social dramas and rituals which regularly conduct open and public discourses. North American studies, in particular, of these ‘focused interactions’ from the 1950s onwards have brought a realization that there are many parallels to be drawn not only between cultures but also between the innumerable cultures within European societies. Researchers have explored performances of their own social life which create the frames for day-to-day conduct, the perpetuation of traditions, ‘ways of doing’, ‘forms of talk’, ‘conversation’, ‘education systems’, ‘kinship relations’, ‘the law’, ‘rites of passage’ and ‘courtship rituals’. (Van Gennep: 1909; Goffmann: passim; Hall, E.T.: passim; Levi-Strauss, passim; Peacock: 1968; Turner, V. passim) Each encounter is ‘acted out’ and ‘lived through’ so that social systems, their conduct and the values societies place on them can be seen and understood by everyone, depending on their level of knowledge. These social performances grease the working parts of societies and are often as invisible to participants as they are to observers. The ‘working parts’ and their success or failure to conduct the business of society are often the direct subject matter of performances and the way in which this occurs largely depends on whether the society operates with a rational or an æsthetic world view. This approach encouraged anthropologists to turn their gaze inwards to the familiar, not externally to the exotic and by understanding their own culture they have
become more open to understanding Other. Subjectivity has started to lose some of its bad reputation.

**Subjective and objective**
The 'subjective/objective' dichotomy (another product of the rational world view) has got in the way in of an intersubjective performance discourse. This problem is dealt with by, among others, David Best (1983 and 1985) in his discussion of the ‘objectivity of dance performance’ and deconstruction of the fallacy that performance is inherently ‘subjective’ and therefore not open to analysis.

The source of the trouble appears to be (a) ... common, but ... misconceived notion of objectivity. It is because of a prevalent but much too narrow and rigid notion of what it is to be objective, that so many people feel constrained to insist that the artistic experience of movement must be a subjective matter ... the concept of objectivity is much more subtle, flexible and complex than is generally recognised. (4)

Too often it has been assumed ... that, whereas objectivity may apply to the judgements of the spectator, the experience of the performer must be a subjective one. That very common confusion is based on a fundamental misconception about the relation of mind and body. (5)

Best exposes the common assumptions that the ‘scientific’ is the only legitimate kind of objectivity (including mathematical and logical) and that because performance isn’t a ‘scientific’ activity, then it cannot be objective. If that were the case, then no one could teach or evaluate progress in any of the performance areas. He cites five prevalent misconceptions about the subjectivity of movement performance:

1. Artistic appreciation of movement cannot be objective because there are radical and irreconcilable differences of opinion about the same performance.
2. Involvement with movement, in dance or theatre, cannot be objective because personal, individual experience is essential for a full understanding of its meaning, whether as performer or audience and personal experience destroys objectivity.
3. For complete freedom of expression, or for completely free judgement in appreciation, it is necessary to avoid the limitations imposed by having learned any techniques.
4. Artistic judgement depends ultimately upon intuition (5)

In other words, there is a misconception that creativity and skill are mutually exclusive, and
And later, he cites a fifth misconception that, without the non-involved ‘scientist’, no objective assessment or analysis can be made of performance. Maybe the problem lies more with who is doing the analysis rather than with the performance itself. Actors objectively analyse their material constantly and dancers have no trouble analysing dance and they certainly use more than their voices and computers to do it.

A great deal of the written literature about performance operates from the premise that the ‘outsider’ is more ‘objective’, a view which performers treat with great scorn. However, this so-called objectivity has come to be considered superior to any form of ‘feeling’ or ‘perception’. Such an attitude, based in the ideals of European humanism (coupled with a later Christian reverence for unequivocal veracity, the Cartesian/Newtonian/La Placian world view and materialist/rationalist thought) has encouraged explicit analysis of performance in European culture which has separated ‘deep’ levels of meaning expressed by the people who make and receive performance. Academia has opted for facile explanations of surface features that can be linked firmly into a rationalist, capitalist economy. This approach creates skepticism about non-written aspects of societies and, although it has been readily accepted by anthropologists and sociologists that these forms of symbolic representation are important cultural indicators within non-industrialised (read 'tribal', 'exotic', 'non-literate', 'uncivilized') societies, they are ‘non-objective’ and have no place in European ‘science’. (Jones: 1998) It seems that either the senses are privileged, or the intellect is, and between them the discourse about the nature of reality rages. It is within this discourse that performance has a voice.

**Authenticity, appropriation and identity**

'Authenticity' is closely linked in society with claims of identity and a perceived lack of authenticity is used to discredit many. Dovey (1985) co-locates notions of authenticity with usage and this is particularly true for performance.

The importance of the concept of appropriation for the understanding of authenticity lies in the emergence of meaning through action. Our successive appropriations and identifications from past experiences form a kind of ontological ground of meaning. In as much as experience is culturally shared, so are these meanings. This ground of shared meanings constitutes the very real experience that the fake tries to replicate. In so far as the fakery succeeds, it conceals an attendant doubt and deception. At the same time, this doubt and deception breeds unreliability into our acts of appropriation - the very acts that generate meaning in the first place. (Dovey: 1985: 38)
Perpetuating difference

Is this picture of cultural difference true? The fierce struggle to maintain 'Europeanism' is no less than the concerns about maintaining 'Aboriginality'. The situation everywhere is in flux, for as much as the European ways of doing things have infiltrated almost every corner of the world, the counter-revolution is also very strong and post-colonial revivals are striving to maintain powerful and vibrant performance diversity in non-European cultures, while the strong avant garde, community arts, urban renewal and cultural fusion movements in European societies are challenging the ‘mainstream’ performance genres for audiences and/or the government funding dollar. Also, there are many diverse sub-cultures in the hearts of some of the most urban of urban European societies that operate in the same way as ‘tribal’ communities. They exist as a world-within-a-world where distinctive forms of symbolic representation are vital to their expression of their particular ecology, with no commercial ambitions - unless discovered by a Benetton scout. All cultures have a range of distinct performance ecologies within which they self-construct and adapt even under the pressures of suppression, colonisation, alienation and perversion, whether or not this is perceived by performers and cultural theorists.

Scholarly ethnographic and cultural studies discourses have done their bit to keep European Australian and Aboriginal Australian cultures apart by accentuating 'difference' rather than looking at mutual meeting grounds where subjectivities can be shared and valued. Pavis, in his highly critical discussion of Eugenio Barba (1992)\(^\text{12}\) notes that difference can also be perpetuated by performance masquerading as intercultural exchange:

\[
\text{If, as I have suggested elsewhere ... translation is an appropriation of the source culture by the target culture, we might say, by analogy, that Barba appropriates oriental performance traditions by transforming them and 'rewriting' them on the stage for a western audience. (161)}
\]

Edward Said's comments about 'Orientalism' apply also when considering 'Aboriginalism' in a European-dominated Australian culture. The assumption is that 'the European' is discovering, translating and constructing 'the Aborigine' from the bulging storehouse of European scholarship and media image. There is hardly a hint that the European might come under a similar Aboriginal cultural microscope.

Performance generated within the contexts of a culture other than one's own, deriving from different ontologies and epistemologies, taking into account diverse ways in which performance is spoken of, taught, learned, understood, presented, valued, conserved, changed and passed on to later generations, generates significant challenges. This is the
case whether the performance is traditional or contemporary (and I would argue that those terms are meaningless when talking of performance, which is always contemporary). It doesn't matter whether an Aboriginal performer is experiencing European performance for the first time or the other way around. The challenge is to find ways of accommodating the amount of implicit knowledge contained in the different performance expressions and understandings of the world. Unless a European Australian is an arts practitioner or from a culture which values aesthetic expression in everyday life, it is no easy thing to create, perform, experience and interpret something as complex as an Aboriginal Australian ritual, dance, song or painting. It is a conscious effort to realise how little of the meaning can actually be conveyed in words or, in the European context, converted to verbal language or ‘literature’.

**Personal perspective**

The challenges are not only intercultural, but exist between performers from different performance genres in the same society. From my own experiences, the things I am 'saying' about myself, my identity and my society were very different when I was performing classical ballet to when I was dancing in a disco cage, or teaching children creative movement in the Sutherland Shire School of Arts, or directing a community celebration in Katoomba. While the knowledge base is linked in a general way, the genres, sub-cultures and social contexts have vastly different codes. My ability to communicate all of them satisfactorily depends on my being able to 'translate' one performance experience into another, drawing on shared or similar experiences. When performing with people of an entirely different culture on shared performance projects, I find my performance radar operates overtime and I need to go back to the 'universals' to find common ground. The same kind of problem exists for me with the audience. I am responding to the context in which I am performing and the knowledge I bring to that. I have something to 'say' and I need people to 'say' it to. They are meeting me in a situation of mutual exchange and either what I have to 'say' will touch a chord of response, or it will not. Their ability to identify with my performance and interpret it depends on their experiences within a shared ecology, not in having a PhD in linguistics. Mutual identification allows us both to enjoy the exchange, and this will bring the sense of *communitas* (Turner, *passim*; Bourdieu, *passim*) that is so necessary.

**Final thought**

The full spectrum of performance practice of any society represents what that society believes and experiences about itself at the time of performance. Bharucha asked:
Can the expressivities of particular performance traditions be divested of the narratives in which they are placed and the emotional registers by which they are perceived? (1994: Op. Cit.)

The answer is, no. However, if Others share performances and experience each Other's performance ecologies, if they join in constructing the narratives of "living in the world" in which they are placed and the emotional and phenomenological registers by which they are perceived, it is certainly possible for translations of culture to take place - although the exact nature of them might only be expressed through an unspoken *communitas*. 
Notes:


2. A retrospective of the articles in, say, The Drama Review, reveals the change in the discourse about performance over the years from the semiotics-bound to the phenomenological.

3. Early European acting techniques were extremely stylized (Hunt: 1965) and based on the Italian Commedia dell’arte and the French style of declamatory stage acting in which every gesture meant something, like the mudras of Indian classical dance. This also affected mime, ballet and opera. Some of these genres still retain stylization and do not affect naturalism.

4. The shift away from the Homeric narratives and massive religious festivals and ceremonies, which operated very much as Aboriginal songlines do (and in as phylogenetically diverse a performance ecology), is discussed by a number of scholars, most recently (Winkler & Zeitlin: 1990; Seaford: 1994; Nagy: 1996; Cook: 1997)

5. See Marshall (1983) for an overview, but also translations of the writings of the church fathers - Loeb Editions.

6. There are no 'orthodox' Islamic students enrolled in any of the professional training performing arts courses at UWS nor, as far as I can remember, in the last fifteen years. There was one young Arab man whose parents forced him to leave when they discovered he was in an acting course, not a teacher education course. The grounds were religious. The same issues arose when an Islamic PhD student enrolled in 1990 to study theatre in community development. Public theatre and dance were still considered beyond the pale in Iran by the Iranian Government although Western ideas were beginning to creep in. Yet there is no embargo on storytelling, poetry, music and dance that is considered sufficiently 'Islamic', such as the Ta’zieh ritual (Tambiah: 1981; Katoonabadi: 1994). The same restrictions apply to members of some Christian sects in Australia who are not 'allowed' to take part in certain types of performances.

7. The Renaissance scholars, led by Vincente Galileo, turned to Greek models of architecture and sculpture, drama and music. Music was thought to have some deeper significance, but that was linked to mathematics, science, philosophy and religion rather than symbolic representation. Marshall (1983) explores the practices of, and attitudes to, dramatic music and staged performances of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans and its links with symbolic representation and Medieval Europe.

8. One of the great hopes of Renaissance scholars was that an apocryphal parallel work on comedy Aristotle would be found in some monastery library. Umberto Eco's Name of the Rose perpetuated this hope. At the same time it demonstrated quite clearly a European semiotician's approach to such research.

9. Robert Layton's The Anthropology of Art (1981/91) is a parallel study which, while we are analysing, looks at visual media in similar intercultural terms. See also Kaeppler on dance (1992).


11. Pavis: 1992, Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
Chapter 4

_kulilkatinyi_

listening more closely

Consider the Balinese trance.

(Geertz: 1973, 3)
4

kulilkatinyi

listening more closely

4.1 Early theories about cultural performance

The ... image of a constant human nature independent of time, place and
circumstances, of studies and professions, transient fashions and temporary opinions,
may be an illusion, that what man (sic) is may be so entangled with where he is, who he is
and what he believes that it is inseparable from them. It is precisely the consideration of
such a possibility that led to the rise of the concept of culture and the decline of the
uniformitarian view of man. Whatever else modern anthropology asserts - and it
seems to have asserted almost everything at one time or another - it is firm in the
conviction that men unmodified by the customs of particular places do not in fact exist,
have never existed, and most important, could not in the very nature of the case exist.
There is, there can be, no backstage where we can go to get a glimpse of Mascou’s
actors as “real persons” lounging about in street clothes, disengaged from their
profession, displaying with artless candour spontaneous desires and unprompted
passions. They may change their roles, their styles of acting, even the dramas in which
they play; but - as Shakespeare himself remarked - they are always performing.
(Geertz: 1973, 35-36)

No reference points

The first European ethnographers started to write more analytically about the cultures of
Other peoples towards the end of the nineteenth century, due largely to the aspirations of
anthropology to be a ‘science’. When they tried to analyse and interpret dramatic
performances and rituals, music, iconographies and dance according to scientific paradigms,
however, they were faced with a singular problem: there was no comparative body of written
European discourse in which to locate their theories. Although there was a long-established
tradition of a kind of practice-related, quasi-scientific and metaphysical discourse for music
and another based on the aesthetics of 'beauty' for the visual arts (and the visual aspects of performing arts), these were closed cultural systems and of little use to an anthropologist or ethnographer in the non-European field. So, because of a lack of broad terms of reference or frameworks for the arts within their own culture, early observers had trouble interpreting forms of symbolic representation in Other cultures. What they made of them was, more often than not, misinterpreted, despite the fact that they recognised that something very interesting was going on.

**New anthropology**

The turning point for the 'new' anthropology could be pinpointed at the publication of Levi-Strauss' *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), which built on ideas first suggested earlier in the century by Van Gennep (1908). As anthropology moved from empirical methodologies to theory and philosophy, a new kind of ethnography was needed. Building on the theories of linguistics researchers such as the Russian Formalists and the Prague School, Levi-Strauss' approach eventually proposed that the central structure of all culture was linguistic (Levi-Strauss: 1963 & 1969). It was a new way of looking at myths, narratives and rituals, not only as universally-linked conveyers of meaning but as forms of language in themselves, reflecting in their 'grammars' and 'vocabularies' the societies in which they were embedded. It provided a key for analysing the transformation (or "cooking") of mythic themes over time and across ethnic boundaries. Further, Levi-Strauss argued, these 'myths' reflected deep 'truths' about cultures.¹

Despite triggering a substantial change in the ethnography, Levi-Strauss' 'fresh' approach remained structural and did not concern itself with the performance process in living ecologies (see especially *Structural Anthropology*: Chapter XI: The Structure of Myth).

Leach, following his study of the Kachin (1954), published a comprehensive overview of the changes Levi-Strauss' revolutionary ideas brought to the field (Levi-Strauss: 1970). Leach was concerned with demonstrating the inter-dependence of the major dimensions of not just mythic but all social life - such as religion, kinship, law, politics, economics and cultural production within structured, performed, ritual frameworks - in terms of symbols (1972, 1976), bringing it all together in *Social Anthropology* (1982). Neither structuralism nor semiotics in their raw forms offered ways for mutual 'translation' of culture and their applications to ethnography were also locked into an assumption of cultural superiority where the European scholar was in a position to 'decode' the culture of the Other using a clever new set of intellectual tools.
In a kind of parallel oppositional practice, Mircea Eliade (1954 and 1973) and Merleau-Ponty (1962 and 1964) explored the relatively new field of phenomenology, the anti-structural side of performance, myth, ritual and shamanism. They attempted to legitimise physical, emotional and phenomenological performative acts designed to bring about transformations of mind, body and spirit within a perceptual frame. The English school was strongly represented during the 1960s and 1970s by a group of scholars who were increasingly aware of the role of experience and perception in understanding the symbolic languages of Others (and by this I do not only mean 'of Other cultures', but 'Other to themselves' in a number of ways, for example, Other in their own culture). Rodney Needham, in Belief, Language, Experience (1972), and Mary Douglas with her extensive work on symbolism in Purity and Danger (1966), Natural Symbols (1973) and Implicit Meanings (1975), were initially dismissed as 'unscientific'. However they weren't trying to be 'scientific' but to give cultural practice some validity. It is evident that this work was hardly acknowledged at all in Australian Aboriginal anthropological circles and ethnographies at the time scarcely mention this approach to symbolism in an anthropological context. An exception was Nancy Munn with Walbiri Iconography (1973) but that exploration was not as vigorous as it deserved to be and waited twenty years for a thorough review. (Morton: 1987)

There is little reference in this early work to the 'personal shamanisms' which were openly explored in the 1960s and 1970s as part of popular culture, especially the role of 'mind altering' drugs. Interest remains high and 'new age' philosophers (Tucker: 1992) still seek to negotiate between "the waking consciousness and the mythic underworld" (Feinstein: 1987, p272) in both performances and in everyday life. Unfortunately, contemporary discourse emphasises either 'new age' mysticism or primitive magic, or the social evils and/or benefits of mind altering substances. It is dependent in its theories on notions of an 'outside agency' rather than exploring the possibilities offered by heightened human perception and experience and the relations between transcendence of the physical body and performance intensity - which has been a concern also of performance analysis. Much related ethnography is similarly couched in mysticism and provides little insight. At the other extreme are scientific experiments, which seek to measure such experience in terms of changing brain patterns. (Bloch, Orthous and Santibaqez: 1987, in Zarilli, ed.: 1995)

**An appreciation of the ecological**

Turnbull's The Forest People (1961) and Rappaport's Pigs for the Ancestors (1968) contributed to post-Levi-Straussian ethnography and broke new ground in that they wrote about performance ecologies, holistic social transactions and economic, physical and environmental systems in which performances occurred. However, they had little knowledge
of the developing field of contemporary performance theory. Interpretive anthropology began to give rise to interpretive ethnography, which located its interest within the 'deep structures' of 'local knowledge'. Peacock's exploration of proletariat drama, Rites of Modernisation (1968) and Geertz's collections of essays Interpretation of Cultures (1973) and the later Local Knowledge (1983) are the beginnings of a dialogue in this field. Geertz attempts to interpret what is meant by 'culture' and to relate that to real behaviour in specific ecologies – especially performative phenomena such as the Balinese trance and its location in a highly organised agrarian community simultaneously related to three different but intertwined socio-religious systems. Bateson's Balinese essays reflect a similar search for meaning through constructed social and individual behaviour within communities. His ideas on meta-communication, play and fantasy are still seminal readings for performance theorists (Bateson: 1973).

Overlapping the end of the structuralist hegemony on theory were ‘new’ Marxist approaches, which were particularly concerned with class and representation within the discourses of popular culture (Brecht/Willett (trans): 1976; Benjamin: 1969; Bourdieu: 1980, 1984, 1989; Williams: 1981 and Jamieson: 1994). Their contribution is more to social and cultural studies than to performance ethnography per se, although their effect on reframing anthropological viewpoints and ethnography in general has been considerable, especially in asking, "Whose culture?", "Whose language? " “Who is speaking here?” and “Who is being silenced?” These were also questions asked by a group of Feminists from diverse cultural backgrounds (Kristeva: 1989; Irigary: 1979; Spivak: 1985 and 1990; Trinh: 1989; Cixous and Clement: 1996). At the same time they re-viewed gender and its construction by both European and non-European colonised peoples and in many respects came to terms with a useful approach to performance ethnography through their preoccupation with 'the body'. While Feminism and Marxism might be appropriate theoretical frameworks for analysis of European cultures, however, they are not automatically appropriate for non-European cultures.

It is most interesting to note the lack of more than passing references in ‘world ethnography’ to Australian Aboriginal societies throughout the first three quarters of the 20th century. It is as if the anthropological world of Europe and North America, while it knew about Australia, was not interested in real encounters, although Aborigines were often cited as examples of particular kinds of 'primitivism'. In balance, it also seems that much of the 'new anthropology' evaded Australian researchers, especially the growing interest in symbolism, ritual and performance as something other than cultural artifacts or vehicles for religious activities.
4.2 Early Aboriginal performance ethnography and theories about Aboriginal performance

Aboriginal and European first contact
Descriptions of Australian Aboriginal performances have appeared in European literature since the seventeenth century, mentioned in passing or described in detail by explorers, missionaries, health workers, cattle station owners and their wives, geographers, botanists, zoologists, surveyors, mineralogists and climatologists as well as, since the late nineteenth century, in specifically documented records published by ethnographers and anthropologists - and the media. It is evident that many kinds of performances once existed in great numbers and diversity throughout Australia and occupied a major part of Aboriginal daily life. The best documented traditional performances are from northern Western Australia, the Western and Central Desert regions, the north and north-west of Queensland, the Northern Territory, Northern South Australia and a number of Torres Strait Islander communities. New South Wales, Tasmanian, Victorian, coastal South Australian and southern Western Australian communities have relatively few surviving records of historical traditional practice but they have a relatively high number of Aboriginal people who have developed vibrant, contemporary urban sub-cultures with very active performance communities. 'Traditional' examples surviving as living practice come from the areas that, because of the comparatively light impact of European settlement and urbanisation, maintained a dominant Aboriginal culture. In almost every case, Aboriginal performance ethnography promoted primitivism.

Early contact with seafarers
Reports of initial contacts between European explorers, invaders, settlers and the indigenous populations of Australasia include quite a number of passing references to performance encounters of some kind, usually incidental and derogatory in their description, although some were curiosities worth writing home about and, in several cases, illustrated with engravings and, later, photographs. Fascinated by the outré, the 17th, 18th and 19th century European worldview certainly classed as ‘primitive’ the performances witnessed in such encounters. Voyages of exploration and colonial expansion produced diaries by Jansz (1605), Cartensz (whose ship Amhem gave its name to Arnhem Land while exploring the Torres Strait), Van Colster (1623), and Dampier, with his well-known A New Voyage Around the World (1729 publication /1937 reprint, Chapter 16) in which he called Western Australian performers the ‘miserablest creatures’ in the world. There are no lengthy descriptions of performances.\(^3\)
The journals surviving from the English ships of James Cook (1770) and Arthur Phillip (1788) and from the first settlement by Watkin Tench (1789 & 1791) are similar in their dismissal of the performances of 'the natives' but give a little information. The first known use of the bastardised Port Jackson (Gamay) word ‘corroboree’ is by John Hunter (1793) in his journal. David Collins also records the words of an unidentified Aboriginal song in his Appendix No. X11 to An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales (1793). A later English perspective includes comments about performances in Arnhem Land by Matthew Flinders (1803) during his circumnavigation of the continent. First contact with the natives usually elicited the ‘terra nullius’ response and early navigation crews or busy botanists and mapmakers took no detailed notes of performances. Terra Nullius indeed! Not only was there somebody home, they were dancing!

Representation in the popular theatre
One surprising Aboriginal-inspired reference turns up in the popular theatre of France in 1792 where, in post revolutionary spirit, one Citizen Gamas wrote a play called Les Emigrés aux Terres Australes or, Le Dernier Chapitre d’une Grande Revolution. It was about an imaginary French colonisation of New South Wales by expelled aristocrats who would have failed to survive without the practical ministrations of their 'working class' servant and the high code of ethics and morals that existed among the 'noble savages' who were their charming hosts. The French playwright (who knew nothing at all about Australia but who was responding to the revolutionary zeitgeist) endowed the Aboriginal population with all of the qualities of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, contrasting them with the arrogant, class-ridden French aristocrats. It was a highly political work, understandably never performed in an English-settled Terra Australis.

A later version of the same idea can be found in James Barrie’s play (and later British film) The Admirable Crichton, but unlike the French play of just over 100 years earlier, the ‘savages’ are not Australian Aboriginal but from a mythical Polynesian island. Up to the end of the 18th century it was not uncommon to find respect paid to Australian Indigenous people, especially resistance leaders like Pemulwuy, but this had completely disappeared by the 1820s in the scramble for land and wealth at any cost by European colonisers (Lepervanche and Bottomly, eds.: 1988; Brook and Kohen: 1991; Kohen: 1995; Willmott: 1987).

Other early theatrical entertainments in Australia included ‘Aboriginal Natives’, this time as exotic characters and colourful supernumeries, especially in the ballets. (Rees: Op. Cit., 3-40; Parsons, ed.: 1995, passim; Williams, M. 1986; and Williams, D: 1995)
**Tall tales and true**

In the early part of English colonisation, studies of ‘the Natives’ were included in general explorations and surveys as part of Australia’s ‘wild life’. Encounters with traditional performance also represented one of the frissons which allowed travellers and explorers to elevate and augment accounts of their physically exhausting and often unrewarding journeys in a relatively boring landscape (compared to Europe, Africa, America or ‘the Orient’). Accounts range from the prosaic to the exotic with some dramatic and colourful episodes. Some were gentlemen’s diaries, such as Angas’ *Savage Life and Scenes in Australia and New Zealand* (1847/1967), with its four plates of ten paintings of dancing figures with description by the author. Backhouse’s *A narrative of a visit to the Australian Colonies* (1843/1967) reveals a similar ‘educated tourist’ gaze. Although the pictures in Angas are valuable as a visual record and some of the observations and descriptions in both are quite interesting and lively, they lack performance detail and expertise, which renders them almost useless for the purpose of performance analysis.

Some authors of the time dwelt on the ‘primitive’ aspects of performances they witnessed, such as a certain Mrs Thomas Mortimer, the writer of several travel books and romantic novels (one of which adorned my Nana’s bookshelf for many years and which I now have). In 1864 she gives a ‘popular’ account that says it all:

I have already told you that the natives have no God; yet they have a DEVIL, whom they call Yakoo or debbil-debbil. Of him they are always afraid, for they fancy he goes about devouring children. When anyone dies, they say, “Yakoo took him.” How different from those happy Christians who can say of their dead, “God took them!”

“People who know not God, but only the devil, must be very wicked. These savages show themselves to be children of debbil-debbil by their actions ... one of the most horrible things they do, is making the skulls of their friends into drinking cups, and they think that, by doing so, they show their AFFECTION!

“These ignorant savages have their amusements. Dancing is the chief. At every full moon there is a grand dance, called the Corrobory. It is the men who dance, while the women sit and beat time. Nothing can be more horrible to see than a Corrobory. It is held in the night by the light of blazing fires. The men are made to look more frightful than usual, by great patches and stripes of red and white clay all over their bodies; and they play all manner of strange antics, and utter all kinds of strange yells; so you might think it was a dance in HELL rather than on earth.

It may surprise you to hear, these creatures have a turn for both music and drawing. Figures have been found carved upon the rocks, which show their turn for drawing.
These figures represent beasts, fishes and men, and are much better done than could have been supposed. There are few savages that can sing as well as these natives, but the words of their songs are very foolish. (Mortimer: 1864, 182)

Some glimmer of hope in the aesthetics department? Mrs Mortimer's account also displays a common problem with both amateur and professional ethnography - a lack of knowledge of Aboriginal languages. This was neither the first nor last time someone would call the words of the songs "very foolish" or imply that Aborigines had no idea what they were singing about. Her book, Far Off: or Australia, Africa, and America Described, was the ‘mass media’ of its day, and sold nearly twenty thousand copies. The intense interest shown in such tales did much to establish an unfortunate attitude to Aboriginal performance and, by extrapolation, Aboriginal people. Early accounts of the performances of 'indigenous natives' almost always were dismissed as "wild, savage, uncivilized leapings around". It was left to missionaries such as L.E. Threlkeld (1834) to make slightly more perceptive observations, especially about the possible meaning of the ceremonies:

The Aborigines of New Holland, in this part of the Colony, have no priesthood, no altar, no sacrifice, not any religious service, strictly so-called; their superstitious observances can scarcely be designated as divine rites, being only mysterious works of darkness, revellings and the like. Nevertheless they are not without some instinctive feeling of dependence on the great 'Unknown Being'. (Threlkeld: Ed Gunson: 1974)

Other early missionaries like Teichelman (1840), Salvado (1846) and Meyer (1846) also moderated some of the earlier comments. Taplin (ed,1873 and 1879) added more understanding with his 1879 edition of a collection which included transcribed music, performance observation and copies of detailed, European-style drawings of dancers done by a male member of the Kingston tribe, originally published by the Surveyor General's Office in Adelaide. The Reverend Taplin was already the late Reverend when this appeared in print; much of the material was collected in the 1840's and 1850's. A transcription of some music from a Narrinyeri “Corrobory” and a verbal description of the event is a highlight. The music is written in European clef notation, with the comment:

A couple of clarionets, with a flute, and, for the bass, a drum, would give the best idea of this corrobory. Our music makes it too melodious, and the harshness of the aboriginal song (sic) is lost. Perhaps the bagpipes might imitate it. (Taplin, ed.: 1879, 106).

The choice of orchestration demonstrates quite clearly that this early musicologist has no way of notating a comparison in terms of sound and is at a loss of how to document it. On one hand he attempts to 'civilise' the music by substituting a small, tuneful wind ensemble (with
the concession of the ‘primitive’ drum). On the other hand he recognises the ‘discordant’ vocal attributes, suggesting bagpipes. At the time, bagpipes were also considered quite ‘primitive’ to English ears (along with the Scots, it should be said). Yet it is certainly heading in the right aural direction. There is a hint that the music might be taken seriously for what it is: a concession that, without suitable notation, instruments and voices, the ‘harshness’ of the Aboriginal song will be ‘lost’. This is the earliest admission found that suggested Europeans might need to listen to Aboriginal music with different ears.

The actual performance description, while interpolated with crude value judgements, is thoughtful, the layman-observer paying great attention to the ‘whole performance’ situation. It was not uncommon for early amateur descriptions to contain information about ‘audience response’ and ‘atmosphere’, often missing from the later, more ‘scientific’ observations. There are also some implicit references to performance practice (which are not explored) such as there being native ‘spectators’ and that performance skill was ‘acclaimed’ by the natives, both of which are denied in later anthropological material which preferred to construct Aboriginal performances as wholly ‘religious’ ceremonies. Taplin picked up the fact that this was a performance with dramatic intentions and energetic use of performance skills and not simply a solemn ceremony of the kind fundamentalist Christians favoured or expected in their religious rites.

A great deal of conjecture has been made by various persons as to the true character of the corrobory. Some have fancied that they saw in it a religious significance. It may have in some tribes, but I do not believe it has amongst the Narrinyeri. I think that amongst them it possesses rather a dramatic character, or, perhaps, more of the nature of the ballet. The main idea is of a spectacle. There are a number of figures all moving in uniform time, and to a regular cadence. The measure is intended either to express joy, or warlike passion, or some other feeling. The song which accompanies corresponds with the dance. The corrobory song above is intended to be merry, and the dance which belonged to it was very graceful. And over this song and dance there is always cast a sort of mistiness by the smoke of fires in the moonlight, so as to impart a weirdness to it. Very often, though, great war dances have been held in open daylight. I will now describe a corrobory at which I was present.

The scene of it was a long low gully amongst the hills. It was a bright moonlight night. There were present about two hundred natives of all ages. In one part of the gully there was a row of fires lighted and made to emit a great deal of smoke that rolled up the gully. On the same side of the fires as that which I occupied there were seated a number of old men and women of various ages with drums called plannge, made by rolling up a skin tightly. They are beaten with a hand or a fist, and keep the time of the dance. The beaters accompanied the planngar with the song. On the other side of the fires, which
were in the middle of the gully, a little to the left of the drummers, there was a moving crowd of naked men - I should think seventy or eighty. They were all painted with white stuff in a grotesque manner - rings around the eyes, spots on the cheeks, white lines on the ribs, white lines down the legs and arms, so that in the gloom they looked like dancing skeletons. Each man had a bunch of gum leaves tied to his legs, which made a rustling noise as he stepped. They all bore in their hands a pair of waddies, called “kanakar” which they beat to the same time as the drums with a sharp metallic clank. This is called the “tartengk”. The sound of eighty pairs going furiously together made a tremendous clangour. On my side of the fires stood with me a crowd of native spectators. To us the dancers appeared through the smoke a tossing crowd of moving heads and arms, the women’s voices rose on our side in shrill tones, the men shouted in hoarse chorus. Just then there was a sudden turn in the song, and from out the moving mass of dancers darted a dozen men right into the quivering firelight: instantly they spread themselves in a rank facing the drummers and spectators, and with legs spread wide apart, arms rapidly beating the tartengk, heads stretched forwards, they danced a peculiar kind of jump or stamp in exact time, but with great energy. This continued about five minutes, and then the chorus changed, and back they sprang and vanished in the crowd. Then the song went on a while, and, as it turned, another party leaped out in the same manner, and danced as the others did. Fine! fine! said the spectators with many notes of acclamation. And thus the corroborey proceeded until they all got tired, and had to stop and rest. The whole scene was of a wild and weird nature scarcely to be conveyed by words, but far more of a dramatic or spectacular character than anything. (Taplin, ed.: 1879, 107)

The early missionaries, who were so opposed to Aboriginal cultural and religious practices, contributed some of the most useful records and in some cases the only records of communities performing, since many groups were completely wiped out by the middle of the 19th century. Of the observations of the early inland explorers, more seriously reflective are those of Edward John Eyre (1845, 233-34) who was one of the first to compare the theatrical components and intentions of Aboriginal inma or corroboree to European theatre and opera but this important observation (however incorrect) and those of Taplin, were paid little attention in the next century.

**Spencer and Gillen**

Spencer and Gillen, in particular, had an eye for visual detail and a style of writing that makes their descriptions of performances much clearer. Take as an example their first major joint work, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899). The confident tone of the narrative, uncluttered by references to well-known anthropologists whose feelings have to be considered and egos stroked. It is commentary unbiased (for the time) and objective (as they saw it); make reading their work an experience in itself. While there are virtually no details of
actual dance or music, and very few references to song texts or performance terminology in Aboriginal languages (particularly "Arunta"), the para-performance detail is very rich and records many aspects of ceremonial life in the Central Desert. Their description of the increase ritual for witchetty grubs (Ibid, 170-179) at Emily Gap, near Uluru, for instance, indicates that the structure, function and content of the various parts of the ritual, as they described it, was very similar to that now practiced on behalf of the maku one hundred years later by the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people in Mimili, several hundred kilometers south, even though the song words and dances of the earlier performed ceremony may have been different. But they just as easily might be the same, as our Aboriginal colleagues assured us on a trip we made with some of them from Mimili to Uluru, where they were clearly familiar with the territory (personal experience, 1987). The ceremonies must have linked up for there to be so many similarities between them in two different language groups, a phenomenon explored by Catherine Ellis in her study of other South Australian songlines (1966, passim).

A criticism of Spencer and Gillen's observations of ceremonies has been their lack of categorisation and structural analysis but, in truth, other specialist anthropologists at the time hardly fared better. Broad, eclectic information is frequently of more use and interest to a performance analyst than an account that has been selected, dissected, censored, pre-digested and scientifically 'interpreted'. A major drawback was that neither of the men is a competent linguist, so the 'collection of interesting data' approach dominated. On the other hand, they did have some experience on their side, having taken part in rituals as "fully initiated" members of the Arunta tribe which detail appears in a later publication (The Arunta: A study of a stone age people: 1927). They simply didn't have the frameworks within which to analyse their performance experiences. Later ethnography is more focused, but while giving more detailed descriptions of rituals, it is still lacking the 'performance' perspective and there is little to suggest that are aware of the relationship between the performance and the country itself. Nonetheless, the works are essential reading in terms of general detail and the sheer enthusiasm for their subject.

The most important criticism is the continuing lack of language knowledge and any understanding of the connections between the song words, music, dances, iconography and the myths, and between the serious ceremonies and other performances:

The songs of this tribe (i.e. the Arunta) ... are merely a collection of sounds and cannot be translated. They have no actual meaning, but are merely a means of expressing such music as there is in the native mind. (Gillen: 1894)
And F.J. Gillen was the 'linguistic expert' on the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia in 1892!

Like Gillen, Stirling and Spencer were oblivious to the real significance of what they saw, their ethnocentrism blinding them to any appreciation of the hermeneutic nature of the ceremonies. Stirling's assertion that "the natives are quite unable to assign any meaning to the words of these and other chants" and his small attempts at musical analysis (1894, 73) are augmented by Spencer's comments on the performance itself. The lack of appreciation of any performance ecology is evident.

A word of warning must, however, be written in regard to this "elaborate ritual". To a certain extent it is without doubt elaborate, but at the same time it is eminently crude and savage on all essential points. It must be remembered that these ceremonies are performed by naked, howling savages, who have no idea of permanent abodes, no clothing, no knowledge of any implements save those fashioned out of wood, bone, and stone, no idea whatever of the cultivation of crops, or the laying in of a supply of food to tide over hard times, no word for any number past three, and no belief in a supreme being ... It is one thing to read of these ceremonies - it is quite another to see them prepared and performed. A number of naked savages assemble on the ceremonial ground. They bring with them a supply of down, plucked from birds which they have killed with boomerangs or gathered from plants, and this down they grind on flat stones, mixing it with pipe-clay or red ochre. Then, drawing blood from their own veins, they smear it over their bodies and use it as gum, so that they can outline designs in white and red. While this is in progress they are chanting songs of which they do not know the meaning, and, when all is ready and the performers decorated, a group of men stand at one side of the ceremonial ground, the decorated men perform a series of more or less grotesque evolutions, and then all is over. (Spencer and Gillen: 1904, 74)

Ironically, to an outsider who does not understand the culture, the context, the language or the meaning, it is a very accurate description of what appears to be happening. The interiority of Aboriginal performance was probably never so clearly demonstrated in early writings.

Yet, despite the shortcomings of the ethnography, as David MacDougall points out in Paul Hocking's The Principles of Visual Anthropology (1975, 111), Baldwin Spencer took both a cylinder recorder and a camera to Central Australia in 1901 to record performances. His lead was followed by surprisingly few early ethnographers in the field. Vanderwal's 1987 tribute, The Aboriginal Photographs of Baldwin Spencer, examines not only the photographs but also the advanced approach to systematic fieldwork he developed over the years. Spencer's remarkable pictures are now often used in other publications, sometimes decoratively and out of context such as in Lawlor's dubiously framed Voices of the First Day (1991).
insertion into a ‘new age’ text might intend to give it an air of validity when what it does is create a clash of philosophies. The shortcomings of Stirling, Spencer and Gillen have been tackled energetically by T.G.H. Strehlow in the introductory section of his *Songs of Central Australia* (1971), largely in defense of his father, Carl Strehlow, whose equally contentious ethnographic works were contemporaneous with Spencer and Gillen's. Any further comment is unnecessary here.

**Carl Strehlow**

Carl Strehlow’s work (1907, 1908, 1910, 1914) was extraordinary in that, while he was fluent in *Arunta*/*Aranda* and other Central Australian dialects, talked to many ‘informants’ in and around the Hermannsberg settlement, and recorded many myths, he never, it is said, attended a single ceremony. His son, T.G.H. (Theodore) Strehlow, (1971: Introduction) notes that it was in fear of compromising his ‘position’ as a Christian pastor. While his work is fascinating as background information and fills four venerable volumes (about to be published in translation for the first time), it can offer performance analysis very little, especially as he didn’t make the connection between myths, ceremonies and social structures, nor did he understand the importance of the land. He was, however, well known and respected in the early part of the 20th century and his work (in German) caused great discussion in Europe. The new professional ‘armchair anthropologists’ such as Sir James Frazer and folklorist Andrew Lang and the power of this particular Oxford-linked group in England ensured that the elder Strehlow’s Christian views were propagated in the literature. There was also his long-running hostility with Baldwin Spencer on the language issue while Spencer openly derided Strehlow’s attempts to make comments about performances he hadn’t seen or taken part in. A nasty, very public running battle ensued and their bitter feud typifies the dichotomy in ethnographic approaches that has plagued the field ever since.

**T.G.H. Strehlow**

Of the serious scholars of Aboriginal language and music (linked to but considered rather separately from the whole performance experience), T.G.H. Strehlow is the outstanding contributor in the field from the 1930’s to the 1970’s. He is justly admired for his extensive annotated transcriptions, recordings of sound and action (on colour film from 1949) and justly criticised for his interpretations. His work embraced the structuralist theories of Levi-Strauss but was framed by an education in classical languages and literature which can make his *magnum opus, Songs of Central Australia* (1971) a little daunting for the reader with no similar grasp of European ‘high culture’. A very sympathetic but critical commentary of his work by Barry Hill (1992) is both amusing and enlightening in its examination of Strehlow’s language style when dealing with translations of Aboriginal song texts and the kinds of dissonant
‘realities’ Strehlow creates. Nonetheless, the collection is of immense importance. His 
painstaking analysis of a large sample and his thorough ‘knowledge’ of the languages, both 
Arunta/Aranda and English, are dazzling. The lack of references to Aboriginal scholars is 
disturbing. The ‘tour de force’ documentation, the transcription of Aboriginal songs into 
European music notation with ‘classical’ and even psychoanalytical interpretations, constructs 
it as an ‘objet d’art’ in its own right rather than an exploration of Aboriginal performance which 
reveals ‘Aboriginality’. I am fortunate enough to own a copy of Strehlow’s rare book. It has 
caused me both delight and alarm in the same way my copies of Spencer and Gillen’s works 
do - so authoritative that it would be easy to be seduced but so ethnocentrically European in 
the filters applied that the Aboriginal performers most definitely remain in the inferior social, 
intellectual and æsthetic position, elevated only by the status of the authors and the 
mystique surrounding such a little known field. His mentions witchetty grub ceremonies in 
Aranda Traditions on page 17, reproduced in Songs of Central Australia as a footnote on 
page 282.

The [witchetty grub] ancestor represents the sum total of the living essence of the 
witchetty grubs - both animal and human - regarded as a whole. Every cell, if we may 
be allowed to phrase it thus, in the body of the original ancestor is a living animal or a 
living human being: if the ancestor is a witchetty grub man, then every cell in his body is 
potentially either a separate living witchetty grub or a separate living man of the witchetty 
grub totem … Today natives still point out to each other the changed, immortal, life 
holding bodies of an ancestor and his sons: they are now become rocks and trees and 
tjurunga … If game is becoming scarce in a bad season, the native can create the 
animals that he needs with ease, simply by rubbing portion of the rock representing the 
changed body of the ancestor with another stone: for every atom of that rock is a 
potential animal; the dust that flies from the rock and is scattered on the ground will stir 
into life when the next rains fall and bring up grass and flowers from the expectant soil.

This small piece of information, together with Spencer and Gillen’s accounts, confirm that at 
least some aspects of the ceremonies have not changed over a hundred years and that the 
witchetty grub dreaming was and is a widespread and important ceremony connected with 
the very act of creation. This is important for interpretation of verses in Chapter 8.

Ellis
The field of performance analysis was perhaps fortunate that Strehlow had a research 
assistant, Catherine Ellis, who did not absorb his particular ‘world view’ but heard Aboriginal 
music from the position of ‘the Other’. While not Aboriginal herself, her experiences as a 
Scottish migrant sensitised her to the dangers of marginalisation. Her long years of living with 
Aboriginal communities with her own young family provided one of the early cultural 
exchanges of a real kind. Early work reflects Strehlow’s organised approach and she had at
her disposal at once a certain personal ‘distance’ as a scholar and a great empathy as a person as well as all his fieldwork to draw on for comparison. Cath also had access to, and used, better technology (recording equipment and, later, analysis practices) in the examination of the musical attributes. Most importantly, she was herself a musician (an orchestral wind player, specializing in bassoon) of very great skill. From the late 1950s to the 1996, Ellis published an enormous amount of meticulously researched and very readable material (see References). She concentrated mainly on South and Central Australian music and culture, combining sensitive observation (collaborating with Aboriginal women and men) with 'accurate' documentation and analysis (Ellis: 1970b-1996). Genius in integrating her findings into contemporary discourse and sharing her experiences and research activities with Aboriginal and European colleagues alike was characteristic. Her most acclaimed publication, up to her expected but untimely death in 1996, is Aboriginal Music: An Education for Living, which has developed a ‘cult’ following among music, dance and theatre students and appears on a number of ‘set text’ lists in universities. My personal preference, however, is the unpublished and restricted-access work on the Andagarinja women's project (1967a and 1968b) and its published article on the role of the ethnomusicologist in such exchanges (1970b) in which she demonstrates that she knew quite well how intimately performance is related to the whole ecology and that she valued the teaching from traditional performers.

One of her great public achievements was the setting up of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) attached to Adelaide University. While it had a rocky start, it has now proven its worth many times over, making Aboriginal music performance accessible to both European and Aboriginal university students and Aboriginal people in the community as well as making European music available to Aboriginal people, employing Aboriginal experts as tutors and lecturers alongside non-Aboriginal academics. CASM now concentrates on training Aboriginal musicians and dancers only, encouraging contemporary creative and technical skills (personal experience, 2000). A constant concern is the integrity of the centre within Adelaide University, including Aboriginal management, equitable remuneration for teachers and performers and acknowledgement of their ownership of their music.

Ellis’ understanding of music’s vital role within human societies has made her perspectives on Aboriginal culture very valuable, offering paradigms for collaborative research and teaching that apply equally to every other aspect of performance. Of great value to me for this project was her “Classification of sounds in Pitjantjatjara-speaking areas” (Ellis et al: 1978, 68-80, Appendix A), which greatly assisted in our exchange. She was also very familiar with Mimili and its people but, while her research was focused almost completely on music and its close relationship and its integration with everyday life and Aboriginal communication systems, she published very little work in the area of dance and dramatic ritual. An issue of great
importance loomed increasingly in Ellis' later work: the ethics of research into the performances of Aboriginal people and issues of ownership. From the early 1970's this is a factor in her framing of her fieldwork and analysis and by the time of her visit to Mimili in 1993 (Tunstill, Ellis and Ellis: 1995), it was the major concern. The Festschrift published in 1995 (Barwick, Marrett and Tunstill, eds) is a testament to her work and contains a comprehensive overview of her achievements and a full bibliography. It is interesting, however, that her ecumenical embracing of all Aboriginal arts has not filtered down to her disciples and that very few Aboriginal people have joined their ranks as co-researchers.

Moyle

At this point, it should be mentioned that the other significant researcher in the performance field at that time was another woman. Alice Moyle's work (1960 to 1997) is also very accessible and relevant but, for some reason, like the work of Catherine Ellis, it doesn't appear in major reviews of ethnography and anthropology. Her status as a researcher into dance and music, as well as her gender, militated against her being given the recognition she deserved in anthropological circles until the 1980s. Collaborations with choreologists like Elphine Allen and Cherie Trevaskis (1981) to tie together the documentation of Aboriginal dance and music for classroom use, gives her approach a fullness that makes a degree of performance reconstruction possible - at least from a technical point of view. Her choice of the Benesh notation system (Benesh: 1956; Page: 1990, and Morais: 1992) over the Laban system makes the simultaneous notation of dance and music possible, if time consuming. The main drawback at first was a 'classical ballet' bent in the dancers collaborating on the original notation and the English-sounding 'demonstrations' of Aboriginal songs on the recordings, an approach which was later changed. The reliance on Benesh dance notation did not, in the end, help in the dissemination of the information, as so few people can read it. Moyle has always emphasised the 'connectedness' between Aboriginal songs and the dances and, like Ellis, is much concerned with the role school education can play in raising awareness of Aboriginal culture. Moyle contributed over many years to the creation of worthwhile resources accessible to children in primary schools, in the form of recordings, videos and notes, together with classroom activities and projects (Moyle: 1991, in particular), which she always advocated, should be taught by Aboriginal teachers. Thus she developed a framework for learning from experience in a performance-based learning environment. Getting such material published and used in schools has its problems, however. Moyle's dream was that traditional owners would do the teaching on a local basis, since community protocols do not permit knowledge to be taught by people not qualified to teach it. Aboriginal teachers are thin on the ground in Departments of Education.9
Ecologies of Performance in Central Australia: 4. *kulilkatinyi*: listening more closely

Elkin, Meggitt and the Berndts

A.P. Elkin, perhaps Australia's best known, 'all-round', non-Aboriginal Aboriginal scholar, moved from research into social organisation (1931) to broad ranging 'cultural studies' involving myth, religion, music and visual arts from the 1930's to the late 1970's. His vast collections of music (reviewed in Jones: 1965) were of immense benefit to European musicologists and his written output in no way ignores the existence of performance as an important aspect of Aboriginal life. However, his analyses are either technical or descriptive and his interpretive values are those of a scientific, philanthropic, Protestant cleric who believed that Aboriginal culture would eventually die out.\(^{10}\)

During the immediate post-second world war period, Ronald and Catherine Berndt (*passim*) and Mervyn Meggitt (1962) also added to the collection of ethnography, documentation of social and ritual life, song words, music and narratives. The observations of Ronald Berndt, in particular, of ritual performances, were very detailed in their para-performance description and social analysis without adding much to the analysis of the performance act itself. The Berndts' *Ooldea* work (1942-1945), Ronald Berndt's controversial *Kunapipi* (1951) with its sealed section, *The Sacred Site* (1969a), *Love Songs of Arnhem Land* (1976a) and *The Speaking Land* (1989) are considered seminal texts but the translations are eurocentric. Nonetheless, their recordings of stories and other performance material comprise valuable archival material and the Berndts had particularly close relations with Aboriginal people and literally gave their lives to the cause.

Catherine Berndt's work on oral literature opened a number of European eyes to new ways of seeing Aboriginal culture. Catherine Berndt's article in Hiatt (ed: 1978, 56-67) "Categorisation of, and in, oral literature" was perhaps the first attempt made to look at how Aboriginal people in several parts of Australia themselves categorise their 'oral literature'. This extensively referenced article traces how previous scholars have gone about such classification and translation. Her research made close connections between the 'told' story and the 'performed' story. It also addressed some of the problems in fieldwork as well as the Europeanising and the re-interpretation of 'data' from Aboriginal 'informants', which has the effect of trivialising the real content and meaning of stories and performances and making them more palatable to Europeans.\(^9\)

Women's business

During the immediate pre-WW 2 period there was an increased participation in the field by women anthropologists and ethnographers. In Phyllis Kaberry's *Aboriginal Woman: Sacred and Profane* (1939), for the first time, attention was focused on the one half of the Aboriginal
population that had been a mystery, due to the inability of male fieldworkers to communicate with the women or to understand the social structures of Aboriginal communities (see also Peggy Brock’s Introduction to Women: Rites and Sites: 1989).

Post war, Catherine Berndt’s sensitive observations and descriptions of women’s ceremonies (1950a, 1950b and 1965) show a closer relationship with the women she consulted and a deeper appreciation of the relations between them. She built up a body of Aboriginal women’s ethnography, which began to increase during the 1960's and 1970's with research by, for example, Marie Reay (1964), Jane Goodale (1968), Faye Gale (1974), Diane Bell (1980-1998) and Annette Hamilton (1971-1990). Many of these women anthropologists/ sociologists/ethnographers make references to performance in terms of 'doing' a social or religious ceremony, but none makes performance itself a main focus. What they do accomplish is a thorough revision of the fiction that women had no great part in ceremonial life and few, if any, ceremonies of their own.

Other women writing about Aboriginal performance

Nancy Munn, with her revolutionary book Walbiri Iconography (1973) and paper "The transformation of subjects into objects in Walbiri and Pitiatora myth" (1973) based on field studies at Yuendumu and its environs in the late 1950s, should have had an impact on the study of performance in Aboriginal anthropology. However her work, which operated on the cusp of the transition from Durkheimian to Levi-Straussian analysis in Australia, was not recognised for its value to performance.11 It would also be true to say that she herself did not recognise its potential, as her self-critical, new "Afterword" to the 1986 re-publication reveals. One of the problems with her study was its perceptions of women's roles in cultural activities and, as she herself acknowledges, "a Durkheimian approach" which prevented her from taking the work into the performative sphere.


In the more recent 'performance analysis' field, Joanne Page (1990) and Meagan Morais (1992) have made material available to European audiences but it is dubious whether their work is accessed by Indigenous dance practitioners and scholars.
Myers and Bird-Rose
Writing about Aboriginal people’s links to their environmental and social ecologies, but not necessarily about performance itself, are Fred Myers and Deborah-Bird Rose. Both authors have contributed sensitive research into the real sources of the disintegration of Aboriginal communities and identities and - therefore – performance: disassociation from ‘nourishing terrains’ and ‘country’ has an automatic impact on performance. Their approaches to ethnography are far more empathetic with indigenous people’s situation than the paternalist Elkin or the expert Ronald Berndt.

Myers’ more recent text, *Painting Cultures* (2000), about the Aboriginal ‘high art’ industry, relates directly also to performances. It scopes entirely new territory for an anthropological work: interculturality, ‘culture-making’ and the complex relations between people, their land, spiritual beliefs, synaesthesia and the many forms and modes of symbolic expression.

Clunies-Ross and the Sydney University Centre for Performance
Margaret Clunies-Ross’ large body of work (1978 -1990) is of a different kind. Clunies-Ross’ research into poetry, song and performance from the late 1970’s, especially in the area of oral performance traditions, is impressive and she is one of the few who also taps into contemporary performance theory and considers issues in ethics and documentation. Her 1983 article *Modes of Performance in Societies without Writing: the case for Aboriginal Australia* is a searching discussion and an overview of past activity in the field, touching on all the important issues. In *The Documentation and Notation of Theatrical Performance* (McCauley Ed: 1986), Clunies-Ross joins forces with the Performance Studies Department at Sydney University in an article detailing her approach to the documentation of the *Djambidj* project. This project began in the nineteen seventies and culminated in a variety of disseminations, each from a slightly different perspective, by a number of different people, including a film - *Waiting For Harry* (McKenzie: 1980), live performances in Canberra and a book – *Rom* (Wild, Ed: 1986) and numerous articles by Clunies-Ross, one of them in the American *The Drama Review*:1989, 107-127). Live performances arising from that initial contact have continued to occur (AIATSIS Journal: 1995) as part of an ongoing process. A ceremony (or group of ceremonies) has thus moved out of the realm of anthropology into the wider world of performance studies. Documentation from the diverse group - including Ian Keen (1977 & 1978), Howard Morphy (*passim*); Les Hiatt (*passim*) generally follows a process which is methodical, open-minded, perceptive, revealing and empowering to Aboriginal people involved - a power of which they are very well aware, as the commentary in *Waiting For Harry* demonstrates. Together with her 1983 article, the 1987 publication of *Songs of*
Aboriginal Australia (with Stephen Wild) and the “North Central Arnhem Land” entry in the International Encyclopædia of Dance (1990), Clunies-Ross made a quantum leap. Her close associations with several other anthropologists notwithstanding, her initial point of view was a literary and cultural studies one (with a deep knowledge of oral culture) and she progressed to a deeper understanding of the performance ecology. This work has been of great value, supporting many of Schechner and Turner’s theories on performance.

Djambidji documentations are among the most comprehensive done in Australia for Aboriginal performance, especially when they are considered as a group effort in which others besides Clunies-Ross, including many Aboriginal people, were closely involved over 25 years. Performance issues extend to space, time, æsthetics and politics, which few earlier researchers even touch on. In return, the Yolgnu people and their neighbours have certainly been part of a cultural exchange, which they have developed over time in a manner compatible with their own needs. The most outstanding outcome is the annual and very well organised Garma Festival which is conducted at Gulkula each year, run by the Yolgnu community. Here, performance teaching and sharing is a main feature; classes are run by Yolgnu performers and most of the participants are non-Aboriginal.

Stanner
When Stanner started to publish his work on Aboriginal religion, he paved the way for some intelligent discussion about the links between the performance of rituals and the spiritual basis for all symbolic representation in traditional Aboriginal culture. The 1985 collection of essays Metaphors of Interpretation (Barwick, Beckett and Reay, Eds) and the 1989 reprint of On Aboriginal Religion (1963-66, Oceania Monographs) with a perceptive double commentary by Francesca Merlan and Les Hiatt (1989), are very valuable sources especially now that Stanner’s own work is readily available again, and despite some recent critiques of Stanner’s concepts. The very first chapter of On Aboriginal Religion entitled “The Lineaments of Sacrifice” (2-21/108-127) in which he speaks of ‘operations’ and ‘transactions’ immediately alerts the performance researcher to Stanner’s active view of ritual performance. He later speaks of ‘processes’, ‘connections’ between the myth and the performed ritual and accompanies this with grid tables with which to analyse the structural elements of the narrative (“The Design Plan of a Riteless Myth” - Appendix, Op. Cit.). However, it is analysed from the point of view of the myth itself and not the performance of the myth. Had he used a grid like Patrice Pavis’ (Pavis: 1982a; 1982b) for instance, he might have seen more connections. The section of the grid marked "Column B: Place" is remarkably lacking in detail, for instance, as though Stanner didn't consider the ecological environment to be very important. There is no mention of any of the other performative elements either. He does insist, however, that
belief and representation of belief as a community performance activity are closely linked. This supports the notion that ‘outside’ participants would learn much from taking part over time.

The frequently repeated statement that his work has not had enough attention paid to it is a truism. Stanner’s ability, at the time, to transcend the constraints of either functionalist and structuralist thinking offer a rich playground for ideas which reflect a multiplicity of possibilities in respect of the representation of individual and collective ontologies. Stanner continued to write and revise up until his death in 1981 and his work demonstrated an increasingly performance-oriented approach to religious ceremonies as performed community expressions of identity. More recently, Hiatt (1989); Morton (1995, 1987 passim) and Swain (1985, 1989, 1991) have played around with interpretations of individual and group perceptions of an Aboriginal cosmos constructed within visual and performative frameworks, but they never really deal with performance itself. A new study of Stanner’s work in connection with Aboriginal performance would be valuable.

Richard Moyle and Guy Tunstall
Musical and performance analysis which pays some attention to the performance ecology has also been carried out by Richard Moyle, whose major works Songs of the Pintupi (1979), the far more comprehensive Alyawarra Music (1986) and the recent Balgo: the musical life of a desert community (1997) represent some of the best published European documentation of Aboriginal music to the end of the 1990s. It is taken from a musician’s point of view and, while the concentration remains on the music, Moyle’s gives valuable insights into other performance aspects as well as recordings and transcriptions. It allowed me to make some valuable comparisons with Pitjantjatjara performance practice although it would have been more satisfactory if he had had a dancer/dance analyst and an iconographer with him. He maps out those areas and gives them focus, even if his own analysis of them is slight compared to the work he puts in on the music. I cannot say how ‘accurate’ (or representative) it all is, but it shows a high degree of sensitivity and I would be inclined to trust his work sufficiently to look at it as a basis for comparison. Also of great value, but concentrating on the music and allied technical and ethnographic phenomena, is the research of Guy Tunstill, who was closely with Catherine Ellis and CASM for a number of years. His work on Pitjantjatjara song complements earlier studies in Central Australian music by Ellis and Strehlow.

The European academic gaze
This sweeps the field up to the middle of the 1990s. In the last few years quite different opportunities have opened up for Aboriginal researchers in Australian institutions but
overwhelmingly the gaze remains European. Very few performance exchanges occur which include Aboriginal people as colleagues in the true sense of the word and there are few Aboriginal performers lecturing in the field of academia. When they do, it isn't always easy to introduce and maintain programs which include Indigenous performance. For a few years the University of Western Sydney had both Bernadette Walong and me on staff and access to many Indigenous performers. Our attempts to integrate Indigenous performance into the Music, Dance and Theatre programs were largely unsuccessful until 2003, when it seems that 'something' might happen at last.

There is usually no intersubjectivity. Ethnography is conservative and performance documentation thorough, but uninspiring. Analysis according to European anthropological paradigms drains "lived life" from vibrant expressions of cultural identity and renders them all but powerless. Australian anthropology remains, generally, oblivious of the opening up of intercultural performance research overseas. Indigenous voices are still not being heard in the research centers of Australian universities and the people being researched are suspicious and disturbed by the documentation of their culture by disassociated Others. (Jackson: 1995) The Institute in Canberra offers more and more involvement and opportunity to Aboriginal scholars each year and far greater consultation is taking place, but there is a still a way to go before an indigenous researcher does not run the risk of being patronised by one of AIATSIS' non-indigenous officers.

Yet, Aboriginal theatre, dance, music and visual arts steadily become not only visible in the 'mainstream', but have demonstrably re-claimed their place as the 'true and deep voices' representing Australia. That the reasons might not altogether reflect the highest of ethics on the part of the dominant European culture is another issue. That in doing this, many Aboriginal performers and artists have completely sidestepped academia and anthropology that had held them in thrall for so long, is the stuff of legend.

4.3 Victor Turner and Richard Schechner

Perhaps the two most influential pioneers in the fields of performance research and its radical ethnography were anthropologist Victor Turner and theatre director and teacher Richard Schechner, whose joint work spans the period from the late 1970s to (in the case of Schechner) the present. Victor Turner, from an impressive background in 'classical' anthropological research in Africa with the Ndembu people (1967, 1969) was, initially, a structuralist with an insight into the performance process. He came to grips with the 'problem'
of comparing symbolic action in different cultures, perceiving the strong links in terms of process between the patterns and structures of dramatic relationships in myths, the social dramas of ‘real life’ and performed rituals and dramas. In the mid 1970’s Richard Schechner arrived by way of the stage door and at last the field had an anthropologist and a theatre director talking to each other in a language they both eventually understood. While not presenting a final solution, as co-researchers they contributed immensely to the debate and asked many of the questions that needed to be asked, while practicing what they preached. Following on from the work of Van Gennep, Huizinga, Levi-Strauss and Bateson, Richard Schechner and Victor Turner are perhaps the most prominent proponents of the notions of "social drama" and "restoration of behaviour":

(They saw) ... ritual as antistructural, creative, often carnivalesque and playful - with (an) emerging understanding of the relationship between social drama and aesthetic drama. Performance is central to Turner’s thinking because the performative genres are living examples of ritual as / in action. And not only when performance is overtly "ritualistic" - as in a mass, a healing ceremony, a shamanic journey, or a Grotowskian poor theatre or a paratheatrical event: all performance has at its core a ritual action, a "restoration of behaviour". (Babcock, in Turner: 1988: 7, her emphasis)

At the centre of any kind of theatre is the act of performance in which aspects of human identity and behaviour are re-constructed and re-presented in present time or, as Turner and Schechner put it, ‘restored’. It allows both the performers and the audience to deal with a different perception of reality in an experiential way. This different perceptual space Turner called "liminality" (1974b & 1984). Performance of all kinds, he claimed, can release both performers and audiences from ‘now’ time and space. If only for short periods, it can create alternative/ additional/ co-existent realities and paradigm shifts, frequently effecting ‘sea changes’ sometimes for some of the participants and sometimes for all (Garner, N. & Turnbull, C: 1979). Such performances have many occasions, contexts and manifestations.

One reason why European anthropologists in the first half of the century were loath to come to grips with performative activities in this way was the potential psychic ‘danger’ inherent in the notion of ‘liminality,’ which has been recognised since the earliest performances. This state of being ‘on the edge’ or in a ‘liminal space’ is experienced in all societies and cultures but is discounted in European discourse. It is one of the ‘grey areas’ for European rationalism, because it happens ‘in the moment’ and cannot be predictably controlled.

(Van Gennep ) insisted that in all ritualised movement there was at least a moment where those being moved in accordance with a cultural script were liberated from normative
demands, when they were, indeed, betwixt and between successive lodgements in jural political systems. In this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen.

In this interim of "liminality," the possibility exists of standing aside not only from one's own social position but also from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements. That this danger is recognised in all tolerably ordered societies is made evident by the proliferation of taboos that hedge in and constrain those on whom the normative structure loses its grip during such potent transitions as extended initiation rites in "tribal" societies and by legislation against those who in industrial societies utilise such "liminoid" genres .... to subvert the axioms and standards of the ancien regime - both in general and particular cases. (Turner: 1974: 13)

Performance is a 'liminoid' genre. Turner goes on to say:

...sociocultural systems depend not only for their meaning but also for their existence upon the participation of conscious human agents and upon men's (sic) relations with one another. It is this factor of "consciousness" which should lead anthropologists into extended study of complex literate cultures where the most articulate conscious voices of values are the "liminoid" poets, philosophers, dramatists, novelists, painters and the like. (Turner: 1974: 17)

In Dramas, Fields and Metaphors (1974), Victor Turner makes passionate pleas for more informed anthropological awareness and research into these areas, pleas which he continued to his death in 1983, after which his ideas were picked up by others who saw it as a means of negotiating chasms between cultures. In 1977 Meyerhoff and Moore edited a collection of related essays entitled Secular Ritual, and in 1979, D'Aquili edited a further collection, The Spectrum of Ritual. John MacAloon, in 1984, in his introduction to Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle, (which contains papers presented at the Seventy-sixth Burg Wartenstein Symposium (1973), organised by Victor Turner, Barbara Babcock and Barbara Meyerhoff), wrote of the still-existing unfamiliarity of anthropologists with the performance genres:

We were asked to assume that cultural performances "are more than entertainment, more than didactic or persuasive formulations, and more than cathartic indulgences. They are occasions in which as a culture or a society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others." The conferees were asked to consider cultural performances in such a way as to bridge and transcend such dichotomies as oral and written, public and private, doing and thinking, primitive and

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
modern, sacred and secular, "pop" and "high", ludic and tragic. We were asked to develop typologies and historical sequences of performative genres, to judge the possibility of cross-cultural comparison, to evaluate existing analytical concepts, and to search for new conceptual tools for the investigation of performative events. Finally, we were urged by our conveners to keep in mind the need to relate expressive culture to ongoing and emergent processes of social action and relations. (MacAlloon, ed: 1984: 1-2, my emphasis)

The Symposium was broad ranging, encompassing papers and workshops on topics ranging from social inversion in clowning and carnivale, the construction of self and culture in ritual drama, plural reflexivity in social drama, to the Olympic Games and theories of spectacle. Ideas were carried further afield by Barbara Babcock (1975, 1980 and 1984) who investigated, along with others, the self-referencing function of performance. It was a watershed for new ideas, which, although they were taken up by a few Australian university performance studies departments in the early 1980s, few reached Australian anthropologists 'working with' Aboriginal culture and performance.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Richard Schechner, who was also present at that 1983 Symposium, continued and expanded his work in performance theory, seeking 'universals of performance'. That is, he was looking for universal phases of the performance process, not in any way implying a universality of specific cultural practices, frameworks or symbols) and applying his findings to analyses of the performance genres of both European and Other cultures. Primarily a theatre director, he was able to forge many of the missing links between theatre and anthropology which had previously baffled the anthropologist Turner, who had lacked the training and experience in performance to understand its processes and therefore was unclear how knowledges about representation were acquired and how skilled performers operated. As Schechner says, while discussing Eugenio Barba discussing Victor Turner:

Not only the narratives but also the bodily actions of drama express crisis, schism, and conflict. As Eugenio Barba has noted, performers specialise in putting themselves into disequilibrium and then displaying how they regain their balance psychophysically, narratively and socially - only to lose their balance, and regain it, again and again. Theatrical techniques centre on these incomplete transformations: how people turn into other people, gods, animals, demons, trees, beings, whatever - either temporarily as in a play or permanently as in some rituals; or how beings of one order inhabit beings of another order as in trance; or how unwanted inhabitants of human beings can be exorcised; or how the sick can be healed. All these systems of performative transformations also include transformations of time and space: doing a specific "there and then" in this particular "here and now" in such a way that all four dimensions are kept at bay. (Schechner: 1988: xiv)
These systems occur in all kinds of performances, from baseball to ballet to Berkoff, which should be valued equally for their capacity to tell us as much about ourselves as the *inma* tells Anangu people about themselves.

Schechner's relatively short association with Victor Turner was extremely productive. The search for 'universals of performance' resulted in what Schechner calls "a somewhat serendipitous panorama of just how diverse and extensive the performance world is" (Schechner: 1988: 251-253). It also resulted in presenting anthropologists and ethnographers with some ‘flexible paradigms’ with which they could begin to address the real importance of, not only performance genres like theatre, dance and music, but the other symbolic forms such as visual arts, design and literature both oral and written, both in their own and in other cultures. Turner's later published works, in particular, signalled all the most important areas still to be tackled - from biogenetic structuralism to a synthesis of ethnography with performance itself - and it is clear that his death cut short a train of consciousness and reflection which was revolutionary in its approach (1988).

There is more within European performance theory than might be expected in a field so constrained by commercialism. The notion of the 'subjunctive mood' and the big 'as if', which can extend experience past the prosaic and into the metaphysical has been incorporated into all European-based actor training of any integrity since Stanislavsky and is thought to have been part of Greek actor training in the pre-Christian period. (Bieber: 1961; Webster: 1970; McLeish: 1980; Walton: 1980 & 1984; Lonsdale: 1993). Belief in the liminal reality and the truth of role, situation, place and time is central now to all serious-in-intent, professional, 'mainstream', naturalistic and experimental practice - but it is explained in rational not phenomenological terms.

In discussing music in particular, but referring to performance in general, John Shepherd is even more pointed about the necessary paradigm shift to realise the enormous importance of translation of perception through ‘imaginative play’ in expressive activities, repressed in European culture:

> The musics of other cultures and other times can be significant, powerful, disturbing and moving, because they have something of relevance to say. And nowhere is this more true, perhaps, than in the cultures of industrialised capitalism, whose own social realities have in one way or another relegated music to their cracks and margins as 'cultural capital', 'leisure' and 'entertainment. (Shepherd: 1991: 215)
However, in 1990, Charles McLaughlin Jr, John McManus and Eugene D’Aquili, after twenty years of research into biogenetic structuralism (and its relevance to performance) disagreed about the seeming breakthrough:

It is evident to students familiar with the history of anthropology that current ethnological theory is virtually moribund. There has been no new infusion of theory into ethnology since the discipline began to waken to the implication of Levi-Straussian structuralism in the seventies. Most of the current attraction of semiotic approaches is actually the discovery of perspectives, like those of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz that have existed for decades.

As we took great pains to point out from the beginning, the same criticism applies to the very limited appreciation by ethnologists of the transpersonal aspects of human experience. There is a great truth to the Eastern adage that one can teach only to the level of one's realisation. Ethnologists cannot comprehend the full range of human experience until they have relinquished the culturally conditioned boundaries limiting their own experience and come to experience more of the vast range of possible cognised environments among humans on the planet. (Laughlin, C. Jr et al: 1990: 347, their emphasis)

Performing the Other
Western Europe has performed the Other in its mainstream theatres since Æschylus wrote The Persians (472BCE). Exotic Others were a dramaturgical 'given' in many popular entertainments in Roman colisseums, commonplace in early European opera and ballet, and definitive in American vaudeville. The most famous Othello is Laurence Olivier’s and the Australian Borovansky Ballet’s 1953/4 production of Corroboree for a young Queen Elizabeth was entirely peopled by white dancers in brown leotards and grease paint. Several research centres for ‘intercultural’ performance studies have been set up since the late nineteen seventies outside universities, of which I will highlight two only. Eugenio Barba’s International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) was in established in 1979 in Denmark as a private foundation to investigate the phenomena of intercultural theatre, dance, ritual and performance as a phenomenon. This ‘school’ welcomes students from all over the world and holds open workshops, symposiums and training sessions. It has also published a number of printed texts and videos about the work (Barba: 1980, 1982, 1986; Barba and Savarese: 1985; Hastrup: 1996) and a lavish Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology (Barba and Savarese: 1991). While the rhetoric is exemplary, the practice is dodgy to say the least. A video of one of the so-called cultural ‘exchanges’ situated in Africa (ISTA: Dances in the sand: 1994) demonstrates a range of behaviours from the anthropologist and performer that are imperialist in the extreme.
Barba's reputation as the guru of intercultural performance is largely due to his personal PR machine and the fact that he attracts acolytes who are highly stimulated by contacts with other cultures. His conferences, workshops and productions attract large numbers of people and while his ideas are always interesting there is no doubt who is in charge. Pavis’ criticism (1992) is that Barba’s brand of interculturality is, in the end, concerned with experimentations in synthesis of performance genres and styles for their own sake, on a stage, and separate from any social context. Participants at the ISTA gatherings describe a political climate that committed, feminist post-colonialists could never tolerate (Cristina Palma: Personal statement, 1995). No Aboriginal performer that I am aware of has taken part.

Peter Brook's Theatre du Soleil (Heilpern: 1977; Brook: Stages (film): 1981; Brook: 1988) emerged in France in the 1970s, arising from his travels through Iran, Africa, Australia and India. His monumental productions - both live and on film - make extraordinary use of the performance styles and epic narrative traditions of Others. His cast is drawn from a wide range of cultures (none Aboriginal or Islander) and the performances are usually multilingual, with each actor speaking in his or her own language. Brook has performed his epics in many parts of the world, including Australia and his methods have aroused both admiration and criticism. However, he is quite unrepentant about his means of appropriation of multi-cultural performance material for his own ends and, instead of Pavis, he has Bharucha (1992) to take him to task.

Summing up

Anthropologists like Levi Strauss, Geertz and Turner, while shifting gear with their more interpretive approaches so compatible with the arts, still needed a satisfactory theoretical foundation for their work. Geoffrey Samuel proposes the multi-modal framework (1990) in Mind, Body and Culture: Anthropology and biological interface, reviews the field to that time (see also Ortner: 1984) together with the other critics of symbolic anthropology. Other approaches include the 'common sense' approaches of Geertz (1983) and Bloch (1974); the 'autonomous systems' of Sperber (1975, 1985); the 'metaphoric’ approaches espoused by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This last links in with the extensive work on autopoiesis by Laughlin, McManus and D’Aquili (1990) and Maturana and Varela (1987).12

Schechner's methods of testing his hypotheses, especially after Turner's death, were to create performances of his own and 'restored performances' of Other people's forms of symbolic action. He wanted to look at what actually happened when people 'performed' rather than when they 'spoke' or 'wrote' or 'lived real lives'. He has attracted a great deal of
criticism in some respects because, in the eyes of many of Other co-researchers and practitioners, he is just as imperialistic as his forebears.

Influential published works fostered in North America by Schechner and his colleagues in the *Performing Arts Journal* and its monographs, and in *The Drama Review* have promoted an increasingly intercultural viewpoint since the late 1970s in which a diverse range of traditional and new work is 'showcased' in multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary forums. An examination of relevant publications in the 1980s and 1990s would reveal an upsurge of participation in performance ethnography by performers from diverse backgrounds rather than anthropologists. Schechner encourages wide interrogation of the field, while dissenting voices (such as Bharucha: 1994) also publish in other forums than Europe and North America.

There is a gulf here that needs to be bridged and the issues arising are quite serious. Many directors of intercultural performances see Other cultures as a palette from which to select new ideas and styles. While accepting that rituals and other types of cultural performances are very important, very few ethnographic studies of performance actually look at the ways in which people engage in the generation of meaning through performed metaphor in living ecologies. Ethnographers need to explore performance analysis approaches and methodologies used in theatre, dance and music to complement their understanding of the social and ecological issues. On the other hand, performance analysts need to pay far more attention to context and experience rather than looking at performances as 'stand alone' objects, end products that are subjected to analysis regardless of context. In all cases, there needs to be a greater reflexive focus on the performers themselves, the performance experience and phenomenology and the close relationship not only between performers and their performance ecologies, but between performers and their intentions, their choices, their creative processes and their statements of identity.
Notes:

1. See also Radcliffe-Brown (1930), Raymond Firth (1932) and Singer (1973) for an overview of the transition from functionalism to structuralism. This is not the place to give a detailed background to structuralism, semiotics and deconstruction. Key works on early structural linguistics which are essential reading for performance analysis are Saussure ( ), Peirce ( ), Jakobsen ( ) and the Russian Formalists, and the Prague School in general (Matejka and Titunik (eds): ) and thence the whole European/American school of semiotics including but not only Derrida, Eco, Lyotard, Elam, Pavis, de Toro and the feminists Kristeva, Irigray and Cixous.

2. Examples of citations of Australian Aborigines as ‘primitive’ in North American ethnography include

3. Ironically, one of these visits at least was recorded in Aboriginal performance and myth in a kind of reverse ethnography - the Cape Keerweer incident in the 17th century. Several other ‘historic’ images are recorded in rock art, etc. The AIATSIS Journal has published a number of articles on evidence of early European contact.

4. A description and some inadequate analysis are found in Rees’ rather rambling and indifferentely referenced A History of Australian Drama Vol. 1 (1973, 1-3). A translation is in the Mitchell Library and the original is in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale (there is no location number given by Rees for either holding). The original play was accessed, revived and performed (with comprehensive dramaturgical notes) by Brendon Doyle and Narelle Fletcher (1999) and their company of French-speaking actors at the Alliance Française in Sydney, in October 1997 (Fletcher: 1997), and is a work of ideological fantasy intended to expose the stupidity and corruptness of the French aristocracy. The leader of the ‘natives’ is portrayed by M. Gamas as a good-hearted, exotic gentleman, speaking passable French, but definitely not ‘foreman material’ - interestingly, without sarcasm or melodrama - as he is too noble and gentle. The rise of the working-class servant to the new leader of the colony has all the elements of a trade union election: a new kind of colonisation.

5. Elkin and Ronald Berndt were particularly prone to categorise rituals by the sacred/secular method. They were also active censors of what they believed ‘ought’ to be read by laymen, juveniles and women, according to leftover ‘Victorian’ morality. This prurience only heightened public perceptions of Aboriginal performance as somehow ‘disgusting’.

6. Hill's major biography of Strehlow is nearing completion

7. Strehlow's film collection at the Institute in Alice Springs is at present being edited, re-recorded and catalogued by Dr Hart Cohen, University of Western Sydney.

8. For three years Catherine Ellis was my PhD supervisor, and it is to her perspectives on Aboriginal performance that I owe my own early approaches. We often discussed the close relationship of all the arts in Aboriginal life, and I know that it was only her desire to maintain her focus that prevented a diversification on her part. It was Cath who suggested I broaden the research to include dance and drama and who gave me much advice on Mimili and information on the ways we might conduct a mutually beneficial exchange.

9. I worked for a short period in the late 1980's with the wonderful Alice Mole helping to re-edit her Aboriginal dance and music material for a newly designed school education kit - for which Australian Music Centre funding was decidedly parsimonious. She finally had her work published in Victoria with funding from Monash University. Moyle's work has been of great value to researchers and students of performance and Aboriginal culture generally (see References). No serious survey of Aboriginal performance by a European scholar could be complete without a thorough appreciation of her published recordings which are virtually all available in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra where she was a Fellow. The fact that her work hardly refers to Aboriginal 'ways' of seeing, moving or hearing is regrettable and the lack of interest by Education Departments in employing Aboriginal cultural teachers predictable.

10. See Cowlishaw (1990) for a short but telling critique of him and others of his time. There are many, including Deborah Bird Rose, who would say that his active influence severely impeded the much-needed change in the field of Australian Aboriginal ethnography which might have opened the field much earlier to post-colonial and post-structuralist thinking.

11. Stanner and the Berndts, with their interest in ritual ceremony, appreciated Munn's contribution and, in the mid-1980s, Morton (1985-1987). In the time between 1973 and 1986 she excited a number of responses. Several pieces of her work were re-published in 1986, this time with appropriate reviews, critiques and analysis from anthropologists and ethnographers as well as being absorbed into the seminal literature of Aboriginal performance research.
Chapter 5

tjakultjunanyi
telling stories

Mythic language is not just an arena for human rationality: it also engages sensual experience as a medium for the incarnation of the mind.

(Doty: 1986, 19)
5

_ tjakultjunanyi _

telling stories

5.1 Oral societies and performance ‘literature’

The simplest way to begin is with storytelling. The passing on of constructed information from one person to another is a universal communication practice. All storytelling involves a series of acts in time and space that physically involve both actors and audiences in a narrative process (one of Schechner’s "universals of performance"). Using one or more of a number of narrative structures, all stories tell/retell/restore what happens/happened in ‘lived life’ (Turner’s “social dramas”) and may also reflect the structure of the community itself. Using a selection of culturally specific symbolic representations (employing all possible sensory channels) culturally specific meaning is created. Varying the conditions of production and the styles and genres of storytelling makes the forms of the content infinitely variable. One of these forms might be writing but it carries the least amount of information on its own, reduced to a non-negotiable, single interpretation. (McLean: 1988; Finnegans: 1988) In Aboriginal narratives, it is not only people who ‘tell the stories’. (Berndt and Berndt: 1989; see also Marshall: 2003)

Storytelling evolves from the ‘lived lives’ of all people and all communities in order to express, share, mark, capture and hold on to both casual and significant beliefs, knowledges, protocols, events and changes. In Aboriginal culture this ‘lived life’ includes ever-present ancestors, spirits, animals, the land and the elements. All stories are concerned with relationships as they develop, climax, are sustained or disintegrate. Relationships can be between people and people, people and ideas, and people and other aspects of their ecologies - environmental, sensory, spiritual, metaphysical, aesthetic, social, political, economic and technological. At an historical distance, and in a constantly building matrix of
present remaining present and/or present becoming past, day-to-day stories mix with past significant events or ideas to become the myths or ‘grand narratives’ of a culture, of a society, of a community or of a family, and construct epistemological frameworks of ontology and identity, which remain current as long as they are relevant - despite the post modern assertion by Derrida (1978) that ‘grand narratives’ no longer are relevant in European culture. In Aboriginal culture, this happens as series of contemporaneous layers and, in European cultures, as a flow of sequential events. Some stories are official and some unofficial. If they share enough stories, people begin to ‘get a feel for’ and better understand each other and the kinds of lives they each lead. The extent to which they do depends on whether they are experiencing a mix of public and/or private stories.

Public and private stories
In one of its key activities, the feminist movement demonstrated very clearly the differences between, for instance, the her-stories/his-stories of European women and men who ostensibly live in the same cultures, societies, communities and families. A general suppression of the ‘female’ (ontologically speaking) is demonstrable in every part of public European life and it is certainly also clear that there is a concomitant suppression of the sensory and the negotiable in favour of the intellectual and the jural at the public level despite all rhetoric about ‘equality’. (Cixous and Clement: 1996; Grosz: 1994) This includes a privileging of written word over direct, physical interaction, the body and non-verbal communication. But it is not so at the private levels, where women often control the storytelling and the cultural histories (and futures) which tend to remain in oral and performative modes. (Morris: 1998)

For instance, "Women in our family are good cooks" is the surface level of a private ‘grand narrative’ which has encouraged the most recalcitrant radical feminist in even the youngest generation of my family - Johnsons, Marshalls, Simpsons, Thomases and Bartleys (and their extended families) - to perform standards of cuisinary excellence which are truly stupendous. One of the main activities at every family meal (even at large and lavish Christmas dinners, to the amazement of unsuspecting guests) is a succulent verbal recounting of the glories of memorable repasts while physically consuming the present addition to the mythology. Great Grandma's grammar pie (with lemon and cinnamon, and very short pastry) covered with double cream, or Old Nana's legendary grape preserves (thick with half grapes) are referred to as living legends. Young Grandma (who hates being called Grandma) and Little Nana serve large helpings of their own specialties - frozen Christmas pudding made from glacé fruits soaked in brandy for two years, with butterscotch chips for extra crunch. Or boned ducks (never less than a pair) stuffed with fresh sage and
dried apricots (stale breadcrumbs are best). Or roast lamb pierced with garlic cloves accompanied by rosemary potatoes. Old recipes are revisited and passed on to younger nieces with notebooks, who appear at subsequent communal gatherings with their first attempts at a lime and saffron bavarois, or a rich veal ragout with sweet peppers, as evidence of their worthiness to belong. The very youngest girls hear words like bouillabaise or choux for the first time, and find out that a tandoori oven is different to a Westinghouse, that the epitome of good food is sea food, that wine is an essential of life, that a blue cheese is already 'off' and that The Essential Ingredient is a gourmet food emporium in Newtown, not a secret herb or spice. Even when the original circumstances have ceased to be remembered clearly, echoes still colour contemporary epistemology with metaphors, jokes, family values, and the structure and content of 'local knowledge'. This, in turn, shapes a visceral understanding of what it means to be a woman in our family and that, if there is an afterlife, Hell might well be a place without a fully equipped kitchen. None of these women could care less how, when or where Harold Holt died and, at that moment, neither could their menfolk. If their Titanic were going down, everyone would reach for Claudia Roden and not Hansard.

Public European stories are built on vast accretions of legal tradition, societal rules which privilege men and imperialistic histories. At the jural level, hegemonic Judaic laws, together with the rational writings of post-Hesiod Greece (the philosophical base for western basis for Christianity), focus on maintaining a monotheistic, ascetic, positivist view of an invisible, intellectual world with unseen barriers and glass ceilings. Rejecting the primacy of the corporeal, constructing Christianity as wholly metaphysical, and encouraging rational and technological systems of government and education, European cultural systems also promote the individual rather than the collective. This deeply affects public European ontology, which tends to suffer from a kind of existential guilt when The Book of Rules is not followed. Most references to food in this Book are to which foods people can't eat, and there are no recipes at all. Women are virtually invisible, physical sensuality is taboo, the spiritual is wholly distrusted, and the natural environment is something to be tamed and non-humans exploited for profit. In other words, the above narrative of my family's cooking will not be in The Book of Rules. Unless we invite you to dinner, you will never understand.²

Such positivist attitudes are carried over into interpretations of Aboriginal narratives as translators wrestle them into a shape that conforms to European traditions of public storytelling - reductionism. Aspects of life that are customarily excised from European stories are excised from Aboriginal stories – censorship.
Aboriginal public stories are different from European because they are derived from a completely different set of ontologies and conditions. They are rich with physical and sensory experiences and recognise relations between animate and inanimate phenomena in which everything has spiritual and ecological relevance, with strong elements of animism. Narrative practices embrace direct experiences of creation by the transformation of country and all living things. They address the sociological, topographical and ecological, emphasising family relationships and survival strategies. This is entirely unmediated by hegemonic and monotheistic god-worship tied to a system of state or national government. It is not reliant on scientific theory. Ancestors and spirit beings are implicit in Aboriginal ontologies which are devoid of linear ‘hero genealogies’, ‘god-heads’, or ‘fixed’ histories written by victors. Constant public ‘re-telling’ and ‘performing’ (not print publication) maintain the stories, supported by expressive iconographies devised from experiences in the lived world, constructed from analogous reasoning, which is every bit as rational in Aboriginal culture as the most scientific written treatise is in European culture.

Aboriginal private stories are derived from the public stories in that they deal with different levels of the public stories. Having such a rich tapestry to draw on in the first place, ‘private stories’ are at times as surreal as dreams and pulse with the heat of life itself. The fact that they, too, are told verbally and enacted in many media only serves to extend that richness. European experiences are often repelled by both the subject matter and the manner of telling or enacting because it transgresses so many of their social and cultural taboos.

5.2 Mythologies

In European discourse, the term ‘myth’ is often applied to Other peoples’ stories (not true) and the term ‘history’ is used for European stories (true). However all ‘mythology’ has a basis in ‘truth’. At a distance, a community’s ontological frameworks and taxonomies form epistemological ‘encyclopaedias’ that reflect distilled systems of truth that underpin all their cultural histories and geographies. These knowledges and logics provide the frameworks for the narrative building blocks for the performances that ‘tell them’ or ‘act them out’. Themes, plots and characters of performances are all derived from the mythologies of a community’s experience. Ways in which stories are ‘told’ vary according to the ways in which mythological information is framed in that culture. Stories might not be always or ‘acted out’ but be constructed visually, or be present in the land itself. (Levi-Strauss: 1986; Doty: 1986; Barthes: 1972; Duerr: 1985; Berndt, R. and Berndt, C: 1989)
An extension of this is that, to Indigenous people, stories themselves have their own existence. They have lives of their own and have power to act on people and situations. Remember Sam Pumani’s advice to us when we were learning inma. “You don’t sing the *inma*, the *inma* sings you.”

Because most early European researchers were ignorant of the culture and what was important to Aboriginal people (that is, *ninti wiya* - unknowledgeable) they were treated like children and given children’s versions of myths and narratives, as the Mimili people did to us in the beginning. Europeans already convinced of the primitiveness of Australian Indigenous peoples were responsible for early ‘translations’ of myths and there is no doubt whatever that essentials were lost, but there is even less doubt that they were never told the full story in the first place. Aboriginal myths published after colonisation were also usually paraphrased and interpreted for the European reader, interpolated with European moralistic sentiments or Biblical references. Or, they were translated literally after a single telling, which isn’t effective because there is no negotiation of understanding, no translation of meaning, no opportunity to build up the layers upon layers of information. The biggest problem here was that early ethnographers did not recognise the connection between the myths and the performances, the landscape and the iconography. They did not recognise that separate layers of each story are encoded in different media, like *mille feuille*.

There have been numbers of collections of Aboriginal ‘myths’. Some are published; others remain in archives in Universities and special libraries, such as the AIATSIS Library in Canberra. Ronald and Catherine Berndt’s 1988 publication of *The Speaking Land*, was one attempt to represent a body of Aboriginal ‘mythology’ to enable a general reader to form an interpretation of an Aboriginal ‘world view’. Aboriginal men and women who were and, in some cases, still are active in their culture ‘told’ this collection of myths and stories from right across Australia ‘directly’ to the Berndts over many years. Despite the fact that almost inevitably they have been turned into ‘good English’, so many stories starts to give a feel for a kind of pan-Australian ontology. However, the reader’s mind is constantly re-directed to a new story rather than explore levels of the same story, as is possible in performance. Further inquiry is also discouraged because the edition has an informative range of ‘supporting literary notes’ and the Berndts are very much the ‘expert’ editors, their presence as strong as or stronger than the original storytellers.³

Comparisons with collections in which Aboriginal and European people have been active collaborators shows how much European translation can change the original. *Warlpiri Dreamings and Histories* (Napaljarri: 1994) is an example. With stories provided in both
Warlpiri and 'literal' English, the nature of the spoken narrative has been preserved. There is no doubt that the Napaljarri collection 'sounds like' and preserves the structure, style and form of Warlpiri spoken-word stories. The reader is made aware, also, that the spoken narrative is but one layer of the story and that even the spoken narrative has many layers, depending on the levels of knowledge of the teller and the listener. And further, that this story is but an episode in the full version of the 'myth'.

In this exchange at Mimili, we were immersed in a community where old 'mythologies' still constructed the real world and the intrusion of European systems and epistemologies had changed the pragmatic aspects of life but not yet the spiritual aspects for many of the older and middle aged people. Mythologies still not encoded in writing continue to be maintained and passed on in expressive performance and non-literary forms of visual inscription, acted out in the permanent present tense. Nonetheless, we were aware that we were on the edge of an era that was closing fast and that new versions of these stories would start to frame knowledge and experience in a different way once the old people had all gone. New versions and adaptations reconstruct myths in the media for both urban and remote contemporary Aboriginal Australia. Such is the nature of change over time in all cultures. (McCulloch: 1999; Dussart: 2000; San Roque: 1998)

Aboriginal myths are very, very complex and very, very long. For æons they have created a cybernetics of relationships that covers the whole of the continent of Australia. This comes as a surprise to those used to hearing or reading (as I did when very young) the somewhat short Aboriginal stories that give the impression of extreme simplicity. However, each is just a small piece from a huge living matrix, continually changing and evolving to include present myth building. Each story is a single entry in an Australia-wide street-directory-cum-encyclopaedia that is made up from all past and present Aboriginal 'songlines', traversing thickly even the driest deserts or the starriest skies. The network once ran, and to some extent still runs, from coast to coast across the centre of the continent and around all the wiggly bits on the edge (Cowan: 1966). As Sam Pumani once said to us, "My story is too big to tell it all at one time".

Central Australian Aboriginal narratives and therefore Central Australian identity are inextricably and clearly framed by an environmental ecology - physically, spiritually and socially. At the core of every aspect of life is the land itself, the topography and geography; the ancestral beings who created the land and who went back into it; the lore/law, religion and notions of the spirit and the metaphysical Other; time and space; humans and social life; sky, air, earth, fire and water; the seasons and the weather; and plant and animal life. The aggregated, networked articulation of this complex knowledge system is maintained entirely
by told stories, sung songs, and danced ceremonies, including visual symbolic representation such as painting, body designs and ground sculptures and paintings which are ‘active agents’ in story telling. This is true for all oral cultures. (Ong: 1982; Clunies-Ross: 1978-1990 passim; Finnegan: 1988 and passim) Traditionally living Central Australian Aboriginal people have especially developed performance ecologies to reflect their living ecologies. The land itself is at once the raison d’être, the palette, the performer and the stage. If an Aboriginal elder says that a wise person is one who knows many, many songs, stories, pictures and dances about the tjukurpa, it also means they know the country like the back of their hand. Expertise in geography is not something that an actor in European theatre would claim.

When any one of the many strands of interrelated, interdependent, non-written communication systems is destroyed (for instance when an elder in charge of a site dies without passing on his or her knowledge, or when people are barred from access to precious places) whole ‘banks’ of knowledge begin to disintegrate and, with them, identity (Ong: 1991). Aboriginal people talk about "Singing the country" and that's exactly what they mean: "Country goes, song goes. Song goes, country goes." (Sam Pumani: personal communication, Mimili, 1987)

It is quite rare still to see published Aboriginal ‘histories’ and ‘geographies’ from Aboriginal points of view or to have readers take seriously the worldviews encoded in their major forms of knowledge preservation. Although there have been sympathetic attempts to publish and broadcast stories told by traditionally-living people in their ‘own words’ (many examples currently available in bookshops), European-edited books and recordings are often the mediators, not the bodies and voices of the story tellers. Aboriginal people, however, find it hard to tell the whole story verbally when much of what they wish to express is not encoded in words at all, but in gestus, music, sound, rhythm, time, space, visual symbol - or transformational experience. European ethnographers don't seem to realise that a printed or spoken version of a 'myth' is a bit like printing every tenth word of a novel. When I talked to women at Mimili about this sort of incomplete information being disseminated, their shrugged response was, "It's not our story, anyway. We don't tell it like that." (Personal conversation: Mimili, 1987)

**Histories**

The rich ecological ‘lineage myths’ told in Mimili inma performances are in great contrast to the kinds of ‘linear histories’ in modern European literature, which concentrate on different essentials and concerns. European histories mostly have an anthropocentric (often male, since women’s stories are not interesting enough – not even, it would seem, to women)
focus and an Aristotelian structure. These linear tales are obsessed with dates in terms of time which can be fixed and explore power (political conflict) and moral dilemmas (the agon of the Greek theatre) of all kinds: people/gods (religion); males/females (sexual and gender conflict); kings/commoners (class); and people/urban society (urban social politics). Europeans are endlessly fascinated with wars; conquests of lands; colonisations of peoples; triumphs of political ideology; technology; economic and material production. There is an 'heroic' thread: obstacles to be overcome; prizes to be won (where the hero gets the girl); desires for personal and individual honour to be fulfilled (to the exclusion of Others and with dire penalties to the losers). There must be final closure. Therefore, when Aboriginal mythology was translated into 'literature' by early collectors there was, in comparison to European narratives, very little to write about since it wasn't deemed 'real history'.

European colonial histories about 'first contact' with Aboriginal people have been ably dealt with by scholars such as Henry Reynolds and will not be explored here.

'Oral' histories by Aboriginal people post-invasion are published ever more frequently now, but are accorded still only qualified validity by European Australia. Most recently, Aboriginal people themselves have taken over the key storytelling role in the field of literature, with a fast growing range of publications about their lives and spiritual beliefs, their performance activities and their family histories. (see, for example, Huggins 1998b; Langford-Ginibi: 1994; Heiss: 2001; and for an overview Heiss and Van Toorn Eds: 2002). It would not be untrue to say that, today, only a foolsd and exceptionally racist European Australian would attempt to write a history or biography about any aspect of Aboriginal life without close collaboration with Indigenous people.

5.3 Performance iconography

Iconography as literature
That performances of all kinds have been recorded in iconographic forms since pre-historic times is apparent from the significant numbers of visual representations of human performance activities surviving on rock surfaces all over the world. Some are perhaps fifty or sixty thousand years old according to recent dating techniques and provide the only inscribed 'literature' to be had, although only implicit ethnocentrism prevents the European scholar from valuing it (in its own context) as highly as 'writing'. (Biddle: 1990, 1996) Little is able to be guessed from these petroglyphs: it is not known what the performances themselves were like, why the depictions were made or what they really represent, although
several theories have been advanced which will not be discussed here (Ucko Ed.: 1977; Cosgrove and Daniels: 1994). Suffice it to say that there are innumerable human activities not recorded in this way, so high value must have been attached to performance. ‘Rock art’ is referred to by European paleo-anthropologists, paleo-ethnographers and paleo-linguists trying to piece together just how and when people in societies without writing began to create symbols and representations of ceremonies, dance and drama. All that can be certain is that live performance began a lot earlier than the inscribed pictures or symbols. Very early non-pictorial iconography (‘dots and dashes’) in patterns which might be depicting performance is found all over the world, including Australia. Sometimes lively ‘stick’ or diagrammatic figures are arranged in what appear to be ‘dance maps’ on cave walls, such as the well-known figures from Altamira in Spain (Lonsdale: 1984), or the Tassili rock paintings in Africa (Lhote: 1987). Abstracted and extremely varied patterns appear alongside quite sophisticated pictorial realism from the same period, so the representations of vigorous movement and spatial organisation have some significance: what people are doing is more important than what or who they are, perhaps. Maybe it is a form of performance notation rather than iconic representation, an idea discussed by Cristea in some detail. (1991, 121-160) He is of the belief that there is much to be gained by an active interpretation of such evidence:

> While some researchers maintain that such ancient documents have only documentary value, our opinion is that their value is greater: we can observe a line of conduct crossing time and space towards us, that possesses common elements in theatre history, both from the period of the Greeks to our time and from that before it. (Cristea: 129)

This notion is not mentioned in the accompanying text if the images appear in art collections or anthropological sources (Bardon: 1979; Berndt, Berndt and Stanton: 1992; Isaacs: 1980 and 1984) or the National Geographic (Lhote: 1987) but it is if the source is a dance/theatre book or journal (Sachs: 1963; Wosien: 1974; Lonsdale: 1984; Cristea: 1991). Interpretation depends on point of view based on experience.

Absolutely nothing can be known about actual performance practice in pre-historic or even historic oral societies from these visual records. While choreo-historiography tries to make comparisons with contemporary performance and quite a large number of reconstructions of performance have been attempted based on so-called ‘tribal’ practice in existing oral societies, it must remain speculation at best.

**Museums and private collections**

Until quite recently, only Europeans collected (and published scholarly works about) decorated objects and iconography or objectified it by keeping them in museums (such as
the Museum of South Australia) removed from their original contexts. Whether or not the collections have value in terms of research, their main function has been as sources of voyeurism of the Other. In the last decades of the 20th century, as they 'modernise', indigenous people have been reclaiming this as 'evidence' of their ancient 'literacy'. For many oral cultures this has been quite a difficult task, especially when so much material has been sold or transported overseas, material to which they were often denied both ownership and access in the process of colonisation. Many sites are on leasehold and freehold land and, all over Australia, even today, Indigenous people are still kept out while graziers conduct guided tours of their heritage.

The Strehlow collection of Aboriginal artefacts and archival film in Alice Springs is a well-known case in point and there has been a good deal of political as well as anthropological debate about its holdings. Barry Hill, Hart Cohen and the staff at the Institute, however, are trying to edit, record and archive the collection to establish original ownership and to return artefacts to their original communities. This action is seen as a positive step by some Aboriginal people but others have little trust in the process. For many objects, no owners will ever be found because the links are broken irreparably. The ceremonies are gone with their keepers. Other indigenous groups feel the artefacts are now safer in the Institute than out of it because communities no longer care for their sacred objects or wish to view old film footage of performances by people who are now dead. (Seminar: 2000: University of Western Sydney, Nepean – Barry Hill and Hart Cohen; Cohen: Mr. Strehlow’s Films, 2002) Indigenous people who still 'own' rock art sites and sacred objects preserve them in situ as part of their historical, cultural and religious capital and accord them an active, continuing role in the maintenance of ceremonies and sacred site ownership (Mimili people – personal experience). However, many portable performance objects are discarded immediately after the ceremony and made new every time.

**Aboriginal performances depicted in iconography**

There is a difference between iconography and artefacts used in performance and visual representations of performance itself. To depict 'a performance' it must be objectified by the artist and this doesn’t happen very often in Aboriginal art. What is most often depicted is the story in graphic form, not the people painting it. Yet it is still spoken of as if it were ‘happening’ and in the telling it is just as likely that the artist will be referring to both the story and the performance of it at the same time. Anyone who has ever worked with an Aboriginal desert artist, for instance, knows that all those dots are always accompanied by singing and very often dance. Anthropologists, ethnographers and art specialists from Spencer and Gillen to Morphy have recognised iconography’s place in the field of ritual and maintenance of cultural knowledge and identity but its active role as performance is largely unexplored. How does
visual art ‘perform’ stories? In what ways do artists ‘perform’ their art when making it? Are they in the same headspace as when they ‘perform’ dance and music? In what ways do the practices interrelate? This warrants further research. (Myers: 2002)

Aboriginal communities have rich stores of archival knowledge about their own performances coded in inscriptions other than writing. They are drawn from the experience of the full range of iconographic modes and, according to Schechner’s “universals of performance”, are deliberately selected, prepared during some kind of pre-performance period, performed with, and interpreted by the spectators (who might also be the performers). Knowledge of them is passed on to others who perform this ‘art’ in the future. In performance they acquire a value that is quite different to their everyday value. (Schechner: 1988, Chapter 1) For instance, a kali (boomerang) in performance can be something much more significant than a hunting implement and the markings on it can mean something very different in each performance circumstance. Gombrich (1971) discusses this performance phenomenon in his “Meditations on a hobbyhorse” (see also Marshall: 1993a). Performers are keepers of holistic knowledge, not just ‘artists’ and this knowledge is usually passed on in its entirety to other performer/artists, in performance, over a period of time.

In other words, very sophisticated performance analysis of several kinds always goes on among performers whether they call it that or not and in a number of modes simultaneously. Not for Aboriginal performers the European ‘disciplinary’ splits between musicology, choreology, dramaturgy and visual analysis. The acquisition of this performance knowledge is life-long and integrated with everyday existence, using the interrelated, agreed sets of expressions specific to and understood by performers and audiences in that society with a level of perception that is tacit and fluid. How performers choose to ‘store’, ‘file’ or ‘catalogue’ their performance knowledge (and therefore their ‘life’ knowledge) will vary from situation to situation. What people choose to retain in their personal paintbox will depend on what is relevant to their statement of personal or community identity.

The complexity of comprehensively ‘re-documenting’ performances in the European way under these circumstances reflects the complexity of performances themselves rather than the difficulty of the process which, by its nature, is time-consuming. According to Gay McAuley (1986) it is “Impossible”. But why bother with such reductive translation when Aboriginal people inscribe and ‘read’ their iconography dynamically? Aboriginal people will very often talk about ‘abstract’ rock or canvas paintings, wood carvings, body painting and scarification, sacred objects and even sand diagrams and ground paintings as living communications: ‘showing’ a ceremony or ‘being’ a myth-in-action. Ground patterns can become choreography, hand movements can become sub-text, story can become
landscape. Performers simultaneously tell or sing paintings, perform mapping in dance or hunt and perform ritual at the same time. Aboriginal people everywhere demonstrate an almost universal tendency not to separate the various forms of symbolic representation in the way Europeans do, so the cultural reading of abstract visual symbology is always imbued with an understanding of the ‘whole performance’ it represents and vice versa. There is no need, therefore, to re-depict performance in a mimetic way (pictures of performances) or in written description because the multi-stranded physical representation by which knowledge is disseminated is far more effective, interesting and challenging and happens all the time. While relatively few examples of Aboriginal paintings or carvings depict performance in a visually descriptive form that Europeans would recognise, almost all of them are doing exactly that. Transcription is for European Australians, not Aboriginal Australians despite the arguments for ‘preservation for future generations’.

There are comparatively few examples of ancient or ‘contemporary’ Aboriginal drawings and paintings directly portraying performance to be found in significant archaeological surveys and not many in documentaries, general art publications or exhibitions. There are few significant articles in journals and the media. Individual examples of diagrammatic and descriptive representations of performance (real or implied) in publications include Aboriginal drawings at Kalumburu Mission, Western Australia, sand sculptures on performance grounds in Arnhem Land, and the extensive ‘galleries’ found all throughout Northern Australia. A recent study, Australian Leisure (Leach and Veal: 1996) devotes three short but thoughtful sections (3-5, 27-47, 302-319) to Aboriginal leisure pursuits in which performance is not only given prominence but also framed within contexts that emphasise the social ecologies of performance (rock art depicting performance, 42). The Encyclopædia of Aboriginal Australia (Headon, D. Ed: 1994) has a small number of examples. Documentation of most of the known recognisable depictions of performance in Aboriginal art, however, are to be found in the holdings of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies library and archives (see annual bibliographies and archives lists now on WWW). Articles have appeared over the years also in the journal, Australian Aboriginal Studies. A major cataloguing feat of contemporary Aboriginal art and artists was performed by Luke Taylor in 1990, The AIAS Visual Artists Biographical Database, which includes some depictions of performance. There are no specialised ‘collections’ of descriptive representations of performance, although I am not sure that it is the result of a conscious decision. Considering the holistic and interlinked nature of Aboriginal symbolism, the very notion of a ‘collection’ of art related to performance would include practically every piece of Aboriginal visual art ever made.
Munn

Nancy Munn, whose ideas on the infinitely creative and re-creative aspects of Walbiri Iconography (1973/1986) and the “transformation of subjects into objects” (Charlesworth et al, eds.: 1984), was to have a significant effect on European concepts of Aboriginal visual images and performative acts. Once her work gained recognition, it opened up discussion about the power of the inscription/performance of roles in a multitude of media, both in the tjukurpa (dreamtime) and mulapa (now time). It shifted European perceptions of actors and objects and the way Aboriginal performance was coded. Had Munn had a background in theatre, play or psychology, she would have had more to work with, but her notions have been taken up by a number of people since and have helped to develop concepts about the role of visual image in performance of ceremonies.

Since Munn's early structuralist research in this area, surprisingly little has been done in linking the visual with the performative in Aboriginal ethnography. Addenda to and critiques of Munn's work mostly concentrate on issues of 'transformation' as a metaphysical concept (Stanner: 1966/89; Berndt: 1979a; Bain: 1980; Dubinskas and Traweek: 1984; Morton: passim 1985 - 1987f) rather than exploring the direct link between the two as a physical reality. John Morton's commentary is interesting, relating to the psychology of the individual and Aboriginal ontology as revealed in the performance of rituals and the importance of visual signs in the landscape, but they are based in a Freudian analysis and are not relevant to Aboriginal people in that theoretical framing. If Morton applied his theories in the process of shooting a documentary film of performance, what visual material would he include? And if film documentation of ceremonies were carried out according to Aboriginal ontologies instead of following examples set by Europeans, what would their choices be? Even Layton's discussion of creativity (1991, Chapter 5, 193-239) stops short of seeing art making as a performance 'act' linked to other performance acts - the issues of temporality and transience in performance and the residue of an art object being the focus of his 'difference'. Peter Ucko's Form in Indigenous Art (Ucko (ed): 1977) is still a valuable text in this area, but there is still a need to draw the notion of 'schematisation' the contributors propose into the wider field of performance.

Body painting

There is no published work of which I am aware that systematically documents and, more importantly, explores with Aboriginal people the still widespread practice of body painting, scarification and other forms of physical decoration. It is often seen in Isaacs' strikingly photographed books (1980, 1884) and is cited in generalist texts, such as Brain's The Decorated Body (1979) or Ginn' The Spirited Earth (1990), and individual ethnographies of

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
specific rituals. A travelling exhibition in Australia’s museums *Body Art* (1999) had some examples but like most exhibitions, it relied on the ‘wow’ factor and there was little information. There is no doubt that this lack in the ethnography is due to the low esteem in which the practice is held in a Christian European culture where all forms of alteration to the ‘temple’ of the body are viewed either as ritualised punishment (Foucault: 1977) or sub-cultural social markings (Hebdige: 1988; Jones: 1998). Body decoration, despite contemporary practices of tattooing and body piercing, is considered a sign of ‘primitive’, subcultural behaviour in Australia and the discourse is exotically framed in that way (Berndt: *Kunapipi*: 1951). Biddle’s otherwise excellent advocacy of Aboriginal iconography as literacy is a case of avoidance in point whereas, in my experience, the equivalent of a substantial oral story is inscribed on bodies in any decent sized ceremony on any one night. The knowledge and application of these designs is an extremely skillful and time-consuming business and requires a deep knowledge of specialised iconography and visual communication protocols in a very physical as well as metaphysical sense. The transference of symbols by one or several people onto the body of Others is one place where the kinæsthetic and the visual communication channels combine on a regular basis, providing yet another field for discussion with Aboriginal people. As there is no comprehensive reference material for this area, in the later performance analysis I will be drawing on my own experience.

**Ochre**

There is a small selection of works on ochre itself. Sagona’s *Bruising the Red Earth* (Ed. 1994, with an extensive bibliography) gives a comprehensive survey of ochre mining and use in Tasmania, for instance, while Jones’ analysis of the red ochre trade in South Australia ties in with many of the desert ceremonies (1984a and 1984b). Aesthetics in ochre use is tackled by Morphy on numbers of occasions (Morphy: *passim*) and colour perception by Jones (Jones, R.: 1978) and others. References are to be found to ochres and their uses in many ethnographies but detail is limited.

**Iconography as a mnemonic**

There seem to be no traditional people who retain detailed records of their performances other than by regular maintenance of performance itself, although the situation is changing everywhere because of European influences (see Moyle, Ed: 1992: the effects of documentation on memory and practice). Visually representing performance by using mimetic, illustrative depictions (however stylised) or inscribed mnemonics seems to be the province of societies with writing rather than without it. This begs another question: “Is there already a link between this and the inadequacy of the written word to convey the performance experience?” rather than, “Did the lack of writing prevent such cultures from making
permanent records?" Further, "Is the development of a written language directly connected to the diminution of performance as a means of communication of knowledge, a decline in this kind of memory capacity and hence a reduction of performance knowledge able to be recalled and passed on?"

We were interested to find out whether Aboriginal performers today used historical visual records of their performances to reconstruct old rituals and other performances. Those living in traditional communities said they didn't: visual iconography is not used as a mnemonic but is a discrete layer of meaning. But urban performers, in conversations with people in traditional communities and with members and ex-students of the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre from NAISDA, and dancers and choreographers from Broome and the Bangarra Dance Theatre (1985 -2001) said yes, they did. Existing visual images are also used to create new intercultural urban events - such as the Mimi creation story performed on stilts, which originated in Western Australia through a collaboration between Kunwinjku people from western Arnhem Land and the non-Aboriginal stilt group, Stalker. This event was featured in the 1997 Festival of the Dreaming, the first of the Cultural Olympiad festivals. Not only did they 'research' their performance from existing records as well as with the elders, but also, after the event, the performance was documented and written about extensively and in the language of performance critique, not that of anthropology and academia. (Program for The Festival of Dreaming: 1997; ongoing conversations with David Clarkson, director of Stalker Theatre Company (www.stalkertheatreco.com.au) and Rhoda Roberts, Director of the Festival).

A Northern Australian example
Connections between the visual image and the performed act can be seen in many traditional groups. Comparable in many ways to Anangu are the Anbarra people from Northern Australia. One of their ceremonies can be seen in the documentary film Waiting for Harry (McKenzie: 1980) where the Anbarra themselves explain the close links between the various forms of expression. Here is an example where a documentary film is very helpful in ‘translating culture’, because of the way it was made: recording social process not just artistic outcome) and because of the high level of directorship by Anbarra people.

Iconography here is very sophisticated. While it does not 'tell a story' to uninitiated observers, when the stories are told, sung and danced, the social and physical ecology experienced and the 'rules' of iconography explained, the visual symbols and their links to performance accumulate and become comprehensible. They represent aspects of a networked epistemology and aesthetics based on concepts of contrast which are alien to but
comprehensible by European artists and performers. (Morphy: 1989) The preparation and painting of elaborate Anbarra burial poles (McKenzie: 1980; Wild: 1984; Hiatt: 1978; Clunies-Ross: 1989) is another case in point. Entire personal cosmologies, social affiliations and day-to-day activities of the deceased are painted on them, including references to the environment, food and wild life as the artists talk and sing many facets of the 'story' through, over and over. Images are every bit as complex as the artwork and artefacts in an Egyptian burial chamber. The traditional way is to introduce the key motif in the song, then return to it again and again, adding more to the story each time, continually layering the story and building to a conclusion. At the same time, the visual imaging continues, image after image, layer after layer, contributing to rather than illustrating the performance.

Not painted on rock walls but around hollow tree trunks, iconography marks the last resting-places of the ashes of the deceased. The paintings on the poles are, again, not illustrations of the life of the deceased but abstracted references to continuous reality and aspects of cosmology and cannot be painted or 'read' by anyone who is not a designated knowledge holder and elder of the family group or its affiliates (McKenzie: 1980). At the same time, the iconography is depicting performances that might or might not take place simultaneously or subsequently. Versions of 'personal cosmologies' relating each participant to the deceased are performed simultaneously by the mourners, both during the painting and while the main performance itself occurs.

There is no record of the proceedings for posterity other than the inscribed poles and, in this case, the film. In Anbarra performance practice, staging instructions are also an integrated part of the oral knowledge and are taught by elders to initiates as part of the process of preparing for and performing the ceremony, not in separate 'performance schools' (McKenzie: 1980). The applied knowledge is also shared between different groups of relatives and the ceremony itself cannot proceed until everyone is present. Individual elders are repositories of the most exclusive knowledge. Similar 'elitism' occurs in many traditional Aboriginal societies, according to the levels of life-long visual literacy acquired by consecutive 'rites of passage'. These rites create the punctuation marks in knowledge-gaining and are extended into other ceremonies, such as 'increase' rituals. Accuracy of detail and skill in creating personalised versions of the old iconography, preparation of sand sculptures and elements of scenery for the dancing grounds, as well as specialised performance 'properties' are matters for ongoing and often heated discussion by the older participants. Younger members of the community look, listen and learn until it is their turn to do, and they become the experts. McKenzie's documentary film concentrates on these aspects of the ceremony rather than on the finished poles or the performances and the overall impression is not
dissimilar to an urban community theatre project. Tempers run hot as expertise and authority are called into question and everything is resolved 'just in time'.

Anbarra people make and perform everything out of doors, on selected sites. These sites would not be always recognised as 'theatres' except by initiated people, as the landscape itself contains the notion of 'site' - although this knowledge can transfer to other locales (Morphy: 1995). After the performance, all is obliterated; community knowledge is preserved entirely in the memory, refreshed by practice. Closed systems of stored cultural knowledge interweave in complex relationships with all the elements of known and metaphysical world re/created anew each time. Performers discard all performance artefacts afterwards such as headdresses and other costumes, which are made communally, afresh for each ceremony, so there remain no examples for later copying. In general, no 'performance relics' are buried with or around the Anbarra dead and the burial poles eventually weather and disintegrate. We found the same kinds of practices in Mimili and with our urban acquisitiveness often lusted after beautifully crafted objects that were thrown away after a ceremony, knowing we could never 'have' them.

The notion that this cultural knowledge should become enshrined in permanent buildings, preserved artefacts or writing to be a sign to later generations is anathema to many Aboriginal people even if the reality is that they are finding new ways of recording their traditions, which are changing too. Their very protection was once the secrecy, the immediacy, the specificity and the power to bind the community with shared knowledge of how to recreate the ceremony at a later time. The Anbarra people in this case had access to visual recording technology in addition to their usual knowledge-keeping traditions to record this particular event. Anthropologists and technicians, instructed by the community, photographed, filmed and recorded a series of related performances over a number of years - from the mid-970s until the present day (a performance of Rom, one of the related ceremonies, was held at the Institute in Canberra in 1995 and another in Sydney in 2000). During one particular part of the film, the Anbarra elders make it clear they are teaching the outside world by this visual medium and see it as an asset in engendering respect for their culture. It is not voyeuristic filming by 'whites'.

'Received knowledge' in European iconographic study is that, because the 4000 year old relics of say, Ancient Egyptian civilisation, are relatively prolific and because many scholarly guesses have been made about them, a researcher can 'know' more about Egyptian ceremonies (Drioton: 1942; Fairman: 1974; Marshall: 1983) that they can about the Anbarra, who leave few signs at all. However, when it comes to the crunch, this is untrue. The Egyptian performers are long dead and can tell nothing, show nothing, do nothing to put life
into their artefacts or buildings. There is no way of knowing how it happened or what the performance experience might have been - or even if there actually was a performance. Even a gap of one or two generations can wipe out community records entirely, as has been the case in most parts of Aboriginal Australia. In a living, performing, oral culture, however, the knowledge is maintained. For a researcher taking part in an Anbarra ceremony or even witnessing one, a very different kind of knowledge is absorbed than would be from studying a collection of artefacts and papyrus writings. Knowledge comes from experience of both making and doing. There is little to be learned about a meteor strike by gazing at the crater.

Being placed in ‘another’ society where nothing is known is a very good way of finding out how dependant people are on tacit information not only to translate graphic symbols but also to understand in which other ways information is carried and the stories are told. As we learned more in Mimili we became consciously aware that this was the case: oral, aural and kinaesthetic communication are of paramount importance in not only performance but in learning about how a society ‘works’. People who acquire extraordinary levels of performance knowledge in their field in some societies are given special status and are sometimes called ‘living treasures’. This is precisely because it is recognised that they hold significant knowledge in their bodies and not in a book or a documentary film.

Visual iconography within Aboriginal performance has hardly been researched at all despite the fact that it has been collected, commented on and sold for high prices. Although iconography of various kinds has been linked in a structural and epistemological way with performance, there have been no studies where the performance function of visual elements has been a main focus.
5.4 Making pictures of the Other

Colonial artists

Earliest ‘realistic’ depictions of the performances of Other cultures were by European artists who were taking part in the colonisation process of the non-European world. This was successful in some regions of the world and fiercely and successfully resisted for centuries in others. Constructing non-Europeans as ‘exotic’ by providing visual information about their ‘difference’ was part of a consistent approach to encourage perceptions of European superiority and the ‘advanced’ nature of European civilization, which sanctioned global colonisation. The juxtapositioning of civilised Europeans and naked savages is a familiar image.

A small number of artworks by early British colonists show performances with Aboriginal men (rarely women) in ceremonial paint and costume in various locations in Australia. Copies of, sources for and historical and contemporary commentary is to be found in both private and public collections, in the archives of State Libraries and Museums, in the Mitchell Library, the State and National Archives as well as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies library in Canberra and collections in England and France.

Depictions of performance also appear as illustrations in early travel books. Early ‘scientific’ ethnographies of non-European societies and their performances relied mainly on the writings of the early travellers and explorers (Angas: 1847; Taplin: 1879; and Haddon: 1901-1908). Publications included illustrations that were often figments of the imagination of the lithographer or the publisher, although some were drawn with great attention to detail from field notes. Others, like Joseph Lycett, cannot let go of the ‘ideal’ Greek figure and his drawings of Aboriginal people look like illustrations from post-Renaissance Italian operas. Some illustrations were by Aboriginal people whose realistic depictions were certainly no less effective that those of many colonial artists. A comprehensive survey and analysis of these would be a worthwhile research project, but is outside the scope of this thesis.5

Some early photography of performances was carried out. Spencer and Gillen’s images from the 1896 and 1914 expeditions are exceptionally good examples (Vanderwal, ed.: 1987) but their photographs were often re-rendered by an artist or lithographer for publication and again given a ‘civilised’, romantic style, often censoring aspects such as nudity and/or emphasising physical differences to the point of grotesqueness. Early photographic images that are unchanged, therefore, such as Elkin’s photographs and early films, are valuable visual
sources (Jones: 1965) and greatly improve the value of his written documentation, which is unfortunately scientistic and patronising of Aboriginal culture. Some photographs offer no performance information other than costumes and body decoration. Berndt’s detailed account of aspects of an Australian Aboriginal ceremony, *Kunapipi* (Berndt: 1951) offer static photographs and present European-style photo-opportunity ‘tableaux’: the action is left to the reader to create from Berndt’s written text. Some of his later work has more active visual documentation such as *Man, Land and Myth* (1970a) but, in general, early photographs of Aboriginal ceremonies are ‘posed’ and show no performance activity.

Since the 1950s, photography and film have been used more often unless Indigenous people objected (for one reason or another) to having their images recorded (and sometimes, even then!). Film sequences come closest to a useful record of performance events but ‘Who’s view is this?’ All the kinæsthetic experience is missing. Silent films lack the song. Often archival film is uncontextualised, shot in the field and simply labeled "Lizard Ceremony - Central Australia". On many occasions, equipment was not available or transport impossible. Early cameras were liable to break down. However, a Central Australian Aboriginal edible grub increase ceremony is vastly more accessible (at one level) to contemporary black and white Australians through the use of video, film and now digital technology – provided that is the wish of the traditional owners.

The epitome of lush production is an elaborate, full-length, documentary, sound/film series, such as the six-part *The Spirit of Asia* (Macintyre: 1980) with the voice-over by the ubiquitous David Attenborough and an accompanying printed book with colour stills from the film. National Geographic films and publications are commonplace, however they lack the kind of detail essential for research and offer only a kaleidoscope of images with voice-over narratives which are often embarrassing in their platitudes and privileging of exoticism. This kind of expensive filming was rarely attempted in Australia in the first three quarters of the 20th century due to parsimonious research funding. However, a growing number of more recent European directed documentaries have recorded performances for communities or for other people to study - some with really informative commentary from the performers themselves.

Films and videos produced by contemporary Aboriginal media organisations like CAAMA and Impartja have replaced those made by non-Aboriginal companies and Aboriginal people are now making the best documentary films of their own performances. Active Indigenous participation in media has produced a range of current affairs programs; educational material; records of community life; music, drama and fashion videos; feature films; comedy series and rock videoclips. Many short programs are shown on more or less mainstream television and
radio (ABC and SBS) and on regional networks like that managed by CAAMA. An unpublished research paper delivered at the University of Western Sydney by Francesca Cathie (1999) reviewed this field and looked at some of the performances being broadcast. New ways of telling old stories, education on-line, recordings of ‘endangered’ ceremonies and stories about the landscape which is being performed, are narrated and subtitled by older Aboriginal people. Long distance discussions about issues of community importance, such as ceremonies, serve to give remote Aboriginal people a greater amount of control over their own world, but it has also made them pro-active users of the most powerful of the European mass communication performance medium, which has had far-reaching political effects.

A recent filming by a group of Pitjantjatjara people in the Western Desert area of their section of the Minyma Kutjara (The Two Sisters) ‘songline’ (1999) was picked up by SBS as an item for ‘mainstream treatment’. They applied their editing hutzpah to a very long video that showed - as it should - every bit of the country and every verse of the story. It has now been reduced to 30 minutes, concentrating on ‘highlights of the action’. The result was significantly lacking in the eyes of the locals, but the city director (an urban Aboriginal man) took over the raw footage and went out to the country to get even more material. Local people must have sighed resignedly as key segments from the narrative hit the cutting room floor to be replaced by tourist images of sunsets and wildlife unconnected with the Two Sisters story in any way. But they will be able to market it overseas and The Two Sisters has been seen on prime time television. I have a copy of the ‘original’ cut, which is over two hours long.

When invited to by Mimili women, I took part in a similar filming session of the Langka narratives (Blue Tongue Lizard) by Ernabella Television in 1989 and it was just like being on a film set. Car headlights supplied the lighting and three cameras were in use with a couple of boom mikes - all run on batteries. One some occasions a petrol generator supplies power but the sound is not helpful and post-production taping is the only way to get a clean singing sound. Directorial control was in the hands of the songman, Sam Pumani, but there were altercations with the film director, an Ernabella man. Very familiar territory: creative genius versus tradition.

There is now a vast Central Australian archive of such videotapes and sounds recordings that is not available to most Europeans. In some respects, television has greatly benefited remote Aboriginal people just as it has supplied a way for urban Aboriginal people to get in touch with each other by means of specific programs on Aboriginal culture and performances in a mainstream arena. This performative means of affirming connections has

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
been extremely effective in creating and renewing an Aboriginal sense of identity Australia-wide. Oral cultures can maintain knowledge through visual technology in ways that are not as damaging to live performance. And, although the iconography has changed in its form, the essential factor is that the medium is being managed by Aboriginal people themselves and it is performative.

**Contemporary Aboriginal painting**

Aboriginal painting, especially contemporary desert painting, has been amply discussed elsewhere. In this chapter it is enough to point out that new technologies and commercial opportunities are expanding the vocabulary of communities all over Australia (Myers:2002). Whatever the outcomes of this burgeoning enterprise with its attendant charges of exploitation by the ‘white’ art world, the paintings remain inextricably part of a network of aesthetic expression based on performance. The pictures are stories in action.
Notes:

1. It is also that within this discourse women are constructed as Other in the same way Aboriginal people are. I have always found it mildly hysterical that within official groupings of underprivileged in Australia often are often included 'the disabled, Aborigines, immigrants, the aged and women'. Government ministers have such extraordinary portfolios from time to time.

2. Cheryl Exum's Fragmented Women: Sub/versions of Biblical Narratives (1993) could be read alongside Phyllis Kaberry (1939), Catherine Berndt (1950, 1965 1989) and Diane Bell (1980, 1981, 1998, 1988) for instance. Women in many cultures are omitted from ethnography for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that women don't write most of the ethnography, but there are other reasons. Maintaining the knowledge as private is one of the ways women retain autonomy over their knowledge and manage it the way they wish. A number of young Indigenous women writers have introduced a number of new perspectives.

3. Both the Berndts worked closely with several groups of Aboriginal people for over fifty years, collecting and publishing their stories 'as told' to them and their work in this field has immense value as accumulated knowledge. Unfortunately, the Berndts' fieldwork has included few Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara stories and neither has anyone else's, so there is a very small body of comparative material. For a retrospective, self-reflective review of the Berndts' experiences in the field during the 1940's and some of the issues it raised, Ronald Berndt's address to the Anthropological Society of South Australia (Berndt: 1989) is illuminating.

4. Artaud: 1958; Huizinga: 1956; Gombrich: 1971; Winnicott: 1953; and Piaget: 1951, 1954, 1956) are all within her time frame, but she was unaware of them, it seems.

5. Holroyd Council sponsored a project in 2000 to produce an educational CD for children in its region that told the 'silent history' of the Darug people -- the first Indigenous Australians to be colonised after the 1788 invasion. A wide range of colonial art was researched and used in the CD as it is the only source of information that gives some idea of performance at that time. The CD is not available commercially but was produced as a joint project between the Holroyd Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Advisory Committee, Darug elders, the University of Western Sydney and three Indigenous researchers, artists and writers: Anne Marshall, Cheryl Rose and Nathalie Garcia. Colonial artists' depictions of performance in the Sydney Basin can be found in a wide range of books. Turbet: 2001 (although the illustrations are all black and white) has an excellent bibliography, and most of the extant drawings and paintings are held in Australian Libraries and Collections.
Chapter 6

kulpanyi

returning to country

Anangu people in the Central Australian Desert
6

**kulpanyi**

returning to country

### 6.1 On Anangu land

The first part of this chapter is a brief accumulation of information from the 'received' anthropological literature, using a wide range of sources from the nineteenth century till the present day in which I have attempted to preserve the detached tone as well as the content.

The second part is approached from a different perspective.

---

**Demographics and geography**

*Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* speaking groups, known to themselves as *Anangu* - 'the people' - numbered an estimated 3500+ in 1999 (spokesperson, Pit Council, based on information from Northern Territory Medical Service and ABS Statistics -1994 Census).\(^1\) They now mostly occupy a number of mixed settlements in arid, traditionally owned lands, which spread across the intersections of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory up to, west of, and beyond Alice Springs. (Goddard's map, 1992, after Hobson: 1990, ix) In the early part of this century, some *Pitjantjatjara* speaking people moved from the drier desert west of Warburton, the Great Victoria Desert and Gibson Desert into *Yankunytjatjara* territory and the Peterman, Rawlinson, Warburton, Blackstone, Tomkinson and Musgrave Ranges, settling in and around white depots and missions such as Warburton, Docker River, Yalata, Haasts Bluff and Areyonga, Pipalyatjara, Pukatja (Ernabella), Fregon, Amata and Mimili (Everard Park). *Pitjantjatjara* are thought originally to have gradually migrated east at least partly because of lack of food and water in years of extreme drought, although they claimed (and still claim) connections with western ancestral lands.\(^2\) In turn,
many *Yankunytjatjara* people moved south towards Ooldea. It is thought that this might have actually been quite a common occurrence in the past, dependent on cycles of weather. It would certainly explain the similarities in language, shared sacred sites and the large numbers of intermarriages. In some of the same easterly areas live *Antikirinya* people, many settled around the small, previously government-administered town of Indulkana. There are also other smaller, connected groups defining (or re-defining) themselves, such as the *Vgaanyatjatjara*. A group of *Vgaanyatjatjara* women performed with *Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara* and *Vgaanyatjatjara Women’s Council* at the opening of the Third International Women Playwrights’ Conference in Adelaide in July 1994.

Neighbours overlapping are *Luritja, Kukatja* and *Matutjara* people to the northwest, north and northeast, and *Ngaanyatjara* people to the west, *Pintupi* and *Warlpiri* further north and northeast. These groups share a similar language with regional dialects. *Arrente* speaking people live further northeast, overlapping around Alice Springs, and have a different language. (Tindale: 1974, Goddard: 1985 and Myers: 1986, Ellis: *passim*).

Compared to many Australian Aboriginal communities, particularly those on the coast or near highly urbanised, extensively grazed, heavily mined or exhaustively farmed areas, some Western and Central Desert communities have suffered less than the usual exclusion from their ancestral lands. This is mainly due to a relatively late 'first contact' with Europeans in the mid-to-late 19th century (Giles in 1872; the Elder Scientific Expedition in 1891). For some groups, this was as recently as Tindale’s survey in 1933. When Europeans did arrive in larger numbers from the mid-30s to explore, sample and map, to establish church missions and food depots, there was little to tempt them. Land was sparsely grassed and watered, requiring expensive bores, so appropriation was more limited, less aggressive and not so tightly fenced. There were media reports from time to time, even in the late 50s, of whole groups who never had seen white people but the extent of that is unsubstantiated.

Aboriginal reserves were set up in Central Australia in the first 20 years of this century by the three state governments. People were subjected to the whim of bureaucrats who took back large tracts for mining, set up Woomera Rocket Range, sanctioned nuclear testing in lands inhabited by Aboriginal people and established Ayers Rock and the Olgas as tourist attractions (despite renaming them as Uluru and Kata Tjuta) but few Aboriginal people were moved out in wholesale numbers in the way they were from other places more desirable to Europeans. Nonetheless, a number of settlements, with their promise of permanent water from new bores, white man’s food (high in carbohydrates and low in protein) and an illusion of security attracted many Aboriginal people from traditional lands. This trapped them into
unsatisfactory mixed tribal groups as happened to the Pintupi and Warlpiri on government or church-run missions like Papunya and Yuendumu (Myers: 1986). One of the common factors in the various actions to relocate Aboriginal people in settlements was the proscription of indigenous languages, social systems, spirituality, land ownership and ceremonies, and the imposition of English law and Christian religion. Broken family groups were seriously displaced over time, often co-located with other language and ritual groups within the settlements and subject to sudden massacres, introduced disease and deliberate starvation (Myers: 1986). Their 'welfare' was administered by a number of State, Territory and Commonwealth Government bodies that did not always co-operate with each other). Graziers and ranchers employed Aboriginal people as cheap and even slave labour on privately owned or leased Crown Land cattle stations.

From the 1970s, and directly as a result of the 1967 Referendum, many Western and Central Desert people who had been drawn to mission stations and settlements began to disperse. Small groups of people often walked hundreds of miles back to their ancestral homelands and ceremonial sites which still existed in living memory and, with later government assistance, they settled in 'outstations' and 'homelands'. (Coombs: 1973; Wallace, in R. Berndt (ed): 1977; Brokensha: 1978a, 1978b and 1987; Goddard: 1985; Myers: 1986; Rose: 1991) Pitjantjatjara people were among the most determined to reclaim their heritage according to white law, making a successful freehold land-rights claim in South Australia during the 1970's, legislated on March 18, 1981. They now hold titles of various kinds (Toyne and Vachon: 1984/7; Hope: 1986), depending on the State under whose jurisdiction the land falls (see State Boundaries map). Inside Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara freeholds, people were organised in family and kinship groupings. Government services like education, health, welfare and law are, in 2000, still under the jurisdiction of three different State or Territory governments, with three sets of regulations, whose artificial 'state lines' cut across the maintenance of traditional Aboriginal social, economic and religious life. The three State Governments are often quite different in their approach to 'the Aboriginal problem', with South Australia demonstrating the greatest goodwill and support for Aboriginal self determination and independence over time and the Northern Territory and Western Australia often enforcing harsh, unpredictable and illogical laws. The different jurisdictions cause great confusion and uncertainty among Aboriginal people and are perhaps the most insidious of the oppressions with which they are still burdened.

Travel
Some people felt encouraged to return to places deserted many years ago to again set up permanent residences thus reviving their Dreaming, while there are also people who remember what was, but remain in towns and settlements. Whether or not people live
permanently on some of the old sites, they travel over wide distances to attend significant ceremonies there. People sometimes still travel on foot but generally the trips are made faster by the common ownership of trucks and four-wheel-drive vehicles and the maintenance of passable roads, aided by the flat desert plains which many drivers negotiate expertly without visible roads (personal experience and conversations: Mimili and Sydney: 1985-1990). On occasions, buses along the Stuart Highway, and trains along the main route to Adelaide are used. Small aircraft fly people over larger distances and small local airports are situated at a number of settlements, often maintained by local residents. This has benefited people who now live far from their ancestral sites, cannot go back there to live but who need to visit periodically for ritual reasons or to maintain care and to assert continuing ownership of their sacred places with which their identities are inextricably linked.

**New relations with the land**

One of the present problems with the Native Title Legislation (requiring the demonstration of continuous use of land to claim ownership) is that it eliminates those who have not been able to maintain a physical connection with their many sacred sites. It ignores the fact that return to these lands was and is dependant on government-imposed economic circumstances and rules which has historically prevented any such demonstrable ownership.  

Recent re-groupings and re-settlements have also resulted in new ritual affiliations and concentrations of people who now share totemic sites through marriage or adoptions that once might not have occurred. There have also been births and deaths that have changed the membership of groups of 'owners'. An economically based re-organisation of groups into settled outstations with fixed buildings provokes unpleasant 'competition' between totemic groups who once might have amicably shared a site. This encourages 'proof-of-ownership conflicts' connected mostly, it must be said, with some Aboriginal people envisioning future possible mining and mineral rights but also who have adopted whitefella ideals of 'home ownership'. (Palmer, in Hiatt, ed.: 1984; Hamilton: 1982; Maddock: 1980; Payne: 1984 and 1989 and personal conversations in Mimili from 1985-1990) Previously, significant changes in a community occurred slowly and by negotiation with appropriate ceremony. A break of even twenty years without due process can create a backlog which, when freed up, is not easily settled by signing a piece of paper in the European manner. (Layton: 1995 and 1997) A great deal of grief has come out of imposing one system of 'land ownership' over another and it would be true to say that some Aboriginal people also have taken advantage of this for personal gain (conversations in Mimili from 1985-1992).
Spoken and non-verbal language

Western Desert people merging into the Central Desert people, while having regionally distinct dialects (Douglas: 1964; Goddard: 1983, 1985, 1987) share a similar language type. Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara dialects are very close indeed and many of the differences still perceptible are in the speech of older people only. A factor has been the 'standardisation' of dialects by the Pitjantjatjara literacy programs based in Pukatja and Alice Springs and their incorporation into Aboriginal schools by Aboriginal teachers. (Douglas: 1977; Kirke: 1985; Goddard: 1983, 1984, 1985, 1987 and 1992; Aitken: 1993; Hartman and Henderson eds: 1994; Christie: 1995)8 Another has been the teaching of Pitjantjatjara at South Australian (and other) Universities and the publishing of language audiotapes and user-friendly language books and dictionaries.

Social systems

While a wide range of individually variant social and religious practices exists, Western and Central Desert people are not very different from each other, culturally speaking.10 Several groups share the same system of social organisation - the Aluritja kin system (but, for Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people, without sub-sections) and the walytja relationship system. People are closely linked by stories and songs which define the inter-connecting journeys of the ancestral beings - 'songlines' - that still form a complex network across the region, joining sacred sites with dialect and family groups. Traditionally living people conduct their business by means of active, lengthy and frequent rituals as well as using European procedures when required by European law.11

Pitjantjatjara /Yankunytjatjara speaking societies are represented in the literature as male-dominated societies although there is much conflicting information in the ethnography.12 The exploration of the notion of a "dual social system" (Hamilton: 1980) would, however, reveal a different situation than was generally reported in the 'old ethnography', especially in respect of performance knowledge, practice and control.13 Nonetheless, it is the men in Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara groups today who seem to have charge of the outward signs of symbolic representation - the stories, the sacred sites and objects, the body decorations, the designs, the dances, the songs, other than those practiced by women exclusively. The main drawback has been the very small numbers of women field-workers and the absence of Aboriginal women engaged in the ethnography of their own ceremonial performance practices (Ellis: 1970, 1989; Brock, ed.: 1988; Bell: 1998).

Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people - male and female - have more freedom than some other groups in determining where they 'belong' and can choose to associate themselves
with the land belonging to either their mother or father or both (Layton: 1995). This is a more realistic approach than the patrilinear system adopted by, say, the Walbiri (Meggitt: 1962/86) or the Pintupi (Myers: 1986) who are constrained by moiety rules which prevent son/mother or father/daughter claims on land or other ritual 'property' such as songs and Dreaming.

The Pitjantjatjara practice creates double extended families, which offer a kind of indemnity in terms of land care and maintenance of the Law, especially through the performance of ceremonies. Perhaps there is an ecological as well as an economic basis - the extreme aridity of the original Pitjantjatjara ancestral lands and the precarious subsistence requiring a greater pool of carers and a need for greater care. The result is a more flexible attitude to land maintenance, including inma ownership, where daughters can acquire ownership of performance sites from both their fathers and mothers. (See also Meggitt: 1962 and 1972; Maddock: 1972; Tindale: 1972; Myers: 1986; R. Moyle: 1979 and 1986; Layton: 1995). It also means that women are much more active in the maintenance of ritual and more likely to own sites (Personal experience: Mimili 1985-1990).

**Religion and ceremonies**

Religion (or, more accurately in Aboriginal society, spirituality) cannot be separated from the other facets of traditional Central Australian Aboriginal religious life, being integral to the performance of the inma and co-existent with material life. The linguistic appellation 'the 'Dreaming', invented by Europeans to begin with, relates to all spiritual beliefs and practices and is thought to have derived from an Aranda (Arrente) term, tjururtja. (Spencer and Gillen: 1927; T. Strehlow: 1947, 1971) Each Central and Western Desert group has its own name for the Dreaming - the Pitjantjatjara term is tjukurpa and the Yankunytjatjara is wapar (Pintupi - tjukurpa, Myers: 1986; Warlpiri - tjurkurpa, San Roque: 1998; and Aylyawarra - atjurrunga, Moyle: 1986) and it includes everything associated with both the spiritual belief system itself and its representation.

The metaphysics of Aboriginal religions are very complex. Similar concepts are discernable over the whole of Australia (Charlesworth: 1984; Swain: passim; Berndt: passim) but there are distinct differences in the cosmology and practices of people from different regional areas and language groups, for instance between desert and coastal societies. Contemporary Central Desert ritual practices tend to place importance on initiation rites for men and relationships and family management for women, but they share concerns with subsistence and survival – including money. This latterly includes mining with all its implications. More recently, new ceremonies have been developed to deal with incursions into Aboriginal culture by phenomena such as alcoholism and petrol sniffing (San Roque: 1998). While one of the commonalities of all Aboriginal religious beliefs and practices is a
concern with ecological matters, the ways in which that affects ontological perspectives of differently located groups varies. Arid desert societies are more concerned with the propagation of sustainable food sources and water sites and have a greater interest in the skies and the star systems that guide their night time/cool time travel over vast tracts of land. Coastal people are more focused on the sea and its food sources, coastal rivers and estuaries, the winds and seasonal storms and their mythology contains tales of travel and cultural contact with other islanders and Europeans in ships.\(^{15}\) In all cases there is an acute awareness of seasonal changes (Davis, S. 1987) indicated by, in the most part, available food sources and their location. This, in turn, impacts on ceremony.

Many *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* people have retained reasonably continuous links with their traditional performance practices. A significant number of rituals seem to have been performed almost without a break, even through the years of dislocation (Ellis: 1989; Payne: 1984 & 1989; Morphy: 1995; Layton: 1997). Many members of the communities at all levels of initiation seem conversant with a wide range of ceremonies, although it is also said by elders that many have been completely lost and almost none have escaped unchanged (personal conversations in Mimili). It should also be noted that a number of new ceremonies also have emerged to express changes in Aboriginal life and are still doing so. An interesting example of this can be found in the work of Craig San Roque with a group of *Warlpiri* people and their new alcohol or *Sugarman Dreaming* (1998) to try to deal with the widespread social problems caused by alcohol abuse. Faced with the same problem, the *Pitjantjatjara* people chose to follow a different path and *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* lands are 'dry', with heavy penalties for bringing in alcohol or coming home drunk. Tribal law is exercised in cases of drunkenness (personal experience). Petrol sniffing among the youth, however, is significantly widespread and, although reportedly better handled in Mimili than in many other places, causes problems similar to alcohol in its social and health impact.\(^{16}\)

**A compromise of Law**

While adhering to Aboriginal law in respect of the sharing and care of the land, maintaining social structures and practices and perpetuating the Dreaming, *Anangu* have also in the last ten years gained valuable experience in playing *walypaltja* (whitefella) politics and in using *walypaltjja* law, resulting in a fair degree of success in dealing with the various Government agencies that circumscribed their lives for so long. In August 1993, a group of *Pitjantjatjara* 'bosses' formed a company and took out a mining exploration lease on their own land, flagging a new phase in the areas of 'achievement' that commanded European respect (and competition) while still observing the sensitive cultural issues of their own communities. This excited very mixed Aboriginal community opinion, like other Aboriginal mining ventures in
Australia. More recent developments demonstrate that autonomy in education and health matters is also being achieved (Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Co.: 1999). Earlier attempts by Aborigines to meet Europeans half way are discussed by Hamilton (1972) and later by Reynolds (Reynolds, ed.: 1989, _inter alia_). Central Desert people are now in a stronger position, re-inventing their culture in a form which takes account of both Aboriginal heritage and inevitable European influences,  

reaffirming traditional links with the land, religious beliefs and education practices, perhaps altered but at least with the chance of a working compromise between the old and the new, despite attempts by the Northern Territory and Western Australian State Governments to maintain a colonial iron fist.  

**School education**

Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people in outlying areas remain unanimous in their concern that the European schooling system is failing their communities. The phasing out of “two-way” education in favour of a wholly European approach conducted entirely in English is only the tip of the iceberg. Too few Aboriginal teachers, poor encouragement and support for indigenous teacher training programs and lack of infrastructure resources at every level mean that outlying schools cannot claim to be delivering equitable education. Poor attendance, minimal retention rates past primary school and rare completions of high school, let alone further education, speak for themselves. (Personal conversations with teachers and parents in the areas, with delegates at National Aboriginal Studies Conferences 1993-2000, and Garma 2000). The issue of education remains on the ATSIC front burner.

**Material production**

'Material production' by most Central Australian Aboriginal people is still for community domestic and ceremonial purposes but groups in some centres also supply the commercial arts and tourism industries. Objects made in traditional Central Desert communities, and specifically by Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara speaking groups, are usually simple and functional objects carved from wood (Brokensha: 1987; Isaacs: 1984) including items such as bowls and digging sticks, small animal carvings and both decorative and functional tools and weapons. The larger, more elaborate ceremonial objects are rarely handed over to dealers and agents and it is a moot point whether they are aware of their existence. I have seen and worn objects in ceremonies that are jaw-dropping in their magnificence, but I have never seen them in a gallery or retail outlet.

Evident since European contact (through appropriation, trade and government handouts) is the use of metal tools and fencing wire heated up to burn the distinctive line patterns into
decorative wooden objects. At Pukatja (Ernabella) there have been attempts since the early 1960s to introduce other kinds of crafts, including screen printing on fabric (Hilliard: 1964, and personal experience). In terms of carving, local work is comparatively 'plain', the nature of the wood itself and the skill of the carver to recreate the animal shape being the main feature. Most work is still done 'by hand' in centres like Mimili, Fregon and Pipalyatjara, but more recent technological changes involve the use of electrical power tools, even lathes and the setting up of small workshops. Issues of 'authenticity' and 'copyright' are currently being debated, linked into the tourist economy on one hand and Australian law and traditional lore on the other (Janke: 1999).

Since the 1950s, styles and techniques adapted from rock art and body painting attracted the attention of the international art world and the Australian tourist industry (McCulloch: 1999). Aboriginal desert 'dot art' from other desert groups such as found in Papunya, Yuendumu or Lajamanu (Allman, J. & Taylor, L., eds. 1990; Berndt, Berndt and Stanton: 1992; Myers: 2002) is very distinctive. The Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people did not produce elaborate 'dot' technique paintings (a relatively recent innovation) in acrylic paint on board and canvas until the 1990s. Such contemporary painting as came from that area seemed to be more reliant of recognisable images and blocks of colour but the style seems to be changing. A 1993 publication of a range of Central Australian paintings and stories by Pitjantjatjara people published by the Nganampa Health Council (H.A.L.T.1993) show realistic elements not often seen in the more familiar 'abstract' paintings of the Warlpiri, Arrente and Pintupi people. It is also noticeable that in collections or books on Aboriginal traditional art, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara work has fewer examples than other groups. (Bardon: 1979; Sutton: 1988; Berndt et al: 1992) Their rich ecological 'histories' are told in their elaborate inma performances instead, where complex costumes, head-dresses, body painting, ritual objects (some of them very large), sand sculptures and paintings and map-making are the most important symbolic forms. These are not usually conserved, their transient existence having little or no meaning outside the performances.

**Food sources**

Central Desert food sources are well documented. The range is not large and very few people live entirely 'off the land' these days, supplementing their diet with tea, flour and sugar and, increasingly, more nutritious walypalitja mai (non meat) and kuka (meat). Food was originally supplied as welfare handouts at settlements, missions and depots by Europeans, in return for land appropriation and, in some cases, as wages (Hetzel and Frith: 1978). This led to a massive decline in Aboriginal health but also had added consequences of undermining people's relationships with their country, alienating them from their ceremonies and their totemic affiliations, especially important increase rituals (Myers: 1986; Rose: 1991...
and 1996). Now Aboriginal people in small settlements can buy a wide range of supermarket goods from local refrigerated stores (shipped in trucks up from Adelaide or down from Alice), preserved in tins and bottles and cooled by diesel-powered refrigeration. There is increasing commitment at government levels in encouraging hunting and gathering practices, the eating of natural foods and traditional ways of healing both physical and psychic ills (Petchkovsky: 1991; San Roque: 1999) as a way of combating a range of serious chronic illnesses. These include diabetes and heart disease, depression and schizophrenia but few funded programs assist the implementation of such ideas. (Bryce 1986 and 1992)

Bush foods are still prized by Anangu and are very much a part of ritual activities designed to build up the numbers or plants and animals now that grazing is no longer such a problem. Feral rats, cats, pigs and foxes are being systematically hunted out in some areas - often for food. Large and small native mammals, birds, reptiles and insects in their various life-cycle stages comprise a basis of desert diets, along with protein-rich seeds. Leaves, roots and fruits of desert growing plants are eaten, both cooked and raw. There was previously no sustained indigenous fruit or vegetable cultivation practice, a situation which is changing as the women particularly get involved in small-scale farming, however this is not pursued very vigorously in outlying areas due to lack of irrigation. Kalotas (1982, 1984 and 1986) and Clarke (1985a, 1985b, 1986 and 1987) have researched the use of plants and animals as food and medicine in desert communities very extensively. However, most of the literature on desert plants and animals doesn't pay more than passing attention to their place in Aboriginal performances. Greater information about animal behaviour and habitat may appear in the verses and dances of Aboriginal ceremonies than the scientific literature, a fact that has rarely been acknowledged by natural scientists - who rarely go to the ceremonies for information.

Medical research teams were tackling health problems systematically with European-style health education and diet programs by the 1980s and 1990s (see for instance, Northern Territory Department of Health: Health Indicators in the Northern Territory, 1986; HALT: 1993), but the change in the Federal Government meant many programs were axed and the policy of pro-activity virtually ceased (Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Women’s Health Council Meeting: 2000). Despite many excellent studies done (Honari: 1993; San Roque: 1998; 2000, personal conversation), most were never implemented. In 2000, it does not seem that much has changed despite a succession of Governments whose rhetoric is more remarkable than their action. Delivering services on the ground requires far more commitment than compiling reports in Canberra.19

Pit Council

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
An administrative company, the *Pitjantjatjara* Council (or Pit Council), located at Alice Springs, was set up in 1981. It now influences a wide range of policy and practice in the Northern Territory and has wide political powers. The Council gives official permission for non-Aboriginal people to enter *Pitjantjatjara* lands, without which all non-Aboriginal led research would be impossible. In recent years it has exercised its rights to exclude people it feels speak adversely about *Pitjantjatjara* business. The Northern Territory and Queensland State Governments are presently seeking to curtail the powers of these land councils (Yunupingu: Garma: 2000).

### 6.2. Visiting the Mimili community

**Getting there**
Our visits to the Mimili community were always epic journeys that seemed to 'just happen' at the time and seem unbelievably difficult in hindsight. To this day, I do not know how we sustained them two or three times a year, over five years. Our expeditions required meticulous preparation: organising cameras and film, audio-visual equipment and tapes, clothing and personal effects, camping and wet weather gear, rucksacks, medical supplies and mosquito repellent, sunglasses, boots and hats. We needed entry permits, several kinds of bookings for trains, planes, buses and car parking, diverse insurances and emergency phone numbers for everyone. We needed to take all the food we were going to eat. We had no experience at all in fieldwork and relied on the advice of Cath Ellis, Hugh Lovesy and Ian Knowles.

With a dozen or so students in train on each visit, a range of assorted colleagues (invited and uninvited) and ourselves in various stages of stress and confusion, we hurtled to and from Mimili season after season. In a mosaic of memories of all the visits, I recall the dawn drives from Penrith to Mascot, the split-second plane connections, the recriminations all round when things went wrong: the lost luggage, the lost students, lost tickets. I slept through the long, expensive plane trips to Alice Springs and back (often not direct flights, taking twice as long) but recall the heat of tarmac and town, the rush to buy two weeks of provisions in the short gap between Ansett arrival and Greyhound departure, the cramped conditions on the bus and the whingeing about the non-existent air conditioning. Arrivals at dusk at Indulkana were always magical, miles from nowhere, with the American and German tourists on the bus boggling as, that first time, we got off in a restricted Aboriginal Reserve - fourteen performers with far too much personal luggage, five sets of stilts and eighteen boxes of long-life milk, fresh, dried and tinned foodstuffs and secret herbs and spices to make them all taste good.
And no one to meet us at the desolate, darkening Indulkana bus stop because the new Toyota had blown its spare tyre and the truck was a snail. And the drive to Mimili along teeth-rattling corrugated roads in utter moonless blackness pierced only by the truck headlights, perched on the back of a truck, clutching our luggage and our vegetables in temperatures below zero and the sky full of bits of star-glass. We arrived at midnight. It was eighteen hours since we had left Penrith. We were numb with fatigue. I am sure we must have had a cup of tea. I don't remember.

When we woke up we were in a different world.

"Don't wander too far" warned Hugh. "There are many places you won't be able to go. They'll let you know where later."

**Day by day**

The air was clear and sharp on that first morning and even when it got hot in the middle of the day, it didn't lose the crispness. We ate breakfast in silence singly or in small groups, as we woke up, then unpacked, chatted, had a nap in the afternoon, testing the grass in Hugh's backyard. A motorbike went past, its rough rumble and dusty wake shattering the illusion of time standing still. We were too late to see the rider. The sun went down in the spectacular display we came to expect every day. Unknown birdcalls filled our ears; some wild horses came up to the fences to be fed. A brown snake was ushered off the premises and we squashed some enormous red-backed spiders under the verandah railing. Sam Pumani dropped by in the mid afternoon, appearing suddenly, seated under a tree by a pool of water in the driveway left over from recent heavy rain. He chatted quietly to us, promising serious action tomorrow. Hugh showed some of the boys how to start the diesel engine. We cooked and ate again, showered, listened to some of Hugh's new CD recordings and went to bed early. For the first day we simply wandered aimlessly about the homestead and took in the landscape.

The old Everard Park farmhouse was the home of the community advisor: our host, the laconic, enormously generous and ever-philosophic Hugh Lovesy. Ramshackle and without more than basic amenities, the house and yard accommodated us all - inside in sleeping bags on foam mattresses and airbeds and outside in sleeping bags in tents. We all agreed to be very neat. With fourteen of us and Hugh, and later Ian, his son Ben and an Adelaide music student, Scott, there was no hope of hot water for showers unless you were one of the first six up in the morning. Trouble was, with all the performance and painting up we needed two showers a day each. It was better outside under the hose!
Just up the road was the ‘village’. We became very familiar with the Mimili village over the years, dropping in and out at regular intervals. Every morning we walked up to the store and passed the time of day with whoever was around and in that way we got invited to all the performances - other than the ‘secret’ business and, later, even that. If we didn’t go up to the store, by lunchtime one or more of the Mimili people would drop in for a kapati, and a chat.

There were few other visitors and most were unwelcome. We were there to dance, not to check up on some tedious government protocol, or check the children’s eyes and we often became allies in ‘routing the enemy’. A degree of disgust was often expressed by the Mimili people in their dealings with government agents, many of who they knew to be racist, cruel, ignorant and narrow minded. For a certain plump, officious education officer, (a kind of regional school inspector who dropped in from time to time to check up on who was going to school regularly and who was wagging it) they had no time at all. The inspector came for lunch in 1988 at Hugh Lovesy’s house, where I was cooking lunch. Several Mimili people, who were lounging around drinking tea, chewing the fat (and the tobacco) with the theatre lecturers and students, got up immediately, squirting tobacco juice in the sand as they left, wordlessly. “Dirty buggers, aren’t they?” the inspector said affably. The students and other staff followed them. It was an awkward lunch with just the three of us and enough food for fifteen. David Umala commented later on the inadequacy of the education in Mimili,

That inspector bloke got no Lore for us. Kids learn nothing about Lore in that school. We got our own Lore. We teach our own kids.

Language
We had a language problem but it was significantly less that it had been in Penrith. Most of us spoke some Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara, which are closely related. Lots of the young Mimili people spoke good English and most of the old people spoke some. In Mimili there are also instances of intermarriages between people speaking different Aboriginal languages, such as Arrente, and one European Australian woman was married to a Mimili man. The issue of language is a big one and people talk about it continually. The local dialects are changing. Pitjantjatjara, with its incorporation of many English words, is becoming more widely spoken, especially among the younger people (Goddard: 1985; 1992) who think Yankunytjatjara is ‘old-fashioned’. When we learned any new ‘language’ it was always taught in Pitjantjatjara, although we were sometimes taught individual Yankunytjatjara terms as well especially in the context of the inma, which was (they told us) in ‘old language’.

Association by language, however, is a narrow way to classify Aboriginal people. This was made clear when, in defining ‘visiting groups’ from Amata and Fregon, the Mimili description
of a group always included an allusion to the main ceremonies with which people were associated - for instance, ‘waru people’, ‘mala people’, ‘ngapari people’, while we were ‘maku people’. All of these imply having responsibility for a set of ceremonies and duties connected to sacred sites. On other occasions people were ‘located’ either by mention of a specific sacred site such as the ‘Antara people’, which implied totemic affiliation but, in the case of an exogamous marriage, might not. Sometimes the definition was linked to non-ceremonial location, a dwelling place near a river, an old cattle station or a bore, as in the case of the ‘Blue Hills people’, or the ‘Finke River people’, or distinguished by their periodic settlement in a small European established establishment, for instance the 'Mimili people' or the 'Ernabella people'. In almost every case, the most favoured association is related to totems, sacred sites and ceremonies and, as people are affiliated with more than one site, knowledge of the context of the reference is always necessary.

I never heard any Central Desert people refer to themselves as 'Aboriginal' or 'Australian' or 'South Australian' but as anangu, meaning "a person belonging to this place", "this place" being quite localised. It is quite rare to hear people refer to each other in conversation by their linguistic groups such as Pitjantjatjara, although the name Anangu Pitjantjatjara (that is: people who speak Pitjantjatjara and all that implies) is used when operating in big political groups, especially with Europeans. While the preference for broad categorisation of people by a language has some currency in European sociology and anthropology (for it also implies shared ontologies and eptistemologies) it has the practical effect in Aboriginal ethnography of separating people from physical environments and encourages generalisations and logocentricity. It implies that their spoken language is the main way Central Desert people claim identity and communicate. In fact, stronger ties exist in terms of totemic relations; performed ceremony; shared sustenance sources; sacred sites and topography; connections with ancestral beings; related iconographies and objects. Most Central Desert people I know speak several localised dialects and a couple of related languages equally well and often. Their Pitjantjatjara -ness' could hardly be reduced to a single set of phonemes. People also used other kinds of unspoken 'languages' such as hand sign language. As time passed, individual friendships and tacit performance relations sprang up which overrode the initial 'them' and 'us' based on verbal language. There are people we liked to dance with regardless of their verbal abilities, and the conversations we had were of a different order.

Access to sites

This is our land. We all live here. Men, women, and tjitji - all live together. People speak together, do ceremony - Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara - other language sometimes, English, we all live here. Over there Amata, Fregon, Ernabella (big arm sweeps,

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
indicating general direction north and north-west) - all one people, y'know? All do ceremony together. University people too, we all do ceremony together, here, at my camp (just outside of Mimili), inma mulapa (a true ceremony). Antara (the most sacred site in the area for the inma maku). We visit that land, eh? Go tomorrow, next day tjinguru (maybe), go to that maku place. Other place too - long long walk (laugh), don't worry, we drive the Toyota, the big truck too. Get there quick. Yeah! inma mulapa. Secret place for men, for women. Inma pulka. Big one, lots of people (getting dramatic) inma pulka! Tonight! My camp! After tea. (Sam Pumani: August, 1996)

All Mimili people have a pre-occupation with ceremony and, as they live close to their sacred sites and along the original 'songlines', it is possible to practice a ceremonially focused life with very little difficulty. Most of the time it can be done without the need to travel long distances. Many Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara speaking people have had unbroken access to their original lands and sacred sites and they have sustained ceremonies which have been virtually unchanged by European contact. However, it is interesting how much influence the Pitjantjatjara 'immigrants' have had on Yankunytjatjara ceremonies and vice versa. Hugh Lovesy said that he thought the Pitjantjatjara were more 'aggressive' than the Yankunytjatjara and had in fact 'colonised' them, socially and culturally, to a great extent.

To an outsider this was difficult to see at first but, when we thought about it, a Pitjantjatjara man was at that time considered the 'owner' or 'head songman' of what was a local (or at least a regional) section of the maku ceremony although his wife, Milatjari and her female relations, Yankunytjatjara women, 'owned' the main sacred sites. The inma maku, then, actually 'belonged' to them, although Pitjantjatjara-speaking Sam was 'the boss' of the inma performance, the 'director'. There was a distinct split in community opinion about that and a number of Yankunytjatjara men and women also maintained a high profile - such as Pompi Everard who, while very gentle and unassuming, was present at every ceremony with his wife Molly, a very strong and active women's leader.

Sam was 'director' of the performances of the Mimili sections but had no claims to the sites. It seemed as though Sam had been involved with maku ceremonies in his old homeland in the Western Desert and might have assumed a leadership role in Mimili on the strength of that also, although it would have been a different section of the narrative. Later, mainly through both research into Spencer and Gillen's work (1899) and while travelling in a truck to from Uluru to Mimili with Hugh and Pompi, and later from Mimili to Uluru with Sam's daughter Margaret and her husband Shane (1988), we found that the inma maku story was much more widespread than Mimili. It was indeed performed right across both the Central and Western Deserts.
That Pitjantjatjara speaking people still live in the Western Desert performing related ceremonies can be attested by a recent series of video recordings made in 1998 and 1999 by the community at Irrunytju (Iruntju Media: 1998/1999). They claim close relationship with a number of Mimili Pitjantjatjara people. There was frequent talk (and some action) about 'going back' amongst Mimili Pitjantjatjara people, especially among the elderly.

However, participation in the originally Yankunytjatjara versions/sections of the ceremonies was extremely high and many aspects of Pitjantjatjara ceremonies had been incorporated into not just ritual but social life (Hugh Lovesy, Sam Pumani and David Umala - personal communication, Mimili: 1986, 1989, 1993). Some Pitjantjatjara people also came from desert areas further north and northwest: elders would sit and talk for hours about the 'old country' and recreate the far-off sacred sites in words, songs and sand maps. Reasons for leaving the Western Desert always concerned food and water. The story goes that there was a big drought early this century and some people moved east to survive. Yankunytjatjara people remained prominent however, and the most likely successor to Sam as songman was David Umala – possibly by the sheer strength of his performing skills and the large numbers of his family involved. It was not clear what his other family connections were.

So, a person can acquire relationships with a second locality by marriage, which was how Sam Pumani got to be wati tjilpi of the maku inma at Mimili. (Ian Knowles: 1986). Interestingly, his loyalties seemed more with his adopted Dreaming than with his original one although, well into his eighties, a year or two before his death in 1993, he retraced his steps and returned to his own homeland 'out west'. Also, friction between Sam and the local Yankunytjatjara people on this point of ownership as well as other matters was finally resolved in the early 1990s.

We found that there was a third way to acquire ownership. Both male and female elders belonging to one specific locality by birth will instruct a young person of either gender and from another family group in a second set of songs and stories. These young people will be admitted to knowledge of a second set of sacred sites, songs and objects, depending on age and, again, gender. This is very effective in ensuring 'rites and sites' are maintained by as wide a group as possible in very harsh circumstances. We came into this third category, although our chances of fulfilling our obligations were pretty remote. On the other hand, we now really care about those places and ceremonies and this in itself is an advantage. We could certainly be called as witnesses with knowledge in a dispute with, say, a State or Territory Government.
There had been some troubles with getting all the *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* land to the south back from European graziers and not all sites were accessible to us. One area was a very large, disused cattle property leased to a South Australian Liberal parliamentarian. In 1990 the long fence for this property boundary ran east to west next to the most southerly road to Blue Hills Camp and was still tightly maintained (personal experience). Despite the fact that very few cattle had ever been run there and none at all were there at that time, resistance to the transfer was fierce. There were several important sites there, people told me, that they were not allowed to visit. It was said that the lessee was interested in mining in the future and had spent a lot of money on legal fees and used his position in the Government to keep the land out of *Pitjantjatjara* hands. (personal conversation with elders and Hugh Lovesy, Mimili 1986 and 1990)

**Food sources connected to the *inma***

Despite the arid climate (about 250 mm annually of unreliable rainfall in unpredictable patterns) there is plenty of plant life. This includes grasses, some fruit trees, edible plants and seeds, eucalypts (some of which are giant river gums, despite the lack of water), acacia, and smaller types of vegetation on the plains, as well as the sand dunes and spinifex country. After good rainfall the country is transformed by broad, contrasting sweeps of brilliant wildflowers. A wide range of edible plants and vegetables grow prolifically for a short time. While not lush, it is clear that with good management the country would eventually support a sparse ‘hunting and gathering’ life again. We spent many hours wandering around with the women identifying various food sources and over the years we were there in a sufficiently different number of seasons to get an idea of the diversity of plant life. We heard many times the story that they didn't really think they would return completely to the old gathering life but that it was important to know that the foods were still there. They were an integral part of ritual activities and, should they disappear, the *inmas* would lose their relevance. Hamilton (1979a) gives a review of traditional food eaten in and around Mimili at that time and very little seems to have changed. Personal experience with the Mimili people from 1985 to 1990 didn’t include the regular gathering and eating of a big variety of local food, traditionally prepared. This was due to a number of circumstances that are now swinging back with changing attitudes to local food sources by European health workers, including improved awareness of the nutritional value of traditional foods - and also the kinds of foods the village store was offering.

All *inma* in Central Australia are likely to include sections for increase ceremonies and there are a great number of them. All Central Desert plants and wildlife appear somewhere in the song cycles, including the extinct ones, either as the focus for the ceremony or as 'bit players' implicit in the many stories of the ancestral beings and creation. Groups of verses -

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
both songs and dances - about the tracking, hunting, gathering, preparing and eating of food appear frequently. The relative scarcity of traditional foods was one of the reasons given for the increase ceremonies being such a focus at this time and why every section of the community was involved, especially to teach the children. Cathy Winfield's study (1982) is a good example of collaborative work to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge into school curricula and to acknowledge a community focus and concern about traditional foods. The book was one of the few useful items in the Mimili school library which, in 1987, was only just beginning to acquire texts in Aboriginal languages. Food is closely linked with natural medicine and the ways in which the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people use a variety of substances and techniques in the healing process are now being studied more closely.  

**Gender wars**

Keepers of the knowledge vary in their rights, responsibilities and claims to ownership. Women appear to be excluded from controlling *inmas* (in their open form at least) however within the women's secret ceremonies another point of view can be heard. Women originally knew the secrets about how to hunt *maku* and, in fact, *maku* hunting is still part of women's work. *Maku* are not even considered *kuka*, but *mai*, which supports their claim. The women assert that they hold the 'real dreaming' and that the men have appropriated the ceremonies in accordance with the prevailing example of European societal norms. One example was the women's version of important sections of the *inma maku*, about Kunanyanatutiny. She was a 'wise woman' who most unwisely told her lover the secrets of *maku* hunting. The men related a conflicting version to my colleague, Gordon (which he won't tell to me) but in it Kunanyanatutiny is a reviled as 'witch woman' or sorceress who sought to steal a man's life force. The Mimili women accuse the men of changing the story so the women appeared wicked and so that the love magic is no longer a threat to them (*miil-miil(pa) / wiil-wiil(pa) wiya*). The men could then keep the secrets about *maku* hunting they stole. The 'danger' referred to is sexual female power of the kind feared by the men, the kind that steals them from other men's company and makes them temporarily mad – but also the kind that loosens a woman's tongue and makes her betray 'women's business' to a man. This is seen as detrimental to the smooth running of the society. Both versions are 'secret' and we could relate to both versions. (Berndt, R. and C.: 1988, for male/female versions of other stories) It was interesting to be involved with a group of people who recognised similar problems between groups of men and women, and who dealt with them not by public magazine correspondence like "Dear Dorothy Dix" columns and private marriage guidance counselors but by dramatised public ceremonies. Conflicting views included the testimony of the men who acknowledged that the most sacred *maku* sites belonged to women. Indeed, three women - Militjari Pumani, Molly Everard and Angelina Wangka - were the ones who gave the
verbal ‘history’ of the sites and the relevance of their ownership and interrelationships at the most important of them - Antara.

The men have a history of imposing a large number of restrictions on women being privy to ‘men's business’ (including death, in the old days). The women seem to have accepted this outwardly but have constructed their own spiritual life. Not until the middle of the 20th century was this recognised, largely due to the experiences of women anthropologists like Phyllis Kaberry and Catherine Berndt. (See also Ellis: 1967a and 1967b; Hamilton: 1979a, 1987)

Men don’t care to have the same restrictions placed on them, however. (Berndt: passim; Meggitt: 1962; Bell: 1998; Hiatt: passim) Occasionally, performances are interrupted because the women become annoyed at the behaviour of the men who are arguing and spear rattling in true blokey fashion instead of sitting to sing and watch them. There are also times when the men shout at the women to “Hurry up the singing!” and to stop gossiping. None of this appeared as serious as it probably once was.

I did not have enough time in five years to sort out all the intricacies of inma ownership but in respect of the women’s body painting at least, no interference from the men was tolerated. A few men did seem able to comment on the style and accuracy of women’s dance steps and song words in open ceremonies. This became more interesting when men and women’s ‘versions’ of the same verse were performed in the same session and the body paintings and the steps said different things - history and herstory?

Other family ties
While traditional kinship relations in Mimili were theoretically maintained (Hamilton: 1979), other kinds of flexible social organisation and family arrangements are apparent. One man of around 50 had two wives - one of about his own age and her daughter (not his) together with all their children, who had an interesting range of relationships as a result. It seems that this was not quite acceptable in the community but the family was held in great respect. Nonetheless, with the man aspiring to the status of wati tjiili, eventually the younger woman left and married someone else, again causing a scandal. I discovered this when I asked some of the women how she was, after noticing her absence. This was a mistake. There was a lot of giggling and sarcastic comment; no one said outright what had happened. Later, one of the women took me aside and explained that she had married someone younger and had moved to ‘another country’. No one could decide which of the two scandals was the greater.

All the women were glad it wasn't the 'old days' where the law might have meant a greater punishment for the young woman and her father/husband and/or the young man. I gathered that the woman might have been penalised but not necessarily the men, or maybe all three would have been killed - nobody could agree. Or, considering the irregularity of the marriage
in the first place, some held the opinion that maybe it was a good thing she had left. The breakdown of community values was clearly demonstrated in the uncertainty. It was a bit like listening to my mother and aunts talking about the changes in European society once divorces became so easy.

Some couples marry under Christian/white law. While they lived within the traditional community structure, it was clear their marriages were 'different' in that respect, but that the kinship system was also still observed, more so among the older people. The women said that some younger people were using the 'white man's law' to avoid traditional marriage partners and that there were things to be said on both sides. Some of them would have changed their own situation if they could have and, in Mimili, the women's comments about their men were similar in many respects. The men who were currently admired were the 'go-ahead' men, the ones that some political clout and, although Aboriginal ngangkari - doctors and wisemen, community elders and inma leaders were held in high regard, they were considered too old and out of touch by the younger women to be 'available' or 'desirable' husbands. It is an interesting shift in the concept of power that could be said to be undermining the whole society in one way. But, if you listen to the women, it possibly offers ways of survival provided the 'go-ahead' men are also initiated and observe Aboriginal Law.

There was also the possibility of relations with the Nepean people. Hugh told me that one of the older Aboriginal men had inquired if I were free, since he fancied me. I was such a good worker to feed all those young people and do their washing every day. I was very moved by that. My own group certainly didn't seem to notice my fine domestic qualities.

There was an active 'women's camp' as well as a 'men's camp' and both groups conducted separate 'business'. These camps comprised two quite different social sub-ecologies, which will be explored to some extent in the performance analysis.

**Ceremonial links between communities**

With today's communications and fast transport, loyalties to more than one group can be sustained more actively than in the past. At a big open inma in 1987, people from Fregon and Amata joined in a festival of performance at Mimili, where about two hundred people shared their performances over three days. Many of the women who had been teaching us in Mimili turned out to have affiliations (both totemic and family) with other groups as well and danced with one or more of the visiting communities, which they said they often did at these big get-togethers. We could not (with one exception - waru (fire) verses because they were shared between all groups and linked the inma). This was because, the Mimili women said, we were 'only Mimili' and didn't know the songs or places from the other centres. This rule
was waived for me when I visited Mimili on my own and was taught songs and dances from another inma series by the older women. Active ‘belonging’ to more than one group was clearly desirable and the younger Mimili girls were encouraged to dance with the women (nyanpinyi) in more than just Mimili verses. Down the line, this practice is also having the effect of homogenising local differences in language, in ritual observance and in knowledge and practice of symbolic forms. Also, it is not so easy to maintain distinct differences in 'style' between communities who are only four hours down the track by Toyota when it was once a couple of day’s walk.

This had a further (and maybe not altogether desirable) ramification in 1989 when Ernabella Television was filming inma ngintaka, a blue tongue inma related to the maku, at Mimili. This program was to be shown by Imparja Television and was one in an early series of programs made to bring regional ceremonies to a wider audience of Aboriginal communities. The Mimili women insisted that I join them for the evening as I was a 'Mimili woman' and my dancing (nyanpinyi) was ‘just great’ (wirunya) even though I was not, strictly speaking, ‘knowledgable’ about the ngintaka (in either the nintini nor the kulini senses). When I suggested that this might not be a good idea as I was to all intents and purposes a visitor in Mimili (my Mutthi Mutthi Nana notwithstanding), they said no, it was a good thing and showed that the inma (this particular one, anyway) was for everyone. It was good for Mimili women to show neighbouring women that the ceremonies were important enough for visitors from the university to learn properly - Aboriginal or not - especially as it was going on television. The issue of me not ‘knowing’ about the inma ngintaka was brushed aside for this time, the cultural politics between communities outweighing the ritual rectitude. The Mimili women were not above sheer flattery to achieve their desire to put on a good show and I was sucked in. When we came to dance, it was what I had previously known as a maku dance. A bit of fast mental recall identified it as one of the crossing ceremonies that occurred at a busy inma piti we had visited. They might have let me know that but, in true Mimili style, let me find out for myself. When Aboriginal visitors arrived from other communities, each community sat and watched the performances of the other and made comments, despite the fact that some people took part in more than one community’s inma. These occasions were contingent on their ritual and totemic rights and obligations. The women, particularly, seemed to have affiliations outside the community, associated with the practice of marrying away from their birth family.

**Initiation**

After three years of sharing performances, some of the Nepean men were offered 'initiation.' This was at the same time daunting and appealing. The desire to 'know' more, however, was balanced by the knowledge that they could never really be a part of the Mimili community and
that it was quite dangerous to romance with notions of 'becoming' a *Pitjantjatjara* man - a *wati*. Our male colleagues were even less ready when it was explained them what was expected of a senior *Pitjantjatjara* man - a *wati pulka*. Several were already circumcised which was evidently a good start, but subincision was not an attractive proposition as they had witnessed the wet feet of any man who did not sit down to pee. As a woman, I was excluded from most of these conversations but 'men's business' came up quite frequently during our visits to Mimili and, on one occasion, the open *inma* was delayed for four days because of it. I understood from Hugh and Ian in 1988 that full male initiations were on the increase in the community. I was not aware if the women ever held up general proceedings for their ceremonies, but I saw no evidence of that.

The women never discussed female initiation in those terms with me or with any of the other Sydney women. Their awarding me the title of *minyma maiatja* in 1988 implied (I was told) it had already occurred, evidently because of my performance of certain ceremonies over time. This title is normally reserved for women with two or more children: while I had none of my own, they perceived my 'care' of my students in the same way they would the obligations of an 'Aboriginal-way' parent, compared with those of a 'blood' relative in the limited European family framework. In many Aboriginal traditional communities a 'tribal' father or mother can be even busier and more responsible than a blood mother. So there it is. It wasn't correct to ask, "Have I actually been initiated?" so I did the usual thing in the community and waited until understanding overtook me, which it did when I realised I was being asked to sit with and do ceremony with senior women. My 'not understanding' made it quite clear to me that I was still an outsider.

**History, knowledge and wisdom**

*Pitjantjatjara* 'history' (dissimilar in almost every respect to European 'history') is theoretically divided into two kinds knowledge - *tjukurpa* (dreaming, ancestral) and *mulapa* (true, real, now, actual, human) but without any functional division: the two are co-existent in practice. (Myers: 1986 and Morton: 1987) The ancestors in the *tjukurpa* determine customary behaviour and people in *mulapa* or 'now' time continues these traditions. The lore/law, *tjamuku*, is one lore/law 21 governing all time. "All lore/law is one", said Sam Pumani in Mimili in 1985. Status is related to levels of knowledge. The old men and women who are the most familiar with the land and who know the songs and rituals associated with the lore/law are still the most respected, despite the prominence of the younger, 'go-ahead' men in other matters. Elders dictate protocol and are deferred to on all points as well as in other areas of day-to-day community control which, anyway, are substantiated as being 'in the lore/law'. Palmer (1984: 128) makes the link between 'maturity' in terms of age and 'possession of religious knowledge’ and the power that gives to elders.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
Problems arise when something occurs which is not covered by the lore/law and not even the wisest elders have a strategy to cope. Alcohol abuse and petrol sniffing are two examples. Often now it is the middle-aged men who seem to make the decisions about new problems, those who have had the most contact with 'new' ways of life. This might eventually undermine the ritual authority of the elders but there were few signs of it in Mimili at that time (conversations with the Mimili women, and see also Edwards: 1987, Hiatt: 1984; Williams: 1988; San Roque: 1999; Dussart: 2000 and Johnson: 2001).

Every culture has its secrets and its levels of knowledge, much of which is revealed only within the coded contexts of symbolic representation. Two main kinds of learning were impressed upon us. One was kulini - which is the kind of learning one feels for oneself as part of a process of becoming wise. Kulini implies listening and consequently understanding what is said. It also implies a novice role - that of someone who listens attentively, with thorough processing and reflection on things learned from wiser people. The second kind was nintini, learning based on actual experience and achieving competence. It has overtones of learning by doing, but also is connected with 'school learning', being told something specific, finite fact. Each of these kinds of knowledge assumes that people will create 'personal constructs' (Kelly: 1965) both for themselves and for their relationships with their society and environment. Examples of the two different kinds of knowledge are when Sam explained a dance's relationship to the inma piti. We knew (kulini) what it meant in symbolic terms and will always think about it like that, but we also knew (nintini) how to do the dance because Molly taught us the steps. Nintini is concerned with recognising or recalling the steps and performing them correctly, kulini with understanding what they represent and their interrelationships with deeper meanings. This made a great deal of difference to recognising the kind of knowledge we were dealing with from time to time. When Sam hissed at us in the middle of an inma, "ngayula wapar kulila!" we knew there was something important we should be taking notice of - and weren't. But if we forgot the paint-up for a particular dance it was a case of nintini wiya - dopey - and we had to ask someone. Also, it is permissible to ask about things in the nintini category but not usually in the kulini category.

Ritual knowledge is accumulated over many years of participation in an Aboriginal community. However, it was not always indicated that we were being told or shown anything. We either were ready for the next phase, in which case we recognised it ourselves, or we didn't, in which case we missed out at that time. After two years it was clear who had listened properly (kulini) and who had not. Sometimes it was many months or even years before the penny dropped - even for those who had been listening. The cross-referencing of knowledge is complex and it is necessary to keep all the threads in one's head to make the connections. It
is of some use to write things down or to tape conversations and songs as an aide memoire but more than three quarters of the information is encoded in auditory, visual, spatial or kinaesthetic languages. Use is made also of olfactory and gustatory signs and references and the jolts they gave to the consciousness when they all worked simultaneously were at times overwhelming. The result of this was that we started to question the ways we taught performance to our young people and to address in a practical way some of the pedagogical issues raised by musicologist Cath Ellis (1985).

There are 'levels of knowledge' for Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people in Mimili, secret and associated with particular rites not open to anyone other than initiates or candidates for initiation. This is not very different to European culture although for some reason European academics think they have a right to know everything about Aboriginal people but wouldn't dream of poking into the lives of a European priest or brain surgeon.

**Totems**

A tjukur, or 'special Dreaming ancestor', is everyone's birthright and with it people gain other rights - over the land, and the songs and dances connected with that land. It is the duty of the elders to pass on such knowledge as a person has a 'right' to (provided they are also 'ready'). Totems give social behaviour focus and definition and provide a social support mechanism. Children often have the same totemic ancestor as their parents but not always. In this way, song cycle and land ownership tend to remain in groups whose collective job it is to maintain the rituals to maintain the land, sometimes resulting in family hegemonies. Part of this maintenance is a continual referencing to ancestors and sites by means of songs, a bit like having the radio on all day, continually “singing the country”, as Sam used to say.

Anything can trigger off a song - a slight reference in conversation, a deliberate mentioning of some aspect of the inma, the arrival of a visitor of the same totemic group or a meeting of an established local group. It can happen passing a landmark while travelling or seeing an animal or bird during the hunting and gathering of food, while feeding a child or fixing a car. I was shopping at the Mimili store and a woman with a small child was singing inma maku as she bought tinned baby food - perfectly understandable if you know that maku are considered the best baby food of all. Someone from a different totemic group might not sing that song in that circumstance, or on the other hand it might have been a coincidence into which we read meaning because we were sensitised to maku at the time.

During one stay in Mimili, we found ourselves in the middle of a ‘deep and meaningful’ all-day discussion about whether ceremonial performances could be marketed ‘with integrity’ (it was a rainy day with no possibility of inma). The other women and I made literally gallons of tea and dozens of pancakes with a variety of fillings while the men talked. The Mimili women sat
on the edges of the male discussion (in which some of the pushier young Sydney women tried unsuccessfully to take part). Well into the afternoon, after everyone had been fed and the Sydney women were sitting to one side with the Mimili women and we were dozing off in front of the fire, I picked up a *Scientific American* (1987, exact reference lost) in which there was an article with exceptionally clear photographs of all the stars – *killipitjuta* - in the southern night skies. Lily and Audrey Umula pointed at the pictures and were clearly amazed to see something with which they were familiar in such a boring-looking magazine. They picked out various constellations - some the same as the European groupings. We heard some of the *Pitjantjatjara* star names and some of the stories, which I was not in a position to document without being extremely rude. While the men continued to talk far into the night, the women (when it got dark) went outside and found the stars in a now clear sky. Our revolving constellation maps (yes, we brought them with us!) were refused - Mimili women didn’t need them. We lay on our backs on a tarpaulin for hours swapping star stories and following the ancestors across the skies.

It seems that there were once numbers of *inmas* about star ancestors, very few of which are performed now. In the old days they were highly relevant as they were, among other things, accurate night road maps during the walkabouts in the desert. With graded roads and Toyotas their use by people under 25 is unusual. Middle aged and old people know them but the young people and children know only the most obvious groupings, like *kunkgarangkara* - the Seven Sisters (the Pleiades in the Greek cosmos). None of the *inmas* we experienced over the years had more than passing references to stars or star ancestors - but our attention was, after all, focused on holes in the ground, like good little *maku*!

**Sacred and secular**

Overall, it was hard to see any difference between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ in the daily lives of the Mimili people, except in respect of dealings with Christian church services and government departments. One Sunday we were in the middle of the *inma kalaya* (emu) and suddenly everything stopped and the whole atmosphere changed. A Fregon man (only five minutes ago dancing the role of the mother *kalya* with a flock of *akalpa* being danced by three small boys) took a *Pitjantjatjara* translation of the New Testament out of his back pocket. Everyone sat down quietly, fanned flies and listened in the heat while he read from the Bible then gave a short sermon on how Jesus was a *wati pulka* and needed to be listened to and obeyed. There was no participation, no response, although I know the Mimili people have a big repertoire of Christian hymns that they can sing in heartbreaking harmonies. When he had finished, he put the book back into his pocket and there was a short prayer. We then got back into the *inma kalaya* again and the spirit of the emu took over the camp once more.
When we asked him later (very politely and in a roundabout way) about this almost surreal digression, he said that Jesus was a 'big boss' for the white men and he should not be left out of things. Then he sat down and started to explain the Pitjantjatjara religious framework for the whole of the area and how the various inma (including Christianity) linked together and which were the most important. He was joined by several of the other older men and they allowed us to film for about an hour while they explained, by means of discussion and very complex sand drawings interspersed with snatches of song, the basis of the inma connections and the way a person from their world identified with his or her totem and therefore each inma. The inmas were the focus for making this belief system 'real' - mulapa. It was in the ceremonies that they were made manifest, acted out and re-affirmed in a tangible form. Christianity however lacked roots and relevance in Mimili. It had no maps, and no connection with the ecology of their everyday lives although many people had embraced its teachings because it offered (or seemed to offer) hope of a better life without doing very much. They realised that by adopting it they got access to many other things from the missionaries. The irony of this was not lost on Sam.


**Dress**

Some Mimili people have European-style pierced ears and wear earrings, especially the younger women, whose hair is usually shortish or caught up in a band or a scarf. A sprinkling of ‘Afro’ or Rasta-influenced hairstyles can be seen, including dreadlocks, mostly among the men. Some men have tattoos, some men and women had ritual and decorative body scars - but very few of them are under 25. Some men wear a red stretch headbands, some tie red cotton scarves around their foreheads; many man and women make headbands from woven red, yellow and black wool in a variety of patterns, from very simple multi-stranded plaits to elaborate macramé weaving anchored on the big toe. We all learned to do this and made them for ourselves.

Choice of everyday clothing is more varied now that travelling second-hand clothes trucks call on a regular basis. When Mimili people were in Sydney, the local second hand clothing shops in Penrith were a highlight of their visit, since very few people can afford new clothes even in the cheapest supermarkets. Items of clothing tended to do the rounds in the community and the Sydney students, when visiting Mimili, found they needed to be prepared to lose anything that wasn’t tied to their bodies, including Reeboks - a circulating of resources. Women almost always wore dresses and skirts; some younger girls had shorts. The men favoured trousers and shirts. Knitted and crocheted hats were common but socks
were not. An area of style we might have influenced was the wearing of sarongs. Most of the Nepean people wore them, male and female, even the middleaged ‘elders’. On the third visit, we saw one or two and on the fourth visit several were in use among the young people. A practical garment for the climate, it might take off, associated with the crafts of batik and screen-printing at Pukatja (Ernabella). Considering the 45°C+ heat, the sarong doesn’t seem like cultural subversion of too great a significance compared to old Fletcher Jones suits and K Mart cardigans.

Under clothes are rarely worn by men or women. It was noticed however that women from some other communities wore bras (usually black) when performing. The Mimili women were pretty disparaging about it and said they weren't 'right', because you couldn't see the paint. We gathered this bra thing was partly costuming and partly due to the influence of missionaries. We realised that this had had a very adverse effect on the young girls of the community who were also seized with modesty between the ages of about 10 and 25. They settled down after a couple of children, we were told, and painted up properly. On our fourth visit to Mimili, in early 1987, one of the (Christian) school teachers said we were setting a bad example to the young Mimili women by ‘immodest dancing’. We explained why we weren't. She was unimpressed but thankfully she was later ‘sacked’ by the community and replaced by a Pitjantjatjara speaking teacher so it all turned out well. Clothing regulations are being constantly negotiated as different standards apply in towns and in the homelands.

Although most Mimili people now are fully clothed in European style once they go to school, even to the point of being overdressed, elders told stories of the days in the 1920s, ‘30s, ‘40s and even ‘50s when they only had skins for garments and carried fire sticks to keep warm in the winter. They said they believed they were better off today with clothes, because they didn't need the dogs to keep warm at night. And it was often a four-dog night! With clothes come additional work tasks, however. The problem of clothes washing is a difficult one to address in a desert country and mostly they are worn and discarded rather than washed. Also, the water is hard and the pink dust pervasive.

While dancing in an open inma, most clothing is dispensed with, other than knickers and swimming trunks when Europeans are present, and sturdy footwear. One of the most extraordinary sights was seeing all of Mimili, maku walkatjara - in full maku paint - and Reeboks. They said it was because of the tjilka, exceptionally sharp bindis that could indeed pierce even thick rubber-soled joggers. The knickers and swimming trunks are dispensed with when Europeans are absent or when the ceremony is an inma pulka - or when it's ‘just men’ or ‘just women’.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
Sharing paint was something we all enjoyed. It is a wonderful tactile experience to be painted up; with so many extra people it became a real concern that we would run out of ochres. When the Mimili people visited Sydney for the first exchange, they brought extra ochre with them but for so many people it was insufficient. After some thought and discussion with the women I suggested we use acrylic finger-paint in the right colours. They were a little apprehensive but agreed to try it and our visit to the local art shop was a highlight of the visit. Derivan was a huge success and had the added benefit of being able to be peeled off later, making a second paint-up possible within a short time without washing. Whenever we went to Mimili after that, the first thing the women asked me was, “Have you brought the paint?” They do not use it in their ceremonies when we are not there, but recognised that it saved everyone a lot of extra work when there were many guests who don’t know where the ‘real thing’ is to be found. After we leave, the children take the leftovers to school. We used only the natural ochre colours - never blues, purples, crimsons, pinks or greens.

Buildings and living accommodation
There was a small collection 'houses' - a couple of weatherboard European residences for government education and health workers and a big run-down homestead shared by the community adviser and the store keeper and his young family (and some of us). The village itself has a general store (the social hub) with a large coolroom and refrigerators, a medical centre in a mobile home; a school; a community office open to everyone (with a radio, a telephone and some office equipment); a big storage shed; the remains of a garage with a working petrol pump and a small amenities block with bore water and showers. The older houses built for the Mimili people in the village, probably in the 60s, by some government department officials who believed they had provided 'adequate housing', were 3m x 3m corrugated iron topped, Besser block dog-boxes and were completely inappropriate. Most of them were uninhabitable and full of rubbish; some had been totally dismantled. Mimili people, except when it rained, rarely used them.

Most people actually lived 'out of town' in moveable camps consisting of a number of wiltjas. Some had tents, tarpaulins and caravans that provided privacy and refuge. Close by there is always a place where ritual 'business' is planned and conducted. In and around Mimili, and in centres with bores, there were mixed camps, and men and women's camps. This practice was being eroded by the construction and occupation of new larger cement-block houses in some of the homelands, like Blue Hills Bore. Large families with a set of grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles and their children and children's children occupied them for long periods, leaving only for distant ceremonies. The younger parents (in their early 20s) seemed to expect to set up on their own houses with their own children and expressed a
desire not to have the problems and obligations of the extended family, nor to live in the traditional outdoor camps. The active ritual life still creates ties that transcend the desire for an air-conditioned bungalow and a nuclear family, although there is every indication this will change.

Some younger people had moved away altogether, for instance to Alice Springs and, while they always remained a part of the community, it was clear from a number of conversations with the women that ‘proper’ work, material comfort and better health care were key factors. In 1989, some of the old people were moving, too. Kanytji, well into his 80s, was having a house built on the road out to Blue Hills Bore. Sam often spoke about having his ‘own’ house and indeed, on several occasions, our inma activities were conducted at one of Sam’s camps at Blue Hills or just up the track from Mimili.

We had a long conversation with the women one afternoon about this housing business and they spat tobacco juice in the sand in disgust and said they were never listened to when housing was discussed. They then described the kinds of houses they would like, nothing like the concrete bunkers going up everywhere. We talked about the kinds of houses in other places in the world that had a close association with the environment, like rural villages in South East Asia. Many of the features - such as split-level roofs with breezeways for cooling and sliding wall sections for wind and weather control - were of great interest. They shrugged off any suggestion that they might get together to demand better housing, design some themselves and perhaps get an agent to represent them to the Government Housing organisations.

Lily: No use. We been asking and asking.
Audrey: Because some people – they pull down the old houses (gesture to the dog boxes) a long time ago, they say we can't have any more houses unless they’re them concrete ones.
Lily: The men like concrete ones but us ladies want big ... (arm gesture sweeping out from eye level indicating breadth)
Audrey: Verandah. All round the house. Bathroom. Kitchen. Microwave. TV.
Lily: Houses men’s business. (spit)
Other women: (Dissatisfied grumbles of agreement. More spitting)

Although I am aware that new housing programs take more account of such things in the new millennium, the results are very slow for most remote settlements. Living conditions have improved very little for most Australian Aboriginal people not located in an urban area.
**Personal possessions**

This is the area in which external societal changes might be seen but, despite years of contact and exposure to the material culture of Europeans, people at Mimili (like most remote people) do not 'own' a great deal by European standards. There is no doubt that the younger people feel differently about this and it is a big cause for disagreements between generations. Hamilton (1979) and Brokensha (1987) discuss traditional 'material culture' in some detail but in the 1990s the situation has changed radically with the promise of 'real' money flowing into the community. Access to mass media has changed expectations and more and more young people are experiencing the 'pleasures' of technology and urban life. Young people want video games and cool clothes, teenagers want cars and mobile phones, the married couples want air conditioning, microwaves and refrigerators and the community council wants computers, sophisticated software and a satellite linked phone.

Personal possessions for older people still tend to be limited to hunting and digging tools, items for the preparation and consumption of food, weapons, and ritual objects and paint. Brokensha (1987: 19) gives a list for Pipalyatjara which is also reasonably representative for Mimili in the early 1990s, and Hamilton (1979a) describes a range of material possessions for Mimili which vary little today. Added to this are more recent plastic items, like large food and water containers, which are favoured because they don't break or rust. A negative aspect is that they never break down at all and Mimili and the campsites are littered with the eternal plastic and aluminium debris of an urban European lifestyle. In 1989, a group of women started a community clean-up service at which they all took turns and things were 'improving'. As they pointed out, 'Aboriginal' stuff eventually goes away, 'white junk' sticks around and makes a mess. It was quite true: all the junk lying around was packaging, aerosols, bottles, and supposedly biodegradable items like 'disposable' nappies, that is, 'white junk'.

**Manufacturing for profit**

Older Mimili people make a large range of tools and artefacts for their own use and for sale. Brokensha (1987) again has observed phenomena for Pipalyatjara that hold true for Mimili. In addition some of the women were learning to screen print fabric and T-Shirts at Pukatja and to sew garments to be sold at a series of outlets set up for the purpose. During our time at Mimili we saw this form of economy-related art manufacture escalate to a possibly lucrative business with many discussions taking place about how it could be increased. They gave us some samples to take away with us. The Mimili people are not painters and do not produce works such as come out of Yuendumu, Papunya or Lajamanu, but the crafted wood, hot-nail inscribed figurines made by the women are alive with the essence of the animals they represent and retain their 'authenticity' in the sense that they are very personal creations and are not yet mass produced, (the example included is from Fregon). Most have stories.
embedded in their manufacture and indeed they are often made while telling a story. I have never seen a human represented in a carving. Some of the men tried their hand, and were very proud of their achievements, evidently being traditionally limited in the past to making personal adornments, tools and weapons (conversations with Mimili women). A crafts industry as such has had a start-stop-start history since 1948 at Pukatja (Hilliard: 1968 and Brokensha: 1987). It seems set for survival and growth in Mimili, responding as it sees fit to the market without undermining the artists' needs and desires and without compromising their aesthetics. The whole process is open to gross exploitation however and the people fight to retain control over their production and be paid realistic prices by dealers.

Recent controversies about world wide profiteering from Aboriginal art have brought the matter to a head and at the time of writing the Federal Government is re-considering copyright and royalty laws to ensure Aboriginal artists and communities whose work is resold at a high profit benefit from this. (Myers: 2002)

**Motor vehicles**

Old cars are strewn across Central Australia, lost and abandoned. One of the features of Mimili is the car graveyard, tucked around between two hills about two kilometers out of town. All 'dead' vehicles are towed there to rust away in perpetuum. When I first heard of it, I thought, oh yes, a few cars. When I saw it, my jaw dropped and the Mimili women who had climbed the hill with me, laughed till their sides ached. We were on the hill looking down into it, because the valley/graveyard was also one of the men's sacred places but we could see it clearly in the middle distance. As the cars had belonged to the men in the first place (a Mimili woman had never been known to own a car) the women suggested (so they said) that they be towed there when they broke down and the men agreed. The women thought it poetic justice. Once a car is 'dead' in Mimili, it is very dead, and should disappear and never be spoken of again. The presence of the old cars in no way altered the fact that the site was sacred. Mimili elders took senior Sydney men there to view certain ritual objects so the site is still active and may even be enhanced by the cars. The women seemed to have a less awestricken view of it.

The ownership of trucks and cars, especially 4x4 Toyotas and Landrovers, is a status symbol among the men of all ages. Few have significant mechanical expertise: some of the younger men have done TAFE courses. Breakdowns and abandonments are common, but the settlements build the purchasing of motor vehicles into their community structures and the rate of repairs has improved. This involves a whole new way of thinking for some Aboriginal communities who now budget for a community vehicle out of their social security money (some of which is often pooled) on a regular basis. Petrol is a commodity that is also now
accepted as a necessary budget item, if people wanted to travel long distances. The adverse side issues are petrol sniffing, which, by the end of the eighties in Mimili, had caused not a few deaths among the young boys in particular. The appearance of a 'car culture' can be detected in some inma kuwaritja- new songs, while the popular television series, The Bush Mechanics (1999), is universally popular. I love it. It is exactly what happens.

Musical instruments
Both men and women make a whole range of decorative beating sticks from different kinds of wood producing different tones. In our actual performances, however, we never used decorated sticks, only plain ones. Decorated, they seemed to be for tourists and personal gift giving. Other musical instruments were tjutinpa, really fighting sticks but also used to beat mounds of earth to give a bass drum effect and ceremonial boomerangs that are both rattled and beaten. Again, the very decorative ones weren't used in actual performance in Mimili but some were brought to Sydney and given as presents - sometimes to more than one person in succession, causing confusion and ill-feeling among the serial white recipients. There are no wind instruments used at all and in no inma I have ever attended are European instruments played, despite the fact that many of the young people have guitars for playing rock and country and western music. Christian church services often include European 'pop' music style hymns using piano, mouth organs and guitars (Breen, ed.: 1989).

The body itself makes a variety of sounds (slapping, clapping etc) and these are used extensively in the inma.

Electronic equipment
Video cameras and tape recorders are common and the Mimili community owned at least one video camera in 1989. Radios and ghetto blasters are popular but have a short life. Not all damage is due to lack of care and skills: the pervading dust in this part of Australia will sabotage even the hardiest equipment and the water corrodes every kind of metal. The school, the store and the health centre have quite modern electrical equipment, including refrigeration and air conditioning, which is operated, like some electric lighting, by generators or batteries. Mimili has a public telephone and is linked by satellite to the rest of Australia and the world. There is also a radio communications service. The Flying Doctor and the police are a call away. Mobile telephones were being discussed in the Community Council. Television and computers are part of local consciousness through exposure at the clinic and the school, even if few individuals own a PC or a Macintosh - yet. Now Hugh Lovesy, the community advisor while we were there, is in Alice Springs, developing user-friendly, culturally compatible computer programs (for example, The Money Story) to help Aboriginal
Communities with their book-keeping and it is expected that more computer equipment will become available as time goes by. (conversation with Hugh in Sydney, 2001).

**Selling the ceremonies**

Some discussions looked at performance as part of ‘material culture’ in the sense that it might be able to be ‘sold’ to tourists. Part of the justification for this was its past value as barter, and the fact that songs are ‘owned’ and therefore are, theoretically, able to be ‘sold’. The idea to bring tourists in to see paid performances was scrapped after much discussion with us due to lack of tourist standard facilities. A compromise of some kind has been reached, however. Now, instead of the tourists coming into Mimili, the people travel to the rail line at Marla Bore and perform for rail and bus travellers. Recordings and books have been mentioned and the long-term plan was to publish recorded and translated material, illustrated. A publication, if it occurs, will remain the property of the Mimili people, with any profits going to the community.

**Adaptation to change**

The Mimili community at the old Everard Park Station is one of the European-organised (1930’s) settlements closely linked by internal road and ritual with Amata, Fregon and Indulkana, as well as Pukatja (Ernabella), Pipalyatjara, Uluru, Docker River, Areyonga, Finke, and Mintupi, Ooldea and Oodnadatta via the Sturt Highway. From 1985 to 1990 (the period of our closest involvement) Mimili was in the process of becoming independent of many Government controls or mission influences and was re-establishing a communal, traditionally based but more technologically modern lifestyle. This is a continual struggle. Health and economic problems, alcohol abuse, petrol sniffing, religious and family breakdowns, psychic dysfunction (Hamilton: 1971; Petchkovsky: 1991; San Roque: 1998 and 2001) and ongoing battles with paternalistic, white administrators for the right to control their own affairs are problems still faced daily.

However, progress towards technologically modern self-management has been steady. Many Central Desert communities, including Mimili, now have indigenous advisors, locally managed community councils, Aboriginal education and health workers who claim access to funding, economic and environmental development schemes, and technology which will enhance their lives on their own terms - depending how ‘enhance’ is interpreted. There are now also small agricultural projects, health programs and environmental strategies based in local knowledge and practice as much as European technologies. By 1992, Mimili people were hiring their own teaching staff (having rejected Government appointees - for example Protestant missionaries posing as teachers) and were advocating to increase the levels of traditional culture and language into the school curriculum. They had elected a Pitjantjatjara chairperson to the Mimili Council and were pushing for real influence in local health services,
which resulted in the *Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* Women's Council Aboriginal Co. Aboriginal law was being implemented in some cases in preference to that offered by the itinerant police patrols and the Alice Springs (and other) courts. The petrol-sniffing problem was being addressed within ritual frameworks with greater success than it had been in the past. Although in 1998 it was still a problem significant enough to make the national press (Sydney Morning Herald: September 16, 2), in 2001 Mimili was recognised as having one of the more successful health programs. Alcohol has been off-limits for many years, with heavy penalties to any person bringing alcohol into *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* territories and the granting of written permits to visit Mimili or any other settlement are in the hands of the people themselves.

Remote Central Desert communities, despite tragic examples of cultural disintegration have developed many skills and knowledges that are assisting them to re-order their cultural identities (Dussart: 2000; Macgowan: 2000; Merlan: 2000; Read: 2000; Myers: 2002) This is not easy or without many setbacks and doubts but there is no doubt that there is cause for optimism as well as regret and despair. There is hope that Central Desert people will be successful in gaining autonomy over their contemporary affairs as well as being able to continue to enjoy the richness of their own culture and maintain the ecological knowledge implicit in that. Mimili seems to be adapting well to the changes thrust upon it by the rapid growth of an ever more sophisticated material culture all over Australia. People seem to be able to choose which aspects of culture to accept and which to reject, that is, to keep their priorities straight. Whether this can be sustained I am in no position to say but recent political changes and public consciousness may curtail the juggernaut processes of assimilation and centralisation and allow *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* people to create their own world in their own way, in no sense isolated from and in no sense having to conform to all the European values thrust at them. In the meantime, people just get on with their most pressing business: doing ceremonies and looking after their country.
Notes:

1. This does not include people living away from the country who do not identify as belonging to a particular group. Lilian Crombie, for instance, lives in Sydney and is a successful actor.

2. Pitjantjatjara people still inhabit these more western areas, and continue to be active in preserving significant sites and ceremonies there. See co-production *Minyma Kutjara Tiukupna* by people at the Irrunytju Community and SBS, facilitated by graduates from the University of Western Sydney Nepean's Communications and Media School, 1999.

3. Earlier explorers and surveyors were Carruthers: 1892, the Elder Scientific Expedition (Helms: 1896), Spencer and Gillen: 1899, Basedow: 1904, White: 1915; but the first comprehensive records were made by Tindale: 1933, 1935, 1936, 1940, 1954; Elkin: 1939; Berndt: 1941; 1959; Hiatt: 1962; Yengoyan: 1978; and for a good summary of the earlier data, Brokensha: 1978 and 1987, with bibliography.

4. I remember reading an article in the *Woman's Weekly* about a 'first contact' in the late 1950s while I was still living at home and the discussion about this in my family, but I cannot locate the edition. There is other evidence that 'first contact' happened not with Europeans at all but with Afghan camel drivers, and that was a story certainly recounted by people in Mimili on several occasions. See (ref)

5. This dietary change has had an enormous adverse impact on the health of Central Australian Aboriginal people, a problem that is not within the ambit of this thesis to explore. See Hetzel and Frith: 1978; Honari: 1995.

6. Many of the leaseholders had scant regard for Aboriginal religious beliefs or cultural practices other than as curiosities, and attempted to eliminate both Aboriginal people and their culture. (Tonkinson: 1974). Station owners were deliberately cruel and exploitative or illegally denied people access to ancestral lands. This is a situation which continues all over Australia, with the acrimonious Wik and Mabo debates and the moves and countermoves, and the determination of a government to ally itself with graziers and foreign investment rather than consider the rights of its indigenous, colonised and displaced people. (Stevens: 1974; Toyne and Vachon: 1984; Pilger: 1988; Reynolds: 1997; Bell: 1998)

7. See Keen: 1984; Tonkinson: 1988; Layton: 1995 and Morphy: 1995 for background. Wik refs, fix Bib. The Annual Bibliographies of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (Canberra) provides a full listing of all recent publications, including the legislative changes, which are too many to reference here.

8. One interesting example is Cliff Goddard's article "The Pitjantjatjara Story Writing Contest, 1998": 1994


15. It seems to me also that the Central and Western Desert ceremonies are longer, more elaborate, of an 'older order', with a greater emphasis on creation stories, metaphysics and transformation whereas the coastal people have more pragmatic concerns, with more complex social sophistication and more human-centred in their approaches to ceremony. This might be an area to follow up at a later time.

16. I was shopping in the small Mimili cold store when a man who had arrived back in Mimili drunk and who assaulted a woman was speared in the thigh.

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis

18. Media sources from 1993 to 2000, sparked by Mabo and Wik, are replete with very public debate about Aboriginal people's oppression by the Territory and Western Australian Governments who, in particular, support an extreme racist and capitalist position.


21. The Pitjantjatjara word means both at the same time, while European epistemology separates them.
Bodied spatiality is at the heart of dramatic presentation, for it is through the actor's corporeal presence under the spectator's gaze that dramatic text actualises itself in the field of performance.

(Garner: 1994, 1)
7

paluni

performing in Mimili

7.1 Sources and subjects

This chapter examines aspects of performance experience and associated activities that enrich my understanding of traditional Aboriginal *inma*, where possible reflecting *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* value systems and terminology. These performances belong to the Mimili people, and by writing about them I am in no way making claim to ownership or implying authority about any aspect. Informed by my contact with, and teaching by the Mimili people, I am offering my personal reflections and interpretations as a way of understanding what it means to a European-educated Aboriginal scholar and performer within an Aboriginal performance ecology. Many of stories about 'the old days', secret and open information about the *inma*, came from the elders, some of whom could remember the time before white people arrived. Among those who were active in performance and our performance education include Sam Pumani, our main teacher, present at every exchange, who died in 1993. This makes open publication of the work extremely difficult, if not impossible. Sam's wife Milatjari, Pompi and Mollie Everard, Kanytji and Pingkayi, Limping Tommy Tjampu, Murika, Angelina Wangka, David, Lily and Audrey Umala, Bruce and Eileen Umala and Kathleen Tjamili are still living at the point of writing as far as I know, but several are in their late 70s and 80s. A small group of elders, they have carried the burden of teaching Others for over 30 years and must be recognised for their generous and patient work. Other published material about Mimili includes works by Catherine Ellis, Annette Hamilton, Guy Tunstil, Cliff Goddard, Cathy Winfield, Ian Knowles, Hugh Lovesy and Helen Payne and their associates, especially in the field of language and musicological research. Between them (and others with whom I was actively associated) they have contributed incalculably to a better understanding between two cultures and indeed have been prominent spokespeople in many intercultural exchanges.
A definition

An inma of the maku type is a Central Australian Pitjantjatjara and/or Yankunytjatjara dramatic song cycle in a ritualised, ceremonial framework and is the representational and phenomenological means by which layers of selected meaning are ‘performed’ (music, poetry, dance, drama, body painting, sacred and symbolic objects, ground paintings and sculptures, mise en scène, etc) using a range of symbolic codes and texts and brought into actuality at a number of different perceptual and spiritual levels by means of personal and group performance experiences, both formal and informal (my definition).

Each of the inma focuses on one or more ancestral spirits and their deeds and travels through the land. Their activities cause people, animals and plants to come into being in order to maintain a plentiful and renewable supply of food, a harmonious existence, and/or to transform themselves into other people, animals, plants or topographical features at significant places known as sacred sites or inma piti. Quite often, sacred objects are created at the same time. There are a very large number of inma in Central Australia, perhaps the best known of the Pitjantjatjara cycles being the inma nyinyi (the zebra finch inma) from Indulkana, recorded in the mid-1970s with the collaboration of Catherine Ellis and published by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music, Adelaide University (Ellis et al: 1982).

‘Subjects’ of the inma often include flora and fauna particular to a local area on which people depend for survival. Some are important over very wide areas and include the maku (edible grub or Cossid Moth) and its mortal enemy tjalku (the burrowing bandicoot, bilbie or big-eared rat), or, interchangeably, tjunku (burrowing bettong or rat kangaroo – nearly extinct in the area) on which this study is based. Tjalku and tjunku are interchangeable, yet again, with the walputi (numbat), which are now completely extinct in the Mimili area (Friend: 1982). This might be a regional phenomenon and several versions of the inma might have been blended at some time in the past. Other ‘subjects’ include langka (blue tongue lizard), ngintaka (perentti), mala (small rufus wallaby), waru (fire), ngapari (sugar scale), ili (wild fig), kalaya (emu), walawuru (wedgetailed eagle) and malu (red kangaroo). These inmatjuta (plural term, lots of inma), along with others not mentioned, are performed in the Mimili area and in the neighbouring communities of Fregon, Ernabella (Pukatja), Indulkana, Amata, and in some cases at least as far away as Pipalatjara, Uluru, Ooldea and Mintabi. Some inma might be performed quite frequently, others on rare occasions, and the social and aesthetic enjoyment of the performances is as important as the serious functions of maintaining the sacred law. Each also has secret sections and levels that are restricted by gender, age and initiation levels and stages.
The *inma maku* is designated in the first instance as a children's *inma*, mostly ‘open’, with interesting cross-links into other *inma*. There are also, however, closed and secret sections that are performed by separate groups of men and women, access and responsibility designated by age and initiation level. These sections usually deal with aspects of the narrative and activities that are ‘unsuitable’ for, or dangerous to, uninitiated people and have levels of meaning not at first apparent. In some cases, they are deliberately misleading to those without ritual knowledge. There are also several levels to the open sections, also.

In one respect, the open levels are didactic and give clear instructions on how to hunt and catch *maku* in the various forms of their life cycle, and tell who can eat them in these various stages. In European terms, the overall protagonist is the *maku* ancestor who is fleeing *wati tjalku* (literally, the bandicoot man, the big-eared rat warrior or bilbie ancestor) or, sometimes interchangeably, *wati walputi* (the numbat ancestor) who threatens the supply of *maku* by insatiable greed and hunting prowess. Inside the big narrative are smaller sub-plots which extend and enrich the main story.

In other respects, *inma* are distilled encapsulations of the lived life of the people who perform them, demonstrated in dramatic narrative dance. The anthropomorphic representations in the narrative drama are easily understood and are related to by participants of all ages who have totemic connections to the *maku* or the *tjalku/tjunku/walputi*.

Less accessible to casual participants are the associated ceremonies of a more direct affective nature. Some are increase rituals, where shale stones are reduced to splinters having been hurled down a steep rock face, each splinter creating a new *maku* - the transformation of ‘objects’ into ‘subjects’ now entering the scenario in a thoroughly tangible way. On a deeper level, the human forms of the ancestors are involved with kinstrife, woman trouble and love sorcery. The *inma* deal with ways in which men and women vie for sexual conquest and domination, ritual power and knowledge - an adult human relationship level, and a magic level which has to do with the power to create new life. There are also deeper levels, but I will probably never know what they are: some secret meanings were not available to us at all.

Some incidents are performed in graphic, mimetic detail with clear narrative, while others are abstract in their choreography and obscure in their references and metaphor. Special knowledge is needed to perform and teach them with accuracy and understanding.
7.2 Functions of the *inma* in *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* society

The *inma* is useful

Without taking a wholly Durkheimian view, it would be fair to say that an *inma* has several, interrelated functions. In the past, most of these functions have been said to be social, educational, pragmatic and/or religious, and are all directed towards the cultural, physical and metaphysical survival of people and their care of the land and the food species. In fact, the whole paradigm of functionalism has a place in the understanding of Aboriginal ceremonies since certainly the Mimili people themselves see their performances as being ‘functional’. While it is not the only way to look at *inma* performances, it is useful as a beginning, if only to establish the levels of importance *inma* plays in day-to-day life in Central Australia.

Nonetheless, in Mimili I found there were many levels of ‘function’ and have drawn on European research in the area of psychology, psychoanalysis, performance studies and pedagogy to articulate some of the other ‘functions’ that involve me as I perform *inma*. In discussions with Mimili people, it emerged that they shared my perceptions although their ideas may have been framed differently. Cited references to publications are to works by Europeans, since most Aboriginal analysis remains in oral form.

The first is a ritual function. The *inma* is a ritual integral to and connected with the *tjukurpa* (Dreaming), concerning the creation of all that is and has been by ancestors, great and small totemic figures. It is the means by which these beings retain a living presence in *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* life. *Inma* performance (enacting the ritual) is the means by which access to these beings is maintained, and the great truths of creation and continued existence are passed onto the younger generations. This is its most important function.

The ‘historical’ function is important insofar as traditionally living Aboriginal people conceive ‘history’ (see earlier discussion). An *inma* is a record of segments of *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* ‘history’, interlinked with spirituality. It is part of the ‘one lore/law’. The past, present, future and the infinite are all intertwined, so that singing an *inma* about episodes in the *tjukurpa* does not imply that everything is set in the past. It is happening now, too: there is a sense of ‘multiple time frames’ operating simultaneously. The ‘historical’ perspective is not based on European concepts of linearity and sequence. Rather, it is a multi-layered network of interrelated events in co-existential time. (Hamilton: 1979a; Lee and Leacock: 1982; Muecke: 1983; Hercus and Sutton: 1986; Austin-Broos (ed.): 1987;

The inma details the landforms of ancestral travel routes and the sacred sites that punctuate them and therefore serves a mapping function. Participants build an intimate knowledge of a whole landscape with all its terrain and geographical features. Each verse (or group of verses) describes a specific place in the landscape or, in 'travelling verses', trace the links between those places: a vast network of criss-crossing ancestral journeys. Inma are topographic maps and doing inma is a geography lesson. (Blakemore: 1981; Pocock: 1981; Sam Pumani et al: 1987, personal conversations; Turnbull: 1989; Harley: 1988; Bird-Rose: 1999)

A care-taking function is related to this. Not only are sites known and mapped, but they are looked after by groups of people who make sure they are not damaged, desecrated or destroyed and that the connections between people, animals and spirits associated with the place are regularly demonstrated. Sites are also 'looked after' in the spiritual sense – kept alive and relevant by the stories and ceremonies. Ritual ownership of inma is often dependant on careful site maintenance, a responsibility that includes performance. Neglect of a site can be cause for serious dispute about ownership. (Personal experience at Mimili 1986; see also Payne: 1984 and 1989)

A record of the sacred sites themselves is maintained at the same time, and passed on to younger people. At these sites, the close relationship between the land and the symbolic expression of that land can be most appreciated. Sacred sites are places where almost all significant events occurred and are still occurring. Sometimes great distances are traveled to perform along the songline and in the actual sacred sites. Sometimes, however, all sections of the inma are represented dramatically in the same performance place, and distant sites are described and referred to in song and action.

The sequence and linking of sacred sites along the tjurkurpa ('dreaming') pathways also provide a cross-referencing system between various inmas and their meeting points and, because of the poetic form, the metaphorical, secret and often archaic language and the many different levels of knowledge, these meeting points may not be always openly disclosed. They can indicate very complex linked totemic and ritual relationships, a multi-layering of the associations that connect different groups and individuals. Sometimes, the same things and people have different names, depending on which inma is being performed: the ‘AKA’ incidence is high.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
A **pan-Australia** view starts to emerge if all songlines, which at one time criss-crossed Australia in every direction, are taken into account. Many of them are now broken, but before European invasion they were the way Central Australian people identified themselves and their place, not just within their own ‘tribal’ territory but within a bigger picture. If carefully plotted, this ‘big picture’ may have spread from coast to coast in Aboriginal consciousness. The assertion that Aboriginal people had no sense of ‘nationhood’ may well have been true in European nationalistic terms but, in terms of a network of meaning and place, encoded in performance, there is a strong suggestion that there was indeed a ‘linkedness’ between all Aboriginal groups, which could be traced from one side of the continent to the other by means of the songs (Ellis: 1967a and 1970; Relph: 1985).

*Inmas* are **encyclopaedias** or repositories of collective community knowledge. Some verses are ‘old verses’, ‘come from the ancestors’ (*inma irititja*), and contain ‘old knowledge’ and ‘have always been’ (Sam Pumani: 1986). Some have been ‘dreamed’ in historical or contemporary times (*inma kuwaritja*) and are about things in living experience (David Umula: 1988). The importance of the integration of ‘all the knowledge’ into elements of performance becomes apparent when it is realised that all the verses are rarely sung in one complete sequence, but are organised like an encyclopaedia - cross-referenced. Metaphorically speaking, an interactive CD Rom operates on a similar system, and reflects something of the complexity of an Aboriginal system of knowledge. The *inma* and therefore the Dreaming can be entered at any reference point. As the ‘whole story’ is known by the community (and other communities) collectively, to sing one verse is to refer to them all, with different levels of meanings to different people (depending on whether you have accessed all the levels in the software). Bill Gates would call it ‘windows’.

Parallels could be found in levels of knowledge of the **Bible**. In telling the story of Moses, the whole **Bible** and where that section fits in is brought to mind - but it means different things to a Jewish rabbi than it does to a 12-year old Australian girl watching The Ten Commandments on television. The same applies to the ‘data storage capacity’ of the **Koran**, the **Torah** or Homer's **Odyssey** and their function in the religions in which they sit. Full knowledge of the *inma* is gradually built up by a series of experiences over a lifetime that may appear unconnected when people are young. After a time all the sections start to fall into place in relation to each other.

On what occasions, where, and indeed if, all **maku** verses are sung in full sequence is unknown to us. Nor is it clear why some verses are sung at certain times, or why some ‘disappear’ from time to time, to be resuscitated if necessary, or dreamed again as if ‘new’
(Wild: 1987). Nor do we know why completely new ones are dreamed (both kinds are known as *inma kuwaritja*) in the sense of 'newly discovered' or 'rediscovered' rather than 'never previously existing'. *Inma kuwaritja* include many contemporary references, although they are still seen as being handed down by the ancestors. Perhaps this offers the community a way of integrating new ideas and new experiences, thus accommodating the law and an growth of individual knowledge, adding new knowledge to old. Certainly it makes the integration of new information easier than if a strict linear narrative history is followed.

The *inma* functions as an **authoritative discourse**. People often quote verses from the *inma* as argument-settlers, or to back up their assertions in much the same way as Christians use the *Bible*, or Jews use the *Torah*, or the Moslems the *Koran*: "If it's in The Book, its OK". Heated discussions occur quite frequently about 'accuracy' in terms of the 'The Book', and adjustments are made even in performance so that the 'right meaning' is conveyed by the 'right words', the 'right rhythm' or the 'right steps', even if not everyone present appreciates the finer points at the time. The elders are very particular about 'accuracy', but will not always explain why, even to their own people. Sometimes, they don't know themselves (David Umala: Mimili 1988). This means, in practice, that Central Australian *inma* may have changed little over the period of European contact, at least. With so many guardians it has certainly changed very slowly and has even 'osmosed' many aspects of European culture, but this has probably not affected the essence. (see also Lord:1960 and Finnegan: 1977, 1981, 1988)

Not for the *Pitjantjatjara* or *Yankunytjatjara* the boring and limited taxonomies of *flora* and *fauna*! Categories are based on types of food: *kuka* (large meat animals), *tjulpu* (birds), *tinka* (lizards), *makutjara* (edible grubs), *mai* (edible plants), *punu mai* (trees which supply food), and *mai rungkupai* (edible seeds). Additional categories such as *wama* ('sweet food') could be added. This also tells what can be eaten and by whom, where the water is and in what season, who are natural enemies. The *inma* tells not just what and by whom, but how, when, where and why something may or may not be eaten. An example is the description of how and where to hunt for *maku*, how a hunter (male or female) knows if any grubs are there, how to dig for them, how they behave in different circumstances, what their life cycle is, and what different forms/stages they come in - and when is a good season or time of the day to hunt. It also tells which other fauna are the natural enemies of the *maku* and therefore, in *mulapa* (real) time, are the rivals of humans for them. To demonstrate the truth of the song in this practical sense, the Mimili women took the Nepean women on a number of *maku* digs to find, extract, cook and eat *maku*. All the time they sang the relevant verses of the songs as part of the instruction. (Bryce: 1986 and 1997) Therefore *inma* has a function as a **natural science text**, an **economic plan** and a **survival kit** related to food gathering.
The *inma* also tells what to do when supplies get low, and gives details of ceremonies that will increase the number of *maku* (or *malu* or *kuniya*). This brings a **regenerative function** to the *inma* and elements of what used to be called ‘sympathetic magic’.

The *inma* is a **source of information about material production** about the different kinds and levels of technology required and which weapons and implements are used in what situations. *Inma* gives details of shelter building, ideal habitat, fire making, cooking and medicine, as well as dealing with other practices such as opal ‘mining’ and ways of making of ritual objects and other art objects.

The *inma* has its own **performance production** and **stage directions**. It tells people what to do in the performance and who is involved in what capacity. It indicates scenes and changes of scenes and whether special items such as ground sculpture and stage constructions are required. These directions are not always as clear as in European playscripts, but they are there for those who know where to look and who understand *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* performance practice and conventions. This is often linked to real life roles and status in the community in general as well as specific circumstances.

An *inma* verse has a **iconographic text**, which uses a different set of perceptual, intellectual, physical and sensory skills to physical performance or spoken word (Howard Gardener: *passim*). If people are performing *inma*, they need to know the appropriate iconography - for body paint designs, ‘props’ and costumes, ground sculptures and paintings. The teaching of iconography for bodies and performance objects is a lengthy business and it happens simultaneously with the teaching of the music and the dance – one set of knowledge linked with another. ‘Paint-up’ verses are part of all formal *inma* and are a very important section of the proceedings. Often taking longer than the dance verses, paint-up verses have a deeper level again and are said to be where the ‘real business’ happens. It’s certainly where the intellectual interchange happens with the women – a kind of classroom where explanations and teaching are at their most ‘articulated’.

An *inma* is big on protocol, providing **guidance for moral and ethical behaviour**, and **gendered behaviour**, telling what is, and what is not, countenanced in the community on particular occasions and under particular conditions. An *inma* verse or section will have at least two versions - one for men and one for women - sometimes displaying different value systems, alternative versions of the narrative in the areas of ethics, politics and gendered behaviour (Kaberry: 1939; Bell: *passim*; Hiatt: 1979, and *passim*; Berndt, R. and C.: *passim*; Bell: *passim*; Kenny: 1996), kinship, land ownership and hereditary rights (Brock, ed.: 1989;
Peterson: *passim*; Tindale: 1974; Morphy: 1995; Layton: 1995). Uninitiated people gain detailed knowledge as they pass through the prescribed rites of passage and reach maturity in adulthood and parenthood, and/or acquire special skills and knowledge in, say, medicine and spirituality. As they do so, matters that seemed ‘open’ take on a whole series of different meanings unperceived by the younger people or non-initiates and different behaviours are required.

The [sociological function](#) of the *inma* is to record the relationships of the people to each other - their totemic, religious, family, and territorial relationships and the rules that govern these complex systems. The *inma* provides examples, in performed frameworks, for all aspects of social relationships, the origins and relevance of which would be lost and the structure of a society undermined were they not part of a living performance and hence social practice. The verses speak as much about societal transgressions as they do about ideal systems. It seems that even when a group does not observe the law in these matters, the lore/law itself is still there in the songs. (Berndt, R and C.: *passim*; Stanner: *passim*; Myers: 1986)

*Inma* has [social capital, cultural capital, and trade value](#). An *inma*, or sections of it, can be given away, bartered, sold, lent, inherited, passed on or lost through lack of care and attention. *Inma* can be taken over, managed on behalf of someone, or stolen. Songs and ceremonies are indications that a community is ‘rich in knowledge’ and both groups and individuals gain power and position by being song or site owners. The same is true for sacred sites. Few people would willingly give up their songs or their sites, however, and maintaining control over individual and community rights is a frequent source of controversy. Ownership is mostly demonstrated by the performance of the right ceremonies at appropriate intervals; those owners who do not comply are criticised sharply. (Payne: 1984 and 1989 and for an in depth study of visual arts, Myers: 2002)

*Inma* is a [source of power and an instrument of politics](#). Associated with this is the politics of power and the ways the ceremonies are used to negotiate this power. (Dussart: 2000; von Sturmer: 1987; R. Moyle: 1979, 1980, 1983, 1986,1997. See also earlier discussion, Chapter 3). An important person knows and owns many songs but a politician is a person who knows how to use this power to influence and direct other aspects of the community. A particularly good contemporary example is influence of the Yunupingu family in Northern Australia, which has developed far-reaching powers affecting not only localised issues but also sections of the Australian economy. This has been achieved through a triple politics of land, education and performance. Performance is the politics that has bridged the racial and cultural gap.
The *inma* fulfills the creative needs of the community, but also has personal **aesthetic and expressive functions**. The *inma* is an all-encompassing expressive medium in which notions of a personal aesthetic can be explored, both publicly and privately, and displayed in making performance and other symbolic media. The idea that aesthetics are not relevant to Aboriginal performance is surprisingly often expressed. At any *inma* in which I have taken part, or in any discussion with Mimili people, there has always been a keen sense of aesthetics, but not necessarily those of European ‘art’. (Myers: 1986, 2002; Layton: *passim*; Morphy: *passim*. See also earlier discussion, Chapter 3: *Atini*).

There is in this an aspect of **desire** in performing *inma*, which is a **source of socio-sexual and autoerotic pleasure**, connected with the opportunities provided both for display and for constructing ‘fantasies’ (or alternate realities) connected with corporeal and psychophysical identity (Hamilton: 1981; Grosz: 1994; Cixous: 1996; see also Morton: 1985 and 1987a, b, c and d). The women at Mimili had an additional agenda during performances, which I was unable to discuss that with them openly because it was not acceptable protocol. I was able to observe their behaviour, however. The women are always on the lookout for an admirer at an *inma* performance and they make sure they look their best in their body paint and decorations: a fair bit of flaunting goes on. They were clearly constructing themselves as individuals in a way that tapped into their corporeal and sexual identity ‘image’ of themselves, in association with the *inma*. During the meal breaks, also, socio-sexual dramas are acted out from time to time, the real significance of which is not always clear to us because of our lack of intimate knowledge of private relationships in Mimili. Gossip in the ‘dressing room’, however, is common and domestic strife often surfaces later.

In terms of the ‘women only’ ceremonies, almost all I experienced had to do with the procreation and ‘love magic’ levels of other ceremonies. This most certainly involved both group and individual sexual ritual and sublimation and autoerotic ‘fantasy’ that demonstrated that the women had more complex agendas than might be perceived in open ceremonies. Cath Ellis describes a comparable range of ‘women only’ activities and behaviours in her restricted publication about *Andagarinja* women (1967b and 1968a; see also Benjamin: 1986; Csoudas (ed.): 1994; Allsopp and Lahunta: 1996)

The multi-level stimulation of performance is a **source of synaesthetic sensory awareness** and provokes physical, intellectual and emotional creativity heightened on a group and individual basis. Responses to these conditions of performance, not just social or religious responses, are certainly experienced by the women and are reported to be by the men. This means in practice that all sensory channels are operating consciously as they are
pushed to the limits. In European education studies, this has been found to vastly improve people's capacity for abstract thought and enables conceptualisation to occur in a number of different modes: multiple intelligences. (Gardener: passim; Ackerman: 1990; Porteous: 1990, passim; Rodaway: 1994; Laughlin, C. Jr., McManus, J. & d'Aquili, E.1990; Baron-Cohen: 1997)

*Inma* is an arena for **psychic role-play** where, because of totemic relationships and the contemporaneous time frames of the Dreaming, belief in a ritual/metaphysical relationship or identity in the performance is carried into real life consciousness and identity. This is the same phenomenon as a European actor believing that he's ‘Hamlet' or she's ‘Ophelia’ and actually taking on that *persona*. In western culture this is seen as mental illness if it occurs in social life. In Aboriginal culture, being able to 'be' someone or something else it is part of the richness of 'being'. Psychoanalytic analyses of *inma* have been carried out by a number of researchers (Roheim: 1969; Hiatt: 1975a, 1987; Morton: 1985, 1987 (passim); San Roque: 1998; Petchkovsky: 1999) in order to find out ‘how Aboriginal people think’. However, none of these people is Aboriginal and interpretations are Eurocentric.

There is something about an **act of public performance** that can only be understood by other performers. Performance is a very focused act in which people affirm certain things about their identities and relations with their community in a very particular state of mind and body. European culture is ambivalent about this, on one hand encouraging people to ‘speak up’ and, on the other, relegating events and arenas where it happens with the greatest skill and depth of meaning to commercially orientated ‘professional entertainment’ or ‘the media’, discouraging active participation by ‘the general public’ and promoting their role as audiences. (see also Featherstone: 1983a; Cohen: 1984; Roland: 1997;)

Learning to manage the physical changes performance engenders is a learned skill. An escalation of adrenaline and endorphins are at the basis of a perceived physical phenomenon of heightened awareness. Receptivity is accentuated by the concentration needed to perform and reach the state of altered consciousness necessary for transformation of self. This affects the atmosphere and is readily discernable amongst the community once things get going. It doesn’t happen every time, but when it does, the performance ‘takes off’ and is likely to go until well after midnight. This is what in Nimbin or at a Sydney dance party would be called a ‘high’ and where a state of community ‘one-ness’ reaches palpable intensity. Under such circumstances, the olfactory senses are particularly alive to changes in body scent and the skin to touch and temperature and the other kinaesthetic channels which contribute to the perception of transformation are much more sensitive.²

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
European societies tend to fear these events and there are always special control mechanisms on New Years Eve, the AFL final, the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and similar occasions where things might get ‘out of hand’ and jural systems might be breached. (Da Matta: 1977; Turner: 1984; Belo: 1966;

The *inma* is an **indicator of change in a society**. The assimilation and processing of new knowledge and circumstances by an oral community is slow. If an issue or phenomenon appears in an *inma* verse, it has been well and truly digested at the community level. Whether it stays there or not depends on how relevant the community thinks the change is and on the persistence of the person who has dreamed the verse. In an explanation that took some time, David Umala explained that nothing was really ‘new’ information. It had always been there - it had just been ‘discovered’ again. That is how Europeans and other ‘new’ things such as cars and planes come to be in *inma* verses. History can be augmented and re-written but always with community assent.

The full range of *inma* provides **taxonomies** of indigenous and appropriated terms, and reveals the **epistemological systems** at work in the community. It is said that you can learn a language best by studying dramatic texts, because they carry both the *langue* and the *parole* in all its manifestations. This is very true in an oral society. (Matejka and Titunic [eds.]: 1989; Barthes: 1977; Barwick: 1989; Clifford: 1986; Melrose: 1994; Muecke: 1988)

Finally, the *inma* is a symbolic representation of aspects of cosmology which, taken together with other *inmas*, reveals **ontological systems** within the community. (Swain: 1985; Stanner: 1989; Morton 1985, 1987a, b, c, d; Petchkovsky: 1998)

Altogether, *inma* is a complex performance form, capable of encompassing all aspects of life in Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara society. The fact that there are so many *inma* sections, interlinked and fulfilling such a wide range of functions, makes it quite clear that the Mimili people believe in the complete appropriateness of performance as a vehicle for containing, expressing and disseminating the ‘meaning of life’. Because *inma* are still being sung and performed in some way every minute of the day within traditional communities, and are still taught to children (coupled with more active community input into local European education programs), they are in good working order. The *inma* is structured enough to provide a strong framework able to be managed and accessed by everyone in the community at the appropriate level, and flexible enough to allow for growth and change and a variety of creative focuses and functions. Within the context of the *inma* there is also scope to explore meaning within all forms of symbolic action, creativity and play.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
The Mimili people themselves talk about these separate functions of *inma*. While no one in the community has sat down and made a list of them as far as I know, they are all functions that were expressed to me and to my colleagues over a period of five years and it is within this variety of functional contexts that we can begin to understand the complexity of *inma*.

### 7.3 Other conditions and contexts

**Occasions for performance**

There is a wide range of 'occasions' for which focused performance is appropriate in Mimili life. To be briefer, it is hard to think of an occasion that is not marked by performance. Referring back to the previous discussion of function, any aspect or need can precipitate the community to gather together and perform: it is the main community activity. This is actually not so different in European culture, but the ways in which those 'performance occasions' are constructed, carried out and controlled are very different. Ranging from an impromptu party to a massive event like the Olympic Games, occasions are reliant on other conditions and contexts in a society which has separated many 'occasions' for performance from community control and community well being. The different agendas that create performance 'occasions' reflect the poly-structural nature of European culture, but also the infinite capacity of performance to reflect that poly-structure.

**Places for performance**

In contemporary European culture, the 'ideal' physical conditions in which to perform usually dictate whether the conditions are 'right'. This is are closely reliant on physical facilities demanded by the particular performance genre (for instance, opera needs an opera house with an orchestra pit; cabaret needs a bar and an intimate audience; dance needs a wide open, sprung wooden floor and side lighting; live drama needs a thrust stage with excellent acoustics and good sightlines; street theatre needs a street; television needs an electronically equipped studio, etc). If these venue conditions are not right, then the performance is seen to be in some way compromised, deficient or 'alternative'. With the *inma*, the situation is reversed. Provided the performance itself is done with integrity, there are literally no physical circumstances where an *inma* could not be, theoretically, performed without losing any of its value. Its reference points are the country from which it was created and, unless it is being performed on site, anywhere will do. As Hamlet says: “The play's the thing!”
However, there are conventions of ‘ideal’ performance places, the most ideal being the sacred site itself. The next preference is good *inma* ground, which operates in many ways like a European performance space. In Mimili, the conventional physical relationship between performers of dance and music/audience members in a performance on an *inma* ground is both oppositional and complementary - spatially arranged just as in European proscenium arch theatre. The spectators/musicians ‘sing’ the dancers down the length of the performance area, from rear to front, performing only one verse at a time. Therefore a flat, open space with bushes up the side acting as ‘wings’ is preferred. (See Chapter 11: *Ananyi*)

**Number of times performed**

It is important to experience an *inma* in as many different situations and on as many different occasions as possible. This is unlike European theatre where people who ‘see’ or ‘sit through’ the same performance many times are thought to be a bit obsessed. “I wouldn’t pay to see that again,” is a standard way of dismissing a performance that did not particularly touch someone. “No thanks, I’ve seen that,” is a perfectly acceptable refusal to an invitation to see a movie. This mindset also impacts on ethnography. Too often there has been a single performance ‘seen’ or ‘sat through’ and recorded by an ethnographer, which is then promulgated as ‘the authentic version’. No *inma* performance I ever attended was ‘the same’ as any other. Even when the actual verses being performed were ostensibly ‘the same’, there is no concept of a single, definitive, absolute version. The accumulation of and exposure to many experiences of ‘the same’ is vitally important to life-long accumulation of knowledge.

**Roles**

The strict European audience/performer/director/designer/production role separations dictated by education and training, the capitalist economy and union demarcation found in ‘professional’ or ‘mainstream’ European theatre and film (but not always in ‘community theatre’ or ‘theatre of celebration’) do not operate in traditional performances in Central Australia. And neither is there an occasion where everyone has a single role all the time. The movement from one role to others at need is fluid and unselfconscious, and there are differentiations in activities while in these roles. (See also Wild: 1984; Video: *Walpiri Fire Ceremony*)

In the *inma*, participation and participation/observation roles often alternate in the same performance. Usually those who dance (*nyampinyi*) and those who sing (*pakani*) are two separate and co-operating groups, both performing to and for each other, and switch over frequently. Men and women do not dance together, but everyone not dancing takes part in
the singing, male and female. No one sings loudly while dancing. Sometimes there are people who simply 'observe'. For instance, children watch to learn or the very old do not take part in dancing but act as listeners, arbiters, teachers, owners and authority figures, or there are visitors present not entitled to perform. Like audiences everywhere, however, the 'theatre of the mind' is as active as the physical performance, even for those not physically participating. In this sense, 'audience' participation is intense and people are almost certainly re-living actual, past performances in which they did take part or have entered a liminal state and are at one with the Dreaming during the performance. All levels of the community watch and listen to those who have knowledge and experience so that they might learn more; those with experience are always alert to errors and inconsistencies in others. There is no time where people completely disconnect with the performance or where audience/performer separation is total (as is often reported in European proscenium arch theatre and is certainly the case with film and television).

There are occasions where complete performance participation operates all the time. In the serious, secret ceremonies I have experienced there is no separation - all were participants but we were all aware of each other. One colleague suggested to me that the 'audience' in these circumstances is an invisible one, the ancestors and spirits. Not at all. In fact the ancestors and spirits are embodied in the performance and are there with the participants, not sitting up in 'the gods'.

Hierarchies
Hierarchies, which occur in all performance situations, are exceptionally clearly marked in *inma* performances. The owner of the *inma*, the inheritor of the song by birth, marriage, talent or sheer strength of will, calls the shots and behaves just as any autocratic director in a European theatre. Underneath are elders who advise and discuss the finer points, and under them people at various stages in their passage through the life of the community. On some occasions, the community is split in its functions along moiety lines. While one half performs, the other half acts as 'stage managers' who look after the fires and the ritual objects and changes of scenery. They also manage the breaks while problems like damp wood, too much dust, fighting dogs and domestic disputes hold up proceedings. This is reversed in other ceremonies and serves a double purpose of managing community tensions. (Wild: 1976, 1977 1978) On other occasions, divisions are based on territorial ownership (the nature of which is made clear in the different performance roles, Arnold: 1991) or on relationship to a totem or to a person (Clunies-Ross: 1987).

Within each of these levels and separations go performance 'rights and obligations'. Children are allowed to muck about but, after a certain age, it is expected that young people
will be attentive and accurate. Failure to 'get it right' will mean a wait before 'new knowledge' is imparted and advancement in the hierarchy will be delayed.

**Breaks in performance**

Breaks in performance can be of two kinds - formal and informal. Within the actual inma itself, formal breaks occur between individual verses, sets of verses, men's and women's verses, painting up and dance verses, etc.

All verses are repeated several times in inma, and there are breaks between repeats of verses in performance. After a verse has been sung once the dancers stand around waiting to perform it again (which may happen several times). The pause is marked by a sharp detachment from the performance itself by both performers and audience. Dancers turn away from the singers, talk among themselves and wait until the leading singer begins again. The intensity of the performance is immediately picked up and continues to the end of the verse repeat, when another short break is observed. The singers are far less obvious in their separation from performance mode between the inma verses but a break occurs in which sotto voce discussion can take place about various points in the performance - like the skill of one particular dancer, or the fact that they are all 'out of sync', or a wrong step is being done. The leading singer dictates the ends of the breaks. At the end of the final repeat, dancers simply leave the stage without fuss. There is no applause.

When the dancers reach the singers, both stop. However, sometimes the dancers or the musicians call it off earlier. This happens particularly when the dancers are not 'into it' and abort the verse. The inma might then proceed to the next verse, or a repeat might be called, or the inma might be abandoned altogether and everyone drops out of role. In a secret and important ceremony, I was told by the men, this "never happens". Everyone is very careful to get it right and everything always goes well. The women said otherwise and that in earlier times a wrong performance could result in severe punishment and even death. They also said the men got it wrong all the time these days and it was the women who had the real knowledge, about the inma maku anyway, and they made very few errors. The men said the same things amongst themselves about the women, I was told. The real point is the high level of concern for the validity of the performance that everyone shares, and maintenance of a concentrated participation.

Other 'break' protocols include the audience 'not seeing' when sacred objects and props are being placed and arranged 'on stage', so that the new scene will be 'disclosed' when the audience turns its attention back. This is part of performance convention and operates in the same way a 'blackout' does in European theatre performance. The audience/singers

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
obligingly shut their eyes or turn away from the dancers, if required, for a change of personnel, or a new ‘scene’ or verse. There are also pauses while complex body painting sessions are completed. During these breaks, the singers might repeat ‘paint-up’ verses, but also everyday life might take over while preparations by the next dancers take place.

Sometimes, the whole process is disrupted when a very small child runs off with the only lump of red ochre. And, within every performance, the social life of the community intrudes: fights break out; dogs bite babies; everyone gets hungry and the dancing stops till after tea. The large breaks, like the end of that day’s performance, or tea-time, are called by agreement between elders but are controlled by the owner of the song, usually the leading songman, or in women’s ceremonies, the songwoman.

The *inma* has a constant presence

The omnipresence of the *inma* in everyday life is a condition of performance that never changes. It also means that all linguistic systems are continually idling, a living motor waiting to be revved up. Singing (either using words or murmuring the words under the breath), ‘hand-dancing’ (the hand movements only of the dances, while seated) and understated, whole-body references to the dances are interspersed with other work actions (e.g. while food-gathering or cooking for the women or, for the men, while making weapons or just lying around in the shade on a hot day, talking ‘business’). Storytelling to the children can be *inma*, travelling though the landscape itself can be *inma*.

An initiated man is rarely without a stick of some kind, which can be beaten on the ground to keep the rhythm whenever required. These very rhythms also have a series of messages encoded in them (Ellis: 1970) and this is considered *inma* too. A group of elders sitting in a circle drawing maps and singing songs is *inma* and painting-up before performance is *inma*. During specific *inma* performances, however, the balance shifts and concentrated symbolic action creates a distinct reality which is out of the everyday and clearly separate from it. The specific languages of voice, body, sound, movement, touch, taste, smell and iconography are fully integrated and the process becomes highly focused into an all-engrossing performance, or what Europeans would more readily recognise as a ‘real’ performance.

**Mulapa or ngunti?**

There was a lot of discussion about whether a performance of an *inma* was *mulapa* (‘true’) or *ngunti* (‘false’). This relates not to the *inma* itself (the *inma maku* itself is *mulapa*) but to the performance conditions and intentions and efforts of the performers and whether the owners were present and whether it was a ritual occasion. Sam was always careful to make it clear to us whether we were being ‘serious’ or not and there was a distinct difference.
between a ‘serious’ *inma mulapa* and a ‘playabout’ *inma*. On one ‘playabout’ occasion we performed our favourite songs and dances quite randomly and had a lot of fun. There was more skylarking than usual, especially ‘backstage’. This was also part of the teaching process and we were allowed to perform without Mimili ‘dance captains’, something that never occurred in serious (*mulapa*) performances.

An *inma* can be *ngunti*, a ‘wrong’ performance, if it is done ‘incorrectly’. The women said the men got it ‘wrong’ all the time these days and the men said the same things amongst themselves about the women, I was told. In their secret and important ceremonies, I was told by the men, errors “never happen”: everyone is very careful to get it right and everything always goes well.

Some of the middle-aged Mimili men said that they thought that when we were performing in a playhouse with the lights down, with actors totally focused on their performance and the audience on the actors, that our performances were *mulapa* too. They felt our performances were ‘more real’ (*mulapa*) when they saw them in the theatre building, which they had the opportunity to do on their visits to the University. They compared it to what happened when we were performing our scenes, dances and improvisations for them in the desert, which, to them, seemed ‘not serious’, since they were in the open. They described the feelings they had when they watched both. The older men and women dismissed both types of our performance as not being *mulapa*, because we allowed anyone to watch it, which by definition meant ‘not very important’, whereas the middle-aged and younger people interpreted it according to their own experiences of European performance. We were constantly asked if what we were doing was *mulapa*, and found it difficult to explain that many of our ‘mainstream’ theatre colleagues would question whether our present involvement in *inma* performance was *mulapa*, either. As far as we were concerned, however, it was all *mulapa*, although our definitions of that were different. On some occasions, the whole *inma* is called off because there is no ‘spirit’ and therefore *mulapa wiya - ngunti*. How sensible. Many European actors have had to go on to the bitter end with a performance they know to be utterly without meaning or value.
7.4 Performance components

A very ‘thick’ narrative
When I began to learn the inma maku from the Mimili people in early 1986, I imagined that it would be a relatively short experience - perhaps lasting one or two years - and that there would be different inma to follow. Two years later, I realised I had been completely mistaken - there is no such thing as a short inma and perhaps no such thing as a finished one, to pursue Tolkein's assertion that all roads 'go on forever', and do not so much lead to, as pass through, Rome - several times. Not only that, in 2001, I still didn't know 'the story' of the whole inma maku. There seemed to be no ending or narrative closure to the 'sequences of events' (as there is in European linear storytelling traditions) and, even though I had read something of this in the literature, I did not comprehend it until I had experienced it for myself - performing the inma in its own ecologies.

I began to realise that being 'told' these stories orally in diachronic time (as Europeans do with their myths) would never give anyone the full picture. But, of course, it does not happen in all European culture either: a storyteller cannot tell a single Greek myth without referring to half a dozen others.1 The 'full picture' of the inma maku was at least a five-dimensional lived network of experience in synchronic and diachronic time and in actual and diegetic space - a web of 'layered' incidents and relationships, discoveries and transformations, creations and conflicts, stasis and change. It was an accumulation of experience that was performed in a seemingly infinite number of ways, each element of the performance with its specific linguistic codes carrying different aspects of the knowledge. So, it was not only multi-dimensional in time and space, it was polysemic. Two hundred and fifty seven verses and five years later I understood why the published stories were so short. Aboriginal storytellers used the spoken word to relate only very short episodes because 'telling' the whole story simply can't be done. Not only that, the stories have many intersection points and at every intersection is also part of another story - which accords with lived experience in my own life.

The language of the inma
The language of the inma is poetic. It is recognised as such and its differences from ordinary spoken language are articulated by the Mimili people. The usual verse structure is a series of short couplets, each telling a small part of the story - a series of episodes. Usually each line is repeated - aa/bb. This can vary, so that either no repeats occur - a/b, or only one of the lines repeats - aa. There seems to be no rule to this: all is based on practice and tradition, but there might be underlying patterns if enough verses were analysed. The number of

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
words in each verse line varies between one and seven, the average being four, in a mix of Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara, or one or the other. At this point it is difficult to see how the inma could be translated adequately into English for the purposes of singing, nor is there any need to do this for performance. Apart from the problem of finding the literal meaning, English words would not fit the music - and it would be far more difficult than trying to Anglicise Italian, German or French opera (Strehlow: 1971). However, a poetic 'translation', without any need to sing it, might retain some of the complexity of meaning. It would require many more English than Pitjantjatjara words for a 'full' translation. One level at a time could be accommodated, but the danger of being simplistic is always present. A translation that would satisfy a young man would be unsatisfactory for a female elder. One solution might be to have several parallel lines of translation to be read together but then, is that a proper process? There are levels that senior people do not wish to be made public to unsuitable (not 'ready') people.

The best way from my experience is to continue to sing in the original language and to acquire a personal understanding of the meanings through juxtapositioning them with all of the other performance elements, which accumulate over years depending on the knowledge level and context, whether it is sung by men or women and whether it is a new verse or an old verse. Only personal assimilation of this knowledge can work effectively in performance. 'Mechanical' translation at an intellectual level stays on the page without the performance experience: it is of limited academic interest only.

The poetic language in the Mimili ceremonies is almost always 'old language' and retains archaic and secret words and linguistic codes (mostly Yankunytjatjara). Nonetheless the verses are retained for their symbolic power and significance, and children learn them exactly as they are sung. This reminded me of my experiences with the Latin Mass, which was almost a total puzzle until Year 7 and school Latin classes, or Hamlet's soliloquies, which we learned verbatim for our final high school exams so we could quote them in essays - without really understanding them.

The meaning/s of inma verses is/are not always clear to elders who do understand the language, at times causing spirited, learned debate among the elders. The secret meanings and indeed the actual words in some verses are often hotly disputed, due to the fact that no-one knows what some of them mean anymore, or maybe the words are 'known' and the general meaning 'known' but the exact translation 'unknown'. The language mix of Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara contains many disused words and phrases that only appear in that one verse. (Sam Pumani and Molly Everard: 1987) They are not less 'sacred' because of that. Many words and phrases really mean something else anyway and in time we
gradually recognised a few of these, especially as the necessary clues were usually 'dropped' for those quick enough to pick them up. We were expected to make connections ourselves. Some examples were akin to the English concept of allegory, or metaphor, some were double entendre, some alluded to other inma, some to spirits or magic by secret names. Some were alliterative. Some were purely symbolic, with no literal meaning. Many words cannot be found in any of the published dictionaries.

On one occasion, Molly Everard sang us some old Yankunytjatjara verses, "Now not sung very often", she said (1987). It seemed that many of these old Yankunytjatjara verses known to older people are not sung in contemporary inma. However, the two new sets of verses dreamed while we were performing in Mimili were in Pitjantjatjara and had no archaic language features whatever but included car engine noises. This is certainly another example of recent change, which warrants further investigation. Earlier examples of plane noises incorporated into songs also appear in some of Alice Moyle's and the Berndt's collections and some ceremonies dating from World war 2 in the Northern Territory. It seemed to me that all the new verses being dreamed since are in Pitjantjatjara, too, not Yankunytjatjara but that is possibly a perception based on narrow experience.

Verbal narrative is non-linear and episodic. The story line is often very subtle in its expression and tends to meander somewhat, from high point to high point, with a great number of sidetracks. Because of the richness of all the other texts, the spoken or sung narrative of the inma is not detailed or even, at times, intelligible. It contributes a part to a whole and not the parts European spoken-word theatre expects. Because of the lack of verbal sequential narrative and the high level of referencing, it is important to keep the big picture in mind at all times, even if only a small section is being performed.

**Inmaku pakani – dancing inma**

The danced narrative, the physicalised verses, usually contain more a recognisable story line: character action and interaction; emotion and conflict; character description; elaboration of points or digressions from the key events. Sometimes there is a clear personal relationship between characters performing and being performed, sometimes none. A character might be danced by many different people in one evening and it is imperative that the clarity of the signs that define each role are maintained above and beyond variations in the personal style of the individual performer who, at the personal level, ceases to exist. If the performer becomes more important than the character, all sense of the narrative can be lost.
Consistency in dance semiotics is of the utmost importance, especially considering the number of transformations that might take place for a single character, or the number of meanings a gesture or step might have. A different dance usually 'animates' each verse, but the same steps might crop up in several dances, being used for different purposes, especially in travelling verses, and when the sequences are short and repetitive. This reflects the couplet structure of the sung words. All steps and gestures can be arranged in a variety of sequences – like enchainments in ballet. However, all steps and gestures have a meaning, and are not chosen for their decorative qualities alone (and not all ballet is, either). There are also different dances for verses with the same words as each other, and vice versa, based on whether a verse is danced by men, by women, in an open or a secret performance. Further options include regional differences involving different gestures and steps or even different languages.

The movement ranges are very subtle, involving many hand, head, foot, arm, finger and body positions. All individual movements tend to be very clear and are un-blurred by excessive stylistic tropes. Sometimes everyday work actions and protocols have been transformed into dances, or steps and gesture are taken from an existing repertoire, which have developed within the local 'style' to give a range of performance conventions. Rarely is a dance action constructed initially out of a sense of the abstract, that is, with an individual aesthetic impetus which is not recognisably derived from life, although some actions performed by ancestral beings or heroes are abstracted past the point of recognition to an observer not familiar with Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara conventions of representation of the movement and behaviour of 'real' people, spirits and animals. Some highly imitative movements are very specialised, such as when dancing kalaya (emu) and the objective is a 'complete' physical transformation into an emu. Mimetic steps often remain specific to the representation of a species and are often the responsibility of a particularly talented dancer whose totemic associations are appropriate.

Some dance is clearly narrative, needing a great deal of mimetic skill if the performers are acting out a sequence in 'real time', however much is abstracted and symbolic and no attempt at realistic imitation is made. Steps and gestures are rarely naturalistic.

**Dance style**

There is a wide range of movements that are recognisable as Central Desert style, Central Desert women or men's style and, even more specifically, regional style. Indeed, men's dancing (*katuni*) and women's dancing (*nyanpinin*) have different names. Generally the men have vigorous steps, stamping hard and lifting the knees and arms high, with leaps and bounds and spins. Considerable energy is expended in the upper body, too, which
frequently twists in opposition to the legs. Women's dancing is more restrained and subtle, arms are ‘graceful’ and feet are never lifted above the knee. My impression is that women’s dance is more internalised and men’s more externalised, at least in public. In ‘women only’ ceremonies a good deal of exhibitionism, satire, send-up and skylarking goes on – usually about the men. I am reminded of social events in Islamic societies where the women have rousing parties with lots of riotous laughter and dancing - and no men are present.

For both men and women, knees are usually bent and the centre of gravity is low in the pelvis. ‘Close to the ground’ dancing can be seen also in other cultures, where people are ‘close to the land’ in their belief systems. Knee trembling (intiţinganyi) is commonly seen in both men and women’s dance and is a skill that excites admiration when done well. After we all practiced a lot in public places we were also told that it was a sexual come-on.

There is a discernibly different local dance ‘style’ for each community. After seeing a large number of dances from other communities, and having talked through this point with some of the women, differences became quite noticeable. Local and regional styles are also referred to in conversation, such as ‘Fregon hand movements’, which are considered very ‘graceful’. Detailed observation and experience would be needed to identify these stylistic variations, but the women who are performing are able to demonstrate the different styles as clearly as a ballet dancer could distinguish between French, English, Italian, American and Russian classical ‘schools’. This made sense to me, having studied exotic Cecchetti (Russian/Italian) ballet when most of my friends were at good old R.A.D. (English/Royal Academy of Dance) schools. Regional variations are often a matter of style.

Style might also be connected to personal interpretation. Different people dance characters in different ways. Other differences include gender variations, say, when male and female dancers are playing the same characters in separate verses, or even in the same verses.

**The configuration of the dance**

The overall choreography - individual steps and gestures plus the ‘floor pattern’ or plan of the dance - is usually quite simple, with a small section of the story danced many times. The spatial arrangement is distinct from the individual steps or gestures and it carries different sections of the narrative. Spatial arrangements narrate travel and broad dramatic action, whereas steps and gesture show individual action and relationships within the bigger picture.

On the real site, the spatial arrangements are dictated by the topography. On a flat inma ground, the topography is referred to symbolically and mimetically and the choreography
here almost always advances the performers from the ‘back’ of the dancing space to the
‘front’. Patterns in the spatial arrangement can be in zigzag, winding or spiraling, can involve
different numbers of dancers.

**Number of dancers**
Sometimes there is a chorus, a chorus and a soloist, two or three soloists, or a single soloist,
depending on the verse and whether it is a 'general' verse, or a verse in which particular
action and conflict takes place. In general, the more ‘dramatic’ the focus, the less likely there
is to be a lot of people dancing. Sometimes an unlimited number of people take part, making
everything quite crowded. To have a great many people in some dances, however, creates
a sense of community and power, as occurred in the 2000 Olympic Games Opening
Ceremony. There is no doubt that this caught most people in the audience by surprise: very
few European Australians have seen so many Aboriginal Australian women dancing and
singing in such force. It happens frequently in Central Australian communities. I have
danced with 200 women before.

Numbers are tied also to totemic and family relationships as much as to the requirements of
the narrative and it is important to have a good showing of key participants if an inma is being
performed.

**Dance partners**
Dancing 'with' certain people carries meanings that are both separate from but connected to
the dance itself. Being invited to dance ‘with’ certain people is a social statement, which can
imply any number of things. In my own case, it was a way of gauging how I was going in my
learning curve. As women and men do not dance together, this is quite different situation to
the European concept of ‘dance partners’. Sometimes friends dance with each other,
sometimes visitors are invited out of courtesy. Sometime partners are decided by seniority
or ritual requirements. Sometimes people are not included for one reason or another. “Too
many for this one; wait for next verse,” was as often as not the reason. Or, “Dance with
kungawara (the girls).” Or, “Too hard, this one. Later on, tjinguru (maybe).” Or, “Not you
university girls, eh? This is new one; watch.” Sometimes, the older women asked us to ‘look
after children’ in the dance line-up, which meant we were considered proficient. Usually
Molly Everard or Angelina Wangka would call the shots.

**Kinesics and proxemics**
I have never worked with a company that had such a sense of proxemics and how to use a
performance space to such advantage. No matter whether the performance was ‘on site’ or
in a studio, there was always an exceptionally finely tuned understanding by everyone of
how to place the action in relation to the space and the other performers, especially in large
open spaces where focus can be so easily dissipated.

Use of the space and numbers also affect the kinesics of the dance and the way in the
physical experience of performance is perceived both by the performers and the audience. I
responded best when there was enough ‘room to move’ so that the action and interpretation
could be played out, but I also liked being close, feeling the rhythms and warmth of other
dancers and inhaling other people’s adrenaline and endorphins. I hated being squished up
at the end of a line, shoved into the fires along the sides or the scratchy bushes.

Proxemics was most observable in the painting up sessions. Who you are near and with
whom you share ochre and the painting up process are very important. Close personal
relationships are built up in painting up sessions where people also slip from everyday into
other personas.

**Sound**

Ambient sound is the least discussed of all auditory experiences. It locates people physically
in a space and relates them to one another and other objects. It has tactile resonances in its
physical properties. It can exist also in time and space and be non-tactile in its semantics.
Ambient sound can occur in all aspects of the natural and physical world and provides a
textured ground in front of which all specific sounds are heard. It provides models for human-
generated musical and vocal sounds; it can affect prevailing volumes, pitches and speeds of
human-generated sounds. Ambient sound provides a source of identity and belonging
which is very deeply rooted and over which a person has no control unless ears are blocked,
as sound is invisible and its sudden occurrence can’t be anticipated. In Alice Springs, when I
hear the ground crackling in the heat – I can smell it and feel it. This gives me a triple
response on which to draw. Inside my air-conditioned office in Penrith, I can only hear the
steel roof pinging. But I feel as I do in Alice Springs, just for a moment, so strong is the sense
memory.

In Mimili, the ambient sounds of the area, the birdcalls and the sounds made by the wind in
the trees and bushes, as well as the acoustic, the ‘sound’ of the space itself, are ever present
and contribute to the ‘sound’ of the *inma*. In a studio in the city, the sound is very different,
flat.

**The melody** is the most obvious musical feature to European ears and is one means by
which the *inma* is identified, just as a melody would any song. The melody is known as the
*inma* ‘flavour’ or ‘taste’ (*mayu*) and each distinctive melodic line is then used in a slightly

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
different way in each of the verses (like a Wagnerian *leitmotif*, perhaps, or a theme and variations). This *mayu* concept is an example of synaesthesia in action – more than one sense informing each other and involved with creating meaning.

Melodic lines in central Australia usually follow a characteristic pattern - a high pitch start, rising slightly, then falling away in a series of steps, plateaus and small rises to a point about four tones below the highest note. Singers sometimes drop down two octaves. (See Ellis and Tunstall, *passim*). Think of a graph describing a drop in the Australian dollar. A new verse can also mean a quick return to the high commencing note. Often this is introduced by the women.

**Rhythms** are exceedingly complex, with the rhythm of the accompanying beating sticks setting the pulse, the words themselves being sung to another rhythmic pattern, the meter of which can vary from bar to bar and from line to line. The metric pattern of the repeated line may fall on different words from the first time it was sung. The dance has a different rhythm again. Some verses use isorhythm, others swing between two alternating rhythms. Syncopation, and polyrhythmic beating are common. A variety of rhythms and meters are used in a single verse, at times. Emphasis, and therefore the rhythms of each individual word (syllabic stressing), can vary from verse to verse, line to line, or indeed from word to word in the same line. Unlike the melody, however, these patterns of rhythms and meters are set and may not be changed. Errors in rhythm are considered very serious and a faulty verse will be repeated until it has been corrected.

Accentuation of the rhythm is also highly complex and not always with the even beats performers are accustomed to expect in most European music. The use of *rubato* is frequent and requires practice in performance. It seems often to provide a performance link between the dance and the song words, which are not always the same rhythm in the same verse, or if they are, accentuate different pulses. (For exceedingly detailed work on rhythm in *Pitjantjatjara* music, see Ellis, Barwick and Tunstill, *passim*).

**Tempo:** Speed varies markedly. This sometimes seems to be dictated by the dance which in its turn is connected to a sacred site / work action / mimed action / emotion / characterisation. In performance, speeds can change from performance to performance. This seems to be dictated as much by personal preference as anything else. On one occasion, Sam deliberately sped up a verse for a joke. It wasn't an *inma pulka*, so he was, firstly, trying to be funny and, secondly, showing us how an increase in speed changed the dance.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
Pitch range: This varies. The basic *inma maku* melody has a range of a major fourth, sung in parallel octaves by men and women, the starting pitch not being absolutely fixed. Some verses use the full range, some less. Some extend it with 'improvised' sections of decoration (which reappear so frequently that the question must be asked, how improvised are they or could they be said to be drawn from a range of decorative conventions?). Some other features, like ritualised wailing, have a range of over two octaves, but still generally follow the melodic line of the *inma*. These variations seem mostly the province of the women and are related to performance practice - different occasions eliciting different levels of endeavour. Some sections, like the wailing, have strong, dramatic content and are emotional both in delivery and reception, producing a profound effect on both performers and others.

Dynamics: This varies enormously, too, depending on emotional content, dramatic intention and dance steps. Some verses, especially those concerning death, show marked use of stressed and accentuated words and syllables; those containing satire and travesty (see also Wild: 1977/8) or explicitly humorous sexual references (Ellis: 1967b, 1968a) are often accompanied by laughter and a consequently lighter approach, with a lighter accentuation of actions and words. Those reflecting work and environmental factors and specific 'effort action' frequently incorporate the dynamics of the effort action in the dance and therefore the song, for instance, climbing a steep hill (referring to a sacred site), spearing an escapee, or digging out *maku* (Marshall: 1994). Travelling verses tend to be at a jogging pace (personal dance and singing experience). Wailing is *ad lib* and seems the one performance occasion where it seems up to the singer to inject personal dynamics into its execution (Angelina Wangka: 1988), since all rhythmic beating stops. Dynamics become more clearly discernable when the performance is intense and often spectacularly so at the sacred sites.

Harmony and vocal decoration: The songs are generally monophonic, sung at the double octave, which is the normal difference of male and female voices and gives the sound a strong, united timbre. Most vocal decoration occurs at the commencement of a line, but at certain points internally a word or a phrase will be lifted up by a single voice or a small group (often the women), and homophony occurs. Harmony is not a deliberate feature of the music of this or related *inmas*, while it does appear easily and frequently when Mimili people sing European music - particularly Christian hymns or country and western music.

There are improvised vocalisations (additions of extra vocal pieces) but very short, and mostly at the beginning of a verse. It doesn't happen at every performance, and mostly appears when people are 'into it'. Women's improvisations are more frequent and more

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
decorative than the men's, which are often restricted to a single held starting-note or simply a heightened first or second word to indicate the commencement of the singing. The rest of the singers then join in, on the second, third or fourth syllable. The ‘improvisations’ are within a convention: notation of a sample would show a similarity between them all. I tried a few times, and even though they are simple, you have to be very sure of yourself to get them right since, for that brief time, your voice is exposed and leaps out of the group.

**Number of voices:** A single voice (either male or female as above) often starts each verse, and other members of the group join in, *ad lib.* It is desirable to have as many singers as possible; too few makes dancing a bit of a chore because the sound isn’t as full and exciting. Some singers drop out or rest from time to time, and some pick up and accentuate various words and phrases. Special tasks fall to the more expert singers, for instance, the role of leadership, just as good singers are considered ‘soloists’ in European choirs. Lead singers also tend to do most of the teaching and correcting. While dancers don’t sing aloud while dancing, they often can be heard murmuring the verses softly under their breath as they dance. Likewise seated singers will often mime body rhythms and hand actions as they sing. Everyone takes part in the singing in some way, but not in the same way, and not all the time.

**Vibrations and harmonics:** Nasal and chest resonators are highly developed in *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* singing and the sound carries and vibrates well in the open air and within rocky caverns. The more voices involved, the greater the vibration set up in the performance space, and the more likely that this will affect the performers transcend reality into a liminal performance state. This kind of harmonics is quite differently produced than in Western European singing, which favours chest and throat resonance, except on very high notes, but it is similarly produced to Eastern European and Tibetan vocal sounds. While the Nepean men picked it up quite easily, the women found it very difficult at first. It was quite a cultural leap requiring both physical effort and a paradigm shift about what was a ‘good’ female singing voice. I never got it right.

**Vocal style and expression:** The range of vocal style and expression varies. A great deal depends on the mood of the performers and the occasion. A teaching session is likely to elicit a 'straight' version, whereas an exciting performance can bring out sensitivity, virtuosity and intensity. Some features observed are:

- Breath control used to sharply accentuate sounds, or make them harsh, or soft edged. Some heavy aspiration use for emphasis at times.
- Full throated open sounds, using head and chest resonators
• Portamento and gliding from note to note, especially in wailing, using head resonators only.
• Irony and laughter injected into the vocal sound
• Nasal, cutting vocalisation, especially by the women in the upper registers
• Solo and chorus singing
• Murmuring under the breath
• Simple ornamentation and variation in the upper voices
• Dramatic expression and intensity injected into the singing
• Stage ‘directions’ in terms of vocal dynamics injected into the verses by the song leader to encourage and increase the performers (dancers’ and singers’) intensity. Some are related to the story (“Ay! Wati Tjalku getting closer!”) or to the song itself (“Come on, sing up now! This is an important bit!”)

Instrumentation: Central Desert people do not use a wide variety of instruments other than the voice. Among the usual accompaniments are hand clapping, lap slapping (women), rhythm stick beating (men and sometimes women), boomerang beating (men), thumping the ground with sticks (men). (Moyle, Tunstill and Ellis, passim, for details). With these seemingly simple instruments, great subtlety, energy and variety can be achieved. The body itself is used as the instrument. A taxonomy of specific qualitative language to describe the inma music can be found in Ellis et al (Op. Cit.: 1978), which equates with our own experiences.

Signs and symbols
The word ‘walka’ means any meaningful mark or sign and that is inma-speak for semiotics. ‘Walkatjunanyi’ means: ‘to make a mark’, or, ‘to signify by some kind of inscription’. European studies in semiotics now accept that this means all signs, not just written or drawn signs. Therefore, Mimili has been into semiotic analysis for thousands of years, since it recognises meaning in signs that can be ‘read’ by any of the senses. Scent is one of the ‘signs’ a maku leaves – of its past journey, its presence, its future direction or its life cycle state (grub, chrysalis or moth). Tracks left by paws and claws indicate spatial and directional travel but some are also transformed into permanent marks, like opals. A sound can be a mark, such as a bull-roarer signifying an ancestral voice or a series of rhythmic clatters with boomerangs indicating a tense situation, but also there are ambient soundtracks made by birds in flight or the feet of many warriors running. Particular movements signify travel over particular terrain, or emotional states, timpilypunganyi is beating the rhythm (which has its own messages encoded in it), and mayu’ – the melody - is the ‘taste’ of the inma. These meanings are often turned into visual patterns and transcribed on bodies, in paintings, carvings, drawings and ground sculptures.
Central Australian iconography is usually linear (lines) and is inscribed with ochre directly onto the body and specially made performance objects, and onto the ground in paintings, sand drawings and ground sculptures. Similar symbols are also found in other communities (such as Warlpiri and Pintupi), but Mimili did not produce dot paintings, an introduced phenomenon in Central Australia. Their European influenced art originally tended towards pictorial realism but more lately they have adopted the Central Desert ‘modern’ dot style. (H.A.L.T.: 1993) Ground sculptures and paintings are very common. Many of the inma performances required elaborate preparation of ground, whether at a sacred site or at a performance site elsewhere. These were erased immediately after the performances and I was asked not to photograph them or include them in video records. Performance objects, such as ‘totem’ poles and batons, screens and headdresses are elaborately made, some so large that they require special paddings and fastenings. They are not to be found in tourist shops and are usually destroyed or abandoned after a ceremony. Rock carvings and paintings are to be found, but not as frequently and not as elaborately made as in more northern parts of Australia. Mostly they are secret and their location is not revealed to uninitiated people.

The relative isolation of Central Australia has preserved most of the sites and they do not appear in European ‘art books’, thus not encouraging unwanted tourists. Jennifer Biddle’s interesting work on 'non-written' graphic communication by Central Desert people (1991 and1996) unfortunately omits reference to the graphic communication systems of performance.

**Body paint**

All inma mulapa require full body paint. The painted designs are all symbolic and there are a very great number of patterns and combinations used depending on age, gender, level of initiation, type of inma, locale, etc. It is possible to ‘read’ an inma straight off the body painting but, like the words and the dance, the visual symbols don’t tell the whole story.

Paint for the bodies is usually ochre - white, red or yellow, plus black charcoal - rubbed to a powder on rocks and mixed with spit, fat, oil or water and, for special ceremonies, blood and urine. White and yellow is dominant for the maku. This is gathered ‘locally' depending on where 'local' is, but some special ochre, such as the red ceremonial ochre for (mostly) men's serious ceremonies comes from further afield, such as Ooldea. Often people will carry a small quantity of ochres with them, just in case. The women gave me a small pouch of Ooldea red ochre, which is very hard and fine and needs a lot of grinding down but makes a superb full body paint which dries smooth and lustrous. Mixed with emu oil, it makes the
body glow! There are special, ritual sites for digging ochres as well, such as the main *maku* sacred site at Antara, which yields true yellow ochre. White gypsum is plentiful: some rich pockets can be seen in a number of places near Mimili. Ochre is a commodity and can be traded.

Occasionally the body is completely covered with ochre - as in the men's *malu* (red kangaroo) dances requiring a special red mix, or the women's spotted cat designs in three colours, red, yellow and white. Mostly complex patterns with more detailed meaning are concentrated on the face, the tops of the arms, hands, the chest and the thighs. Sometimes backs, shanks and forearms are included. Feathers, when used by the men for elaborate feather patterns in the *waruwalu* (eagle) ceremonies, are stuck on with blood, sometimes obtained from opening a vein in the arm or the sub-incision of the penis. Each verse/set of verses has a different paint design, although recognisably repeated elements specific to each *inma* are combined and recombined - a palette of symbols which can be read by all who know how.

Painting-up occurs in what can be directly compared with a European 'dressing room' situation, screened by bushes and trees, similarly segregated by gender and fulfilling many of the same functions. It is customary for dancers to paint each other. Women reciprocate freely within big groups, or a single woman may be painted up by number of others. People chat, get changed, gossip about everyday life, discuss the performance, tell the *inma* story, hum and murmur along with the 'paint-up' verses being sung by the singers back around the main fire, and (because they have one ear on the performance proceedings) respond to remarks and commands issued by the song leader. Schechner's 'universal' of performance preparation occurs here, as people slip into a liminal phase between performance space and 'real' space and - with Aboriginal performance - a third, *tjukurpa* space.

**Other costuming**

In many performances in Central Australia (such as gender specific ceremonies for initiated men and women) no European clothes at all are worn and symbols cover the whole body. Open ceremonies tend to require that the genitals be covered even when Europeans are absent. These small flaps are usually very decorative. In some parts of Australia women wear bras. The wearing of clothing, especially bras and skirts for women in areas influenced by missionaries, has meant that some of the designs, so important a story element, are missing. It need not be pointed out that this is an undermining of culture of a very insidious kind.

Other decorative costuming is worn, such as animal ears, plaited belts, pubic tassels and waistbands, arm bands, ankle and leg bands, small aprons and skirts and a variety of...
headdresses (Brokensha: 1987), including some impressively huge and elaborately decorated boards worn on the head during dancing (personal experience, Mimili: 1989). A variety of fluff, feathers, fur, wool, grass tufts and flowers is woven into a range of decorative items. The men used their own blood to stick on the feathers and other kinds of fluff from plants, or even cotton wool, but I never experienced women using blood for any form of decoration and rarely stuck stuff onto their bodies, although feathers, fluff, fur, skins, sinews, grasses and flowers in the headdresses and other items like bracelets and necklaces were very common and very intricately made.

General observations of the inma maku would reveal that a few body-painting designs are shared by both men and women. Some denote an ordinary human man or woman, or a specific character, some show when a dancer is part animal and part ancestor spirit, some show that the dancer is completely transformed into an animal or a spirit, some show the location of the action, some show what kind of activity is going on and some show relationships with other totemic groups. In addition there are a number of other signs and symbols which are visually coded on the body, adding narrative and associative meaning not necessarily connected with inma maku. Common to all maku performers, however, is the single, white horizontal strip across the bridge of the nose and down onto the upper cheeks.

**Olfactory signs**

The inma maku is seriously olfactory. Bodily excreta are the means by which the maku ancestor leaves its ‘mark’ and, therefore, it can be tracked. The yellow ochre representing kuna (faeces), mixed with water representing kumpu (urine), is used for the body paint patterns in performances of the inma when it is an inma pulka done at the sacred site (where the yellow ochre is located). In other performances, where white gypsum is used, a second order theatrical representation of that ‘olfactory mark’ is made. The marks described by Spencer and Gillen were also white and very similar to the Mimili patterns but those on the rocks at the Emily Gap site are yellow. (Isaacs: 1984) Spencer and Gillen made no mention of any olfactory connections or the use of the yellow ochre, but as their language was so limited and their acquaintance with sensory coding probably non-existent, that is not surprising. Since Antara is so far south of Emily Gap and the location so specific and so appropriate to the inma story, the only conclusion I can come to is that there are regional variants and the Mimili people were extremely fortunate to have such clear indications of the presence of the ancestor in their territory and made the most of it.

So, the walkatjara (performers painted up) carry not only symbolic visual symbols but also the maku scents. This olfactory reference takes precedence over any other kind of sensory

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
reference in this series of verses and is said by many Mimili people to be the most important of the senses.

A children's song was current at one time, which disgusted the elders completely:

Happy birthday to you
You come from Uluru
You look like a maku
And smell like one too (small Mimili boys, 1987)

There was another scent, which all performers know about: the 'smell of the performance'. Performance produces adrenaline and, if the performer is terrified, formic acid which can both be sensed by other performers — sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. Non-performers 'doing ceremony' inevitably become completely swamped by a self-conscious flush of excitement (caused by sensory overload), particularly the rush of adrenaline and pheromones. They are often unable to manage this, and are incapable of analytic thinking or indeed awareness of the situation around them. They then produce formic acid. European theatre has terms for the worst cases, like 'stage fright', 'performance blackout', 'roar of the greasepaint, smell of the crowd', 'butterflies', 'footlight flush', etc. People sweat, burp and throw up, forget their lines, tremble and get big headed. They are risky and unreliable partners and are avoided. Experienced performers, on the other hand, do not get this sense of unmanageable frisson - or they have learned to manage it after years of practice and skilled relaxation techniques. Afterwards, they can remember what happened clearly and are far more objective about their experiences than the anthropologist or ethnographer with no performance skills (and by that I do not mean 'talent'). Compare for instance the field reports of Wild: 1977a, b & c, von Sturmer: 1987 and Ellis: 1985. Ellis is the seasoned performer, having been a professional musician. Wild and Sturmer have difficulty explaining their reactions.

When two experienced groups of performers work together, however, it brings a different quality to a performance exchange. All people in Mimili managed the 'high' of performance because performing and transformation is part of their everyday life; Nepean people managed it because that is their chosen career and professional training. Both groups were able to talk about what happened at a later time with a great deal of 'objectivity'.

Taste
Because the inma is about food, there are many references to gustatory matters. As already mentioned, the melody on which each is based is the mayu - the taste - of the inma.
Tracking by taste, tasting the smoke from the fire, tasting the wind, tasting the rain on the wind – are all part of the desert experience. Add to that a constant concern with the maku in its many forms and life stages as food, and the number of times other animals and plants are tracked, caught, cooked and eaten in this and other inma. Taste starts to pervade the consciousness. The Mimili women were determined we should all ‘taste’ what was being sung about, especially witchetty grubs, which taste very good when roasted. It also provided some extremely funny situations where the Nepean men were shamed into eating maku in other forms in the life cycle (like the liquid and custardy stage of the mirinpa – chrysalis abdomen) because Sam with a straight face but a distinct twinkle in his experienced eye told them: “Real men eat mirinpat”

While we never made a full meal out of any of the local food and did not spend every day looking for it, we did hunt/gather/prepare and ‘taste’ everything available over the years, and this gave us the ‘sense memory’ to relate to the verses in which they were mentioned.

**Touch**

It is clear by now that touch played a big part in our teaching and learning. Coming from a society where touch is one of the big taboos and unwelcome touch is grounds for a sexual harassment or paedophilia case in the law courts, it was sheer bliss to live with people for whom touch remains an ordinary part of human interaction. In European culture, the performing arts, sports and medical therapies are among the few ‘professions’ where touch is permitted as part of the practice and even then it is fiercely circumscribed. Parents must even be careful about touching their own children who have been made nervous by over-zealous teachers and welfare workers or reports of child abuse in the media. This is not the place to carry on about the de-humanising and isolation of people by multi-national capitalist hegemonies (Chomsky: 1996), or the ways in which ‘touch’ in European culture has become associated with violence and punishment (Foucault: 1977) however the extent to which European lives are being relentlessly destabilised, isolated and controlled by the ‘touch nazis’ is frightening. Despite this, ‘body language’ and non-verbal communication through the senses and the unconscious is known to be a vital part of European communication systems (Soja: 1989; Kristeva: 1989; Garlick: 1990; Bandler and Grinder: 1982; Poyatos: 1982, 1993).

Much in Mimili life is communicated by touch, particularly in performance. In painting bodies, touch is essential. Luckily, performers are among the few whose very occupation requires not only touch but also expression through touch and, after a short period in which we stopped censoring our behaviour, we responded in the way we do among ourselves. Few
words at all were needed and our mind’s non-verbal receptors start looking for the body language first.

Much teaching in dance, drama and music is done by touch. In all performances, intra-performance signaling is ‘wordless’ - tactile, gestural, proxemic and kinaesthetic. Extraneous verbal or written communication is almost never used past the early rehearsal stages (apart from interjections by directors or audiences, or cue cards!). Groups use touch to ‘keep together’, or to ‘change gear’ to increase intensity levels, the pace or the focus.

**Emotional expression.**

As there are no ‘spoken’ words or ‘straight acting’ in the *inma*, dancers and singers have to put effort into expressions of emotion in performances. Bearing in mind that there is no place for effusive, romantically styled emotionalism in traditional Aboriginal culture anyway, strong feelings are stylised rather than realistic and the power comes from the manipulation of the conventions. This is accompanied by strong concentration and perceptual transformation.

*Kabuki* or *Noh* theatre have some similar characteristics. This does not diminish the internalised feeling or psychological motivation but it does alter the style of representation.

*Inma* performances produce intense emotional responses. This might seem contradictory but, in performance, overt emotionalism by a performer does not equate with emotional response in others. In fact, it is likely to have the opposite effect. What produces emotion is meaning: the greater the meaning the greater the response. If it’s being ‘spelled out’ for an audience in a realistic way, the response will be passive: there is no room for personal constructs.

**kutjuparinyi - transformation**

For an Aboriginal performer, ‘the body’ means more than a physical body or a cultural body but also a spiritual body and a transforming body. Transformations during performance are very rarely considered in European societies where all performance is held to be ‘false’ representation, although actors attempt to find ways of making it ‘true’. The very real emotional and perceptual changes that take place in actors and onlookers, however, were dismissed until relatively recently by a prevailing rationalist mindset which claimed that, even if people did ‘suffer’ an aberrant emotional change, they very quickly re-adjusted to ‘normality’. An obsession with normality works against an understanding of transformation.

People in Mimili devote a very large proportion of their time to creating transformational performances and there is a strong tendency to integrate this into the pervading spiritual framework that supports the whole of their experience of the day-to-day world. That does
not mean that many of the factors contributing to performance do not have also physical, secular, aesthetic and intellectual discourses also, but they are subsequently transformed by a religious framework and integrated into the universal cosmology. The large body of literature on Christian approaches to transformation is not included in this thesis because it so vehemently excludes any discussion of transformation that is not within the Christian canon. European notions of transformation exist also within an almost wholly secular and scientific culture, where it occupies a position of very shaky respectability within a capitalist economy.

While societies in other parts of the world found themselves caught in a spiral of growth and an increase in technological complexity, Aboriginal Australians chose to reduce work and technology to a minimum. Their hunting and gathering techniques were such that they spent a smaller proportion of their time on the mechanics of subsistence than do most peasant agriculturalists or industrial workers in other cultures. The time thus made available was utilised to devise complex social systems, rituals, narratives and song traditions and for other aesthetic and intellectual pursuits. (Dixon: 1980, 6-7)

Nearly all of these "other aesthetic and intellectual pursuits" are performance-linked. Max Charlesworth points this out in his introduction to Religion in Aboriginal Australia, 1984, and Merlan and Hiatt refer to it in their 'double introduction' (ppi to xxxix) to the 1989 reprint of Stanner's seminal work, On Aboriginal Religion. There has been an obsession with constructing Durkheimian social/economic frameworks for all aspects of performances, where rather there should be a search for an understanding of the religious, aesthetic and intellectual worldview that underpins the outward signs and functions of performances. What is occurring between the 'actors', their shared spiritual beliefs and their interrelationships with their linked physical and psychophysical environments is of far greater interest.

First, it is impossible in Aboriginal religious life to make the distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane" spheres that is crucial to Durkheim's theory. And, second, in a very real sense Aboriginal society is not a function of Aboriginal religion. In other words, one might almost say that society exists for the sake of religion rather than religion for the sake of society. (Charlesworth: 1984, p 4)

Performing with the Mimili people, I find Charlesworth's notion to be true, without altogether dismissing some of Durkheim's ideas. All aspects of daily life are sacramental and are incorporated into performances that identify, reify and represent Aboriginal life. But it is not enough to observe, record and analyse performances, or to know and be able to follow the narrative or to seek out levels of religious meaning and references. Nor is it enough to be able to link the performances to everyday practices maintaining Bourdieu's communitas. It is
first of all important to appreciate a whole ontology - in this case, what life is ‘like’ for the Mimili people and why performing the inma is important to them in maintaining their spiritual, ever-transforming world.

**Practicalities of transformation**

Europeans generally locate transformation with other ‘alien experiences’ and isolate its practitioners as ‘not altogether safe’. Its teaching and exploration is marginalised on the fringes of psychotherapy and ‘new age’ shamanism. Although I have heard teachers say after a breakthrough of learning: “That child is absolutely transformed now he can read!”, it is unlikely that a school system which values rational education and cognitive approaches will in any way wish to teach an Aboriginal approach to education when it undermines its own.

There is no elitist attitude to acquiring skills and knowledge about transformation in Aboriginal communities. It is expected. (Ellis: 1989) All performance learning is transformational and associated with lifespan, growth and the passing through of the rites of passage. Traditional Aboriginal people learn how to express their being and identity through all of the perceptual channels available to them from before birth due to a constant presence and active use of those channels. Specific information and new things are experienced and contextualised when the time is right in the eyes of the community and from personal desire to ‘change’. Much of this the people at Mimili people share generously with those who genuinely wanted to understand (Marshall: 1989 and 1998). However, with knowledge come obligations - and this is what many have not understood.

What is possible among performance practitioners, however, is a very high degree of objectivity about transformation - and it is very controlled. There is a cold-blooded absolutism about experienced performers transforming themselves and their audiences. They are always 'on the edge' of a kind of schizophrenia where the balance between different realities must be maintained but they develop skills that allow multiple realities to exist in their conscious minds. Remembering exactly what happened while you are ‘there’ is much more difficult. The getting 'in and out' of performance is part of this skill. If people do slip away, community safeguards operate, as evidenced by communities which practice trance. That's why there are 'minders', experienced elders who can bring a performer 'back', stage managers and other performers. For those who achieve very high levels of transformation and liminality, a very keen set of personal skills develops over time.

It’s also why mass ritual events (no audience as such) can be so dangerous when people don't understand mass liminality. Note that the police are the 'minders' for audience members or participants in European societies. European theatres control transformation by
seating, separation and fourth wall illusion but it's not so easy with Carnivale or Mardi Gras, or the AFL Grand Final where all people become free radicals in the street.

In the Central Desert, there are also strictly defined procedures that cope with the temporary alteration of social norms. One is the ability to know what is happening and to be able to talk about it. We were very surprised at the matter of fact way the Mimili people managed this and it was a great relief to all of us. It made it possible to be analytical during and after performances, because we were both able to get out and back in, and up to steam in a matter of seconds - flipping in and out of that 'liminal state' with great precision.

It is a challenge and a revelation to European-trained performers to 'flip' in this way. Traditional Aboriginal performers already have, as it were, left their motors running - and can transform effortlessly. After a period of practice, it becomes progressively easier for a non-Aboriginal performer to achieve a similar state. Schechner (1988 and 1990) is undoubtedly correct to include 'transformation' as one of his 'universals of performance' but not all performers (or audience members) will experience it fully all the time.

Intense performance is completely engrossing and all consuming for the dancers, and their intensity gives impetus to the seated singers who, it must be said, are not as prone to slip out of the 'real' world. They sit within the social context of people mixing, eating, laughing, yelling at the children and keeping warm. The intellectual requirements of remembering words and music is a different activity to dancing and physically transforming into spirit ancestors. Also, with the singers, directed by the lead singer, rests the responsibility of the performance sequence and the accuracy of the narrative.

As the level of intensity increases, and secret and dangerous rituals are taking place, the focus intensifies in purpose rather than on performance. More importance is placed on reaching an altered state so as to truly 'be one with the spirit', not in just a metaphysical sense but also in a physical sense. A complete commitment to 'being there' by both singers and dancers drives that moment. In the cases of the more closed and secret rituals, focus on the purpose of the ritual ensures that almost all participants, free from even a quasi-audience situation, can transform completely much sooner. It would be true to say that the physical and metaphysical 'knowledges' are mixed at all times and that the many kinds of 'reality' elide constantly. Contributing to the performance intensity are the environmental factors that enhance transformation by altering brain patterns - including repetitive rhythms and vibrations, as well as fire, smoke, heat, wind, water and nearly always an enveloping darkness of night to blur the boundaries.
Extra humans
Inanimates, animals and plants are, in European epistemology, treated quite differently to human life. Only children’s performances allow the non-human to ‘perform’ and then almost always as anthropomorphic characters. Adult theatre and film relegates any references to nature and the environment (and there are many) to the metaphorical level or to special effects. This is in complete contrast to traditional Aboriginal performance, which acknowledges spirit, animal and plant life to be equally important as, and intrinsically linked with, human life, attributing life-spirit qualities to the inanimate. Perception depends on the ecological framing of the performance within its society. Being an emu as an emu (or a rock formation that was/is an emu ancestor from time to time) in an adult drama might appear bizarre to an actor in the Sydney Theatre Company. However, plays in which people are concerned with petty issues of urbanised domestication (‘sit coms’ and ‘well made plays’) seem empty and uninteresting to traditional Aboriginal performers.

Value judgements and critique
As for all forms of group and individual creative expression, some kind of value judgement is inevitable, some post performance critique. A ‘good’ inma performance, however, may not entirely be critiqued on the basis of technical skill. Nor is it on the basis of personal charm and personality. Attitudes towards the dancers and singers among the Mimili people indicate that their most subtle performers tend to be older people with a lot of knowledge and it isn’t considered respectful to criticise them in the same way as in European theatre reviews. It is also noticeable that the older performers do have a high degree of physical skill and are not significantly lacking in strength, endurance, charm and personality, even at ages that exceeded eighty.

More often, performance critique will centre on pragmatics: whether all components of the performance were correct in every detail, whether enthusiasm was present, whether performers were committed, whether this or that young person was learning well, whether the fires were properly maintained properly and whether the right people were present.

A different kind of critique is also prevalent: what Europeans would call ‘critical discourse’, where the social, educational, economic and religious contexts and values of the inma are debated. This relates back to the section on ‘functions’.

Too many meanings
Inma performance is a very exciting activity and one that binds the community together in a network of shared physical and metaphysical experiences. Because of the many levels of knowledge, there is always more to learn, keeping what seems to be repetitive and
unchanging material full of surprises and challenges. This is absolutely essential in any creative activity. What appears to be ‘traditional’, which implies fixed and unchanging, is full of internal variety and responds flexibly to change. What may look repetitive can in truth gain great power and dynamism in that very repetition. Within the inma, Mimili people say a great deal about their lived lives and they ways in which they choose to represent themselves. By performing inma with them, we gained insights into other ways of being in the world that we would never otherwise have done.

One of our students sighed deeply and said: There are too many meanings.” Not the first person to make that comment!
Notes:

1. While preparing students’ notes for a production of Æschylus’ Agamemnon, in 1983, I tried to trace the family genealogy of the House of Atreus. I needed six books on Greek myths and all of the plays that featured aspects of the tale from both Greek and Roman times. It took days to work out and the resultant family tree showing places of significance and journeys of note was extremely complex indeed, cross-referenced and interconnected. Craig San Roque did a similar exercise in 1988, but he had the sense to do it in a huge 10m² sandpit. This was eventually how I mapped the inma maku. Unfortunately, it cannot be included in this thesis.

2. (Garlick: 1990; Gardner, passim; Garner: 1994; Poyatos: 1983; Pocock, passim; Rodaway: 1994; Porteous: passim; Reinelt and Roach, eds: 1995; Tuan: 1993; Roland: 1997). Sensory and perceptual phenomena of this kind are discussed in the literature of clinical studies in sensory functioning; psychology; psychoanalysis; æsthetics; pharmaceutics; music, theatre and dance performance; visual arts practice and sociological studies into trance and drug use - but there has been very little discussion of the field in the anthropological literature.
Chapter 8

*inma maku*

narrative in performance: mapping change

How the *maku* women's secret knowledge was stolen by the *tjalku* men and a new ceremony was created.
8

inma maku

narrative in performance: mapping change

8.1 Stories and sites

Witchetty grub stories

Behind all performance, somewhere, there is a story, no matter how slight or obscure. The inma maku, on one level, is about food. Sir Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, Carl Strehlow and T.G.H. Strehlow are the significant early European observers of the Central Australian witchetty grub ceremonies and possibly the first Europeans to hear its stories. Spencer and Gillen give an account of Aranda (Arrente) witchetty grub increase ceremonies (intichiuma) at Emily Gap, out of Alice Springs, in their 1899 edition of Native Tribes of Central Australia (1968, unabridged reprint). There are striking similarities to the descriptions of the ceremonies and the older iconography (photographed some time before the 1890's) in both contemporary Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara ceremonies and to the iconography still painted on bodies and inscribed and painted on rock faces around Mimili. T.G.H. Strehlow reports similar rituals in his Aranda Traditions (1947) and mentions them in Songs of Central Australia (1973). Ronald and Catherine Berndt were active in the desert regions also but their focus is on human subjects rather than the ecology. Also, their interest was not witchetty grub ceremonies, although witchetty grubs make an appearance in their collections from time to time (Berndt and Berndt: 1988). Some missionaries, explorers and government surveyors such as Tindale (1936,1940) filed reports and made maps and films in the area but, unfortunately, there is no comparative material concerning inma maku performances. Catherine Ellis, who originally worked as T.G.H. Strehlow's research assistant, went on to make major contributions to the field of understanding Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara music in ways which certainly related the music within its social and performance
ecology (Ellis: 1989; Tunstill: 1987) but she had little to do with witchetty grubs and passed on the very few references she had. There are a few individual studies of Pitjantjatjara song (Kartomi: 1980); dance (Moyle: passim), ritual transformation (Bain: 1980) and sacred sites Payne: 1984, 1989) but very few witchetty grubs are to be met with. Several recordings of maku related songs collected by various ethnographers are held in the AIATSIS Library, Canberra, but they are uncontextualised. (Appendix C) My analysis of the inma itself will, therefore, contain very few references to previous research. Witchetty grubs evidently did not catch the ethnographic imagination in the same way other more glamorous subjects did.

Specific sacred sites associated with the inma maku
Sacred sites are the sources of all inma performances. The most important maku site for the Mimili community is Antara, a high monolith in the heart of the southern section of the Everard Ranges, around 40 k southwest of Mimili. Located within that large site, part way down the northwestern side, is the very source of the maku ceremonies for that area, known as Karu ranypana, which name has a number of connotations. Literally, Karu is a creek bed or waterway; karu ranypa is the swelling made by the presence in the tree root of a maku grub (Goddard: 1992: 33-34). This is signified by a remarkable rock formation that reflects the natural habitat of the maku grub. This in itself is very significant, as it denotes Karu ranypana as a major survival site in a desert ecology.

Other significant sacred sites occur in the area, some in the mountains themselves and some in sheltered oases in the valleys below, where momentous events occurred/are occurring. They include a large permanent spring, a spectacular waterfall area punctuated at various levels by large stone basins that in themselves form sizable pools; significant giant trees and rock formations identifiable as the living ancestors of some of our colleagues; a large rock resembling (and representing) the female form of the alleged sorceress, Kutanyanatutiny, fallen forward on her front, with her back pierced by many spear holes; abundant maku hunting grounds crowded with hospitable acacias; rocks and open caves containing objects sacred to both men and women; and ‘animate’ formations, such as wanampi, the rainbow serpent, whose form clearly curls, sleeping, across three large hills. Some sites are more secret, for instance, in a cliff face in a narrow cleft studded with opals are tjalku fingernails where Wati Tjalku tried to climb the cliff tracking the maku, or a deep, hidden cave with a perpetual spring and many sacred wall carvings and objects, visible only by firelight.

Many of the sites are not ‘ideal’ to dance on, in European terms, as the ground is not flat. The variable terrain of the sites, however, creates changes in physicalisation which are then
transformed into abstracted dance movements performed on *inma* grounds elsewhere, providing subtle differences to what otherwise might seem repetitious steps.

The necessity of referring to sites and terrain within the execution of the dance steps and gesture opens up a whole new field of Aboriginal dance analysis and suggests some of the ways in which the body can be decoded - in terms of geographicality and sacred sites.

**8.2 Learning about *maku* and *tjalku*, Mimili way**

In the field
Our education in *inma* was so relentless we hardly had time to rehearse or think about our exchange performances. We spent part of every day travelling to a different *inma* site and learning about its connection to the *inma*. We learned the songs and dances on site, and some of them were ones we had learned in Sydney, which now began to make more sense. We had started to get a feel for the landscape now, and had a better idea of the topography. At nights we performed at a variety of flat *inma* grounds - around Mimili, but mostly at Sam’s camp, just up the track or at Blue Hills. Both had a large bore and an open tank, which, in the daytime, was full of shrieking children dive-bombing each other. Here we learned many, many dances and started to get involved with Mimili’s performance culture. Whereas the area seemed almost deserted in the daytime, at night over a hundred people appeared, ready to perform.

On one intensive day we were taken in a range of vehicles to the central site, *Karu ranypana*. The trucks and 4WDs were parked at the side of the track, and we headed off along a narrow path across a meadow of shoulder-high flowery scrub, full of very small finches, to the side of a steep, high hill, or a low mountain. It was about 11 o’clock and we had been warned to bring something to drink. Pompey Everard, Sam Pumani and David Umula were our guides, with Audrey and Lily Umula. It was clear that Pompey was in charge of this expedition and was doing most of the talking. After a seriously tiring climb up the rocky face of the hill (not too steep, just full of gullies and dry runs, we passed a cave, which we were warned not to enter. It was, Ian told us, a men’s keeping place and had sacred objects and rock carvings and paintings that uninitiated men and women may not see. In there resided a very powerful spirit. A large goanna sun-baked on a nearby rock and two wedgetailed eagles circled overhead. There were insects whirring and clicking everywhere and other birds swept past continually, snatching them from the air.
We reached a clear section and emerged from the crevice onto a vast smooth plateau of ancient, rotting, splintering shale, running like a bull-nosed shingle roof along the edge of the sheer drop to the flat land, where we could now see the vehicles parked like matchbox toys, far below. We had climbed quite a distance, but it was only half way.

“This is a very important place,” whispered Ian to the rest of us coming behind. “Listen to Pompey.”

Pompey pointed to flat chunks of shale lying around, and picked up a piece himself. He hurled it over the edge and we could hear it smash far below. He asked us to do likewise, and we picked up a rock each.

“Now line up! Line up!” he ordered, and we did. “Now throw … all together!” And we did. Twenty pieces of rock smashed down below. “Again!” And we did it again. And again. We were very puzzled but there was a good reason, as always. Pompey explained that every time we threw a piece of shale over the edge, it smashed into tiny pieces and every piece became a new *maku* – not here at the bottom of the cliff, but in real life. Each splinter, he explained, became a *maku nyiri*, or cocoon. He figured that our group had made a significant difference and that there would now be plenty of *maku* to eat this season. (Verse example 2)

We cautiously inched forward on the unstable bull-nose edge to see what we could see: a vast terminal moraine of shale, which by now came half way up the side of the cliff. There was no way of calculating how long it had taken to build up. Certainly hundreds of years. There was a fair bit of the mountain lying down there, so we also figured that the ledge must have been a lot higher at one time.

We now moved up through another series of gullies and crevices to a much higher level, still curved, but more stable and clearly leading to the top. Between the huge chunks of rock grew lines of short grass, with the occasional stunted bush. “This is *maku* mountain,” said Pompey. He waved his arm across and a sweep of 180°. We stopped and turned to look. Pompey gestured far to the south-east: “Mintabi, there … *Antara*, here.”

*Wati Tjalku* had certainly walked a long way.

After stomping out an unintentional and fast-spreading grass fire caused by a student lighting a cigarette, we moved to the summit and looked around us. We had a 360° view of the country and for some minutes nobody spoke. It was just like being inside a fire opal, but this time we were up high above the ground and the colours were muted by distance and
haze. In verbal shorthand Pompey described the journey of *Wati Tjalku*, using the landscape as a map, pointing and referring to various sites we couldn’t really pick out as he spoke, because there were so many and most were out of sight. The story of his journey finished at *Antara* and now we were to go to the core site where we would pick up the main section of the story. All this knowledge is encapsulated by reference in one verse of *inma*! (Verse example1)

As we started walking over the round crest of the mountain and more energetically down the other side, Pompey asked us to continue throwing shale pieces and we did until we saw a hand waving and heard a shout. Coming up to meet us was half of Mimili, mostly women and children, but a few senior men. They guided us to a flat site of the other side of the mountain top, where we saw Molly Everard, Milatjari Pumani and Angelina Wangka on an outcrop at one edge of a naturally formed, very flat circular stone stage, edged with big boulders. Everyone was in a holiday mood and the children were having a great time shouting and jumping from rock to rock. The usual number of small ones skinned their knees and burst into tears.

This was *Karu ranypana*, the most important site.

Towards the eastern end of the flat area was a deep cleft in the rock around which Molly, Milatjari and Angelina were now sitting. The site itself comprised a possibly bottomless hole about three meters in diameter divided into two by a flat, thick, rock wall, rounded on top with a deep cleft either side into which water continually seeps - a natural, permanent waterhole high up in a mountain. The rock formation looked like a giant acacia root swollen with a *maku* grub. Men or women can stand in these side trenches, which are now very deep from excavation of their contents. One side holds yellow ochre (the true *maku* ochre) moistened by a little seepage, which is the *maku kuna* (faeces) often mentioned in the *inma* verses. The other holds a lot of water, made yellow by the presence of some ochre, which is the *maku kumpu* (urine), also featured in the narrative.

A man was standing in each of these clefts (they were very deep) and passing up ochre and water to Molly, who was now perched on top of the swollen root as she painted up – in yellow, not white as we usually did. They explained the situation and asked us to paint up too. The wind was pretty strong and it was not exactly a hot day but we did it, and all sat in a half circle while Molly, Milatjari and Angelina explained at great length about their family heritage and their ownership of the site, and the women’s role in the secret levels of the *inma maku*. The men stood back and chimed in only occasionally. Although we recorded this story on video, I will not give details here, as I am sure it was not intended for publication.
Some verses were also sung. Then we dressed and the women went down the mountain, while the men took us over the other side and down a level to where we stood on the edge of an immense circular rock basin, at least a kilometer wide. This had been invisible from the flat site.

“Look!” directed David Umala, pointing to the distant opposite bottom of the basin.

Far away, at the other side, we saw a man emerge from behind a short bush, carrying two bundles and a digging stick (We could not see the nguntal-nguntal – but words of verse the verse tell us they are there). It was Wati Tjalku approaching Antara at the end of his long journey from Mintabi. He walked steadily up the side of the stone basin as Sam, Pompey and David sang the verse. The acoustic was excellent, because every time they stopped, so did the dancer – who turned out to be, now he got closer, Yanki, a man we had danced with before, in full paint.

We also recognised the song verse as one we had learned in Penrith, and the dance as the one that had puzzled us all, because of the odd ‘snow plough’ gait. Now we saw why. A dancer would need to walk that way to get up the hill. This was a mammoth effort and even the fit Yanki was tired.

“Down the mountain!” ordered David.

When we reached the bottom, the sun was well and truly headed towards the west and the rest of Mimili was waiting for us. The men who had driven us to the first drop-off had backtracked and had come around the other side of the range to pick us up. We walked along a dry river bed where Angelina showed us her Grandfather – a huge old red river gum - and we moved to the next site.

This was key Kutanyanatutiny’s site. And there she was, flung on her belly, her back pierced with many spear wounds. At this point in time, there were a couple of dozen children skylarking all over her but that in no way detracted from the seriousness of the story. The unfortunate woman had been speared by the tjalku men as revenge for seducing Wati Tjalku away from his male companions. They desire the women’s secret maku knowledge and since she had already told the secret of maku hunting to Wati Tjalku, they speared her while he was away in Mintubi. He arrived too late.

We now split into two groups - adult men and women. There were sacred objects to be shown and the two versions of the story told, neither to be revealed to the other side. The
versions were not too different in the basic event narrative - Kutanyanatutiny' gets speared by the tjalku men - but the rationale and motivation given were quite different. The women told us the women’s version and also their version of the men’s tale. I do not know what the men were told by the men.

In the women’s version, the wise woman, Kutanyanatutiny, is the keeper of much wisdom. She and the other women know all about the maku, which is a very rich source of nourishment in the desert, has multiple forms in its lifecycle and therefore needs more than one hunting method. The women are the ones who reportedly classified the maku into the mai category, thus bringing their hunting (or gathering) into the ambit of women’s work (its close relationship with acacia trees is the reason given). Allied to this is the use of maku as high protein food for young children and old people and the need for the women to control this valuable asset – especially times of drought and shortage.

The tjalku men also prize maku. They are delicious tidbits and make great food to take on hunts and to snack on anytime. However, the men are greedy and want them all for themselves. The maku women will not reveal their secrets. Maku kept reminding me of prawns and their status as a good and nourishing bite to eat. In our family, there is always a squabble about the men getting more prawns than the women.

Wati Tjalku and Kutanyanatutiny' somehow get together. The men call it sorcery. The women call it love magic (ilipinyti). The men say Kutanyanatutiny' is trying to kill Wati Tjalku and has stolen his breastbone which has given her power over him. The women say she has ‘stolen his heart’, or words to that effect. The tjalku men are angry because Wati Tjalku now spends time away from men’s camp, and send out a tjina karpilpa, an assassin with magic powers – literally ‘bound feet’, referring to the emu feather shoes he wears to cover his tracks. (He is better known, perhaps, as the kadaitcha man among Arrente people.) Kutanyanatutiny' outwits him, so they stalk her on mass at a time when Wati Tjalku is in Mintabi, maybe ‘looking after’ the maku dreaming in that area. (This is hinted, not stated).

Alarmed, she signals him to come back (unclear how – but maybe the eagle, the enemy of the tjalku, acts as a messenger? Or smoke signals? Both are mentioned in the song verses). The tjalku men spear Kutanyanatutiny' and she transforms herself into the rock formation we can see in front of us – goes back into the country. They cannot find the ‘breastbone/heart’, which is now a women’s secret object: a large but portable stone, kept in a secret place on the western side of the mountain.
Wati Tjalku is on his way back, but he is too late. He tries to reach Kutanyanatutiny' quickly by climbing up the southeastern cliff face following the scent trail of the maku but is transformed and only his claw are left – opals in the rock. This is a men’s site, near the cave on the first side of the mountain and we women did not see it.

Addenda:
After writing this, while half asleep in bed one morning, something else occurred to me. I remembered the rocks and the way Pompi Everard had kept asking us to smash them into as many small pieces as we could, and what Spencer and Gillen and Strehlow wrote of the ceremonies in Arrente territory. This concerned the rubbing of sacred stones on men to give them power, but also the rubbing of stone on stone to create dust that has regenerative properties, since every cell in an ancestor's body is 'live'. Strehlow's piece is worth reproducing again here, and Spencer and Gillen’s photos are included here:

The [witchetty grub] ancestor represents the sum total of the living essence of the witchetty grubs - both animal and human - regarded as a whole. Every cell, if we may be allowed to phrase it thus, in the body of the original ancestor is a living animal or a living human being: if the ancestor is a witchetty grub man, then every cell in his body is potentially either a separate living witchetty grub or a separate living man of the witchetty grub totem … Today natives still point out to each other the changed, immortal, life holding bodies of an ancestor and his sons: they are now become rocks and trees and tjurunga … If game is becoming scarce in a bad season, the native can create the animals that he needs with ease, simply by rubbing portion of the rock representing the changed body of the ancestor with another stone: for every atom of that rock is a potential animal; the dust that flies from the rock and is scattered on the ground will stir into life when the next rains fall and bring up grass and flowers from the expectant soil.

Strehlow (like others of his generation) constructed the witchetty grub ancestor as a man. But according to the Mimili community, the witchetty grub ancestor is neuter and the custodian, Kutanyanatutiny’, is female. I remember clearly one of the women saying that the maku Dreaming was essentially women’s business and had been stolen by the men, just as they stole the hunting secrets. Women still hunt the witchetty grub (still classed as mai not kuka) almost exclusively, although men certainly know how to hunt it, and do so on occasion but not ceremonially. Also mentioned is the way in which the maku transforms, and its many life phases and names – egg, grub, cocoon, pupa and moth. (Other butterflies and moths do to, but the maku is the biggest of them and has exceptional food value). It is known as a creature that can ‘generate itself’ and is also linked with women’s life cycles - the most important phase being child-bearing.
In the verses, many references are made to the attempts of the men to ‘rescue’ their ex-comrade, and it always struck me that he didn’t seem to need rescuing. It sounded like jealousy on their part that he had knowledge (and a relationship with the country) they didn’t. Was he a ‘new man’? Was he part of a different relationship between men and women in which they shared creation of new life?

The women say they have lost some of their power but still control their secret *maku* ceremonies, knowledge and the sites, and *maku* hunting is still women’s business. The men, however, look after the most of the open ceremonies and the men’s ceremonies. Men have no real interest in *maku* other than eating them, they say, just like *tjalku* who are the ‘real life’ competitors for *maku* with the women.

I am not sure, however, that that is all there is (as if it wasn’t enough). Nonetheless, it is a compromise of sorts with the result being the dual system of responsibility for the *maku* ceremonies and Dreaming, which is supported by sociological studies of Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people, especially Annette Hamilton’s research in desert communities (Hamilton: 1979a; 1979b; 1982; 1987 and 1998)

### 8.3 Brief analysis of the *inma maku*

**Melody, rhythm and time**

Notation in the European manner of the *mayu* (basic melodic line or ‘flavour’ of the *inma*) and the melodic variations of the *inma maku* is not part of this thesis.

It could be done, and by a computer, but there is little point unless a musicologist wished to deconstruct a single recorded event for analytic purposes. As an ex-musicologist, I will not include such notation here - for all the reasons I have already outlined: conversion to European notation has the same effect on sound as translation into English does on words.

All verses use a variation of the main melody, and it can vary from performance to performance. Far more important are the rhythmic patterns of the music and the clapping points, which do not vary. They are complex and, at times, isorhythmic. Ellis discusses the importance of accurate rhythm as an independent carrier of information very thoroughly in a number of analyses of Central Desert music, but so far there has been no conclusion to the inquiry. (1967c, 1968c, 1984, and with L.M. Barwick: 1987) Ellis has also discussed time-

Were I to do an analysis of this musically, it would be laid out thus.

A. MELODIC LINE
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
SONG RHYTHM
_______________________________________________________________________________
BEATING PULSE
_______________________________________________________________________________

lakutakuta kulpangu

lakutakuta          goes / returns

Lakutakuta (the tjalku ancestor) (leaving from Mintabi) travels

B. MELODIC LINE
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
SONG RHYTHM
_______________________________________________________________________________
BEATING PULSE
_______________________________________________________________________________

nguntal nguntal kulpangu

nulla nullas (carrying)    goest / returns

He carries his nulla nullas as he comes and goes

VARIATION
_______________________________________________________________________________

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
Levels of meaning

The *inma maku* is on one level a children's *inma*, an 'open' ceremony, which is why it was chosen for us to learn. While there was certainly a simple surface narrative, and the *inma* acts as a survival manual for young people on how to hunt *maku* sustainably themselves, there are other levels. One is a straightforward ‘increase’ ritual, but even deeper levels exist, made more complex by the passing of time and the accumulation of detail. These include the seasonal life cycle of the *maku*; a mapping of the country of that Dreaming; a catalogue of sacred sites; and, at a deeper level again, a significant incident of social change: how the *tjalku*/*Tjunku* men stole the secrets of hunting *maku* from the *maku* women and how a man and woman transgressed the societal norms and were punished. There is also a ‘love magic’ level that ends in tragedy for the wisewoman (or sorceress, depending on whether you are a man or a woman) and shows, perhaps, the shift of Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara society from a matriarchy to a dual system. Note that a shift to a patriarchy is not implied as it might be for other groups, or might be assumed by European anthropologists.

Language

I am indebted to the Mimili people especially, as well as Hugh Lovesy and Ian Knowles for providing initial working translations for each verse. I slaved over other aspects with Cliff Goddard's *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Dictionary* (1992) and several language and grammar sources edited by him, as well as compared the dances and body painting with the words. Other meanings were gradually revealed by a Mimili teacher when appropriate (in my case a woman elder - often my Mimili mother or an auntie). I am not yet old enough to have been told all the levels.

Also, knowledge in performance comes in a variety of packages and ways of understanding; speaking to 'informants' reveals one kind of information only. The verses I have added most recently pose the most problems because I had performed them less frequently and there has been less time to learn about the deeper levels. Some of these personal 'discoveries' I have been able to verify with elders verbally, or they are only articulated through social discourse and performance. Others are revealed in the landscape or under certain weather conditions. More are encoded in proxemics and choreographic modes, as dancing bodies carry kinaesthetic messages. I have tried to convey this by means of various notes, tropes, pictures and diagrams added to my versions of the 'narrative' but this can only convey a very small part of how my mind and body now understands the *inma*.
Some verses proved untranslatable as they use anitji words - archaic and special words found in the inma only and which not even the elders were sure of or, if they were, I was not ready to be told. Some aspects also are 'meant to be discovered' by novices themselves and are never articulated, so Molly told me.

It will be noticed that each verse is extremely economical. In fact, it is so economical that on its own it tells very little. Knowledge of the 'story' is assumed and often a verbal explanation to me was filled with detail not found in the verse but turned out to be stuff I should have known anyway (and would have if I had been part of the community since childhood). I have mostly given the women's version of the story, which varies from the men's - at times slightly, at times radically. Some sections are shared by men and women and it was the men who filled in the gaps by telling their versions.

Repetition was the only way we could learn the dances, as there appeared to be no names for the many of the steps, but there are analogic descriptions. We eventually linked the steps and the meanings (the ones we knew of) to the verses themselves (e.g. the step for hunting in the sandy desert when the tjalku is leaving Mintabi; the hand movement for a fleeing maku throwing kumpu (urine) over its shoulder). This made learning and retention easier and was the best way of communicating with the Mimili people about it.

Meaning can also be 'read' in the landscape and is implicit in the performance sites themselves and in the complex intermeshing of the environmental and linguistic. The sites mentioned I have visited and, more importantly, performed in or observed others performing in. Here, the narrative is much clearer and I am able to fill in the 'un-performed', the tacit referential knowledge of the environmental features which is found nowhere in the words and music of the songs but is in the steps and choreography of the dances. Where I am not familiar with the sites, there are distinct gaps of which I only became aware after I realised what a difference knowing the site made.

**Narrative structure**

What follows is my version of some salient parts of this 'narrative'. I have selected several from the 257 verses we 'learned'. I worked on the basis that we did start 'at the beginning' – kuwaripatjera - and that we followed the 'songline' from sacred site to sacred site, as the elders said (and as we did in reality) even if there was a great deal of back-tracking and lateral movement along the way, and even if multiple timeframes were operating. The narrative seems broken up and episodic because, firstly, quite separate episodes are happening simultaneously and they are told by switching across from one to the other; secondly, the narrative switches from one element of a single episode to another, from one time frame to
another, from one state to another without warning and, thirdly, new bits are introduced which seem to have no relevance until connections are made later. Tarrentino’s *Pulp Fiction* received critical reviews for the same narrative tactics. The body of Greek myths has similar characteristics.¹

It seems that what I have called Verse 1 is in fact the first verse of the core *Mimili* section of the *inma maku*, as it describes in one sweep the ambit of their ‘territory’ and their sacred sites connected with the *maku*, the beginning and the end of that section of the ‘songline’, and the central character, then the rest of the *inma* gets down to the business of filling in the detail. (See Ellis: 1966) It should be noted that not all the verses in the 257 are to do with the core story. Many are about other aspects of *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* life and are in some way linked or connected with different, relevant episodes, side issues or interconnecting ‘songlines’ or completely different but connected *inma*. Usually these are set at an *inma piti* where links could logically be expected to occur.

**Narrative voice**

The *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara* verses are constructed in the first, second or third person narrative in the present tense, with a stated or implied 'I' or 'we' involvement. This is something I have rarely found carried over into translations, which almost always change the literal meaning into the third person past tense narrative for European publication. Critiques of the ‘anglicising’ of Aboriginal oral narratives usually take the position that it is imperialistic to ‘clean up’ the original syntax of the informant. It is far worse for performance. What no one seems to realise is that the use of the present tense has to do with performance presence, not grammar usage or an unsophisticated narrative 'style'.

The present tense is the key to the performance framing of the Dreaming, the Aboriginal sense of co-existence of past and present. In performance, the first person verbal narrative provides immediacy to the song and the dance - the action is being mapped as the story proceeds, affirming in an economical, referential and poetic form what is occurring at the same time in the musical and physical narrative. The words become virtually a stream of consciousness for action which is happening in the 'here and now', not the 'there and then'. It is absolutely impossible to sing a narrative in the third person historical and 'be' the character simultaneously. To eliminate the first person narrative voice betrays a narrow perception of who or what is 'speaking' in performance and a lack of experience in the "transformation of subjects to objects" and *vice versa*.² Sometimes the 'subject' is human, sometimes it is an animal, or a totemic ancestor or an evil spirit like a *mamu*, or what
Europeans call an 'inanimate' object, such as a rock, a waterhole or a digging stick. It makes no difference. In performance, all who 'speak' are 'subjects'.

Although European philologists, anthropologists and book editors might be short on liminal experiences and transcendent transformations, European actors are not and fully understand the need to say and believe, "This is happening to me now." The minute a myth slips into past tense within the consciousness of a society - even though there may be re-enactments and restitutions - it's all over, whether the fat lady has sung or not! This made this aspect of working with the Mimili people very easy for performance students since, in training for 'naturalistic' acting, they spend half their time learning about 'being in the moment'. It also made Nepean performances accessible to the Mimili people, since the students created their 'verses' and performed them also in the present tense - as one does with group devised work.

When telling the story out of the performance setting, however, the narrative tense preferred is past tense.

**Categories for discussion:**

With each verse, different aspects are worth discussing. The following headings are used, but not for every verse. There is necessarily a lot of cross-referencing, since phenomena need to be talked of in different contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse words</th>
<th>Place, space and time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation by elders</td>
<td>Other performance factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Plants and animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Components</td>
<td>Minerals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Geography and topography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Weather and climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Not included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance description</td>
<td>Music notation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choreographic pattern</td>
<td>Pictures of each dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iconography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory coding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 9

ngapartji-ngapartji
sharing performance

a good place to start is with your dreams
(Gordon Beattie 1986)
9

ngaparti_ji-ngaparti_ji

sharing performance

Who are we?
We were invited guests. The Nepean ‘theatre staff’ members were constant – Gordon Beattie and me. Hugh Lovesy was the Mimili Community Advisor; Ian Knowles was an old friend of the community of many years standing. Regular colleagues (both for Sydney and Mimili visits and, separately, at other times) were Leon Petchkovsky and Craig San Roque. Other non-students were usually actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, social ecologists or psychotherapists back in their urban lives. All were interested in intersubjective performance exchange, not in cultural tourism. Of the other women staff members invited, none came, mostly because (they said) they were shamed by the need to take their clothes off in front of Aboriginal people (and these are women who would do it without thinking on a stage). On their first visit to us in Penrith, the Mimili elders made it clear that there were certain students - or, rather, certain types of students - they didn’t want to invite back to Mimili. Although that caused us grief down the track at the university, we respected their wishes. Interestingly, we were happy with their choices, which were made anew on each of their visits to us. Some students were included in virtually every Mimili visit and some even after they had graduated. Some came once, others two or three times. We paid for our own travel and food, with ‘unfinancial’ students subsidised by us, or the Student Union on a couple of occasions.

An eclectic group of performers over the years, our ages ranged from 17 to 50. There was always a more or less even number of men and women and always more students than lecturers. We brought with us a different mix of ethnic backgrounds and therefore different music, narrative and dance traditions, diverse instruments and performance styles. We all had a passion: performance. Different views of it, maybe, however performance was our reason for being there. Each person’s story of their ‘Mimili experience’ would be different, too, and some of them are still not over.

Everyone in Mimili was keen to see us perform something, and we had no idea what that ‘something’ was to be. Our main concern, growing out of the elders’ first visit to us in Penrith, was...
devising performances that would be a worthwhile exchange. As noted in Chapter 1 - Tjunguringanyi, we had tried a number of things, which, while safe in Penrith, did not seem right in Mimili, where there were no dance studios or theatres, and where we could not hide behind the technology. Gordon’s idea was to take simple ideas with us on the first visit, the kinds of things we did in the streets or at festivals, and wait till we got there to see what else might be possible. Thus, the five pairs of stilts. And the juggling balls, the guitars, the drums, the folk songs, the bright costumes and material to sew - and the masks, the small coloured suitcases and the rope.

A motley crew
We took refuge in the tradition of ‘wandering players’ as many displaced performers have done before us. We dressed up in our best and brightest and wandered up to the village, a group of 20th century “mimi, scurræ or histriones” (Ogilvy: 1963; Bucknell: 1979; Chambers: 1903; Babcock: 1984). We had worked out a number of basic lazzì (semi-improvised commedia dell’arte scenarios), which we intended to build into our encounters with the children (Duchartre: 1929; Babcock, Ed. 1975). This used our skills in juggling, acrobatics and mime. The story lines were minimal - simple interaction between ‘stock’ characters’. The children loved it, of course, the adults smiled too and a large crowd gathered behind the school. But after the show, what?

It was over. And…? We didn’t have any idea.

There was inma pulka that second night in Mimili and we all painted up and danced in a hot, dusty inma ground, adjusting to the new situation. We used spit to wet the kaltji (gypsum) because someone knocked over the water bowl. By the time the men needed to apply their tutu (red ochre), there was more water brought to us by one of them. The women painted us up, in full paint this time, not part paint as had happened in Penrith. And we discovered our backs, arms and faces could read: we knew what was being painted on our skin even though it was very dark and we had no mirrors. We met many new people who were all very friendly and helpful and quickly drew us into the community.

When it was our turn to perform, one of the students, a Spanish performer, led some singing in Spanish and everyone learned the words to her funny song with a call and refrain structure. Again, the children loved it. We sang some other ‘campfire’ songs, which actually stayed in the repertoire over the years because everyone learnt the words and we all liked singing them. But we had an uneasy feeling that the elders had expected something else. Next day, responding to the gender separation convention, the six Nepean women choreographed a dance using the big orange and blue full-circle skirts we had made. A kind of retro-hippy ‘women’s awakening to life’ dance, it was accompanied by improvised recorder music by Ian Knowles. It was performed that night and looked
wonderful in the firelight. More *lazzi* had been devised by the male students. These were enjoyable and served the purpose but Gordon was still uneasy.

“What does it mean?” asked Sam. “Is it inma mulapa?”

The audience-performer relationship in the *inma* was very fluid but the Mimili people usually remained an audience in respect of our performances, despite our shared objectives of ‘ngapartji-ngapartji’. Only the children were keen to be involved in a practical way or took part in any of our performances. We, however, were rarely allowed to just sit and watch an *inma* and were expected to join in most of the time. We worked very hard! While the Mimili people considered it crucial we took part in their performance, in their country, they did not feel inclined to take part in ours. This needed a bit of thinking about, until we realised that it was a reasonable decision, based on cultural practice, not a lack of interest. In traditional culture people do join in. In urban culture – European and Aboriginal – they do not.

But who were we? And what was ‘our’ performance? What were we saying about ourselves with this collection of motley pieces that were designed to entertain but little else? What could we offer that would show the people in Mimili about our urban multi-cultural mix and what kinds of performances did we have in our repertoire that would do it? It wasn’t altogether true that we had nothing -- we had *Hamlet* and all the other great ‘spoken language plays’ of the English language and *Swan Lake*, and Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* and *Monty Python*. But they were about other people, other places and other cultures. Where was our own performance, the stuff that said who we were, in our own country, in this country?

**Improvisations, characters and masks**

Before we knew about the Mimili exchange, Gordon had often raised similar issues of ‘cultural authenticity’. He put aside (for the moment) the spoken scripts perpetuating the European cultural hegemonies and was now working with corporeal relations in time and space. Similar techniques were also developing in Europe but in different schools of thought interested in mime, neutral mask and movement. Despite fierce resistance by a group of theatre staff (who constructed themselves as ‘British Thespians’) to this ‘low class’ activity of researching the nature of performance using all that ‘Artaudian French stuff’ and ‘tribal rituals’, he persevered. He used a laboratory approach (that is, no public performances of the outcomes) to explore characterisation by working from individuals’ relations to, and with, masks derived from their own faces. Students made their own masks (or, strictly speaking, a mask-maker molded one directly on their faces, and the students finished and painted them in whatever ways they wished). When the students put the masks on, it is a matter of record that they changed their personas as they ‘got to know’ the mask they had created, the mask that was in fact another
aspect of themselves. They then related, in a series of free and structured improvisations, to the other masks - not the other people behind their masks. This was a very important discovery, since they could no longer argue that their character was someone else and that they were simply pretending: they were that Other persona.

There is a whole body of work relating to performing with masks and the power of masks in developing alternate (but cognate) personas, especially related to animals and spirits, which this thesis will not attempt to review. (Lorenz: 1976; Cawte: 1978; Johnston: 1985; Napier: 1986; Lommel: 1967, 1970; Raz: 1983; Richmond and Zarilli (eds.): 1990; Willis: 1990; Beattie: 1989; Lonsdale: 1981 and 1993) However, there were distinct parallels with how the Mimili community (and perhaps traditional performers everywhere) allowed ‘characters’ to ‘inhabit’ them as different aspects of their own being and how our students were able to use their masks to explore different levels of their own ‘being in the world’ - which ceased when the mask was taken off but remained as a memory trace and therefore affected and changed their perceptions of reality.

This mask making process meant that by the second visit to Mimili, we knew how to move around the twin megaliths of ‘psychological realism’ and ‘written script’. We could avoid the established canons of European stage theatre and create ‘new born’ characters finding their personal stories in their subconscious. “A good place to start is with your dreams,” suggested Gordon.

These new characters could start to relate to their Australian ecologies rather than those reconstructed and dictated by a texts originating from other times and places. They could avoid the stereotyped characters created by those printed texts as paradigms for ‘European’ beliefs and behaviours. We took the Masks to Mimili and let them out to play.

They played with the space and the place. Then they started telling stories about it.

We decided the characters would use no words at all but to stick with the mime and the masks. Soon we decided that the Masks needed to make some sounds - not necessarily words. Music (mostly percussion) was used to give an auditory narrative – perhaps linked to characters but perhaps also to dramatic action and dynamics. Characters could also use any ‘props’ like costumes, implements or simple scenic devices to give added information. As the Masks already had costumes, chosen from the Theatre Department wardrobe while ‘in mask’ (very important), it was decided to go with those as a basis for other development.
Exploring themes and structures

Trying to reach right back to our origins, after a year of discussion, we identified two key themes that seemed to be relevant to all our experiences in the world. One was our relationship with place; the other was our relationship with Others. Since the issues of identity and character had been transferred to the Masks, we could start from scratch. They were creating their own lives as we worked with them. Out of that came more specific themes: identity; ownership and boundaries relating to place and country; kinship relations; community relations; male/female relations; extra-human relations. Specific context could be added as themes developed. If we broke down the inma into themes, the same concerns were apparent.

Structure was another issue. In Mimili, it was once possible to know (eventually) all the stories to which you were entitled and to know where stories linked to other stories, which continued on into other communities. Narratives and ceremonies maintained by the community were in sharp focus and known thoroughly, but this focus became hazier and more fragmented as the ‘songlines’ blended into different areas and different communities. Nonetheless, there was a sense that they continued, that all stories were linked and that a community owned and performed their bit of ‘singing the country’. As Sam Pumani once said to us, “My story is too big to tell it all at one time”. One of the big changes for traditional communities must have been in discovering that there were stories (it appeared) that they did not know and were not linked to. Of course, they were, eventually, but Sam was right: it is a question of scale. Other people were needed to ‘tell the whole story’.

This concept of ‘linkedness’ kept coming up. So we decided to start with a single story then expand it into a series of episodes (or verses) that explored one or more of the themes. The second verse could then go off in any direction, provided it linked with the first. The third verse could be a progression of the second, or it could link with the first verse and go off in a different direction. This meant that we started creating our own networked series of songlines in which, if we were involved in creating them or we saw all of them over a period of time, we would understand all the links. We all agreed that this was also the case in older European storytelling but that we had been encouraged to see our theatre stories as ‘complete’ in themselves, to have known ‘authors’ and to follow the Aristotelian formulae, which requires final closure. If we took this networked idea further, we could envisage links between all times, all events and all peoples.

We started to recognise how we were working in a number of simultaneous timeframes: Nepean time, Mimili time, tjukurpa time and liminal time/performance time. We each also
recognised a corporeal time associated with our own ‘being in the world’, a memory time about past events or stories of the past and a sense of future time. We started to get the hang of the Dreaming.

It was the same for place. We related to ‘real life’ places in Penrith and Mimili, theatres and inma grounds where, in performance, we re-created and restored events, characters and places. We had ‘sacred sites’ where those things happened and, because we were performing them as real, (whether a play or an inma) they were happening now/again. We tried to find some way of signifying ‘place’ that was at the same time specific and mutable. Someone suggested using a rope, a long rope, or even a series of ropes that could be changed and moved and reshaped to signify variations of ‘place’. But place was only relevant if it interrelated with something/someone else - a person/character/animal/spirit/idea.

So it was decided to have a single person (male) define his place and to ‘settle’ in it, thus claiming it. The next issue arose when a second person (male) arrived and asked to share the space and it had to be negotiated. The next verse added a third person (male), and harmony was not so easy to maintain. The fourth verse introduced a woman and all semblance of harmony was shattered as other issues exploded. By this time, the Mimili community was in stitches. It was the closest we had got yet to inma mulapa - a shared comic spirit.

This was the basis of our ‘improvisations’ over the years. We retained comedy as a very strong component but as we progressed we certainly started tapping into deeper and darker aspects of European culture drawing on the conventions of absurdism and surrealism. The narratives grew more arms than an octopus and characters (or had we created archetypes?) appeared in and out of them, bringing with them resonances of old episodes. Different students could play the characters and their own personalities intruded subtly, not so that the character itself was changed. The Masks acquired both iconic and specific character status and the Mimili community related to them in the same way they related to their own. We also introduced other constant elements: brightly coloured bags and suitcases out of which surprises emerged. These might be the ubiquitous ropes, special masks, musical instruments, fireworks, cloth and costume pieces, bird whistles, juggling balls, etc, and no one ever knew quite what would happen till it did. This introduced an element of suspense, and a means by which our narratives could ‘go off in a new direction’ as the Masks discovered what to do with whatever was in the suitcase. Not only was the audience wondering what was going to happen, but also the performer.
It did not matter that we interpreted each other’s performances according to our own ontologies: the important thing was that we understood the discourse and had made connections that now encouraged dialogue.

Later, we realised that this was what traditional Aboriginal performance had done for thousands of years. The need to interrelate with other communities and to share narratives across language groups meant that the performances needed to be as ‘universal’ as possible, while at the same time retaining the specificities of the ‘home crowd’. Our performance style was pure European mime, our narratives based in urban concerns, but our themes and structures were designed to address the need for universals where two cultures could meet.

**Dreaming and creativity**

People at Mimili were always concerned about our creative practice. All *inma* performance was part of the Dreaming, and any new verses were also part of the Dreaming, a revelation from ancestral beings. A community member literally ‘dreamed’ them fully developed and offered them to the community. If they were accepted, they became part of the *inma*. If not, they were performed a few times out of respect, then dropped discreetly from the repertoire. They were always ‘in the style’ of existing *inma* verses but the content could be quite radical. It didn’t happen very often that we were aware of — only twice in five years for the *inma maku*— and whenever it did, there was always great excitement.

On the other hand, we exposed our creative process. Since we had decided that Gordon’s role was ‘improvisational facilitator’ rather than ‘director’, everyone was expected to contribute not only to their character’s development but also to the creation of new narratives. So rehearsals were the usual ‘free for all’ workshops for part of the time where ideas flew around until something was agreed on and trialed in rehearsal. Decisions about aesthetics were Gordon’s province as he had the ‘outside eye’ but there is no doubt that the Desert Verses had a high level of participant contribution.

Part of this was contributing our dreams on a regular basis. There is something quite fascinating about seeing them come true in performance. Imagination and creativity are fine, but they are moderated by ‘common sense’ whereas dreams often go over the edge into the surreal. Allied with our better understanding of how multiple timeframes work, this source of performance ideas produced aspects of our narratives that would not have been possible if we had stuck to ‘reality’.

Anne Marshall     PhD Thesis
Myth building

So we built new, living myths. For five years we told new stories drawn from our own Dreaming based on the Masks’ responses to their experiences of a new life that included Mimili as well as Penrith which allowed the Masks to operate as a community in themselves, welded together by a desire to maintain the interconnection by making more stories. Mimili assisted us in that process, especially since their inma also started to include references to their experiences with us and ours with them. As they had always done, they incorporated new relations and changed circumstances into their performances. This was an organic process, which would have had no ending at all that we could see had we all kept going. Our performances left behind traces in Mimili that are different to the traces we left elsewhere, and that is because they were being interpreted within that particular performance ecology and therefore have different meanings in Mimili than in the Performance Space in Sydney.

We started to perform the Desert Verses in places in Sydney as well as Mimili and we became aware that our audiences were reporting different responses than they usually did to our work. I made a note of several of them:

“Where did that come from?”
“I thought I was in someone else’s dream.”
“I forgot where I was.”
“It was like being in another place.”
“Time was different.”

Phillip Genty’s work with large scale stage imagery and illusion perhaps comes closest to evoking this feeling for me, but this group worked only with their own bodies, some simple stage props, lighting and sound/music. We used fire sculptures, fire sticks (as did Mimili performances at times) and fire eating. We used juggling, acrobatics and dance steps drawn from our diverse cultures. We used terrain like the tops of the hills, creek beds and inma grounds and, when we felt more secure, indoor theatres, the streets of Sydney, railways stations and Circular Quay. We formed a small performance group called the Kulini Company, which also started to develop indoor theatre performances of far greater sophistication and complexity. By the end of the exchange we felt that what we were offering in ‘our turn’ of the ngapartji-ngapartji process was worthy.

When the exchanges stopped (for financial reasons, mostly), we all maintained some momentum. A very high proportion of students involved in those exchanges now make their own, very creative and idiosyncratic work as well as practice a mainstream acting craft. We were all sorry the exchange stopped. We all felt it had been a very precious and life changing
experience in which two groups of people got to know each other well enough to create performances about each other - and dream about each other.

**NOTE:**
The performances are all on videotape however, as I have withdrawn the Mimili performances, I have withdrawn these too. They can be viewed privately, by arrangement with Gordon Beattie or me.
Notes:

1. In another circumstance, the similar perception of colour was evident. I am prone to extreme colour co-ordination of my clothes (partly to do with my gift - or curse - to be 'shade perfect' with colour in the same way others are said to be 'pitch perfect' with sound, a trait inherited from my mother). The Mimili women on more than one occasion referred to my 'desert clothes' with good-natured sarcasm: "You gotta watch that one or she goes right into the desert," hooted Pinkai on one hunting trip to dig maku in a particularly flat and featureless plain. What they were referring to was my entire Mimili 'wardrobe' which, although completely practical in its articles, was composed of desert camouflage colours - red sand, brown and grey rock, dull green foliage, ochre yellows and charcoal black. I didn't buy them especially for Mimili - they were all old clothes - and they are the kinds of colours I wear a lot anyway. I had chosen them to bring with me because they seemed the right ones to bring - costumes I guess. Also, when we shopped together for ochre substitutes (acrylic paints) in Penrith, it was clear we were 'seeing' the same tones and hues of natural colours. I could thereafter be sure that, when talking colour, we were of the same mind.
Chapter 10

\textit{wangka}

\textit{discourse}

Theatre can resolve one of anthropology's great difficulties: translating/visualising abstract elements of a culture, as a system of beliefs and values, by using concrete means: for example, performing instead of explaining a ritual, showing rather than expounding the social conditions of individuals, using an immediately readable gestus.

\textit{Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture} (Pavis: 1992, 16)
10

wangka
discourse

10.1 A structuralist approach?

Performance and representations of the "lived world"
Performance (or, as theatre director Richard Schechner (1985) puts it, "restored behaviour") in all cultures can be described as the continuing, changing, deliberate (selected), embodied representation of people's relations with each other. It presents their social and physical ecologies by means of symbolic action, making use of (as required) all available sensory and communication channels and affecting (changing, transforming) the participants (actors and onlookers) in the process of them making statements about their perception of experience, meaning and identity in their 'lived lives' (not, however, necessarily exactly the same perception, experience, meaning and identity for everyone). In the meantime, it negotiates opportunities for reflection for all involved.

Anthropologist Victor Turner (in Schechner and Apel, eds: 1990) is more poetic - and anthropocentric - when he says,

Cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances. A performance is a dialectic of 'flow', that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and 'reflexivity', in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen 'in action', as they shape and explain behaviour. A performance is a declarative of our shared humanity, yet utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies. (1)

When a member of a completely different culture, Mimili songman Sam Pumani, unaffected by European academic discourse, asserts

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
Everything, the whole world - the land, the people, the sky, the spirits, the songs, this place, you, me, (sweeping arm gestures to include all this) the **whole world is the inma, inma mulapai** (the true ceremony, the real Law!)

(Sam Pumani, his emphasis, *inma* performance, Mimili: 1986)

a very similar whole-world-view-through-performance is apparent.

The "whole world" meant to Sam Pumani the whole of the *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* world as he experienced it in Central Australia. Implicit in everything he said and did is that the best way to understand Mimili people and their beliefs about their world - aspects of culture, society, personal relationships to each other and the natural environment - is by experiencing their performances within their ecological context. *Anangu* forms of symbolic action, supported by all of their 'grammars' and 'vocabularies', show how *Anangu* perceive their realities, their "being in the world" (Heidegger: 1962). It also shows how they wish to articulate and frame those perceptions to Others (Auerbach: 1957). An extension of this notion can be applied to all performances in all cultures. Therefore, intercultural performance exchange implies far more than simply documenting and analysing 'theatrical' productions or processes of Others but living with each other through our performance experiences - *ngapartji-ngapartji*.

**A conscious communication process**

This seeks to locate performances as constructed indicators of lived and shared human interrelations within a culture (or society, or sub-culture) and, more specifically, within the contexts of very particular social and physical ecologies. Performance is not, therefore, in itself "lived experience" (Dilthey: 1985). Neither is it just 'entertainment', 'exhibitionism', 'instinctive behaviour', 'aesthetic expression' or 'history acted out'.

Symbolic action is a structure of conscious reference, at once overlaying and deriving from the unconscious referential structure of skilled habitual action. Conscious reference cannot be seen as ritual, a repetitive set of practices to do with life, death and other rites of passage. Conscious forms of reference help to make manifest the problems of unconscious practice. (Godsen: 1994, 89)

And not just the problems. Performances - on stage or off - disclose how people order their society, what people fear and enjoy about themselves and what they value, desire and aspire to in their 'lived lives'. If this is true, then performance is a unique form of 'languaging' and is especially concerned with narrative (Gadamer: 1975; Ricoeur: 1984/5/8). Empirical evidence demonstrates it is a universal human communication practice. (Mithen: 1996: 174-179)
that practice, it is not restricted to the visual and performing arts for expression, nor to any culture. It arises, it has been claimed by Laughlin, McManus and D'Aquili (1990), as a function of human biogenetic brain structure. This includes a capacity for analogic thinking: the making of metaphor to make reference to and reflect on existing phenomena or lived experiences, and/or to create new ideas in a linguistic/symbolic/experiential meta-narrative so that they can be meta-theorised and known about.¹ (Ritzer: 1992; Godsen: 1994) Other recent scholarship has looked also at the inherent 'performativity' of all culture (Parker, A. & Sedgwick, E. eds: 1995), especially within the media-and-image conscious world of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries with all their complex sub-cultural interactions.² (Hebdige: 1988; Bollen: 1999)

Maturana's and Varela's exploration of 'languaging' (1987) is relevant here for it is in the relations between people using many different forms of 'languaging' at the same time where meaning is most fully constructed and exchanged. Their image of European knowledge being a branched tree where every leaf and twig is interrelated in a series of connected systems is not necessarily compatible with the ways in which Aboriginal knowledge is constructed, however. Chomsky (1980 and 2000) has also noted that language of all kinds involves interaction between surface structural production operations and 'deep' structural comprehension operations. The 'deep' structures of groups and individuals are constrained by the limits placed upon "possible grammars" by the genetics involved in the biology of the human brain. Embodied performance is, then, an externalised intersubjective discourse which engages all of the possible sensory channels in the creation of 'texts' to express ideas which are initially constructed by the brain in a pre-expressive stage, based on the experiences in the world of the participants. This makes all forms of symbolic action performances of performances - more layers to the Buttonmoulder's onion (Ibsen: 1876, Peer Gynt. 5:7)

Complex texts
Every performance is constructed as a text (or multi-texts) capable of being 'read' as discourse. (Derrida: 1973, 1974, 1978; Ricoeur: 1979; Eco: 1977; and 1979; de Toro: 1995) However, 'reading' performance takes on the much broader connotation of 'interpreting for meaning' or, as the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Onions, ed: 1993) offers, "making out the meaning of", implying that some extra effort is involved. And so there is. It's very hard work indeed. While all potential performance texts are constructed from individual components, which are themselves already extremely complex and multi-stranded, and although the individual components are capable of being deconstructed separately, they must be 'read together'. And also done together.

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
Performance is a communication crucible into which all forms of symbolic representation are tipped with what might seem, at times, a cavalier disregard for the individual 'integrity' of phenomena which European taxonomies so carefully separate and define. It could be said that performance is a 'grand social hermeneutics' in action. New relationships and juxtapositions create new meanings and new texts (hybrids) or affirm existing ones. Performances can be constructed with minimal textuality or they can be (and usually are) polysemic, simultaneously using a mixture of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, verbal, gestural and kinetic iconic symbols and acts, with all their culturally-specific 'forms' and 'styles' (paroles) as well as different grammars. They are affected by social theories, taxonomic and notation systems, compositional structures and choreographic protocols (langue) - as well as, I would argue, the ontological and epistemological 'givens' such as concepts of self and Other, and physical environments in which performance occurs (Marshall: 1994). Every expressive linguistic and sensory component brings a new-coloured stitch to the 'language tapestry', adding an utterance, re-working the fabric. Selection of these 'threads of meaning' is decided upon by the makers of each kind of performance and occurs within the cultural frameworks of social discourse by a process of constant negotiation with audiences and participants. (Pfister: 1991) The threads can be perceived separately but their meaning is unclear, incomplete, unless they are seen as a whole. Patterns are infinite. Converted to image, sound, gesture and movement (which are perceived phenomenologically by the senses), word and dramatic action (conscious intellectualisation), mediated by time and space (co-ordinates and trajectories), place (localised geography and environment) and sociality (context) there is nothing that is not, and cannot be, 'performed'. The concept of multi-languaging must be extended also to include the senses of smell and taste and their rich vocabularies. This is well known to performers in some cultures, while whole banks of sensory information are avoided in others.

Also embedded in performance, and implicit in all the above, are spatial and temporal languages fundamental to performance - deixis and anaphora - which distinguish performances from all other forms of 'literary' discourse in that they link 'locutory acts' (in whatever form of parole) to a 'pragmatic context'. That is, it happens in the 'here and now' (deixis) rather than the 'there and then', although the 'there and then' can be referred to as having happened in the past (anaphora).

By deixis is meant the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it …
Performers develop a dialogic and diegetic relationship with their own lived experiences, with performances expressing their relations with those experiences, with other performers and, in another relationship, with their audiences. None of these 'texts' is static, although at times some are tacit while some are fore grounded.

### 10.2 Taxonomies

#### Ordering the lived world

Taxonomies reveal how societies organise their knowledge of their 'lived world'. Diverse epistemologies are observable in the different systemic approaches to linguistic 'raw materials' and to the diverse ways in which taxonomies are constructed. The propensity to create taxonomies to order knowledge is found in different degrees everywhere but is very pronounced in European epistemology. European actors and audiences see performances as discrete 'events' and special 'activities' standing apart from 'real life' and European performance taxonomies are obsessively reductionist: the main objective is to analyse each component of performance into discrete categories, treating each of them separately and writing about them 'deconstructively' and 'objectively' and never putting them back together again, concentrating on technical minutiae: the whole picture never emerges. A mechanistic ability to categorise each minute aspect according to sets of attributes does not carry with it an automatic understanding of performance in action. A car in pieces on a garage floor conveys very little of what it looks like, sounds like or moves like when assembled and speeding along the road, filled with people.

This has also been the case with analyses of traditional Aboriginal performances and (up until very recently) using European anthropological taxonomies rather than Aboriginal performance taxonomies. Any concept of a holistic performance ecology slips away under a weight of deconstruction using an irrelevant taxonomy. Central values, conditions, functions and meanings in a society are often overlooked while technical and tangible external 'evidence' is recorded in ever more reductive detail.

European epistemology, dating back to the ancient Greeks and Hebrews, not only separates all 'art' from 'real life' but so-called 'cultural' performances (æsthetic performances and ritual ceremonies) from 'real life' performances (focused social interaction and social dramas), unwilling to see the close relations between the two. Greek theoreticians, in particular, contributed further categorial distinctions by identifying each kind of 'cultural' and 'real life'
performance by its dominant expressive (linguistic) channel, its ethnic origin, historical period, structure, form, genre and style. Common Greek terms still in use today include: music, choreography, poetry, art, drama, comedy and tragedy, protagonist and antagonist, climax and catharsis, as well as terms like scene, architecture, deus ex machina, atmosphere and even theatre and auditorium. The etymological roots are not only Greek but the words themselves, their meanings and functions, have changed very little in over 2500 years.

Aboriginal people, in all their original languages, did not have a single word for ‘performances’ or ‘rituals’, but a number of words and concepts linking the acts of performance to the whole ecology. The word inma means all of the performance components and anything associated with them, including pakani and inkanyi (see also Ellis et al. 1978, 68-80; 1983) and can apply equally to iconography (and all the visual arts) that are frequently created as group activities and are often performances in themselves. Similarly, and in a far wider framework, tjukurpa denotes everything associated with the Pitjantjatjara sacred and transcendental life, including the inma. This brings to mind series of concentric circles, a good visual model for a society which values a hermeneutic approach encompassing fluid and conditional relationships.

For instance, while pakani means ‘dance’, it more correctly means ‘rising’, or the action of ‘getting up to dance’ or the act of ‘leaving the ground’ in the dance, while the word inkanyi means, among other things, to play with enjoyment, have fun, to sing, to play a musical instrument or to dance with an implicit sense of spontaneity. European performers would probably say, "getting into it". Some ethnographers have seen this term, very wrongly, as a pejorative - a performance that is worthless because it is only ‘playing around’. Other words for singing and dancing exist, but inkanyi highlights a key function of performance - that of pleasure. This then is where the æsthetic discourse can be found in Pitjantjatjara and other Aboriginal performances - in the rising up with and enjoyment of performance of spiritual significance (Layton: 1991).

Performance events themselves are often perceived as holistic in their nature in other societies, also. In early Egypt, for example, the all-embracing word hbj was used to denote all performance (music, dance, singing, drama), meant also 'to be joyful', 'make a joyful noise', regardless of whether it was a sacred or secular performance (Sachs: 1963, 15 ff). There were no individual names that have reached down to us for individual performance types but the impression is that they were all pleasurable.
Rather than create precise 'dictionary definitions', Aboriginal performers use a referencing process which firstly is concerned with where an individual is in an experiential network of human and extra human relations of place, space, time and a process of transformation. (Bharati, ed.: 1976 & 1979; Ellis: 1984; and, with Barwick and Morais: 1990; Berndt, R. 1987; Hiatt: 1988) This is framed by spoken word, sound, movement and iconography which is, in many cases, poetic or demonstrated corporeally or intuited tacitly from the practice of both ceremonies and everyday life, and from empirical evidence in the surrounding environment - sometimes never verbalised at all. Lastly, technical knowledge used in other parts of everyday life is transferred and applied when and where appropriate and vice versa. Indigenous performance taxonomies worldwide are holistic and continually networking inside the practice of broad, highly contextual social relations. (Kaeppker: 1978; Csoudas, ed.: 1994; Tilley: 1999)

These are starting points of entry into a multi-dimensional network. Aboriginal performance is entirely dependent on context, just as is European performance. Meanings are constantly negotiated when something is said or done at a particular time, in a particular place, under particular circumstances (Ellis: 1983). It is also recognised that there might be some things an outside person will never understand, a situation not to be tolerated by European-trained scholars! The taxonomies that arise are therefore conditional, not absolute. Positivist European performance taxonomies need to be questioned anyway, for such rigidity is also inappropriate and limiting for European performance. Conformity with ‘typologies’ as a way of approaching aesthetic expression leads to stagnation. To impose them on analyses of Aboriginal performances is to subvert and devalue entire sets of epistemologies and, in the process, misrepresent the performance ecology.

10.3 Framing

Performing is cultural framing
In one way or another, virtually every piece of 'culture' (Williams: 1981) - tangible and intangible - is framed by language in one or other of its forms. It is played with and re-presented (re-framed) symbolically in performance at some time and in some way, by design or incidental inclusion, either explicitly or implicitly. Performance is also capable of devising seemingly infinite different re-framings of the same piece of culture. In European culture, the generally accepted embodied symbolic framings are dance, music, theatre and their hybrid combinations with each other and the visual arts, known broadly as 'performance arts'. They are, in one of their functions (and perhaps their main function), frames for social meta-
discourse. There are also areas of focused interaction which are performance frames for systems of ritualised social conduct, interpersonal behaviours, styles of dress and cuisine, relations with the non-human and the more-than-human and with physical environments, spaces, places and time.\(^5\) All have their own vocabularies and grammars. This is true for all societies, but the vocabularies and grammars vary in each, according to the languages used in each.

The notion is easier to deal with (from the European point of view) if the status of the written word is diminished to the point where the concept of ‘language’ is applied as a matter of course to all representational practices. This supports the evocative and accessible ‘mirror to nature’ analogy cited by Richard Sheridan in *The Critic* (1779), notions of structuralism in performance put forward by the Russian (1958; 1962) and Prague Schools (Matejka and Titunic, Eds: 1989) in the early part of the 20\(^{th}\) century, Kristeva’s theorising of a social linguistic process she calls ‘phenotext’ (Kristeva: 1973; 1989) and Hawkes’ interesting notion (1985) that society itself might be a language through which all communication codes are linked and interwoven.

In short, a culture comes to terms with nature by means of ‘encoding’ through language. and it requires only a slight extension of this view to produce the implication that perhaps the entire field of social behaviour which constitutes a culture might in fact also represent an act of encoding on the model of language. In fact, it might itself be a language.

(Hawkes: 1985, p22)

If Hawkes’ notion that the structure of society itself is a form of ‘languaging’ is true, then all aspects of society comprise ecologies where we perform constantly.

**Performance is its own discourse**

Performance is, from his perspective, a framing discourse where the ‘voices’ (none of which might be vocal) are constantly changing. Each of the individual voices contributes to a multi-dimensional discourse in different ways by all participants (actors and onlookers) in a dynamic that requires continual exchange and a constant state of negotiation of symbols, meaning and ideas (Elam: 1980; Pavis: 1982, 1990; de Marinis: 1993; de Toro: 1995). Interplay is frozen if trapped in reductionist modes (such as stopped-in-time print) and the full interplay of those many voices is compromised. While symbolic anthropology has contributed enormously to the understanding of practical ‘culture-making’, few anthropologists have concerned themselves with how this translates into interpretations of human languaging. This conceptual framework applies just as well to other forms of symbolic communication as it

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
does to literature or spoken word drama and narrative. It is rarely explored, as 'the arts' are so infrequently included in the 'discourse' in that sense (de Toro: 5-33).

In 'traditional' Australian Aboriginal performance, people but also animals, objects, natural phenomena and spirit beings join their voices in fluid sensory dialogue. Contrary to what many might think, this also happens in contemporary Australian European performances, although the ecological intersubjectivity is less apparent and not always welcomed, acknowledged or indeed recognised by those who construct the arts as 'higher order' intellectual activities, stripping them of their "subterranean" significations (Muecke: 1999).

Performance is said to be managed in European culture in two main ways. Firstly, there are those who are designated and who function specifically as cultural narrators - 'messengers', 'orators' or 'representers' - trained formally and informally, individually or collectively by a process of societal or professional education. Not only performers, but also writers, directors, designers, choreographers and composers take part. Secondly, there is everyone in a society who ever conducts a communicative interaction with another person, which is closer to the Aboriginal concept. Both groups engineer shifts out of the everyday reality into Other dimensions, giving symbolic form to ideas and creating 'realities' on the other side of the limen for those who participate. Unconsciousness ceases and conscious discourse takes place, where subjunctivity can operate in sufficient measure for reflection and awareness to infiltrate above and apart from daily life.

Because they are so stimulating, performance discourses are often also sources of physical pleasure, emotional fulfillment and entertainment for both audiences and actors. One of the most damning epithets for any performance/conversation/ceremony is 'boring' and boring performances are eventually thrown into the cultural waste paper basket. The three major criticisms by audiences of 'boring' performances are lack of stimulation of the imagination, lack of psychophysical energy and lack of relevance. This heightened consciousness of being 'entertained' harks back to the real meaning of the word - 'to hold mutually' (Onions (ed.) Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: 1973, 664). Performance is indeed shared discourse.

The key is not to limit communication to a single symbolic type or to require and expect an exact match, word for word, symbol for symbol (Fletcher: 1999). While similarities are essential for the intercultural translation process, difference is also essential and must be maintained, nurtured even, to avoid colonisation, assimilation and eventually a grey smudge where a full rainbow once existed. Written word alone effects this 'smudging' very rapidly, whereas the performance experience heightens both sensory and intellectual comprehension of culture in ways which maintain diversity. Mapping this polyseemic discourse is a very daunting process (Pavis: 1992, 23) but the act of performance itself is extremely
simple, considering the variety and richness of its trappings, conditions and contexts. It is the pivot on which turns the whole spectrum of transformation of internal lives to external representations of "living in the world". It can be recognised, read, known and negotiated, not only by people using similar sets of paradigms and ranges of symbols but also by others whose symbolic languages are, while the same in kind, differently organised and coded.

The empty space
Possibly the first concise, contemporary theoretical framings of the 'act' in the European lexicon came in the 1960s (bearing in mind earlier writings by Stanislavsky and Copeau), with Brecht's publication of his Short Organum for the Theatre (1948/1964, 180), Southern's Seven Ages of Theatre (1962, 21), Bentley's Life of the Drama (1965, 150), and Grotowski's Towards a Poor Theatre (1969, 118). However, the most influential has been from Peter Brook in The Empty Space (1968) because it is so simple:

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for the act of theatre to be engaged. (12)

Or, indeed, any act of performance - regardless of whether it is on a designated, bare "stage" or not, the "actor" is male or not, or the performance is "theatre" or not. In the thirty or more years since Brook first wrote this, definitions of performances and their various actor-onlooker relationships have been expanded considerably by both theoreticians and practitioners. They include much more than that which occurs live on European theatre stages - yet which engages in the same basic act. Such a reductionist verbal definition, however, would be met with disbelief by traditionally living Aboriginal performers for whom performance implies immeasurable and infinite components connected to the way their entire system of culture and vocabulary of experience is encoded. To start with, an Aboriginal space is never empty.

In an academic European epistemology, reductionist definition is considered essential for discourse about an object, idea or phenomenon to have intellectual validity. In Aboriginal ontology, if an object or phenomenon is reducible, it is of little importance, especially if it does not have at the same time physical, sensory and spiritual dimensions. Immediately there is another clash in the discourses.

In many ways, Brook's brief statement opened the floodgates of the first intellectual attempts at analysing European performances as statements of cultural identity at their most essential level (in terms of a social interaction in time and space) since Plato and Aristotle. (McAuley: 1999) As a consequence, it encouraged new approaches to performance exchanges, both

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
practical and theoretical. However, the separation of mind and body, intellect and experience, real life and performance, ‘raw’ and ‘cooked’ still persists in European epistemologies. Brook himself has been criticised for his apparently unrepentant Eurocentrism in taking part in performance exchanges only in terms of how he can re-frame material he ‘gathers’ for himself and his multi-cultural company, just as a European-Australian restaurant might incorporate ‘bush tucker’ into its menu. In particular, Brook's re-workings of the *Mahabharata* (1991) incurred wrath and derision from Indian (and other) scholars. Brook refutes this very ably both in philosophical and theatrical terms, but Bharucha's points from the position of the Other (1992 and 1994) are even more relevant in 2000 and Pavis' observations about colonisation as a function of interculturalism in European performance practice remain illuminating (1992). Closer to home, Aboriginal spokespeople, like Festival of the Dreaming Director, Rhoda Roberts (1998), translate the intellectual discourses into plain language. Rhoda demands that Aboriginal arts exist in their own right, with their own meanings, using their own languages and not be 're-framed' into a form of academic colonisation or exotic titillation for the mass market.

### 10.4 Dialectics

**Content**

The best discourse is always 'about' something of interest to performers and audiences. The 'content' - the narratives and dialectics of performances - draws on all the myths, histories, memories, maps, laws, traditions, customs, symbols, rites and rituals of a culture. It selects and synthesises. It presents what it sets out to present. It is usually conscious, specific, decisive and effective. Performances are based in what is already known even if it is re-presented in a different light, with a new twist, texture or pattern. It is not in the nature of performance to invent anything new (other than new kinds of performance) but in the process of creating performance people often create new ideas, frameworks for new 'mythologies' which foster conscious thinking about the unconscious and promote discourse from which invention springs. In some cases, symbolic discourse can bring about a realisation, pull an idea into sharper focus or make it possible for a discussion to take place or questions to be asked that cannot be asked in the 'real' world. Whatever its capacities for engendering change and interrogation, performance usually maintains the *status quo* (or allows the *status quo* to be maintained by addressing its inversions) and affirms societal histories, values and knowledges. Performance which does not support the received discourse in any society often is considered 'subversive', 'oppositional practice' or 'alternative' and this may be seen as desirable or undesirable depending on where you are...
standing on the front grid. European culture (along with many others) has a history of 'allowed' dissent which is compatible with the diverse options available to its citizens, whereas traditional Aboriginal performance is said to never engage in overt acts of dissent. However, as Bourdieu (1989) and Roseberry (1989) agree, all performance is either 'allowed', or is allowed to be 'disallowed' by the societal systems in which it exists, and either succeeds or fails accordingly. "Heretical discourse", even a revolution, needs recognition and acceptance to succeed:

Heretical discourse must not only help to sever the adherence to the world of common sense by publicly proclaiming a break with the ordinary order, it must also produce a new common sense and integrate within it the previously tacit or repressed practices and experiences of an entire group, investing them with the legitimacy conferred by public expression and collective recognition (Bourdieu: 1989, 129)

He goes on to identify 'dramatisation' as an agent for this kind of social change. Performance in ritualised situations - such as theatre or religious ceremonies - provokes discussion within a meta-discourse rather than incites new action, because it is intellectually based and guarded by protocols. Massed, non-intellectualised performances, however, dependant on emotional communication, such as rallies, mass competitive sport and festivals tend to promote mass action directed by a group psychology with a simplistic discourse. (MacAlloon: 1981, 1984 and 1984 Ed.) This can have a very destabilising effect on otherwise socially controlled people - sometimes for only a very short period of time. (Da Matta: 1977, 1984, 1991) The causes of these two polarised performance behaviours are sites for some very interesting future research.

Over the centuries, all forms of symbolic representation within the European tradition have had to contend with the philosophies, policies and proscriptions of the ruling powers of the times and suffer the consequences of attitudes and opinions which find their way into print. Anthropological ideas about European art have been coloured by a recorded history that led to the exaltation and the preservation of a particular 'class' of art while discounting most of the others.

Even at their most esoteric, anthropological ideas about culture involve a series of (often unstated) ideas about history, capitalism, the state, political action.

and ...

Given the nature of hegemonic political communities and the political and economic structures in which they are inserted, most alternative movements and images take a
form (and may involve contents) similar to the dominant culture. The dominant imagined community may invoke the equality of regions, religions and persons, but state politics will favour certain regions, classes or projects. Feelings of disquiet or discontent may take religious or regionalist forms, perhaps eventuating in political movements. These feelings and political movements will also involve images of community that can serve as alternative to the hegemonic. (Roseberry: 1989: 228-231)

This ‘take-over’ process tends to highlight the product without being aware of the process and the creation of meaning and denies power to the makers of forms of symbolic representation. The process is, however, not limited to European societies. All societies make these rules about symbolic representation - the issue is the degree to which it is representing the people and the society for whom it matters or whether it is being culturally engineered from within the community or from without. The ‘cultural product’ will still be reflecting something of the culture, even if it is fantasy - and that fantasy needs to be looked at very carefully, too.

This notion can be seen in the critiques of the two main philosophies of theatre in European culture – ‘Aristotelian’ and ‘Brechtian’ - and the acting styles that usually accompany them - naturalism and representation. In brief, Aristotelian naturalism places all the action and response on the stage and the audience, watching through the fourth wall, empathises but is not moved to action as the actors ‘tear their passions to shreds’. Here the politics are those of compliance and earned the scorn of those Marxists who called the theatre (along with religion) the ‘opium of the masses’. In Brechtian representation, the audience is confronted with the technique of verfremdungseffekt, which break the illusion of reality on the stage, and presents the audience with issues to be debated hotly in a more ‘representational’ mode. Non-realistic characters represent types, or archetypes, and there is no attempt to present ‘bourgeois’ ideals like ‘dulce et decorum est pro patria mori’ as desirable, rather as an exercise in irony and disclosure. Here the politics are those of subversion. It was Brechtian theatre, with its anti-realistic performances, that caused the riots and clamours for social change in its time, not the theatre of the ‘well made play’.

At their core, most performance genres operate within cultural bounds, preserving the status quo, maintaining archetypes and updating old ones; providing new role models for contemporary times, perhaps; negotiating new cultural paradigms to serve changing social and environmental ecologies but not outside the dominant culture itself. While new European performances are frequently portrayed by the popular press as ‘dazzling’, ‘innovative’ and ‘controversial’ and often lay claim to post modernity, contemporary Aboriginal performances too, despite traditional roots, have proven as versatile as is necessary to cope
with and reflect societal change. Traditional Aboriginal performances are said to be 'museum pieces' to be conserved for future generations and not given to oppositional practice but many forms of European performance are also maintained as museum pieces. Contemporary Aboriginal performance is among the most 'dissenting' performance in Australia. The program fielded by the Festival of Dreaming; the uncompromising way in which every hegemony in Australia was challenged in Indigenous plays, songs and dance; the political militancy of the Aboriginal arts community; the massive public performances like the Reconciliation Walk over the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games were, in their different ways, 'in your face' dissenting political theatre. The dissension is largely about constructs of race, hence of class.

**Style**

Every kind of performance has its own 'style' and every 'style' has its own discourse. Part gender, part 'age' (in all senses of the word), part class, part fashion, part skill, part subculture, part group identity, part personal creativity: style is the individual imprint on performance. It is the imprint locating it within its most specific context or, in the case of appropriation, defining the sources/s from which it is derived. ‘Style’ carries very specific messages about social position, levels of skill and knowledge, notions of sacred, secular, elitist and popular culture, private and public behaviours and physical environment. ‘Difference’ is the essence, the comme ça of performance, but not so different that it becomes another form or genre. It has to do with the 'how', the manner and mannerisms of a performance, not the major features, content, conditions or key structures. It is the accent not the langue or the parole. Style is less tangible than structure and yet a whole lot more observable. Perception of ‘style’, however, requires expert skills and a trained eye, ear and body, as well as a means of ‘recording' small differences within the body memory very exactly. Analysis becomes extremely intense and the relationship between vision, hearing and body becomes even closer. And why? Because 'style' is such a desirable part of performance and is what people try to emulate - or create - when they perform. It is an identifying imprint and the bit a performer or group of performers have control over, no matter how strict the hegemonies that govern other parts of the performance. Even if you don’t get the steps, words or music right, style can be osmosed and can make a big difference to how others see a performance and how performers ‘feel’ about themselves. Style is everything.

It is quite easy to differentiate between the 'styles' of closely related individuals and groups. For example, dancers in the Australian Ballet, the One Extra Dance Company and the Sydney Dance Company move very differently and perform very different repertoires even though they are all contemporary dance companies in the same city. In Central Australia, the style may be recognisably different for exactly the same dance and song in the same language, in

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
Mimili, Fregon or Ernabella and within different family groups. In both cultures individuals also
develop personal styles that are recognised and commented on. Working out the reasons
for these stylistic differences is part of performance ethnography and is as important as being
able to tell there is a difference in the first place. Sometimes there is no perceptible
difference at all in style between performances within two completely different contexts
where one might expect there to be a difference. This phenomenon is most discernable in
youth dance parties where style is really the ONLY thing that counts and woe betide a dork (or
whatever the current word is for a person with no style).

This is the case with Pitjantjatjara inma, where a dance or song is classified as ‘secret’ or ‘open’
depending on the circumstances defined by the performers within the society and may well
be both, but the performance style is the same. The difference lies not in the performance as
much as the participants’ perception of the performance. Distinctions in performance ‘style’
between, say, sacred and secular, native or foreign, and male and female start to be written
about from Ancient Greek times. From the European Medieval period ‘style’ was largely
linked to conscious notions of church and state, aristocracy and peasantry and, from the
growth of mercantilism and nationalism, ideas still current in contemporary society to do with
race, class, gender and power. Dance was known to have regional style in Ancient Greek
theatre with its generic choruses of, say, Trojan Women or Persian sailors, as were costumes
and other theatrical properties, such as weapons and machines.

There are occasional examples of moral distinctions in ‘style’ - such as the Athenian judging
panel’s objection to certain kinds of inappropriate musical ‘modes’ used in a tragedy by
Euripides. The various musical modes were believed to have a psychological and a physical
effect on an audience and on the performance itself and some, like the Phrygian, were
considered far too sexually arousing to have a place in an Athenian tragedy. (Michaelides:
1978; Walton: 1980; Lonsdale: 1993) It was the wrong ‘style’ as well as the wrong ‘key’
(Marshall: 1983). In the case of music, the stylistic load was carried through into the modern
world by way of the Roman Christian church and notation. Notation helped to establish music
as the only ‘rational’ art form and at times when the other arts were banned, or closely
confined, music escaped, developing a huge range of ‘styles’ with taxonomies and structures
to match. Even the Christian Mass developed regional ‘styles’ (Reese: 1964). ‘Musical style’
can be very clearly articulated, because the notation itself can show where there is an actual
difference and musicians can explain and demonstrate stylistic traits very clearly. This
approach was eventually adopted by other forms of representation, culminating in the rash of
‘theoretical’ treatises largely based on technical elements of style.
The ‘-isms’ in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century, from Neo-classicism to Postmodernity, are now all largely defined by ‘style’ rather than by their philosophies. In a contemporary urban context, Hebdidge’s work on style and aesthetics in urban sub-cultures is highly relevant to the discussion (Hebdidge: 1979 and 1988) as is Muggleton’s more recent work (2000). Style is a specific imprint in any performance genre: it denotes affiliations, attitudes, inversions and discourse.

In Balinese and Indian dance, also, style is of the essence. The Ramayana can be told in many, many different ‘styles’ (de Zoete and Spies: 1937 and Richmond: 1989 & 1990) all denoting different aspects of, and ways of representing a performance of a widely recognised narrative from an infinite variety of social standpoints. Bartenieff’s article, “Research in Anthropology: A study of dance styles in primitive cultures”, (1968) was an early attempt to apply analytic frameworks across different groups, but some ethnographers didn’t know what was meant by ‘style’ because they didn’t dance.

Take an example of dance ethnography by Stephen Wild, on Walbiri dance style in the katjiri ritual:

Women’s dancing style consists of a small, regular, up and down jump. Both legs are synchronized and slightly bent at the knees; arms are bent while elbows point towards the ground and hands and forearms point upward. During the dancing the body may remain stationary or move forward. A soft, high-pitched “whoop” is emitted on alternate jumps or a low-pitched hum, pulsating with the jumping movement, is sounded. Jumping is synchronised with the meter of the singing which accompanies it. During the ceremonies in which both men and women participate, men provide the singing for the women’s dancing. (Wild: 1977/78, 17)

This says nothing about ‘style’. It says what they did, anatomically, in a very bare fashion with no dynamics or qualitative description of the manner of the performance, which is what style is about, and is typical of Wild’s description in this article. There is no detail of gesture, effort-action (Hutchinson: 1970) or the energy level used, or the difference in gendered styles between the men and the women - particularly in the sections where the gender roles are inverted. There is no use of ‘dance language’. Since the article is entitled “Men as Women: Female Dance Symbolism in Walbiri Men’s Rituals”, it needs a good deal more information. The article has a lot of detail about the sequence of events, the social context and symbology of the ritual in terms of its function in the society and the ritual inversion of the gender roles, which is certainly essential as background information. However, no clear picture emerges of the ‘style’, the manner in which the men performed women or the effect that has on the audience and other performers. For this a writer needs to talk ‘dance talk’ and use qualitative...
language. Reference to 'style' is rarely to be found in the anthropological literature, yet it can make a vast difference to the performance discourse.

'Soft' and 'hard' discourse

In a multi-cultural society, performance in 'real time' is one way by which different groups can begin to communicate with each other, using components of culture that can be presented in a public rather than a private arena. Festivals, celebrations, media, street performance soften barriers and open up dialogues. Initially, most successful cross-cultural 'performances' are achieved through sharing social discourses such as food and music, dance and visual images (especially portable ones such as decorative symbols, colours, artifacts, jewellery or clothes, and style – the ways in which social and aesthetic life is executed. Firth: 1973; Muggleton: 2000). This is 'soft discourse' and appeals to senses not being threatened and can occur in situations from which the participants can withdraw at any time. 'Hard discourse' involves full-on engagement with theoretical as well as practical interculturality. This includes less negotiable areas such as permanent rites of passage like marriage, social hierarchies and community moral values, shared living space and personal space and conflict of social practice related to gender, age, religion and politics - and identity. (Douglas: 1975; Kolantzis et al: 1992; Willis: 1993) Spoken and written languages have been found also to be 'hard discourse', initially alienating and even threatening, and are usually effective only in exchanges where the participants have made a specific effort to learn the rules: either the spoken dialect or other kinds of structural social grammars. Once learned, skill increases the effectiveness of more specific exchanges with more complex and challenging content.6

Discourses of the body

Some kinds of embodied discourses - the language of moving bodies in space - play around with the performance of themes, images and metaphors. The more they do this, the more they approach what European taxonomy calls 'dance'. Dance is able to address issues of corporeality, kinaesthesia and proxemics and can concentrate on emotional and metaphorical messages and the 'intelligence of feeling'. (Best: 1985) This makes intercultural exchange through dance very much easier than through spoken words. There is also room for negotiation. Dance frames aspects of lived life but, because the area of movement is generally less prescriptive than the 'talking heads' of spoken word and literal naturalism, it is also felt to be less threatening. At times, dance discourses are more explicit and more widely 'read'. Aboriginal dance is both aesthetically nuanced and linguistically coded but not to the same extent as spoken word, like Indian Bharatanattyam, where the mudras themselves and the style or interpretation each carry a different line of discourse: one aesthetic, one linguistically specific. The narrative can be quite clearly followed in such dance, whereas George Balanchine or Graeme Murphy's choreographic works are more metaphoric than

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
metonymic (Jacobsen & Halle: 1956; Barthes: 1967; personal experience and conversation with Murphy, 1997); Pina Bausch and Meryl Tankard’s work switches between the two (personal conversation with Meryl Tankard, 1999).

The range of physical protocols in all the performing arts derive from physical behaviours in 'real life' but in dance movement styles and ranges are given special recognition as discourse. This is different in European and Aboriginal culture. For instance, much European dance since medieval times derives, in the most part, from the quotidian and has evolved to the aesthetic. Movements have symbolic significances, which have then become choreographic and aesthetic components in their own right without necessarily referring directly back to their real life sources, although some echoes of the original meaning remain. Audiences either 'get it' or they don't but they can still enjoy the aesthetics. In Aboriginal performance, the ways things are 'moved' derive from real life, are arranged in patterns and performed as 'dance', but are carried back over into real life again, creating a cycle: dance steps rarely lose their original referents. While digging maku (edible grubs) in the Central Desert with Anangu women, I was referred to the dance movements and patterns for the correct (that is, successful) way to get at the grubs. While dancing, however, I was referred to the real maku dig for the 'right' dance style, effort actions, weight transferences and movement range. Aboriginal dance is far more observable as drawn from real life – closer to Tankard than Murphy.

While de Certeau (1988) has identified aspects of a quotidian aesthetic in 'the practice of everyday life', I have yet to hear a Sydney mother refer her daughter to Bernadette Walong (previously with Bangarra and now lecturing in dance at the University of Western Sydney) for a demonstration of the ways she can relate physically to her social milieu. However, the fact that Walong constructs dance the way she does in her teaching means the discussion is taking place, albeit esoterically. A young Aboriginal girl in Sydney is far more likely to be exposed to the movement protocols of MTV. In what way does this affect her view of her world - or indeed what conflicting world (or worlds) is being constructed for her and her body?

While the actual differences between Aboriginal and urban European physicalisation of social behaviours in performance are not so great, the practice of discourse is. An Anangu woman in Mimili practices her embodied knowledge in dance within an ecologically related world and talks about it with all her peers. Anthropologists in books and seminars conduct European discourse about traditional Aboriginal dance for Europeans, not for Aboriginal people. The discourses seem never to be reconciled. Understanding European dance is severely hampered anyway by the way both practice and discourse is generally limited or controlled by academics devoted to theories of postmodernism and arts professionals.
devoted to style. In urban areas, Aboriginal dance has only been on the Indigenous agenda since the early 1970s (Robinson: 2001) and ‘professionalised’ since the late 1980s. Urban Aboriginal dance is tied up with political discourses about race and cultural resistance to colonisation. Does this get talked about it at all outside professional dance circles or dance academia?

Music
Music is even further released from the need to be 'literal'. Sounds frame experiences and conduct discourses in ways which are more subtle than spoken words, or even body movements because they aren't visual and can happen while other things are going on - like the washing up or maths homework. Music is also highly flexible and adaptable and is often used by theatre, film and dance to 'underscore' or 'layer' meaning. Music can indeed provide a 'focused encounter', such as in a concert hall, where audiences are asked to concentrate on the music itself. However, the vast majority of music is ambient, lying in wait for unwary ears: in the air, so to speak. Its close intertwining with everyday life makes it a very powerful discourse tool. (Shepherd: 1991) This can be harnessed to political ends, as was discovered by the Roman Church in 600 AD at a time when the European ontology was supposedly ruled by one faith controlled by one music.7 (Chambers: 1903/1973; Smoulden: 1980) The same is said of Nazi Germany at a time when the dominant ontology was one of fascism, which was extended to all forms of symbolic representation including music. In my M.Litt thesis I have already explored 'dramatic intention' in music (1983) and it is out of the scope of this thesis to deal with the field in any detail.

10.5 Ethnography

Approaches to performance ethnography
Performance theory, performance semiotics and performance analysis are still relatively new topics in the ethnography and are still in the process of developing epistemologies within which to define their many aspects and contexts. Therefore, an ethnography that can actually address performance is also in its relative infancy. Taking into account existing and changing theoretical positions and methodological strategies as well as acknowledging the importance of very different subjective and objective perceptions arising from the individual and group performance-making experiences in different cultures, it is a post structural minefield and a post modern playground. Initially a peculiarly European pastime, many cultures are now starting to reflect on their forms of performance within similar or modified frameworks. Although the answers are often very different, the questions are more or less
the same: "Why and how do we make performances and what do they mean to us and others?" While recognising that imposed analytic approaches and frameworks are in themselves forms of cultural imperialism, they at least offer a means by which silent voices might be heard, since the necessity to speak has been forced on them by outsiders who would otherwise re-interpret their performances and speak for them.

Performance is possibly the hardest area of symbolic representation to document in writing because of its fugitive and very complex nature. It simply won't stand still and there seems to be no end to the amount of data that can be drawn from even the simplest performance. The ‘impossible’ task of recording and documenting theatrical performance” in the working papers The Documentation and Notation of Theatrical Performance (McAuley: 1986) is an honest, if brief, survey of what is entailed and the pitfalls. McCauley’s “Introduction” and article “Preserving the traces” speaks of the "impossibility" of doing such an immense task satisfactorily. There is much truth in her remarks. Her comments are by no means confined to European performance and stress the need for hermeneutic as well as analytic approaches. One of the other articles is by Margaret Clunies-Ross, “The documentation and notation of Australian Aboriginal Theatre Performance” (op cit), expanding on her already significant published work. It remains for an Aboriginal scholar to give the indigenous point of view. If a culture embodies all its teaching and experience in performance, perhaps reducing it to documentation or written analysis creates a secondary discourse relevant only to its authors' skills in creating ethnography and not to the performance itself.

Intercultural performance ethnography demonstrates a mix of approaches - semiotic analysis, physical training manuals, post-colonial revivalism, postmodern travesties, post-structural narratives and phenomenological responses to new experiences. In some performance training courses in universities and colleges, students now study aspects of intercultural performance in their first year. Specialised courses dealing with performance ethnography are a compulsory study for all postgraduate performance research students and some undergraduate students (University of Western Sydney and Sydney University Course Calendars: 1994-2003). Not all ethnographic writing about performance need be academic, however. An interesting example of the difference between literature generated by non-academic and academic practitioners is seen in Mickey Hart’s written and illustrated account of his drumming experiences all over the world, Drumming at the Edge of Magic (Hart: 1990). This is an example of an attempt to capture fugitive encounters with percussion instruments and the people who play them. In comparison, James Blades’ classic, Percussion Instruments and their History (Blades: 1975), is a collection of well-researched ‘data’.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
performance and their social and musical contexts reveals a hermeneutic approach, focused on material objects and their physical musical capacities with some ethnographic information. The second is taxonomic and ‘factual’. One writing style is personal and revelatory, using the performance languages of musicians around the globe, the other scholarly and authoritative, using the language of universities and conservatoria.

How do you write about a transactional experience?

(Literature) is the divorce between audience and speaker, reader and author. Where, as with oral (i.e. unwritten) literature, communication depends on personal performance, an audience response and on the direct personal interaction between author and public, the effect is likely to be rather different from that of written literature which facilitates the opportunity for the independent and withdrawn author, and for abstract meditation divorced from the pressures of an immediate audience or for the immediate need for action. (Finnegan: Literacy and Orality: 1988, 18)

Performance is not written text

Writing about performance is not performance; nor is a printed script, dance notation or a music score. Transliterations of performance and other emotional, sensory and physical activities will make sense only if they tap into a reader's previous experience. Reading about performance will inevitably result in misconceptions and reductionism unless the reader has previously shared the original (or a very similar) experience. In that case, the reader is once divorced and transliteration operates as a mnemonic, a reminder what the real thing was 'like'. When a reader has never actually experienced the performance but has some non-literary information to draw on - say, a video documentary - he or she is twice divorced. There is access to some sensory information to augment the written word- mostly through sight and sound. When there is no previous experience at all, and no sensory material, images from the imagination are being constructed about what it 'might be like', based on an understanding of the words in similar contexts, for example using similes and metaphors. In none of these examples is there an opportunity for the reader to negotiate an understanding of meaning with the performers.

An audience completely ‘divorced’ from a culture with which it has had little or no previous experience has quite a challenge ahead of it in respect of performance understanding, especially because the dominant European mode of ‘reputable’ discourse have become the verbal and technically produced written word (Benjamin: 1969; Ong: 1982) and it is assumed that these channels of information are sufficient. Writers about performance (who work from
their own knowledge, feelings and experiences) often assume that 'the written word' will be enough. Readers without comparable knowledge rely on second order data. (Lyotard: 1984) If the writer and the written text are privileged over the experiencer and the experience in one culture, the translation of non-verbal, sensory, emotional and creative relationships from (an)Other culture which does not use writing as a means of conveying cultural knowledge is extremely difficult.

**Analysing performance discourse**

European performance analysis usually is quite methodical and detached in its approach and 'looks at' surface phenomena 'through the eyes' of an 'objective observer'. A dispassionate, professional, 'scientific' gaze (though not necessarily cold) with its 'participant-observation' approach is usually employed to deal with the 'data', using paradigms set up by the area of academic study, not by the performers. There are sometimes concerted gestures towards using more revealing and specific 'qualitative' approaches and analysis in the form of fieldwork journals, interviews, oral histories and some personal exegesis - particularly where the ethnographer has been immersed in a performance experience that has provided deeper insight and has aroused unexpected passions.

Other approaches are highly interpretive and draw on wide ranging personal knowledge to expand the raw data to address issues well beyond the objective. (Bollen: 1999; Martin: 1998) This involves as a matter of course the spiritual, the æsthetic, the physical, the sensory, the emotional, the transcendental and the transformational as well as the informational. It is now not so unusual in contemporary research for performers to construct performance itself as discourse and as the research methodology. In that context, a phenomenological approach is preferable because performance experiences really cannot be generalised or objectified (Van Manen: 1990).

In some cases, there is an extraordinary deployment of writing skills and ‘picture editing’, which results in a creative analysis that re-writes the phenomena itself - a kind of docu-fiction. A rare, very interesting (though sometimes self-indulgent) ethnography emerges when the subject of the research is also the writer - ethnography of 'self-in-performance' (Crisp: 1998; Long: 1999; Richardson: 2001). The problem remains: who will 'read' a performance as a research discourse in a society where performance equates with entertainment? Whatever the approach, in almost all European discourse about cultural phenomena, that which can't be theorised, analysed, quantified or qualified from recognisable performance 'data' is left without comment although the non-verbal discourse might exist and in different kinds of physical 'conversations' might be in fact recognised.
This begs the question, why analyse and document performance in written forms at all if such experiences cannot be satisfactorily translated? Stephen Muecke in his 1988 article "Body, inscription, epistemology: knowing Aboriginal texts" sums it up when he says that the important thing is "the relation between epistemology and the conditions of production" (43-44). So, instead of comparing 'literacy' and 'pre-literacy' in cultures, thus emphasising differences that cannot be satisfactorily resolved, why don't anthropologists and ethnographers examine those phenomena that are shared? Why not perform together? Written/spoken discourse might be the dominant European intellectual discourse mode in sectors like law, commerce, the sciences, education and politics but it is not in 'the written word' where all complex dialogues about 'lived life' occur - even in European culture (Poyatas: 1992). Performances, on the other hand, encode embodied experiences in ways that can address such complex discourses, and which do allow for negotiation of meaning. To understand the cultural information contained in performance, people must do performance. Performances are experiential phenomena, complex, symbolic transactions between actors and onlookers. Both (and people might be both simultaneously) need to be present at the time and in the space to experience that transaction which should be the primary source for performance research (Brook: 1968; Turner: 1983; Bennett: 1990; Blau: 1990; Carlson: 1989; Schmitt: 1990, Zarilli: 1995; Reinelt et al: 1996). Removing that transactional experience and committing an account of it to literature makes any future audience necessarily a 'divorced' one (Finnegan: 1988), and (ob)literates the performer and the performance. If the essence of performance is the experience, the action, then what is the reader reflecting on when reading about performance? In almost every case it is a second order of 'reality' created in spoken/written language by what is in fact a second 'author' (Baudrillard: 1983). It is experience converted by means of word but not necessarily offering anything that might be called 'translation'. This might be a valid exercise in itself, but it doesn't help in understanding performance phenomena and is particularly problematic when researchers are observing and analysing performances from cultures other than their own. Performance ethnography is a supremely alienating and distancing process. Performance is not a written text.

John Shepherd makes a further point:

As well a encouraging an historical and analytical perspective, literacy emphasises the visual at the expense of the auditory. Whereas sound underlines the dynamic immediacy of the environment, visual stimuli underline the distancing and separatedness of events and objects from each other and individual people. As sound underlines immediacy in time, so vision underlines distancing in space. Further, since literacy facilitates the safe and permanent storage of information apart from people's consciousness, it also induces a psychic distancing.  

(Shepherd: 1991, 25-26)
And the other senses? Visual and auditory codes certainly need to be understood, but the discourses created by the body in performance and the other non-verbal texts, such as temporal, kinaesthetic, spatial and environmental signification systems, and those using the less conscientised sensory channels of smell and taste, are also integral to a full reading and, most importantly, the creative act of performance and the extent to which *autopoiesis* (Maturana and Varela: 1987) and individual desire are involved. To help overcome literary 'distancing', experience must be extended to many types of 'inscriptions, including physical performance experience (if not of the performance in question, then of other, similar performances to provide comparison). It also should include knowledge from experience of the ecological, social, economic and religious contexts of performances and the symbolic inversion and subversion of these.


But even 'radical ethnographers' who develop excellent personal relationships with their 'subjects' (and many do), and who integrate their own experiences within action research frameworks, are not very often required to take part fully in the cultural context of the phenomenon they are researching and, in particular, they are not involved in direct comparisons based on a series of exchanges between Others and themselves, requiring constant reflection and re-evaluation of their own process as knowledge of each Other grows. The power of this kind of ethnography is very great; it couples scientific discourse with personal experience in the field and ethnographic writing can act very much as a dramatic script and stage scenario, setting up the characters, the space, the place and the time of the action. (Clifford: 1988, 26 & 30)

Whatever the methodological approach, in almost all European research into cultural phenomena, that which can't be theorised, analysed, quantified or qualified from
recognisable, stable ‘data’ is problematised or left without comment if there is no verbal language by which it can be 'discussed', although the phenomena themselves might be acknowledged as existing. This is an inadequate approach when dealing with performance, which involves, as a matter of course, the spiritual, the aesthetic, the physical, the sensory, the emotional, the intense, the transcendental and the transformational. Scholar/performers prepared to ‘blur the genres’ by re-exploring culture in general, linking religion, metaphysics, economics, politics, and psychology with all forms of symbolic representation deeply affect the ways in which a possible 'translation of culture' through sharing performances both 'social' and 'cultural' may be now considered.

Atkinson's The Ethnographic Imagination (1990) was one of the milestones for ethnography, however he was writing his text not for performers but for disengaged social scientists (including anthropologists), and he possibly was not aware at the time of the implications of his work to that field.

The acts of social research have been recognised for what they are, social transactions themselves (ibid, 177)

He refers to influences such as Mills (1959), Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Van Manen (1988) and continually emphasises that he is not attempting to undermine the 'science' of the subject matter but to explore the transaction. Like his predecessors, he valorises the written word - a "textual construction of reality" - and makes no mention of other forms of discourse in his anxiety to present and argue the case for meaningful written accounts. This is also the position taken by Van Manen (1990), although he makes oblique references to 'the arts'. Neither of them ‘sees’ the arts as 'primary documents'.

How people manipulate and record their own culture and environment in performance is very revealing. Assumptions about Others, such as were made by the early anthropologists, are not now tenable. This may be connected as much to the eclectic, creative, synthesising nature and reflexive function of performances themselves, which are a vigorous part of rapidly changing societies, as well as an unprecedented era of global communication. Creative phenomena are constantly on the move and ethnography needs to develop the same fluidity as the phenomena it studies.

**Different paradigms**

In the case of some societies without written languages, such as New Guinea hill tribes (in particular see Feld: 1982) and among many Aboriginal 'traditional' communities (Ellis: 1989) descriptive analysis and semiotic approaches based on observation, or even participant-

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
observation, is critically inadequate without a sharing of performance experience. Where a proportionately large amount of the community ‘knowledge’ is carried by the enactment and its meaning to the people as they do it, or by the interrelationships between performances and the spaces/places in which they occur, or by musical sounds themselves, or is contingent on the presence of particular wildlife or seasonal weather phenomena, written academic ethnography is completely inadequate. Because of misinterpretation, dismissal, or even the complete oversight of vital aspects of performance-knowledge based in experience, great gaps occur and ‘versions’ of performances documented by outside ‘experts’ supersede the ‘local knowledges' and the actual experience of performers. Ethnographies taken as ‘truth’ by other scholars complicit in the hegemonic ownership of academic knowledge (Ong: 1991) escalate the problem to the point where even the owners of performances can no longer articulate what is going on because of the imperialism of European positivist, scientific and academic approaches to cultural ownership and the eventual perception by the practitioners themselves that the European academics must know more than they do. A deeply shocked Catherine Ellis's story of what happened to a whole ceremony she documented and ‘collected’ is a tragic example. What she didn't understand was that the women had in fact given the song to her. When she returned some years later and inquired about its performance over that time, they told her that it couldn't be performed at all if she wasn't there. (Ellis: 1989)

**Ethnographic ethics**

The other problem, that of continually disempowering people through ethnography, is one that has not gone away. The I988 Colloquium of the International Council for Traditional Music, focusing on the Music and Dance of Aboriginal Australia and the South Pacific, and which examined The Effects of Documentation on the Living Tradition, published papers and discussion (Moyle (ed): 1992) which showed that ethnographers need to continue to search for ways of working collaboratively with the owners of the culture they so closely observe and record and to examine the ethics under which they operate (see also Tunstil: 1996). While social scientists argue for a degree of ‘academic distance’ rather than training in the arts, practitioners know that such 'distance' limits understanding. Dance ethnographer Adrienne Kæppler had the following conversation, with Dieter Christenson, a musicologist, as part of an open symposium in 1988 between performance ethnographers who were by no means as convinced as she is of the importance of personal performance experience by the analyst in the deconstruction process:

**Adrienne Kæppler:**
That's how dance anthropologists work. People who work in dance don't just take a video and think they've done their job. In order to analyse a dance tradition or a dance, you
have to learn it yourself. The analysis you can do partly from your own learning, your own process of learning. I would imagine that this is the same in music. Sometimes you are going to have to do a recording. You don't have to do a video or a film. You can learn it and write it down while you're learning it, or then try it out on people to see if you've done it correctly or incorrectly, then make your hypotheses, change them and so forth. This is what dance anthropologists do all the time. (Discussion)

**Dieter Christensen:**

....I'm really surprised that Adrienne's anthropology is really based on learning the dance.

**Adrienne Kæppler:**

I didn't say that. I said you do your analysis while you are learning it. (laughter) Analysis is what dance anthropologists are doing all the time.

(Kæppler and Christensen in Moyle, (ed): 1992, 107)

Kæppler is right. In the process of learning to do a dance, the deconstruction is meticulous and, in the same way a novice learns how to sing a song or how to paint a pattern or to understand a performance space in ways other than intellectual. To be taught how to do it by doing it gives the keys to deconstruct it and reconstruct it later. Reading about it is not the same thing. The closest ethnographers will get to a full set of information is to learn to do it themselves (whatever 'it' is) and then perform in the same context. As a bonus, the learning will be of a different order - a combination of all sensory channels that, according to many educators, is the best way to learn.\(^\text{10}\) Deconstruction will then be able to proceed along a number of simultaneous, related paths that will eventually address integrated performance aspects not necessarily visible to 'sight' or audible to 'hearing' but very tangible indeed to 'touch', 'taste' or 'smell' or a range of emotional responses. This, in turn, gives access to 'ways of knowing' the Other, which is one of the main goals of radical ethnography. However, any ethnography implies an unequal power relationship and it is a dubious way of translating culture unless the authors are 'closer to the ground'.

**Cultural studies**

Newer approaches are highly interpretive and draw on wide-ranging knowledge and experiential responses to expand the data into complex discourses that address issues beyond the original ethnographic study. In some cases there is an extraordinary deployment of writing skills that result in a creative dissertation as colourful as the subject - a kind of docu-fiction approach. A really interesting (though again tending towards the self-indulgent) ethnography emerges when the subject of the research is also the writer ethnography of self.
Anthropology and broad cultural studies often now are conflated, but topics are still studied as separate, objectified phenomena or, increasingly, a couple are linked in more lateral and interdisciplinary approaches. It is with the performance of culture that ethnography has trouble. Some time after Levi-Strauss and the explosion in linguistic and cultural studies, it is now recognised that ethnography is a social act, which can and does affect people's perception of themselves and Others.

'Voices' of the performers
There are three main kinds of performance discourse: those conducted about performance by performers, those conducted by performance itself and those conducted by Others. In the case of Aboriginal Australia, the most powerful Others are Europeans whose intellectual dialogues are very often conducted at a distance from both the performance and the performers. This marginalises performers' input into the discourse and gives power to those who write about the performances rather than those who do them. It doubly disadvantages performers from oral cultures and reinforces the institutionalised ethnocentrism already present. (Tilley: 1999) For an Aboriginal elder who already holds the equivalent of post-doctoral qualifications in performance in his or her own culture (and many do) the situation is insulting. It means that the published discourses around Aboriginal performance have always been written by non-Aboriginal people and they ignore the discourses Aboriginal people themselves conduct. Very few of the voices struggle through the welter of descriptions of who wore what feathered headdress.

Vocal 'subalterns'
In the last 35 years, anthropology has been expanded from what was generally understood to be the serious, academic and scientific study of 'non-literate', 'pre-industrial' and 'primitive' peoples to the study of all peoples, including contemporary Europeans looking at their own culture. 'Ways of seeing' have been required to become diverse and complex and anthropologists no longer have 'right of entry' into most places on the earth. Many of the people who were the original subjects for European and American anthropological research have themselves developed anthropologies, sociologies, arts and cultural studies departments in universities of their own and are being heard to speak with their own voices. They are broadcasting on their own media, publishing their own newspapers, journals and books, performing their own plays, creating their own visual arts, recording their own music and re-writing and telling their own histories from their own perspectives.11

In Australia, interculturalism has been slow to occur. Arts Festivals such as the Adelaide and the Adelaide Fringe, Womad, the Melbourne and the Sydney Festivals and others offer a multicultural smorgasbord and as a run-up to the Olympics in Sydney, the Festival of the...
Dreaming highlighted a range of contemporary Aboriginal performances - the first festival of its kind in Australia. In Sydney and other capital cities, Aboriginal performance schools have graduated a significant number of young performers who now control their own game. The 'new' anthropology claims a role for performance which is a representation of community identity as well as personal identity, allowing an individual as "a self, isolated in physical, subjective experience" to co-exist with the sociocultural order as such. (See Dubinskas and Traweek, 1984,9, and their critique of the shortcomings in Munn's ethnography)

In the last ten years, European mainstream, academic performance ethnography also has become more and more aware of the need for a different kind of 'intercultural' research and has broadened its parameters to include non-European performance - hitherto the province of anthropology. This has meant an exponential increase of the different performance codes to be deciphered, even more puzzling than the different spoken codes. Pavis (1992, 1) described "their inexhaustible babble, their explosive mix, the inextricable collage of their languages". Reaching an understanding (or translation) of those performance languages and the ontological frameworks within which performances occur is a most difficult challenge for someone not 'born into the culture'. There has, therefore, long been a need for practitioners and theorists in non-European countries to make, research and to write about their own performances unfettered by colonial interference - if not completely free from its residual influence. Indian scholar, Rustom Bharucha (1992, 1996), who expresses violent objections to the 'colonisation' of the non-European performance discourse by European academics, has also raised his voice in criticism of the European hegemony on performance 'restitution' within cultures where performance genres are perceived to be 'dying out. Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook and Richard Schechner are his particular targets. However, in another part of the world, Tadashi Suzuki (1982 and 1986) pushed explorations of the dynamics of the contemporary Japanese performing body to the limits, drawing on the fused contexts of traditional Kabuki and Noh without acknowledging any influence of European scholarship. Butoh, a Japanese post-war dance/theatre form more popular in European culture than in Japanese, nudes the line even further. The form has gathered a cult following in its own right, but more important are the visiting Japanese performance companies who conduct schools and workshops around the world and the international magnet of Suzuki's school in Japan where he maintains control of the discourse.

I see little evidence, however, that Aboriginal people have been engaged in discussing their own performance theories with ethnographers or that the effects of post colonialism have been very great. (Spivak: 1999) With such an expert grasp of iconography, it would seem to me also that, if they wished to, Aboriginal dancers could develop some very effective written dance and music notations of their own. But there is no need to do this at all. Performance is

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
not passed on in this way in Aboriginal culture (nor, in practice, in European culture (Johnson: 1987)) and already has its own sets of mnemonics that function perfectly adequately. Travesties in the ethnography include Durkheimian interpretations of technology use without perceiving its creative application; collections of performance artefacts out of context; recording of iconography as static symbology instead of interactive language; translations into 'good English' of original Aboriginal narratives; no layered subtexts or examination of performance contexts of song verses; interrelated songs, dances, iconography and narrative separated from each other for analysis without ever putting them back together again; lengthy discussions about 'totemism' without relating that to identity and the performance of ceremonies; analyses of food sources and subsistence practices without linking them to Aboriginal beliefs, experience and information; ignoring the information sharing in and through performance; geographers' reports on sacred sites with no recognition of the direct influence of topography on choreography of dance and composition of song, etc. (Davies: 1997) On the other hand, Aboriginal performers talk about these things all the time. It is absolutely extraordinary that so few ethnographers have perceived this while documenting or even physically taking part in ceremonies and other types of performance. Those who have are already performers themselves.

10.6 Experiencing

Embodiment
At the centre of all performance is the human body (even in electronic simulation), with all performance occurring within defined human social contexts that involve other human bodies. Participating bodies must all be 'live' at some point and, although the contexts within which the 'acting' or 'onlooking' is carried out sometimes seem irrelevant within contemporary technology and postmodern theory, the essentials remain the same. Such concepts also must involve kinæsthetics and proxemics, which establish the physical, visual and environmental relationships between actors and onlookers. A realisation of this, after almost half a century of semiotic-driven analysis, has meant that the emphasis in European performance research has shifted from 'seeing' and 'hearing' performances as visual and auditory 'texts' only (which had the effect of separating theory from practice and produced some really silly literature) to investigating by 'participation' and 'experience'. (Csoudas, ed.: 1994) This places emphasis back on a phenomenological transaction between performers and audiences with full complements of sensory awarenesses. Semiotically framed performance analysis grids for notating observable phenomena have proven to be inadequate for understanding physical and affective aspects of European performances.
(where presumably 'the tacit' is known by the ethnographer) let alone of Other performance (where 'the tacit' is highly unlikely to be known). Analysis grids are useful for isolated snippets of performances, or in short experiments set up at workshops, symposiums and conferences but not for understanding a 'whole' physical ecology. Exchange of understanding means continual embodied negotiation during all kinds physical transactions. Respect must be mutual if people are to reach a shared epistemology and to appreciate not only each other's world views but how, when, where and why they are expressed by synaesthetic bodies. (Baron-Cohen: 1997) It involves each person opening up all sensory and kinaesthetic channels to awarenesses of new languaging (Allsopp and Lahunta: 1996; Jones: 1998) and new ways of knowing in a very physical way, not just noting a range of predetermined signifiers. It means 'knowing in your bones'.

A biological theory of the body in performance and biological research into the performing arts has been an area taken seriously by few scholars until only recently. As Jean-Marie Pradier (1996) asks:

> How is it that this art whose basic substance is life - *bios* - did not bring about earlier the emergence of a biological theory of the body in performance and of biological research in the performing arts? (1)

and laments

> ... the lack of a global theory which would be able to take into account the biological, psychological and cultural aspects of organised human performing behaviours as a whole. (2)

His identification of a possibly new focus for research is outlined in his persuasive paper "Ethnoscenology: The biology and culture of human performing behaviour" (1996). In this he traces a line of theoretical argument through Darwin (1872), Meyerhold (1980) and a range of early 'neuro-cultural' researchers to a diverse range of recent scholars looking closely at the body and its role in performance, such as Pradier himself (1979,1990), Bloch, Orthous and Santibáquez (1987), Armstrong (1994), Butler (1986), Laughlin, McManus and D'Aquili (1979,1990), Rodaway (1994) and Samuels (1990). Included can be the work in performance phenomenology of States (1985 and 1992) and Garner (1994). Implicit in this research is the notion of a performing ecology rather than a performance ecology, within which a performing body is constructed.
An awareness and use of a full range of sensory and body experiences in performance are alien to contemporary Europeans. In his recent work *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Miller (1998) details (although he wasn't talking about performance in particular) all of the reasons why taking part in 'traditional' Aboriginal performance would be physically, socially and emotionally repellent to members of a culture which has long since demonised and degraded the 'animal' senses (especially those of smell, taste and touch) and which still censors re-enactments of human activities which involve blood and other body fluids, sex, gratuitous violence and sadism, and ritual human sacrifice. This is despite the fact that such activities are a part of social practice and their implicit threats underpin a rather large proportion of performance.

Europeans are often unable to overcome culturally ingrained revulsions for physical contact with the Other - and that increasingly means people in their own culture. There is a very high ratio of the urban population, according to Miller, who choose to have no bodily contact with other people at all and a significant and growing number remain celibate for most of their lives and live alone. Aversion to, and rejection of, the natural functions and excretions of the body, unless sanctioned by extremely complex and alienating euphemistic social rituals, are virtually universal in urban European societies. Ackerman's *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990) gives a slightly different perspective, but underlines the need for a de-intellectualisation of sensory perception so that its full potential in "translating culture" can be accessed. In performance rituals, many of these 'prohibited' social interactions are 'normalised' and contact is tolerated, even sought.

**The naked body**

Nakedness and socially dictated notions of body etiquette, of decency and morality, of secrecy and disclosure have very complex rules in urban European societies, as they do in traditional Aboriginal societies. While rules exist in all cultures, they are most often discussed in European performance analysis in terms of inversion, perversion, transgression and oppositional practice, arising for one reason or another from a sense of shame inculcated by Christian morality and the binary split between mind and body. In Aboriginal 'traditional' performance, clothes as a covering for nakedness are not worn at all, although the costume and decoration can be very elaborate. What Europeans would call 'indecent exposures' have always been a normal part of Aboriginal performances. All forms of undress by performing Others have been tolerated with a degree of prurience by Europeans but are seen as signs of primitivism. Nakedness in Aboriginal performance has become an issue in the last 200 years only due to the imposition of notions of shame by Europeans. Clothing is worn in performance now when 'outsiders' are present or when the performance is given in a European context, but not in private ceremonies. When performing on urban stages,
Aboriginal dancers always observe notions of modesty and are very circumspect in comparison to European counterparts.

**Sensuous geographies**

Theorising of the sensory 'texts' that arise from being aware of the body and, more specifically, the bodies of the Self and the Other, originated from studies in the early 20th century interested in psychoanalysis, intelligence and learning, and research into sensory deprivation, such as in hearing and sight disabled people, or those with perceptual disorders. (Ackerman: 1990; Schafer: 1977 and 1995) This initial interest in 'the perceptual senses' petered out in the middle part of the century in favour of more 'scientific' and quantifiable attempts to understand the human condition, such as IQ assessments, behaviourism, structural linguistics, and measurements of degrees of ability (giftedness) in expressive areas according to checklists developed by scientists (Rodaway: 1994). New ideas began to emerge in the late 1970s, producing a confluence of ideas, which has started to change the ways human behaviour, including performance is being interpreted. A resurgence of interest has produced some pertinent work in the field of 'sensuous geographies' (Ackerman 1990; Rodaway: 1994), much of which applies directly to performance, particularly since both performance and performance analyses are really special kinds of phenomenological sensory mapping. This has opened up understandings not previously appreciated, although the need was flagged from time to time, especially in dance research. Haptics, kinesics and proxemics and the limbic senses of smell and taste are being recognised again as powerful and integral to the human experience as well as social and spiritual experiences. (Cain: 1978; Porteous: 1985, 1986a; Pocock: 1981; 1989; 1993; Poytas: 1982, 1993) Spatial and temporal senses are also being explored for the way they can affect both performers and audiences - and these knowledges cannot be acquired except through experience, since they can neither be seen, heard nor touched (Bachelard: 1964; Tuan: 1977, 1993; Soja: 1989; Swain: 1991; Tacey: 1994: Csoudas, ed.: 1994) 'Sensory mapping' has opened up ideas for mapping not just from the external observer's point of view (although that is important too) but from the point of view of the performer situated within the performance ecology and the ways in which cultural information is shared, one on one, group to group (Porteous: 1990; Carter: 1992). This in turn has affected the ways in which especially performers themselves are conducting performance research.

The distinct manner in which each of the sensory channels is socially mapped and utilised differs in each culture. Hiatt (1978) edited a fascinating early collection of articles that looked at Australian Aboriginal concepts about, among other things, perception and semantics in connection with symbolic representation including colour, oral communication, sound, dreaming, and taxonomies of various kinds, human/animal relationships, elemental qualities...
and notions of 'safe' and 'dangerous'. Ellis' explorations of time consciousness among musicians (1989), Biddle's work in "non-literacy" (1991 and 1996) and Morphy's in aesthetics (1989) reveal rich areas for mutual exploration. It is surprising that there has been so little interest in these conceptual fields in Aboriginal performance ethnography.

**Sensory languages**

Communication of meaning is achieved through engaging with many sensory channels simultaneously. It means both constructing and interpreting the messages: visual, auditory, haptic, olfactory, gustatory, spatial and temporal. Additional considerations proposed are the functions of intelligence, perception, memory and gestalt, and the endocrinal and hormonal activities of the body all of which affect mood and therefore performance making, receptivity and interpretation. Each of these channels and affective 'agents' has several methods (singly and in combination) of sending (making), receiving and interpreting 'messages' in performance. The most easily understood (quantifiable?) involve the selection and use of recognisable and agreed-upon symbolic components in a series of both closed and open systems which are negotiated in a transactional process of 'meaning creation' by all participants. Despite the practice of some cultures to privilege some senses and bodily activities and functions and to suppress others in day-to-day social life, in performance they usually all are used to a very great extent although the degree is still affected by the societal rules within which they operate.

**Seeing**

European perceptions of performance are mostly from the point of view of the audience. The most privileged senses are sight, followed by hearing (Levin, ed.: 1993). The very word 'theatre' is derived from a Greek word 'theatron', privileging 'spectatorship'. Other European words for different kinds of performances are 'shows', 'spectacles', 'scenes', 'videos' and 'displays'.

Visual channels perceive elements such as line, colour, shape, texture and form as well as measurements of size, mass and distance and interpret constructed artefacts, iconography and the visual features of space and place. (Pocock: 1981; 1990) They also perceive movement, patterns and relationships between all other visual features. While complex enough, visual phenomena initially seem the easiest to make, describe and analyse because, apart from actual movement, they usually have static potential, the most static of which are descriptive writing and other forms of inscribed iconography (Tuan: 1974; 1975; 1979a; 1979b and 1993) and, more recently, photographs, films and videos. Some dance and gesture is also visually coded for direct or literal meaning: classical ballet, Bharatanattyam, French mime, Hawaiian traditional dance and Auslan are among many examples of movement
performance where the vocabularies and grammars are visual and physical and need to be 'learned' by looking as much as doing.

While visual images are imported from one culture to another, and are appreciated for certain aesthetics, it is not always certain that they are understood in terms of a real intercultural exchange. It would seem that many retain an aesthetic appeal quite apart from what they 'mean' in the culture of origin, even with something so prescribed as writing - such as the typography of the symbols. I have often shared with friends the view that I find Japanese/Chinese writing so attractive because I have no idea what it means and can just appreciate the visual design. The same goes for Hindi and Arabic. Greek and Latin, or even Russian, bring out the 'translator' in me and I immediately attempt to decipher meaning. The choice of typeface in a language that is very familiar has a more subtle effect. My choice of typeface for this thesis is an aesthetic one, for instance. The messages being conveyed by that might be unclear (unconscious?) to all but another typographer. In other words, even visual symbols that are exactly interchangeable have Other qualities.

How much more subtle must be the visual languages of cultures which are not so exact and do not have a verbal or written counterpart or 'translation'. To what degree is a man's tie too narrow, or the soles of his shoes too thick for him to be a merchant banker? When is an Aboriginal dancer 'beautiful'? How much brown can there be in red ochre before the majority of the group will see it as brown? When an audience 'watches' a performance, what is it looking at, exactly? Or is this term quite misleading?

**Hearing**

Auditory communication includes voice, music, sound effects and ambient sounds that form discrete 'soundscapes', texts with completely different sets of messages. (Pocock: 1989) They can all complement each other or stand alone. Vocal sound encoded into articulated words has a different effect than sound without words, for instance. Following on from the previous comment on visual perception of written word, I find the sound of Italian and German opera fulfilling without translating the spoken language. In opera, it might be observed that not knowing the exact meaning can be at times a blessing. Listening to Aboriginal voices singing at first made no intellectual sense, as we had no idea of the meaning of the articulated language. However we were very comfortable with the sound of it, especially in Mimili where the spaces enhanced and complemented the voices.

Sound itself can be analysed technically extremely accurately, but explaining its meaning as 'performance' is a far more complex business for which there is very little existing literature (Schafer: 1977 and 1985; Pocock: 1983; 1987; 1988; 1989; 1993). Sound is transitory and

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
opiates in both synchronic and diachronic time, making its ‘nailing down’ in either time or space problematic, even with recordings and notation. What has been missing is a concerted effort to analyse the physical and emotional effects of sound. (Tame: 1984) When completing a Master of Letters degree in musicology in 1983, I attempted to talk about this in a paper at a postgraduate colloquium and, while there was some interest, emphasis was laid on the ‘impossibility’ of such research. At the time I proposed that all that needed to be done was for individuals to communicate how various sounds and musics affected them so that some comparative studies might be done, but this was not ‘scientific’ I was told. Of course not. Why should it be? However, ‘meaning and emotion’ (Myers: 1956) remains a largely untouched area in European music apart from music therapy (Davies: 1994) and music performance research as such is still ignored in favour of 'the dots' or borrowed cultural studies to look at contexts (Nattiez: 1988; Attali: 1985). The best intercultural musical research is happening between musicians who play together. In terms of public acceptance and knowledge, it is far in advance of other kinds of intercultural performance 'translation' enterprises, with huge audiences, a booming production economy and seemingly endless possibilities. Intercultural exchanges of this 'community based' kind happen so frequently as to be considered 'normal' and many musicians feel they can 'talk' the musical language of any Other with no effort at all. Participants in all kinds of musical exchanges seem to operate better if they let the music do the talking for them. Enough people have claimed that music is a language or at the very least a social text (Shepherd: 1991; Davies: 1997).

**Touch, small and taste**

Touch (and the deep 'limbic' human senses of smell and taste) is virtually ignored as a necessary component of society and culture by urban Europeans even though they are the means by which we all learn about the world as babies. They are an integral part of performance, at both a conscious and subliminal level. Touch, smell and taste are virtually buried beneath a compost heap of urban European euphemisms and avoidances. (Porteous: 1985, 1986b) They are rarely recognised as a key component of performances. It may also be noticed that in European theatres the audience is seated individually so that no person need touch another.

The Australian Ballet these days insists on deodorants and mouthwashes lest partners are offended and dancers are very careful where they place their hands during lifts. The body itself, its functions and its excretions raise issues that are very difficult for Europeans to deal with – increasingly in the dance world. In European societies only people designated as 'scientifically objective' and 'properly trained' (like doctors) carry out procedures deemed likely to be socially controversial in respect of touch. Try it in performance (for example, Stellarc) and it's perversion. Some practitioners of postmodern performance (for example,
The Sydney Front, Annie Sprinkle) have explored some 'taboo' issues involving touch, but within a very intellectual milieu and, again, within a confrontational (oppositional) framework. Yet touch is integral to all performance and is deliberate and essential. In real life’ it has became embarrassing and even illegal to touch anyone publicly, and in private life more and more people are constrained by concepts of the morality and safety of physical isolation. Some have suggested that this is one reason why pornography in all its forms is so prevalent but this discussion is outside the scope of this thesis.

While it takes some time for a European to get used to being conscious of smell, it is like adding more channels to the performance radar. Ambient olfactory stimuli are very powerful, even in buildings. European playhouse theatres all smell exactly the same (sweat and makeup filtered through wood, dust, mould and personal fresheners, the smell of hot metal lights and colour gels, with a hint of popcorn in movie houses to stimulate sales). Some approximation has been noted in talking to city street performers but their range of awareness is dulled and masked by high-octane petrol fumes, street cleaning chemicals and fast food scraps in council bins. Nonetheless, all performers report that the smell of a 'real' performance place is enough to put them in the right 'frame of mind' - or not.

Smell is never included as a factor in European stage performance unless a deliberate move (often dismissed as a gimmick) has been made by a director to include olfactory stimuli in a production - for example, brewed coffee wafting through the audience. However, in most stage performance taste and smell are avoided (tea instead of alcohol, for instance and no meals on stage), and most references are diegetic (within the script or action). The popularity of theatre restaurants and outdoor festival owes a great deal to the inclusion of food (smell and taste). Unfortunately, that is often seen as a signal to lower the standard of the 'entertainment', which is a big mistake, but it might be asked why this is so? Clearly there is a relationship between 'high art' and starving oneself of physical gratification. This is not the case in most other cultures where signs like "No food or drink to be taken into the theatre" are unknown.

An interesting offshoot is the ‘food movie’ and the countless TV cooking shows where, safe on the screen, taste ands smell are explored minutely – at a distance. It is a statistic that cookery books are the best selling books in every western country. ‘Food porn’ is the phrase used.

Aboriginal performances carry with them a vast range of kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory experiences. Apart from human interaction, this variety is connected with seasonal changes; location changes; particular vegetation; topography of the surrounding countryside; altitude;
fire and wood smoke; food; animals, birds and insects; the scent of rain on dry dust; pollen carried by the wind and the tang of seasonal flowers and fruits. Cooked or raw food is always included in a performance context and is sometimes the subject of the narrative. Performers are all aware of subtle changes in themselves and others. Intensity of concentration, sexual and emotional arousal, fear and excitement cause great changes in body tension and relaxation, heat and moisture and therefore body odours and pheromones odours during performance. This is acknowledged by Aboriginal performers and in fact sweat and other body fluids are sometimes exchanged between performers and there is no attempt to mask natural functions. (Berndt: 1951; Porteous: 1990; Brooks: 1995; Chomsky: 2000; personal experience)

What is most interesting is that European performers are aware of these things, but are constantly required to suppress them. It was a great relief to work with people who used the senses of touch, smell and taste consciously in performance, as well as in everyday life.

**Performance intensity**

Performance intensity depends on the level to which all senses are engaged during performances, allowing a shift out of the everyday into a different perceptual space. Questions of performance 'intensity' are hard to come to terms with, but come to terms with them we must if performances are to be shared by people of differing spiritual beliefs. Intensity is not only to do with audiences and performers operating in a 'liminal' space and being able to 'suspend disbelief' to reach a high degree of emotional 'truth', 'spiritual commitment' and 'transformation of reality', it is inextricably linked to the social parameters set by the people doing/audiencing the performance (Bourdieu: 1975; Armstrong: 1981; Morton: 1987). Aboriginal performers discuss transformation very openly, while European ontology problematises it as anti-social behaviour. There is a fear and reluctance to accept the dangers of transformations that might go too far. This sanitising of performance occurs because modern European jural systems recognise it potency, and the whole of the European worldview is constructed to repudiate that which cannot be satisfactorily controlled by the scientific, civic and legal systems.

**10.7 Identity**

**Performing is saying who you are**

Embedded in symbolic representation is a desire to make statements about personal and collective identity, connected with the ways groups of people perceive themselves, each
The way people re-create and affirm those relations very often occurs through ‘restored behaviour’, a collective restatement in symbolic forms of that which is important, and continues to be important for some reason. Over time, these ‘restorations’ can themselves become part of the collective identity of a whole community, state, nation or race and come to form part of the mythologies and rituals of identity - hence open to stereotyping. Thus, the mannerisms of speech and head wobbling an actor ‘performs’ to denote he or she is ‘Indian’ become the stylistic truism for all Indian people. Pavis is clearly aware of the vast range of factors in performance discourse:

Never before has the western stage contemplated and manipulated the various cultures of the world to such a degree, but never before has it been at such a loss as to what to make of their inexhaustible babble, their explosive mix, the inextricable collage of their languages. ... Access to this exceptional laboratory remains difficult, however, as much because of the artists who do not like to talk too much about their creations, as because of the spectators, disarmed face to face with a phenomenon as complex and inexpressible as cultural exchange. Does this difficulty spring from a purely aesthetic and consumerist vision of cultures, which thinks itself capable of dispensing with both socioeconomic and anthropological theory, or which would like to play anthropology against semiotics and sociology? (Pavis: 1992, 1)

Although he is writing from a Eurocentric viewpoint, Patrice Pavis highlights the fact that intercultural performance and intercultural discourse through performance have become one of the performance issues in many cultures. While he is in no doubt that extensive intercultural performance takes place, he also refers to the translation of culture through such performance as being a "complex and inexpressible phenomenon" and to the challenges inherent in finding appropriate theoretical frameworks for the discourse.

Practitioners and aficionados of post-mediæval European performance and other expressive genres plundered the styles of the ‘exotic’ shamelessly during 600 years of colonisation without much attempt to ‘translate’ any ‘culture’. However, non-European cultures also appropriate (if less aggressively until the twentieth century) European forms, styles and technologies. While growing active resistance to all forms of ethnic dilution during the post-colonial movement has interrogated the inevitability of cultural imperialism and cultural extinction (as in the case of Aboriginal Australia), Europeans and non-Europeans now are claiming both ‘pure’ and ‘hybrid’ performance heritages. At the same time, a mixing and merging of contemporary/ traditional theory and practice is constantly reframing these
positions. Within this debate, Pavis’ essay "Theory as one of the fine arts" (1992: 75-98) is highly relevant. Nonetheless, the dual relationships between the performances themselves and the particular cultures in which they operate remain very different and this in itself can make intercultural exchanges problematic. Whatever the stylistic particularities, however, the essential 'act' of performance remains the same and provides a nexus for discourse.

In a climate of community change in Australia, with widespread cultural fusion/confusion, the issue of representation of identity - both individual and group, and particularly racial - arises again and again. One of the key ways identity is expressed is through style, yet little work has been done in the field of ethnography in developing theories and methodologies to explore the means by which such identities are created, experienced and interpreted. With the use of structuralism and semiotics and deconstruction techniques, it might have been expected that something would have emerged, but style tends to evade this analytic approach, relying more on a very special embodied 'paint box' which comes from participation and experience and is, in most people, as unconscious as their spoken accent.

Attention to the 'style' of Others by Europeans can have a dangerous colonising effect. As Una Chaudhuri notes:

The West's construction of otherness takes a dizzying turn when, supported by multinational capital, it dictates the self-construction of non-Western identities. This spiral of misrepresentation and self-misrepresentation - which has its origins in the orientalist discourse of the earliest colonialisms - is now well established. The logic it obeys is similar to the traditional logic of gender difference, according to which the best woman is a man because (as Song Liling says in M. Butterfly) "only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act" (p 63, in Bergson, 1990). Unlike gender, however, national and ethnic identities are often derived from or directed toward a geography; there is a location of identity based on race, nation, ethnicity, language - in short all the elements that together or in part designate the notion of a culture - that is often absent from the discourse of gender. To put it bluntly, the construction of cultural otherness is also a mapping of the world, a fact that contributes powerfully to the literalisation of accounts of ethnic difference. (Chaudhuri, 1995, 3)

In this, the performance process, its synthesis, and its relationships to, and sources in, the identity has been virtually ignored, or 'mystified'. Instead, the performances themselves have been separated out as 'objects' to be studied, copied, stereotyped and manipulated in isolation from their ecological sources and this, in turn, dislocates performances from the sources of 'style' and hence identity. In Aboriginal culture, it is not possible to do this, partly due to the operation of 'totemism' within a society that closely associates plant and animal
species with human social groups, and partly because no one wants to be more Other than they already are. As Levis-Strauss (quoted in Samuels: 1990) explains:

\[\text{The resemblance of goanna people to goannas and kangaroo people to kangaroos is entirely secondary to the argument that goanna people and kangaroo people differ as do goannas and kangaroos. (11)}\]

Samuels continues:

\[\text{The symbolism, nevertheless has a life of its own, since the symbols are real rather than abstract. One could also say, after all, that goannas and kangaroos differ as do the corresponding human social groups. For us the goanna-kangaroo distinction may be phylogenetically prior to the distinction between goanna and kangaroo 'people'. It is not ontogenetically prior for the Aborigines, who in the course of their individual life cycles may well learn these two parallel distinctions alongside each other.} \]

\[\text{The net result of the bringing together of all these sets of associations and relationships between symbols is the construction of a series of complex entities which are neither human nor animal nor territorial nor mythological in nature, but a combination of all of these, in which each component helps to define how the other is to be seen.} \]

**Liminality and identity**

Performance has been identified as a ‘liminoid’ genre (Turner, *passim*). This is attributable to its very nature and purpose: the potential to stand outside ‘lived life’ for a moment to observe, reflect, analyse, dissect and creatively *manipulate* for symbolic re/presentation in performance drawing on all aspects of human life and all forms of culture using all channels of communication. The metaphor of theatre being ‘a mirror to life’ tells only part of the story. At the point of liminality - as participants themselves slip though the looking glass - a translation occurs, a translation from what ‘is’ in one reality to what ‘is’ in ‘the Other’. Because participants are already receptive to that translation, it doesn't actually matter what those two (or more) realities - and therefore identities - are. "A willing suspension of disbelief", as Coleridge would say, is all that is necessary. In that willing suspension of dis-belief, it is not absolutely necessary to believe in ‘the Other’ as reality, but to recognise and experience its potential. This is not simply ‘empathy’ (the Aristotelian paradigm that European rationalism has preferred to espouse) or an unconscious act over which people have no control. Although, in some cases, the people who 'transform' might not be the same people who ensure their return to 'real life', but a translation of conscious self of the 'here and now' into the conscious self of 'there and then'. This is the condition all shamans, mediums - and performers - strive for.
All performance involves a consciousness of doubleness, through which the actual execution of an action is placed in a mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered model of that action. Normally this comparison is made by an observer of the action - the theatre public, the school teacher, the scientist - but the double consciousness, not the external observation, is what is most central ... performance is always performance for someone, some audience that recognises it and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self. (Bauman: 1996, 6)

A fear of losing the self-identity and not being able to return can hold back any transformation. This is the fear preached by European rationalism. So can disbelief. And, in a culture geared to ‘disbelieve’, the phenomena will not occur except in an environment where it is allowed to a limited, such as during a performance, or with the aid of consciousness altering substances or activities - often involving music and dance as well. But, when it happens (and it does happen every day) the experience can either turn people off or open them up to completely different kinds of experiences. Like Alice, we find it “curiouser and curiouser” and, despite the demands it makes on our concomitant desire for a completely accountable and socially cohesive world, it is entirely possible to perceive our ‘being in the world’ from the Other side of the mirror without immediately hurling ourselves back into the quite deceptively ‘normal’ space whence we came.

This was explored by the ‘Surrealist’ and ‘Absurdist’ artists of the early 20th century, such as Cocteau, Ionesco and Beckett. The transformation happens for many performers almost every time they perform. For some - more rarely. For others, not at all. In the world of commerce and science, the phenomenon is denied validity and, should it happen in too great a degree, a person can be declared insane and treated with drugs to suppress the liminal capacity or is locked up as a criminal. One identity is considered enough for a normal European. In many non-European cultures - even industrialised ones - multiple identities are normal.

**Me/not me: altered states and perceptions**

Performers are often engaged in activities that are hard to document within existing European rational and so-called ‘objective paradigms’, and so aspects like ‘performance intensity’, ‘liminality’ and ‘altered states’ are rarely dealt with at all in ethnography, yet they are known to be an integral part of performance. They are not ‘magic’, or ‘religion’, they are physical and psychological states over which performers (or their communities) have control. To examine what performers do and achieve, they must be addressed. Ellis is right when she says:

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
In my experience those altered states of awareness are critical to performances; and none of that is recorded. We can’t get those onto a recording. We don’t have the mechanism for doing it; (Ellis: in Moyle (ed): 1992: 98)

But if we know it happens, and they know it happens, then there surely here is a basis for some co-investigation? We can’t all be mistaken about something so obvious and, as it lies at the centre of all performance, it certainly can’t be ignored for much longer. Research in the last twenty years into aspects of biological functioning (Pradier: 1996) during performance may well hold some keys but, more than that, the role of perception, and the objectiveness of the subjective experience of both the observer and the performer must be taken into account and not dismissed as ‘illogical, irrational and unscientific’. ‘Logical, rational and scientific’ are constructs of European thought and are highly prejudiced and closed terms which do not imply that there might be other ‘logics, rationales and sciences’ within other knowledges (Eliade: 1964, 1968, 1973; Lewis: 1971; Kirby: 1974; Best: 1983 and 1985).

Ellis’ further comments about ‘knowledge’ are also relevant.

...and I think the whole thing nobody seems to have raised as yet is the nature of knowledge and what we define as knowledge as opposed to what other people define as knowledge; and the only way we can get that knowledge is to go through the whole process of growing up in that tradition such that we get all the nuances, all the altered states of awareness, and all the extra-musical things that happen. (Ellis: 1992, Loc. cit)

In the whole process of ‘conserving’ performance material, however, if this ‘heart and soul’ is excluded, what is documented is a shell of the performance, the technical and ‘scientifically recordable’ aspects only. Florian Messner, an ethnomusicologist with wide field experience in Bulgaria, Mexico, Papua New Guinea and East Flores is dubious:

We do not yet have access to the processes of perception associated with music making. As long as we ignore this, as long as we do not consciously include it in our research, we will not have any kind of ability to forecast - to predict - what the usefulness of this return of recordings will be to the people. They can’t use it because their ways of perception have been changed already through the missionaries, through the new ways of education. Their time concept has changed and probably they are not even able to use the music in the way it was meant to be used. They will probably be able to produce these kinds of sounds but they will not mean the same thing. They won’t have the same impact. (Messner, in Moyle ed: 1992, 99)

Apart from the assumptions in this statement about the implicit power of missionaries and the fragility of Aboriginal beliefs, there have been quite extensive studies in the area of perception and biological processes and music-making (as well as other kinds of
performance) and a revolution in approaches to scientific analysis since Kuhn as well as a general acceptance that there are a number of ‘ways of seeing’ that allow ethnographers to access Other kinds of knowledge, but if what Messner is looking for is an easy answer, a check-list of attributes, then “not yet” will last a long time for him. He has to make the jump, not the people he speaks of.

Early anthropological approaches towards understanding performance phenomena and perception in ‘primitive societies’ include those of Levy-Bruhl, Durkheim, Jung and Levi-Strauss. Morton’s valuable article “Being of two minds: critical remarks on Primitive Mythology and the rehabilitation of Levy-Bruhl” (1986) is a good deconstruction of the way this kind of thinking has prevented any real progress on the subject. The Turner/Schechnner partnership is valuable in that it bridges a gap in its search for ‘universals’, together with Artaud, Brook, Barba and MacAloon, a departure point which in 1986 Morton rightly acknowledged, where he says “The structuralist analysis of ritual - the work of Victor Turner notwithstanding - has hardly begun in earnest” (16). Was he aware at the time of Turner’s close links with theatre? Is anthropology on the whole yet aware of performance analysis research and its connections with contemporary psychology and psychoanalysis, especially that which is concerned with the construction of self and reality by the restructuring of the many kinds of sensory languages used in performance?

In cultures where there is an active, indigenous, integrated performance, altered states often occur as they go hand in hand with a complete belief in the connections between performance and alternative and/or co-existing realities. When it doesn’t work, it is because performers are focused on technique and ‘success’ not on belief and in a spirit of being at one with the beat and at one with the dance (Ellis: 1989: 195-208; Yeats: 1960). Rituals and theatre develop into boring, repetitive ordeals if that is all that was going on, but not when individual and community belief is fully engaged and the performances are relevant to expressing that belief, or when the exploration of the creative material is so engrossing that everyone shares in that creativity at a very high level of awareness. Notions that European performers cannot and should not operate within altered states are the result of social programming not actual performance practice. Performers sustain ‘liminality’ and long periods in alternate realities and can effect transformations both for themselves and their audiences, which are in themselves a "lived life".

Freud (1971), Althusser (1971) and Lacan (1968) and their theories of ‘the self’, together with the work of Kelly (1956) on ‘personal constructs’, opened different windows and changed many concepts about ‘the subject’ and ‘the self’ and thence the roles of the ‘actor’ and ‘audience’. It takes very little effort to extrapolate their theories to apply to the ‘performing
self'. Solo performers, such as shamans or other mystics, and individual performers of all kinds can certainly operate in an altered state for a long time. It is extremely easy to do, especially if supported actively by the community around them who provide an emotional and psychic safety net (Bourdieu: 1983). Other than in situations of extreme heightened awareness and/or physical stress and danger, rarely are individual performers in such a liminal state that they lose sight of outside reality completely, or for very long periods of time. When they do it is very dangerous for them and the other people working with them. Oddly enough, there are much fewer accidents than might be thought, provided everyone is cooperative and goes with the flow. The main problems with ‘out of control’ performance situations occurs when a jural system sets up in opposition in an attempt to ‘keep order’.

Where the performance is part of a regular event, or is based in structured chaos (like Carnivale), the community expectation is that some people will enter Other states, and everyone knows how far they can go, for instance urban bull runs, Balinese Barong-Rangda rituals, or the huge Hindu Ramlila festivals. Errors and accidents are always recognised and accepted, corrected immediately or covered by other performers. In many cultures it doesn’t matter if someone gets killed in a performance situation. Extreme risk is part of the social frame.

Sometimes the audience is the one transported and transformed. Hamlet remembers all his lines and can still make those sword fights look real for them, even if his arm is dropping off and he is hoping he’ll make the last train home. String quartets operate with all their musical antennæ extended while the audience melts with pleasure. Hundreds of opera arias, and thousands of dance steps are recalled and performed without fault by people who have sore throats and sore feet. Dangerous physical operations occur in the stage machinery and, as a rule, people don’t get injured. In those situations, many will be as aware of and concerned with the process of production as they are with any transformation. But for the audience it has been a ‘transporting’ experience.

It varies. The actor playing Jesus in a Phillipino Easter Passion may well be ‘out of it’, and so might be sections of the audience crowd, but someone has to keep their head or there really would be a crucifixion - and occasionally there is. The same applies at an inma, where ancestors stalk the land for most of the community and some performers are aware enough of the everyday to manipulate the fires and kick the dog. Collectively, however, all performances are sustained by means performer-audience cooperation and the ability to reach altered states when required while maintaining the limits set down by the community. When things get out of hand, those community safety nets are breached and everything is ‘played on the edge’.
Multiple identities are the norm in performance. Performance is as complex as life itself, with the same capacity for infinite change and then some. Liminoid performance exists in time, in the moment. It is a "paradigm of process" (Schechner: 1988: 8), sacred or secular, popular or elitist - and only its artefacts and our memories remain to remind us of an experience which, for a brief space, was a co-existent reality. The result is greater than the sum of the parts, producing a phenomenon that is completely different from any of them, both from the point of view of the final result and the effect it has on the participants.
Notes:

1. I do not intend in this thesis to argue the case for either constructivist thinking or biogenetic structuralism. It has been done elsewhere. See also Wright (1998) for an application to creativity and learning through performance and Pradier (1990 and 1996) for connections with a biological theory of performance.

2. Bollen's work in the 'performance of identity' within Sydney's gay and lesbian community is an in-depth study of a European-Australian subculture that is concerned both with individual and group identity and the creation of a new social language.

3. Ellis, Ellis, Tur and McArdell (1978) compiled a list of Pitjantjatjara performance terms, Catherine Berndt (1978) attempted to categorise various types of oral 'literature', while Jones and Meehan (1978) and Morphy (1989) examined the ways in which different Aboriginal groups 'see', among other things, colour. Before any analysis of any aspect of society and culture can occur, the key concepts must be recognised.

4. See, for instance, Ellis (1983) "When is a song not a song?"


6. There has been very little 'research done on this, however references throughout ethnography, the popular media and an analysis of travel brochures and tourist information, reveal that this is a common perception. "What's going on?" is a question asked anxiously by people at a 'foreign language' play. They do not find it difficult or confronting to assimilate the non-verbal messages of dance. See Poyotas, F. (ed.): 1992

7. Of course it wasn't. Even today most countries supposedly catholicised retain much of the 'old' religions and traditions.

8. Such educators include Vygotsky (passim); Bateson (passim); Courtney (passim); Best (passim); Gardner (passim).


10. Aston and Savona (1991) provide most of the current examples and brief history of semiotics in performance analysis; also Pfister (1991); and de Toro (1995)

Chapter 11

*ananyi*

travelling through the landscape

Experience discloses beneath objective space, in which the body eventually finds its place, a primitive spatiality of which experience is merely the outer covering and which merges with the body's very being. To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world. Our body is not primarily in space, it is of it.

(Merleau-Ponty: 1962, 148)
11

ananyi

travelling through the landscape

11.1 Geographicality

Inside the opal

Around us in a circle was always a line of hills. Contrasting and ever changing in their hues, the purple-madder granite outcrops, the iron-red soil, the brilliant cobalt sky and the subtle greens of the vegetation flashing with a rainbow of feathers gave us the feeling of being inside a fire opal, the colours of which varied from instant to instant, depending on the light and the time of day. Opals, topped up with water to keep them bright, were a gift to me a couple of years later from the Mimili women, "Not to sell - that's our country in that bottle" (Molly Everard: Mimili: 1988). I have no idea of their value in European terms but they are magnificent. There is evidence that some Aboriginal groups ‘see’ colours differently to Europeans (Jones & Meehan: 1978; Morphy: 1989) but the analogy with the opals is parallel with my own initial experience and perception of the colours of the land.¹ There are many known deposits of precious and semi-precious stones right across Central Australia, notably the Mintabi and Coober Pedy opal fields or the sapphire and amethyst beds outside Alice Springs but there are also other undisclosed sources which are connected to ceremonies. These ‘semi-precious’ stones are another example of different values placed on items by European and Aboriginal Australians. The existence of opals is known, and their distinction from other mineral deposits recognised, but their most important role is in the songs: in one verse as the claws of the tjalku ancestor. This is another example of Turner and Schechner’s ‘universals’ – transfer of a value to performance objects different to their everyday value – which in the original Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara value system and terminology means from an attractive rock, to marks of eternal existence. A pretty big shift.
We were indeed inside a living opal and, although we didn’t realise it at the time, we had made a connection with the performance ecology of our hosts.

The landscape in this part of Central Australia is extraordinarily beautiful and Anangu people respond to it in aesthetic as well as in spiritual and pragmatic ways. The heart-stopping sunrises and sunsets, star-flashing night skies with the extremes of temperature from 45 °C in the day to below freezing at night (I remember dancing one night when it was -6°), the curls and billows of smoke and clear orange/blue flames from mulga fires, the pink dust from willy-willies and dancing feet, the snarling black storms and indiscriminate cracks of silver lightning, the flash floods and the occasional inundations that turn the land into sea, all contribute to an environment which is inherently dramatic and provides a powerfully dynamic environmental *mise-en-scène* for all the ceremonies. It is used to theatrical advantage quite consciously by the Mimili people. It also forms the backdrop to everyday life.

Explorer Giles (1889) also waxed lyrical about the fantastic granite formations, the dominating features being the Musgrave and Everard Ranges. These were sculpted in the *tjukurpa*, when the Ancestors came from the ground, originally a flat and formless plain and created all the landscapes seen now. After this was done, they returned to the earth and are “...not here now in those old bodies.” (Sam Pumani: 1986). The main sources of permanent water (unpolluted and icy cold) are sinkholes in the rocks (many of them secret) and deep billabongs along the creeks filled by the run-off from the occasional heavy rain. The water holes were all made when an ancestor stood, or sat, or thrust a spear (Kantji and David Umala: 1986). Many of these waterholes are unknown to Europeans and their secret locations mark pathways of the ancestors between *inma piti* and therefore contain sections of the stories that are also unknown to Europeans. Much more recent are the European-made bores, none of which to my knowledge have acquired any ceremonial or mythical status whatever, despite their necessity for survival and the recreational pleasure they bring. People cannot always drink pump-up water safely and sometimes the mineral content is so high it literally rots the galvanised iron and copper fittings. Officer Creek, the main watercourse, and the smaller creeks rarely contain running water except in seasons of spectacular inundation. But they leave quite lushly overgrown creek banks and wide, flat beds filled with silky pink-white sand, which make comfortable campsites (except for flash floods!). There was one close by the house and we thought it might make a good rehearsal area. When we looked around further we could see many possible performance spaces within walking distance. Then we looked up and out again.

Later, with permission, we started to explore myriad new performance possibilities as we responded to the landscape with seemingly boundless creative energy. The vastness of
distances, the clear sightlines, the sense of losing ‘self-as-separate’ and becoming part of
the whole evoked in us an urge to call to each other across the great scoops of the valleys; to
notice every tree and every tussock of grass; and make closer and closer connections with all
other living things, to say something, to do something, sing something, dance something
– walkajunanyi! - to make our mark! It suddenly became very clear why traditionally living
Aboriginal people spent so much time painting up and performing ceremonies. There was
so much to respond to in this ever-present performance space.

David Abram’s The Spell of the Sensuous (1996) speaks at length about this ‘response’, this
reciprocity between people and their natural environment. David Tacey’s Edge of the
Sacred charts his personal relations with the Australian desert.

We? We had been dropped into the biggest theatre in Australia.

A geographical heritage
Country is the cornerstone of Aboriginal Australia. All other aspects of culture spring from
the close relationship between people and the land: not in just the physical sense but in
every sense. People and everything in the world come from and go back into the land just as
the ancestors who created the diversity of life sprang out of and went back into the land, now
transformed. The land itself lives and people live for it and because of it. All Aboriginal
people who have had even a part-way traditional upbringing have an acute awareness that
space, place, land, landscape and ‘geographicality’ is important for the survival of their
culture. Many people originally from remote areas now have been re-located in far-away
urban settings and, even if they never go back to their original homeland and they feel like
exiles, they know how they are still connected to their country. They pass this onto their
children and grandchildren who (like me) first learn about country they have never seen from
family and friends. Those who have remained in country which has become urbanised (like
the Darug people of the Cumberland Plains, west of Sydney) are more fortunate in one
respect - that they still live on their land but, in other respects, it is more difficult for them.
They see its continual degradation and absorption into the European economy and the
gradual and now almost complete loss of language and ceremonies needed to maintain it.

What ‘country’ means to Europeans has changed over time. Once they were closely
connected to their country in the same way Aboriginal people are. With the coming of the
Industrial Revolution everything changed. Dardel in 1952 described ‘geographicality’ as a
perception which:
... binds people to the earth, man's (sic) way of existence and his fate. Geographical reality demands an involvement of the individual through his emotions, his habits, his body, that is so complete that he comes to forget it as much as he comes to forget his own physiognomy.

This is clearly written by a European who has forgotten what 'geographicality' might be to a person whose awareness of their land becomes more and more conscious as time goes by until it is better remembered than any physiognomy - as it would have been to a farmer's laborer from Europe in the 1800s and, in some places, is still today. Relph (1985) has another definition:

The geographical experience is the entire realm of feelings, acts and experiences of individuals in which they apprehend themselves in a distinct relationship with their environment. (20)

Distinctly different approaches in thirty years, as environmental movements gained a voice.

'Natural' landscapes
 Constructed landscapes and gardens are known to have a great effect on European Australian wellbeing. Note the massive urban, domestic, irrigated garden industries in Australia, for instance, such as Burke's Backyard and Gardening Australia, plus their TV programs, expos, lecture programs, overseas garden tours, magazines and marketing empires. However, despite the advocacy of 'native' gardens and zero-irrigation programs, most urban gardens in Australia reflect European worldviews about controlling 'nature' not living within the landscape. Elements of 'original' country which seem not to be in themselves constructed 'landscapes' also deeply affect the wellbeing of European Australian people and the ways they understand their world - even if the affect is largely subconscious (Carter: 1987; Cosgrove & Daniels eds: 1989; Tacey: 1995). To an Aboriginal person, however, these very same 'original' landscapes are constructed - by ancestors in the creation of the world and are anything but the random outcomes of a mindless series of 'natural' events. (Anderson & Gale: 1992; Duncan & Ley eds. 1993; Hirsch and O'Hanlon: 1995).

Mathematics and ways of seeing country
 From the Renaissance, representations of place changed because of new theories and practices in art and architecture. These can be co-located with the 'discovery' of linear perspective by Brunelleschi and Alberti in what is described by Duncan (1993) as "a key taxonomic moment in the history of representation", in line with a revolution in European
philosophy by Descartes, and the new science of map-making. The world could now be represented 'accurately', and this led to a privileging of "experience, observation and painstaking description; older hermeneutic readings of the world as a divine text declined in the face of this new empiricism." (Rodaway: 1994, 41. Also Eliade: 1959, and Smith: 1987).

The following period of exploration and imperial expansion brought Europeans in contact with many Other cultures and their platial classificatory systems were suddenly inadequate. At first explorers believed that the new environments could be described by direct analogy with the old. ... (but) ... Finally, the strain of these environmental differences became too great on the older taxonomic system as Europeans confronted the fact that they had an inadequate descriptive vocabulary. Faced with this failure of language, natural scientists who accompanied explorers began to rely more heavily on what was seen as a more reliable form of representation - vision ... pictures and objects were made co-partners with language in knowledge.

Eventually, a descriptive language was appended to this visual array, but, it was thought, mimesis was best captured visually, allowing the person in Europe actually to see the object or the landscape as the naturalist in the new world saw it. It was believed that the language that came closest to replicating the mimetic qualities of realist art was a dispassionate, objective language of science that could both describe the visual qualities of objects and classify them in relation to other objects. This project brought together the representational achievements of Renaissance art and Enlightenment language. The focus upon vision and the discourse of mimesis marginalised other modes of representation. (Rodaway, loc. cit. 41-42)

Almost always experienced in adversity by the first European invaders, the startling Australian landscape was feared by them as an untamed and untamable Other (like the Natives) and, to a certain extent, it still is represented that way in popular media and contemporary political rhetoric. Early European Australian visual artists helped to construct this discourse because they were alienated by the spaces and places they encountered in the bush. So incompatible was it with their painterly 'dreamings' of lush green farms and herds of fat domestic stock that they translated Australian landscapes into their European visual discourses, unable to 'see' the difference. This was reinforced by the reports of the early explorers whose words and photographs confirmed the notion of an alien environment. Poets, composers, novelists and filmmakers continued to build the European myth (Said: 1978) of *terra nullius*, an empty, cruel and barren landscape and, despite Dorothea McKellar's eulogy to the "wide brown land", Australia largely evaded a place in any list of "other Edens" until the last quarter of the twentieth century. While a few nineteenth and early twentieth century artists like McCubbin, Streeton, Roberts and Heysen captured a
sense of space and light, the meta-landscapes depicted by Williams, Drysdale, Nolan and Boyd in the mid twentieth century came closer to the real truth: Australia is not England.

**Spirit and place**

A growing eminence of Aboriginal artists since the 1950s and a greater effort by European Australians to understand the country through Aboriginal ways of seeing and telling (Capell: 1972; Bardon: 1979 & 1991; Ucko: 1979; Ryan & Akerman: 1993; Haynes: 1997); the influence of indigenous artworks on the European Australian psyche; and a sense of the spiritual in 'place' has shifted the paradigm dramatically. This was demonstrated in Sydney's 1996/7 Museum of Contemporary Art Exhibition: *Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996* (Waterlow and Mellick eds/curators: 1997), which showed a mixed collection of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal visual responses to place/country and its spiritual underlay. Very few Aboriginal people attended the exhibition (report from gallery director) but non-Aboriginal visitors reported that it made them rethink their ideas about the nature of place in Australia (personal conversation with MCA workers, 1997).² Late twentieth century European writers (for instance Chambers: 1989; Samuel: 1990; Rose: 1991, 1996; Layton: 1986, 1991, 1995 & 1997; Tacey: 1995; and Muecke: 1997 & 1999) have helped to bridge the word chasm, with much assistance from Aboriginal people.

Apart from a few well-known poets and storytellers who have published their work (Roe: 1983; Benterrak, Muecke & Roe: 1993; Cataldi: 1990; Brooks: 1995) very few Aboriginal people have written about/talked about their own landscapes or seem to wish to, and their point of view remains unheard by those outside of a direct experience with both people and their country. Australian Aboriginal people would prefer to paint it, tell it, sing it and dance it. Implicit beliefs about landscapes are not always articulated in overt symbols or words: they are learned about and known implicitly through a range of senses and are expressed by them. They are not necessarily responded to by direct verbal description and analysis, articulated in the way knowledge usually is in post-Cartesian European culture as I have just done - visually and linguistically (Duncan: 1993). Over time, physical elements of a lived world are constructed into subconscious geographies in the minds and imaginations of people who inhabit an area. They are subject to human interpretation, use and manipulation, for instance the choice of architectural styles and building materials; vocal sounds and speech patterns; visual art works; travel routes; religious practices; tools and musical instruments or, indeed, social organisation. Landscapes shape people's personal geographicalities and socialites and are in turn shaped by them.
Space and place in performance

The landscape constructs meta-languages that directly and indirectly are reflected in performances. Such meta-languages encompass both space (undefined but located area) and place (defined positional context within a space). Both can change as space and place change their relationships with people and with each other. Performance space in the post-Brook European discourse is usually conceived of as ‘empty’ but, of course, that is untrue. Space comes with all of the baggage of its relative situation. (Bachelard: 1964; Foucault: 1980; Read: 1993) To indigenous Australians space, like time, is a very crowded phenomenon, filled with unseen acts and presences from the co-existent past/ present/ future, ready to manifest themselves at any moment. The use of, and references to, the meta-languages of space and place in performances conduct meta-discourses about the particular context in which a performance ‘sits’, a metaphorical term in European theatre but a real one in Aboriginal epistemology where a significant inma piti is indeed somewhere an ancestral Being ‘sat’. Implicit texts of space and place are just as important as, and are inextricably connected with, the constructed texts of social relations expressed in spoken, sung or danced narrative.

Geographical reality (place) can be re-called into being in any distant space (and time), sometimes in meticulous detail, and draws audiences into the performance experience. The desire to create and re-create certain places in performance is deeply grounded in the knowledge that they trigger strong physical and emotional responses, contributing to an embodied relationship with the mise en scène which invites all participants to travel through a real space and place into a liminal space and an imagined place, a journey in four dimensional ‘hyperreality’ (Eco: 1995). All actors and onlookers "apprehend" themselves to be both spatially and platially located in the performance space in at least four dimensions simultaneously, but it is different in Aboriginal and European cultures.

11.2 Creating a geographic ecology for performance

The first approach

This is internalised and personal, unauthorised, tacit and accepted as existing without question. The space and place is the starting point. Where a performance happens within a particular space and/or place might even be the source and subject of the narrative. Elements of the physical space and place directly affect other elements like visuality, sound and movement. The nature of the space itself - acoustics, distances, height, view, coveredness or openness - affect complexity or simplicity of verbal content, style of dance or
range of movement, as well as affecting the volume, timbre, melodic range, pitch and tempo of music. Shapes and patterns in the environment find their way into the iconography. Other living things - plant and animal - are sometimes co-performers. Elements like weather, celestial bodies and topographic features can be incorporated and characterised, often transforming 'subject to object and object to subject' during the narrative. (Munn: 1973a and 1973b, Payne: 1984 and 1989, Morton: 1987 passim; Dubinskas and Traweek: 1984, Morphy: 1995) Continual re-embodiment of aspects of the land and re-integration of live bodies back into the land are a recurring theme. Ambient smells, tastes and sounds add richness and particularity to the experience of the place itself until they become fused in the subconscious of the inhabitants. What is in the environment might be used to construct performance-related objects or performance 'stages'.

Randomly accumulated experiences are woven into a fabric of empirical geographic knowledge that is initially absorbed without reflection and is wholly phenomenological. By chance, by coincidence, by just being there, links are made between things and occurrences that do not necessarily have a European 'scientific' basis although they may be quite logical within Other belief systems also. Links are made during journeys as well as in everyday domestic and ritual experiences, mapping landscapes and creating polysensory narratives. Individual knowledge is gleaned through individual experience and gives rise to levels of shared knowledge recognised by a group and reaffirmed through practice. There is, necessarily, a very close connection between that which is performed and 'real life', although it is recognised there is a difference. Performers learn to 'read' their physical ecologies using a combination of all their senses without the need to 'translate' them into words. A complex iconography evolves which maintains a robust physicality in both the 'writing and the 'reading' of it, even at a vast distance and even in other landscapes. (Morphy: 1997)

Performances created in this way enable participants to interact at a deep level of sensory perception. Transformation and meaning-creation come easily, touching chords of response to and connection with the land perceived to be alive. Performances usually happen on 'one-off' occasions, when there is a need for them, or in cycles associated with seasonal change or social transormations. Their original significance is maintained over time as symbiotic relationships develop between the place and the performance (Payne: 1984). Dissemination is usually localised unless outsiders wander in or are invited, but pre-experience of the same ecological kind that the performance-makers went through is necessary for an understanding to be reached. This is how Aboriginal performance ecologies work.
In this first approach,

- Place influences performance: aspects of the real physical and social environment become part of the performance in that environment.
- Performers see, hear, touch, feel, taste and relate to all aspects of the environment. These sensory stimuli are carried with them as 'sense memories' even when not performing in the original site so that the environment is always present.
- Notions of 'authenticity' and the actor's ability to interact with the environment can be sustained. It is far easier for a performer to make whatever transformatives are required when the place is authentic. This in part explains the ability to live in two worlds at the same time: the place is the same. Pitjantjatjara people call it a *mulapa'*(real, everyday) and *tjukurpa* (dreaming) place.
- Performance does not change the environment except in very minor and temporary ways.
- Performance in a place is usually affected by that place.
- People decide in ongoing negotiations with their communities what can, or may be, or is allowed to be, performed at particular sites.
- A concept of appropriation is moderated through respect for ownership and usage by self and others.
- Performance is more than an æsthetic exercise.
- What exists in the environment and all its qualities is the stuff that is used to construct performance (technologies, tools, materials, styles, visuals etc). The nature of the space affects many degrees of complexity and simplicity, acoustics, distance, closeness, openness and coveredness influences movement, voice production, musical quality, narrative style. What can be achieved in the environment affects performance (sounds, movements, speed, volume, etc).
- Content/narrative reflects experience in the environment/context shared by actors/onlookers.
- Space and place have shared usage within the community so all referential material is not only experienced first hand, but is in many cases its own reference.

The second approach

The second approach to place is externalised. It is rational, distanced, theorised, discussed, taught, learnt and able to be deconstructed, analysed and explained. Knowledge and skill are usually mediated and ranked, and theories often reflect other people's realities. Verbal information is acceptable and group knowledge about performance arises from practice, spoken and written discourse and from seeing many other performances that reinforce an accepted body of knowledge about a space. Experience of a space or place is not always...
necessary and, if it happens, it often happens away from the 'original' context in a 'neutral' studio or on a theatre stage where experts such as directors, choreographers and composers impart ordered knowledges to non-experts in a situation removed from actualities. Essentially, European performance spaces are built for performances as 'empty spaces' where anything can happen. Performances in those spaces refer to place by mutually agreed sign systems and research supplies any missing dramaturgical information.

There is a conscious making and remaking of relationships between actors and onlookers who are kept separated and who need to work hard to create their scenes, to tell their stories, to achieve transformations and to negotiate both old and new meanings. Performances are disseminated widely to audiences familiar with the discourse rather than the experience of performance itself. Performances are objectified, commodified, centralised and controlled and are often repeated 'exactly' many times to a number of audiences, toured, filmed or notated for future re-performance. Exact resemblance to real places (a castle in Denmark) is unnecessary as they can be so easily recreated by dialogue (deixis and anaphora), performance convention or technology (de Toro: 1995). It is also undesirable, since if an actual place is denoted exactly, it can exclude audiences who are drawn from widely different communities. Nonetheless there is a recognisable connection to what audience members with their diverse backgrounds remember or theorise about such places and their preparedness to accept a symbolic or iconic representation rather than a realistic replication. This is the European approach.

**In the second approach**, performance represents and refers to aspects of the physical and social environment, but not necessarily in the same context.

- Actors and certainly audience members do not 'touch' anything unless they must, and then the 'touch' is often alien. This goes for all the senses. Because so little is real, there is a conflict of sensory messages and there is a disjunction between what is expected and what is received and actors must disassociate themselves from their own bodies. Trying to suspend one's disbelief in a forest constructed of industrial waste smelling of latex is an effort indeed.
- Performance influences and changes a site (stage/performance place) that tends to be a neutral space when no performance is occurring.
- Spaces/places are constructed for particular types/genres of performance rather than using their original geographical contexts.
- Limits on what is *able* be performed are usually technical. Limits on what *may* be performed are usually aesthetic. Limits on what is allowed to be performed are usually legal or 'conventional'. Jural and 'convention' systems are often in conflict.
• The full range of known and available technologies, tools, materials, styles, visuals, sounds, movements etc are laid out like a palette to be chosen from and appropriated, regardless of their origin.
• Shared usage replaced by shared meaning referred to by symbolism. In this process, environments for use become environments for viewing, but they are also appropriated in the collective consciousness associated with identity.
• Things 'look like' rather than 'are'. This raises question of 'authenticity'. European performance places are almost always cited as 'fake' despite attempts to reproduce reality. "Inauthenticity emerges out of the very attempt to retain or regain authenticity." (Dovey: 1985, 36)
• Content/narrative can be anything at all relevant/of interest to the actors and/or onlookers and there is little sense of the sacred.

Both approaches are valid, but each reflects a different ecological ontology. One sees performance as a phenomenon consciously responding to, and arising from, the unpredictable factors of "being in the world" - a ground up approach; the other sees performance as an entity in itself, able to be independently created, controlled and articulated - a top down approach. Both seek to maintain their links to place and space within the social and technological ecologies that support them. Performance in both approaches is 'mapped out' geographically during rehearsals and preparations and that 'map' is followed in performance. The maps are followed spatially, platially and (usually, but not always) sequentially; the difference being that Aboriginal performance is working in a real geographical ecology and European performance in an imaginary one.

Meetings
Paradoxically, the referential second approach needs to draw on the real knowledge of the first. Both cultures in their contemporary performances seek to explore the approach of the Other: Aboriginal Australian people explore what European controlled stagecraft and technology has to offer, and European Australians mine the sense-rich world of site-located Aboriginal performance.

Place is re-created by design in many European performance spaces where it attempts to recall sometimes in meticulous detail a mirror world which, just like Alice's, is strangely familiar, strangely different. Naturalistic European performances, like stage plays and most movies, aim for illusions of reality in representing place, a process in which audiences remain passive observers while the performers are playing in front of the images of environments. These give visual pleasure and dramatic 'coherence' while only subliminally tapping into the other senses. More 'imagistic' performances use symbolic references to realities or surrealities, as

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
in the fantasies of Phillip Genty or much of the work at the Sydney Performance Space where 'places' are constructed as equal partners in the creative process and audiences are not at all passive. Traditional Aboriginal performances recognise that the environment is something they are physically part of - something they move inside of and relate to. Transitions are states of awareness not scene changes. Spaces and places are not represented as objects but as live elements where things happen, where people and other animate forms, spirits, topographical features, the weather and other elements are constantly co-involved. Experience tells all people that this is true, but many choose to block it from their minds, overwhelmed by the interference in the messages. Abrams (1997) discusses this at length in The Spell of the Sensuous, where he reflects with great feeling and perception on the differences between cultures with primary sensory perceptions of place and space, and those who are blocked by the deadening effects of urban and technological 'development' and 'design'.

However, the desire to locate performances in designated spaces, places and environments - either within geographical or environmental 'realities' or within stage settings - is because settings are a crucial part of any mise en scène, which invites actors and onlookers to enter into a liminal place and space together. Places where performance happens are able to trigger focused physical and emotional responses even before the performance begins, and settings supply a ground against which the figures and their actions interrelate in the dramatic action. In his introduction to the collection of essays, The Anthropology of Landscape (1997), Hirsch clearly locates Australian Aboriginal perceptions of landscape as seminal to a study of the way space and place are perceived. Una Chaudhuri (1995) argues that all performance is, finally, about one's 'sites of importance', one's home, one's sources, one's roots, and one's identity. Conflict arises directly out of alienation from that identity. It is not out of keeping, then, to suggest that if 'place' is so important in performance, attention should be paid to it as a little more than simply a backdrop for action.
11.3 Aboriginal performance places

Inma and the landscape

References to the performance environment appear throughout inma verses and it is the inma verse that confirms a place as being significant. Aspects of landscape are re-created in the dances, in onomatopoeic language and music, and in the iconography. Every feature of the topography is likely to turn up in an inma verse - the waterholes, caves, gorges, rock formations, creeks and trees. Someone not familiar with the land and the significance of the sites could hardly begin to appreciate the ceremonies, related as they are to not only the many levels of metaphorically coded meaning in the verses but to a vast physical topography which is patently present with its own discourses. The dances, originally composed to reflect the actual sites and what happened there, take with them, embedded in the choreography, topographical references translated into movement. A dance about walking up a hill, even when done on a flat, 'formal' inma ground (or an urban theatre stage), is faithful to the particular way the body moves and is balanced when walking up the actual hill. Likewise, various 'body actions' (or 'effort actions', see Labanotation for a European way of explaining this: Hutchinson: 1970) are appropriated and stylised to an extent but depend on the dancer's experiential knowledge of the original location: the scale, distance and gradation; the original physical form of any character being danced (human, animal, geographical or meteorological in origin) and its action, speed, or emotional state; the vegetation; the animal life; spirit presence; the topographical features; the nature of any transformations at the place; the surface being walked on, or the substance being moved through; the time of day; the placement of other people or objects 'in the scene' and the props, instruments, tools or weapons used. To be called a 'good performer' implies a deep physical knowledge of the land and its relationship to performance. The physical world is dealt with both simply ("This or that happened right here") as well as metaphorically (veiled allusions to place embedded in symbolic references). Sites can be re-created symbolically on other performance grounds hundreds of miles, and perhaps thousands of years, from the original sites. 'Place' is the glue which holds performances together. A question we were asked continually about our performances during the exchange is, "What place is this?"

All performances of the maku kind denote part of a 'journey line' and tell of one or more travelling ancestors. Where the action is taking place is highly significant: a major task of Aboriginal ancestor beings was, after all, to create pitjuta (many significant places) by literally, making a walka (mark, or sign) in the landscape as they traveled through. And most ancestors do travel and how they travel! Each inma piti, usually incorporating a water source of some kind, is part of the ngura inma nguru, or 'country of the song'-inma country\(^5\) - and
follows a line of a group of connected and interconnected songs and ceremonies that cross a landscape - hence the popularised name ‘songlines’.\(^6\) An inma piti might have several significances (and names) depending on which ancestors are associated with it and in which inma it is featuring at the time. People whose songs intersect have ritual connections with each other at that point, which can override other obligations. Hence inma piti tend to be rich in significance to more than one group of people, and the care of the sites is shared and sometimes fought over. People born or conceived today in, or in proximity to, a particular place have a personal connection to the ancestor and to the place, while the songs themselves about the ancestor might belong to an individual, and/or a family or group (Angelina Wangka: Mimili 1986). Being familiar with the sites and all their ancestral songs is the source of real knowledge and power in Central Desert life as it is elsewhere in Australia (Payne: 1984 & 1989; Ellis: passim) All people acknowledge the metaphysical, spiritual, the dramatic, the embodied and the representational links between space, place and concepts of reality and "knowing your country" means to be able to visualise and recreate it in performance. According to Sam Pumani, everything starts with the actions of the ancestors while forming the landscape and therefore all performances that tell those stories ideally should take place there.

The issue of ‘characterisation’ (a key issue in European performance) never really arises for the Aboriginal performer who is valued for knowledge of the contexts of ‘space’, ‘country’, ‘place’, ‘sacred site’, and ‘home’, not the ability to seem exactly ‘like’ another person he or she is portraying. In fact, the 'he' or 'she' is likely to be a whole lot of other things and not all of them human or even animate in the biological sense.

**Inma grounds**

Inma is not always done at an inma piti. In fact, most performances occur on selected grounds away from the site. There are many established grounds in regular use but, if a new one is desired, days can be consumed in finding just the right place, preparing the surfaces, gathering enough wood for fires and checking out the facilities: access, water availability, plenty of food, ochre supply, not too far from the camp, with shade and shelter, and, these days, vehicular access. It is also desirable not to have an inma ground which runs on an east-west axis because of the fierce sunsets.

A ceremony on an inma ground can be very organised, but it can be also quite spontaneous. Spontaneous performance can transform any space into makeshift inma ground immediately, just as any group of players can transform spaces such as streets, classrooms, and factory floors by the very act of performance. The same sense of ‘sacredness’ applies - a performance space is a special space while the performance occurs but, unlike the inma piti,
it can revert to being 'ordinary' after the show is over. I have performed *inma* in the back of a moving truck.

**Performance space layout**

The kind of 'stage layout' favoured in many traditional performances in Central Australia is an almost exact plan of a European proscenium arch theatre, without the roof. At first we thought it was our European bias in interpreting it this way, but after many experiences in setting up we found that the whole process was related to traditional performance practice and that this was an example of the many 'universals of performance', in this case associated with staging (Turner, in Schechner: 1990).

**Scenography**

Within this general performance area, many effects of a scenographic nature can occur - and these are much admired when they are effective. Many are specially constructed for each performance and include ground paintings in ochres and sands, stone patterns and earth sculptures (Ucko: 1979; Clunies-Ross and Hiatt: 1978, Clunies-Ross: 1989 and McKenzie: 1980). There is also constructed scenery such as shelters or screens woven from vegetation, heaps of stones, tall ceremonial poles, large ritual objects and weapons. (R. Berndt: *passim*; Munn: *passim*; Marshall: 1993) While most 'scenery' needs to be imagined by both performers and audiences and 'place' is often indicated by the song words, the body paint or the dance actions and gestures, some is made especially. Objects constructed might only have value and meaning within the performance framework and are often discarded later as having no 'value', as are European scenery and props after the season has finished. (see Schechner: 1988) This causes the European collector some distress, as these artefacts are often very intricately crafted and decorated and very 'beautiful' in the European aesthetic sense. Paradoxically, some of the most sacred objects are very 'plain' in European eyes and 'not worth keeping', whereas Aboriginal people will store them for generations in secret places restricting access to their viewing and handling or even the knowledge of their existence because of their meaning and value as spirit ancestors rather than their appearance.

Other physical stage effects and props can affect the performance conditions in terms of scenography and staging. Dust kicked up deliberately from dancers' feet (wet weather performance is rare) can represent bushfire smoke, or mist. *Nguntal-nguntal* (fighting sticks) placed in the ground can temporarily represent a penis, or a totem pole. *Parka* (bunches of leaves) held in the hand can 'be' a number of different things, while even a twig can represent a large digging stick or a spear if required. When time allows and occasion...
demands, real items can be very elaborately prepared, but just as we all do when engaging in imaginative activities, the line between reality and symbolism is fluid (Gombrich: 1971).

**Fires and lighting**

As well as being of ritual significance, fires provide warmth and cooking facilities for the performers, sometimes over several days and nights if it is going to be an *inma pulka*, so ample wood is essential. Even in midsummer, in broad daylight, fires are essential for performances as they serve as a ritual focus. Sometimes extra fires are placed on the stage itself for use in the dance. At other times their presence is indicated. At night, the fires can be manipulated for general stage lighting as well as to create spectacular effects, carefully controlled. Woodsmoke of different colours, scents and intensities wafts through the playing space, or conceals characters. There is extensive manipulation of light intensity and blackouts, a use of 'black theatre' techniques (that is, no general lighting at all, but glowing firesticks only, or moonlight picking up distinctive white body markings). Flares, torches and, on occasion, as a fairly recent innovation - truck lights are used when there is not enough wood for big fires, especially when filming is taking place.

**Mapping**

Most Aboriginal performances are narrative landscape 'paintings' or, more technically, environmental, topographical, social and historical maps. Paintings are also performance scenarios. When explaining a performance, a Mimili elder will very likely draw a map in the sand and refer to a site and the associated terrain and physical features by singing a verse from an *inma*. If there are people standing around they are likely to start dancing, so as to give all the information. Such interrelated means of expression are used to maintain knowledge and connections with country and identity within a performance mode. When site-specific performances are transferred to *inma* grounds, the original site is always referred to in drawings, spoken and sung word, and dance movements. In Aboriginal maps, space, distance and size relativities are visually negotiable, but the relationship between the sites, and the sites and their users is always clearly defined. This differs from European maps, which work with accurate proportionate measurement of space, distance and size, but rarely show the relationships between sites and users. (Brock, ed: 1989) Some Aboriginal people can also draw proportionally accurate maps of the country from performances and performance iconography or recognise a previously unseen part of the country (especially from the air) by recalling a performance or even just the songs. (Blakemore: 1981) This is not a feature of European performance. Air travel has had the effect of enlarging people's perspectives of their lands and re-affirming the traditional oral, danced and visually symbolic 'maps' which had previously been constructed from an 'on the ground' perspective but which proved extremely accurate when compared to the aerial maps made by government.
The use of Aboriginal mapping practices is now starting to decline as Aboriginal people start to require 'certainty' about boundaries and hence European “standards”. (Duncan and Ley: 1993)

Urban country
Some urban Aboriginal people perform in landscapes remembered from their home country, no matter where they are. Others are skilled in European theatre conventions but have no experience of their original spaces, places and landscapes. The first group does not even attempt to recreate new geographical or ecological realities: they simply perform the old knowledge 'out of context' and try to pass on the true lore/law to their families and audiences. If people want to know more, they must go to that country and learn by being with the community and in the landscape. (Mimili elders, personal conversation: 1986) The second group goes to some lengths to give a sense of 'authenticity' to their performances to please urban audiences. Settings are created which have no relation to a real place and, while there is no intention to construct 'fake' sites, there are often clichéd environmental references in the stage lighting, floor patterns, colours and soundscapes, appropriated from traditional Aboriginal culture in general but referring to no particular community. This results in a hotch-potch of styles, which draws criticism from many in the Aboriginal community.

The use of the didjeridu, for instance, is a case in point. It is a ubiquitous indicator for generalised Aboriginality, despite the fact that the instrument was originally found in very specific parts of Australia. It has caught the ear of the universal market, however, and is now appropriated by all and sundry, even Aboriginal performers whose people never saw a didjeridu. To the Mimili people it was, originally, as strange as a keyboard. Yet, when the same people performed in Adelaide in 1981 with Peter Brook, it was suggested that a didjeridu be added to satisfy the expectations of overseas tourists at the Festival - as it provided a sense of ... wait for it ... landscape! (Catherine Ellis: personal conversation, 1985).

Many young urban Aboriginal people are going back to country to find the roots of the culture for which they have been so busy fighting. When the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre in Sydney first began, they had a number of urban students who had never been back to their country and a number of students who had come to Sydney for the first time. The cultural clash was significant (Robinson-Sawyer: 2001). It became a priority of the group, however, to ensure that all students had the chance to work in a remote community and work with people who, in their original country, still practiced the traditional lives they were conserving in their dance programs. Later, Bangarra did the same, calling on elders to teach and dance with them and 'going back to country' for real knowledge and inspiration. In a very moving paper given at the first National Aboriginal Dance Conference in Sydney in 1995,
Stephen Page (1995) told of how he, a city boy, first began to understand country by sitting with one of the elders for two days on a rocky outcrop with a wide view of the surrounding territory in Northern Australia - and they said nothing.

A crossroads has been reached where displaced Aboriginal people are beginning to adopt urban country as their homeland. How do urban Aboriginal people create new identities in towns and cities where they have been excluded from ownership and, therefore, the old ceremonies? What are these new ceremonies to be about and how is space and place to be celebrated and re-connected. Do people perform outside or inside the European paradigms? (Marshall: 1998 and 2003; Willis: 1997).

**Public and private space and place**

A general comparison can be made also between concepts of 'public' and 'private' space and place in Aboriginal and European communities. In broad terms, for Aboriginal communities the concept is connected with shared guardianship and caretaking of country, not private ownership. Responsibility is networked through family and totemic connections, with individual knowledge of lore/law and progression through life stages marked by rites of passage in Aboriginal communities the key markers. Although the actual rites have changed a great deal for many communities in the last 100 years, the concept is still alive and well. For Europeans, public and private space is a matter of complex negotiations between systems of social, legal and political rules and regulations regarding private ownership and public access. The difference in perceptions of community and private ownership of land is at the heart of the Aboriginal land rights struggle.

In Aboriginal communities, attainments of the requisite levels of knowledge ensure eventual access to all performance spaces and places to which people have rights by totemic or family affiliations. A performance place also might be secret/sacred (private), limited to people who have attained certain prerequisites connected to a person's whole social being. Or, a performance might be in a seemingly open (public) place but deeper meaning and relevance might be known about at different levels by some members of the community, depending on their levels of age, gender, ceremonial knowledge and experience. Theoretically, Aboriginal notions of public space are mediated through community practice and, while there is also 'oppositional practice', the borders are usually clearly drawn and observed by most of the community. This is true for remote and non-urbanised sections of Australia but in towns and cities it isn't the same. The gazetting of identified public places has become an art form for town planners and civic authorities, as less and less space seems to be available. The cost of
maintaining public space is heavy, while the demand for privately owned space increases. For Aboriginal people this means they often are doubly disenfranchised. Firstly, they can rarely afford to buy urban land. Secondly, no urban public space is available without permits, costs for access and services and strict embargoes on activities that can be conducted there. It is virtually impossible to maintain any meaningful cultural practice related to 'country' in a city or even a town. It is possible to perform remembered sections from 'traditional' ceremonies and narratives relating to country 'out of their place', or to re-invent lost ceremonies, but they mean less and less to dis/placed people as generations go by. This has had a serious effect on urban Aboriginal performance practice, which has shifted to embrace the European concepts of performance spaces and places. It has also affected the kinds of spaces and places depicted in performance. For instance, interiors of houses and public buildings.

What Europeans might call the 'personal, private space' is never performed or referred to in 'traditional' Aboriginal ceremonies and social celebrations. However, in contemporary European-style performances within urban settings - plays and films - writers and directors follow the European trend of intruding into the most private of spaces and places - domestic life and personal relationships. This is still a very new concept for many Aboriginal people and seeing people interacting in lounge rooms, bedrooms and bathrooms causes great distress to some older members of communities in particular. (Marshall: 1998) In recent conversations with a group of urban Aboriginal performers working in Sydney, one of the key topics was the lengths they had to go to get a non-Aboriginal theatre or film director to understand how an Aboriginal person would interpret a situation and therefore act, based on the 'where' rather than just the 'who, what and why' (Justine Saunders, Lydia Miller and Rhoda Roberts, personal conversation: 1998).

11.4 European performance places

The empty space
Framings of performance by space and place have been sidelined in contemporary European performance research until very recently. Brook's concept of the 'empty space', while opening up the theoretical discourse on the nature of human performance as nothing previously had done, at the same time unwittingly shifted the 'space' from the spotlight. The extraordinary fact that it was conceived of as 'empty' was never really discussed. So keen were playwrights, choreographers, composers, historians and theorists to focus on the actor/audience relations, that notions of space (that key phrase in Brook's definition) were

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
passed over while the 'universal conflict' of human interaction within that space - and place -
was privileged. Add to this the European dramaturgical propensity for shifting a 'place' or
'location' of a performance to suit a local audience (Scolonicov and Holland: 1989; Fletcher:
1999) and an attitude to performance is revealed which says, "It doesn't matter where it takes
place, it's the human drama that counts." Bharucha's rebuttal of this approach (1992) is now
legendary in theatre circles, as he demonstrated the methods of colonisation that theatre
directors employ to detach performances from their ecologies. Una Chaudhuri's Staging
Place (1995) was the first major study of this phenomenon in European theatre (although
there are also a number of journal articles) and explores the undercurrent of place in
European performance. Gay McAuley's more recent Australian publication Space in
Performance (1999) is also essential reading, but again concentrates on theatrical space
rather than real place.

**Performance places**

European performance has been noted for its construction of special places for
performance, which frame both actors and onlookers, priests and participants. This was
recognised by the 5th century BCE Greeks in their construction of vast circular
amphitheatres, by the Romans in their ornately engineered colisseums and proscenium arch
theatres, and was revived by Mediaeval European Christians as they performed in
monumental cathedrals, urban street squares and fairgrounds (Vitruvius: c30 BCE; Nagler:
'theatre in the round' in the late 16th century (Southern: 1987), play texts themselves
acknowledge intersubjective space as an essential component of theatre performance (the
Prologue in Henry V, for instance). Post-Renaissance, exploration of the platial specifics of
performance was constrained by the court and public theatres patronised by the gentry,
(Worsthorne: 1968; Nagler: 1976b) and the massive stock 'sets' developed for the post-
Renaissance and Baroque theatres of Europe. For 500 years most theatre performances of
which there remains a written record were viewed face-on, moving dioramas framed by the
two-dimensional dictates of the proscenium arch; illusions of real worlds, placing performers
and audiences in binary spatial opposition to each other, as in Sheridan's mirror. Seated
orchestras were housed in specially built pits, which, incidentally, separated and controlled
both the actors and the audiences and prevented intersubjective "translations of culture" or
negotiations of meaning. Theatres became places in which Others were appropriated,
tamed and fed back to audiences in digestible bites, echoed in the 20th century by the
television frame and the big screen. 'Indoors' is still thought by many Europeans to be the
'proper' way to experience performance.8

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
It wasn't until the turn of the sixteenth century and a revival of Greek and Roman theatre building techniques by Vitruvius that stage scenery became an indispensable part of performance, influenced by a post-Renaissance, Italianate love of spectacle and new technology - and rampant capitalism and colonialism. Wild and wonderful locations were created by scenic masters who had almost as many servants as the wealthy merchant princes whose courts and opera houses they transformed into exotic outposts of empires. The first section of Rodney Hall's novel, *The Island in the Mind* (1996) gives a well-researched and graphic account of such spatial and platial fascination and greed for colonising the "new world" coupled with technology and design (Nagler: 1959, 1976a and 1976b; Worsthorne: 1968; Izenour: 1977). It has been said more than once that 18th century stage scenography was infinitely more interesting than the plays, ballets or operas it decorated. In Paris it became a fashion to attend the theatre at the beginning of the season simply to see an exhibition of the scenery and the scenery changes! From that time, stage design became a perceived necessity for European theatrical performances and the set designer held a place often more respected than that of the composer. Such scenery was wholly devoted to creating stage illusion and was very much part of the exotic, aristocratic spectacle of theatre and opera in front of which actors and singers struggled to maintain their integrity. It was also part of the new worldview of space and place, which was linked to the growth of capitalism and the subsequent counter-philosophies of Marxism. Soja's comments can be translated into the theatre.

In the context of society, nature, like spatiality, is socially produced and reproduced despite its appearance of objectivity and separation. The space of nature is thus filled with politics and ideology, with relations of production, with the possibility of being significantly transformed (Soja: 1989, 121).

And

A similar argument can be made with respect to cognitive or mental space. The presentation of concrete spatiality is always wrapped in the complex and diverse representations of human perception and cognition, without any necessity of direct and determined correspondence between the two. These representations, as semiotic imagery and cognitive mappings, as ideas and ideologies, play a powerful role in shaping the spatiality of social life. There can be no challenge to the existence of this humanised, mental space, a spatialised *mentalité*. But here too the social production of spatiality approaches and recasts the representations and significations of mental space as part of social life, as part of second nature. To seek to interpret spatiality from the purview of the socially independent processes of semiotic representation is
consequently also inappropriate and misleading, for it tends to bury social origins and potential social transformation under a distorting screen of idealism and psychologism, a universalised and edenic human nature prancing about in a spaceless and timeless world. (Soja, ibid, 121-122).

There were very few attempts to address ecological centralities in European performance until the advent of stage 'realism' and the cinema in the late nineteenth century: the experiments of Stanislavsky with Chekov's settings are well documented. At the same time, however, the Existentialist, Abstract, Futurist and Expressionist movements in the arts denied realism and iconic representation in scenography (Goldberg: 1988). Central to this development was the early work of designers Edward Gordon Craig and Adolph Appia who explored the nature of stage atmospheres and spatial relationships that could be created by artificial light and constructed spaces, places and levels which were symbolic and deictic rather than specific. Their work was much influenced by the early use of electricity in the theatre, which gave them control over the lighting, revolutionising the ways in which perceptions of space and place could be linked into the dramatic action and the spoken text in diachronic time. It also eliminated the last vestiges of a direct relationship with a place that could be recognised as 'Denmark' in favour of a stage atmosphere that highlighted Hamlet's psychological plight. Yet the play is still called Hamlet: Prince of Denmark, and the place is important in its subliminal messages.

Weather, the seasons and natural 'disasters' have ceased to be active components of most serious contemporary European live performances although they continue to be featured in many films where tornados and volcanoes can be turned into leading actors. A component of 19thC sturm und drang romanticism, the weather is seen as 'old-fashioned' subject matter by contemporary art-makers despite the fact that it tends to feature prominently in linguistic metaphors and influences the sub-text of much symbolic representation. In Aboriginal performance, the weather is an active player and is always personified.

European sacred performance sites

Some kinds of European performance require and use spaces and places with similar qualities to the Australian landscape. Sacred performances, for instance, operate with the notion of a sacred 'site' and, although a church is very little different to a theatre and is constrained by similar jural systems, it is a sacred site in the same way an Aboriginal site might be termed sacred. All the events to which its sacred performance of rituals and ceremonies refer happened elsewhere and are mediated by the intellectualised and externalised system
described above, nonetheless non-religious performances generally do not occur there, only those in whose name the church was sanctified.

**Site specific performances**

There is an interest in 'site specific' performances where places themselves influence the performance created there. Sometimes this is context driven but in most cases it serves the aesthetic ambitions of the director/designer/performer and not the site itself. Very occasionally will a European performance actually 'perform the site'. Examples in Australia include the work of Rinaldo Cameron in the 1980s who involved European communities in celebrating Australian geographies and elements of weather; Nigel Cameron’s work with fire; Gordon Beattie’s numerous works in a range of sites from the Central Desert to Town hall Station; Jacqui Simmonds’ performance of the old Rydalmere Hospital Sydney, prior to its restoration as a campus of the University of Western Sydney; and the Reclaim the Streets movement (Nicholson: 1998). Opera in the desert, concerts in the canyon, dance in the stockyards – increasingly European Australian performance is exploring site specific work.

Spaces and places that originally have no special performance function can acquire a sense of specialness and transformation because performances occur there. The Sydney Opera House forecourt is an example for, while it is physically co-located with an opera house, a concert hall and a theatre and is a thoroughfare and at times a bus park, it often provides a space for some of the most innovative outdoor performances for large audiences in Sydney, including Aboriginal ceremonies. Other such sites in Sydney are streets, squares, plazas, the sides and tops of buildings; jam factories, car parks, railway yards and quarries. These spaces and places are reframed by performance, although they might (or might not) revert to their quotidian function after the show is over. Specific spaces and places can be linked to outdoor performances, such as the recent ambulant Linnaeas in the Sydney Botanical Gardens (January-April, 1998), which needed to be created within the existing spaces, paths and plantings of the Garden. It was experienced in the same places by botanists, curators, performers and audience alike, surrounded by the very subjects of their epic narrative. It was one of a comparatively recent (since the mid 1970s) string of site-specific works affected and inspired by an ecology comprised of not only the space and place but also (in this case) the scientific and social discourses around botanical research. Originating in Scotland in the Edinburgh Botanical Gardens, this performance was localised for the Sydney Gardens. Its structure and conventions were those of a songline, however, a similarity remarked on by a number of Indigenous people who were audience members.
To stage performances in real places in European theatre practice is to be labeled 'alternative'. A sensate, autonomous, active performance setting does not appeal to many live stage actors or audiences who have had 2500 years to enjoy a theatre spotlight focused on their human conflicts. Although the idea of a living 'set' has been used with some success in science fiction movies and virtual reality games, it is rare for a European performance to begin with a place. Nonetheless, subconscious links between geographical and social ecologies remain and cause dramaturgical paradoxes and complications when attempts are made to shift those contexts (Scolonicov and Holland eds: 1989; Bharucha: 1991; Fletcher: 1999).

**Theoretical approaches to space in European performance**

While geographic, ecological and environmental sciences and related cultural studies certainly explore physical, theoretical and phenomenological experiences of space and place to some extent, European theatre performance has largely delegated its physical and specific experience of 'geography' to the referential or even the completely theoretical. (Hiss: 1991) Only very recently have issues of place, natural and physical worlds or geographical consciousness in performance been dealt with in any depth, influenced to a great extent by Bachelard's seminal work, *The Poetics of Space* (1964) and the later Lefebre's *The Production of Space* (1991).¹¹

**Intersecting spaces**

Intersecting spaces are among the new concerns of contemporary performance making. These can occur in a number of ways. When two kinds of performances - for instance, live and electronically generated - combine two different spaces simultaneously, extremely interesting things happen which cause both audiences and performers to see their ecologies in sharper focus. Based in the *verfremdungseffekt* notions of Brecht, and theories of space explored by Bachelard and Deleuze, a performance of *Hamlet* created by Dean Tuttle (1997) used mixed live acting, videoed dramaturgical commentary and a virtual reality video game, confronting many of the conventions of fixed space and place experienced in live theatre. Interestingly, the multiple framing is not very different to that experienced by traditional Aboriginal performers shifting their time and space frames. In intercultural performance exchanges such shifts are likely to occur quite frequently.

Referencing direct experience of place and space in live urban theatre is no longer a priority. Contemporary stage drama does, as Chaudhuri suggests, erase spatial particularity. Scenic stage realism is replaced by film realism that controls an illusion of space and place, as no live

---

¹¹ Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
theatre performance has been able to in the past. Audiences have responded to film realism for a large number of reasons which I will not discuss here (see Mulvey: 1989) but, as most of the viewers are urban dwellers whose shared ecological experiences are increasingly locked into a controlled "age of mechanical reproduction", film realism operates as though the audience was in that Other place and space with the performers and allows them to experience vicariously an alternate ecology, albeit restricted again to vision and sound. That film world then becomes real for everyone who sees the movie - a new collective dreaming, as George Miller called it (1996). An extreme experience is the film Being John Malkovich.

While the true function of contemporary European performance might very well be to put people back in contact with their senses, one of its real limitations is its lack of capacity to tap into the deep wells of a shared platial experience. Controlled (and, it might be said, repressed) platial connections between people in a systematised urban world don't make such interesting theatre. People now experience share imaginary worlds through a series of electronic screens on the World Wide Web while live theatre audiences become smaller. It has been said that more people share virtual realities through shared electronic media and movies than they do through shared "lived lives".

**Urban survival**

A close examination of the themes of performance in all cultures reveals a range of universal concerns about survival and these are also connected to notions of place. European urban performance ecologies disassociate themselves from the 'natural' world, 'flora and fauna' and the daily pressures to find and consume food and water, while these are central issues in traditional Aboriginal performance as well as the places where food and water is found. There is an attitude of denial created by European urban taboos about food; the body and its functions. Direct references to edible animals and plants are usually found only in performances for children and lifestyle shows on television. However, a favourite adult novel and movie theme is 'the city person starving in the wilderness' where inevitably there is a confrontation with 'nature' in some way and the 'civilised' person either triumphs over 'nature' or is saved by an Other who understands these things. Yet less people starve in the bush than they do in cities where having money to buy goods in a supermarket has superseded skills to hunt, find or grow food. Survival is a central issue for all people. Traditional Aboriginal performance deals with it directly in terms of their performance discourse. European performance cloaks it in historical or metaphoric allegory and deals with it obliquely as though the city wasn't an ecology in which people might not be able to survive. The sense of alienation and connectedness, loss and ownership in European concepts of 'survival' demonstrated in performance needs to be explored, just as do the ways urban Aborigines deal with the problems of a split culture in their performances.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
11.5 Temporality

Time

While performance is a complex interplay of movement through space, pulling both the actors and the onlookers into a phenomenological, physical and sensory experience, the factor of time is one of Schechner’s universals and like space and place has significant cultural variables. It is a field, moreover, even less researched than space and place. The following comments scope some of the more intriguing areas, although a deep study is well beyond the scope of this thesis.

Christopher Godsen in *Social Being and Time* (1994) says

> Time is the crucial element in all human activities, and in order to understand it we do not need more refined means of measurement, but concepts that can catch temporality and change. (7)

Which temporality and change, in fact, is experienced nowhere better than in performance. Godsen then explores 'social being' and 'time' in a way that is most helpful to a social scientist. He begins with concepts of time within the major theories of history, social sciences and cultural studies and links them with reflections from (among many others) Plato, Hegel, Marx, and Husserl, and especially Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962). He moves through to Fabian’s *Time and the Other* (1983), Ricoeur's three volumes *Time and Narrative* (1984/5/8) finishing up with Thomas' *Out of time* (1989). On the way, ideas from Einstein, Hofstader and Hawking are added. The wide sweep focuses the field, however, he (like the others) makes very little mention of the many kinds of time and perceptions of time which are linked with performance and other forms of symbolic representation and very little is explored within an Aboriginal hermeneutics, although the ‘Dreaming’ gets a mention.

Dance, music and theatre and the other areas of performed interaction are said to share, among other things, a diachronic time dimension in their performance practice.

This is an understatement.

Despite being overloaded with temporal signs, performances is said to produce fugitive performance outcomes and this distinguishes them (in European epistemology) from (generally) static visual artefacts. I would suggest that this is not the case. The most important visual experience is the act of creation of visual representations in time (or the
performance of the making) not the later viewing by others and that considerably opens up the field. Arnold Berleant (1997, 93-95) explores this in terms of the aesthetic experience of 'living in the landscape' and the notion of the 'humanistic function' of the artist acting as a medium between the environment and an audience and if you are 'acting as a medium' you are acting temporally.

It is convention and technology that has defined which section of the process is considered the final and valuable one: the section happening in time or the section stopped in time. It is easy to see how the visual came to be privileged in European scholarship. It was so manageable. It was so convenient to measure, to prove, to store, to refer to: it was the 'real thing'. The intellectual complexities of time and its discourses could thus be avoided.

With the invention of film, video and sound recording techniques in the late 19th century, music, dance and theatre, it was possible to 'capture' performances. They could be trapped 'in time'. But film is comprised of frozen frames, snaps of action run at high speed or digital media in bytes - a kind of technological trickery that only looks as though it's moving. The live performance is captured but not free to negotiate since the editor makes the decisions and the makers are absent.

**Performance frames time**
Within both European and Aboriginal performances, however, time is framed in a variety of other ways - all of them experiential and perceptual. The experience of making and experiencing performance is always fugitive: it will not stand still to be examined or reflected on at the same time as it is happening. Time can expand so that the perception of many years passing can take place in one hour and forty minutes in a film. Meaning is made before, during and after 'the event', using all the senses, through a series of consecutive small bytes of communication that are experienced and responded to separately and collectively at the same time.

Experienced time framed as 'event', then, sits in the human consciousness, outside measured time, yet it occupies the same time regardless of perception. The discourses on time are all in agreement that there is a vast difference between the perception of measured time and experienced time for people (Heidegger 1962, 1982; Ricoeur: 1984/5/8; Godsen: 1994). Interrelationships between time and space in performance have been theorised to an extent in past European performance studies (Ricoeur: *Op CIt*; Finnegan: 1981; Ellis: 1984; Kalweit: 1988; Duerr: 1985; Grosz: 1999) and for many European performance practitioners, time has ostensibly become a controlling mechanism, such as in metronomic time in music, moving 'in time', 'curtain time' or 'timing' in comedy.
Aboriginal performers talk about different kinds of perceptual time. To Samuels (1990, 102-5), an Australian Aboriginal time concept is only one of a number of the many concepts of time that are not 'linear' or 'historical'. Many are at odds with the dominant European ontology and many are closely linked with concepts of co-existential space and place (Duncan: 1993 and Morphy: 1997). Called the Dreaming in current discourse, this kind of time perception is possible when people live inside their histories. It is harder when they are divorced in time, space and place - and only the oral histories are left. To contact the past, people go to the place. This is surely why they pay thousands of dollars to travel and stand in the Roman Forum, or the Greek Parthenon or the shores of Gallipoli.

Aboriginal performance discourse written by Europeans usually mention shamanism and rarely looks to Australian Aboriginal culture for explanations other than to cite concepts of the 'Dreaming' in the context of religion (Stanner: 1979; Swain: 1985, 1989 and 1891). However, scholars like Ellis (1984 & 1989) have seriously researched the phenomenon in respect of altered states of time-consciousness in Aboriginal musicians (which is also an issue in European music) and other kinds of performers. Concepts of co-existent, flexible and shifting time frames seem to pose problems for European anthropologists. For Anangu people it all seems perfectly clear. Aboriginal performers are quite prepared to discuss this with their European counterparts but hardly anybody asks them. We did, and we got a lot of answers, not all at once, but over time. It was not much of a surprise because it matched very closely the complexities of time consciousness we all lived with in our performing lives. (Martin: 1992)

**Reflecting on time frames in performance**

Performances frame time in a great variety of ways. Until the performance is over or without a great effort of will, it is impossible to reflect on even a moment of performing time. Different parts of the brain which are constructors and receptors are constructing and receiving so much material in sequence simultaneously that to pause for reflection means the next bit in the information or experiential sequence is 'lost' in one or other of the streams. Neither actors nor onlookers like 'reality' to get in the way of being able to maintain their focus as actors or onlookers. 'Losing your place', 'getting out of sync', 'forgetting your lines' are common problems for all performers whose concentration is broken. In training they are directed to reflect in study and rehearsal until they can 'do it without thinking' but are warned never to reflect while actually performing. Audiences really like to 'lose themselves' in what they are experiencing too and become uncomfortable and cranky if 'reality' intrudes on their audience 'time'. These experiences accumulate in a linear way for participants in a series of rolling spirals. When performance-making or art-making is over, some kind of overall
reflection occurs which encompasses the whole experience and allows them to pick up both streams and tie them together in some way. It is a different experience for each of the makers and for each of the spectators. In tightly knit communities there is likely to be a greater similarity in experience and a more unified response, however.

**Liminal space and place**
Performance is a negotiation of the blurred edges of perception and operates in a number of shifting liminalities across the boundaries between the perceived spatial realities of people who participate in them and the external realities of their social and physical environments. In other words, it is possible to perceive yourself to be in two (at least) places at the same time. These boundaries are at times hard to pick, especially for 'non-performers' or those who are not aware that they are performing. (Turner: 1974 & 1984. See also Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili: 1990, Chapter 5; Winnicott: 1974; Turnbull: 1990; Zarilli (ed.): 1995; and States: 1985; Marshall: 1997). While very familiar to all performers and audiences, liminal perception is usually relegated to the field of phenomenology and therefore, until very recently, was outside the scope of ‘good’ scientific research. For Aboriginal people, a sense of liminality is incorporated into all the senses. Nor is it always conceived in visible or tangible dimensions. Liminal space perceptions extend into liminal time perceptions which allow both space and time to expand and contract and are basic to the experience of performances: just as there is ‘Dream-time’, there is a ‘dream-space’,12 (Berndt: 1969; Swain: 1985, 1989, 1991; Morphy: 1995; Anderson & Gale eds. 1992)

**Historical time**
For much of Aboriginal culture, the question is always asked by European academics, scientists, art market dealers and tourism entrepreneurs: “How old is it?” This applies particularly to iconography and artefacts, since performances themselves evade the auction room. But to a traditionally living Aboriginal person it is an unnecessary question. Take the case of rock art. Ongoing maintenance of ‘active’ Aboriginal rock art and the use of body iconography by traditional owners is part of everyday life - the 'now'. The art, then, is continuous rather than historical and is linked into Aboriginal notions of continuous ‘Dreaming’ that completely subverts the European premise of historical time. Also, the links with performance are very close - one barely exists without the other.

Comparison could be made, perhaps, to the 'up-dating' or even 'restoring' of European written texts in constant use, like religious texts, statute books, dictionaries or encyclopaedias, or restoring and maintaining the Sistine Chapel, or keeping a Strad in good nick, or doing productions of Shakespeare for 400 years. "How old is it?" means something different to Aboriginal people. Age is linked to eternal continuum, spiritual value and
community ownership, not to an identifiable creation date, market value and individual ownership. The length of time something has been around is correlated with its continuing value and relevance to the community. Exact age (in the European sense) is not as important, especially in an oral culture. But in European culture, exact age itself is valued, particularly if the thermo luminescence or radiocarbon reading is impressive, and pristine condition assists resale for a vast price at auction. People set great store on age in both cultures but it is value is perceived differently.

Social change over time
Aboriginal people assert that their performances are constantly updated to reflect change while, at the same time, they are very old. Relevance ensures from continued performance. Performance is a re/presentation of society; it must perforce change as society does, gradually replacing one snippet of tradition with another. The notion of 'change' is not the same thing in all cultures. Traditional Aboriginal performance is often cited in the popular European press and, indeed, in the academic press, as preserving only the traditional; that it is immutable in its forms and styles. Diversity, individuality and the use of modern technology can give the impression that somehow European performance is more sophisticated, diverse and responsive to change. Neither assumption is true without qualification, but the ideas seem to have framed the way cultural exchanges generally have been conducted. Perhaps there has been also a vested political interest in each culture maintaining their perceptions of change over time and maybe also each has partially constructed that image on behalf of the Other.

Within the flexible time-frames of the Dreaming, ceremonies easily incorporate the past and the present into the eternal while maintaining their representation of their culture in performance frames, forms and styles developed over thousands of years. Aboriginal elders are very clear on that point. Changing climates and conditions, new owners of sites and songs, stories of creation which incorporate new moral and ethical issues, new taxonomies, new experiences, new places, new people, new (and disappearing) living creatures, new journeys and events of "great pith and moment", the creation of new archetypes, role models and ideals, political changes, and changes in paradigms - both social and technological - are all accommodated. Until cultural clashes with Europeans, there was no need, or desire, to alter what was already a 'perfect' response to change at any great speed or to develop anything approaching 'history', which in Aboriginal culture (and other oral cultures) spans about four generations. As a response to those clashes, new identities now are being represented in performance. They include the incorporation of new expressive genres and styles that attempt to 'translate' new ideas between Aboriginal culture and a number of other cultures. It is a very fast response. What was not once recognised is that
change is constantly being incorporated into the traditional performances of Aboriginal communities - but within a very different time framework. Performance which is constantly 'innovative' is not so necessary where change occurs slowly and happens as a result of negotiation within whole communities rather than because of the creative ambitions of individuals in response to a society which values an individualistic response.

Paradoxically, European performance as a reflexive activity is also engaged in maintaining cultural values and traditions - after all, the Greeks 'invented' history and the arts. Despite its claims to modernity and individual creativity, most European performance is extremely conservative. However, because fast change and innovation in all sections of European culture have come to be seen as desirable since Renaissance times, greater change and innovation are required also of performance. While some of us talk a great deal about the desirability for 'innovation', what we are really demanding are performances which reflect our own changing experiences and which give us a chance to look at them at a distance, that is, in a metaphoric reframing. The more we are at the cutting edge of societal change, the more we are able to assimilate ideas about change in our forms of symbolic representation. When we operate at the cutting edge of performance innovation, our appetite for the 'new' becomes voracious, as performance itself has become a commodity in European culture and change in performance itself demands attention. But we don't all want that all the time.

**Parallel dreaming**

Embedded in universal senses of identity are connections through references to particular spaces, places and their histories. This interrelationship is essentially of the same kind, whether it is taking place on a salt pan 'dreaming' site in Central Australia with a hundred dancers of all ages, shiny with emu oil and white clay markings, or on the main stage at the Sydney Opera House where a symbolic lake has been created for thirty two anorexic swans, shiny in white satin and tulle.

Aboriginal and European performers who become involved with each other's performance traditions face challenges. An Aboriginal traditional, geographically based, social ecology was a successful 'closed' system, mostly defined by and in performance and was not open to external individual choice, imperialism, commercialism or academic reductionism. Close encounters with eclectic European approaches to performance are initially threatening. Performance is such an integral part of maintaining traditional Aboriginal culture, and the spiritual, the physical, the emotional, the transformational and the transcendental elements are accepted so absolutely, that the intellectually driven, organised, calculated and rehearsed way Europeans tackle their performances in bare rooms and blackened theatres or inside electronic machines, far from any ecological context, is alien. There is a need for
Europeans to listen to what Aboriginal people say about their experiences and perceptions of time and place in performance. Performance has the capacity to create liminal spaces and occasions where people can share experiences and perceptions and that sharing of space. Place and time bonds people together. Inherent in an intercultural performance exchange, then, is a need to redress seeming differences with a concept not of "utopias" but of "heterotopias" (Soja: 1989, 17), whether that is in the Everard Ranges or in Eveleigh Street, seventy thousand years ago, or today.
Notes:

1. The Darug people have just had a Native Title Claim accepted by the Tribunal for the Sydney Basin. This is hardly likely to succeed, but they certainly meet the requirements of continuous habitation.

2. Other major exhibitions of Aboriginal artworks are held in every centre in Australia and in many overseas galleries (Sutton: 1988). The aspects of spirit and place are always emphasised.


5. The European word 'country' is not an exact translation of what an Aboriginal person in the Central Desert means by ngura, but the combination of ngura and nguru in the phrase has a very deep sense of 'coming from' and 'home' in the most organic and spiritual sense. The word piti has a number of referred meanings as well as 'hole' or 'waterhole'. It can mean a water dish, a burrow, and names of fixed places associated with the origins of things or moveable places connected with the family - that is, a 'home is where the heart is' place.

6. Chatwin: 1985 might have ruffled feathers but his terminology struck many resonances. Tacey (1989 and 1995) goes further in his personal response to the land and presents a European appreciation of how Aboriginal people relate to their country.

7. There have been numerous occasions when this has happened. As Aboriginal people have traveled in small aircraft over the last fifty years, they have often astounded themselves with their ability to recognise places from the air that up to that point had been known only in narratives (Ellis: 1992a, 259-280; Sam Pumani: personal conversation: 1987).


9. Ingemar Bergman's film of Mozart's Magic Flute is set in a 'working' eighteenth century court theatre at Drottningholme in Sweden and Bergman's fascination is indulged to the full.

10. Some Australian examples are Aftershocks, about the Newcastle earthquake in 1989, and a raft of movies in which the Australian landscape is constructed as the antagonist, such as Wake in Fright and the Mad Max series.


12. The term 'Dreaming' is not an Aboriginal word at all, but was coined by early ethnographers working in Central Australia. Spencer and Gillen were accused by TGH Strehlow of manufacturing the term, however, it has become current in both European and Aboriginal vocabularies (Swain: 1985) and 'everyone knows what it means'.

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
Chapter 12

walytjapiti
home to Penrith
12 walytjapiti  
home to Penrith

12.1 Out of the dreaming

Reflections
Returning home to Penrith from Mimili was always rather like returning from a long dream. Reluctantly, we wandered out of the desert at a fraction of the speed we had hurtled in and always with a sense of loss. Tired and dirty, with terminally pink underwear, we slid back into our classes and offices and conjured up mulga smoke and sunsets, with the songs ringing in our ears. It was weeks before they stopped and, later, when we occasionally heard a verse or two on a television documentary, the news, or a stray recording of Aboriginal music - our ears flicked into fine-tune mode to hear whether it was one of ‘our’ songs - and sometimes it was. It is very difficult to describe how hearing them makes us feel. After five years of exchanges, involving hundreds of performers from both communities (with a core group of about 40 from each), what did we bring back with us to Penrith? Certainly nothing tangible.

However, to answer the questions I posed at the beginning, I offer a series of reflections.

How was each group and person affected and changed by the experience?
We each brought back different visions of how our own world might be, perceived not only through our city-dweller’s eyes but also through Other eyes, ears, and skin, and tongue and nose, spoken language and cultural performance. We knew how being Other might feel, and might construct spiritual beliefs, temporal perceptions and spatial relations because, in short flashes of hyperreality, by performing Other we had become Other than we used to be. We each were left with different understandings of how Others might understand us and, for a short period of time, for a number of people (both from Nepean and Mimili), becoming permanently Other seemed an option. We all worked through that one, however, and
everyone came out on the other side stronger in their understanding of their own culture and with greater respect for ‘both ways of being’ in Australia.

How do we know? Because we haven’t stopped talking or thinking about it since. It is part of our consciousness as well as our unconsciousness. We find ourselves looking at things “Mimili way” as well as “Nepean way” and thinking what Sam or Molly might have said about it. We are not entirely comfortable in closed in spaces for very long and are more aware of the claustrophobias of our urban worlds. Very few of us are still living in a city. We respond to the kind of consensus that is negotiated tacitly - ngapartji-ngaparti - with each person taking turns to give and take, to be aware of themselves, others and ‘community’, before pursuing a course of action. We have become wary of ‘control’ by edict and we are more attracted to mutual responsibilities and partnerships. We feel free to engage directly with our ‘dreaming’ capacities and this has freed our imaginations and our aspirations, while also anchoring us in a sense of our own identity. We embrace difference and Otherness in others, recognising our own difference and Otherness. We are more relaxed and less driven, preferring to take a long view and see a big picture instead of being caught up in micro-management. We value our histories without being slaves to them. We understand ‘in our bones’ something called “Mimili time”.

In February this year I was invited to a dinner party and sleep-over held by a graduate student and other students who had been in his year and who had all taken part in the exchange. Out of a class of thirty or so, eighteen people came, very relaxed with each other and up to date on the various life changes within the group. Three more were to arrive the following day and one who would have been there had recently died. That is an extraordinary turnout after ten years: still a family. The main topic of conversation was their collective performance experiences and how these experiences in, and with, another culture had affected their lives. This was the group that had toured Déjà Vu (Gordon’s ‘adaptation’ of King Lear as a series of Desert Verses) to Czechoslovakia. Some were still working in the ‘The Industry’; others had moved on but everyone was still also ‘back there’ in part of their head. This is not an isolated circumstance. Whenever we meet up with graduate students who took part in the exchange, the topic always comes up and there are other stories to tell. One young man attended a music workshop at the South Australia Museum and was immediately greeted by two men he had known in Mimili. He was introduced to the rest of the group as a “Mimili man”, a person who knew not only the songs but also the dances and was asked to sit with the teachers and act as a ‘junior instructor’: he was acknowledged, all the attendant politics notwithstanding. Another graduate was lost in the back streets of Adelaide in the early
1990s. While performing in *Phantom of the Opera* there he had decided to explore the town and somehow got into a ‘rough quarter’. Some young Aboriginal men were cruising around and started yelling things at him – in *Pitjantjatjara*. The young man answered and within half an hour he was having a *kapati* with the family, who were from Fregon, and not only remembered the connection but said they had been there for a particularly spectacular local festival where this young man had danced. The father of the family, who had moved to Adelaide because one of his sons was in long-term hospital care because of the effects of petrol sniffing, had looked after all the young men on that occasion. In a camp at Gulkula, for Garma 2000, after I had pitched my tent on the first night and gone to sleep, a group of late arrivals woke me and I overheard their conversation about their long journey as they pitched their tents. It wasn’t until I was fully awakened that I realised they weren’t speaking English. Their songs were a great comfort over the week, we chatted often and I felt closer to them than to any other people at the gathering - a group of very high powered, English speaking Aboriginal academics. A fourth instance is the number of graduates who tell us how they still dream about Mimili and that in these dreams they experience states of being that run counter to their everyday lives, moving them to think more deeply about what is going on in their worlds.

So the change is individual and hard to quantify. But it is also permanent, pervasive and affects more than performance. In every case, any degree of what might be termed ‘racism’ in the non-Aboriginal Nepean people was replaced by a deep appreciation and understanding of an/Other culture from the inside, not the outside. After the initial cultural shock, no one felt ‘sorry’ for the Mimili people and their extreme poverty, poor health and bleak prospects in the stock market. That issue was dealt with in a wholly practical manner. Several ex-students swung in alongside the Mimili people and did practical things to assist and undertook lobbying roles elsewhere. Nepean people learned to respect and value the things the Mimili people themselves valued because they showed us another way of being and a different aesthetics. Nepean participants became active advocates for Aboriginal self-determination, the right for people to choose their way of life, to be educated “both ways”, to gain equity in every aspect of Australian society.

The Mimili people? We have no way of really knowing whether we were able to offer anything other than a greater understanding of our ‘being in the world’ through performance. We do hear that Mimili is considered a particularly strong and united community in Central Australia, with very good governance (conversation with Craig San Roque who reported comments made at a Women’s Council Meeting in March 2001). We wondered if their openness to

Anne Marshall PhD Thesis
intercultural contact (and not just ours) has strengthened their hand in an otherwise inequitable game. We still hear from them, individually and collectively, from time to time. Inquiries and good wishes find their way through mutual friends and we know we are each still part of our community’s collective memory. We do know we are friends.

**What did we learn about each other’s performances?**

At the instigation of the Mimili people, our intention was a comparative study of performance conducted through an exchange between Australian urban performers of mixed racial heritage and traditionally living Aboriginal Australians – ngapartji-ngapartji. Through that exchange of performances, we hoped to explore and perhaps ‘translate’ each other’s culture. To do that it was necessary to engage in not just the performances themselves, out of context, but within each other’s performance ecologies.

We learned we had many things in common as well as great differences. The differences needed effort, persistence and acceptance to understand and accommodate. The things in common, however, were also the things that make performance exchanges possible. The Schechner/Turner “universals of performance” can sum them up.

1. Transformation of being and / or consciousness
2. Intensity of performance
3. Audience performer interactions
4. The whole performance sequence
5. Transmission of performance knowledge
6. Performance evaluation [Schechner and Apel: 1990, 4-6]

**Transformation of being and/or consciousness**

We all agreed that unless a degree of transformation occurred, a performance was not worth doing or witnessing. This is the whole point of it: to be Other than everyday - Other than self, but still self - even for just a few seconds. Sometimes the transformation was total, a rite of passage, an epiphany, or a change of identity. Sometimes it was as simple as a temporary role, or ‘seeing another point of view’ or the irony in a situation, or being aware that a sense we don’t use very often has become dominant. We then began to open up to how often we are given the opportunity to transform in everyday life and how to use that in making performances that will engage participants more fully. With very limited technology, Mimili people had more clues than we did about how to do that, but we learnt that we all carried the skills in our own minds and bodies to transform at any time. We had been taught this intellectually in our performance training but we had never seen or experienced it in such a complete and ongoing way. It was also evident that Mimili people were seizing on the kinds of western technology that would assist them to take their performances into new arenas of
potential transformation, such as film and television. The skillful use of visual and sound technology is now a feature of Aboriginal electronic media, a recent example being the film *Yolngu Boy*.

**Intensity of performance**

This is connected to the first point. If performers are half hearted and go through the conventions without intellectual, spiritual, emotional and sensory engagement, then a performance will not be capable of effecting transformation. The act of ‘becoming’ and the moving out of a quotidian situation requires effort. Different cultures do this in different ways: some with drugs, some with trance, some with language, some with technology and some with mastery over their own perceptual channels and those of their audiences. Every culture is ‘conditioned’ to reach *ecstasis* in a particular way and for particular outcomes. Where levels of *ecstasis* are repressed, intensity suffers. By looking at what kinds of intensities are encouraged in a culture, it is possible to make some abductions about how the culture ‘works’. If the most ‘popular’ forms of performance are analysed, it can be seen that Europeans are ‘permitted’ *ecstasis* in areas of (for instance) violence, sport, misogyny and capitalism. Aboriginal people are ‘permitted’ *ecstasis* in spirituality, the ‘arts’, collectivism and ecologism. In cataloguing these differences I run the risk of stereotyping but they are supported by my experience. As an Aboriginal urban woman, living and working within the European Australian system, I realise that, despite the passionate rhetoric, most urban Aboriginal people do not live the Aboriginal way with Aboriginal values and the performance intensity isn’t there as often as it should be. There are too many barriers put up by the aspirations of Aboriginal performance groups and individuals to be ‘rich and famous’ in the European paradigm, sacrificing the thing that makes them unique. (Marshall: 1997)

**Audience performer interactions**

In a culture where people perform throughout their lives as a matter of course and where all performance is community based and not commercialised (although there might certainly be protocols of reciprocity), the audience-performer relations are fluid and conditional. In a culture where everything has a price tag, performance has been commodified and, if people have paid see a performance, then they immediately become consumers. This changes the relationships between the participants. Australia’s dominant economic system means that Aboriginal performers need to ‘make a living’ if they move out of their ‘traditional’ environments. Unless they are ‘mainstream’ they cannot even contact an urban audience – Aboriginal or European. This cultural clash between perceptions of audiences and performers is also one of the more subtle forms of colonisation and will in the end serve to undermine community based performances unless community practices are firmly maintained.
We, on the other hand, tend now to create performances out of the playhouse, at a distance from commerce and closer to our audiences.

**The whole performance sequence**

Both groups had a keen sense of ‘whole performance process’. Performance making had exactly the same phases for both groups – occasion, preparation, rehearsal, warm up, engagement, performance, liminality, transformation, re-entry, warm down, disengagement, reflection. The implicit awareness in both groups of the phase they were in was noticeable. However, in each culture, each phase had different proportions of time and attention attached to it. Mimili people spent almost no time on rehearsal, for instance, but a great deal of time on warm up and the central performance phase. They sustained the actual performance section - engagement, performance, liminality, transformation and re-entry and back again to engagement without any warm-down and at a high level for very long periods of time without appearing to tire. The lack of rehearsal was because everyone learned what to do from a very young age and, as performances were so frequent, there was no need for rehearsal. Also, the repertoire was linked into every aspect of community life, so reinforcement was happening on a continual basis. Comparisons could be drawn, however, with group devised community theatre in European culture, or events like seasonal festivals or religious services where community knowledge eliminates the need for long periods of rehearsal. In mainstream European theatre, however, actors are required to ‘learn their lines’ and to ‘block their moves’ anew for every new play, opera or dance in a period of 4 to 6 weeks. Very few plays reflect the performers’ lived experience’ so they need to find techniques to represent the lives of others in a convincing way. This makes formal rehearsal time very long.

**Transmission of performance knowledge**

Mimili people do all their performance teaching over a lifetime, in performance as a rule. Because we were such rank beginners in the language, extra teaching sessions were run so that we would learn and practice the words, rhythms and melody but we never saw this happen with Mimili youth. We gathered that it was just for us. We had no similar extra dance tuition: it was all done in performance.

Because of our need for lengthy rehearsal as described above, it was harder to involve the Mimili people in our performances. They could not see the need for practice without any purpose other than to achieve ‘perfection’ in execution and did not need to ‘learn’ something they already knew and practised in everyday life.
In terms of ‘knowing country’ and ‘knowing community’, however, five years were spent on our basic education. Bearing in mind the circumstances, we were continually being taken to relevant sites and taught relevant life skills and practices that underpinned the *inma*. We knocked around in a variety of vehicles, visited or stayed in a number of camps and got a feel for the terrain within about a 50 k radius. In Sydney, we spent time on ‘knowing country’, too, and time was given to touring around and explaining the importance of various sites to our Mimili friends. In that, we became conscious of them ourselves and ceased to take our ‘country’ for granted, learning to see them through Mimili eyes. We saw our world in a new light because we needed to ‘translate’ it for our friends and therefore had to work out how to articulate it.

‘Knowing community’ was a very eclectic and much less quantifiable process. This meant both groups learning how each other’s community worked and how to find a place in it. Activities apart from performances included barbecues, dances, movies, discos, festivals, picnics at the beach, ferry rides and zoo excursions and just socialising around a meal or a sitting in the garden. Finding common ground requires fine skills in translation and we all needed to negotiate meaning on a minute by minute basis. There was no question of withdrawal or walking away, we had to keep negotiating.

Theatre experiences included everything from traditional *inma* to contemporary dance to orchestral concerts to environmental theatre-in-education performances. There is no doubt that of our performances the Mimili people enjoyed the environment theatre in a rainforest the best of all.

Although we felt we had been ‘taught’ much about traditional *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* performance, we did not ever reach the stage where we felt we ‘taught’ Mimili people anything about performing European theatre and dance. I think they learned about European performance and about urban European culture through performance but they took part in few of our presentations, although many were an audience at our group devising workshops and rehearsals and offered advice at various points. Coming from such a different belief base, it was, as one of the women remarked, a bit ‘funny’ watching us ‘make up things out of nothing’. Another problem was the gender separation in *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* performances. They were never comfortable with our mixed gender performances, as one bush-dance episode in 1987 demonstrated. There were aspects that both groups could have addressed here and with more time (more time than five years) we might have.
There is far too much attention paid in ‘acting schools’ on the kind of training that is pretty useless (sitting through lectures on performance practice) and not nearly enough on actual performance. ‘Set pieces’ are practiced till they are word, technique and move perfect but little attention is paid to the two things we all agree are essential – transformation and intensity. An international conference in Paris in April 2001 (Training or Transmission: Can Acting be Taught? run by Université du Québec, Centre Nationale du Théâtre à Paris and Département des Arts du Spectacle, Université Paris X – Nanterre) examined the proposition that most forms of technical actor training all over the western world are possibly a waste of time. Can acting be taught? From my observations and nearly 40 years of experience, not very well - unless the engagement with performance is regular. What a student learns in acting or dancing or music school are the conventions of a closed professional system. Very few institutions pay any attention to issues of transformation or intensity, which we all agreed were the two most important issues. Mimili people didn’t do any acting classes at all and their performances were absolute gripping - not necessarily always in the ‘spectacle’ sense (although there was plenty of that) but certainly in transformation, intensity and integration with their whole ecology and their whole being in the world.

The biggest difference is that Mimili performance is, to quote Cath Ellis again, “an education for living”. For urban Australians, for Europeans and increasingly for urban Aboriginal people, it is a profession and while still closely related to expressions of identity within a particular community, it operates within a different ecology: one which promotes a commercially based, professional approach and which excludes ‘amateurs’.

**Performance evaluation**

If we were looking for critical evaluation, we had come to the right place. While there were no ‘rehearsals’ as such, there was constant teaching, correcting and ‘post mortem’ reviews in the Mimili community on a moment by moment basis. There was so much discussion about various aspects of performance that there didn’t seem to be much else talked about at times. We were continually corrected (and praised) and found the process very different to, and far more helpful than, the university assessment procedures that use comparative grades as markers of achievement. The open way in which evaluation was done changed the ways in which we could talk about our performance to each other and this carried through to our urban lives and the University. We had not expected this. Critique of performance in European culture is normally unwelcome. Analysis and discussion is essentially framed as a negative and the role of critics (often unqualified journalists) in the public media is feared. Journo-critics can, and do, ‘make or break’ a commercial theatre production, often with self-important malice and little practical experience. For Mimili people, criticism was part of the
process and it was open, serious and instructive. After that, some of our Sydney critics started to look even worse!

The biggest critique was the constant inquiry: “Is this inma mulapa?”

Are your performances real and important?

12.2 Outcomes:

Changed performance approach
Change comes not only from affect but also from reflection on that affect. Our period of reflection has covered over ten years – as long as it has taken to write this. In that time, everyone who took part has been in some way changed and the influence of those years with the people in Mimili can be seen most in the performance work we have all done since. Significantly, this includes:

- a need to maintain diversity of cultural expression in performance–within both European Australian and Aboriginal Australian culture;
- an increased awareness of the importance of locating performance within the ecology of the society in which it sits;
- a more conscious and diverse approaches to narrative;
- many different perceptions of time and space;
- a greater understanding of the importance of sensory engagement deeper than just the auditory and visual;
- the power of non verbal languages used in performance;

Possibly the person whose theatre making was obviously affected the most was Gordon Beattie. His extraordinarily powerful and haunting pieces of non-scripted performance created during and after the exchange deeply touched the dozens of students who took part, and hundreds of audience members. They were never produced in Sydney commercially despite blandishments from entrepreneurs and festival directors, but they toured to other countries like Turkey and Czechoslovakia, where they were part of yet another intercultural performance exchange. Some pieces used as their impetus European ‘classics’, like Shakespeare, Brecht and Beckett. Many now well-known Australian and English theatre performers, dance and music practitioners took part. The works include about 25 interlinked Desert Verses (1986-1990); and full-length stage pieces such as Déjà.
Vu (1993); Bahnhofkreis 459 (1994); The Theft of Joy (1995) and The Ship of Fools (1997). There have been, in addition, some remarkable street theatre and festival performances. All have a strong element of ecological grounding and evolve through a process which requires all participants to fully engage as both creators and performers.

Many participants, graduate students and staff, also report a singular shift in their perceptions of self and Other and the ways in which they carry out their professional performance lives. It is not in the nature of this thesis to carry out formal interviews but it could be demonstrated that over three quarters of them have kept in touch in one way or another, and that Mimili memories are always part of the bond. Others have integrated Aboriginal performance approaches into their primary and high school teaching programs or have gone back to Central Australia to work or visit. Some now work in companies where intercultural skills are valued. Some have enrolled in and completed postgraduate research studies in this field; some have started up companies of their own because commercial European/mainstream Australian theatre no longer satisfies them.

**Changed teaching approach**

I was inspired to write and introduce a new Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies at the University of western Sydney, which is focused on cultural studies rather that ‘black-armband’ history, lack of social justice and emotive reactions to invasion (not that those things are to be ignored). I am more interested in Indigenous knowledge and how this can be incorporated into contemporary pedagogy and hence into contemporary society. If we don’t know anything about the culture we are all trying so hard to maintain, it makes it almost impossible to maintain.

In its sixth year, the degree’s future is in balance since other urban people would rather we spend time counting deaths in custody than dancing. Since I am no longer at the University, and those coming after me are not performers, this shift to a reactionary position is probably inevitable. Urban Aboriginal people have adopted white values and issues in an attempt to refute the racism which invades us still.

**Changed understanding about traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture**

In truth, I can only answer for myself. As I pointed out earlier, being Mutthi Mutthi is not being Anangu. I was a ‘city woman’ with some experience in being a ‘rural woman’ but without connections in a traditionally living community. My experiences in Mimili provided a deeper

Anne Marshall  PhD Thesis
and richer understanding of the power and presence of ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ Aboriginal culture and the ways in which it is a force in the evolution of a new Australian culture. Far from being dead, my culture (or co-culture) is alive and well. In transition, certainly, but not ‘just breathing’. Instead, it is making artworks and performances that can move the world.

**Changed approach to ethnography**

Despite my dislike of ethnography, I was provoked to write this thesis and a number of journal articles and edit a collection of pieces by other Aboriginal performers. I have resisted, however, the calls to ‘document’ or analyse the *inma* according to accepted European ethnomusicological or choreological conventions or to show the hours of video we shot, other than to our students (which was approved by the people at Mimili. Firstly, out of respect to the many Mimili people who have passed into the Dreaming who still appear on the video but who are “not here now in those old bodies”, as Sam would have said. Secondly, because it is a completely useless activity. If people want to dance and sing *inma*, they can go and learn from the source. Thirdly, I could only write about every tenth word and the other nine are in performance forms.

**Changed attitude towards country**

I would not say that my feeling for country was changed, but my knowledge of it certainly has certainly intensified by being with people who know how to include it in their being in the world as a matter of course. I left the university and the city and moved to ‘the bush’. In my present life I am engaged in organics and Permaculture and run an organic, sourdough bakery. While I still work very actively in the arts, it is within regional and community contexts and there is a far stronger integration with country.

### 12.3 Conclusions

What was revealed to us is that in order to ‘translate’ ourselves to others we all, as a result of reflection and re-negotiation, are continually ‘performing self’ in terms of our changing ecologies: our physical and natural environments, our social organisations, our personal relationships, our re-orderings of reality and the many other aspects of our lives in ways which are explicit, complex, responsive and immediate. At the same time, performance is more ephemeral than static iconography or written language and leaves traces which are far harder to quantify. In that very ephemerality exists the capacity to accommodate change and to
learn new ways of adapting to new worlds. This is especially true for Aboriginal communities [Michaels: 1986: Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Media Association and their many video Productions since 1989]. Even if the elements of participation and transformation would seem to have been lessened. Even if in late 20th century religious rituals of all kinds seem to be marginalised and undermined by television ‘viewerism’. Even if elements of European pop culture have changed the sounds of Aboriginal songs and the colours in the paintings. The dialogues are still crossing over and interacting in a serious way since the internationalization of Aboriginal music, performance and visual arts has also changed the sound of much western art.

While some have deplored commercialisation as the thin edge of the appropriation wedge and bemoan the lack of anthropological consultation (some Aboriginal consultation would be preferable!), it highlights the fact that a new attitude to Aboriginal culture has been growing for some time in the European Australian community and consciousness: a spear thrust which has led in a straight line to internationally based ‘cultural tourism’ and Indigenous control. Aboriginal art is being auctioned in prestigious New York galleries for millions of dollars and steps are being taken through legislation to halt the exploitation and ensure royalties continue to be paid to Indigenous artists and their communities. The clear appropriation by advertising agencies and manufacturing companies of Aboriginal visual images in every part of the marketplace is noticeable but is now carried out with far more respect. Some dramatic legal battles over copyright, especially in the last fifteen years have helped to re-establish a balance: a very much publicized court battle was recently won by Aboriginal people after an overseas carpet manufacturer plagiarized the work of an artist using traditional motifs. Cultural tourists now buy Aboriginal craft works certified as ‘authentic’ rather than crude imitations. Aboriginal artefacts, which have long been plundered (as the automatic perquisites of anthropological and other expeditions) for their exotic appeal as much as their scientific interest are being returned. Aboriginal people are now tackling the legal and equity issues so that European Others will no longer control the health of the Aboriginal ‘market’. The juggling act is to maintain cultural integrity as well as equity.

Aboriginal playwrights and actors like Kevin Gilbert, Bob Maza, Jack Davis, Justine Saunders and Jimmy Chi (among many) have appropriated European theatre genres and acting styles in order to get their message across. Wesley Enoch has been a Director in Residence at the Sydney Theatre Company, bringing alive Aboriginal people and culture in an arena until now reserved for the Shakespeares and the Williamsons while at the same time re-interpreting them from an Indigenous standpoint. But it is still unusual to see ‘Blacks’, ‘Orientals’ and
‘Coloureds’ playing ‘White’ roles in popular media entertainment - film and TV. Typically, in Australia, ‘Blacks’ are still portrayed as ‘off centre’ characters, and rarely are they cast as romantic leads. In Australia, there is a separate Showcase book for Aboriginal actors. Young European-Australian actor Joel Edgerton, in 2003, was been considerably criticised for his real life association with an Indigenous star.

By the time the Festival of the Dreaming presented Noel Tovey’s A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1997, a degree of public acceptance was beginning to emerge but it is by no means a universal acceptance: neither critics nor audiences (black and white) could stop themselves from asking whether it was ‘appropriate’ or ‘relevant’. The consensus, overall, was that it was ‘interesting’, which is more than can be said for the savagely racist and uninformed reviews of the Smoking Ceremony which opened the same Festival outside the Sydney Opera House (Sydney Press: 1997, passim). The 1997 Festival of the Dreaming as part of the Cultural Olympiad acted as a kind of watershed and the resonances of that exceptional Festival program will be felt for many years to come. It is now a two way street to some extent but there is an unequal battle going on. In this new society, Aboriginal Australians strive to maintain their ‘authenticity’ by means of performances that are also, as a direct result of the wider dissemination, affecting European performances. What compromises are made and how is integrity preserved? How do urban Aboriginal performers maintain power over their own culture? How do they maintain links with the sources while accepting the fact that all performance is contemporary and responds to the needs of multi-cultural societies? In this context, issues of ‘cultural capital’ and ‘social capital’ tend to be points of contention and matters of intellectual copyright are war zones. Meanwhile, Bangarra travels to India and Ernie Dingo hosts The Great Outdoors, attracting wide audiences simply on the grounds of his Aboriginality.

Despite contact with European culture, the emergence of post modernism, post structuralism and post colonialism and the growth of the commercial ‘art market’, the ‘Aboriginal ideal’ still holds true for many people living both urban and traditionally-oriented lives (source: many conversations with Mimili elders, 1986-1990 and urban Aboriginal people, to date). Even among fully urban dwellers, all forms of Aboriginal symbolic representation are used in strong and compelling acts of communication and affirmation of identity (Gerry Bostock, personal conversation, 1993; Lee Willis, 2000; Justine Saunders: 2001). Very little is purely ‘æsthetic’ in the sense of ‘art’ but that does not in any way lessen the æsthetic qualities embedded in an ecologically framed ontology. In traditional or even transitional Aboriginal performance, forms of symbolic representation are not willingly separated into specialist categories by social practice or any other act of exclusion, although individual forms may have a special focus.
within the urban context. The creation of all forms of art and everyday life are intertwined, each sustaining the other. Therefore analysis must of necessity be collaborative. Aboriginal arts were, and to some extent still are, what European arts haven't been allowed to be for thousands of years - integrated and interactive.

The arts are of life, after all. (Berndt: 1962) Every member of a traditionally living Aboriginal community is involved in expressing and sustaining that society. This occurs mainly through performance, bearing in mind that the making of visual arts is seen also as a performance and a community activity. This is often re-interpreted within European performance paradigms in order to make them more 'understandable' instead of incorporating as truth what Aboriginal people have shared with them.

Even a cursory study reveals that in intercultural exchanges the written word, the 'literature', is not a substitute for complex, metaphoric languages, but neither is it for the spoken word. The assumptions made by early documenters of Aboriginal performance completely ignored even the possibility that the verses which formed the 'lyrics' to the rituals and other performances were highly developed in respect of their claim to be poetry or dramatic text because of this 'orality' which was taken to imply 'simplicity'. Since structuralist studies in linguistics began to be related to non-European languages, it has been demonstrated that lack of knowledge of the epistemology and the metaphorical levels embedded in the many Aboriginal languages, verbal and non-verbal, is the main reason why they are not fully understood. Translating this is exceptionally complex and doomed to reductionism if done in isolation from a living ecological context. Rather, with characteristic egocentricity, many hope to learn and appropriate from Aboriginal culture inspiration for the purposes of tourism, academic research and publication or commercial production of their own creative works without engaging in ngapartji - ngapartji.

All this 'sensitive' work aside, it seems that the sooner there are Aboriginal people speaking up about their own forms of symbolic representation, the better. Most of the extant literature smacks of cultural imperialism (this work will not be excepted, despite its best efforts) while 'knowledge' about 'the thing' called 'Indigenous culture' is neatly and accessibly re-packaged in European terms.

The completeness of the invasion of European culture has meant that much traditional knowledge has disappeared. What is left is now compromised and in great danger of being swamped as Aboriginal people increasingly feel that their culture is inferior to that of the
Europeans: old people refuse to pass on real knowledge which they see is no longer valued or needed or, when they do, young people do not treated it with respect, finding it irrelevant to their needs. It takes too long. It takes a lifetime.

It is not too late to stem the tide. The new cultural strength growing within Aboriginal communities all over Australia, as well as increased access to the Aboriginal mass media indicates that much of value remains and will be transformed, where appropriate, into a contemporary voice. Hopefully, too, an Australian European (and increasingly Asian) society will learn and absorb something which will help it on its own long search for a cultural identity from Aboriginal people themselves - and create live performance ecologies in which we can all speak to each other in languages more meaningful and compelling than just the written word.

We learned that performance is indeed a means by which people can negotiate “translations of culture”. Performance always reflects aspects of real life in symbolic forms and modes and, by us performing the symbolic, the quotidian can be more easily grasped. By performing together, opportunities for negotiation open up as a matter of course, and just as performance operates in a liminal space, so does any discussion in and around performance and therefore lived life.

Performance is not just liminal, then, it is the limen.

Notes

1. An exception is Yothu Yindi. I have been an audience member on a number of occasions, and in 2000 I was present when they played a concert ‘at home’, at Gulkula, just prior to their full-on commitments. Now that was performance intensity.
Bibliography and References
Appendix A

Other *inma* verses

These are mostly painting-up verses with many references to that process. Some places referred to were visited but no dancing took place there on those occasions. Sections we are yet to learn? Some verses are about the *tjalku* ancestor travelling from Mintubi to Antara and hunting *maku* prior to the *Kunanyanatutiny* episode. Some are only semi-translated. Some we have no idea of the meaning yet.

**Verse 18**

\[ nyuntu ngalili yunkula kuranu \]

you and I, having given (*maku*), make it bad (by taking the grubs back)

\[ mirinpapa nakanu \]

the moth dances

**Verse 19**

\[ (l)itari tari (l)itari \]

pulling and pulling (at the roots of the kurrajong tree)

(first banded anteater ancestor - *walputi* - the numbat) (a site at Anpuru)

\[ pantungka pantungkarinya \]

on the salt lake (ground is like the skin of the *tjalku*)

**Verse 20**

\[ wana itari kati \]

pulls with digging stick (at the bark of the gum tree)

(at Pocket Well) (*Walputi* drags the digging stick on the ground)

\[ parkangka parkangka ngara \]

and dances with leafy branches (*parka*)

Anne Marshall – PhD Thesis
Verse 21

nyālpīngku yilaŋu (l)amiri tjaraŋyá

with leaf (the anteater) pulls rock-hole place with

(site with rock hole -kapu wipi)

nyālipingka yilaŋu (r)untanu tjaraŋyá

with leaf pulls and pushes at that place

(cuts the leaves and pulls them up) (?)

Verse 22

lunkikitjangku paŋkuna walkatjuna

painted maku I draw (on body)

(the painted form -drawn on the body with gypsum - a variety of patterns, nose marking standard)

wararana walkatjuna

on the cliff face I make the marks

I draw the witchetty grub marks on the cliff face (thus creating maku)
This is the Tjalku singing

Verse 23

tjinkikitjangku paŋkuna walkatjuna

(as above - tjinkikitjangku is the same meaning as lunkikitjangku)

wararana walkatjuna

(as above) (? significance of an almost exact repeat)
Verse 24

\textit{kalpi ngalya tila}

pulls the leaves towards (forehead or body)

\textit{kalpingu pampanu}

the leaves touch (parts of body)

There is some power in the leaves

Verse 25

\textit{anpurunyana papapakanu}

at Anpuru I got up and danced

at Anpuru (the Walputi site - near Pocket Well) I get up and dance

\textit{anpurunyana pirinykatingu}

at Anpuru I slowly move (in the dance)

Verse 26

\textit{karu ranypana alyalingu}

the swollen root ancestor (\textit{maku})

\textit{karu ranypana yumpuluru wani}

the swollen root ancestor (\textit{maku}) throwing (\textit{kumpu} and \textit{kuna} over his shoulder)

(Site with rock formation in the centre and two deep troughs - containing water and ochre - at the top of the mountain)
Verse 27

**kulpinya kulpi wararrangka ngarangu**

the cave on the cliff face is

**kulpinya kulpi puyululu ngaringu**

the cave in the heat haze lies

Verse 28

**(li) piripirila pitingka yilunu**

having scratched in the hole we pull up

Having scratched with our fingernails in the hole we pull out maku

**(li) piripirila liikingka yilunu**

having scratched with our leg we pull up

Having scratched with our leg we pull up maku

*Tjalku* sitting with back legs out in front of piti, pulling up maku (right from Mintubi to Antara)
This is a verse that tells there are *maku* all the way from Mintubi to Antara and shows how to dig them out

Verse 29

**nyarawa nyarawalu**

same *iwara* - *iwara walputi, iwara tjalku* - *kantul pai kunna kunna*

*yanutjanu yanutjanu*

*Tjalku* and *walputi* the same thing. That is, *walputi* does the same. The animals are in fact slightly different, the big eared kangaroo rat and the numbat. Both hunt maku, both virtually extinct in this region now.
Verse 30

N g a l p i r i n y t j i ngalpirinytji ngalpirinytji ngalpirinytji

yalantarai yalantarai yalantarai yalantarai

Unsure of translation

Verse 31

p i n t a l t j i p i n t a l t j i p i n t a l t j i

white maku (the moth state)

n y r i n g k a n y i r i n g k a r i n g k u

becoming a chrysalis

Part of another recognition lesson for hunting. The maku has many forms, all of which are edible.

Verse 32

k a l t j i l a n g a r a

with white powder we stand

With white powdered gypsum ready for painting (our bodies) we stand

k a l t j i l a r u r u n a

crushed (?)
Verse 33

*Ilatikatika nyinangu*

*maku* sits (in the ground)

*mantangka tjulpurupuru tjulpurupuru*

in the ground, digging (at Wanmara, six miles NW of Mimili)

Verse 34

*Taila kunalu wangkanyi*

rock ledge faeces lay

The *maku* faeces lie on the rock ledge

*yalangkunya wangkanyi*

at a cave opening / at a place (?) Yalangku?

Verse 35

*kumpuna nyangu*

sees the ancestral *maku* urine tracks

*kumpuyala pungu*

sees the ancestral *maku* urine tracks (?)
Verse 36

wakara yilanu kutun pungu

spears and pulls up, throws from a long way away

? second line

Verse 37

mirinpaŋi nyina

we two maku moths are sitting here

liwatiwata ngaringu

as chrysalises we lie together

Verse 38

ngiltira ngiltiralu (no repeat of line)

At Ngiltira

(name of wild fig (ili) site where tjalku men became fig trees)

yatulpinya katira tjunu yatulpi katira tjunu

humpy (?) (The Tjalku) paint on maku, carry and place their humpy here

The Tjalku came to Ngiltira and became fig trees Yatulp? Kulpila inkanyi - maybe singing the humpy into being)

tjunu also has a sense of putting one's mark on, externalising, naming, creating, making and forming, empowering
Verse 39

ngaliyana ngaliya

we two

(two walputi, sitting,)

wangkantjana wangkantja

talking (singing)

Two walputi sitting together, singing inma (Sam’s note)

Verse 40

See second line only (?)

kukatjana kukatja

Name of a tribe (related) from near Yallata

or meat (?)

Verse 41

yapapa yipa yapapa yipa

yakunya ngalili kutjara (no repeat)

We two Walputi men are travelling in search of Maku

Walputi site - Pocket Well
Verse 42

galta watangka tjiwilitijunu
at its base the kurrajong tree put its roots down

galta watangka puyariltingu
Anitji word – used in inma only

Verse 43

tatanga ngaranka
standing

kunpalunpalu
the crested bell bird is standing on the sapling

Verse 44

wirutjuluru pampupampunu
the eagle ancestor touches and touches

mirinpa pampupampunu
the moth touches and touches

Is this a dance?
Verse 45

See also No. 13

\textit{yulpalu panya katira wakanu}

\textit{parari wanungku paratjatupinu}

Verse 46

See also 32

\textit{paranti ngarai} (melodic descent can be changed)

there are the marks

\textit{kaltjilaru runya}

put on with gypsum

Verse 47

\textit{kata tangkana puyululu ngaringu}

in the exit / big hole smoke / haze I lay

\textit{pilyuru waningu}

\textit{maku} threw

\textit{kata tangkana tunngutunngunu}

in the exit / big hole I made it tight

Is the \textit{Maku} being smoked out? There seem to be three lines to this one
Verse 48

lapintapintinya

the maku moth

(l)anganti ngarai

is protected (?)

By what or whom?

Verse 49

lapintapitinya ngangu

tjanpurna nyangai

VARIATION (One can change the melodic descent of e.g. ngangai with impunity. Ian did this and was told "tjukarurukutu".

Verse 50

wala kutjaranya nurungka nyinangu

two tjalku

wala kutjaranya kantura yirpini

two tjalku dancing at inma piti (Antara)

Two tjalku ancestors dancing at the maku grub site
Verse 51

nyina katira walparinpiri
nyina katira pantaru katingu

Verse 52

palarunku waltjanku yumpu wakanu
palarunku waltjangku tinarurunu

Verse 53

kuṭuṭu antjul antjul

wanira wanara uraŋa antjulantju

the tjalku licking the opal to see if its a good colour

This is one of the several references to opals that show there is recognition of them as aesthetic objects

Verse 54

walka marila ngurira wanunu

(putting) the marks, looks around (for tracks), and follows

ngurira

walka ngurira katukatunai

(putting) the marks and lifts up (climbs?)

Possibly the Tjalku climbing up the cliff face after Maku where he leaves his marks as opal fingernails
Cousins - 1972
Sam Pumani teaching inma maku - Penrith, 1987
Sacred drawings of the witchetty grub totem on the rocks at the Emily Gap.
(Spencer and Gillen: 1899, fig 24)

Part of witchetty grub ceremony, Emily Gap
(Spencer and Gillen: 1899, fig 26)
Contemporary photographs of the witchetty grub rock paintings at Emily Gap. Isaacs: 1984, p165
Central desert ground painting
(Isaacs: 1984, p213)
Marks in the stone were *mala* men fled.
(Isaacs: 1980, p37. Photo R. Beeche)

Circular stone arrangement
kalaya - emu and chick
(Isaacs: 1980, p143. Photo D. Marfleet)

nintaka - the perentie
(Isaacs: 1980, p248. Photo D Roff)

lungka - the skink
(Isaacs: 1980, p42. Photo D. Roff)
Finding water in the desert depends on knowing the stories and the songs that tell you where to look. (Isaacs: 1980, p125. Photo, R. Edwards)
Women at Amata, near Mimili, South Australia carve similar desert animals (Isaacs: 1984, p262)