



United Nations
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Cultural Organization

Bangkok Office



Australian Government



PROMOTING DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION IN ARTS IN AUSTRALIA

A case study report

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**WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY**



Institute for Culture
and Society

DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

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PREFACE

This report is an outcome of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Australia Council and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Bangkok to promote cultural diversity in the Asia-Pacific, signed in 2012. The report aims to contribute to understanding and debate of the implications of UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression, to which Australia became a signatory in 2009.

The selection of projects featured in this report was conducted jointly by representatives of the Australia Council, UNESCO Bangkok and the researchers from the Institute for Culture and Society. Projects were selected on the basis of their suitability for a 'best practice' case study report on the interpretation and implementation of the UNESCO Convention with a national and international readership. In-depth interviews were conducted in order to gain an understanding of multiple stakeholder perspectives on the processes and practices in question. Ethnographic material has been supported by analysis of available project documentation, other public documentation and critical writing.

Since the research was conducted, many of these projects have evolved considerably. However, the detailed case studies still provide relevant material for discussion and insight on the wide range of practical possibilities to promote diversity of cultural expressions through the arts. The introduction of the report presents five key principles to advance critical discourse in this field.

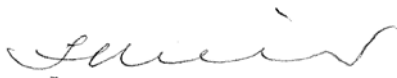
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INTRODUCTION

The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions was adopted by UNESCO in 2005. This Convention is a legally binding international agreement that ensures artists, cultural professionals, practitioners and citizens worldwide can create, produce, disseminate and enjoy a broad range of cultural goods, services and activities, including their own.

The Convention authorises 'diversity' as a key leitmotiv for cultural policy in the 21st century. In today's interconnected, globalised world cultural diversity is no longer the peripheral to an otherwise mono-cultural centre, but a central dimension of the entire domain of culture and society. Diversity should be seen as an asset, not a liability, for both individuals and societies. Cultural diversity is now seen as an essential requirement of sustainable development, because a world where diversity flourishes increases the range of choices for people and communities, thus nurturing their capacities for creativity and innovation. Moreover, promoting and protecting diversity is essential for world peace, as it boosts the potential for creative dialogues resulting from interactions of diverse cultures, both nationally and globally.

Australia became a signatory to this Convention in 2009. Signatories to the Convention take on the 'right and obligation' to develop policies and adopt measures to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions within their territory. In this regard, the Australia Council for the Arts can play a leading role, not just in implementing the Convention in the Australian context, but also in advancing critical reflection on what it means to nurture 'diversity of cultural expressions'. It should also deepen understanding of the different ways in which artistic work, which represents and extends cultural diversity, can benefit society at large. This is the aim of this report.

The Australia Council already has a rich history of strategic engagement with the promotion and protection of cultural diversity in the arts. Previous Australia Council policies such as Arts in a Multicultural Australia and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts policy speak to such strategies, which are concerned with making participation in the arts more inclusive of all Australians, irrespective of background or personal circumstances. Since 2007 the Council has adopted an overarching Cultural Engagement Framework with the aim of ensuring 'that the artistic and cultural skills, experience and resources resulting from Australia's social and demographic diversity are given the opportunity to develop flourish and contribute to a distinctly Australian style of artistic excellence and innovation'. In its 2014-2019 strategic plan, the Council envisions Australia as a 'culturally ambitious nation' that draws strength from its diversity of identities, faiths, individual differences and pursuits. Supporting a diverse range of artists is a central priority for the Council to better reflect and extend the diversity of cultural expressions in Australia.

This report presents a range of innovative artistic and cultural projects, supported by the Australia Council, showcasing the wide variety of initiatives which contribute to the dynamism and vibrancy of Australia's diversity of cultural expressions. These case studies can function as models for a discussion about the development of 'best practice' in the promotion and protection of diversity of cultural expressions, not just in Australia but internationally.

In this way, the report aims to improve dialogue around, interest in and ultimately increased uptake of the Convention, not just in Australia, and the wider Asia-Pacific region. The case studies discussed are:

The **Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA)** is an organisation which supports Aboriginal Art Centres across these regions, 'working together to keep art, country and culture strong'.

The **Arab Film Festival Australia (AFF)**, initiated by Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) in Parramatta, New South Wales, shares the stories and culture of the Arab world with diverse Australian audiences through film.

black&write! is a program based at the State Library of Queensland combining a national Indigenous writing fellowship with a mentoring program for Indigenous editors.

Edge of Elsewhere was a three-year contemporary visual art project of the Campbelltown Arts Centre and the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, commissioning artists from Australia, Asia and the Pacific to create new works that engage with the diverse communities of Sydney.

Kultour, an initiative of the Australia Council's Arts in a Multicultural Australia program, is dedicated to touring innovative multicultural arts across all art forms. It aims to play a leadership role as national advocate, service organisation and in artist development.

Metaverse Makeovers, developed as a participatory artwork in which nail technicians and their clientele take part in a digitally augmented nail treatment triggered by a mobile device, has become a technology start-up company for digital cosmetics 'appcessories' in Asia.

TransLab was an initiative of the Australia Council's Theatre section which supported the development of new intercultural and interdisciplinary performance through research and development residencies.

Visible is a music mentoring and support program developed by Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV), catering to musicians from new refugee, immigrant and Indigenous Australian communities.

This report describes each of these projects in detail, with a focus on the intricate artistic and organisational processes involved. Each project is singular, utilises cultural resources and artistic processes in unique ways. But across them we can distinguish three distinct approaches to promoting diversity of cultural expressions, revealing their different priorities and rationales:

- a) The key aim in *community-based* approaches (Visible, Arab Film Festival) is to support minority groups, under-represented in the arts, to participate in cultural life. This can be either as artists (e.g. musicians) or audiences (e.g. film festival attendees). The focus here is on enhancing *cultural democracy*.
- b) In artist-mediated approaches (Edge of Elsewhere, Metaverse Makeovers, Translab) the emphasis is on the creativity of the artist in the generation of innovative work to extend the diversity of cultural expression. The focus here is on fostering *cultural innovation*.
- c) In *industry-based* approaches (ANKAAA, Kultour, black & write!) the initiative centres on organisational development to enhance the promotion of diversity of cultural expressions through advocacy, networking and capacity building. The focus here is on ascertaining *cultural sustainability*.

The three approaches are of course not mutually exclusive: they often overlap as particular projects encompass a range of community, artistic and industry-focused activities. Cultural democracy, cultural innovation and cultural sustainability are three distinct yet inter-related objectives whose pursuit is greatly advanced in an environment which is committed to cultural diversity, as exemplified by the case studies in this report. On the basis of these case studies, we can distil five principles in relation to the practical possibilities of promoting diversity of cultural expressions through artistic practices of many kinds. We present these five principles here as a contribution to critical discourse in this field.

The five principles are:

1. Truly relevant and energetic creative work will come from working across cultures.
2. Building cultural capabilities is best served by developing strong cross-cultural partnerships.
3. Locating arts practices within 'culture cycles' will facilitate a broader understanding of the diverse forms of 'value' generated by cultural expressions.
4. Inclusive and dialogical curatorial processes are a key means of enhancing diversity of cultural expressions.
5. Supporting diversity of cultural expression will enhance art's ability to resonate and make a difference.

1 TRULY RELEVANT AND ENERGETIC CREATIVE WORK WILL COME FROM WORKING ACROSS CULTURES.

The presence of many social and cultural groups benefits the broad cultural experience of living in a diverse society. Beyond the recognition and 'showcasing' of the art and culture of many ethnic and national groups, creative activity can utilize the dynamic and unpredictable interactions that characterize any 'normal situation' of cultural diversity. This involves moving beyond a narrow 'multicultural arts' perspective that frames distinct minority groups as set apart from a cultural 'mainstream', and recognising cultural diversity as an inescapable interactive context to which artists and cultural workers respond in their working processes. The 'multicultural' cannot be siphoned off as a separate reality. It is deeply embedded within, and intrinsic to, the entire society.

This broadening of perspective is reflected in significant shifts in thinking and practice around the arts and cultural diversity in Australia. Kultour was founded in 2001 to support multicultural artists and organisations in touring exhibitions and performing arts nationally. Experience with the development of a nation-wide network of arts organisations supporting diverse cultural work, has led Kultour to shift its focus gradually from supporting specific cultural groups and a 'minority' multicultural sector to locating diversity in the society as a whole. Kultour now 'supports intercultural and cross-cultural arts projects. These reflect multicultural Australia and provide a national voice to advocate for the importance of cultural diversity in the experience of and participation in the arts for the benefit of the broader community.'¹

From this wider perspective, a diversity of cultural expressions is intrinsic to social experience in all contemporary societies. Cultural difference is not something 'out there', outside of us, but part of who we are, irrespective of our cultural or ancestral background. Artistic work can express this intrinsic diversity by mobilising the unpredictable interfaces of intercultural exchange, which can be found everywhere. The cultural programs examined in this report largely take this broad and pervasive situation of diversity as their starting point. As an invitation for organisations to participate in Translab put it: 'Cross-cultural theatre work explores our relationship to the diverse cultures we inhabit.'²

Such 'inhabiting' and working with new creative forms often develops at some distance from established cultural institutions. Relevant and dynamic intercultural creative work requires resources and support to move across existing boundaries of cultural influence and artistic form.

Translab recognised the importance of a 'research and development' phase to support the particular requirements of cross-cultural performance. In a context of a general lack of resources and continuity of practice for intercultural theatre work, no one recipe for generating intercultural theatre existed. Working processes and ways of developing creative networks varied widely within Translab projects. Translab resident, Paschal Berry's company developed *Within and Without* by pursuing an established collaborative relationship with Manila-based artists, Anino Shadowplay Collective. Theatre Kantanka (*Missing the Bus to David Jones*) and Branch Nebula (*Sweat*) used intercultural performance engaging artists of diverse backgrounds as a means to examine broad social issues of aging and migrant labour.³

The desire to move beyond multiculturalism as ethnic showcasing is apparent in the work of Samoan-Japanese artist Kihara Shigayuki. She expressed her disappointment with the static nature of many multicultural events, where there is often very limited actual exchange. Kihara is more concerned with 'intra-relationships between people'; the kinds of interaction between migrant groups based on what they actually share. Kihara's *Talanoa V*, one of three contributions to *Edge of Elsewhere*, emulated talanoa meetings in Samoa. Talanoa -- literally 'big talk' -- is utilised as a formal model to bring groups together and create sometimes unlikely sounding collaborations employing music and dance, in this case between Chinese and Cook Islands dancers. Community leaders were brought together to discuss ideas for the collaboration, and a work of cultural exchange was developed using the (mainly) wordless embodied languages of music and dance. Specific socio-cultural and political processes were used as a formal framework to negotiate cultural exchanges that seek to avoid exoticising or trivialisation.

Projects seeking to support creative practice that enhances diversity in innovative ways must engage in a detailed and ongoing examination of artistic processes and collaborations. Too often limits are placed on 'diversity' in cultural representation, which is easily stereotyped as ethnic difference, or dumbed down to exclude more complex dynamics. Artistic processes and forms tend to involve a wider range of differences than the single dimension of ethnicity, coalescing around the intersections of age, gender, class, sexualities, dis/ability, religion, cultural styles and personal experiences. The challenge is to engage in a broader conversation about 'differing diversities' in creative practice.⁴

2 BUILDING CULTURAL CAPABILITIES IS BEST SERVED BY DEVELOPING STRONG CROSS-CULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS.

We might imagine intercultural artistic engagements naturally taking place as cultural 'flows', as easy or even inevitable confluences of globalization. Of course, sustaining such engagements is rarely easy. Effective support of the diversity of cultural expressions requires the active promotion of relevant cultural skills and capabilities to enable practices located outside dominant ('mainstream') cultural fields to be viably maintained within national cultural life.

Building cultural capabilities requires a thorough analysis of developmental processes in relation to particular cultural industries, fields, markets and audiences. Developing necessary skills often entails bringing about highly focused learning situations. This is an important feature of many of the projects described in this report. In the Translab model, cultural research and development was supported by designing dedicated residencies to enable experimentation with unfamiliar processes to develop new productions.

The Visible program of Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV), addresses several barriers to cultural participation such as the lack of resources, industry knowledge, creative networks, and audience development. Building cultural capabilities required more than accumulating artistic and business skills; it included ways of developing cultural and community confidence. *The Visible* is integrated into MAV's Emerge cultural network which provides broad support for artistic as well as social needs of artists from emerging cultural communities. *Visible* programs are flexible enough to support musicians aiming to develop careers in the music industry, as well as helping recently settled community groups to use music for cultural maintenance. For example, the Burundian community were supported in making drums and passing on drumming traditions to young people.⁵

black&write! The program ingeniously addresses capacity gaps in the Australian publishing industry, where Indigenous authors are under-represented and where there are only a handful of Indigenous editors. Writers and editors work closely together to develop a book for publication, made possible through a partnership with Indigenous publisher, Magabala Books.

Harvesting Traditional Knowledge is a partnership program initiated by the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA). Indigenous artists skilled in bark painting and crafts such as hair spinning, pearl shell, boab nut carvings, boomerang and spear making met with museum and gallery conservators to share knowledge and develop ongoing relations with communities concerned with conserving cultural materials. *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* provided a rare occasion for Indigenous artists and museum professionals to meet 'on country', enabling the latter to experience the actual context of the production of cultural artefacts.⁶

The examples described above have been grounded in identifying gaps in skills and knowledge affecting cultural groups on the margins of 'mainstream' culture. Capacity building for these groups was most successfully addressed through partnerships that also extend cultural capabilities in many directions, generating increasingly dense networks and exchanges that contribute generally to enhancing the diversity of cultural expressions.

3 LOCATING ARTS PRACTICE WITHIN ‘CULTURE CYCLES’ WILL FACILITATE A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIVERSE FORMS OF ‘VALUE’ GENERATED BY CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS.

UNESCO works with a broad but flexible conception of art as a ‘culture cycle’ that encompasses ‘all aspects of the cultural activities, goods and services in their diverse modes of creation, production, dissemination, distribution and access, whatever the means and technologies used’. The culture cycle is UNESCO’s attempt to provide a flexible model to account for the chain of agents creating value around cultural expressions: ‘creators, producers, distributors, public institutions, professional organizations, etc.’⁷ This provides a challenge for artists and cultural practitioners to extend their strategic thinking to the larger ‘value chains’ in which particular cultural activities are located.

black&write! is built on a well-conceived culture cycle model that addresses the historical lack of Indigenous participation in the book publishing industry. black&write! recognised that editing is a key link in publishing practice, as it provides the closest working relationship between the writer and the editor, shaping the text and enabling close collaboration in developing books to publication. black&write! has been able to address Indigenous participation throughout the literary culture cycle, supporting writing groups, building capacity in the publishing industry, promoting diversity in Indigenous writing styles, including new genres and readership, increasing Indigenous publications through publication partnership, and seeding other forms of diffusion such as writers festivals and blogs.

Indigenous cultural expressions provide a complex test for a culture cycle model. ANKAAA’s network of arts centres in remote northern Australia aim to support most aspects of creation, production, dissemination and access of visual arts and craft practices that are strongly linked to traditional forms of life and in particular to custodial and ritual relationships to land. In this respect, it can be argued that ‘traditional’ cultural activity is more appropriately aligned with UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage than with the Diversity of Cultural Expressions Convention, with its focus on cultural goods and services within a market economy. But the phenomenal success of Aboriginal painting in the contemporary art market belies this separation. Ian McLean argues that Aboriginal visual artists ‘invented’ contemporary art, leading the way for a connection to be made between traditional societies and contemporary arts that has had global repercussions.⁸ Indigenous painting overlaps and blurs the categories of traditional knowledge and contemporary cultural expressions, bridging the gap between culture as intangible heritage ‘transmitted from generation to generation’⁹ and cultural expressions in contemporary cultural industries and the art marketplace. This has many implications for the culture cycle model: for instance, it stresses the embeddedness of creativity and cultural production in ‘traditional’ ways of life, and it foregrounds different models of intellectual property and authorship.

In the culture cycle conception, audience reception and enjoyment are given as much weight as cultural production. The focus on the audience is apparent in the work of Metaverse Makeovers whose work accesses new audiences simultaneously engaged in fashion and digital screen culture. Metaverse Makeovers alerts us to the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of popular consumer service industries. Metaverse Makeovers works in the interface of a 'real' world of bodies and places - nail bars and salons in Asia and Australia - that are also digitally augmented spaces, layered with images and information.¹⁰ Technological development is at the centre of the project: Metaverse Makeovers developed a wearable technology app that allows users to create and share nail designs. As artist Thea Baumann describes it, the app is the result of a convergence of '3D gaming, photo sharing, and fashion nails together as a new social mobile product.'¹¹ Metaverse Makeovers emphasizes potentials for aesthetic expression in new consumption spaces, extending the notion of the culture cycle into niches beyond the conventional 'creative industry' model.

The culture cycle model locates arts activity within larger industrial and economic processes. However, it is clear that both Indigenous visual art and art grounded in the convergence of technological communications and new user practices stretch the model considerably. The culture cycle idea also implies more than the transmission of economic value. Art works and cultural activities bring together economic and symbolic values that radiate in unpredictable ways. A more adequate conception of the culture cycle for cultural expressions would need to consider the dimensions of meaning and effect in the reception of artistic works, forms of participation, critical responses, and so on.

4 INCLUSIVE AND DIALOGICAL CURATORIAL PROCESSES ARE A KEY MEANS OF ENHANCING DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS.

Curatorship has become a key process within arts practice, particularly where exchanges between different cultural worlds require interpretation and translation. The traditional function of curating, initially limited to the custodianship of museum collections, has given way to more discursive and dialogical approaches to making exhibitions which 'allow for open-ended, cumulative processes of engagement, interruption and possibility.' It is now commonly accepted that exhibitions (and other forms of presenting and framing creative work) result from 'varying forms of negotiation, relationality, adaptation, and collaboration between subjects and objects'.¹² Curating has arguably become a pivotal cultural process in an increasingly networked world, joining the dots between artists, cultural institutions, art works, framing devices, interpretive strategies, thematising, publication, and collection. Curators take on mediating and linking roles. They often engage in activities beyond the conventional realms of art, such as creating forums and discursive platforms, engaging in social and political activism, or attempting to redefine arts institutions. At its best, the curator's role involves the creation of discursive and aesthetic spaces for exchange, criticism and dialogue, sustaining an important interface for the promotion and framing of diversity of cultural expressions.

Curatorial strategies have been crucial to several of the projects examined in this report. *Edge of Elsewhere* provided a platform to explore ways of extending cultural diversity through sustained community engagement in western Sydney for a three year period. Fourteen prominent artists from Australia and the Asia Pacific were invited to test new modes of engagement as a means of 'increasing opportunities for collaboration, cooperation and the exchange of skills and knowledge between artists and communities'.¹³ The curatorial brief was open-ended; the only requirement for artists was to make culturally relevant, engaged work over a three-year period. *Edge of Elsewhere* provided a means for questioning the boundaries of culture, community and identity. Such mediating processes move well beyond taken-for-granted repertoires of cultural difference, seeking to develop what Nikos Papastergiadis calls 'new strategies for cultural understandings'.¹⁴

For instance, Khaled Sabsabi's three video contributions to *Edge of Elsewhere* –99 (2010), Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement (2011) and *Corner* (2012) were the products of an ongoing exploration of Sufi practices and communities as Sabsabi encountered them in Lebanon, Syria and western Sydney. In his work Sabsabi, an Arab-Australian of Lebanese background, draws on the parallel perspectives gained from the migrant experience. As Sabsabi explained, 'Going between Arab culture and Western or Australian culture, you have the ability to experience and see and to analyse both cultures, both traditions, both histories'.¹⁵ *Edge of Elsewhere* also sought to disseminate and amplify these cultural engagements through an extensive program of public events: symposiums, artist talks and conversations, publications, documentary videos, and blog posts.

The Arab Film Festival, which shares cinematic stories and culture with diverse Australian audiences, is grounded in a somewhat different curating style and intention. The selection and programming of festival films is carried out by a board that shares expertise in Arab cinema, and at the same time maintains close links to Arab-Australian communities. This produces a commitment to both cinematic excellence and to relevance to audiences and their particular interests. In this sense, curating goes beyond the programming of films and takes on many considerations to do with audiences, ideas and themes, current political issues, and so forth. Curating the Arab Film Festival entails a strong ethical dimension, one which seeks to combine aesthetic considerations with a critical and educative role.

Curators have been central players in robust strategies that support notions of cultural diversity and dialogue. More broadly, curating has become a loose metaphor for the mediation that is central to cultural and artistic interchanges. The roles of the curator serve well as a description of the people who provide impetus for the mostly small projects and organisations that characterise new initiatives to promote cultural diversity in the arts. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's describes a curators roles as 'animator, pusher, inspirer, brother, community maker, someone who makes people, work and things happen, who inspires people with ideas, programmes and projects, and who gives them a sort of alphabet for reading what they see but cannot quite decide about'.¹⁶

5 SUPPORTING DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION WILL ENHANCE ART'S ABILITY TO RESONATE AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Art, as conceived in western modernity, has been understood as an autonomous activity. Hence the common opposition to the 'instrumentalising' of art and culture for political or social purposes, which is seen to threaten art's autonomy from other spheres. However, the incorporation of instrumental functions for the arts has been normalised in many areas today, for instance in the creative industries, community arts or cultural diplomacy. What is perhaps most important in this regard is that where art and cultural expressions are utilised for 'non-art' purposes, their use is broadly in accord with the will of relevant cultural constituencies. The integrity of such work lies in the way in which relations are established and maintained with communities of interest.

The most striking example of cultural expressions put to use were the paintings specifically deployed in Indigenous land and sea claims in Arnhem Land and the Kimberley. The impulse to 'paint our country' as a form of legal evidence of ongoing relationship to country has deep roots; for instance, in malleable design elements found in Yolngu bark paintings which have been transferred from rock or sand painting or the painting of bodies in ceremonies. Such cultural expressions are intimately linked to land, natural features, kinship law and social organisation. In supporting its network of Aboriginal Art Centres, ANKAAA has maintained a strategic balance of priorities concerning Indigenous culture as a way of life, as a means of caring for country, and as a vital economic resource. This balance is based on an awareness of the interrelatedness of Indigenous culture, land and economies.

MAV's *Visible* program adopts developmental strategies in supporting emergent cultural groups, particularly refugee communities and new immigrant groups. MAV's flexible program design can be adapted to differing needs, whether an individual musician's career development, or cultural maintenance for newly established community groups. More generally, cultural support for diasporic groups can have international resonances, since diasporic cultures extend transnationally.

The role of curating the link between cinema and audiences in the Arab Film Festival has already been mentioned. Immigrants of Arab background have been the object of much negative stereotyping and hostility in many countries. Arab-Australian communities have also taken on much of the responsibility for anti-racism and social integration activities. The AFF's mandate is 'to address contemporary misrepresentations of Arab peoples and cultures by reflecting the complexity and diversity of Arab experiences, and providing a critical space presenting alternative representations of Arab subjects, cultures and narratives'.¹⁷ The AFF received funding through the Australian Human Rights Commission, brokered and managed through the Australia Council, enabling the AFF to expand the festival to a national scale. The AFF's approach made a good fit with more inclusive approaches to supporting social integration.

The uses of art and culture often extend well beyond immediate value chains or culture cycles. The cases above point to the role of art practices in extending cultural diversity. This is closely connected with vital social and political questions of social and cultural recognition. This does not at all mean that they adopt one-dimensional or doctrinaire approaches; indeed their power would seem to derive from their gathering of multiple perspectives and aesthetic languages, surely the hallmark of a diversity of cultural expressions.

- 1 <http://www.kultour.com.au/programs.html>, viewed 22 January, 2015.
- 2 From the TransLab invitation for arts organisations to host the residency program.
- 3 Websites for Branch Nebular and Theatre Kantanka: <http://www.branchnebula.com/archived-projects/>;
http://www.kantanka.com.au/shows/missing_the_bus_to_david_jones/index.html
- 4 Tony Bennett, 2001, *Differing Diversities. Transversal Study on the Theme of Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity*, report for the Council of Europe. https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/completed/diversity/EN_Diversity_Bennett.pdf
- 5 <http://www.kultour.com.au/programs.html>, viewed 22 January, 2015.
- 6 From the TransLab invitation for arts organisations to host the residency program.
- 7 UNESCO Culture cycle, webpage, Paris, n.d., viewed 22 June 2014, <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/cultural-diversity/cultural-expressions/programmes/global-alliance-for-cultural-diversity/culture-cycle/>>.
- 8 Ian McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art: Writings on Aboriginal art*, Power Publications, Sydney, NSW, 2011.
- 9 UNESCO, Convention for Intangible Cultural Heritage, Article 2.1.
- 10 See Len Manovich, 'The poetics of augmented space', *Visual Communication*, vol 5, no 2, 2006, pp 219-40.
- 11 Claudia Jambor, 'QUT Graduate combines Nail Art and gaming with Metaverse Nail App,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 1, 2015 '<http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/games/qut-graduate-combines-nail-art-and-gaming-with-metaverse-nails-app-20150101-12gez.html>
- 12 Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2012.
- 13 Francis Maravillas, *Edge of Elsewhere: An evaluation report*, Campbelltown Arts Centre [unpublished], Campbelltown, NSW, 2013, p 3.
- 14 Nikos Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 2006, p 4.
- 15 Nick Terrell, 'Round trip', *Incubate*, no 6, 2011, p 55.
- 16 Zygmunt Bauman, cited in Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', in Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (Eds.). *Issues in curating contemporary art and performance*. Intellect, Bristol 2007.
- 17 Arab Film Festival Australia, About us, webpage, viewed 22 June 2014.

SUMMARIES

1. ENHANCING CULTURAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

VISIBLE

Web information: <http://www.multiculturalarts.com.au/>

<p>WHAT IS VISIBLE?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A music mentoring and support program for musicians from new refugee, immigrant and Indigenous Australian communities. • An integral part of a suite of programs run by Multicultural Arts Victoria’s Emerge Cultural Network, a program that supports artists from emerging communities.
<p>THE PROBLEM(S) THE PROJECT ADDRESSES:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project addresses a lack of resources and cultural platforms for musicians from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their communities in general.
<p>CONCEPTION OF DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:</p>	<p>‘It is vitally important that we break down barriers and look at new ways to engage artists and communities from non-English speaking backgrounds in a very real way. It is about systemic change’ – Jill Morgan, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural Arts Victoria.</p>
<p>PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-established community networks identify talented musicians who could benefit from mentoring support aimed at helping them gain industry access. • Music mentoring programs lead to extended networks, lasting friendships and musical collaborations. • Flexible program design can be adapted to different needs, such as an individual’s career development or cultural maintenance for new community groups.
<p>ACHIEVEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE CONVENTION:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective capacity building. • Policy initiative. • Building collaborative partnerships. • International engagement and exchange. • Advocacy for diversity of cultural expressions and the Convention.
<p>WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT VISIBLE?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful music mentoring program well matched to the needs of individual artists as well as communities. • Participants supported by a strong structure across various platforms within what MAV calls a ‘cultural network’. • Strong connections to other programs within Multicultural Arts Victoria, such as festivals, an artist agency, media outlets for music, and youth programs.

ARAB FILM FESTIVAL AUSTRALIA

Web information: <http://arabfilmfestival.com.au/>

<p>WHAT IS THE ARAB FILM FESTIVAL AUSTRALIA (AFFA)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A showcase of stories from Arabic-speaking peoples for diverse Australian audiences. Through film it reflects the complexity and diversity of Arab experiences. • A community-managed cultural event which supports freedom of thought, expression and information.
<p>THE PROBLEM(S) THE PROJECT ADDRESSES:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misrepresentations of Arab culture. • A lack of recognition of diversity of Arab and diasporic cultures.
<p>CONCEPTION OF DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Film culture should provide ‘a critical space presenting alternative representations of the diversity of Arab subjects, cultures and narratives’ – AFFA website. • There is diversity in Arab cultures, as well as Arab contributions to diversity in Australia.
<p>PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION:</p>	<p>The programming of the film festival is linked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a grassroots knowledge of Arab Australian communities and issues • strong engagement with international cinema networks and markets • addressing misconceptions about Arab people and societies through diverse film narratives • developing a critical space for reflection and dialogue.
<p>ACHIEVEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE CONVENTION:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extending diversity in the Australian film market. • Increasing access to arts. • Supporting artists and building capacity
<p>WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT AFFA?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong community base in Arab Australian communities in western Sydney. • Cultural dialogue based on strong engagement with audiences • It has a focus on social and political relevance, and a close connection to the arts production community, particularly young people.
<p>THE FUTURE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend into new areas such as local production of Arab Australian films, mentoring, and forums on Arab screen culture.

2. FOSTERING CULTURAL INNOVATION THROUGH ARTIST-MEDIATED APPROACHES

EDGE OF ELSEWHERE

Web information: <http://edgeofelsewhere.wordpress.com/>
<http://www.4a.com.au/edge-of-elsewhere/>

<p>WHAT WAS EDGE OF ELSEWHERE?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A three-year project of the Campbelltown Arts Centre and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art that focused on commissioning contemporary artists from Australia, Asia and the Pacific to create new works that respond to, and engage with, the diverse communities of Sydney. • The flagship contemporary art project of the Sydney Festival’s program from 2010–2012. • Work sought to extend reflection on ‘what or where a community is, and how artists can hope to truly engage with these communities’ – Edge of Elsewhere website.
<p>THE PROBLEM(S) THE PROJECT ADDRESSES:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of recognition of established and emerging cultural groups in the west of Sydney, the largest city in Australia.
<p>CONCEPTION OF DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary arts as a means of generating participatory engagement amongst emergent communities in Sydney.
<p>PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A curatorial group selected artists to make work through community engagements. • 14 national and international artists were involved over a three-year period. • Artists developed work through community engagement. • The program supported experimentation in the participatory process, resulting in many styles of engagement.
<p>ACHIEVEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE CONVENTION:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributing to diversity of cultural expressions through a proliferation of contemporary artworks and community engagements. • Use of participatory processes in contemporary art to explore novel forms of cultural expression, as well as intra-cultural and intercultural engagement.
<p>WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT EDGE OF ELSEWHERE?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong participatory work was carried out over a long period, enabling a thorough exploration of engagement processes. • The meaning and form of cultural diversity and community were not assumed, but maintained as open questions animating the projects.

METAVVERSE MAKEOVERS

Web information: <http://www.metaverse-makeovers.net/site/>
http://aphids.net/projects/Metaverse_Makeovers

<p>WHAT IS METAVVERSE MAKEOVERS?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaverse Makeovers developed a participatory artwork, Metaverse Nails, in which nail technicians and their clientele take part in a digitally augmented nail treatment. • Staged performances have taken place in Shanghai, Melbourne, Sydney, Darwin and Brisbane.
<p>THE PROBLEM(S) THE PROJECT ADDRESSES:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of women’s sociality and community in the intersecting practices of digital communication, handheld devices and fashion.
<p>CONCEPTION OF DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary cultural expressions are increasingly based in the ubiquity of digital media, information technologies and mobile devices. • Diversity of expression is located in new intersections of shared cultural taste, digital communication, and physical locations such as nail bars.
<p>PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performances entail working closely with nail technicians and nail bars. • 3D virtual jewellery appears to burst out of clients’ fingernails when viewed through a mobile device, using a mobile application to respond to QR markers placed on the nails.
<p>ACHIEVEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE CONVENTION:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting diversity of cultural expressions in the digital art and live art domains across the whole cultural cycle.
<p>WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT METAVVERSE MAKEOVERS?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the interplay of fashion, mobile devices and social media as a basis for cultural expressions. • Technical innovation in augmented reality. • Extends of notions of community and cultural expression through digital media and site-specific performance.
<p>THE FUTURE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the project through marketing products, apps and expertise in Asian markets • Propel the project using fast-developing augmented reality technologies.

TRANSLAB

WHAT WAS TRANSLAB?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Australia Council initiative that supported the development of new intercultural and interdisciplinary performance. Implemented by the Theatre section of the Australia Council, and delivered by Arts House, Melbourne and Performance Space, Sydney, in 2008 and 2009.
THE PROBLEM(S) THE PROJECT ADDRESSES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for a research and development phase to support the specific demands of intercultural performance. • A lack of continuity for groups practicing cross-cultural theatre and performance. • The need for more dialogue and networks of artists engaged in intercultural performance.
CONCEPTION OF DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of cultural expressions is enhanced through intercultural collaboration and it has the potential to generate distinctive expressions and performance forms.
PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION:	<p>The TransLab program provided residencies that offered critical and supportive environments for artists from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertake research and development • experiment with new processes for creating work • generate new intercultural performance projects.
ACHIEVEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE CONVENTION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building capacity for the cross-cultural performance field. • Deepening creative outcomes in theatre and performance through a research and development phase that supported artists and creators.
WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT TRANSLAB?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-designed policy initiative to better enable research and development through a curated residency program. • Support of formal innovation in intercultural performance resulting in four successful productions.

3. ASCERTAINING CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INDUSTRY-BASED APPROACHES

ASSOCIATION OF NORTHERN KIMBERLEY AND ARNHAM ABORIGINAL ARTISTS

- Web information:**
- <http://www.ankaaa.org.au/>
 - <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/written-on-a-bark/4762442> (Radio National program on Harvesting Traditional Knowledge)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml2Z3nDBSEk> (WIN presentation)

WHAT IS ANKAAA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ANKAAA supports and advocates for a network of Aboriginal Art Centres and some 5,000 artists across northern Australia.
CASES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Harvesting Traditional Knowledge</i> is a partnership program concerned with ways of conserving and caring for traditional materials and artefacts such as bark paintings. Museum and art gallery conservators are brought together with Indigenous practitioners to share experiences and techniques on country.• ANKAAA's presentation at the 2013 World Indigenous Network Conference explored how collective painting projects in Eastern Arnhem Land and in the Kimberley were used successfully in land and sea rights cases.
THE PROBLEM(S) THE PROJECT ADDRESSES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aboriginal artists and art centres have pressing problems caring for artefacts.• Conservators working with collections of Aboriginal artefacts had little experience of the actual context of their creation.
CONCEPTION OF DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversity within ANKAAA reflects the diversity of Indigenous cultures.• Cultural expressions are closely linked to an intrinsic sense of culture that is intimately linked to land, nature, kinship, law, social organisation and cosmology. These expressions are the basis for thriving arts practices linked to the (intercultural) worlds of contemporary art.
PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dialogue between Indigenous artists and conservators "on country" in the <i>Harvesting Traditional Knowledge</i> workshop enables richer understanding of materials in their social and cultural context.
ACHIEVEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE CONVENTION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protecting material traditions, supporting artists, and building capacity.• Building ongoing networks between artists on the ground and key museums to strengthen partnerships and create greater Indigenous involvement in the care and presentation of important artefacts.
WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT ANKAAA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic balancing of priorities concerning Indigenous culture as way of life, as a means of caring for country, and as an economic resource.

KULTOUR

Web information: • <http://www.kultour.com.au/>

WHAT IS KULTOUR?	<p>Founded as an initiative of the Australia Council's Arts for a Multicultural Australia and founded in 2001, Kultour is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'the national voice advocating for the importance of cultural diversity in the activation of and participation in the arts for the benefit of all Australians, reflecting our multicultural society' – Kultour submission to the 2011 public consultation on the National Cultural Policy• supports a network of artists actively contributing to the diversity of cultural expressions in Australia• works with partners and stakeholders to advocate and raise the profile of arts that reflect a multicultural, socially inclusive Australian society• provides professional development opportunities and services for artists of diverse cultural backgrounds, Kultour company members and the arts community in the presentation and touring of culturally diverse work.
THE PROBLEM(S) THE PROJECT ADDRESSES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The need to support networks of artists and arts workers to adapt to changing conceptions of multicultural arts and diversity in Australia.
CONCEPTION OF DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversity in society as a whole, rather than diversity as a description of minorities or margins.• Advocacy for diversity through all of arts practices.
PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kultour's member organisations, partners and ongoing contacts form a nationwide network of bodies supporting diversity in the arts.• Advocacy within a network activates multiple voices to connect different bodies, maintain trust, and garner support for common causes.
ACHIEVEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE CONVENTION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting artists and artist development.• Advocating and promoting diversity of cultural expressions.• Building capacity and networking.
WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT KULTOUR?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The transition of Kultour from having an important, but limited, function as a multicultural touring agent, to having a national network focused on advocacy, service and support, and development for culturally and linguistically diverse artists.

BLACK&WRITE!

Web information: • <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/whats-on/awards/blackwrite>

WHAT IS BLACK&WRITE!?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • black&write! is a program based in the State Library of Queensland that combines a national Indigenous writing fellowship with a mentoring program for Indigenous editors
THE PROBLEM(S) THE PROJECT ADDRESSES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underrepresentation of Indigenous writers being published • A lack of Indigenous editors working in the publishing industry.
CONCEPTION OF DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting Indigenous writing and publication to contribute to diversity of cultural expression. • Promoting diversity within Indigenous writing, including new genres and readership.
PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous writers are chosen through an annual literary competition to work with Indigenous editors to develop their book for publication. • Publication is guaranteed through black&write! partner Magabala Books. • A supportive Indigenous writing community is developed. • Indigenous OnScreen Trainee Editors Program locates Indigenous editors in remote/regional areas.
ACHIEVEMENTS IN TERMS OF THE CONVENTION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting culturally diverse expressions in the book publishing industry. • Building capacity in the publishing industry, Indigenous communities, and regional and remote areas. • Developing innovative programs.
WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT BLACK&WRITE!?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A unique and well-conceived program that concretely addresses a question of capacity within the publishing industry. • It adopts a dual strategy of linking writers, and training and mentoring Indigenous editors to develop manuscripts to a high standard. • It expands the capacity of Indigenous writers by enhancing the writing environment and process through editorial collaboration.
THE FUTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for publishing in digital media.

VISIBLE

Visible is a mentoring and support program catering to musicians from new refugee, immigrant and Indigenous Australian communities. Developed by Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV), Visible began as a small-scale health initiative in 2005 that aimed to help recently arrived African musicians from the Horn of Africa. The mentorship program works with musicians to develop their knowledge of the Australian music industry, to encourage connections with other artists and arts workers to develop new musical projects through all aspects of the cultural value chain. Participants produce a high quality recording, which is of value in promoting their work. These recordings are featured annually on the popular Visible compilations. In addition to supporting musical careers, Visible helps groups pursue cultural development aims through music. The Visible program is integrally linked to MAV programs such as the Emerge Cultural Network, Black Harmony Gatherings, Music Deli and the MAV Artist Agency.

PART 1: THE VISIBLE PROGRAM AND MULTICULTURAL ARTS VICTORIA

Multicultural Arts Victoria reflects changing approaches to supporting cultural diversity. MAV's history coincides with the period of official multicultural policy in Australia. MAV had its beginnings in the Festival of All Nations, a local multicultural festival centred on the inner-Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy, which began in 1973. MAV gradually developed as a state-wide organisation committed to arts development, the promotion of artists from diverse cultural groupings, community education and advocacy.¹

When Jill Morgan began as Executive Officer in 2003, MAV reformulated its objectives in broader terms, and incorporated an ideal of access and participation in the arts by all cultures. This inclusiveness was not only about working with well-established migrant groups. MAV was more proactive: they proposed 'identifying and promoting new and emerging artists and communities', and committed to excellence and innovation in multicultural arts.² MAV would focus on recently arrived emerging and refugee artists and communities, particularly from Africa.

The state of Victoria was a major place of settlement for refugees and family union immigrants from the Horn of Africa, representing over 60 percent of people settling through Australia's humanitarian settlement program. The Horn of Africa - including Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia - has seen some of the world's worst civil strife, poverty and famine, which are often legacies of European colonisation. Refugees and immigrants from this region face a range of challenges stemming from the effects of war, displacement and social fragmentation. They also face difficulties associated with settling in Australia, including language and educational challenges, racism and discrimination.³ A positive aspect discovered by MAV was the presence of many artists, particularly musicians. In an interview Jill Morgan, now Chief Executive Officer of MAV, observed:

About eight years ago we realised that there was no entry points for new and emerging artists who were refugee artists. So we developed what we called the Emerge Cultural Network, and it started in Fitzroy. And it led to the Visible mentoring program, because many artists that were coming in were highly skilled arts practitioners, but they didn't understand how to get connected, you know; the existing networks and the local lie of the land.⁴

In 2004, MAV organised a Refugee and Asylum Seekers Festival to highlight the wealth of cultural expression among newly arrived refugee communities. At this time refugees and asylum seekers were increasingly becoming objects of hostility and fear in the wake of government 'border protection' agendas. MAV developed the Emerge Cultural Network – which includes the *Visible* project – as a comprehensive program for working with refugee communities.

The conception of diversity in this program is an activist approach to working towards social justice and inclusion by attempting to overcome obstacles to cultural participation. As Jill Morgan put it:

It is vitally important that we break down barriers and look at new ways to engage artists and communities from non-English speaking backgrounds in a very real way. It is about systemic change.⁵

This highlights a dimension of Australian multicultural thinking that is often obscured: an emphasis on social justice, rather than the mere recognition of cultural difference. This dimension is basic to the *Visible* program, which supports artists in sustaining their work in an ongoing way.

In a way MAV's engagement with African communities, and particularly with African music, was a fortuitous one. As MAV Artistic Program Manager Anita Larkin put it in our interview, they provided

strong, visible cultures that could be accessible to the wider community as well. We had some strong links to those communities as well to build on. I suppose when you're a tiny ... we were a very tiny organisation at that point; you focus on your strengths. So yeah, I suppose the first few years of the project focused mostly on African culture.

It is worth noting the organic nature of MAV – it has a strong community base with many volunteers. In 2003, there was only one full-time worker. MAV now has some 14 workers housed in an elegant Victorian town hall building in South Melbourne. Although still a very lean arts organisation, MAV has become something of a national leader in running programs supporting diverse cultural expressions. What has propelled this evolution? We will concentrate on *Visible*: its process, the way it links with other elements of MAV's program, and its strategy as cultural development.

We interviewed program managers, participants and mentors. In all of these interviews there was a sense of excitement about the interface between musical exchanges, and the recognition of emerging cultures and communities in Australian society. It was the music itself that was at the core of this enthusiasm.

PART 2: THE VISIBLE PROGRAM: PROCESS

They set up this model where they would go to the communities, find these people, and then hook them up with professional musicians already in the scene. So they could continue with their craft while living in Australia. I took on a producer's role because I actually loved it so much. The big thing about it was - every time you met with a Sudanese band or a Somalian band or an Ethiopian band, you kind of went to their country. For me it was like going on an international trip every time we went to work in the studio.

Interview with Nicky Bomba,
Visible mentor and producer

The Visible program, at the simplest level, is a mentoring program that supports musical participation by individuals and groups from emergent communities. Artists spend time with a mentor, chosen as the most appropriate person to match their needs. A program of workshops and seminars supports practical skills in areas such as recording techniques, business management, publicity, finding gigs, understanding the Australian music industry and writing grant applications.

Visible took shape organically around the needs of musicians. The Visible program was largely developed by Anita Larkin, herself a seasoned musician with a cosmopolitan curiosity about other music styles. Visible is very much grounded in an enthusiasm for musical interaction and a practical knowledge of musicians' networks and ways of making connections. The first Visible program in 2005, supported five groups originating from the Horn of Africa who performed at MAV's Refugee and Asylum Seekers Festival, now the Emerge Festival. Musicians in this first Visible intake included Dereb Desalegn and the members of hip hop duo, Diafrix.⁶

While the festival was successful in introducing and showcasing new cultural expressions, a one-off performance could not provide a firm basis for enabling African musicians to continue their careers. The Visible program was refined and recording became a central focus for the mentoring program. The aim was to produce one high-quality song recording that could be used by the artist as publicity and to secure work. The tracks were then assembled in the annually released Visible compilation CDs.

Acclimatising artists to the recording studio had multiple benefits. Some artists had no recording experience, and mentoring could be done in the studio. As well as getting people used to recording processes, it also encouraged musical refinement, as recording exposes 'rough edges' and involves many decisions about the composition and quality of work. Nicky Bomba, who recorded many of the bands in Visible's first four years, recalls:

It was about creating a sense of comfort, like they were in their own lounge room. And I would talk about what we were doing. Like the recording process doesn't have to be a clinical, hard process. We had a lot of fun. And the fact that they are digital nowadays, if you don't get it right, just do it again, it's okay. So, no real pressure. I think that was kind of a big thing in the past to have recording studios when everything was a big expense. Nowadays, with the technology, the whole thing can be quite relaxed.

Professional recording provided a high-quality lasting document of the artist's work, which is indispensable for promotion in the YouTube era. Musicians have also been encouraged to develop portfolios, e-press kits and websites as means to promote their work. Artist development workshops were added, enabling participants to learn more about the Australian music industry, for example how to manage a music business, and ways to seek funding. Visible developed music

industry workshops that encouraged a broad grasp of the skills required to negotiate a path in what is a difficult and precarious environment for anyone, let alone for people faced with larger issues of adapting to a very different society and cultural framework. These workshops enabled musicians to develop a realistic understanding of their position within the music industry (neither selling themselves short, nor getting too caught up in fantasies); the mechanics of finding work; strategies for releasing recordings as an independent producer; and the administrative and legal skills of managing a business.⁷ As Jess Fairfax, MAV Project Officer and Visible Program Manager, explained in our interview, 'The whole idea is that after the program they have enough material and enough knowledge so they can take it on and not be dependent on the program'. The combination of mentoring exchange, music industry workshops, and the networking encouraged by MAV events allowed musicians to orient themselves within the Australian music scene.

Visible is not a fixed program aimed at producing a single outcome. Rather, Visible is attuned to respond flexibly and sensitively to the particular needs of artists and communities. Participants can be involved in different ways and with different intensities, and the demands of recent arrival in Australia, acculturation and language skills are crucial to take into account. Mentors are chosen not just on the basis of their professional skills and background. They are also chosen for their willingness and capacity to engage across cultural boundaries. Anita Larkin observes:

Part of it has been trying to choose people who have some empathy with the migrant experience. So whether they've been migrants themselves or whether they have an interest in multiculturalism, they should be prepared to be just more than 'fees for service', to invest a bit of passion and energy. Quite often the mentoring is about developing friendships as well with professional artists that can support

and encourage them. Sometimes that's all people need: they might not have actually learnt a lot through the mentoring but just being supported, acknowledged, encouraged and validated as well, by someone who's a professional artist.

Hence people participate in different ways. Aminata Doumbia, a talented and eclectic singer with Mandingo and Burundian Tutsi background, didn't feel she needed much technical assistance from Visible. She has drawn on the program to promote her band and locate work opportunities, activities she could not undertake while working full time. 'If they hear of a gig they holler', she says. Visible attempts to provide 'pathways' appropriate to the particular needs of musicians and their current situation. Anita Larkin says:

We always try and work with people for probably two or three years in the program. It's that pathway, and linking artists to different opportunities along the way. It's developed organically in response to the needs of the musicians. So it's not just prescribing stuff - okay, we're going to do this and this now. But actually - what are these people needing and wanting? This involves a lot of consultation along the way and feedback from the artists.

It should be clear that the mentorships are hardly a one-way exchange where the mentor simply imparts knowledge to the mentored musician. Rather, the relationship between artists and mentor could release musical potential that can be shared by both mentor and mentee. Many longer-term creative relationships have developed from these mentorships. Sometimes the artist being mentored has as much experience as the mentor. Mentor Jason Heerah remarked that the artist he was working with, Bitsat Seyoum, had played more gigs than he had.⁸ On a musical level, the exchange will often generate creative outcomes for both mentor and mentee. Nicky Bomba recalls the spark he felt in his first meeting with Ethiopian musician Dereb Desalegn in 2006:

That was a beautiful experience ... Anita told me about Dereb, and it came good the first time I met him. He came to my place, he got out the masenko,⁹ he started singing, and I was blown away. My first response was: wow, whatever he's playing, it's ancient, it's relevant, it's resonating, it's powerful. And I said look, let's start recording now. I've got a studio at home - we went upstairs and did one song. And we loved what we were doing together. It was just the two of us - basically I played all the instruments. He sang, and I'd give him different options and he'd go yep, or no. It was definitely a hybrid. And we ended up doing an album together.

The album recorded by the pair, Drums and Lions, gained them entry into the prestigious WOMAD festival. Through producer Tony Buchen, Dereb Desalegn recorded a fine album and formed a group called Dereb the Ambassador with largely local Australian musicians. For these musicians, playing with Desalegn is a kind of school in other musical approaches, for instance the particular harmonic language of Ethiopian music, or distinctive styles of saxophone playing. The album Dereb the Ambassador pays homage to a 'golden age' of Ethiopian soul in the 1960s.

CASE STUDY: DANNY ATLAW

Daniel Atlaw Seifu, who has worked with Dereb Desalegn, is another Ethiopian who has come through the Visible program. Atlaw's case illustrates how Visible operates strategically to support musicians to understand the Australian music industry, develop networks and engage in projects with local musicians. Although Atlaw had been a well-known musician working with the Ethiopian National Theatre, when he arrived in Australia in 2007 he had no thoughts of being a musician. As he related in our interview:

At that time it was dark, very dark. I had no plans to be a musician - I had been a musician in another country. I knew everything over there, but here I didn't have any idea.

This sense of blockage and discontinuity was alleviated by participation in Visible, giving Atlaw the confidence to embark on musical projects. Firstly, he formed the band Afro Habesha, which in his words played 'the real Ethiopian way of music'. Then, several years ago, Atlaw founded JAzmaris, a band that plays Ethio-jazz, a style that fuses jazz and Ethiopian harmonic structures, associated with Mulatu Astatke, an Ethiopian who worked with jazz musicians in the USA. Atlaw wanted a sound 'like more mixing stuff, the Ethio-jazz thing mixed with the Australian style of music'.

Visible supported Atlaw's projects in a number of ways. As Atlaw had ample technical skills and familiarity with recording, he was mentored with Paul Anderson, the Music Program Manager at the Melbourne Arts Centre. Anderson helped Atlaw with management issues and getting to know the industry in Australia. Atlaw was involved in recordings for the annual Visible samplers, and participated in events sponsored by MAV, such as Emerge Festivals.

MAV facilitated the Lions on the Move Tour of Ethiopia in 2011, which saw Atlaw perform with Dereb Desalegn and Dereb the Ambassador. This was organised through the Australian International Cultural Council, a program of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The tour also involved a partnership with the National Theatre of Ethiopia, where Atlaw had worked before coming to Australia. The band played at the National Theatre in Addis Ababa, as well as a fundraising concert at Gondar, the old Ethiopian capital.¹⁰ 'We played very well, and people were very excited', Atlaw said, 'they have a lot of good bands, but they have never seen white musicians playing Ethiopian music'.

The musicians also participated in workshops with Ethiopian musicians at the National Theatre and the Yared Music School, where Atlaw had studied. He says:

The Australian musicians they showed their way of jazz style, and the Ethiopian musicians showed them the way they were treating Ethiopian music. It was very interesting. It was good for our Ethiopian music and it's good for Australian music too. Then I took the Australian musicians and they got a lot of chance to see how Ethiopian music is. We went to clubs, we listened to music. The Australian musicians had a big experience from that. I think it was a very successful relationship.

Atlaw is proud of the role he played on the tour: 'It's a good thing for me. It encouraged me to do more for this multiculturalism. And it helped me artistically'.

Recently, MAV facilitated an Australian tour with an iconic figure of Ethiopian music, Mahmoud Ahmed, now living in Canada. As Jess Fairfax put it:

Danny's band supported Mahmoud, and backed him, and got to play at the Mona Foma [an arts and music festival in Tasmania] and the Melbourne Arts Centre. What it has done for that band is amazing. First they had to really pull it together and rehearse like crazy, so they're sounding amazingly tight. Second of all, the connections are all made with the Mona Foma; they performed in front of thousands and thousands of people. And it really firmed the band up and I think they've got a lot more chance now of getting grants and work.

Events such as this are important for communities like the Ethiopian community in Melbourne. Community members are unfamiliar with mainstream cultural institutions, so marketing through the normal media channels is not effective.¹¹ Atlaw described the Melbourne concert:

It was a really good moment. That was my dream, for this thing to happen. Especially for my community, we have a lot of problems community-wise ... It's a new community too so people don't know where the Arts Centre is. They don't know where it is, and it's our arts centre. And they thought it costs a hundred bucks or two hundred bucks [to see Mahmoud Ahmed]. They always ask me, yeah it's forty bucks, no worries.

Atlaw and MAV put a lot of energy into promoting the concert through Ethiopian community networks, both as a way of bringing new audiences to these institutions, and as an event for an emerging community to recognise its cultural value. Jess Fairfax observed:

The Arts Centre had never seen an entire theatre full of Ethiopians dancing and going crazy. We were able to bring a new audience into these very white institutions that don't usually entice community members, through Mahmoud Ahmed and opening up these networks.

Atlaw has become something of an ambassador for the kind of multiculturalism that MAV promotes. He is grateful for the opportunities to participate musically. Speaking with Beat magazine (n.d.) he explained:

I've [been given] a chance to promote my music and show people my music. Generally, I wouldn't get that chance, and [without my involvement in Visible], I probably wouldn't be able to play here like I do now: playing with two or three different bands. That's how I met all of these other musicians, through Visible, and my travels.¹²

The Visible program is a way of building cultural capacity that can then lead to other opportunities. MAV articulates the Visible process as a part of a larger developmental model, a 'strategic development' of both artists and communities. They explain this flexible strategy in terms of 'stepping stones' that create cultural platforms appropriate to the needs and trajectories of particular new communities.¹³ In Atlaw's case, the steps have involved mentoring, professional development, recording, showcasing through festivals such as the Emerge Festivals and the Visible Sessions, media exposure, platforms for creating new work, and international touring and collaborations. This approach supports and promotes artists through all phases of the cultural cycle. MAV's support for the tour of Ethiopia and for the collaboration with Mahmoud Ahmed was recognition of the diasporic scale of music practices, markets and audiences. These strategies form a kind of cultural diplomacy 'from below'. The tour by Mahmoud Ahmed was used to open up new audiences for arts institutions as well as extend the cultural access of Ethiopians. This is in line with the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions' encouragement of programs for disadvantaged groups 'to facilitate their access to cultural goods and services'.¹⁴

Visible doesn't only focus on supporting career pathways for professional musicians; it can also be part of a cultural development process for emerging communities. An example is the small Burundian community centred in the Melbourne suburb of Brimbank that came to Australia largely through refugees programs. When approached by a Burundian organisation, MAV found that there were few accessible cultural resources or avenues for cultural expression. As drumming is a key cultural practice, Burundians wanted to build drums in Australia so that these traditions could be handed down. This had been difficult, given that many of the young people had been born in refugee camps. Around 20 men and boys were involved in Visible workshops in drum making, mentored by other Africans experienced in drum-making and able to access materials such as skins. Their efforts were aimed at a performance for the Burundian Independence Day. MAV supported this performance and linked it to the Emerge Festival in June 2011.¹⁵ Since then, the Burundian drummers have been provided with rehearsal space to take part in festivals. In addition, MAV supported a filmmaking program in which Burundians were intensively mentored in filmmaking skills, enabling them to put together *Ubuzima Bushasha*, a program of eight short films documenting aspects of Burundian culture and stories of the Melbourne community, including the drum project.¹⁶

MAV supported these cultural maintenance efforts, which were aimed at sustaining careers in the arts, but the identities of emerging communities. As Anita Larkin expressed it:

They're using the arts as a tool to come together and share their culture and be profiled in the wider community and have some sense of identity with the broad Aussie mix.

She recalls a Burundian man speaking about the healing effects of the Independence Day celebrations: he'd spent years in refugee camps and had not even wanted to call himself Burundian. The relationship between personal identity and cultural pride grounded in cultural expression is particularly important where people have been destabilised by traumatic events.

MAV's programs, including Visible, incorporate both the artistic domain and other non-art purposes without too much contradiction. In response to a question about how MAV combines social outcomes with artistic ones, Jill Morgan suggested:

In doing a program like this, yes the quality of the art is absolutely critical, but also the social inclusion aspects are vitally important. What we do is we walk with those two intentions through all our programs. It's not just about art just for art's sake - it's to present quality art while we are ensuring that social inclusion is also an outcome.

PART 3: LIKE PEELING AN ONION: VISIBLE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MAV

We have concentrated on the Visible program in this case study, although Visible is in many ways linked to the larger strategies of Multicultural Arts Victoria. The cultural capacity building function of Visible can be considered as a base for MAV's music-based cultural development programs, such as:

- the Emerge Festivals and other events supported by MAV which aim to increase recognition of the cultural expression of emerging communities
- Connect, a cultural mentoring and youth advocacy program¹⁷
- the annual Black Harmony Gatherings, in which Indigenous and African artists combine in an anti-racism celebration¹⁸
- audience development strategies such as the MIX IT UP partnership with the Melbourne Arts Centre, which aimed to draw new audiences for diverse cultural expressions, as well as bringing new kinds of arts and cultural expression into established cultural institutions¹⁹
- MAV's Artist Agency, which is able to source artists for events, festivals, and education purposes²⁰
- Music Deli, a radio program that presents diverse musical styles in live concert recordings on the national broadcaster Radio National, which has often been involved with MAV in co-producing programs and concerts²¹
- MAV's International Artistic Program, which includes the above-mentioned Ethiopian tour, develops partnerships to enhance pathways for artists internationally and in diasporas.²²

The interrelated and interlocking nature of these programs means that Visible participants are supported by a strong structure that links various platforms within what MAV terms a 'cultural network'. These platforms match various stages of what UNESCO calls the 'culture cycle' for cultural expressions: creation, production, dissemination, audience reception, and consumption/participation.²³ The culture cycle involves not just artists and cultural producers, but the many people and organisations that distribute, publicise, involve audiences, and create narratives around the work. This involves the formation of myriad partnerships (formal and informal) to share information about relevant cultural networks and fields, from grassroots contacts with emergent communities, to various enablers in cultural industries and government.

MAV is adept at drawing together these kind of strategic partnerships, as evidenced by the 'stepping stones' supporting Danny Atlaw's musical activities. MAV is aware of the many dimensions of promoting cultural expressions. Supporting Ethiopian musicians in Australia also involves promoting Ethiopian music, encouraging new audiences in venues such as the Melbourne Arts Centre, and activating interest throughout the Ethiopian diaspora by supporting international tours and cultural exchanges such as the Lions on the Move Tour of Ethiopia and the Australian tour of Mahmoud Ahmed.

MAV's evolution from a community festival to a broad-based arts organisation with a strong and proactive program exemplifies recent shifts in thinking about cultural strategies: from a communal to a professional emphasis; from a focus on local communities to wider cultural networks; from local community action to an understanding of international demographic trends and flows. Nevertheless, MAV has maintained a strong interest in advocacy and social justice. The organisation has been a strong advocate of inclusive policies including the rights of asylum seekers, both in the public domain and through its programs.

MAV has shown a strong awareness of the Convention. MAV's annual program also includes events linked to the United Nations (UN)'s Elimination of Racial Discrimination Convention, such as the annual Black Harmony Gathering; UN World Refugee Day; and UN Human Rights Day. 'All our major initiatives are linked to UNESCO ideology, if you like', Jill Morgan commented. But MAV is more proactive than this. Their approach to working with immigrant and refugee groups resonates with the sentiments of a commentator (2010) who has suggested that action to support the Convention should 'go beyond the adoption of general measures and specifically address the systemic barriers faced by minorities in creating and enjoying their own cultural expression'.²⁴

The Visible program is strong in most areas suggested by the Convention. Visible's structures and policy are well thought out and flexible enough to cover a range of individual and community needs. Visible is closely linked with MAV's supportive programs and strategies, which are flexible enough to involve other partnerships within an overall developmental strategy. Visible's *raison d'être* is capacity building, and its mentoring program has effects well beyond the person being mentored: mentors, other musicians, communities and audiences often benefit from enhanced knowledge and skills.

As in the case of the Ethiopian musicians' shows, Visible mentorships can lead to international exchanges and collaborations. Indeed the program is built on intercultural exchange. In terms of analysis and sharing of information, the workings and philosophy of Visible - and MAV programs more generally - are often shared with various levels of government, arts audiences, and NGOs. Visible's visibility is necessary for its success.

Helene George, UNESCO-appointed Expert in Cultural Governance and Sustainable Development for the 2005 Convention, made the following comments:

Multicultural Arts Victoria and its programs such as Visible align directly with the spirit, objectives and guiding principles of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The Visible program provides immigrants direct access to the cultural industry systems of Australia. In doing so it promotes greater diversity of cultural expressions and fosters social cohesion for artists, communities and audiences alike.

Article 11 states "Parties shall encourage active participation of civil society..."²⁵ MAV by design and dedication is playing the most active role in the implementation of the 2005 Convention in Australia.²⁶

On the one hand, the policy responsibility for the implementation of the Convention lies firmly with its signatory governments. On the other hand, implementation will necessarily require civil society response and mobilisation. We can expect Multicultural Arts Victoria to be at the forefront of that advocacy.

PLAYLIST

Dereb & Bomba, 'Yematbehla Wof'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwWwMcOSXgw>

Dereb the Ambassador, 'Ambasez'

http://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_831985&feature=iv&src_vid=3KM4jfVor4E&v=p9cwguZdhME

Mahmoud Ahmed and JAzmaris, 'Anchi Balegame'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aR4dCgf-oY>

Bitsat Seyoum, 'Alsemi Geba Belew'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPQQTr1LGvk>

Seble Girma and JAzmaris, 'Far from Ambasel'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZssEesRwmOQ>

- 1 Paul Clarkson, *Giving Voice: A history of Multicultural Arts Victoria*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, Vic, 2011, pp 26–27.
- 2 Clarkson, *Giving Voice*, p 90.
- 3 For issues faced by young people, see Pooja Sawrikar, Megan Griffiths and Kristy Muir, *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People and Mentoring: The case of Horn of African young people in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, ACT, 2008, pp 71–82. Available from: <https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/40_Report_NYARS_CALD_Nov08.pdf>.
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- 5 Clarkson, *Giving Voice*, p 90.
- 6 MAV, Refugee & Asylum Seekers Festival 2005, webpage, South Melbourne, Vic, 2005, viewed 10 January 2013, <<http://www.multiculturalarts.com.au/events2005/refugeefestival.shtml>>.
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- 8 Kylie Northover, 'A Star of Ethiopia shines anew', *The Age*, 15 June 2013.
- 9 A single-string bowed lute commonly featured in Ethiopian and Eritrean music.
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- 14 UNESCO, Articles 7, 8 and 17 of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; Operational guidelines; Measures to promote and protect cultural expressions; Approved by the Conference of Parties at its second session (June 2009), guidelines, Paris, 2009, p 2, viewed 10 September 2013, <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/Conv2005_DO_Art_7_8_17_EN.pdf>.
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CASE STUDY

ARAB FILM FESTIVAL AUSTRALIA

*The Arab Film Festival Australia showcases stories from Arabic-speaking peoples to diverse Australian audiences through film, reflecting the 'complexity and diversity of Arab experiences'. A primary aim is to address the (mis)representations of Arab peoples and cultures by 'providing a critical space presenting alternative representations of Arab subjects, cultures and narratives. A community-managed cultural event, the Festival supports freedom of thought, expression and information, as well as diversity of screen media to enable cultural expressions to flourish.'*¹

PART 1: ARAB FILM FESTIVAL AUSTRALIA AND WESTERN SYDNEY

Arab Film Festival Australia (AFFA) grew more or less organically in the western suburbs of Sydney, an area that has attracted the highest concentration of Arabic-speaking people in Australia.² One commentator has remarked that the festival came about 'almost by accident'.³ Perhaps it was through tenacity rather than by accident. We briefly trace the somewhat sporadic history of AFFA and how the Festival developed.

The first Sydney Arab Film Festival was an outgrowth of an art exhibition, *East of Somewhere*, at Casula Powerhouse in 2001. So much video material was received for that exhibition that a three-day satellite event was held at the Roxy Cinema in Parramatta. There was a strong desire to present different images and stories of and by Arab people, given the prevalence of negative representations of Arab people in Australia from the 1990s onwards. These imaginings of an 'Arab other' brought together national anxieties about terrorism, crime and cultural difference in a highly damaging and divisive way.⁴ The original event was organised as a combined effort of western Sydney communities and arts organisations: Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE), Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, and Fairfield Community Resource Centre. At the time, ICE was a small community information and arts organisation in Parramatta,

headed by artist and activist Lena Nahlous. Lena is an important advocate for multicultural arts who helped ICE grow into a significant regional arts promoter. In 2008, ICE was selected as a 'key producer' organisation by the Australia Council, recognised for their 'outstanding leadership and success in community arts and cultural development'.⁵

In 2004, ICE hosted an evening of short films by Arab Australians, a BIG Night of Arab Shorts. The event was presented as the 'Sydney Arab Film Festival'. Its stated aims were 'to create an independent space for the artistic development of Arab Australian filmmakers, and to present stories emerging from diverse Arabic speaking cultures'.⁶

In 2005, ICE managed an ambitious attempt to launch a bigger festival showing 48 films over two weeks across western Sydney, in Parramatta, Bankstown and Campbelltown.⁷ This event was a serious curated film program that included a retrospective of Egyptian films from 1947-71. However, the scale of the event was perhaps too much of a strain on the organisation. As AFFA Co-Director and ICE Cultural Development Program Manager Mouna Zaylah recalls: 'we went from something quite small to something really big, and we knew that we needed something kind of in between'.⁸ Reflection on this attempt helped the Festival Advisory Committee to visualise a workable and appropriate scale for the event.

This included an assessment of the festival's audience, which was perhaps 50 to 60 percent Arabic speaking, including a significant 'second generation' and non-Arab audience. It was decided it would be more feasible to make Parramatta the home of the festival, to scale down the event, and to make it more compact organisationally. In 2007 the festival was revived. Driven by ICE workers Mouna Zaylah and Fadia Abboud as Festival Directors, the festival was based at the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta. It had a particularly strong documentary program, provocative forums about producing cinema in the context of war and occupation, a matinee for school students, and a gallery exhibition of audio-visual experimentation.⁹

Zaylah and Abboud have continued to organise the festival from a base in ICE, giving the Festival some organisational stability. In our interview Zaylah remarked:

We had that stability; being within the organisation meant we had the resources on hand: we can review how it's been working, what's not working, and really just move on with it. We revived the AFF Advisory Group and turned it into an Organising Committee with Terms of Reference and invited people who complemented one another, and came from different Arab backgrounds. So they're not all Lebanese - we've got Palestinians, an Egyptian, an Iraqi, Jordanians, a range of representatives from the Arab community and a range of professional backgrounds as well. So they can contribute to the growth of the festival.

AFFA was now on a firmer footing, and has since continued to develop a festival that provides an interface between the expanding world of Arab cinema while deepening connections with its constituency in western Sydney. As AFFA Committee member Charles Billeh put it in our interview:

It was more focused on bringing the films of the entire Arab world to a place where people would appreciate it. And western Sydney would be the best audience for that.

The Arab Film Festival has maintained its base in Parramatta, preferring to remain in proximity to the Arab Australian 'heartland' in western Sydney. As AFFA Co-Director Fadia Abboud explains:

I think, what separates us is that we are in western Sydney, and we're staying in western Sydney. We could easily just go into town, go to Newtown¹⁰ - we think about it sometimes, having the Festival there - I know we'd do really really well. But we want to stay relevant to the people that the Festival is about. And because we stood our ground, we're still growing our audience, we've got people coming in from town, I mean to Parramatta. And they're used to it now ...

The Arab Film Festival is a distinctive part of Sydney's film culture. It is the only festival or substantial film event that takes place in the western part of the city, an area that is also dominated by mainstream multiplex cinema outlets, and that lacks non-mainstream outlets such as repertory cinemas. Interestingly, AFFA is not staged in a cinema, but in the large theatre space of the Riverside Theatres in Parramatta, where the projection and screening equipment must be brought in at considerable cost. People feel comfortable there and the space can be organised in different ways to accommodate accompanying events. As Mouna Zaylah puts it: 'the Riverside Theatre makes people feel really really laid back and comfortable because it's not a cinema ... People come and hang out and they stay and talk'.

Apart from loyalty to a demographic audience, the Arab Film Festival is solidly grounded in western Sydney in institutional terms. It has a longstanding partnership with Parramatta City Council, and the council supported its development because it drew new audiences for cultural programs in the city.¹¹ The Arab Film Festival Australia is a project of ICE: its two workers are ICE employees and AFFA's practice is intertwined with the cultural networks in western Sydney, in which ICE is an important player. More recently, AFFA received substantial support through the Creative Community Partnership Initiative - Australian Human Rights Commission, brokered and managed through the Australia Council's Community Partnerships section over three years (2009-2011). This funding initiative was a response to concerns about racism and vilification in Australian society.¹² As Dreher (2006) has pointed out, rather than being passive victims of racism, Muslim, Arab and Sikh organisations have shouldered much of the responsibility for anti-racism and community relations programs.¹³ This funding helped put AFFA on the map as a national event. In 2011, AFFA was able to extend the festival to four more capital cities: Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane and Adelaide.

AFFA made a good fit with the Australia Council's Cultural Engagement Framework. It also shared the focus of Council's Community Partnerships section, which supported projects promising both significant art and non-art outcomes, while requiring excellence in content. AFFA was relevant for Community Partnerships support because it had good developmental prospects, its work challenged cultural stereotypes, engaged with national and international dimensions, and it had a strong engagement with young people.¹⁴

From this perspective, and from the history we have outlined, the Arab Film Festival Australia is at once an arts program and a community development project. Part Two of this case study will detail AFFA's process of cultural engagement that links films and specific communities.

FIELD NOTES, RIVERSIDE THEATRES, PARRAMATTA, JUNE 27, 2013:

The Arab Film Festival is celebrating its tenth festival. The opening night is a big social occasion, as it usually is; people dressed to the nines, and tables groaning with delicious and abundant food. There are plenty of speeches - I notice how frequently the speakers mention the words 'community', 'community arts' and 'community cultural worker': the audience seems to feel an affinity with these terms. I can feel the sense of ownership of the event by this very diverse audience of around 650 people. After the screening, the merits of the opening night's featured film, *After the Battle*, is the source of much discussion, pro and con, as people mingle around the tables where excellent baklava awaits them. There is also a sense of gravity as the film is about the epochal events in Cairo's Tahrir Square two years ago when pro-democracy demonstrators toppled the Mubarek regime. In the present moment, mass demonstrations in the same square are demanding that the elected President Mohamed Morsi stand down for failing to deliver hoped for change in Egypt. The director, Yousry Nasrallah, had been invited to attend the opening but has stayed in Cairo to be part of a crucial stage of these important political events. He sent a Skype message to the audience about the precarious state of affairs. The distinctive feel of this festival is apparent tonight.

PART 2: THE ARAB FILM FESTIVAL'S PROCESS: MEDIATING FILM AND COMMUNITY

In this section we consider AFFA's process of cultural engagement. How do you analyse the engagement processes of a film festival, which from the outside only has an existence when it screens films annually? To examine AFFA's engagement processes we will consider the following three dimensions, all of which are interrelated in practice:

- a.** connections to the international film field
- b.** programming and curating practices
- c.** engaging audiences and communities.

A. ARAB CINEMA AS INTERNATIONAL FIELD

In order to source a variety of Arab films and maintain a perspective on what's important, innovative, topical and relevant to their audiences, AFFA have to be in touch with international trends and cinema releases. The most direct way to stay in touch with Arab cinema is through film festivals in the Middle East. Film festivals such as Abu Dhabi and Doha are proliferating, fuelled by the desire of oil-rich economies to promote cinema in their regions and to become world players in the film business. Beyond showing new products, these festivals also play a major role in funding film productions. The Dubai International Film Festival actively supports filmmakers and may contribute towards production and post-production through its film funds and market initiatives. The Middle East festivals are integral to the development and global marketing of Arab cinema. As one player put it in a *Variety* article: 'these are the places to come to discover these new Middle Eastern filmmakers, who are saying something interesting not just about the political turmoil but also cultural realities here'.¹⁵

Fadia Abboud has attended the Dubai International Film Festival three times for AFFA. She says:

That's where a lot of stuff happens. Between them and Abu Dhabi, they really cover all the Arab films that get made and screened in the Arab world, they really do. I don't even get a chance to see all the films that they screen. They do everything; they screen films from all over the world, but they have a strong Arab program. They also have a market, and they have projects that have been developed there during that week. They have forums - a lot of them are about Arab issues. It's a really great festival. I get a chance to go and watch films there and think about the ones that we might want, and bring some of those back. And to make connections with filmmakers and distributors as well.

All the elements in a festival like Dubai are useful for getting a feel for what is new, interesting and relevant in Arab cinema. Abboud does much of the reconnaissance for possible films, and works closely with the AFFA Committee in making choices about the best films. Getting access to films for a festival is another matter, which is conditioned by competition for the films with other festivals. This year AFFA was interested in six films that were subsequently taken by Sydney Film Festival. Sydney Film Festival has the highest profile amongst mainstream Australian film festivals so, understandably, directors prefer to maximise their exposure. Festivals also tend not to share program content for the same reason. AFFA aims to develop good relations with directors, and they negotiated with the directors of the films the Sydney Festival were seeking. Charles Billeh observes:

You can't blame the filmmakers for wanting to go with the best festivals. We would talk to the filmmakers, and say we'd still like to screen your film if possible, and we made friends with many of them. They really appreciated that sentiment, it wasn't just about marketing or advertising or income revenue, but about choosing the best films for our audiences. And some of them let us screen their film anyway.

B. PROGRAMMING / CURATING FOR THE ARAB FILM FESTIVAL AUSTRALIA

Rather than simply screening films, festivals entail programming or curating, which is itself an aesthetic practice and a key element of film culture.¹⁶ Through film programming and curating, cinemas and film festivals mediate between the cultural product – cinema – and what audiences see and how it is framed. There is often a distinction made between programming, the selection of work for ongoing presentation or distribution, and curating, a more professionally specialised, aesthetically informed process of choosing material for one-off or episodic events such as festivals. The curator's role is developmental, a caring role that extends beyond the artworks themselves, to artists, communities and creative contexts.¹⁷ In this sense, curating goes beyond the programming of films for the festival and takes on many considerations to do with audiences, ideas and themes, and current political issues.

In the case of the Arab Film Festival Australia, members of the festival committee all take part in programming and making selections, working closely with co-directors Fadia Abboud and Mouna Zaylah. All current committee members have a background in film or related arts practice, and are well informed about Arab cinema and film culture in general.¹⁸ Selecting and programming is an intensive process, that requires dedication and a real passion for watching films. Committee members might watch up to 10 films per week over three months. The committee meets to sort through boxes of DVDs received from filmmakers and distributors from all over the world. In their initial meeting they discuss the focus of the coming festival, and whether there will be themes for particular sessions or an overall theme. Charles Billeh explained how the committee has created a system whereby everyone would take five to 10 DVDs home for a week, whatever they could watch. He says:

We had a little slip, and we'd fill out the slip according to what we thought. And we'd rate it out of 10, and give notes and feedback. And at the end of the week we'd compile all the DVDs again and switch. And watch new DVDs or some that someone else has watched. So we'd circulate each DVD amongst the whole committee.

The selection and programming process is sometimes carried out under considerable stress, with deadline pressures and uncertainty about the availability of films, particularly due to the aforementioned competition from other film festivals.

The criteria for the selection of films are conditioned by AFFA's values, which have emerged out of the history of the festival's development. The films should be high quality films that have not been seen by Australian audiences. Hence the festival would not screen a film if already available in some form in Australia. The films selected should not be simply Arab by origin, but should contribute to the festival's mandate (as previously cited; 2013) to:

address contemporary misrepresentations of Arab peoples and cultures by reflecting the complexity and diversity of Arab experiences, and providing a critical space presenting alternative representations of Arab subjects, cultures and narratives.¹⁹

This statement is the 'focus and the checklist' for the festival, as Zaylah puts it. How is this interpreted in the process of selecting films? It is more complex than resisting negative stereotypes. Firstly there is the question of who the audience is. Zaylah explains:

It's there not just for the non-Arab audience, it's not about us challenging stereotypes by non-Arab communities, it's both: it's for our own community as well as the non-Arab community.

This spells out the intra-cultural as well as the intercultural focus of the festival. Furthermore, the dictum to resist misrepresentation does not entail a kind of smoothing of cultural practices and representations. Abboud says:

That's not to say that we play a film and that everyone will love it. We play a film and some people love it and others go, "oh but the woman is still being raped by her brother" or something like that. But of course, this happens to women all over the world. We're presenting it, but we're not reinforcing some kind of stereotype. But we're not afraid to talk about it either, and show that it happens, but this might be why, or this might be how she handles it. We're presenting these stories, they're made by Arabs, and they're in our festival.

The idea of a critical space entails a commitment to discussion. Each festival features at least one forum providing occasion for reflection and dialogue. The 2013 festival, for example, featured a forum on Arab masculinity. Forums too are an aspect of programming: their themes link films and audiences and encourage thought and dialogue about social realities that are present in film representations of the Arab world.

The discussion so far shows how considerations about audiences feature strongly in programming deliberations at AFFA. Of course, programming or curating always entails some conception of the audience and how it will receive and respond to the work. In the case of AFFA this would seem to be more so. It is not just the quality or 'entertainment value' of available films. Issues, topicality and current relevance to the community have to be considered. Hence the focus given to Nasrallah's film on the uprising in Cairo: not all of the committee agreed that *After the Battle* was the best film to open the festival, but it was clearly the most relevant to the moment.

As Mouna Zaylah says: 'every year our program is influenced by what is going on in the Arab world and what's going on in Arab Australian communities'.

In addition, a lot of feedback comes from audiences about the festival programs and what people want. This can be related to the sense of ownership that AFFA audiences clearly feel towards the festival. The Arab Film Festival also surveys audiences, both at the venue and through social media. This concern with feedback is important for AFFA. However, as curators and programmers, festival organisers also want the leeway to explore new or unexpected work. Balance is required to program a mixture of conventional narrative films and more cutting-edge cinema. A diverse audience means different backgrounds, age groups and levels of film literacy. People come for various reasons: some to see non-mainstream films; some to be with the community, and for the social occasion. There is a perception that there are two audiences in the sense of screen literacy. Older audiences prefer to watch films they know, whereas younger audiences - the children of migrants and their friends who may not be of Arabic background - have more of a hunger for alternatives. The festival is always looking for films that can appeal to both simultaneously. As Faddia Abboud puts it:

The best films though - for us - are the ones that speak to both audiences. The ones that I can take my mother to and I will enjoy myself. There's ... a handful of films like that that come out, between commercial and art house, that really have resonance. And they're the ones that encourage people to bring their aunties. Because they love to do that; people love to come to the cinema. It's a social activity that you can do with an older member of your family that's not about eating, you know; it's about going somewhere, participating in the arts in Australia, that we don't often get to do

with our family. And our festival provides that for a lot of people. People love it, and they say: what can I bring my mum to? We always have to have one of those films. They want to do something; they want to bring their parents out to Parramatta, to the cinema. That's another kind of service that we provide.

C. ENGAGING AUDIENCE AND COMMUNITY

We have discussed some of the considerations that must be balanced and negotiated in selecting and programming films for the Arab Film Festival. Clearly this programming entails more than simply screening good films, although good films are vehicles for cultural engagement, generating dialogue and forming solidarities. A rather mechanical view of programming as a way of actively constructing audiences – what Fung (1999) has called ‘programming the public’ through the cultural products on offer – must be partly true.²⁰ But with a community-based body such as AFFA, programming – which includes engagement with audiences – is an ongoing process of extension and inclusion. By this we mean that the festival tries in an ongoing way to further the involvement of its audience, which is diverse in its needs and interests, and to extend the ways in which particular subgroups participate. In the process it helps to generate a wider recognition and understanding of these subgroups within the audience as a whole.

For instance, one year AFFA curated a selection of music videos in the festival. The thinking behind this was to appeal to younger people and to fans of particular music cultures such as hip hop because, as Abboud explains, these videos

... speak and have values that some films don't. They speak a bit more about sexuality; they speak, especially Palestinian ones ... a lot about the politics of the everyday. So we included a range of video clips from a lot

of different artists. For the Arab world, they are like these short films. Some of them have whole narratives. Part of what that means I think is we're just open to what is happening out there that we feel best addresses Arab culture and Arab people artistically and thematically.

AFFA has an interest in film production and has future plans to extend its involvement in this area (see Part 3). AFFA has partnered with other organisations in western Sydney to produce films with young people. *Hurriya and Her Sisters* was an animation project run by the Bankstown Area Multicultural Network and supported by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Young women from Muslim-Arab backgrounds were given training in film and animation skills and made short films around shared stories of discrimination and racism. Some of these films were shown at the 2009 festival.

Another partnership involving young women was *Changing Lives*. This was developed between Auburn Community Development Network and ICE, with girls of Iraqi background studying at a high school in Auburn making videos about their lives.²¹ The Arab Film Festival showed some of these short video stories and invited the audience to discuss the stories with their makers. *Changing Lives* was paired with *Underexposure*, an Iraqi film directed by Oday Rasheed whose title refers to both the expired film stock with which the film was made, and the lives of Iraqis growing up under the Iraq embargo. Fadia Abboud reflects:

So we had this feature film from Iraq which was really dark: it was all about there, and these girls were all about here, Iraqis in Australia. It was a great program.

This juxtaposition shows the way in which programming can bring film narratives and stories of everyday lives into a conversation across a globalising Arab world.

PART 3: ARAB FILM FESTIVAL AUSTRALIA: FUTURES

We have been examining the Arab Film Festival's emergence and development in a specific time and place: western Sydney – a heartland of Arab Australian settlement – during the post-9/11 period. This has been a difficult time for Arab Australians who have had to confront highly negative, racialised images and narratives that can be threatening to cultural and social inclusion. AFFA's approach has been to draw on and provide a connection to the diversity of cultural expressions emerging from a growing international field of Arab cinema, and to curate and make available festival programs that speak to Arab and non-Arab Australian audiences.

AFFA is a small player in the film festival and cinema distribution marketplace. Its strengths are its close links with audience communities, which enable a strong sense of cultural and community relevance in its film curation and audience engagement strategies. Community relevance is in fact a key element in the Australia Council's Artistic Vibrancy Framework designed to guide cultural producers.²² The relevance of presented work to audiences' social, cultural and political concerns will obviously enhance its impact and appeal. But there are also issues of community control and the freedom to enjoy one's cultural resources, which is at the heart of values underpinning UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

The Convention pointedly supports 'paying due attention to the special circumstances and needs of women as well as various social groups, including persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples', to 'have access to their own cultural expressions' as well as to diverse cultural expressions.²³ This suggests the importance of a sense of cultural ownership that is of particular relevance to migrant groups such as Arab Australians that are struggling to find cultural legitimacy. Support for AFFA by the Creative Community Partnership initiative, funded by the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Australia Council, was an important recognition of the AFFA's role in supporting cultural legitimacy. Identifying cultural projects that contribute to Australian social integration by extending the diversity of cultural expressions should be a priority for policy implementation of the Convention.

The Arab Film Festival is not a culturally closed space. AFFA is highly aware of its audience as diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, age and screen literacy. AFFA's programming and curating practices are informed by a balancing of imperatives: to deliver excellence in cinema programming while remaining accessible to audiences, and relevant to current issues and concerns. At the same time, AFFA seeks to provide a critical space for audiences to consider questions that cinematic narratives are able to pose. That is, AFFA strives to be – in a modest way – an opportunity for cultural learning and reflection that can help forge a space for a cultural freedom based on the recognition of differences. A combination of elements contribute to this:

- a close engagement with audiences
- a strong focus on social and political relevance
- a commitment to excellence of cultural product, guided by strong art form knowledge and awareness of trends
- a close connection to the arts production community and particularly to young people, which provides a good knowledge of emergent concerns and cultural styles.

In terms of the Convention, the Arab Film Festival contributes to promoting the diversity of cultural expressions in the following ways. AFFA brings new films from a burgeoning sphere of film production – Arab cinema – thereby augmenting the diversity of the Australian market and informing film culture and audience literacy. Representatives from film festivals, multicultural broadcasters and distribution companies take note of AFFA’s program, and frequently choose films that have been first presented at AFFA for broadcast. The festival explicitly chooses films reflecting the complexity and diversity of Arab experience. In doing so it contributes to a specific curating and valuing of films as ‘vehicles of identity, values and meaning’.²⁴ Through its commitment to present alternative representations and narratives of Arab people, AFFA also contributes to the Convention’s broad objective to ‘encourage dialogue among cultures with a view to ensuring wider and balanced cultural exchanges in the world in favour of intercultural respect and a culture of peace’.²⁵ In terms of encouraging film production, the festival provides an outlet for local Arab Australian films and actively assists in building filmmaking capacities of Arab Australians through partnerships such as *Changing Lives*. Hence AFFA contributes to a diversity of cultural expressions at many points of the cinema value chain, supporting

*the creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment of such domestic cultural activities, goods and services, including provisions relating to the language used for such activities, goods and services.*²⁶

However, there is something limiting about such an account in relation to the Convention that does not quite capture the dynamic of the project. Arts bodies, especially non-mainstream ones, are usually characterised by uncertainties. Cultural programs also involve thinking about futures; that is, about new ways in which engagement can be extended. Rather than finishing with a summary of what the Arab Film Festival Australia is so far, it might be more interesting to consider what else it might become.

While AFFA is now relatively secure with its administrative base in ICE, there are uncertainties, particularly of a financial nature. The festival must seek further sponsorship to meet rising costs. There is little prospect of a further funding injection on the scale of the Australia Council Community Partnerships grant that enabled the expansion of the festival presentation beyond its base in Sydney. Mouna Zaylah believes there is a place for the festival for the next five or 10 years, as its audience is still growing. The uncertainty comes, ironically, with growing interest in Arab cinema, and competition from mainstream film festivals that might secure the rights to a film because they have a bigger budget and a higher profile.

Are there alternative futures for the Arab Film Festival Australia? Rather than seeing the festival as a fixed entity, AFFA is developing ideas to extend its activities. With its grounding in the international field of Arab cinema; links to Arab Australian community networks, particularly in western Sydney; an extended audience through the festival's expansion to Melbourne and Canberra; and considerable expertise in film curation and production, the Arab Film Festival is well equipped to consider different ventures and community projects. We spoke with Mouna Zaylah about future directions AFFA could pursue.²⁷

In order to address issues of access to and supply of Arab films, AFFA have been investigating new sources of Arab films. This includes films developed with Arab film festival or European funding that have not been picked up by other festivals, television or Internet distributors. As Zaylah puts it:

There are really good stories, not necessarily being produced with big budgets. The technical facilities are not as fancy as others. Of course we look at the quality of the production, but the important thing for us is the story, and the guts of the film.

One way to extend digital access to Arab cinema would be to develop an online distribution channel for Arab short films. Short films could be drawn from the festival program, an annual collection of short films curated from the Arab world, and the Arab Australian short films developed by AFFA. This selection of films could change each year as the festival launches and would complement the touring cinema program for those who are unable to attend festival screenings.

A feature of the Arab Film Festival has been the forums that allow the public to engage more directly with themes being explored in programmed films. These could be extended to one-off events with partner organisations such as academic institutions or arts centres interested in Arab cinema and related themes concerning the Arab world. These events could also be extended by broadcast or digital means, to engage more people in discussion and debate, and build interest in the festival.

AFFA is interested in supporting more production opportunities for Arab Australian filmmakers. At present the AFFA is liaising with local schools to encourage students to share their stories about being young, Arab and living in Australia, through a digital storytelling program. As Mouna Zaylah puts it:

It will also mean that they'll start to develop this storytelling early on, and we will hopefully give them space at the Arab Film Festival to present their work and talk about their digital stories, which are really mini-films.

In addition, there is a more ad hoc process of supporting the production of short films to encourage emerging Arab Australian filmmakers to create work that reflects the diversity of the Arab Australian experience. This involves mentoring emerging local Australian Arab filmmakers, and supporting them by providing access to facilities at ICE, and on occasion matching them with other creatives with whom they can work.

Another film culture project with a community focus is *The Home Made Arab Film Project*. This has been trialled and is awaiting further development. The project aims to collect and archive films made by Arab Australians using Super 8 and 16mm film between the 1930s and 1980s. AFFA would 'provide a space to preserve, record and document as well as contribute to the archive of the Australian community'.²⁸ A key partner will be the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, an Australian government body committed to the preservation of Australia's audio-visual heritage. The Archive is already a partner of AFFA, annually presenting the festival in the national capital. Zaylah thinks there could also be considerable potential for international touring for this project, 'because it is really about Arabs in the diaspora'.

It should be stressed that none of these ideas have yet been realised. However, building on its multi-stranded engagement with local communities and the international field of Arab cinema, and on its expertise in film production, curation and community cultural development, AFFA has strong prospects for extending its work beyond a pure consumption model.

- 1 Arab Film Festival Australia, About us, webpage, Parramatta, NSW, 2013, viewed 13 June 2013, <<http://arabfilmfestival.com.au/about-us/>>.
- 2 For instance in the suburb of Bankstown, 23.5 percent of households spoke Arabic as the main language at home, compared to 17.3% who spoke Vietnamese and 16.9% who spoke English. In Parramatta, where AFFA is based, 10.3% spoke Arabic at home, with 43% speaking English. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2011 Australia: SBS census explorer, interactive website, [Crows Nest, NSW], [2011], viewed [6 July 2013], <<http://www.sbs.com.au/censusexplorer/>>.
- 3 Katherine Knight, *Passion, Purpose, Meaning: Arts activism in western Sydney*, Halstead Press, Ultimo, NSW, 2013, p 196.
- 4 Scott Poynting, Greg Noble, Paul Tabar and Jock Collins, *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab other*, Sydney Institute of Criminology Series, Sydney, 2004.
- 5 Knight, *Passion, Purpose, Meaning*, p 196. Megan Carrigy, 'A place for dialogue', *RealTime*, no 85, 2008, p 21. Available from: <<http://www.realttimearts.net/article/85/9028>>. Australia Council, Community partnership key producers, webpage, Surry Hills, NSW, n.d., viewed 13 January 2014, <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/about_us/our_structure/artform_panels/community_partnerships/key_producers> Webpage no longer live. Contact the Australia Council for more information.
- 6 Sydney Arab Film Festival, A BIG night of Arab shorts, program, n.p., 2004, viewed 16 August 2013, <<http://arabfilmfestival.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/2004.pdf>>. Webpage no longer live. Contact the Arab Film Festival for more information.
- 7 Sydney Arab Film Festival, Welcome to the 2nd Arab Film Festival, website, Parramatta, NSW, 2005, viewed 13 January 2014, <<http://sydneyarabfilmfestival.com/saff2005/>>. Webpage no longer live. Contact the Arab Film Festival for more information.
- 8 For this case study we draw on interviews with AFFA Festival Directors Mouna Zaylah and Fadia Abboud, and AFFA Committee member, Charles Billeh.
- 9 Megan Carrigy, 'The logic of mediation', *RealTime*, no 78, 2007, p 21. Available from: <<http://www.realttimearts.net/article/78/8527>>.
- 10 A trendy inner-city suburb.
- 11 Parramatta City Council supported AFFA in establishing its 'home' in Parramatta. See ICE, *The Sydney Arab Film Festival, a Parramatta Creative City Event, 2007-2009*, updated proposal to Parramatta City Council Events Team. This paper is accessible through Parramatta City Council's Business Papers Archive <http://www.parracity.nsw.gov.au/your_council/council/business_papers_list2> via a link published as part of the 'Culture & Leisure' item of council's meeting held on 18 December 2006. AFFA received a three-year grant from Parramatta Council (2007-09) and has continued to receive support on an annual basis.
- 12 See Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Australian Human Rights Commission Annual Report 2009-2010*, Sydney, NSW, 2010, p 30. Available from: <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/annual-report-2009-2010-australian-human-rights-commission-0>>. Community Partnerships funding requires evidence of development "by, with and for" communities. See Australia Council, *Guiding Principles for Community Partnerships*, document, Surry Hills, NSW, 2011.
- 13 Tanja Dreher, *Whose Responsibility? Community anti-racism strategies after September 11, 2001*, UTSePress, Broadway, NSW, 2006, p 1. Available from: <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/research/bitstream/handle/10453/19827/Whose%20Responsibility%20WEB_final.pdf?sequence=1>.
- 14 Thom Scire, Program Officer, Community Partnerships, Australia Council, conversation, 10 April, 2013.
- 15 Diana Lodderhouse, 'Fresh fests step up in Middle East', *Variety*, vol 425, no 5, 2011, pp 18-19.
- 16 Skardi Losit and Marijk de Valck, *Film Festivals / Film Festival Research: Thematic, Annotated Bibliography*, 2nd edn, Departments Sprache, Literatur, Medien I + II, Universität Hamburg, 2010, viewed 22 September 2013, <<http://dare.uva.nl/document/162604>>.
- 17 Nuno Sacramento and Claudia Zeiske, *ARTocracy: Art, informal space, and social consequence: A curatorial handbook in collaborative practice*, Jovis, Berlin, 2010, p 15.
- 18 The current membership of the AFFA Committee can be found at <<http://arabfilmfestival.com.au/the-team/>>.
- 19 Arab Film Festival Australia, About us, webpage.
- 20 Richard Fung, 'Programming the Public', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol 5, no 1, 1999, pp 89-93, cited in Losit and de Valck, *Film Festivals / Film Festival Research*, n.p.
- 21 See Danielle Cliche and Andreas Wiesand, *Intercultural Dialogue through the Arts and Culture? Concepts, policies, programmes, practices*, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), Sydney, NSW, 2009, viewed 13 January 2014, <<http://media.ifacca.org/files/ICDpaperAug09.pdf>>.
- 22 Kevin du Preez and Jackie Bailey, *Artistic Reflection Kit*, Australia Council, Sydney, NSW, 2010, p 15. Available from: <http://home.ied.edu.hk/~artsmgt/Artistic_Reflection_Kit_FULLLV2.pdf>.
- 23 UNESCO, *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, webpage, Paris, 2005, Article 7.1.a-b, viewed 13 January 2014, <http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>.
- 24 UNESCO, *Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Article 1.g.
- 25 UNESCO, *Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Article 1.c.
- 26 UNESCO, *Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Article 6.2.b.
- 27 This section draws on our interview with Mouna Zaylah and an unofficial AFFA discussion paper on future directions.
- 28 AFFA, unofficial discussion paper, p 3.

CASE STUDY

EDGE OF ELSEWHERE

Edge of Elsewhere was a three-year project of the Campbelltown Arts Centre and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art that focused on commissioning contemporary artists from Australia, Asia and the Pacific to create new works that respond to and engage with the diverse communities of Sydney. It was the flagship contemporary art project of Sydney Festival's program from 2010–2012. The work did not merely sample existing cultural expressions, but sought to extend reflection on 'what or where a community is, and how artists can hope to truly engage with these communities'.¹ Over the three years, 14 artists from Australia and the Asia Pacific participated in a major contemporary arts collaboration.

PART 1: EDGE OF ELSEWHERE: CURATING DIVERSITY

Edge of Elsewhere was an open-ended experiment in generating contemporary art processes and works out of a variety of extended engagements with diverse communities. As such it is of interest in relation to UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions because it investigated directions in which cultural expressions can be understood through participatory processes in contemporary art. We were less interested in 'final' outcomes, and more in the cultural processes that were enabled by *Edge of Elsewhere*.

What was the basis of these engagements? This section will explore the curatorial concepts that motivated *Edge of Elsewhere*. The original curatorial team was Lisa Havilah, at the time the Director of Campbelltown Arts Centre in south-western Sydney; Aaron Seeto, Director of 4A, an arts institution specialising in Asian art located in Sydney's Chinatown; and Thomas Berghuis, until recently a lecturer in Asian Art at the University of Sydney. This part of the case study relies largely on interviews with Lisa Havilah and Aaron Seeto.

Edge of Elsewhere formally began to take shape in 2009 with a proposal by Lisa Havilah to the Festival of Sydney, Sydney's summer arts and entertainment festival. Lindy Hume, Director of the Festival of Sydney, had responded to Lisa Havilah's request for Campbelltown Arts Centre – some 57 kilometres south-west of the CBD – to participate in the festival. This was a newly inclusive step for the festival, which had generally disregarded Sydney's western 'edge' where nearly two million people live in newer suburbs, often with significant migrant populations.² The basic proposal was to commission accomplished Australian and international artists to work with diverse western Sydney communities to make culturally relevant, engaged work over a three-year period. Lisa Havilah describes it as follows:

The idea was to engage the artists over three years so we could build relationships between the artists and the communities. So every year we kept on bringing the artists back and they became more and more engaged or integrated into those communities.

Taking a longer view, the project was made possible by some 30 years of socially engaged arts activity in western Sydney that has created strong precedents for the work in *Edge of Elsewhere*.

CURATORIAL CONCEPTS

Given its inclusion in the Sydney Festival over a three-year period, *Edge of Elsewhere* proposed an ambitious program of arts engagement with various emergent communities in western Sydney. For Lisa Havilah, this was an opportunity to 'rethink' the cultural make-up of Australia's largest city – and by extension the nation – by including cultural currents normally left out of the mainstream gaze. In a book accompanying the project, Havilah proposed that *Edge of Elsewhere* would 'engage communities across Sydney to develop and produce a series of contemporary art projects in partnership with artists from Australia, Asia and the Pacific region'.³ This engagement with communities, necessarily a cross-cultural process, would 'help to expand the profile of Sydney's emerging communities, connecting them with broader national and international arts practices'. Groups mentioned included Aboriginal, Pacific Islander, Arabic, Chinese, Southeast Asian, and still more recent Afghani, East Timorese and Sri Lankan communities.⁴

In the same publication, Aaron Seeto warned against the assumption of 'ready-made communities'⁵, based in nothing more than art institutions' 'desire for bridging'.⁶ Seeto's desire for 'less prescribed, less predictable engagement'⁷ led him to focus directly on artists' modes of engagement with audiences. As he explains in our interview:

We are interested in both audiences and artists because they provide different ways of seeing cultural engagement, you know, they're not straightforward. You can't take the relationship between subject and object for granted. I suppose what drives me is that curiosity around how artists work, that they're actually not disconnected from various types of communities.

The selection of artists by the curatorial team followed two logics. The curators wanted *Edge of Elsewhere* to feature both diversity of artistic practice and 'cultural diversity', reflecting the fast growing migrant communities in western Sydney. So, for Lisa Havilah, artist selection reflected both an 'actual demography', and the requirement for developing and extending socially engaged contemporary arts work of a high standard, 'where the community is not just about developing content, but actual, true collaboration'.

One of the most notable features of *Edge of Elsewhere* was its curatorial openness. There were no specified themes or even suggestions of content. As Havilah puts it:

The curatorial construct for the project wasn't about anything in particular; it was about providing an environment for the artists, a group of artists that reflected the cultural demographics of Sydney, to engage with a particular community or communities to make a work that engaged with issues that were important to those communities, or somehow reflected or made visible things within that community. So really that was the curatorial framework.

There was also no specification that any artist should work with any specific group, although there may have been some tacit expectation that generally Pacific artists would engage with Pacific people, Indigenous artists with Indigenous people, and so on. Furthermore curators maintained there was no operating notion of success or failure. Havilah explains:

I don't think any of the projects were looked at as a success or a failure. In my mind they weren't judged qualitatively, because it was all about the process of making the work as much as the work itself. Because they were high-calibre artists, and had a history of working with those particular processes, we were more able to feel confident that there would be success in terms of the quality of the work.

This faith in the capacities of artists underpinned the openness of the curatorial framework.

Seeto says:

Well, you can't impose them [objectives]. Projects like this are rare - it's not often that you get to work with an artist over three or four years ... to see how work develops. The strategy in the exhibition in the first year was really about creating context to understand where these artists' practices come from. That was the reason why the first time we showed an artist, it was always presenting existing work. And so they can be introduced to our spaces, and introduced to our audiences, and our audiences could begin to participate on that journey over the next few years.

The key dimension of this open practice was extended time. Havilah explains:

Instead of the way that artists usually work, which is like project to project - six months, three months, then move on to the next project - artists were actually able to think about it as a body of practice.

The additional time provided possibilities for experimenting and working in greater depth with new forms of engagement.

STYLES OF ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

An important aspect of *Edge of Elsewhere's* curatorial strategy was the involvement of participants in artist projects. One implication of the open brief was that this involvement of participants would derive from the artists' initiatives. Thus some projects were largely focused on participant involvement while others were less so. As expressed in an unpublished independent evaluation report of *Edge of Elsewhere* (2013), an important aim of the project was to test new modes of engagement as a means of 'increasing opportunities for collaboration, cooperation and the exchange of skills and knowledge between artists and communities'.⁸ We have not been able to assess this dimension, as this would have required considerable access to non-artist participants. The evaluation, commissioned by the Campbelltown Arts Centre and conducted by Dr Francis Maravillas reviewed *Edge of Elsewhere's* participatory strategies. In particular, it looked at the domains of 'Community and Cultural Awareness', 'Community Connectedness', and 'Artistic and Cultural Capacity', analysing participants' responses to these dimensions in case studies of three projects.

Maravillas' report found that in general community engagement in the arts projects did produce positive outcomes for participants and communities, although there was significant unevenness in terms of the quality of communication and organisation.⁹ Participants sometimes failed to connect intellectually or emotionally with an artist's project, or were confused about processes or expectation of outcomes. It would seem that uncertainty increased the more conceptually open the artistic strategy. The skill of the artist in defining and

managing the engagement process was also an important factor. However, an 'art of engagement' must be more than this: it is necessarily a collective project, involving ongoing negotiation with participants and stakeholders of various kinds, the support of mediating institutions, and the artist's methods and personal skills.¹⁰ This illustrates the considerable challenges posed by curatorial openness regarding the achievement of specific local outcomes, such as increasing cultural and arts participation, or strengthening understanding within or across cultural communities. Indeed, in his conclusion Maravillas pointed to the 'tension between an open-ended approach to collaboration and participation and a more structured framework of engagement' as the key issue to be managed.¹¹

In summary, an examination of the curatorial concepts operating in *Edge of Elsewhere* reveals a conception of diversity that is grounded in experimental processes of contemporary art. On the one hand, there is an institutional interest in specific demographic and cultural groups; on the other hand, engagement was led by unspecified engagement processes determined by the contemporary artists. The effect of *Edge of Elsewhere*'s radically open curatorial framework was to place the initiation of engagement primarily with the artists, through their projects and ways of working with particular communities. One consequence of this arrangement is the possibility of a gap or tension between the artistic process and some of the policy agendas of the project.

PART 2: ARTIST PROCESS AND CONCEPTIONS OF DIVERSITY

Due to the openness of the artists' brief, cultural engagement took many individual paths. These pathways derived in part from artists' existing career practices and bodies of work, they also developed their own dynamics in the process of engagement, however this engagement took place. In most cases there was a proliferation of work developing out of each artist's engagement. For instance, the work of Indonesian artist FX Harsono was built upon movements between Indonesia and Sydney, around visits and the sporadic meeting of teams. For the project *In Memory of a Name*, Harsono formed a curatorium 'comprised of emerging artists, writers, critics and curators from across Australia, [which] both undertook research into various communities about the effects of changing one's name, but also became a **constructed community** in themselves'.¹² *In Memory of a Name* also generated diverse projects carried out by participant members of the curatorium.¹³

Rather than attempting to summarise the singular processes and trajectories of all 14 artists and the proliferation of work in *Edge of Elsewhere*, we have chosen to examine a few processes in detail in order to gain some sense of the possibilities for cultural expression that *Edge of Elsewhere* could generate over a three-year period. We focus on two artists, Shigayuki Kihara and Khaled Sabsabi. Both artists have an established commitment to participatory work with a strong body of work in this direction, and both have discussed their approach in some detail elsewhere. Both developed three works over the period using a variety of engagement approaches. The case studies have been developed using interviews with the artists and other critical writings. The focus is on *Edge of Elsewhere*'s engagement process and its effects on the process of developing artworks.

ARTIST PROCESS CASE STUDY 1:

SHIGEYUKI KIHARA

Edge of Elsewhere works:

- *Talanoa V*
- *Bring Your Game Hip Hop Summit*
- *Culture for Sale*

The banner for a recent conference on Shigeyuki Kihara stated that her work ‘interrogates the ways that art, performance, and the public interact and prompt dialogue about understanding the complexities of humanity’.¹⁴ Her work crosses genre boundaries of video, photography, dance and performance; explores many aspects of colonialism, culture, tourism, gender and sexuality; and draws on her Samoan and Japanese background in complicated ways.

In our interview, Kihara described how she understood the *Edge of Elsewhere* brief, and how that allowed her to engage with any group of people:

[I could] basically work with whoever I wanted, but I did know that I would work with Pacific communities, because it's the community I understood best. But at the same time [I can] also apply the politics and the social issues of my community in branching out to other communities that are maybe faced by similar concerns.

Although there was no specification from the curators, there must have been a tacit expectation that Pacific artists, for instance, would be likely to work with Pacific Islander communities. Kihara specifically wanted to work with non-art communities – people who do not go to art galleries – because it is more ‘exciting’ to invite their participation, allowing more possibilities for surprise and transformation. Kihara’s strategy for locating such people involved a project manager from Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre who could find people in the Samoan

community. However she also utilised her networks, which were formed by artistic, ethnic and political links, as a transnational community of like-minded people:

My community in Australia, we have a really liberal politics, we believe in Indigenous solidarity and all this kinds of stuff, so I'm kind of surrounded by a group of people that ... believe in similar political ideas, so I was able to source the community based on the group of people I knew in Australia that could, like, point the finger to where I can go and find people.

For instance, through contacts with the hip hop community in Sydney Kihara was able to generate links for her *Bring Your Game Hip Hop Summit*. Kihara’s participatory works seek to engage people ‘where the body experiences the heart’. The engagement works through the work’s concept being played out in the bodily dispositions and emotions of participants:

The idea becomes embedded in their mind and their heart and their body, and they react to the idea. They perform the idea. Because in the Samoan culture and Indigenous communities across the Pacific we use song and dance as a way to archive sociopolitical occurrences in our cosmology, you know?

There is an idea of enculturated bodies being the basis for a kind of collective archive, as in Samoan cultural styles:

Because we don't have a written language, we use song and dance to archive sociopolitical history. So when you use song and dance as a way to archive, right, the memory, the history, and the ideas and the philosophy gets embodied in your head, your heart, your body and your soul, you know? So you become – you are the imprint of that experience, of that sociopolitical, spiritual experience. So your body is an archive.

Kihara's work often seeks to create an engagement, but doesn't always primarily do this through words. Cultural pronouncements are grounded more in bodily interaction than verbal interaction:

These community leaders, especially men, they don't really talk much. They just want to get into the action and just do it. So, being that they're both musicians, they're musical groups, they don't say much to each other, but they say a lot to each other through music and dance ... It's like musos jamming.

Although Kihara's work often employs dance – all three works for *Edge of Elsewhere* did in some way – Kihara doesn't use formal choreography, but gets people to move based on what they know:

It wasn't me teaching them how to dance. I work with people who already know it, and then I kind of, like, manipulate it, shift it here and there, change the context, change the framework, in order to suit my conceptually driven ideas.

This manipulation involves negotiation and consent. Kihara has utilised Samoan concepts of social interaction such as talanoa, literally 'big talk' or discussion, and as she explains in an interview with Aaron Seeto, 'a process of dialogue between two entities ... [which] includes the more formal dialogues that occur amongst representatives of chiefs'.¹⁵ Kihara takes this idea of a meeting process and seeks to translate it into a different context, and into an engagement with other cultural groups. Art is a means of creating something like a social laboratory or experiment, however she doesn't want to use these words, which connote forms of control. Rather, for Kihara this kind of engagement requires an ongoing social awareness of the ordinary needs of people. She was mindful of the needs of workshop participants to pick

up their kids or park their cars near a venue; for there to be adequate catering. This is all 'part and parcel of engagement', which for Kihara is a form of hospitality.

The most important aspect of 'cultural expression' for Kihara is 'intra-relationships between people'; for instance, the kind of interaction between migrant groups based on what they share. She wants to focus on the possibilities of intra-relationships 'so it's not just colonised with the colonised and the coloniser; it's not about white and black', however important these dimensions are. This is not to say that these exchanges are necessarily easy or smooth; the stress and awkwardness of exchanges is as important as any easy 'integration'.

TALANOA V (2010)

As described above, the talanoa is a Samoan style of meeting that Kihara uses as a model to bring groups together and create sometimes unlikely-sounding collaborations employing music and dance. *Talanoa: Walk the Talk* is a series of works that began in Auckland with *Talanoa I*, which brought together a Highland pipe band and Chinese dragon dancers. The work commissioned for *Edge of Elsewhere*, *Talanoa V*, brought together Chinese dance group Yau Kung Mun Association and the Sydney Cook Islands Dance Group.

The talanoa process involves, firstly, a consultation with community leaders or elders to discuss the grounds of the collaboration. Then the groups come together to discuss the ideas for the collaboration and to physically act it out, moderated by the artist. A live performance takes place and is made into a documentary video which is then given to all the participants.¹⁶ For participants, it was the group-to-group dialogue that was most important. This is a practical and largely embodied dialogue, based on 'maintaining communication with music as a way of learning to get something done', as one participant

put it.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is clear that the strong performative role of the artist is crucial to shaping the process. Kihara is in no doubt that she is at the centre of these intercultural meetings and collaborations:

I just plant the idea and I become a medium for it. But at the same time, I'm also trying to manoeuvre, and be a maestro, and to manoeuvre the whole interaction to be sure that everything comes out right.

BRING YOUR GAME HIP HOP SUMMIT (2011)

This event was a program of talks and workshops that brought together people from the hip hop community, with participants coming largely from New Zealand and Pacific Islander backgrounds. Kihara brought in King Kapisi and Teremoana Rapley, two well-known artists from New Zealand. Talks such as 'How to Stay in the Game: Think like an Artist, Work like a Hustler' let people know about the business side of hip hop. These were combined with practical workshops on topics including beatboxing, rhyming, and DJ technology. The participants took part in a performance at the exhibition launch in January 2011 at Campbelltown Arts Centre.¹⁸ This included a very moving song composed by the participants, combining hip hop vocals and Polynesian harmony singing.¹⁹

Kihara's rationale for the event was that she did it because she could, and that it would be an enjoyable event:

I can put together a hip hop summit and bring all these Sydney-based rap artists, rap poets, but you know, I needed another big name in the hip hop community to kind of, like, wake everybody up. Hence, I brought in King Kapisi and Teremoana Rapley from New Zealand to participate in the forum, because when I brought them over, then everybody in the hip hop community [said] "Woah! Yuki brought them over!"

A DJ at the summit spoke about why such events are valuable: kids in the area 'live and breathe hip hop'.

CULTURE FOR SALE (2012)

Culture for Sale is the most complex of Kihara's works for *Edge of Elsewhere*. Kihara had carried out some research in German archives on German-Samoan colonial relations. Of particular interest were the *Völkerschauen*, literally 'people shows', which were a form of popular entertainment featuring people from colonised lands, including Samoa. *Culture for Sale* was a public performance and video installation at Campbelltown Arts Centre. The live performance featured Samoan dancers from a Sydney dance group called Spirit of Polynesia, who were instructed only to perform when offered money by audience members. The video installation mirrored the performance in only showing dancers performing when audience members inserted coins in a slot machine. The work plays with the notion of value in culture, and comments on the commercialisation of Samoan culture and the connections between performance, identity and value. This could be quite didactic, but the live performance put audiences on the spot in quite moving ways. Kihara made use of the Samoan dance *Taualuga*, a stately dance usually performed by a noble, where people can offer money as a gesture of appreciation. But its logic is reversed in capitalist exchanges where rather than expressing appreciation, money, can objectify relations and exert control. As Kihara relates:

The main dancer goes onto the dance floor and starts performing this stately dance. And then, when this performance takes place, the audience is invited to participate in this performance, but the choreography of the audience does the total opposite of the stately

dance, of the main dancer. They end up doing all these, like, clowning and foolish dance, to juxtapose the stately dancer. So the friction between the stately and the clowning is very important, because it is in this friction that all these kinds of social politics are being negotiated. Yeah? And so in the process of Tauluga, when the audience participates in the performance, they would walk up to the dancer and start putting money on them.

For Kihara the performance stages a critique of value that is placed on art and culture: while the creative industry ‘puts value on art, based on measurement ... there is also an insidious and sinister side, because of the issues related to race, indigenism, exoticism and exploitation’. She says:

It’s a very tongue in cheek, simple performance, but also very loaded conceptually, because it has such layered meanings. And initially it came out of the idea of how indigenous cultures of the Pacific are always being seen through the frame of ethnography and anthropology.

In this performance something quite poignant and subtle happens with the audience’s combination of guilt, fascination and hesitation. ‘The performance is about the audience,’ says Kihara, ‘and the emotions of awkwardness and embarrassment it precipitates’. This staging of interaction seems to invert that of the *Talanoa* series, where a cultural collaboration is made possible by a bodily engagement through dance and music. Here a valuation which is also devaluation seems to prevent any intercultural sharing, unless such an exchange can arise negatively from emotions of guilt, embarrassment and awkwardness.²⁰

ARTIST PROCESS CASE STUDY 2:

KHALED SABSABI

Edge of Elsewhere works:

- 99
- *Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement*
- *Corner*

Khaled Sabsabi was born in Tripoli, Lebanon. He emigrated to Australia as a boy and has lived in western Sydney since 1978. He has generated an eclectic body of work grounded in his experience of diasporic and often excluded communities in Australia, and has incorporated engagement with Lebanon and the contemporary Middle East. His work moves beyond the opposition between local and global and he frequently draws together these parallel fields, establishing surprising correspondences. Sabsabi’s work encompasses a variety of mediums including hip hop, soundscapes, performance and video installations. In an interview with Sabsabi, Nick Terrell (2011) writes:

*The dual-identities that develop through the migrant experience can create anxiety and uncertainty, but they can also generate a flexible cross-cultural awareness. Sabsabi explains, “Going between Arab culture and Western or Australian culture, you have the ability to experience and see and to analyse both cultures, both traditions, both histories”.*²¹

Khaled Sabsabi’s interpretation of *Edge of Elsewhere*’s brief was that it was less about matching artists’ work with emergent cultural groups, and more about supporting artists with a particular commitment to community engagement in general. As Sabsabi put it:

I think it wasn’t just about emerging communities ... It’s also about artists that are actually genuinely committed to working in that sort of practice, and their works are informed, or questioned, by that idea of community; what is community?

So I think that was the nice thing, or that was the great thing, about *Edge of Elsewhere*, because it was quite open; so the brief was, “We would like you to engage with whatever community that you would prefer to work with, and you’ve got three years to do it”.

Sabsabi’s enthusiasm ran right through our interview, particularly in relation to having three years to develop an open-ended project, ‘wherever that might go’. He contrasted this with the more common arts project that is ‘output and outcome driven’. He reflected, ‘It was flexible, and it was being developed as the works were being developed, and they were responsive to each other. That was a great process’. For Sabsabi, the strong support for collaboration as the basis for work was mirrored by the curators and directors of *Edge of Elsewhere* creating ‘a think tank between the venues’ (Gallery 4A and Campbelltown Arts Centre); an interesting metaphor for an ongoing conceptual engagement between artists and arts institutions. Sabsabi was also very aware of the institutional implications of connecting to the prestige of the Sydney Festival and the greater resources this attracted:

That buy-in from the Sydney Festival got the Australia Council Visual Arts Board excited about it. And it’s also about the artists that are involved in those exhibitions: I’m talking about the local, regional and the Pacific artists that were involved in this. And for me too – the works that came out of the process, gallery representation, prizes.

Sabsabi was not shy of speaking of career benefits, or the international attention that came with his involvement in this project. For Sabsabi, *Edge of Elsewhere* set a benchmark, largely through the quality of content generated by a project that allowed extended development of a work. For Sabsabi, *Edge of Elsewhere* allowed him to take up and further develop work with a Sufi community in Lebanon, which he started in

2003 but had not been able to resolve. *Edge of Elsewhere* led him back to this interest in Sufism and specific Sufi communities. Sufism exerted an attraction for Sabsabi as an alternative tradition in Islam; a tradition rendered almost invisible in present understandings of the Arab world. Perhaps he is also drawn to the trajectory of Sufis, as historical travellers who evaded many empires. Initially an outsider to Sufism, it took Sabsabi a long period to reach an understanding of its practices, and he explored these in three video works for *Edge of Elsewhere*. Sabsabi is interested in Sufi communities in everyday contexts, therefore he was careful to avoid exoticising Sufism, while trying to bring out ‘the significance of certain important things’.

99 (2010)

99 was the opening *Edge of Elsewhere* project, to Sabsabi this was ‘just about putting the work out there’. A dizzyingly multi-layered video work, the title refers to the 99 names of God in Islam by assembling 99 video screens depicting 99 images of spinning dervishes. These spinning images, just one revolution of a spinning body, are juxtaposed with various scenes of war and destruction drawn from Sabsabi’s travels as well as from media sources.

Sabsabi was interested in the idea of revolution, starting with physical actions. From this Sufi perspective revolution is integral and comes from a human core: ‘the essence of the revolution [which] is actually the centre, which is the heart, and from that spreads out to the body and beyond’, as Sabsabi explains. He goes on: ‘The idea of the ritual is that as the dervishes spin, they’re receiving energy and distributing it around ... it becomes a channelling of positivity’. This is all prevented from being too esoteric (for outsiders at least) by screening the images of dervishes on multiple television screens, alluding to hyper-commercialism and the media proliferation of meaning and interpretation. It constructs a kind

of media labyrinth, and in his work on Sufism Sabsabi says he wanted 'to explore ways of dealing with globalisation, and religion as a part of globalisation'.

99 is a formal work generated by multiplying levels of belief, practice and external representation. It draws on a long period of thinking that flowed from the artist's engagements with specific people and communities: the images of the spinning dervish came from a Sufi community in Aleppo, Syria, one of the oldest cities in the world and a place presently engulfed in the horrors of civil war.

NAQSHBANDI GREENACRE ENGAGEMENT (2011)

Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement is a more intimate video work that came from engagement with a Sufi community in south-western Sydney. Sabsabi was seeking an Australian Sufi community with which to engage for *Edge of Elsewhere*, so he sent a call out to six that he could identify across Australia. Of these, only one replied: members of the Naqshbandi order who meet each week in a scout hall in Greenacre, close to where Sabsabi lives. This 'beautiful irony' was perhaps an omen for the work, which was built from the slow process of the artist getting to know the community and gaining acceptance. At first he simply observed their ceremonies, and then he gradually took part. Initially, Sabsabi says he was not aiming to make a work, but was there 'simply to learn'. Accustomed to taking along his media artist 'bag of tricks', as he told Jane Somerville (2011), 'in this engagement, I didn't go in with anything'.²² After a few weeks, he was able to talk to people in the order about the ceremony and the structure of beliefs, 'orders, paths, nucleus, the surrounds, the heart, the vibration, the universe; all these questions'. Eventually Sabsabi showed them some of his earlier footage of Sufi groups in the Middle East and discussed making a video work.

The humility of the work's presentation reflects Sabsabi's gradual engagement with the community. For Sabsabi it was 'about the community, how they want to be seen'. Its method is built on minimal intrusion: there are uninterrupted takes of the Zikr ceremony lasting an hour and a half on three channels. The unedited documentation of the ceremony shows the coexistence of formal and informal moments:

In one of the takes, one of the kids just runs into the camera and it falls over, the tripod, and he just picks it up and puts it back, and it just becomes a different angle. It's left! I didn't want to montage anything, you know? I didn't want to touch up anything. Sufis believe in this idea of the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, the realm of what we're in, [and] there's this other realm that exists in parallel without realms as well. So this idea of having those three, the disjointedness, puts that out there for me, and that's what I wanted to show in this idea. In its simple way.

Sabsabi has maintained relations with the Greenacre Sufi community. The Greenacre community attracted interest after Sabsabi won the Blake prize – Australia's premier award for art on religious themes – for *Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement*. Sabsabi was pleased that the community took a sense of ownership of the work in the public realm.

CORNER (2012)

Corner was conceived when Sabsabi returned to Lebanon to extend his work on Sufism. *Corner* is a complex, even enigmatic video work that attempts to encompass all of Sabsabi's enquiries and work on Sufism thus far, and to condense what he had learned from his engagement with Sufi communities. Sabsabi had been getting to know Sufi groups and practices for many years,

but 'didn't know what to do with this knowledge', with 'what was given to him' by Sufis. The open time afforded by *Edge of Elsewhere* enabled him to work through these experiences and insights.

Corner draws on the connotations of corner (zawiyah) in Arabic: a foundation for spirituality; a place where ceremonies, teaching and important discussions take place; a space of protection and comfort; a Sufi lodge. Sabsabi mentioned the zawiyah areas he had observed in small Sufi communities in northern Lebanon that were much more substantial than the humble spaces where people slept and ate. Such corners were the model for the installation spaces of the work at Campbelltown Arts Centre and 4A.

Corner consists of two parts, split between the two *Edge of Elsewhere* venues. Thus *Corner* tells us something about dual places and journeys between them: the journeys of Sabsabi himself between the west of Sydney and the east of the Mediterranean, and between two significant Sufi sites in northern Lebanon. An artistic acquittal report for *Edge of Elsewhere* (2013) suggests that *Corner* shows 'how diverse geographies are connected through movement of people and through spiritual practice'.²³

In the large exhibition space at Campbelltown Arts Centre, the installation was a projection of a room wrapped around a corner space. A large *sanjaq*, a ceremonial Sufi flag embroidered with formulae and Koranic texts, adorns an adjoining wall. Three video cameras on tripods point towards the projected room, which appears to be empty. But sounds can be heard from the cameras. Viewers may be drawn to observe a Sufi ceremony taking place in the cameras' viewfinders, however nothing can be seen in front of the camera. Here Sabsabi wants to suggest something of Sufi notions of the visible and the invisible. Watching the ceremony they imagine is taking place in the room, viewers may notice shadows in the projected room:

Once you realise and you keep looking and watching, you sort of take note that there's the shadow of the tripods and the cameras in the projection as well. By the time you associate with it, you find that your shadow is actually in the projection as well. So it's this idea of invitation, and taking you exclusively of who you are and what you are, into the space.

In this elaborate participatory video work, the viewer is invited to occupy the space of the artist, to enter and seek to understand this particular cultural and spiritual world.

The quiet and reflective tone of the work at Campbelltown Arts Centre was something of a contrast to the other part of *Corner* at 4A. At 4A another corner is created with two video monitors, a large screen and a small screen. These are connected by a carpet, which provides an invitation for viewers to immerse themselves in images of the artist's journeys towards two Sufi centres in northern Lebanon: the zawiyah in the village of Danke and in the ancient port city of Tripoli. These journeys, incorporating ordinary scenes such as the bustle of laneways and markets, are a means of 'presenting an everyday perspective of the Sufi path', as a synopsis of the work (2013) puts it.²⁴ Split-screen images juxtapose these quotidian scenes with Sufi religious practices, such as an eloquent sermon delivered by Sheikh Bilal, 'his calmness melded by the hectic roads, laneways and humdrum of Tripoli on the other side of the screen', as Farid (2012) describes it.²⁵ Further images show the skewering of the skin of a disciple, an act of faith known as *darb al-shish*, practiced by adherents of the Rifa'i order.²⁶ 'It's all part of it', was all Sabsabi would say.

This lengthy description of *Corner* is required to show the levels of correspondence, the parallelism of places and the interlinking of sacred and profane spaces, which demonstrate Sufi (and perhaps also Sabsabi's) notions of interconnection that at the same time demystify religion by placing mystical practices alongside the daily contemporary life of Lebanon. The doubling of things and dimensions is represented in the use of split-screen methods; the structuring of the work around two places and two journeys; and the two Sydney venues. Sabsabi was struck by the correspondence in very different geographies: the distance between Campbelltown and 4A (54 kilometres) was the same as that between Tripoli and Danke in Lebanon.

Sabsabi's engagement was not so much a formal process, but rather a continual artistic reflection on the evolution of his learning, an understanding that required time to take place. Sabsabi would think about what he had learned, including the Naqshbandi meetings in Greenacre; discuss what he had been doing with his Sufi informants; and show the works he had been making. The work seems to have emerged in the spaces between encounters, paralleling Sabsabi's quest to capture the intricacies of what he finds in the Sufi ceremonies and the journeys toward them. *Corner* is a highly personal work, but one that is built from relationships with Sufi communities. The work parallels Sabsabi's journeys: he wants audiences to take the time and make the effort to reach an understanding of it and believes the works offer the necessary tools.

COMPARISONS

The two artists, Shigeyuki Kihara and Khaled Sabsabi, clearly differ greatly in terms of their engagement styles. The work of both artists is inherently cross-cultural, deriving from reflections on intercultural situations and questions. Neither simply 'represents' a particular cultural perspective; rather, they explore new possibilities for intercultural relations and understanding through a constant movement between cultural worlds.

Shigeyuki Kihara takes quite distinctive approaches in her three works. The *Bring Your Game Hip Hop Summit* is almost classic community arts, setting up a pedagogical situation that enhances participation and enjoyment in a particular cultural activity. *Talanoa V* creates a cultural intersection through a performance process using a game-like set of rules grounded in a Samoan cultural style as a means of negotiation between groups. People are the medium in this process-oriented series of works in which engagement is literally produced through bringing together the knowledge of acculturated bodies. Engagement is staged in a way to make it visible and containable within the work, which is essentially documents the engagement process. That is, the work in the *Talanoa* series is much more 'for' the participating groups than for an external audience. But these groups are not the temporary 'new communities' generated purely within certain participatory art processes and thus 'beyond culture'.²⁷ They are performance groups that already embody specific cultural knowledge and practices in dance and music that enable a meaningful collaboration to take place in a way that largely bypasses language. *Culture for Sale* entails a more audience-directed performance, drawing the audience into the implications of the colonising gaze that continues in some ways into present forms of commodification and exoticisation of cultures, most notably tourism.

Khaled Sabsabi's work also uses an array of engagement processes that inform the works for *Edge of Elsewhere*. Sabsabi explores different dimensions of Sufism, not as an abstract doctrine, but as a living cultural practice. Sabsabi does not work with a participant group in the same way as Kihara: the human engagement is not the media of the work itself, rather it extends out of its concepts and dynamics, incorporating these elements in the structure and composition of the works. Equally performative as Kihara's work, it is the camera and the formal properties, visual form and juxtapositions of Sabsabi's video works' installation that 'perform' different facets of the relationship and learnings from the engagement with Sufi communities. 99 draws on Sufism's multiple layering of meaning and representation which is embedded in the intimacy of bodily practice, in the long historical conflicts over religion and power, and in contemporary media representations of Arabs and the Middle East. By contrast, *Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement's* apparently unmediated narrative style emphasises the everyday practice of religion, with its mixture of formal and informal interactions, that is somehow undisturbed by the symbolic violence of media representations and cultural stereotypes. Finally, *Corner's* formal emphasis on journeys between places and to reaching an understanding invite the viewer to follow the artist in crossing cultural boundaries and to enter into another cultural reality. Its structure and installation across two venues also evoke the many dimensions and parallels of the artist's engagement with Sufi communities in Australia and the Middle East.

PART 3: EDGE OF ELSEWHERE AND CRITICAL DIVERSITY

In terms of UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, *Edge of Elsewhere* provided a platform that enabled a greater diversity of cultural expression through the whole cycle of cultural 'goods and services' · 'creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment'²⁸ - within contemporary art processes. *Edge of Elsewhere* extended the cultural and demographic footprint of the visual arts in a major city's premier cultural festival, by involving participants from emerging cultural communities in Sydney in a range of collaborative visual arts projects. Operating on a number of levels, *Edge of Elsewhere* generated international cultural exchanges with significant artists from Asia and the Pacific, and facilitated Australian artists to work in widely differing ways with local communities in Sydney. *Edge of Elsewhere* aimed to stimulate various forms of cultural development at local and regional levels, and worked with communities not usually engaged in arts processes. The Convention endorses policies and programs that extend cultural participation and access to 'various social groups', including cultural minorities and Indigenous peoples.²⁹ Artists such as Shigayuki Kihara specifically seek to work with groups who have not been exposed to art institutions, although they are clearly engaged in cultural activity in a broader sense.

This case study began by examining the curatorial intentions of *Edge of Elsewhere* and the way these framed the project. Curating is an increasingly important means for channelling cultural material and processes. The importance of the curator as 'globally connected auteur' framing cultural presentation has increased, along with the growth of biennials and major arts festivals as the dominant way of conveying contemporary art.³⁰ While some writers have

criticised 'curatorial functionaries' who allow artists little direct influence on the ways work is framed and presented³¹, this is certainly not the case with *Edge of Elsewhere*, in which artists were given carte blanche to choose any directions for engaging with communities and developing work collaboratively.

The open curatorial brief of the project and the three-year period allowed a variety of artistic responses to develop and resist generalisation. Contemporary art privileges the sovereignty of the artist's vision to explore an apparently limitless field of possible concepts and themes. A long counter-history has seen many attempts to 'decentre' the artist, and to position their role more firmly within cultural and political situations through participatory and collaborative engagement. This coincides with the requirements for art institutions to extend their audiences and maintain relevance within changing cultural and demographic situations. *Edge of Elsewhere* can be located within this history in its pursuit of work relevant to emerging cultural communities, particularly in western Sydney. Consistent with contemporary art practice that incorporates conceptual questioning, the nature of these communities was not assumed: most of the artists did not take these categories to be stable. *Edge of Elsewhere* provided a means for questioning the boundaries of culture, community and identity.

Edge of Elsewhere's openness to potential cultural engagement without limits or rules provides an interesting test for concepts of culture and diversity found in the UNESCO Convention. Would a completely open conception of cultural engagement be too broad to focus on what would generally be understood as identifiable cultural expressions? In the work of Shigeyuki Kihara and Khaled Sabsabi, the emerging expressions tended to be anchored

in a combination of the artist's cultural background and the ongoing trajectories of their artistic practice. For instance, Kihara's use of the Samoan notion of talanoa and the Tauluga dance used traditional styles and cultural expressions as conceptual tools to generate new forms of intercultural exchange. Sabsabi's exploration of Sufism arose from his search for alternatives within an Arabic culture that were not his own. Nevertheless Sufism was part of an Arabic heritage that he was able to explore, not just in religious sites in the Middle East, but in a scout hall in Greenacre, Sydney. Both artists work within the context of migrant diasporas. Sabsabi's work in particular illuminates the parallel circuits of cultural practices in home and migrant contexts. Both artists employ what Nikos Papastergiadis calls a 'spatial aesthetics' which arises from an entanglement 'between local and global ideas of place' that occurs through travel, migration or exile in artists' practice.³² Artists bring their own cultural journeys and cultural intersections to bear in their arts practice in ways that are - to varying degrees - experimental and unpredictable.

When art practices entail collaborative and participatory encounters, as was the case in *Edge of Elsewhere*, there are necessarily complicated relations with participants around the nature of the process and their role in it. As mentioned in Part 1, it could result in tensions for participants between the open-ended nature of the artistic project and expectations of more structured processes and outcomes. That engagements of this type are often difficult or awkward, or even unequal in agency or outcomes, should hardly be surprising. These tensions and challenges should be thought of as part of the process. There will always be differing degrees of agency, different investments by parties, more or less direct input into creative and intellectual contributions, and

differing assertions or concessions of control, witness Kihara's 'maestro' role in the *Talanoa* process. Indeed the messiness of such arrangements is part of their high risk and their potential to generate new thinking and expression. Opinions are divided about art made via processes of engagement between artists and participant groups: whether the work made from engagements should be **by, for** or **with** participating communities.³³ These are important elements for negotiation to ensure clear processes grounded in respect and mutual understanding. One possibility could be the development of sets of protocols for use in cultural engagements with various modes of participation, creative contribution, and capacity building. What matters for an 'art of engagement' in complex collaborative situations is what the French artist François Deck calls 'reciprocal expertise', a negotiation of competencies and incompetencies: what partners know and don't know.³⁴ There is still much to learn about the modes of engagement tested in *Edge of Elsewhere* that could be further developed and articulated. Perhaps this will emerge in planned further publications by *Edge of Elsewhere*.

Collaborative and participatory engagements guided by artists are important ways to extend and renew cultural expressions, and to generate new expressions. Indeed, the Convention includes cultural interaction and dialogue among its core objectives.³⁵ The significance of collaborative or participatory engagements in art is that they require a stage at which the capricious dynamics of cultural and social exchange can intervene to shape the developing work – or cultural expressions – in unpredictable ways. Collaborative methods of making art have helped to affect a shift from the representation of difference to a situation whereby understandings

of difference and diversity require some mediating process. For Papastergiadis, such mediating processes should attempt to go beyond taken-for-granted repertoires of cultural difference and seek to develop 'new strategies for cultural understandings'.³⁶ This description fits both Kihara and Sabsabi's work. The effects of art engagements are rarely limited to immediate and local situations (an interactionist account of process). Cultural engagement in one location entails reflection on extended cultural domains and on cultural histories. These reflections resonate in artworks and in evolving artistic practices. In addition they contribute to diverse perspectives and cultural material within public spheres. *Edge of Elsewhere* sought to share and extend its cultural engagements through an extensive program of public events: symposiums, artist talks and conversations, publications, documentary videos, and blogs.³⁷ These amplifications are essential to a contemporary art practice that supports the sharing of diverse expressions and engenders critical spaces to engage with the many dimensions of cultural change and mobility.

- 1 Campbelltown Arts Centre, *In Memory of a Name* podcast series, blog entry, Campbelltown, NSW, 2012, viewed 20 August 2013, <<http://edgeofelsewhere.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/in-memory-of-a-name-podcast-series/#more-1007>>.
- 2 For an accessible overview of the tensions and complexities in the development of Sydney's western suburbs, see Gabrielle Gwyther's entry on Western Sydney in the Dictionary of Sydney at <http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/western_sydney>.
- 3 Lisa Havilah, 'A suburban rethink', in Lisa Havilah, Aaron Seeto and Thomas J. Berghuis (eds), *Edge of Elsewhere*, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, NSW, 2010, p 15.
- 4 Havilah, 'Suburban rethink', p 15.
- 5 Aaron Seeto, 'The unpackaged community', in Lisa Havilah, Aaron Seeto and Thomas J. Berghuis (eds), *Edge of Elsewhere*, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, NSW, 2010, p 28. 'Ready-made community' is a term adapted from curator Emma Bugden, 'We are together: Resistance from the inside', *Column*, no 4, 2009 p 47.
- 6 Seeto, 'The unpackaged community', p 28.
- 7 Seeto, 'The unpackaged community', p 28.
- 8 Francis Maravillas, *Edge of Elsewhere: An evaluation report*, Campbelltown Arts Centre [unpublished], Campbelltown, NSW, 2013, p 3.
- 9 The analysis tested the project's engagement processes using a number of core dimensions devised by the Community Partnerships division in the Australia Council, which provided significant funding for *Edge of Elsewhere*. The case studies were *Phaptawan Suwannakudt's Home (away from Home)*, Michel Tuffery's *Povi Vasa* and FX Harsono's *In Memory of a Name*.
- 10 See Ien Ang, Elaine Lally, Kay Anderson, Phillip Mar and Michelle Kelly, 'Introduction: What is the art of engagement?', in Elaine Lally, Ien Ang and Kay Anderson (eds), *The Art of Engagement: Culture, Collaboration, Innovation*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, WA, 2011, pp 1-13.
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CASE STUDY

METaverse MAKEOVERS

metaverse:

'a 3D virtual world, esp in an online role-playing game ... the universe as portrayed in a given work of fiction ... Etymology C20: from meta + (uni) verse'; 'A computer-generated interactive environment. ... from science fiction novel Snow Crash'²

makeover:

'A reorganisation, a reshaping, esp a thorough refashioning of a person's appearance through beauty treatment'³

'Transnational, cross-cultural, collaborative, future-forward' company Metaverse Makeovers⁴ developed a participatory artwork titled 'Metaverse Nails', in which nail technicians and their clientele take part in a digitally augmented nail treatment. While receiving their treatment, an interactive animation appears to emerge from the client's nails, triggered by a device such as a mobile phone or iPad. Alongside the technical processes, 'Metaverse Nails' is aligned with the live art movement: it is strongly performance-based, and concerned with new interventions for audiences and public spheres.⁵ Metaverse Makeovers performances have taken place in Shanghai, Melbourne, Sydney, Darwin and Brisbane. As a technology start-up, the company aims to market digital cosmetics 'accessories' in Asia.

PART 1: BLING CULTURES: FASHION, CONSUMPTION AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

A project that fuses fashion and digital arts seems an unlikely candidate for inclusion in a collection of case studies about protecting and promoting cultural expression. Both fashion and digital media have been seen as phenomena of a globalising capitalism that have the potential to erode localised cultural expressions. *Metaverse Makeovers* is located at the intersection of these phenomena and is thus a useful test case for examining new forms of cultural expression, and considering their value.

How did this intriguingly hybrid project come about? Its inaugurator Thea Baumann is a media artist, producer and curator; she is also adept at games design and programming. A confluence of interests – linked particularly to Asia, where she has lived and travelled extensively – led to

Metaverse Makeovers. Baumann was interested in beauty and its embeddedness in Asian cultures, and saw nail bars in particular as an intriguing social space after observing them in Vietnam. Allied to this was an interest in young Asian women and their use of handheld digital technology.

What connects all these things? *Metaverse Makeovers* explores the relationships between people's everyday media and mobile communication experience, and the world of consumption and desire, particularly women's engagement with fashion. Baumann is interested in young and newly affluent urbanites, known in China as the post-90s generation, for whom the internet and social media is totally integrated into their daily lives: 'It's a generation that only knows the internet, or engaging with each other socially and like sharing, sharing through social media'.⁶

These young people are likely to be immersed in fashion and in shared patterns of consumption based on eclectic subcultural styles.

This echoes the more general observations of sociologist Manuel Castells, for whom the access to almost infinite resources of digital information are also influenced and channelled by a 'privatization of sociability', the 'rebuilding of social networks around the individual and the development of personal communities, both physically and online'.⁷

While many bemoan this privatization, Baumann feels it is also an opportunity for new forms of intimacy and community. The nail bar is a social world that can bring together these dual socialities of physical and online. Baumann noticed the intensive social activity of Chinese women going for nail treatments who were active on phones and other handheld devices: sending photos of treatments, texting and gaming.

In nail bars, both globalising trends and cultural specificities can be seen. Nail art as a global fashion form developed from the new paints and colours that were derived from automobile paints in the 1930s and marketed by Revlon. Artificial nails, and acrylic and gel nail enhancements developed from the 1970s. Nail art is now a thriving fashion form incorporated into the 'look' of top designers. Its global credentials were exemplified by the involvement of a nail design company in the London Olympics, working with women competitors: 'Almost every time a female winner held up her medal, some nail art seemed to flash up'.⁸ On the one hand, there is the vogue for nail art creations such as those sported by Lady Gaga or Katy Perry. On the other hand, there are the ordinary pleasures of nail bars in more down-market locations, where women engage in social exchange with nail technicians

and other women. There is also a cultural specificity to nail bars. For example, many intricate designs were introduced by Caribbean women, who were the drivers for nail bars in Britain. Vietnamese refugees and immigrants were the main promoters of nail-only businesses in North America and Australia, where nail bars became an important new segment of the fashion industry. Easily obtained training and access to a business career that didn't require a strong proficiency in English contributed to the popularity of the profession amongst Vietnamese. Pillar notes: 'As the industry transnationalized, it moved back to Vietnam and many nail technicians now train there before emigrating[,] and have jobs already lined up before they even leave the country'.⁹

Thea Baumann, whose mother has a Vietnamese background, was intrigued by the nail bars she observed in Vietnam, and their atmosphere of promise and compensation, particularly for migrant workers. In our interview she also mentioned the 'deep tragedy' of the pink neon signs that could signal a brothel by night:

That's the thing that attracts me, as an artist or an art director; these surfaces that you see. And there's such a deep layering that's bubbling away underneath that. And I think nail bars are a perfect crystallisation of this. And that's basically why I'm attracted to them ... In Australia, most nail bars are run by Vietnamese immigrants. On a personal level I'm deeply attracted to somehow bringing technology to this group, because I'm such a product of it.

Baumann's personal and artistic interest in nail bars coalesced with her explorations into the possibilities of using augmented reality technologies as an expressive form:

That's how I started to work with Vietnamese nail technicians in Brisbane. It's an idea that had been bubbling away in my mind, to do a project in nail bars in Australia, but I just didn't know what form it would take until I started working with augmented reality. And it was like, this is it! Because augmented reality is like this other layer; it's like the other virtual layer that I was always very interested in. It was kind of where I knew mobile phone technologies were going to be heading to. On a conceptual level, augmented reality was like make-up; it's just another layer. And so I wanted to just explore it - I mean it just seemed very obvious to me, to basically build an experiential product - a 'Metaverse Nails' product that uses augmented reality as this other make-up layer.

This 'eureka!' connection between nail treatments and augmented reality technologies was the conceptual coming together of the project. Apart from being a technical description, the notion of layering in augmented reality also implies a certain approach to ways of relating to culture and communities. The following section will explore the role of augmented reality (AR) in the conceptualisation and realisation of *Metaverse Makeovers*.

PART 2: METAVERSE AND AUGMENTED REALITY: TECHNOLOGIES OF ENCHANTMENT

Metaverse Makeovers is the work of three key artistic collaborators: Thea Baumann, Ben Ferns and Shian Law. Ben Ferns describes himself as a visual artist 'focusing on new techniques in augmented reality, generative visuals and computer vision, for performance and installations'.¹⁰ Shian Law works as a 'performer, collaborator [and] choreographer in the context of dance, trans-media performance and live-art intervention'.¹¹ Despite their specialised skills, *Metaverse Makeovers* works closely as a team. For instance, while Law is more explicitly involved in performance aspects, he is also involved in production; in conceiving performances and environments; and in translating projects to participants. *Metaverse Makeovers* operates via a thoroughly networked collaboration process, and the three partners have often worked on a 'live' presentation while being in three different cities. Ben Ferns is based in Tokyo, and Baumann and Law move frequently between Melbourne and Asia. Together they have progressed *Metaverse Makeovers* through a number of phases: the creation of an augmented reality platform; performances and showings of their nail designs along with nail treatments; and product development of an 'appcessory', an AR application developed through *Metaverse Makeovers* as a technology start-up company.

METaverse AND AUGMENTED REALITY

In a review of artworks which make use of game structures or refer to gaming cultures, Ricardo Peach categorised the work of *Metaverse Makeovers* as 'game-like art', a kind of art which uses the tools of game engines – software platforms used to design and develop video games – 'to invent new applications for both experimental arts practices and innovative community engagement'.¹² Ben Ferns was the primary developer of *Metaverse Makeovers'* applications which use game engines to enable '4D' special effects to appear, as if from people's nails. A marker pattern applied to a nail as part of the treatment can trigger virtual animations when passed over by a mobile device. The animations can be seen on the screen of the device in real time. They can also be photographed and sent to other people via social media streams. Initially the marker patterns were crude and blocky, 'derived from the necessities of computer vision, rather than any design on our part,' as Ferns explained in our interview.¹³ Newer software enables more natural-looking designs, like the leopard-skin prints *Metaverse Makeovers* now uses.

Thea Baumann speaks of such effects as an augmentation of existing 3D nail art. Augmented reality is a 'container term describing the use of data overlays on a real-time camera view of a location'.¹⁴ Some form of digitally generated sensory information – text, image or sound – is introduced and superimposed. This can include data triggered by AR markers such as QR marker codes, as with *Metaverse Nails*, or data generated using deeply interactive processes such as face recognition and forms of 'haptic feedback' that can create a sense of the material depth of objects.¹⁵ Ben Ferns looks forward to using these evolving technologies with facial make-up and clothing, which are more closely tied to the way we see each other.

Identification with AR technology is also strategic in terms of *Metaverse Makeovers'* philosophical approach. Augmented reality is distinct from virtual reality – with its fantasy of an entirely simulated world – and also from a realism that does not account for digital and informational dimensions. Media theorist Lev Manovich sees augmented reality as a useful term for thinking more broadly about 'augmented space': the way that physical spaces are increasingly 'overlaid with dynamically changing information, multimedia in form and localized for each user'.¹⁶

This is where *Metaverse Makeovers* locates itself. The nail application produces a digital layer superimposed on a real physical space: the fingernails. From this researcher's experience of the nail treatment, there is a strongly embodied feeling as the images leap from your nails, even though this effect is screen-based. Thea Baumann and *Metaverse Makeovers* want to rethink augmented reality in terms of its potential as personal expression, going beyond common marketing uses such as product previews and promotions. But however pleasurable the sensation of images that seem to be exploding from one's nails is, is it not also something imposed that is not of your own making? Nail designs are not self-created; they are objects of consumption. What is the expressive dimension here? Is it in the potential for the sharing of objects and their further manipulation? For Thea Baumann, 'the object is not to design purely interactive experiences, but enhancing what is already fertile and bubbling away within Asian subcultural life'. The exchange and sharing of new objects of consumption can enhance the expressive capacities of established digital or face-to-face networked communities.

Some writers have argued that the potential of AR is exaggerated. Common uses of AR are often quite limited or distracting to our potential for perception. Such uses are of course always circumscribed by the data that is entered.¹⁷ Ben Ferns agrees that AR uses thus far are hardly enthralling: 'you hold up your phone and you look at the cereal packet and advertising data comes out of the cereal packet - it's not very compelling'. Nevertheless it might be banal content that is the problem, rather than the technological medium itself. Augmentation in the form of the fantastic - as in the bling of holographic nails - can create a sense of the miraculous.¹⁸ This ties in with a view of how cultural expressions such as fashion can work in a powerfully aesthetic way. Nigel Thrift has argued that the glamour present in fashion results from a kind of glitzy spell, that is generated through an aesthetic 'manipulation of surfaces' which uses effects of light, colour, or even a kind of phosphorescent glow. Glamour is a form of allure created when the boundaries of the person and materials are blurred. Thrift writes:

Through the manipulation of surfaces, glamour casts a secular spell - often only very briefly - but the moment of traction is, I argue, a real one which needs to be taken into accounts of cultural economy if we are to make sense of modern consumption.¹⁹

The holographic bling that leaps from your nails aspires to the affect of this momentary spell. Augmented reality may have this kind of aesthetic potential, yet the technology and its potential for social and cultural engagement is very much in its infancy. Ben Ferns says:

I can definitely see a future where it's not so much a volitional thing, where you kind of have to decide to have an AR experience; rather they would come to you. And that's when the virtual make-up stuff will become a part of everyday life.

Ferns hopes that augmented reality engagements with fashion will become something more specific to individuals and their self-perception:

I asked the nail technicians in Shanghai - I always ask a quick question - "If you could put anything on your nails, what would you put on here?" And the answer always came back exactly the same: diamonds. Imagine when everyone has AR and the capacity to do it; the first year everyone will be wearing the equivalent of Prada, or Gucci, or whatever. And then, the year after ... what happens when these consumption status brands can be had by absolutely everyone? You could have it that way, or you could be a bit different; more specific to the person and how they are able to perceive themselves.

METaverse MAKEOVERS AND PERFORMANCE

'Hologram Holiday' ... involves a performative nail salon treatment, an experimental sound track, several "hologram hostesses" assisting with new augmented reality nails and virtual reality applications. Nail technicians place special QR codes on clients' fingernails, which when viewed through an application on a smart phone or mobile device, reveal three dimensional, virtual reality jewellery popping out of each nail. A cornucopia of virtual bling.²⁰

Ricardo Peach, 'Art & games, a killer combination' (2012)

Metaverse Makeovers comes into public existence through its live performances and showings. Performance is inherent in *Metaverse Makeovers'* use of augmented reality, and its layering entails an active engagement with specific social and cultural realities. *Metaverse Makeovers* has performed its nail iterations in a variety of contexts: at the Fur Salon as part of the L'Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival (2011); in a nail bar in a mall in suburban Sunnybank, Brisbane, as part of *My Own Private Neon Oasis*, a contemporary arts project celebrating Sunnybank's diverse cultural environment (2011); in a club environment at the Jue festival in Shanghai (2012), a music and arts festival; and in *The Portals*, a simulcast event linking nail salons in Darwin and Sydney (2013).²¹

Metaverse Makeovers puts considerable work into constructing appropriate site-specific environments, both physical and digital, that consider the audience, the spatial environment and the cultural setting. Each performance is preceded by a community engagement, where nail technicians are recruited and introduced to the augmentation procedures, in the process restyling them as 'Hologram Hostesses'. Shian Law, dubbed by Thea Baumann as 'the face of the Metaverse', plays a lead role in *Metaverse Makeovers'* performances. Law projects the image of a being that is 'mutable, transformative and transnational, like an Asian person from the future'; a kind of icon for the *Metaverse Makeovers* brand. Law also carries out much of the liaison that enables performances to take place, as an act of hospitality linking artists, nail technicians and clients. He explains:

The role that I'm playing always has multiple functions. The first thing I have to connect with is the nail technicians: connecting with the nail technicians is the first contact with community. That's always the first contact, so that they have a key concept of what is happening; a general picture of what is taking place. And even though they're in a very highly performative environment, they remain doing a very decent, very tactile, really humanistic sort of service; to apply nails. So, I think they're aware of that. Usually they wear wigs and become really, you know, performative. They have this really humanistic role in the tactile content and application.

As Baumann explains, the core of the performance has remained the same from the first performance:

In a site-specific context, what happens is essentially like any manicure - if you went into a nail bar and you wanted some kind of like, you know, nail art manicure. You would just go in there, you sit down and the nail technician gives you a normal manicure and just paints your nail, and then applies the Metaverse nail markers; they're like pattern markers. I've developed them now like they're leopard prints - those are just applied to your nails like the same treatment as a normal manicure. And then when you look at it through my apps, then the virtual diamonds and bling and all kinds of 3D animation literally pop out of your nails when viewed through the mobile phone camera.

Physical, tactile engagements are the basis of the performances. As Law describes it:

It's a very simple, a luxurious sort of experience. It's very simple, very localised as well. It's just on your hands. Yeah, very localised, very small, microscopic in some way.

This intimate attention to the hands seems appropriate to the *Metaverse Makeover* philosophy: hands and fingers have become partners with the eyes in new ways of seeing with phones, computers and remote control devices. *Metaverse Nails* makes apparent what Cooley (2004) has called 'tactile vision', the 'material and dynamic seeing involving eyes as well as hands and [mobile screen devices]'.²² At the same time, *Metaverse Nails* is a kind of ritualised service offered at a specific site, with the nail bar as its model. Baumann explains:

That's where the intimacy of the nail bar really plays into this because it's trying to create these new types of face-to-face engagement with people ... Metaverse Makeovers is absolutely about creating these spaces of engagement with people, and between people.

HOLOGRAM HOLIDAY

One example of *Metaverse Makeovers'* spaces of engagement is iNails, a nail bar in Sunnybank Plaza, in a multicultural suburb of Brisbane. Brisbane - and Sunnybank in particular - has been at the centre of Taiwanese migration to Australia over the past 25 years. The mall itself is not a flashy temple of consumption, but a somewhat ageing mid-sized shopping centre that was built in the 1970s. On approach one discovers a multifarious collection of stores and eateries, with an everyday buzz that differs from the enclosed and generic environment of larger chain malls.²³ The many Asian stores are not relegated to the older strips outside the central mall, as occurs in many Australian suburbs. The iNails bar is

unprepossessing for a fashion establishment. It has a homely feel that no doubt suits its clientele, which is quite mixed in terms of age and ethnicity.

iNails was one of the performance and installation sites in *My Own Private Neon Oasis*, a retail collaboration involving the Museum of Brisbane that celebrated the contribution of Asian immigrants to shaping Brisbane's urban environment and culture. Curator Louise Rollman was aware of Thea Baumann's interest in nail bars as ventures largely run by Vietnamese immigrant women. Rollman invited Baumann to participate, and facilitated the partnership with iNails through Sunnybank Plaza's Marketing Manager, Lisa Smith, who the owners knew well and trusted. *Hologram Holidays*, as it would come to be called, fitted into the overall conception of *My Own Private Neon Oasis*. Rollman explained in an email: 'All of the works explored the status of artworks amidst consumerism, duality and in-between-ness, illusions, rendering the invisible visible, re-adaptation and transformation in ways that were cultural and location-specific'.²⁴ The Museum of Brisbane was responsible for the exhibition design and the fit-out of the salon, along with ensuring the safety of staff and clients as its normal business and its spell as a contemporary arts space coincided.

This was the context for *Hologram Holiday*, which *Metaverse Makeovers* interpreted as a kind of tropical Shangri-La. There was a dreamy exotic soundtrack and the words 'Paradise and Beyond' in neon signage. The performance and installation aspects of *Hologram Holiday* evoked the seductive and utopian dimensions of the fashion encounter.²⁵ Ben Ferns recalls that *Metaverse Makeovers* wanted a 'guided experience' for clients who were not ordinary iNails customers, but who had booked nail treatments through the Museum. The clients would come in and have

someone take care of and pamper them. They would sit down as they would in the normal nail parlour, then they would see a video of Shian Law introducing the experience on an iPad in front of them (on this occasion, Law was not in Brisbane, but had performed for the promo video in advance). Hostesses in skin-tight infinity suits²⁶ then helped nail technicians take the people to the final stage of their nail treatment. Clients would then use a camera station to have their nails projected on the salon's plasma screen, for them and other clients to see. As Ferns explains, this guided experience

*was meant to take away the unease people normally get from the technology, by having it be this pampered kind of experience. Any kind of control is taken away from the person; they can just kind of relax and enjoy it, this slightly surreal Metaverse experience.*²⁷

The iNails performance illustrates the *Metaverse Makeovers* team's concern with thoroughly designing each experience. At the same time it shows how *Hologram Holiday* was nested in the institutional support provided by the *My Own Private Neon Oasis* project. The participation of the iNails owners and staff seems to have been fairly amicable, if a little stressful. When we spoke to the busy iNails proprietor between nail treatments she recalled the performances as 'rushing, rushing, but it was fun'. However Louise Rollman thinks that some of the staff may have been taken out of their comfort zone. *The Hologram Holiday* installation remained in the nail bar for some time, giving it the atmosphere of a nightclub, and the manager remarked that 'a lot of customers liked the sound and music'. There were some benefits for the business, and iNails could see that digital technology could play a greater role in nail art in the future.

METAVVERSE MAKEOVERS AS BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

Thea Baumann revealed that she first realised the commercial potential of the project after the Sunnybank performance. *Metaverse Makeovers* has become a business, a 'transformed augmented reality company' seeking to market its AR application for the Asian market. For the *Metaverse Makeovers* team, this seemed a natural step to sustain the project and provide the application and digital services to a large number of people. Bauman explains: 'I just wanted to make it accessible, and I actually wanted it to be for the people ... I didn't think of it as this one-off solitary art bubble experience'. In Bauman's view there is little sustainability in project-to-project funding, and little likelihood of a project funded in this manner being able to evolve further. This also makes sense to Ben Ferns, as a visual artist with an interest in working with new AR technologies that will present new possibilities for *Metaverse Makeovers*, for instance in areas of clothing and facial make-up. It also establishes new contexts for art and performance. As Ferns says:

I'm excited by the possibility of showing a specific project in a more brand contestable context, just pushing the way art can be viewed and [by] what kind of audiences. So it is contemporary digital arts practice: it involves the community; it involves multicultural communities; but hey, it's in a fashion festival.

Working as artists and imagineers within the highly commercial milieu of computer and mobile media applications, and promoting glittery augmentations through the huge potential markets provided by Facebook and Twitter – as well as Chinese counterparts Weibo and RenRen – *Metaverse Makeovers* has the ambition to extend its work through the market on a much larger scale.

PART 3: WHAT KIND OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION IS THIS?

Metaverse Makeovers does not easily fit the picture of a culture or cultural expression associated with UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This picture is usually implicitly framed by region, ethnicity, language or religious belief.²⁸ *Metaverse Makeover's* work is located at the intersection of globalising fashion markets, mobile communications and social media, which makes the project's cultural expression difficult to characterise. Metaverse is unusual for its overtly commercial orientation, considering it was a funded arts project that has developed into a technology start-up business marketing its application and sustaining development. What is the nature of *Metaverse Nails* as a cultural expression? Upon hearing that the project was about nail bars and bling fashion, a colleague remarked, half in jest: 'I thought that was the kind of cultural expression that we're supposed to be opposed to'.

What kind of cultural expression is this? Any consideration of contemporary practices of cultural expression would have to consider the worlds of consumption as vehicles of culture. Nigel Thrift argues that: 'Aesthetic practices can take on a number of forms but amongst their chief expressions must surely be the vast spectrum of consumer objects which ... are able to produce all kinds of affective allegiances.'²⁹ The idea of affective allegiances suggests the kind of communities that form around tastes · whether for Nike shoes or One Direction · that are disseminated and amplified through the internet and social media. What is the expressive potential in such consumer responses?

Perhaps expressive potential lies not just in the products or their augmentations, but in the extent to which they are able to enhance a participatory culture or community. Digital communications and the ubiquity of mobile devices have further expanded notions of community and sociability. A culture of real virtuality is one where the digital and physical worlds are increasingly integrated and accessible. For Castells, digitally networked systems of communication have the potential to open up the 'inclusiveness and comprehensiveness of all cultural expressions', while at the same time exposing users to a 'privatization of sociability'.³⁰ There is a tension in the technological interface between cultural globalisation and personalisation. Privatisation is not automatic, however. Nanna Verhoeff suggests that conditions for a 'participatory culture' could exist where there is a 'multi-layered performativity of user, interface and the spaces within which this takes place'.³¹ This suggests the kind of vision that *Metaverse Makeovers* proposes when they speak of grounding augmented reality in the physical space of real communities. These communities are harder to grasp categorically, as they are defined less by standard identity categories and more by webs of digital communication practice, and shared consumption domains and styles. They are grounded in the immediacy, the 'liveness', of everyday practices in which digital communication is increasing becoming a constant feature. *Metaverse Makeovers'* emphasis on bodily augmentation points to the intimacy of the way in which bodies – specifically fingernails – are implicated in this layering of cultural information and aesthetic expression.

The question ‘what kind of cultural expression is this?’ demands that we locate cultural expressions within the augmented environments in which they increasingly occur, where informational flows, personal desires and bodily interfaces converge. How then can *Metaverse Makeovers* be located in relation to the Convention?

The Convention places emphasis on supporting the diversity of cultural activity, goods and services within national territories. It does this because one of its principal aims is to support the autonomy of the national cultural policies of its signatories. However the Convention is also concerned with the ambiguities and tensions of globalisation and the technologies facilitating it. The Convention’s Preamble explicitly notes that the processes of globalisation, ‘facilitated by the rapid development of information and communication technologies...afford unprecedented conditions for enhanced interaction between cultures’ while also posing a ‘challenge for cultural diversity’.³²

Metaverse Makeovers is a transnationally oriented project: it is built on direct and personal cross-border encounters and is driven by practitioners with diasporic connections. It operates in a highly digitally networked way, with key collaborators often spread across dispersed geographical locations, even when hosting a face-to-face performance. *Metaverse Makeovers* has been engaged in tracking a globalised fashion form – nail art – that has largely been promoted by immigrant women. *Metaverse Nails* as a community engagement takes its inspiration from the nail bar as a fashion service industry. In a sense, *Metaverse Makeovers* provides a service to this industry and its clientele through its AR nail products. Nail bars are locations for particular forms of hospitality that, although part of a globalising form, have considerable cultural specificity.

The Convention focuses on culture within national contexts in policy terms, and stresses the importance of international exchange and cooperation. The Convention principally deals with international exchanges promoted by and between governments, but it is also supportive of new technologies and partnerships that foster diversity of cultural expressions.³³ The ‘Operational Guidelines’ to the Convention suggest that nations should ‘place specific emphasis on measures and policies aimed at promoting the diversity of cultural expressions that are best adapted to the new technological environment’, and foster information transfer and expertise in new technologies for cultural professionals.³⁴ This suggests a new consideration of cultural expressions that develop at the interface of emerging communication and informational forms beyond the territories of individual nation-states.

With the ubiquity of digital communications and the online world as a mass phenomenon on a global scale, the potential contribution of digital media for the diversity of cultural expression should be considered. Tracking the culture cycle of works of digital art, for instance, would also point to the complex networks involved in its creation, production, dissemination, audience reception, and enjoyment or participation.³⁵ The work of *Metaverse Makeovers* alerts us to more complicated dimensions – the interfaces with the ‘real’ world of bodies, places and communities – which are also augmented spaces, layered with information, and surprising objects of desire.

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- 5 For more on Live Art, see <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/artforms/experimental-arts/news_items/live-art>. Webpage no longer live. Contact the Australia Council for more information.
- 6 Interview with Thea Baumann. This paper has drawn on interviews and email and phone communications with Baumann, Ben Ferns, Shian Law, Louise Rollman and a nail bar operator.
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- 8 Kira Cochrane, 'Nail art: Power at your fingertips', *The Guardian*, 25 September 2012, viewed 28 July 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2012/sep/25/nail-art-power-at-fingertips>>.
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- 14 Nanna Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens: The visual regime of navigation*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2012, p 157.
- 15 Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens*, p 157.
- 16 Lev Manovich, 'The poetics of augmented space', *Visual Communication*, vol 5, no 2, 2006, pp 219–40.
- 17 Kathy Cleland, 'Seeing like a robot: Augmented reality vision', *Column*, no 7, 2011, pp 58–65.
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- 19 Nigel Thrift, 'The material practices of glamour', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, vol 1, no 1, 2008, p 10.
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- 22 Heidi Rae Cooley, 'It's all about the fit: The hand, the mobile screenic device and tactile vision', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol 3, no 2, 2004, p 137.
- 23 Sunnybank is sometimes described as Brisbane's 'real Chinatown', in contrast to the more tourist and entertainment oriented Fortitude Valley, which is closer to Brisbane's CBD. See, for example, Tony Moore's Brisbane Times article at <<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/lifestyle/for-brisbanes-true-chinatown-look-outside-the-valley-20110303-1bgf7.html>>.
- 24 Louise Rollman, email, 14 May 2013.
- 25 Louise Rollman, *My Own Private Neon Oasis = Wo zi ji de ni hong deng lü zhou*, Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane, Qld, 2011.
- 26 See <http://aphids.net/shop/Infinity_Skinsuits>.
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- 29 Thrift, 'The material practices of glamour', p 11.
- 30 Castells, *Rise of the Network Society*, p 405.
- 31 Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens*, p 113.
- 32 UNESCO, *Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Preamble.
- 33 UNESCO, *Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Article 12.
- 34 UNESCO, *Basic texts of the '2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions'*, UNESCO, Paris, 2013, p 28. Available from: <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002253/225383E.pdf>>.
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TRANSLAB

TransLab was an initiative that supported the development of new intercultural and interdisciplinary performance. TransLab was initiated by the Theatre Board of the Australia Council for the Arts and delivered by Arts House, Melbourne and Performance Space, Sydney in 2008 and 2009. The TransLab program provided residencies offering critical and supportive environments for artists from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to: undertake research and development; experiment with new processes for making work; and generate new intercultural performance projects.¹

The TransLab initiative supported six intercultural research and development residencies,² involving 41 artists and eight dramaturgs for a total of 26 weeks of residency. Of the six residency groups, four led to productions. The TransLab initiative did not continue beyond 2009, however learnings from TransLab have been incorporated in subsequent programs funded by the Australia Council. TransLab is a useful model for thinking about ways to support intercultural performance work. It may have broader applicability to other artforms.

PART 1: DEVELOPING THE TRANSLAB INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT CROSS-CULTURAL THEATRE

TransLab was developed by the Theatre section of the Australia Council.³ There has been a long history of grappling with questions of how to make arts practices more inclusive and broad-based within changing conceptions of culture and cultural diversity. The 1993 Australia Council policy Arts for a Multicultural Australia (AMA) aimed to support non-English speaking background (NESB) cultural activities and to develop an Australian multicultural identity.⁴ A later version of the policy signalled a further shift in thinking about multiculturalism in the arts. The policy recognised that ‘our Australian community as a whole is multicultural’ and moved beyond the notion of multicultural arts as centred on ethnic-specific or immigrant cultural expressions. Multicultural arts practice should encompass a range of modes of expression, including intercultural and cross-cultural work that reflects the dynamics of cultural interaction in Australia.⁵ TransLab came out of a longer

process of discussion, within the Theatre section and Council more broadly, about how to enhance social inclusion, cultural diversity and cultural relevance. There was a need to consider cultural expressions that arise from the social and cultural diversity of Australian society, and works that take this diversity as their starting point: ‘Cross-cultural theatre work explores our relationship to the diverse cultures we inhabit’, as a TransLab document puts it.⁶

Such emergent forms tend to develop at some remove from the theatre mainstream that developed historically as the ‘legitimate’ form. In a context of declining funding and the need to maintain existing large and medium sized theatre companies,⁷ the Theatre section had to confront the policy problem of how to support innovative work that does not rely on ‘established ideas and forms’ and involves ‘investigating, testing and taking artistic risks’.⁸ We spoke to Antonietta Morgillo of the Theatre section about the development of the TransLab initiative. Morgillo has a background in theatre and writing, including acting with Doppio Teatro, a pioneering Italo-Australian company producing

bilingual productions. In Morgillo's view many theatre projects and groups foundered because they were unable to secure support or establish continuity between projects.

There was a question around what kind of development programs would support genuine cross-cultural theatre that was innovative and of high quality. The emphasis had been on supporting development – or 'creative development' – to help galvanise a specific production. When offered resources, artists often moved too quickly to the creative development of a work, without sufficient exploration of both content and form. Something in between speculative 'hothousing' and supporting particular productions was needed. There was also need for time and money required for experimentation, to allow more rigorous dramaturgical forms to develop.

A number of previous Australia Council programs had sought to support new work from artists of diverse cultural backgrounds through partnerships or residencies. These programs included *Time_Place_Space*, *Cultural Diversity Clusters*, and *Get-It-On: NESB artists in production*. *Time_Place_Space* was an initiative that sought to seed new collaborations and works in hybrid arts: its strengths included 'strong curatorial management and structure, with dramaturgical input and guidance'.⁹ This was also an important element in TransLab. *Get-It-On: NESB artists in production* aimed to support artists of non-English speaking background to develop new theatre work. A weakness of this program was that artists were not required to 'make a case about their collaborative process or practice' in advance, suggesting some may have lacked strong commitment to further collaborative exploration.¹⁰ Morgillo developed a proposal for cross-cultural residencies that drew on analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these earlier programs. A major recommendation of the proposal was to support residencies based

in organisations that would be able to provide strong curatorial and dramaturgical guidance. Artists would be able to 'experiment collaboratively to research and develop new artistic practice, and seed the making of innovative cross-cultural theatre work'.¹¹ The proposal argued for the merit of funding a research phase not tied to an immediate outcome. As Morgillo (2012) wrote in an email:

*At the time ... the idea of theatre makers requesting paid time to undertake research and development separately to a creative development phase was not common practice because of the limited resources available and because it was difficult to secure funds for research when competing with projects a bit further along at the creative development stage. I was able to argue the case for culturally diverse work needing additional resources (time and money) to evolve the form.*¹²

The proposal was supported by the Theatre section, which negotiated for funding within the Australia Council. The proposal then received support and endorsement from the organisation. TransLab was supported from funds earmarked by the council for Industry Development Initiatives to support Australia Council strategic priorities. As an initiative – as opposed to a grant-funded program – the council had a much higher financial investment, and was more closely engaged in the development and delivery of the program. The amount of funding allocated to the program was significantly less than the amount proposed.¹³ This had the effect of limiting the program to two years.

The next phase was to find a suitable host for the cross-cultural residency program. The Australia Council extended a national invitation for arts organisations to submit proposals to host a 'cross-cultural residency program' and provide curatorial support. The expressed aim of this residency plan was 'to provide teams of

artists with the resources to practise, research and develop new artistic processes, and to seed the making of innovative cross-cultural work'.¹⁴ A joint proposal by Arts House in Melbourne and The Performance Space in Sydney was chosen, primarily for the organisations' experience in developing practice through residencies and laboratory initiatives. Fiona Winning, then Director of Performance Space, recalls that they were interested in supporting theatre and performance-making with a range of culturally diverse artists who wanted to explore and deepen their practice. Another aim was to build dialogue about intercultural and cross-cultural practices by encouraging a cluster of projects to occur simultaneously. This countered many artists' experience of working in isolation, and opening up strong peer networks enabled artists to challenge and support one another.¹⁵

TRANSLAB IMPLEMENTATION

Groups were invited to participate via a national call-out for the program. One requirement for participation was a proven interest in 'making innovative cross-cultural theatre work'. The pitch was directed at artists who had already begun investigating cross-cultural issues drawing on contemporary Australian experience. In addition, TransLab aimed to 'attract artists who embodied a range of alternative cultural frameworks'.¹⁶ Interestingly, the call-out defined cross-cultural activity and content around 'geography, ethnicity, sexuality and gender'. The shift in the language from multicultural to cross-cultural also saw a broadening of the notion of diversity along axes different to just ethnicity and language. This was a significant shift. As Fiona Winning explained, performers often did not make separations between these categories. Nevertheless, each proposal also addressed cultural diversity in the 'old' sense, that is, around ethnicity, geography and migration.

A curatorial panel of experienced and intercultural connected professionals was instituted to provide ongoing guidance and advice; to connect groups to resources; and to connect each project with an appropriate dramaturg.¹⁷ The TransLab curatorial panel was concerned with extending the reach of each group, and new relationships with dramaturgs occurred in five of the six projects.¹⁸ Only one group was paired with a dramaturg they had worked with previously, while the remaining groups were paired with dramaturgs chosen for their difference in approach, to provoke new thinking.

The TransLab model combined the Australia Council's emphasis on research and development and the interpretations of Performance Space / Arts House. The stated aims of the TransLab program ([2007]) were to:

- Stimulate dialogue and build knowledge about contemporary cross-cultural and intercultural performance practices within artist communities, our organizations and our audiences;
- Network the residency artists with other artists, producers and venues;
- Seed new cross-cultural performance works.¹⁹

PART 2: A PROCESS TO EMBODY DIVERSITY IN CREATIVE PRACTICE

Four of the six TransLab residencies resulted in productions. These were *Sweat* (Branch Nebular), *Missing the Bus to David Jones* (Theatre Kantanka), *Within and Without* (Paschal Berry group and Anino Shadowplay Collective), and *Am I?* (Shaun Parker and Company).²⁰ In this section we examine the working process of two of the four TransLab residencies that reached the production stage. Here we are interested not so much in artistic outcomes – that is, the final form of the productions – but the research and experimentation that TransLab afforded. The analysis is based on interviews with Carlos Gomes of Theatre Kantanka and Paschal Berry.

Both of the case study residencies took place at The Performance Space located within Carriageworks, a major arts facility in converted railway workshops close to the Sydney CBD. As Fiona Winning explains, the Performance Space was committed to maintaining an ongoing engagement with the artists in its residency projects, ‘both learning from their challenges in the project’ and ensuring that they were ‘receiving external presenter-audience type questions’. At the end of the TransLab residencies there was a get-together of 28 of the participants – the TransLab Dialogues – which was intended to enable a degree of cross-fertilisation between projects.²¹

RESIDENCY CASE STUDY 1:

THEATRE KANTANKA – MISSING THE BUS TO DAVID JONES

Since 1995 Sydney-based Theatre Kantanka has specialised in working at sites not normally associated with theatre performance, such as car parks, tunnels, gardens and munitions stores. Kantanka is committed to generating cross-cultural and interdisciplinary work that explores the micro-universes of the city.²² The production

that emerged from the TransLab residency, *Missing the Bus to David Jones*, came out of lead artist Carlos Gomes’ interest in exploring questions of ageing, and in particular the micro-universe of nursing homes for the aged. The following account of Kantanka’s research process with TransLab is distilled from a long conversation with Gomes, an engaging man who has a passionate belief in the possibilities of cross-cultural performance.

RESEARCH PROCESS: MISSING THE BUS TO DAVID JONES

Carlos Gomes rejects hierarchical roles in the theatre, such as ‘author’ or ‘director’, in favour of collaborative works in which all participants can take on equally creative roles. He describes Kantanka’s process in the TransLab residency:

Everyone here is a collaborator, everyone here is a co-creator, everyone can write ... we wrote a thing, passed it to another one, transformed; passed to another, transformed; and at the end you sort of have what everyone agreed [to] ... and that works really well.

Gomes and Theatre Kantanka ‘had a few ideas but didn’t have any material’ – the distinction is important. The group did not want to simply invent the performance material, they wanted it to come out of genuine engagement through a collective research process. Kantanka’s research aim was fairly straightforward: allow the members of the company to gain knowledge and experience of nursing homes in order for them to collectively fashion a work. Normally this kind of research could not be funded. At most an author would do some research and use it to help shape a guiding text. But Kantanka wanted to immerse all 10 Kantanka participants in the research experience, this included the performers as well as the sound and video artists.

The research involved interviewing and forming relations with residents and staff, in order to gain an idea of the rules and conventions within the micro-universes of the nursing home. Members would immerse themselves in the reality of the nursing home, then return and workshop those experiences with the Kantanka group. Gomes explains:

It was more like: live that moment and then get out of that universe, share the information. And from that exchange, ideas would start to sprout, of what we can do.

Research for art or performance purposes goes beyond fact-finding: it is practice-oriented. That is, its data must be amenable to a 'working with' as a basis for shared performance possibilities. Nevertheless, grounding in real experience was important for Kantanka, because it could provide material that 'could not be imagined'. It also provided for the necessary emotional spark to move the project beyond an abstract idea. Research experiences could be disturbing, disorienting and difficult to process. For instance, Kantanka members observed two women who thought they were in an RSL club: they were carrying out a conversation that seemed surreal, yet 'the emotions were real'. Gomes recounts:

They really believed they were in the RSL! We sat down there and we had a conversation, but because it didn't quite make sense, the whole thing. We were talking about the waiters and talking about the flowers that were plastic on the table, what kind of flowers they were ... it took a long time to discover that actually it wasn't a flower, they discovered it was plastic, and it was amazing they discovered that piece of flower was plastic ... For this woman, old age had arrived and she had that sort of ... one of the commonalities is that they start to touch everything. This woman arrived and she started to touch the older lady ... God, that's

so sad. It's really sad to see someone arrive in that state. So they're talking about themselves as well, and there was quite a strange moment where she was accusing one of the ladies' sons: "You've been sleeping with her!"

These experiences involved emotional work, sharing and processing emotions about challenging experiences. Gomes explains:

The idea was to try to treat the material, to approach the idea, but to more get the feeling of our feelings, the feeling I myself was feeling, then "How can I get the feeling to the audience?"

Material such as this would give the work a particular mixture of craziness and poignancy, and extend its moral weight. The eventual performance included the conversation about the flowers. Gomes recounts:

At this part of the show there are two little dolls that are ageing. It's a dialogue you can't create, because it's full of strange interventions. One woman wanted to go to the toilet: "You can't go to the toilet, you can't leave me with this woman".

Material would begin to form around such fragments of experience as they were distilled into narratives. The group worked on these until various scenes that could be worked into a staging framework coalesced. The eventual production was set in a nursing home's common area where a plasma TV constantly plays and people sit on chairs like in a waiting room: 'And they're waiting. Waiting, waiting. And within that waiting, things sporadically happen'.

Annette Tesoriero was the dramaturg matched with Kantanka by the TransLab Curatorial Panel. After initial misgivings about working with a dramaturg, Kantanka was happy to work with Tesoriero - a 'woggy Australian' as Gomes affectionately put it - who has experience in

intercultural performance work. She was the only participant of the residency that did not take part in the nursing home visits. As such she was an outsider to the process and, in this respect, 'like the audience'. She would question whether things would convey to an audience what they thought it would, or enable the material to be sieved: 'We wanted to do so much – but sometimes it's better to not overdo it'. Tesoriero would interrogate every part very thoroughly and that helped, she explains, to shape the work 'when it was made from so many fragments, with so many inputs'.

On the last day of the residency in an open debrief Kantanka was able to show elements of process documentation, including sound recordings, video, writing and photographic material. This demonstrated the material's potential to Gomes, and convinced Kantanka of their commitment to developing the process further.

Carlos Gomes was very positive about the TransLab residency model:

TransLab gave us that chance to really dig for material. We didn't have to make any performative work, so it was purely to investigate and then to bring to the table, and have discussion[s], and from there, springboard; to be able to do much more academic research, the conditions of ageing and stuff like that. So it was a really intense four weeks, but really, I think it was highly important in the sense of what it gave us the chance to see. As well, our own reactions were very important.

With 'Missing the Bus', we had the time to mature things, there was no requirement to come up with something before it's ready. It's a more empowering way to go, like, "Are we ready to show something?" and you say, "No, no". Then we can debate with you every inch of the process and all of the decisions.

For Gomes, the support offered by TransLab was vital for bringing the whole group into the research process, which would not have been possible without the residency and financial support. Another vital outcome from the program was a symbolic one: the important Australian Government recognition of and support for intercultural work, which Gomes strongly believes makes a contribution to the history of the nation.²³

Kantanka took part in the TransLab Dialogues, and found it valuable for establishing better connections with other groups doing cross-cultural work:

It was like a kind of debrief where all the groups came together, and then we had an exchange of processes and assessments, which was great. I felt it could have gone longer. It was necessary that it happen. After that the dialogue in a sense continues when we meet with other companies that did TransLab, so we can have a little bit of ... talk about the process itself. That dialogue is important – within Kantanka itself we can continue it. But because [TransLab] doesn't exist anymore, it sort of evaporates ... So it's still echoing but it's not a solid thing anymore.

Gomes' description underscores both support for the TransLab Dialogues' process and the need for some form of supportive interaction to continue to inform the practice of intercultural performance groups.

RESIDENCY CASE STUDY 2: PASCHAL BERRY AND GROUP, WITH ANINO SHADOWPLAY COLLECTIVE - WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Within and Without was the outcome of collaboration between writer Paschal Daantos Berry, performer Valerie Berry, and members of the Manila-based Anino Shadowplay Collective.²⁴ These artists had worked together since 2005. Anino had earlier been involved in Paschal Berry's play, *The Folded Wife*.²⁵ TransLab enabled Members of Anino Shadowplay Collective - Datu Arellano, Andrew Cruz and Don Maralit Salubayba -to take part in the residency. The group is a collaboration within the Filipino diaspora and a major consideration for them was to produce work of relevance to the Filipino community, and to perform it in venues where it would be accessible to a Filipino audience. Both *The Folded Wife* and *Within and Without* were performed at the Blacktown Arts Centre, an area with a major concentration of Filipino-Australians.

Within and Without had its beginnings in 2007 when the group began to consider a work about Intramuros, the old walled city of Manila. *Within and Without* had already received funding for a research and development period in Manila, during which the group had compiled a collection of material on the site and history of Intramuros, and Manila.

The TransLab residency continued their earlier research and allowed the work to take a different form. The collaborators sifted through all of the data collected about Intramuros and Manila and began to conceive of building a physical structure that would be a means of presenting all their ideas.

RESEARCH PROCESS: WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Paschal Berry had written a number of theatrical texts that the group was planning to develop at Performance Space based on their research in Manila. As they worked through the material they discovered that the 'stronger language' for the work was a visual arts language. In our interview, Berry explained the shift came out of

a negotiation between me, Deborah [Pollard] and the Anino artists, where we realised that we wanted to build a city made out of cardboard boxes. Which is what came out of the TransLab residency really. Because before that it was such a different work. It was a theatrical work. It just became very clear to us that the city itself was really the work. What TransLab did was totally change what the focus was, which was the visual language of the Anino Shadowplay Collective.

The research process that followed revolved around physically building a miniature city of Manila from cardboard boxes and debris collected from dumpsters near the site of the residency. Found objects could trigger ideas and associations, and the artists would create little scenes around bits of debris. It was a way of 'looking at the micro and the macro in one space'. The act of construction was a means of understanding and exploring ways to present the layered history of Manila, and the 'edifice complex' of the Marcos period when Intramuros was reconstructed to show off the Philippines as a new tiger economy. The focus on tangible material and working with a visual aesthetic offered the artists ways to present contradictions in Manila's urban vision. Berry remembers:

‘One dramaturgical line of thinking was to construct something that was so beautiful when it was lit, but was so incredibly ugly when you turned the lights on’.

Deborah Pollard was the dramaturg attached to the project. She had previously worked with the team as director of *The Folding Wife*, and she would later direct the productions of *Within and Without*. She is a visual artist and as such she was attuned to the developing way of working. In the TransLab process, the team would work with the city, constructing detailed scenes and ideas. Then Pollard would come in and engage in a series of provocations about the work and, as she explained in our interview, ask questions that ‘would force you to step outside the frame’.

This process led to the development of a tour guide character, a device for linking to the audience (this presentation of the artist as guide or someone in a ‘service’ role is another parallel with visual arts practice). The group also played with archetypal Filipino characters and let them ‘float around in the space’ to coalesce as characters or narratives. The idea of play is apt: Berry described the process as ‘like being kids for three weeks’. He continues:

In terms of making a picture for you, it was really about spending a couple of hours together, and just constructing little pieces, and just watching it grow really. So it was kind of growing grid to grid and suddenly we realised there was a city around us.

Performance Space and Arts House intended to generate something of a cluster of activities through the organisation of the residencies, which would enable further engagement between groups developing cross-cultural performance. Berry recalls:

Around that time there was also another TransLab development that was happening in parallel, which was ‘Sweat’.²⁶ But the interesting thing about having artists doing the same initiative is that there is a great amount of goodwill that happens between the two different rehearsals. And for me the interesting thing is how it continues from that point of contact. I’ve been working with other TransLab participants, from different projects. So that was interesting too within the scope of a widening network.

Paschal Berry was generally positive about the experience of the TransLab residencies, and the opportunities for dialogue and networking that it presented. His concerns were around the question of continuity:

It's an interesting model if it has a continuity, you know. I've been around long enough to have a certain degree of cynicism when it comes to initiatives that pop up, especially with the hotbed of cultural diversity. Because I feel like we're still talking about the same kind of issues that we were talking about in the mid-90s. Especially within performance ... where putting a body on a stage, a non-Anglo body, is already a politicised question. For us, TransLab was an opportunity to take the shackles off, those very pedestrian aspects of performance.

Going back to what we were talking about, the sense of continuum, I find that initiatives like this kind of come, then they disappear for ages. Whereas for me, I was always going to be working on this, we have always had a cross-cultural practice. My question is, I guess as a provocation, for anyone else who did TransLab: have they continued those relationships? Or else, what's the point of doing it? The heartening thing is companies like Kantanka are pretty much playing with the same team. That's brilliant, and I think if there is a continuum based on an initiative that happened six years ago, that's a pretty damned good result.

SUMMARY AND COMPARISON OF THE TWO TRANSLAB RESIDENCIES

For both groups of artists the TransLab residencies provided an intense period of research and development that allowed their performance to take shape and develop new forms. Kantanka was able to immerse all the performers in a community research project in nursing homes across Sydney and distil the myriad fragmentary experiences and emotional engagements in a thoroughly collaborative process. Paschal Berry and Anino Shadowplay Collective were able to build on their earlier research in Manila and further their ongoing partnership, particularly by placing visual arts processes of physical construction at the centre of both research and performance. This helped to anchor the work in a material process that could create 'a sense of mapping and traversing through time and space'.²⁷ For both groups of artists the TransLab residency was decisive for deepening the development of work processes and concepts, and for the eventual performance outcomes. Both groups had issues with the question of continuity and sustainability. TransLab turned out to be a one-off project, and its funding source was discontinued. Arguably TransLab could have benefitted from a longer project time, particularly with regard to its aim of enabling strong supportive networks of cross-cultural theatre practitioners. This is a logistical question that extends beyond theatre, and connects with broader strategies to support intersectional and multi-disciplinary arts.

PART 3: A MODEL FOR WORKSHOPPING CROSS-CULTURAL ARTS?

TransLab's strategy was to support artists with commitment to developing new cross-cultural work, through enabling a research and development phase where they could experiment with new processes and develop material prior creating concrete 'work'. This could best occur within the critical and supportive environment of a residency, a safe space that offers substantial curatorial resources and support. In addition, TransLab was intended to build dialogue around cross-cultural working processes and the development of networks to support ongoing practices and the sharing of ideas.

This case study has focused on both the policy initiative and TransLab's practical implementation. The policy process is relevant to the problem of supporting innovation in cross-cultural art that emerges from a nation's social and cultural intersections. Firstly, the development of the TransLab initiative is of interest in the way that it sought to learn from strengths and weaknesses of previous policy within the Australia Council and the AMA policy. The TransLab program sought to embed a combination of elements such as a research and development phase, a supportive curatorial residency, and the selection of artists with an already developed commitment to working in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary forms.

In terms of artistic output, TransLab was a success, with four of the six residencies leading to productions. These outcomes demonstrate that investment in a research and development phase can be productive, and provide confidence for further support for the research process. Research and development is a normal part of a value chain as it is understood in many industries, however it is not so commonly understood in the arts where creativity is often seen as an inherent quality of the artist. The TransLab case illustrates

the complex processes of cross-cultural collaborative work in the creative phases before the production of a specific work. This case should help underscore the importance of supporting research and development, or creative research: the unpredictable collective investigations that can develop work of greater depth, and negotiate new directions in terms of the content and form of artworks. These are considerations that need to be made when looking for ways to support the 'culture cycle'²⁸ implicit in UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Learnings from TransLab subsequently informed thinking and programming in a range of areas within the council and its Theatre section. They informed thinking about ways to increase engagement of culturally diverse artists; to support new work; and to invest in the practice of independent artists making work. Some projects supported by the Australia Council that have been informed by TransLab include: a Queensland Theatre Diversity Associate, a project that assists culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) theatre artists to develop and fund their work; and In the Mix, a partnership between the council's Theatre section and Major Performing Arts Board to fund major companies for projects that work with the small-to-medium and independent sectors to provide inclusive opportunities for experienced CALD artists, collectives and companies.²⁹ This is perhaps one way to address the issues of continuity and sustainability for small groups working in cross-cultural forms.

Secondly, TransLab pointed to the need for specific cultural investment in innovative work emerging from cross-cultural and intercultural contexts. A core purpose of TransLab was to test ideas around investment in the research and development process as an enabler of intercultural practice. A key question for the Australia Council was: does investment in the research and development phase, and explicit support for diverse practices, lead to better work? For Antonietta Morgillo, the legacy of the TransLab program, and its idea of funding a research phase for culturally diverse theatre work, has become clear over time:

It is only now, years after the initiative ended, that we can see the fruits of this idea. The projects that were developed, with processes that included a research and development phase that TransLab offered, are far more sophisticated in their form and content. Besides this, TransLab being an Australia Council funded initiative, legitimized the research phase that most practitioners did without support. It valued research and development as a legitimate activity to develop excellent work.³⁰

Thirdly, TransLab was an experiment with open-ended development processes that encouraged reflection on the nature of intercultural creative processes. The program required artists and delivery partners to consider a range of questions such as: What should occur in a research phase? What is distinctive about cross-cultural or intercultural practice?³¹ The program and process raised a number of tensions and challenges, particularly in defining the processes in which artists were engaged. The TransLab curatorial panel reflected that ‘the level of discourse around intercultural practice is generally lacking’.³² This would suggest that development of a creative discourse in intercultural practice is an ongoing task that may require ongoing strategies for future programs.

The Convention explicitly supports the fostering of ‘interculturality’ as ‘the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect’.³³ Of course, the Convention does not specify what this means in terms of concrete measures to support artistic processes extending the diversity of cultural expression. If we accept that innovative cultural production is likely to emerge in culturally diverse societies with the practice of artists committed to working at the intersections of differing cultural experiences and influences, then there is a need to consider ‘intercultural arts’ as an important area for cultural investment. This will be relevant across all artforms. While ideas about multicultural arts in Australia have developed beyond supporting ‘ethnic’ and CALD artists and projects, this has created other strategic challenges. In extending concepts of diversity of expression to more cross-cultural or intersectional processes, there is an uncertainty about what now constitute multicultural or diverse arts. Is there an intercultural sphere? What are its qualities? How are its networks constituted? And how can it be supported? TransLab provided a window into intercultural performance processes that can also provide learnings relevant to other artforms.

- 1 Performance Space, TransLab, webpage, Newtown, NSW, 2010, viewed 6 July 2013, <<http://www.performancespace.com.au/2010/translab/>>.
- 2 Theatre Board of the Australia Council, TransLab Cross-Cultural Residency Program 2008-2009 Report, 2009, p 1.
- 3 At the time known as the Theatre Board, Australia Council for the Arts.
- 4 Australia Council, Arts for a Multicultural Australia, Redfern, NSW, 1993.
- 5 Australia Council, Arts for a Multicultural Australia (updated policy), Sydney, NSW, 2000.
- 6 This description is from the TransLab invitation for arts organisations to host the residency program.
- 7 For instance, see John Baylis, Make It New? Some proposals for the future of theatre funding, Australia Council, Surry Hills, NSW, 2006>.
- 8 Australia Council, Theatre, webpage, Surry Hills, NSW, n.d., viewed 23 January 2014, <<http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/artforms/theatre/?a=4457>>.
- 9 Antonietta Morgillo, Paper supporting new AMA Initiative, for Theatre Board of the Australia Council, 7-9 March, 2007, p 2.
- 10 Morgillo, Paper supporting new AMA Initiative, pp 1-2.
- 11 Morgillo, Paper supporting new AMA Initiative, p 2.
- 12 Antonietta Morgillo, email, 12 December 2012.
- 13 Only one third of the budget requested - \$240,000 of \$679,869 - was made available. Australia Council, Assessment Meeting Report: Theatre Board, report, Surry Hills, NSW, 2007, p 5.
- 14 Australia Council, Cross-Cultural Residency Program, invitation to submit proposal, 2007.
- 15 Interview with Fiona Winning, 6 March 2013. All information on the Performance Space residencies derive from this interview.
- 16 Theatre Board of the Australia Council, TransLab Cross-Cultural Residency Program, p 6.
- 17 The Curatorial Panel was: Siu Chan (Community Cultural Development Officer, City of Yarra), Claudia Chidiac (Powerhouse Youth Theatre), Constantine Koukias (IHOS Opera), Alvin Tan (The Necessary Stage, Singapore), Steven Richardson (Arts House) and Fiona Winning (Performance Space). Theatre Board of the Australia Council, TransLab Cross-Cultural Residency Program, p 3.
- 18 Theatre Board of the Australia Council, TransLab Cross-Cultural Residency Program, p 7.
- 19 [TransLab Curatorium], TransLab: 2008 Cross-cultural residencies program, call for expressions of interest, Newtown, NSW, 2007, p 1.
- 20 Missing the Bus to David Jones was performed at The Performance Space and Campbelltown Arts Centre in 2009; Within and Without was performed at Blacktown Arts Centre in 2011; Sweat was performed at Performance Space in 2010, and at Arts House and the IN TRANSIT Festival, Berlin, in 2011. Am I? will premiere at the 2014 Festival of Sydney. For more details of these productions, see <http://www.kantanka.com.au/shows/missing_the_bus_to_david_jones/>; <<http://www.kennethmoraleda.com/within-and-without-press/>>; <<http://performinglines.org.au/productions/sweat/>>; and <<http://www.shounparkercompany.com/shows/am-i/>>.
- 21 Rebecca Conroy and Daniel Brine (eds), TransLab Dialog, Performance Space, Newtown, NSW, 2010. Available from: <http://issuu.com/performancespace/docs/translab_dialogues>.
- 22 [Theatre Kantanka], Kantanka, webpage, Earlwood, NSW, n.d., viewed 23 January 2014, <<http://www.kantanka.com.au/kantanka/>>.
- 23 A video excerpt of Missing the Bus to David Jones can be viewed at <http://www.kantanka.com.au/shows/missing_the_bus_to_david_jones/index.html>.
- 24 Other performers involved were Kenneth Moraleda and David Finnigan.
- 25 The Folding Wife is a play about three generations of Filipina women that was presented at Blacktown Arts Centre by Urban Theatre Projects in 2007. See Stephen Dunne's Sydney Morning Herald review at <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts-reviews/the-folding-wife/2007/04/23/1177180541109.html>> and Jan Cornell's RealTime review at <<http://www.realttimearts.net/article/79/8607>>. The play was later presented at Carriageworks in 2010; a review by Augusta Supple can be read at <<http://augustasupple.com/2010/05/the-folding-wife-urban-theatre-projects/>>.
- 26 See <<http://performinglines.org.au/productions/sweat/>>.
- 27 Australia Council Theatre Board, TransLab Cross-Cultural Residency Program, p 18.
- 28 UNESCO, Culture cycle, webpage, Paris, n.d., viewed 22 June 2013, <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/cultural-diversity/cultural-expressions/programmes/global-alliance-for-cultural-diversity/culture-cycle/>>.
- 29 This information was provided by the Australia Council's Theatre section.
- 30 Morgillo, email, 12 December 2012.
- 31 This information was provided by the Australia Council's Theatre section.
- 32 Australia Council Theatre Board, TransLab Cross-Cultural Residency Program, p 3.
- 33 UNESCO, Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, webpage, Paris, 2005, Article 4.8, viewed 14 January 2014, <http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>.

ASSOCIATION OF NORTHERN KIMBERLEY AND ARNHEM ABORIGINAL ARTISTS (ANKAAA)

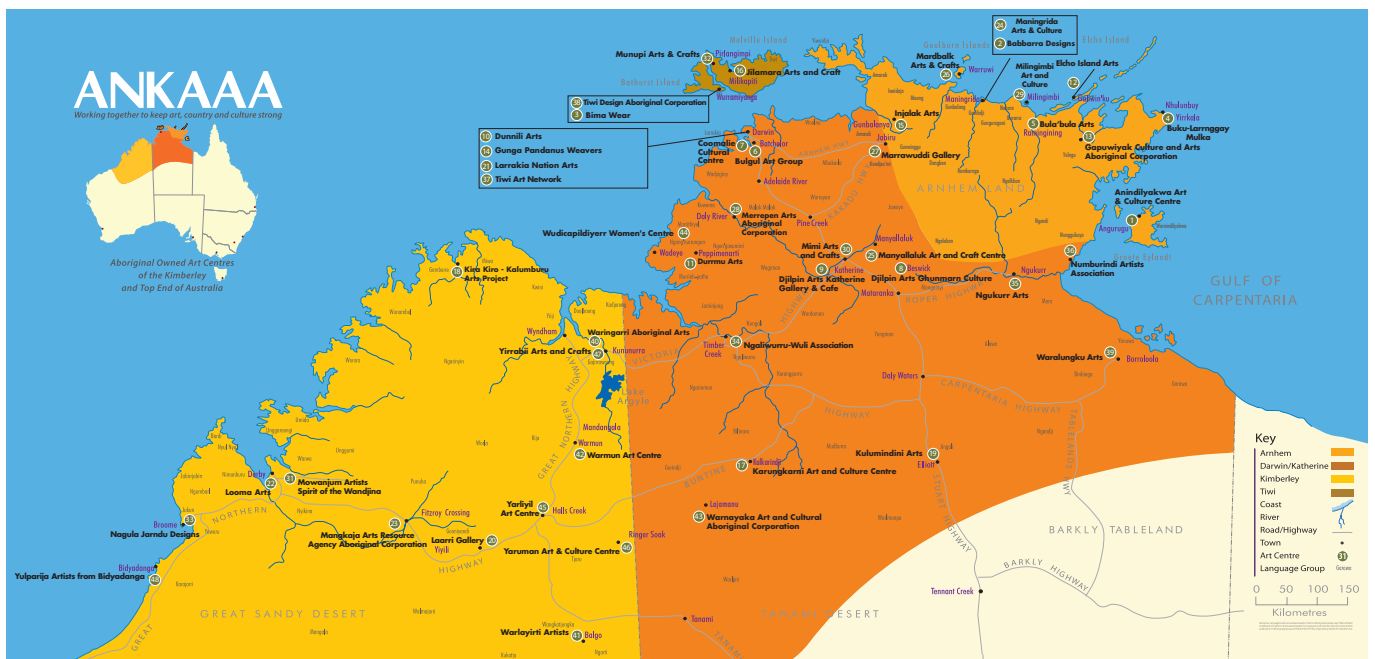
The Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) is the peak body that advocates for and supports a membership of over 5,000 Aboriginal artists and 49 Art Centres in an area of roughly one million square kilometres in Northern Australia. The ANKAAA Board of Directors is comprised of Indigenous members representing ANKAAA’s four regions: Tiwi Islands, Arnhem Land, the Kimberley and Katherine / Darwin.

ANKAAA (originally ANCAAA - the Association of Northern, Central and Arnhem Artists) was founded in 1987, and in 1993, Central Australian Art Centres formed a separate association, now known as Desert. At first its members were largely non-Indigenous ‘art advisers’, concerned about threats to the community control of Art Centres.¹ Nevertheless, the first objective of the new organisation was ‘that Aboriginal art is controlled by Aboriginal people’.² In 1995, ANKAAA’s new constitution affirmed that membership was based on artists of Aboriginal descent, and that the board would also be comprised of Indigenous members.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO ANKAAA

ANKAAA acts as an advocacy and lobby group for its members and Art Centres. The protection of Indigenous artists’ rights is one of ANKAAA’s

primary tasks. ANKAAA supports the Indigenous Art Code, which it helped to develop. This industry code has operated since 2011 to ensure fair dealings with artists, it sets out best practice standards for the production of art, and sales



Map of ANKAAA regions.

Image: ANKAAA

relationships between artists, Art Centres, galleries, buyers and agents.³ ANKAAA works with Art Centres in many ways, providing training, supporting arts projects, and assisting with the marketing and promotion of arts products. ANKAAA also works with the Art Centres to manage physical infrastructure projects, to secure funding and develop professional teams experienced in working with Indigenous communities.⁴

A commitment to consultation underpins the governance practices of ANKAAA's four regions. Annual regional gatherings take place in each of the four regions, enabling members to come together over several days to share knowledge, engage in discussions, and make decisions in relation to the Art Centres, business matters in the regional arts industry, and wider political issues.⁵ These gatherings and ongoing consultations are major logistical feats, involving members and staff travelling over huge distances. A further challenge is the cultural and linguistic diversity across the ANKAAA membership, even within each of the regions. Linguistic issues are enormously complex: some members have good Indigenous language but almost no English, which is used for most negotiations; some have adequate English but little of their home language; while others utilise a mixture of creoles, which may not allow speakers to communicate beyond the local milieu.⁶

A large proportion of Aboriginal artists work in small communities in remote parts of Australia, where there is significant geographical and cultural distance between the makers of the work and its buyers, who are usually non-Aboriginal. Art Centres evolved in the early 1970s as places of brokerage and mediation between Aboriginal artists and art markets. Prior to this, mission settlements had provided some arts facilities and infrastructure at places such as Ernabella in South Australia and at Yirrkala in Arnhem Land.

The government supported the Art Centres that emerged in the 1970s, largely through the Australia Council's Aboriginal Arts Board, which was formed in 1973. These Art Centres typically granted membership to artists, who elected a committee to run the centre. The centres provided communities with resources; employed arts advisers; and provided a site for the exchange of information about arts practice and the sale of work. They were – and are – a meeting place of cultures and styles of governance. In Jon Altman's words, Art Centres developed as 'hybrid organisations, at once cultural and commercial, local and global, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – fundamentally inter-cultural and operating between thoroughly different locales'.⁷

ANKAAA and other Indigenous peak organisations have helped to shape Art Centres over a period of 25 years. They have asserted principles of self-determination for Art Centres. For ANKAAA, Art Centres have many roles: they function 'as a protector of cultural property, as a resource for materials, and as a general arts and culture facilitator'.⁸ Art is conceived broadly as a means to enhance the survival of communities, since art practices connect to many aspects of traditional life. At the same time, art provides economic opportunities and a connection to the national and international world through the art market. This is important, as there is often little other economic opportunity in Aboriginal communities, particularly those in remote areas. In spite of being an important player in the visual arts industry as an arts marketer, ANKAAA has resisted adopting a primarily commercial focus. ANKAAA's value statement concludes with: 'It is important to balance culture and money business in everything'.⁹ ANKAAA's motto, 'Working together to keep art, country and culture strong',¹⁰ expresses its aspiration to simultaneously support art practices, the life of the cultures in which they are embedded, and the land that provides much of the basis for Indigenous culture and value.

Rather than attempting to cover the whole of ANKAAA's programs, the focus of this case study is on current projects that encapsulate ANKAAA's approach and values in action. *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* is concerned with the conservation of traditional materials 'on country', in its cultural context. We examine one of the project's workshops on bark painting held at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, Yirrkala, in North East Arnhem Land in May 2013. This will be related to ANKAAA's presentation at the World Indigenous Network conference in May 2013, entitled "The Land and Sea Can't Talk, We Have To Talk For Them": Working together to care for country - collective painting projects and land and sea rights claims'. This allowed a wider consideration of painting as a cultural expression, and its use in relation to land and sea claims in Arnhem Land and the Kimberley.

PART 2: HARVESTING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Harvesting Traditional Knowledge responds to ANKAAA's concern with issues involved in the conservation of Indigenous material culture. The project brings together Indigenous artists and specialist conservators from key institutions such as museums and galleries that have collections of Indigenous artefacts. The aim is to share practical knowledge about preserving traditional bush materials.

Harvesting Traditional Knowledge was in part precipitated by a disastrous event that demonstrated the vulnerability of cultural materials. In March 2011 the Warmun Art Centre in the East Kimberley was destroyed by a flash flood, which caused significant damage to its collection of over 400 paintings by important artists such as Rover Thomas and Queenie Mackenzie. Many damaged paintings were subsequently restored with the help of the Centre for Cultural Material Conservation (CCMC) at the University of Melbourne.¹¹

A recent training partnership between ANKAAA and CCMC involved arts workers from across ANKAAA's regions visiting Melbourne for training in conservation issues and techniques that will assist them to best maintain local artefacts and materials. At the same time, conservators at CCMC and other museums were able to learn first-hand about traditional practices in the production and treatment of materials, which would help them to understand the most appropriate ways of conserving Aboriginal cultural material. *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* continues this collaboration of arts and science to conserve Indigenous material practice, this time 'on country'. The first workshop took place over three days at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, Yirrkala, on Yolngu country (Eastern Arnhem Land), an area considered

the hub of contemporary bark painting. The focus was on the conservation of bark paintings, in the context of the people producing them and environment in which they are produced. Participants included 30 artists from Arnhem Land Art Centres and 15 conservators from key Australian museums and other cultural institutions that hold bark artefacts.¹²

ANKAAA's intention for *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* is to build networks for the future, bringing together people who have a stake in conserving bark artefacts. ANKAAA put out a call for conservators to take part, and within days they were inundated with requests. For conservators the workshop was an unprecedented opportunity. As ANKAAA Chief Executive Officer Christina Davidson remarked in our interview:

*That was one of the reasons why we got rushed by conservators around the country, when offered a chance. Well over half of the people here have never been to Arnhem Land before, yet they are the front-line custodians in the museums of those objects that came from here.*¹³

What was also different about the workshop was the experience of the materials on country, in their cultural context. As journalist Lorena Allam put it in the 'Away' program on ABC Radio National:

*For the first time, curators and conservators have gone to the place where the art was made, spoken to the artists who made it - or their direct descendants - and learned the long and elaborate processes of harvesting bark, stripping and treating it over fire to flatten it out, and preparing it for painting. While museum restoration experts might, among themselves, discuss the use of various chemicals to treat and preserve bark, Yolngu show them their way.*¹⁴

Participants experienced the whole process of making bark paintings, from selecting the tree, removing the bark, obtaining ochres, preparing the bark surface for painting, and applying the paint.

On the first day, everyone went to a stringybark forest and took part in the traditional process of locating the best tree for bark, and removing the bark with an axe and a large forked stick, so as not to split it. Djambawa Marawili, ANKAAA's Chairman and a Yolngu elder, commented on the morning's work:



Removing bark for painting

Photograph: ANKAAA

The harvesting of bark was fantastic. People learned a lot, and wanted to really get into the thing that they wanted to know ... We showed them how to cut the bark and [how] to skin the bark. Everybody thinks it's a really dangerous thing. But it's not dangerous, no. The bark was one of our tools before, old people used it to carry food and also, make bark houses, and also it's a medicine for us too. We boil it or chew it when somebody has flu, they used to drink from the bark.¹⁵

Bark is a fundamental resource that is integral to many aspects of life and alive in Yolngu life and memory. Bark paintings are prepared and produced in much the same way as they were when observed by anthropologist Donald Thompson in the 1930s. The bark is cut and removed from stringybark trees, and the outer fibrous surface is removed and flattened using fire. The inner surface is sanded and primed with red ochre, then pigments applied to it: red and yellow ochre, black manganese and white clay. Formerly the juice of the dendrobium orchid was used as a fixative, now commercial PVA glue is more common.¹⁶

Handling bark painting involves complex issues apart from its purely physical properties. As one of the conservators observed: 'Conservators are trained to understand materials, but what's missing for us is this gap, this ethical knowledge'.¹⁷ Ethical questions may arise concerning the use of adhesives in bark paintings, and whether certain substances are appropriate if derived from the sea or from particular animals. There are different viewpoints about the use of these materials, particularly chemicals, and whether older paintings being conserved should be repainted. There may be a need to respect the original pigments, some of which may have come from different communities with differing sensitivities about the materials and who should act as custodians of them. The use of particular ochres such as the white clay, *kapan*, may require permission of elders. Gavin Namarnyilk, an artist from Oenpelli in western Arnhem Land, expressed the link between materials and kin relationships: 'The bark is like a baby - treated like a family'. How bark as a material is treated depends on overlapping contexts of clan and place, and whether its use is for ceremonial, public or market purposes.

Through the workshop, stronger connections between the artists and custodians of the work opened up. Museum Victoria conservator Stephanie Hamilton spoke of wanting to be guided by the creators about how to appreciate barks. Karen Coote, formerly a senior conservator at the Australian Museum, expressed the enthusiasm of conservators for getting to learn more of the Yolngu and their relation to land: 'conservators have learned to respect and understand community a hell of a lot more than they have in the past'. The workshop opened up opportunities to have a dialogue with the custodians of paintings. As Coote said: 'Now, the first thing [the conservators will] do will be to go back to community and ask, and talk through solutions, rather than being in an institution [and] coming up with a solution'.



Painting with the hair brush

Photograph: ANKAAA

The project met ANKAAA's desire for 'building connections, building pathways on which more things can evolve over time ... [We're] matchmaking between different people with shared interests', as Christina Davidson put it. The success of the workshops will be gauged by the strength of ongoing collaborations between conservators and Indigenous producers in Arnhem Land and elsewhere. Another motivation for ANKAAA was to promote bark painting, which Davidson considers the most exciting medium in contemporary art. The workshops, Davidson says, will help to

increase knowledge and understanding of where the barks come from, and how rich and exciting it is that most of the artworks have got this deep relation to country; that is, made out of that country as well through that organic relation they have with the land, the ochres it's made out of, and the traditional bark.

The *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* workshop amply demonstrates that bark painting as a material culture is deeply connected to many aspects of Yolngu life. On the other hand, bark painting practice is not simply rooted in an everyday or 'ethnographic' reality of the Yolngu, unaffected by wider events, cultural contacts and exchanges with others. Bark painting practices were reported on the east coast of Australia from the early colonial days. Bark painting exercised a fascination for Europeans, who connected it to the 'primitive' nature they imagined Aboriginal

people possessed. Such intercultural exchanges have historically shaped the aesthetic form of bark painting. It was in Arnhem Land that bark painting developed as an item for exchange, with the help of missionaries and anthropologists such as Donald Thompson and Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who in different ways contributed to a demand for bark painting as Arnhem Land was colonised and exposed to outside forces.¹⁸

The recognition of bark paintings as things of economic and symbolic value was an important contributor to the cultural form of the bark paintings. Howard Morphy considers that while the Yolngu painted 'mainly for economic return', there were clearly different modalities of painting, ranging from painting for ritual occasions, to 'anyhow' paintings traded in exchange for tobacco.¹⁹ Djambawa Marawili speaks of working with certain formal expectations of a painting commission for a gallery: 'I will do a good neat job'. Paintings produced for the market may exclude certain elements, left out because they are seen to be in the province of sacred ceremony. As Marawili says: 'Those patterns and the designs were really sacred before, only for men. Now it can be shown, but the reality of sacred objects we still keep to ourselves'.

Over time Yolngu bark painting has exhibited a malleability of design and materials. Design elements found in bark paintings have been transferred from rock or sand painting or the painting of bodies in ceremonies. For Djambawa Marawili there is continuity in the fundamental designs and patterns used by each clan group that can be understood as a kind of recognisable ownership. When asked how particular patterns could be understood in terms of law, he told us:

The patterns tell me the owner of that painting, patterns or design. I will know straight away if my pattern can be done, that is, for my clan and for my ancestors too. And it's really to tell where the patterns and the design comes from. From one particular country, you know.

Traditional cultural expressions, such as Yolngu painting, exist not in an enclosed world but in a dynamic relation to others. For instance, Yolngu art bears influences of exchange with Macassans from Sulawesi, who visited the area over many centuries in search of trepang [sea cucumber] and developed a reciprocal relationship with coastal Aboriginal peoples. Yolngu paintings included Macassan boats, fabrics, cloth designs, and a sand sculpture in the form of a Macassan *prau* is still incorporated into Yolngu mortuary rituals.²⁰ In considering the parameters of a cultural expression, and its aesthetic form, it is necessary to also consider the political context, including the intercultural relations that make possible cultural exchanges.

PART 3: PAINTING AS COLLECTIVE ACTION

As the *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* workshop shows, bark paintings are interwoven in the lives of Yolngu people on many levels: as material resources of the country of which they are custodians; as reflections of the different practices of clan groups, in relation to sacred designs and ritual; and also as an economic resource. To this we can add their significance as expressions of cultural identity, law, property and political recognition.

For Djon Mundine, Indigenous art historian and curator, the Yolngu use of bark painting and other cultural expressions has been sophisticated and strategic:

The [Yolngu] community has experimented in myriad ways to successfully maintain a cultural tradition of their own while reaping the fruits of the modern world. Utilizing the oral histories of its elders, fiercely retaining the local languages and religious practices, and funding its activities through strategic marketing, the community provides a model for us all - in economics but also in encouraging a rich and meaningfully productive existence.²¹

Because of the integral nature of arts to Aboriginal life, visual art has been a particularly powerful means to articulate collective aspirations of Yolngu people. Recently Kevin Rudd, then Australian Prime Minister, was at Yirrkala to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the bark petition sent to the Australian Federal Parliament in 1963. The bark petition took the form of two bark paintings depicting the two main Yolngu moieties, the Dhuwa and the Yirritja, and an attached text requesting that the Aboriginal people living on the site of a bauxite mine proposed by the mining company Nabalco be consulted about the development.

As Morphy put it, the genius of the bark petition was that it introduced Aboriginal symbolism into Parliamentary discourse, making it harder for Europeans to respond in terms of their own cultural categories.²² This decentring of governmental and legal language created new possibilities for Aboriginal cultural interventions.

This aspect of paintings as cultural expression – as a collective political statement – was explored in ANKAAA’s presentation to the World Indigenous Network (WIN) conference in Darwin in May 2013. WIN is a recent initiative, launched at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio in 2012, and supported by the governments of Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and Norway. It aims to bring together Indigenous peoples as land and sea managers, to share knowledge and support sustainable uses of natural resources, and to develop economic opportunities.²³ The session was entitled “‘The Land and Sea Can’t Talk, We Have To Talk For Them’: Working together to care for country – collective painting projects and land and sea rights claims’. ANKAAA’s Chairman Djambawa Marawili and Deputy Chair Annette Kogolo, a Walmajarri elder from the Kimberley, spoke of the ways in which painting played a key role in achieving land and sea rights in their country. The remainder of this part of the case study will provide additional background information to the WIN presentation, which told the story of the important role of collective painting projects in achieving land and sea rights claims in Arnhem Land and the Kimberley.

DJAMBAWA MARAWILI PRESENTATION: ‘SALT WATER - BARK PAINTINGS OF SEA COUNTRY AND THE BLUE MUD BAY SEA RIGHTS CASE’

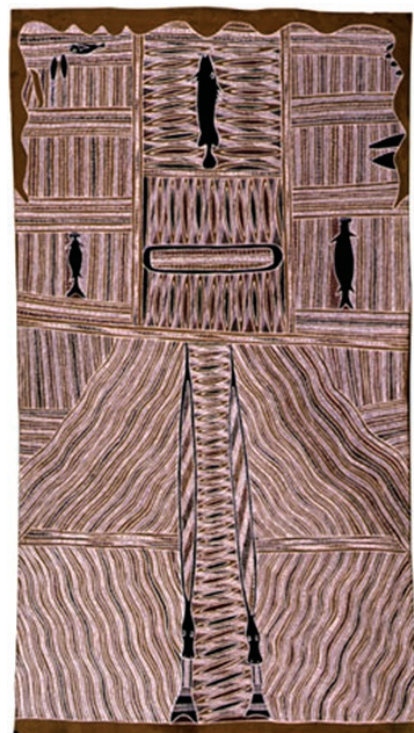
The bark petition did not prevent the Australian government granting a special mining lease to Nabalco on reserve land occupied by Yolngu. In 1971, the Yolngu contested the mining lease in the first native title litigation in Australia. This dispute contributed to the calling for the Woodward Commission into Aboriginal Land Rights, which led eventually to the Northern Territory Land Rights Act of 1976. The land rights legislation granted Yolngu ownership of land to the low watermark, but left rights to the sea unclear. The Croker Island Sea Case of 1998 found that the traditional owners had land rights over an area of the sea, but that they did not have exclusive commercial rights, for instance to fish in the area. From 2002, the Northern Land Council supported the Yolngu people’s case for fishing rights in their waters, and challenged the Northern Territory’s rights to grant fishing licences in these areas.

An incident had occurred in 1996 involving illegal fishermen desecrating the site of a totemic Baru (crocodile). This led Djambawa Marawili, Madarrpa elder and then Chair of the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, to consult with elders and gather artists from Yolngu clans to produce a series of bark paintings about their relations to sea country. In some cases this involved a process of recovering and re-learning the patterns of the clan from older sources, and through relations to particular stories and natural features of country.²⁴

The 80 paintings produced represented the clans and their countries along the coast, from Wessel Island in the south to Blue Mud Bay in the North. This was their way of documenting and asserting Yolngu historic claims to land and sea by compiling a comprehensive map of the saltwater country of North East Arnhem Land. The collection of 80 bark paintings by 49 artists ‘documents the spiritual and legal basis of Yolngu people’s ownership of land in North-East Arnhem Land’.²⁵ How do bark paintings map this territory and document an ancient relation between communities and their land and sea? As mentioned above, specific patterns can be related to particular clans, and also to particular aspects of the environment. In each painting, a highly specific and identifiable visual language ‘maps’ a landscape that also incorporates sea waters. As Morphy argues, ‘land and landscape can be taken to incorporate sea, since the mythological maps of the sea are continuous with those of the land’.²⁶ Morphy also notes the Yolngu’s ‘acuity of vision’ in relation to the sea.²⁷ Morphy observed Yolngu people on a boat who were able to recognise changes in water depth, shoals of fish, and currents from purely visual information. This extends to the Saltwater paintings and the way in which they use geometric techniques to map the forms of the land and sea and the ‘ancestral forces that are embodied in the landscape’.²⁸ For instance, the Saltwater catalogue publication explains how in Gawirrin Gumana’s painting, *Djarrwark ga Dhalwanu*, geometrical patterns associated with both Yolngu moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja, are used to convey

*the flow and state of energy in country around the mouth of the Baraltja River; from rain, to river, to salt water, to storms that form over the sea and move back to the land.*²⁹

The painting embodies references to complex details of the topography of place, specific iconography, ancestral stories and song cycles that demonstrate a deep cultural knowledge held by custodians of the country. Like all of the Saltwater paintings, the creator of this painting meant for it to constitute a document of the land and its enduring relationships. This is what claimants for native title were required to demonstrate. Saltwater paintings such as *Djarrwark ga Dhalwanu* were presented as evidence in the Blue Mud May Sea Rights case.³⁰ Exactly what weight they brought to the case in terms of evidence is difficult to judge. But an important parallel function of the collective work of the Saltwater paintings is the learning and sharing of knowledge and feeling through the circulation of these complex and compelling works in the public sphere. The Saltwater collection toured Australia and the detailed catalogue sold over 10,000 copies. The collection of 80 bark paintings was eventually acquire by the National Maritime Museum.



Gawirrin Gumana, *Djarrwark ga Dhalwanu*, 1998, bark painting, 153 x 83 cm. Photograph: Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre

ANNETTE KOGOLO PRESENTATION: 'NGURRARA: THE GREAT SANDY DESERT CANVAS AND THE NGURRARA NATIVE TITLE CLAIM'

In her presentation at the World Indigenous Network conference ANKAAA Deputy Chair, Annette Kogolo, described the way in which painting was enlisted in the successful land claim of the Walmajarri, Wangkajuna, Mangala and Juwaliny peoples.³¹ The ancestral homes of these peoples with distinct though related languages are in the vast Great Sandy Desert in the southern Kimberley region. They had been displaced to other parts of the Kimberley, largely around Fitzroy Crossing and Turkey Creek. This was part of a very recent frontier contact history, with some people emerging from the desert as late as the 1950s. Annette Kogolo's parents also came out of the Great Sandy Desert and, like many others, worked in the pastoral industry. In Fitzroy Crossing a visual arts scene began to emerge around the Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency, founded in 1981. Most artists paint on canvas but utilise designs and patterns drawn from traditions of working on sand, rock or the body in ceremonies.

When considering how to present a case under the *Native Title Act 1993*, it was decided to paint a single canvas to tell the court about the country and people's relationship to it. In an article authored by Larissa Behrendt, the initial idea was credited to painter Ngarralja Tommy May:

*We were wondering how to tell the court about our country. I said then if kartiya [Europeans] can't believe our word, they can look at our painting. It all says the same thing. We got the idea of using our paintings in court as evidence.*³²

Behrendt also provides another version:

*Fred Chaney from the Native Title Tribunal came over 10 years ago. I explained to him that these were desert people. Some couldn't read or write. We'll paint our country.*³³

Both of these reported statements make sense in the light of a community grounded in oral transmission of their cultural knowledge and identity, that is also very close in time to the country and traditions from which they have been only recently displaced.

The strategy of collaboratively producing a single painting on a huge scale to represent the combined country of the four language groups is most striking. Many painters collaborated on Ngurrara, and there were two versions produced. The first, smaller canvas was painted by 19 artists in 1996.³⁴ Apparently, there was dissatisfaction that this canvas did not fully represent important areas and stories. It was felt that the painting needed visually to work better as a whole, in order to provide a clear representation for the court.³⁵ A still larger canvas measuring 10 by eight metres and involving some 50 artists was painted the following year. It was this painting that was presented as part of a National Native Title Tribunal claim in 1997.

The Ngurrara paintings depicted the desert country of each of the claimant painters, showing the vital jila or waterholes. The massive scale of the two collaborative paintings contributed to their expression of 'the extremely strong affiliation to land that people had to the land they had lived off ... until the 1960s'.³⁶ In the WIN presentation, Kogolo described the *Ngurrara II* painting as 'the map of our country'. Indeed most of the claimants understood the painting as a map. Kirsten Anker points out that the painting did not fit the legal requirements of a map of the claim area.³⁷ It did not conform to the European map's linear cartographic vision, with its flat projection and grid of 'infinitely exchangeable portions'.³⁸

The canvas 'has a spatial organisation in which there are no [exchangeable] portions, only places known and named'.³⁹ The only common feature with conventional maps was the depiction of the Canning Stock Route, to provide a point of reference in relation to conventional maps used in the case.⁴⁰

Unlike the Saltwater bark paintings, also understood by their creators as maps, the *Ngurrara* paintings did not attempt to incorporate the full complexity of country, lore, and song cycles. Rather it functioned as a performative platform for the claimants, who gave evidence in native title hearings standing on their part of the canvas and explaining their relation to

the land and to neighbouring country.⁴¹ Standing on a canvas is, of course, anathema to the usual untouchability of fine art. For Geraldine Brooks, the sight of people walking on *Ngurrara I* in mud-encrusted stock boots was startling.⁴² The painting performed its task as a kind of mobile country. For example, the painter and dancer Nyilpirr Ngalyaku Spider Snell performed the *Kurtal*, or snake dreaming dance, on the canvas in front of Parliament House in Canberra in support of the claim.

It took 11 years before native title was achieved in 2008. In the meantime the life of the *Ngurrara* paintings in public circulation, like the Saltwater collection, supported the cultural recognition



Ngurrara artists and claimants, *Ngurrara II*, 1997. Acrylic on canvas, 10 x 8 m

Photograph: ANKAAA

of its creators. *Ngurrara I* was exhibited at the Perth International Arts Festival in 2004, and again used literally as a platform for performers to open the festival. Brooks describes the circumstances of the decision to offer *Ngurrara I* for sale in 2002. Sotheby's Tim Klingender convinced the artists that selling the painting would bring them big money; help their claim in the courts by increasing the painting's audience nationally and internationally; and probably result in an Australian public institution buying it for the nation.⁴³ Eventually the painting was acquired, by National Museum of Australia. This may be quite questionable in terms of ethical dealing. The point, however, as with the Yolngu case, is that the political outcome was not entirely separate from the success of the work in the commercial art market, nor did the artists themselves see it as separate. Cultural advocacy made through the contemporary art field contributed alongside the legal effort made in the court.

Eventually the Ngurrara land rights claim was won by the Walmajarri, Wangkajuna, Mangala and Juwaliny peoples. The Federal Court handed down the Ngurrara Native Title consent determination on 9 November 2007, granting exclusive title to some 75,000 square kilometres of land.⁴⁴ In her WIN presentation, Kogolo said that the large painting *Ngurrara II* 'actually won our native title rights'. This is a complex statement when approached from a legal standpoint, and no doubt many factors contributed. But the Ngurrara paintings, even more than the Saltwater paintings, opened up questions of what constitutes legal evidence, how it can be presented, and how it can be interpreted. Under the Native Title Act, claimants were required to prove knowledge about country and traditional law, an often difficult and onerous task that doesn't take account of historical displacements and destruction of cultural links to country. A painting could be given validity as evidence, as a means to convey knowledge to the court. As Anker argues:

In the logic of native title, the 'tradition' of designs, boundaries and Dreaming stories is the frame of reference which gives a painting value as evidence. Designs originating in sand, rock, bark and body painting embody relationships between ancestors and law, living people and places in the land, which makes them crucially relevant to what is being translated in native title as property rights.⁴⁵

A painting, its patterns, associated stories or songlines could contribute to the weight of evidence, as indeed could the performances of witnesses using the painting as a mobile platform for country. As we have argued, paintings may not have been accepted as a form of evidence without Aboriginal paintings being generally accepted by art publics as meaningful ways of accessing Indigenous traditions.

The painting would seem to have brought together the desert peoples around the claim. For the Ngurrara claimants (significantly, Ngurrara means home) the painting tells about the songlines of their collective countries, especially linked to the important freshwater holes. *Ngurrara II* had an educational function during the case, providing a way for often non-literate people to relate to country. It was used in the hearings not only to illustrate the claimant's knowledge of the land, but also to assist those whose spoken English was not fluent.⁴⁶ Since the native title case, the Ngurrara paintings are still referred to by rangers and others involved in the care of the Warlu Jilajaa Jumu Indigenous Protected Area, the land restored to the Ngurrara people.

PART 4: CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS, TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY

This case study has linked two recent ANKAAA activities, the *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* workshop on bark and bark painting, and the World Indigenous Network presentation on collective painting projects and their role in land and sea rights claims. These two activities were quite different in function. *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* is an ANKAAA program that supports Art Centres and their need to share conservation expertise through developing partnerships with museum-based conservators. The World Indigenous Network presentation was not an ANKAAA program per se, but a sharing of histories, knowledge and strategies with other Indigenous peoples, in particular regarding land and sea management. We see the presentation as a wider statement about the relation between art and the culture that underpins it, and the political uses of art in this context.

The two ANKAAA activities complement each other. Both the events described in the WIN presentation and the *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* program are grounded in an understanding of art as intertwined with ways of life, customary practices linked to specific social groups and social arrangements, and a custodial relation to country. ANKAAA and the communities involved seek to balance their desire for cultural autonomy and self-determination, and cultural exchanges in which the sharing of Indigenous cultural knowledge results in dialogue or collaboration, hopefully on a mutual and equal basis. As the above account has argued, intercultural exchange has been at the heart of cultural expressions and the way these have evolved historically. ANKAAA seeks to mediate intercultural

exchanges to build connections that result in mutual benefit for the artists, Arts Centres and the communities in which they are embedded, as well as for other players in the arts field.

In bringing together Yolngu bark painters and museum conservation professionals, the first *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* workshop at Yirrkala showed how these two communities with interests in material cultures had largely existed in different worlds, due to a colonial history that generated distinctions between cultural collectors and collected cultures. However, by meeting on country in the living social and physical environment of Yolngu people, a mutual collaboration could take place, expanding the perspectives and interests of both artists and conservators. For conservators, an understanding of the lived context of material culture involved recognising overlapping social, religious and environmental contexts in which bark paintings are made. Aboriginal artists and arts workers were able to participate in a genuine dialogue, not only on the conservation of materials, but on the ways in which their work is understood by others. As Christina Davidson said in a radio program following the second *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* workshop at Monajum in the Kimberley: 'people on the ground have so few opportunities to get to mainstream institutions and to understand the context that the art that they're making goes into'.⁴⁷ ANKAAA will be seeking to sustain these relationships in which the production, conservation and presentation of Indigenous artwork – both past and contemporary – is informed by mutual exchange and dialogue.

The interrelatedness of art practices, in particular visual iconographies, and the social and legal structures of Aboriginal societies, as well as narratives and spatial understandings of land and territory, has meant that art has had great relevance for land rights claims in Australia. ANKAAA's World Indigenous Network presentation showed the efficacy of collective painting strategies in support of native title claims. In the Yolngu and Nurrara cases, collaborative art work was able to support claims based on demonstrating the continuity of traditional knowledge and cultural identities.

The *Nurrara* and Saltwater paintings, and bark painting in general, could be considered as examples of 'traditional cultural expressions' and 'the knowledge systems of indigenous peoples', in the terms of UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.⁴⁸ At the same time we have noted the remarkable fluidity of Aboriginal art as a contemporary cultural expression. Specific symbolic languages and narratives can operate between quite different media and contexts: there are parallels between the patterning of body painting, sand painting, rock art, bark painting, canvas painting, and other contemporary arts forms. As art historians have observed, Aboriginal art can be at once traditional and contemporary. Ian McLean has gone so far as to argue that Aboriginal visual artists invented contemporary art, leading the way for a connection to be made between traditional societies and contemporary arts, a connection that has had global repercussions.⁴⁹ The status of Indigenous art as heritage and tradition on the one hand, and as vibrant contemporary work and high status commodity on the other, has implications for its relation to the UNESCO Conventions applicable to art and culture.

Cultural activities such as bark painting could be appropriately linked to UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.⁵⁰ However, the Diversity of Cultural Expressions Convention gives much greater emphasis to measures for maintaining the diversity of contemporary cultural expressions through production, distribution and dissemination of cultural goods and services in the context of national cultural industries, and often through market mechanisms. The Convention is thus highly relevant to Indigenous art, which is a vibrant sector of Australian visual arts. As noted above, bark painting continues to evolve aesthetically. A highly viable cultural commodity, it is widely recognised as a contemporary art form.⁵¹ Indigenous painting and arts more generally overlap the categories of traditional knowledge and contemporary cultural expressions. Indigenous cultural expressions come closest to bridging the gap between culture as intangible heritage 'transmitted from generation to generation',⁵² and cultural expressions in contemporary cultural industries and the art marketplace, hence their uniqueness and special significance for the diversity of cultural expressions in Australia.

The resonance of Indigenous art for the contemporary art world and its audience helped to create grounds for cultural recognition that assisted in the legal claims of Yolngu and Ngurrara people. While ANKAAA and individual Art Centres were certainly not the sole agents of these achievements, they have been important advocates of an ethic of self-determination and cultural maintenance linked to generating art that has contemporary resonance. ANKAAA's motto 'Keeping art, culture and country strong' reflects an ongoing balance between priorities of cultural maintenance and economic viability. Aboriginal communities face great challenges, including social problems, cultural displacement, and economic marginalisation. In our interview, Djambawa Marawili was anxious to point out the immediate problems of poverty and homelessness for many senior artists who are vital bearers of cultural memory. This report by no means suggests that art can be an easy panacea for ongoing problems of poverty and marginalisation.

ANKAAA has a broad mission, with concerns going beyond its core tasks of supporting artists and art centres to operate sustainably in the arts field. ANKAAA provides support for many activities relevant to the culture cycle as a whole, including artist development, fostering management skills, creating mechanisms to ensure fair dealings with artists, maintaining best practice standards, and being actively involved in the marketing and distribution of cultural products. This is in alignment with the Convention's support for an environment enabling people and groups to 'create, produce, disseminate, distribute and have access to their own cultural expressions, paying due attention to the special circumstances and needs of women as well as various social

groups, including persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples'.⁵³ ANKAAA's ultimate aim is to enable Indigenous artists to take on positions of leadership within the arts field in ways that can also support the ongoing viability of the cultural worlds that support Indigenous art.

Harvesting Traditional Knowledge is an important example of bringing together cultural and professional worlds. In the radio program *Continuous Harvest*, Christina Davidson was asked how *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* was contributing to ANKAAA's mandate. Her response was that the program is extending ANKAAA's ongoing aim of 'building bridges between the mainstream art world and the Indigenous art world'. *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* exemplifies the Convention's broad aim 'to foster interculturality in order to develop cultural interaction in the spirit of building bridges among peoples', as the Convention puts it.⁵⁴ ANKAAA and the Indigenous communities that support it have recognised the importance of these bridges, and of enhancing the quality of dialogue and the ongoing understandings that can flow from it. This is illustrated by Davidson's remarks about the impact of *Harvesting Traditional Knowledge* on participants:

*It's making all of us involved with [the program] understand in a much richer way the relationship between the country and the art and the material objects and the philosophies and the knowledge systems that are] embedded in it; and how that all fits in with contemporary art.*⁵⁵

- 1 Felicity Wright, email, 14 June 2012, cited in Christina Davidson, 'Working together: ANKAAA 25 years of keeping art, country and culture strong 1987–2012', *Backbone*, vol 12, no 1, p 2.
- 2 ANCAAAA, Draft aims and policies, 1987, cited in Davidson, 'Working Together', p 2.
- 3 Ron Merkel, About the code, webpage, Civic Square, ACT, n.d., viewed 24 August 2013, <<http://www.indigenousartcode.org/>>.
- 4 Jessica Booth, 'NT Arts Infrastructure Project', *Backbone*, vol 9, nos 2–3, p 17.
- 5 Michelle Culpitt, 'The annual ANKAAA Kimberley regional gathering', *Backbone*, vol 7, no 3, 2007, [pp 4–5]; Anthea Burns and Miriam Charlie, 'The 2007 annual ANKAAA Katherine regional meeting', *Backbone*, vol 7, no 3, 2007, [pp 6–7]; Matt Ward, 'The 2007 Arnhem regional meeting', *Backbone*, vol 7, no 3, 2007, [pp 8–9]; Matt Ward, 'The 2007 Tiwi regional meeting', *Backbone*, vol 7, no 3, 2007, [pp 10–11]. All articles available from: <<http://ankaaa.org.au/News/The%20Arts%20Backbone%207-3.pdf>>.
- 6 Interview with Christina Davidson, ANKAAA Chief Executive Officer.
- 7 Jon Altman, *Brokering Aboriginal Art: A critical perspective on marketing, institutions and the state*, Deakin University, Geelong, Vic, 2005, p 6. Available from: <http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/topical/Altman_Myer_2005.pdf>. Much of this case study's description of the evolution of the Art Centres draws on this publication, which is based on Altman's Kenneth Myer Lecture in Arts and Entertainment Management, delivered on 7 April 2005.
- 8 Gretchen Stolte, 'Policy mismatch and Indigenous Art Centres: The tension between economic independence and community development', in Natassia Fijn, Ian Keen, Christopher Lloyd and Michael Pickering (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies II: Historical engagements and current enterprises*, ANU E Press, Canberra, ACT, 2012, n.p. Available from: <<http://press.anu.edu.au/apps/bookworm/view/Indigenous+Participation+in+Australian+Economies+II/9511/ch13.html>>.
- 9 [ANKAAA Board of Directors], ANKAAA Value Statement: What is true and important to us, ANKAAA, Darwin, NT, [2008], viewed on 8 July 2013, <<http://ankaaa.org.au/value-statement/>>. This balancing act between business, and community / cultural development is not easy. See Stolte, 'Policy mismatch'.
- 10 ANKAAA, Welcome to ANKAAA, webpage, Darwin, NT, n.d., viewed 29 September 2013, <<http://www.ankaaa.org.au/>>.
- 11 Hilary Smale and Ben Collins, 'Flood damaged Warmun art returns home to the East Kimberley', news item, Broome, WA, viewed 24 July 2013, <<http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/06/14/3782223.htm>>; Bridie Smith, 'Blood and ochre save Kimberley's art legacy', *The Age*, 18 May 2013, viewed 24 July 2013, <<http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/blood-and-ochre-save-kimberleys-art-legacy-20130517-2js58.html>>.
- 12 The account of the workshop at Yirrkala relies to a large extent on the Radio National documentary of the event, *Written on a Bark*, made for the Indigenous program 'Awaye', ABC Radio National, 22 June 2013; available at <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/written-on-a-bark/4762442>>), as well as on discussions with ANKAAA Chairman Djambawa Marawili and CEO Christina Davidson. The second Harvesting Indigenous Knowledge workshop was held at Mowanjum Artists Spirit of the Wandjina (an Art Centre) at Derby in the Kimberley in September 2013. This workshop dealt with 'the context, meaning, production and conservation of Aboriginal art and craft, especially boab fibre for hair spinning, pearl shell, boab nut carvings, ochre, spinifex gum, kangaroo sinew, boomerang and spear making'. ANKAAA, e-bulletin, 5 September 2013. Available from: <<http://us5.campaign-archive1.com/?u=4c3ba3de9dc3186e1e4c74cd9&id=d6e6785713&e=1a313d00f4>>.
- 13 An important prior relationship with a conservator was in relation to the Yirrkala 'church panels'. Sue Walston was in Yirrkala in July 1979, working on two large paintings of the creation stories of the Dhuwa and Yirritja moieties, the 'Church panels' that had been in the Yirrkala Methodist church. Australian Museum, *The Australian Museum Sydney Annual Report, 1979–80*, Australian Museum, Sydney, NSW, p 34. Available from: <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Uploads/Documents/26913/AMS112_1979-1980_lowres_web.pdf>.
- 14 Lorena Allam, On the fine art of preserving bark paintings, webpage, Sydney, NSW, 2013, viewed 28 June 2013, <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/bark-preservation/4766232>>.
- 15 Djambawa Marawili quoted in *Written on a Bark*, ABC Radio National, 22 June 2013.
- 16 Howard Morphy, *Becoming Art: Exploring cross-cultural categories*, Berg, New York, 2007.
- 17 *Written on a Bark*, ABC Radio National, 22 June 2013.
- 18 Djon Mundine, 'An Aboriginal soliloquy', in Linda Michael (catalogue ed.) and Dion Mundine (guest ed.), *They Are Meditating: Bark paintings from the MCA's Arnott's collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, The Rocks, NSW, 2008, pp 15–33.
- 19 Morphy, *Becoming Art*, p 237.
- 20 Morphy, *Becoming Art*, p 156.
- 21 Djon Mundine, 'The spirit within: North-Eastern and Central Arnhem Land', in Linda Michael (catalogue ed.) and Dion Mundine (guest ed.), *They Are Meditating: Bark paintings from the MCA's Arnott's collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, The Rocks, NSW, 2008, p 87.

- 22 Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998, p 256.
- 23 World Indigenous Network, About the WIN, webpage, Canberra, ACT, n.d., viewed 24 August 2013, <<http://www.winism.net/about/>>.
- 24 Interview with Djambawa Marawili.
- 25 Djambawa Marawili, 'Salt Water - Bark Paintings of Sea Country and the Blue Mud Bay Sea Rights Case', World Indigenous Network Conference, Darwin, NT, 28 May 2013, PowerPoint presentation text. Available at: <<http://www.worldindigenousnetwork.net/win-conference-darwin-2013/the-land-and-the-sea-cant-talk-we-have-to-talk-for-them-working-together-to-care-for-country-collective-painting-projects-and-land-and-sea-rights-claims>>.
- 26 Morphy, *Becoming Art*, pp 89-90.
- 27 Morphy, *Becoming Art*, p 90.
- 28 Morphy, *Becoming Art*, p 89.
- 29 Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, *Saltwater: Yirrkala paintings of sea country*, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, NT, and Jennifer Isaac Publishing, Neutral Bay, NSW, 1999, pp 36-37.
- 30 Marawili, 'Salt Water', n.p.
- 31 Near the end of her presentation, Annette Kogolo was joined by Ngurrara Ranger Frank McCarthy as a co-presenter.
- 32 Ngarralja Tommy May, cited in Larissa Behrendt, *Ngurrara: The Great Sandy Desert canvas*, feature item, n.p., 2008, viewed 28 August 2013, <<http://www.aboriginalartdirectory.com/news/feature/ngurrara-the-great-sandy-desert-canvas.php>>.
- 33 Jilpia Nappaljari Jones, cited in Larissa Behrendt, *Ngurrara: The Great Sandy Desert canvas*, feature item, n.p., 2008, viewed 28 August 2013, <<http://www.aboriginalartdirectory.com/news/feature/ngurrara-the-great-sandy-desert-canvas.php>>.
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- 38 Anker, 'The truth in painting', p 111.
- 39 Anker, 'The truth in painting', p 111.
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- 42 Brooks, 'The painted desert'.
- 43 Brooks, 'The painted desert'.
- 44 See <<http://www.atns.net.au/agreement.asp?EntityID=4948>>.
- 45 Anker, 'The truth in painting', p 100.
- 46 Mangkaja Arts Agency, *Collaborative works*, webpage.
- 47 Christina Davidson, quoted on *The Continuous Harvest*, made for the program 'Awaye', ABC Radio National, 9 October 2013; audio available at <http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2013/10/aye_20131019.mp3>.
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- 49 Ian McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art: Writings on Aboriginal art*, Power Publications, Sydney, NSW, 2011.
- 50 UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, webpage, Paris, 2003, viewed September 3 2013, <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>>.
- 51 The Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art notes in regard to a recent exhibition of Arnhem Land bark painting: 'By the 1970s, a strong market had developed - bark painting was recognised as contemporary art and it continues to evolve today'. Queensland Art Gallery, Arnhem Land bark painting, webpage, Brisbane, Qld, n.d., viewed 24 August 2013, <<https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/learn/collection/indigenous-australia>>.
- 52 UNESCO, *Convention for Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Article 2.1.
- 53 UNESCO, *Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Article 7.1.a.
- 54 UNESCO, *Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Preamble.
- 55 Christina Davidson, quoted on *The Continuous Harvest*, ABC Radio National, 9 October 2013.

KULTOUR

Kultour was an initiative of the Australia Council's Arts in a Multicultural Australia policy, dedicated to touring innovative multicultural arts across all art forms. It has now taken on a stronger role as a national advocate and service organisation that supports artists and arts workers. Kultour presents itself as 'the national voice advocating for the importance of cultural diversity in the activation of and participation in the arts for the benefit of all Australians, reflecting our multicultural society'.¹ Kultour's beginnings as a national touring program supported by a network of multicultural arts organisations equipped it well to maintain and support a network of artists actively contributing to the diversity of cultural expressions in Australia.

PART 1: MULTICULTURAL ARTS IN TRANSITION: KULTOUR'S EVOLUTION

Kultour, a peak body for artists of culturally diverse backgrounds, is an organisation in transition. Originally focused solely on providing a national touring program of multicultural arts, Kultour has evolved to take on a leadership role in promoting diversity in the arts more generally. This case study will focus on Kultour's transition process. The challenges and opportunities that Kultour faces in this task tell us much about the structures required to support and sustain a diverse cultural sector within a national arts field.

Kultour began as an initiative of the Australia Council's Arts in a Multicultural Australia (AMA) policy, which from 1999 carried out a major consultation with stakeholders across the country. New thinking at the time was beginning to conceive of Australian multiculturalism as a description pertinent to Australian society as a whole, rather than to ethnic minorities or immigrant communities.² AMA placed considerable emphasis on the marketing and distribution of multicultural arts. One of the findings of the consultation was that access to touring would extend multicultural artists' capacities, as well as extend audiences for diverse work. In 2001 the Kultour Touring

Network was piloted as the first national touring program dedicated to multicultural arts. Kultour's program aimed to present cultural work that ranged across all art forms, at a high level of excellence and innovation.

A key idea behind the Kultour initiative was to work with a network of member organisations in each Australian state and territory to assist multicultural artists to move beyond their local communities through a national touring program. Kultour members were a diverse range of arts organisations and arts centres that concentrated on developing and presenting diverse cultural programs.

In an early evaluation of the program in 2004, Kultour was characterised by Fotis Kapetopoulos as a 'network structure [that] increases [the] capacity of organisations of varying resource base and size'.³ As a resource network, Kultour could draw on artists and cultural content and differing arts specialisations, as well as provide infrastructure such as shared venues for touring programs. Kultour's member organisations pooled people of diverse and cosmopolitan backgrounds. As a knowledge network, Kultour could bring together its members' expertise and experience in arts, which often extended beyond Australia, differing approaches to arts development and management, and 'convergent mental models adept at working in complex cultural environments'.⁴

This nationwide network structure undoubtedly contributed to Kultour's ability to successfully access and develop excellent and innovative artwork – whether performance or visual arts – as well as facilitate viable touring and arts development programs. Kultour utilised its member organisations to present work in capital cities, where they were mostly based, as well as partnering with other organisations to enable touring in remote and regional areas. This reliance on a network structure would also contribute to Kultour extending its reach beyond its initial mandate.

Over the past few years, Kultour has been in the process of reinventing itself, moving away from its original incarnation as a multicultural touring agency. Kultour's success as a touring agency led to organisational change. Culturally diverse acts and exhibitions are now provided for by a number of industry processes and touring agencies – for example Long Paddock and Performing Lines – and are routinely included in general touring provisions. The initial problem that Kultour addressed – broadening access and distribution for multicultural artists – was supplanted and replaced by a broader engagement with the question of cultural diversity in the arts. As Kultour's then Chairperson Noris Ioannou put it in the organisation's 2010 annual report, Kultour had been 'dedicated solely to increasing awareness of Australian multicultural arts through touring performing and visual arts'. However, while Kultour had become a well-regarded brand in the presenter network, it was 'limited in [terms of] advocacy of broader engagement and inclusion of cultural diversity across the arts'.⁵ This reflected the ambitions of Kultour and its membership network to move beyond touring and distribution.

In 2009, more fundamental change began to take place when Magdalena Moreno became Kultour's Chief Executive Officer. Strategic meetings of Kultour members supported Kultour in actively

pursuing a wider role as a national advocacy body.⁶ An in-depth review of Kultour was initiated, which proposed strategic and organisational change. This led to negotiations with the Australia Council aimed at consolidating a new role for Kultour. In 2010 Kultour and Nexus, a Kultour member, hosted the National Multicultural Arts Symposium in Adelaide. This event, *Diversity in the Arts: Theory + Action*, signalled a new energy. Two days of performance and exhibitions demonstrated the quality and innovation of diverse arts, while speakers supported the idea of cultural diversity leading Australian arts, rather than being marginal to them.⁷ This seemed to signal the new face of Kultour.

In 2010, Kultour launched a business plan for 2011-13, which was basically a three-year program to transition the organisation into its new form. Kultour's expanding perspective included drawing on UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Kultour now presents itself as 'the national voice advocating for the importance of cultural diversity in the activation of and participation in the arts for the benefit of all Australians, reflecting our multicultural society'.⁸ It has moved beyond being essentially an arts touring body and taken on a role as a peak advocacy and service organisation to support 'artists, producers and presenters' in facilitating increased representation of culturally diverse artwork.

Kultour's change in direction entails an expansion in possibilities, while also presenting instructive challenges and dilemmas. These are best understood by looking at what Kultour does in its ongoing practice at the interface of artists, communities and audiences. Kultour illustrates in microcosm, some of the changes occurring in Australian multiculturalism.

PART 2: KULTOUR: PRACTICES IN TRANSITION

Part 2 of this case study explores the practical implications and challenges of Kultour's new strategies and ambitions. The task of representing, advocating for and supporting a difficult-to-define section of the arts field – culturally diverse arts practice – is both organisationally daunting and conceptually challenging.

It is important to point out that Kultour is a very small organisation. In December 2012, there were only two full-time employees supporting Kultour's ambitious agenda, Chief Executive Officer Julie Tipene-O'Toole and Programs Officer Georgina Sedgwick.⁹ This underpins the extent to which Kultour literally is, in sociologist Manuel Castells' words, a network enterprise, where 'networks, not firms, have become the actual operating unit'.¹⁰ It is easy to describe an organisation in terms of networks, for what isn't a network? But Kultour's leanness makes this an imperative, as does the heritage of its structure as a provider network for increasing the mobility of multicultural arts. In our interview, Julie Tipene-O'Toole articulates it very well:

Partnerships and collaborations are critically important to our delivery. Without that, I don't believe we'd be able to achieve what it is we need to achieve. Plus also the members of the Kultour network, those arts organisations work on the ground in their location ... Working with our member organisations enables us to still have that connection and engagement with them, and opportunities to support them and hear what works [and] what doesn't work; to enable us to undertake advocacy; to help improve opportunities and conditions, and existing frameworks that support the creation and presentation of work. We could not do it without our partners; without our members. In fact, part of this transition is to rebuild that even more strongly.

1. GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE

Kultour's new role and identity required a change in its organisational structure. A larger representational role required a larger network and an intensification of connections, extending both on the ground with artists and communities, and at higher levels, such as institutional, peak industry and government connections. Change was also required in terms of Kultour's internal governance structure, and funding arrangements. The original membership and board structure, very adequate for supporting a national touring program, was not adequate for managing a national advocacy and service organisation. Kultour's membership has been extended from 10 to 30 organisations distributed in each Australian state and territory. With this growth, governance, accountability and consultation became more unwieldy, requiring a membership structure that allocates some governance responsibilities to a body in each state. As Tipene-O'Toole explains:

The idea is that once we appoint a key arts organisation in every state and territory – an example would be in Brisbane, BEMAC – their core business is multicultural arts. The idea is that they are a key organisation member of Kultour, and in their state and territory we're looking at this notion of clusters of membership. So they will be a key partner for us in terms of bringing on board other arts organisations and agencies in their state to form a cluster group in Queensland, a cluster group in NSW. [This] takes the workload away from Kultour in terms of resourcing.

II. ADVOCACY

Advocacy is a common organisational term, but it raises questions of what is being advocated, and who is advocating for whom. We asked Julie Tipene-O'Toole about what being a national advocate for multicultural artists entailed. She explained:

I think first and foremost, the key to all of this is being connected. You cannot propose to be a national voice for artists in the community without being connected to them first and foremost. I see Kultour as merely a channel for information, for views, for success stories, for challenges and barriers that they experience, in terms of the creation and presentation of work. And it goes beyond that: Kultour is that channel which talks to the various government agencies, funders and key arts organisations in Australia, to inform them of the situation on the ground. It also provides information and advice on how these things can be addressed - I'm talking about issues and barriers and challenges. But also our role in the advocacy mode is to promote success stories. In particular, what are the key ... factors that make these things successful? Why were they successful? What are the existing challenges and barriers for emerging new communities in this country?

'Merely a channel': here is a strong statement about mediation in a network structure. For Kultour advocacy encompasses both policy dimensions – such as articulating problems and solutions for increasing opportunities for diverse cultural expressions, or lobbying around the needs of particular new communities – and the promotion of specific artists and their work in a variety of situations. Narratives and 'success stories' drawn from concrete engagement with artists and communities are important currency for advocacy. As Sedgwick expresses it:

We all understand the power of storytelling: I think that's the key critical thing. Advocacy in multicultural arts – or advocacy in general – is about telling a story. If ever I'm trying to pitch anything or do anything I always start with an example of a story and that will draw people in.

This storytelling could take place on many levels, not only on the level of attempting to influence policy through government. Working in partnership can enable the creation of supporters or 'champions' in different places and organisations. As Sedgwick expressed it, advocacy within a network entails the activation of 'multiple voices coming from all different areas' to connect different bodies, establish trust, and garner support. This kind of network advocacy is not just about carrying messages from below, but strategically joining at many levels.

III. AN INDUSTRY SERVICE ORGANISATION

Kultour's development as an industry service organisation for the multicultural arts sector is still something of a work in progress. This aspect of its role is about providing resources to artists and arts workers to develop and promote arts work. This could include arts development work, working with individual artists or projects, or working with particular multicultural communities, assessing needs and how they might be met. Often, actual service provision cannot be directly provided by Kultour but can be facilitated through its knowledge of available capacities and resources. For instance, Kultour can link artists and projects to mentors, locate residencies to further develop work, or help with funding opportunities. Servicing this sector – which is not as concrete as the word suggests – means making things happen through connections. This requires an ongoing analysis of the arts field. As Tipene-O'Toole put it:

[It's] about being aware of who plays in the space; what do they do; do they have services and resources available now that artists and arts workers can access? Are they being developed? Are there opportunities to develop resources that don't yet exist?

Kultour has worked closely with many artists. Artist development might occur organically during tours, and through the close association of members, partners and partner organisations. By 2008 some 25 artists were being provided with artistic development support.¹¹ This support is becoming more systematic through Pulse, Kultour's artistic and creative development program, which is very much tailored to the individual development of artists. Pulse provides a two-year program of support in the areas of 'producing, budgeting and finance, business acumen, funding and grant making processes, marketing, audience and/or community development, touring, and establishing strategic partnerships and networks'.¹² In Sedgwick's words, artist development is about

creating multiple opportunities and not just through touring but producing work, connecting people - that matchmaking idea. I spend a lot of time with the artists just talking to them about where they're at [and] what their next move might be, and I would say, well you should speak to this person; you should talk to this person.

In some cases artists with proposals to tour particular works would be encouraged to reflect on a range of strategies that could develop the work in different directions. For instance Kultour's association with Lisa Hilli, a Papua New Guinea born weaver and filmmaker, resulted in Hilli extending the boundaries of her art.

Lisa had a proposal for an installation exhibition based on material that would become *Just Like Home*, a work built around her mother's way of cooking and preparing *I gir*, a Tolai dish from the

Rabaul area in Papua New Guinea. The work combines video, sculpture and participatory performance, as Lisa and her mother Cathy cook and eat the dish and involve the audience. This project had a long gestation and went through a number of versions. Georgie Sedgwick encouraged Lisa to step back and take part in a cultural project on Elcho Island (Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory). It was there she had something of an epiphany, prompted by a cultural environment similar to her own, where art such as weaving and food production were fundamentally communal. The question that emerged - 'Why do I think I can only do art in a studio?' - led Hilli to a much more open and participatory practice with *Just like Home*, and an embracing of her Melanesian background within her broader art practice. This has included working with Polynesian weaver, Maryann Talia Pau, and starting the Pacific Women's Weaving Circle, an informal group of non-professional artists that meet to talk and make things.¹³ Sharing women's knowledge and stories has become an important resource for cultural maintenance of the Pacific Islander Community in Melbourne.¹⁴

The example of Lisa Hilli's association with Kultour shows that artist development requires time, access to networks, and a space for experimentation, in order to bring out more levels of understanding and access to the work. Sedgwick explains:

All this stuff takes time and that's why when we talk about dealing with artists, we can't do this in a year: I can't just bring an artist in; get their trust, I guess; tour their work, and then after a year the engagement's over. You don't feel right. You get to that point where you're a year or two years into the engagement and you're just starting to get momentum, you're just starting to see the possibilities and you open up the space for that and you can provide that support.

The question of identity and cultural expression is always a complicated and entangled one, especially in a nation where many immigrant pathways have intersected. Lisa Hilli found ways to make her art a means to express an Islander identity that was also compatible with contemporary art in Australia. A further case is that of Jade Dewi who also brings many cultural styles into work through background, training and curiosity.

KULTOUR AND ARTIST DEVELOPMENT: JADE DEWI AND 'OPAL VAPOUR'

Jade Dewi Tyas Tunggal is a young dancer and choreographer who exemplifies a restless desire to incorporate into her practice many influences and experiences. Born and raised in Australia, she has a strong interest in Indonesian dance and performance forms she was exposed to due to her Javanese background, as well as many dance styles she has pursued in her training. The work *Opal Vapour* is a collaboration between Dewi, lighting artist Paula van Beek and musician and composer Ria Soemardjo. The work is a multimedia dance piece that explores elements of ancestry, place and ritual, and that completed a national tour in 2013.

The development of *Opal Vapour* is a good illustration of the artist development processes through which Kultour attempts to open up new creative spaces. Jade approached Kultour in 2009 with a proposal to tour a work called *6/7 Empty*, developed for her masters of Choreography at the Victorian College of the Arts. For reasons of cost and the difficulty of marketing contemporary dance, Kultour was unable to tour *6/7 Empty* at that time.¹⁵ In the meantime, Dewi was offered a chance to develop a 20-minute Indonesian-Australian contemporary dance performance as part of Multicultural Arts Victoria MIX IT UP program at the Melbourne Arts Centre. In 2010, this

commission was the birth of *Opal Vapour* as well as Jade's collaboration with Ria Soemardjo. Paula van Beek's striking live-feed video techniques originated from this time: the dancer's body was lit from above and below producing intriguing shadows, while live images of the dancer were projected onto a cloth screen.

Subsequently, Kultour worked with Dewi and *Opal Vapour* to explore options for further developing the work. Rather than attempting to tour the work at that stage, *Opal Vapour* was further developed through residencies. Kultour had to argue for funding from the Australia Council on the basis of artistic outcomes, given the risk attached to such processes and the fact that the artists were not well known. The work was developed and tested in 2011 during residencies at Salamanca Arts Centre in Hobart, and the Glasshouse Arts Centre in Port Macquarie, New South Wales. The two residencies allowed an intense collaborative experience that encompassed sharing through living together, and sharing through movement and meditation practice. Conceptually exploring the role of the *dalang* (puppet master) in Javanese *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theatre) and the temporal dynamics of epic *wayang* performances resulted in a detailed and layered performance where all elements – the dancer's movements, sound, light and image – were intricately orchestrated. Working towards a demonstration performance in a fully equipped performance venue helped the maturation of a complex and layered multimedia work. In its developed form the work premiered at Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre in 2012, and toured nationally in 2013.

Kultour's support for Jade Dewi and the *Opal Vapour* team illustrates the collaborative possibilities that flow from Kultour's shift in emphasis from touring to working more broadly in developing artists and artistic expressions.

The most common analogy used in our interviews with Kultour workers talking about artists was that of the artist's journey. This indicates a way of working more developmentally and speculatively with artists. The term journey also suggests an ongoing movement in the creative process, beyond simply touring production outcomes. Finally, the focus on the artist's journey locates the cultural expressions in many instances of cultural dialogue, not simply in a culture of origin. Sedgwick says:

I think that that was one of the key things that we tried to do, to say this is actually about good art. These people are artists first. They don't want to be defined [with reference to] their cultural background necessarily, even though their work is quite often formed by that. We're just trying to raise that debate and make people understand that. That's not to say that working in a community, being formed by community, cultural development ideals, isn't important too. It is actually something that we should think about and break down rather than separating the two.

This location of art and creative process in an ongoing and mobile encounter with different influences and engagements certainly matches the reality of many contemporary artists. It also presents many challenges on an organisational level. We were interested to see the way that the rhetoric of touring has vanished from Kultour's written presentation, replaced largely by a discourse of mobility. In the organisation's Business Plan, we find that 'mobile' and 'mobility' are used in different ways. Thus mobility could simply stand in for touring, as in 'mobile programs across the country'.¹⁶ Or it could imply an emphasis on a less embedded notion of engaging with culture and community, as in Kultour supplying 'a range of mobile projects and services to the sector'.¹⁷ Finally mobility appears as a rationale in itself, where Kultour is spoken of as a voice of 'cultural diversity through mobility'.¹⁸

This might be seen as a confusing attempt to move beyond old associations, for an organisation that has touring embedded in its name. On the other hand, it might point to an organisational disposition to engage in and support 'culture on the move', whereby mobile processes, migration, exile or encounters with different cultural styles and contexts can generate new aesthetic concepts.¹⁹

IV. TOURING

In spite of its major direction change, Kultour has not exactly vacated the touring field. Rather, Kultour is moving from being a direct provider to largely being a facilitator of touring opportunities through partnerships. In Sedgwick's words:

We also just felt we're doing the heavy lifting, but we're just two people doing tours, where there are huge tour organisations which are set up for that. Why should we be doing that? Wouldn't we be better positioned to actually create partnerships, to become a voice for multicultural arts and bring touring organisations together and artists and encourage them to take this work on?

Kultour simply did not have the people to carry on with a central touring role as well as the new functions it took on. Nevertheless, as the only specifically multicultural touring organisation in Australia, it was felt that retreating from the touring market entirely could be detrimental to diversity in the field, for artists and audiences. Also, touring had been one means of accessing grassroots knowledge of cultural intersections on the ground. Kultour's understanding of touring was more holistic than simply extending distribution, rather Kultour understood it as a delivery mechanism for extending a market. From this perspective, touring is a cultural engagement that involves building bridges between artists, specific communities, and cultural and social possibilities. As Sedgwick says of Kultour's touring practices:

We give it time. We never just go into a performance and leave. It's all about ... getting people to come into a community one or two days before: you walk around, have chats and there's a buzz that builds and a kind of a confidence and a trust.

Kultour had developed a particular touring ethic that they wanted to continue in touring partnerships. One such partnering organisation is Artback NT. A brief examination of Artback helps illustrate the way in which partnerships can extend a particular practice and ethics.

ARTBACK NT: CASE STUDY IN PARTNERSHIP

Artback NT Arts Development and Touring is an arts touring agency operating in a unique environment, Australia's Northern Territory. This vast region has a population of around 232,000 spread over 1.3 million square kilometres. The Northern Territory has by far the largest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, almost 32 percent, compared to a national average of 2.3 percent.²⁰ There are some 650 remote Aboriginal communities. Touring in the Northern Territory presents great challenges, but also many opportunities. Kultour relies on Artback to organise tours, particularly in remote parts of the Northern Territory, and their relationship is a close one. In 2007, Artback was one of the first organisations that Kultour worked with as a touring partner, shifting the heavy lifting of direct provision of touring services. Kultour recognised that they did not have the capacity or the experience on the ground to undertake such tours, given their concern to work with cultural and community sensitivity and their more holistic approach to touring.

Artback NT illustrates the points of connection required to underpin successful partnerships. For Georgie Sedgwick, Kultour 'have this kind of synergy with Artback NT where [they]

both understand that central role of culture, particularly with Aboriginal culture'. Kultour works with Artback to ensure the appropriateness of process and 'trust that they understand how to negotiate culturally as well and that they go in and they have a relationship with their communities'. The partnership is mutually valued. Artback's Performing Arts Touring Manager, Angela O'Donnell, explains that Artback is drawn to Kultour's work, because they are 'both used to working on the margins of things, which is a far more interesting place to work'.

Angela O'Donnell has worked with Artback NT for some five years and runs its Performing Arts Program. Allied programs include a Contemporary Music Program and an Indigenous Traditional Dance Program, which runs an annual festival, Dancesite.²¹ O'Donnell concurs that Artback has had a good working relationship with Kultour, and shares similar priorities and values including a commitment to local knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and the creation of local opportunities beyond audience development.

Angela O'Donnell is responsible for selecting performance work to tour in the Northern Territory. Technically, Artback is a buyer of programs (including Kultour programs) that become available through touring art markets, such as Long Paddock.²² O'Donnell says:

Basically I would go along to a Long Paddock and look different acts that are available for touring; I would think about the needs and desires and what has worked in the past in the communities and also in the Performing Arts Centres that we've worked with. I would usually then 'vote' for, in that process, a week or two weeks of a particular act, and then I would come back to the Territory and work out which communities might be able to partner with us, or which regions, depending [on] what was going on at the time, had a desire to work with us on different things.

This complicated process ensures the possibility of organising tours by marrying larger towns with remote communities in order to make those shows happen. Remote communities literally have no box office. There is no financial viability to them and no charge is made for people to attend. Artback gauges the interest of these communities, gets support letters from them, and seeks to raise funds from government, community partners, or grants tied to particular purposes. This is a description of a market that has many non-market features. Touring in remote communities entails many kinds of non-commodified exchange. Where there are no conventionally equipped arts venues, spaces are improvised. White paint can be hastily daubed on an outside wall for a film screening or performance backdrop: 'there's lots of ways you can do things without too much, it's mostly about access'. Performances thus have an entirely different character, less governed by the conventions that underpin relations between audiences and performers. In addition, some quite particular intercultural relations can be developed.

In 2010, Kultour presented a national tour of Mandinka Sound, two groups of West African musicians, that was handled in the Territory by Artback.²³ For O'Donnell, this worked very successfully in the Northern Territory because of the strong engagement between the African musicians and Indigenous audiences. Artback also arranged for two musicians from Mandinka Sound, King Marong and Lamine Sonko, to take part in StrongBala, a culturally appropriate health and well-being program for Indigenous men.²⁴ This event took place near Katherine, and involved men who had issues concerning substance abuse or domestic violence, some of whom were directed by court order to take part in the project. Angela O'Donnell describes the occasion:

The two guys from One Africa did a performance there, and then ran a session with some of the men. And that was hugely powerful in that all the whitefellas left the space, and it was about an exchange of two groups of men who have both had an extraordinary amount of challenge and disadvantage put at their feet.

While we can make no formal assessment of outcomes of this program or this particular event, it is a good example of effectively organised cultural engagement that relied on local knowledge and initiative. O'Donnell and Artback NT also see the close relation between the art, the cultural context in which it is able to generate an engagement, and advocacy.

Artback embodies the on-the-ground cultural engagement that Kultour has championed. The dilemma for Kultour is how to maintain this level of cultural contact at a community level. Kultour's movement to a peak representative structure has necessitated further mediation on a structural level. In terms of services and artist development, Kultour has continued to work closely with individual artists, particularly projects and communities.

PART 3: KULTOUR: A GATHERING NETWORK

Kultour's ambitious re-shaping from a touring agency concerned with the national distribution of quality multicultural arts work, to a national peak body representing artists of diverse cultural backgrounds, signals some important shifts in the understanding of multicultural arts. Kultour found that its success in promoting diverse cultural products through touring did not prevent the pigeonholing of these expressions. Kultour's broader drive is to incorporate cultural diversity into arts practices in general. On the other hand, might this tactic of mainstreaming risk losing touch with what is distinctive in particular cultural contexts beyond the diversity of market choices? Is there a danger in the merging of commerce and the language of creativity and diversity, which is now so commonplace in business models?

Kultour's website links to a report issued by Arts Council England, *The Role of Diversity in Building Adaptive Resilience*. Part of the report's argument is about the convergence of creativity as a business strategy and as an aesthetic dimension. The authors inform us that they 'found the creative case to be very similar to the business case for diversity in the private sector'.²⁵ Cultural and social diversity is another desirable attribute, along with creativity, accompanying the merging of the rationales of the artistic sphere with commerce and trade, a merging that is contested by cultural critics such as Angela McRobbie.²⁶

From our discussions, Kultour's practice doesn't collapse commercial imperatives and the creative process as it manifests in various art form practices. Kultour's practice is grounded in a faith in the singularity of what artists do. This is exemplified in their work with artists such as Jade Dewi Tyas Tunggal and Lisa Hilli. Kultour seems to get its buzz from the fusion of quality aesthetic practice and the emergence of different practices

and expressions, and using these stories in their arguments for inclusive arts practices that reflect the diversity of Australian society and its cultural contexts. That is perhaps why artist development continues as a key organisational interest, rather than pursuing a purely aesthetically neutral advocacy and service role.

This is very much in the spirit of UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions on 'nurturing and supporting' artists in the provision of a diversity of cultural expressions.²⁷ Kultour's role as advocate and support organisation, and its artistic development activities, clearly supports the Convention's requirement to 'recognise the important contribution of artists, others involved in the creative process, cultural communities, and organisations that support their work, and their central role in nurturing the diversity of cultural expressions'.²⁸ Kultour's role in supporting artists also involves the whole cultural value chain of cultural expressions in a cultural economy: 'the creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment of such domestic cultural activities, goods and services'.²⁹

Kultour's evolution has centred on a network structure that by its nature has linked cultural grassroots, the arts field and governance and policy spheres. Kultour's new ambit raises many challenges and risks that accompany the ambition of its program, such as losing touch with the ground, stretched resources and communication fatigue. In Part 2 we gave an account of Kultour's key functions in the wake of its organisational transition and reorientation. Kultour's governance structures have been refashioned in order to expand its capacity as a national peak body and service organisation representing artists from culturally diverse backgrounds. As mentioned, this has required not simply an organisational expansion, but a major organisational restructuring to enable the further extension of Kultour's

network capacities. There are considerable challenges to providing a national advocacy and service organisation, notably the challenge of resources. Aside from the logistics of negotiation and lobbying government and relevant institutions at national, state and local levels, advocacy for Kultour also entails maintaining a two-way flow of information and responses informed by Kultour's networks. As a service organisation, Kultour must be able to support artists and arts workers in a multiplicity of contexts. Again, viability will turn on capacities to utilise networks and grassroots knowledge of the arts field, and to continue to display flexibility and mobility in making connections. We presented some examples of Kultour's commitment to artist development, which entailed supporting artists pursuing mobile, zigzagging processes in an improvised strategy of developing innovative work to a high standard. In spite of its physical withdrawal from immediate touring functions, Kultour will continue to have a role in the presentation and distribution of diverse work through its involvement in the life cycles of developing artistic projects, and with the further expansion of its creative networks.

Can the strength of these knowledge and resource networks continue to sustain the development of a critical practice of supporting diversity of cultural expression in artistic production in Australia? Kultour is an evolving model of ways to mediate between cultural networks, to strengthen linkages, and to build on the largely invisible structures constituting diverse arts. From the perspective of the Convention, Kultour has most to offer as a model for mediating advocacy and governance through loose structures. At the same time, Kultour maintains an important role in the aesthetic dimension, supporting artistic development, benchmarking, showcasing and making available excellent diverse artists and artworks.

Kultour's advocacy role at a national level is also relevant in relation to arts policy and the way it reflects the implementation of the Convention. Kultour contributes to national policy debates, developing its response from the feedback of its membership. One contribution of relevance to the Convention is Kultour's submission to the National Cultural Policy in 2011.³⁰ Kultour explicitly cited the Convention in arguing for its vision for the National Cultural Policy. Hence the goals Kultour articulated in relation to this submission (2011) are of interest also to the implementation of the Convention:

GOAL 1: *Ensure what the Government supports - and how this support is provided - reflects the diversity of a 21st century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture*

GOAL 2: *Encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries in ways which enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture*

GOAL 3: *Support excellence and world-class endeavour and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas*

GOAL 4: *Increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy.*³¹

These goals reflect a synergy between the Convention and perspectives developed in Australian multicultural arts practice. They condense Kultour's values, combining a quest for artistic excellence, the valuing of inclusion, an insistence on the relevance of the diversity of Australian society as a whole, and an interest in disseminating Australian stories that are often intercultural in nature. As a means to implementing the Convention, the Kultour submission recommends embedding these aims not just in the Australia Council, but in a whole of government approach which would include government portfolios such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade, Diversity and Social Cohesion Programs and the Ministry of the Arts.

In 2013 Kultour trialled a new program, *Kultour Gathering 2013*, a three day creative lab to test new concepts and artistic frameworks. Workshops led by artists focused on how they work creatively, and how they might draw on diverse backgrounds.³² The workshops were delivered to an audience of curators, producers and policy makers, and were as Tipene-O'Toole says:

artist-led workshops, talking about how they create their work; how they present it. And the dynamics of that given that they come from a diverse background - what does that mean? So when you're creating, do you see it differently to someone else? But the artist will be presenting this to the audience: the audience will be made up of key curators and producers that we will invite, as well as policymakers that we want to invite to this session

Kultour Gathering 2013 will also be a test of Kultour's extended structures.

Tipene-O'Toole continues:

We are working very closely with BEMAC in Brisbane, because that's where it will be held. BEMAC is our resource on the ground in Queensland, so they are introducing us to our partners, which will be the Brisbane Festival - we want to link this to the Brisbane Festival. So BEMAC are doing that work for us; creating those connections; building support both financially and non-financially for us; helping to promote it widely there. And so, all the things that we need to ... help deliver it in Queensland - they're helping to connect us too. We can't do that - we don't have the intimate relationships they have.

Kultour Gathering 2013's stated aim was to 'contribute to the development of the practices of culturally and linguistically diverse artists in relation to contemporary, multi-disciplinary arts in Australia', develop the profile of such art, and support Kultour's advocacy for 'the potential, the value and the significance of culturally diverse arts practice'.³³ The initiative is typical of Kultour's particular network ecology, placing artists and innovative arts practice at the heart of their policy strategy.

- 1 Kultour, Kultour Submission to the National Cultural Policy, submission, Melbourne, Vic, 2011, p1, viewed 6 July 2013, <http://creativeaustralia.arts.gov.au/assets/Submission%20315_Redacted_o.pdf>.
- 2 Australia Council, Arts in a Multicultural Australia, Australia Council, Surry Hills, NSW, 2000, p 12.
- 3 Fotis Kapetopoulos, Who Goes There? National multicultural arts audience case studies, Australia Council, Surry Hills, NSW, 2004, p 13>.
- 4 Kapetopoulos, Who Goes There?, p 14.
- 5 Noris Ioannou, 'Chair's report', in Kultour, Kultour 2010 Annual Report, Kultour, Melbourne, Vic, 2010, p 13. Available from: <http://www.kultour.com.au/images/kultour_images/PDF/k2010_final.pdf>.
- 6 Noris Ioannou, 'Chair's report', in Kultour, Kultour 2009 Annual Report, Kultour, Melbourne, Vic, 2009, p 13. Available from: <http://www.kultour.com.au/images/kultour_images/PDF/kultour_ar_2009_2.pdf>.
- 7 Esther Anatolitis, 'Multicultural arts: Always already mainstream', RealTime, no 98, 2010, p 42. Available from: <<http://www.realttimearts.net/article/98/9954>>.
- 8 Kultour, Kultour Submission to the National Cultural Policy, p 1.
- 9 Kultour's team, as of January 2014, includes Julie Tipene-O'Toole (CEO), Marcus Hughes (Programs Manager) and Maysam Latif (Communications and Community Development Coordinator). Kultour, Team, webpage, Melbourne, Vic, 2013, viewed 20 January 2014, <<http://www.kultour.com.au/about-kultour/team.html>>.
- 10 Manuel Castells, The Rise of the Network Society, Blackwell, Cambridge, MA, 1996, p 187.
- 11 Rohini Sharma, 'CEO's report', in Kultour, Kultour 2008 Annual Report, Kultour, Melbourne, Vic, 2008, p 13.
- 12 Kultour, Pulse 2013/2014, webpage, Melbourne, Vic, 2013, viewed 23 January 2014, <<http://www.kultour.com.au/component/content/article/12-whats-on/143-pulse-20132014.html>>.
- 13 See <<http://www.kultour.com.au/component/content/article/12-whats-on/38-just-like-home.html>> and <http://www.kultour.com.au/images/kultour_images/PDF/lisa_hilli_a5brochure.pdf>.
- 14 See <<http://www.abc.net.au/arts/stories/s3002030.htm>>.
- 15 6/7 Empty would eventually be toured by Kultour in 2011.
- 16 Kultour, Business Plan, 2011-2013 [unpublished], Melbourne, Vic, [2010], p 6.
- 17 Kultour, Business Plan 2011-2013, p 9.
- 18 Kultour, Business Plan 2011-2013, p 6.
- 19 See Nikos Papastergiadis, Spatial Aesthetics, Rivers Oram Press, London, 2006.
- 20 Australian Human Rights Commission, A statistical overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia: Social Justice Report, webpage, Sydney, NSW, 2008, viewed 2 June 2013, <<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/statistical-overview-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-australia-social>>.
- 21 Artback also runs a Visual Arts program, which is much more focused on touring work out, than touring it in, given the success of Indigenous visual arts in the Territory.
- 22 Long Paddock is a gathering of arts producers, presenters and touring agencies, where arts projects are presented for potential touring. Long Paddock is held to coincide with funding rounds of Playing Australia, the national program supporting touring opportunities. The name Long Paddock comes from the cattle industry, referring to outback stock routes. See <<http://www.artbacknt.com.au/index.php/theatre/2012-theatre/long-paddock/>>.
- 23 See <<http://www.kultour.com.au/archive/archivednews/33-mandinka-sound.html>>.
- 24 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgEgsShhI_I>.
- 25 Tony Nwachukwu and Mark Robinson, The Role of Diversity in Building Adaptive Resilience, Arts Council England, London, 2011, p 5. Available from: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Diversity_and_adaptive_resilience_public.pdf>. This report contains very interesting case material on private sector creative projects.
- 26 See Angela McRobbie, "Everyone is creative": Artists as pioneers of the new economy?, in Jean-Marc Léger (ed.), Culture and Contestation in the New Century, Intellect, Bristol, UK, 2011, pp 77-92.
- 27 UNESCO, Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, webpage, Paris, 2005, Article 6.2.g, viewed 28 January 2014, <http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>.
- 28 UNESCO, Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Article 7.2.
- 29 UNESCO, Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Article 6.2.b.
- 30 This National Cultural Policy was launched in March 2013. See <<http://creativeaustralia.arts.gov.au/assets/national-cultural-policy-discussion-paper.pdf>>.
- 31 Kultour, Kultour Submission to the National Cultural Policy, pp 4-7.
- 32 The Gathering 2013 had not yet occurred at the time of writing.
- 33 Kultour, Kultour Gathering 2013, webpage, Melbourne, Vic, viewed 23 July 2013, <<http://www.kultour.com.au/component/content/article/152-the-national-gathering-.html>>.

black&write!

black&write! is a relatively new program that seeks to address the under-representation of Indigenous writers in Australia. Indigenous writers have not achieved the same status and recognition in Australia as they have in other cultural fields such as visual arts, music or sport. For black&write!, a project of the State Library of Queensland, the lack of publication outcomes for Indigenous writers was related to the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the publishing industry. black&write! approaches the problem of how best to support Indigenous writing through an innovative pairing of writers and editors. Indigenous editors are given a start in the publishing industry through Indigenous Editing Mentorships. They work with authors in receipt of Indigenous Writing Fellowships chosen through an annual writing competition to develop a manuscript to publication. Publication has been secured through a partnership with Magabala Books, an Indigenous-managed publisher. In addition, the Indigenous OnScreen Trainee Editing Traineeships program augments black&write!'s drive to increase Indigenous capacity in the publishing industry by further increasing editors' ability to work supportively with writers in regional and remote Australia.

PART 1: black&write!: DUAL STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS WRITING

The *black&write!* program was initially conceived by Sue Abbey, a Texas-born editor and literary professional of some 25 years. Her detailed knowledge of Indigenous writers and literature came from working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers while at the University of Queensland Press (UQP) – at that time the most prominent publisher of Indigenous literature – from 1981 until 2005. Abbey became UQP's Senior Editor, in charge of the Black Australian Writers List and the David Unaipon Award. The Unaipon Award, which annually selects an Indigenous manuscript by a previously unpublished author for development and publication, has been the major literary award for Indigenous writers in Australia. Participation in the David Unaipon Award since its inception in 1989 fostered many of Australia's leading Indigenous writers. This involved Abbey in a close working relationship with new authors.

Abbey's idea for supporting the ongoing development of Indigenous writing and publication crystallised in the *black&write!* project. In 2010 she proposed the project to the State Library of Queensland (SLQ). *black&write!* was given a two-year trial, and has since been adopted as a core program of the library. The project is currently directed by Katie Woods; Sue Abbey has played a strong role initially as *black&write!*'s Project Director and editing mentor, and she continues her association as a consultant.

black&write!'s dual strategy consists of firstly encouraging new writing with a literary fellowship, which is awarded following an annual writing competition, and secondly training and mentoring Indigenous editors to work with these manuscripts to develop these books to a high standard. This double strategy seeks to bring into play an expansion in capacity of Indigenous writers by enhancing the writing environment and process through editorial collaboration. It also aims to develop greater capacity within the publishing industry through the training of Indigenous editors.

WHY EDITORS?

Editors tend to be invisible figures in the literary scene, at least for the reading public, literary critics and literary historians. Writing is imagined as a lonely struggle in a proverbial garret. It is certainly true that writing is often a less collective creative process than, say, cinema or theatre (both of which, of course, need writers). Nevertheless, the task of bringing a work of writing to publication often entails a close partnership with an editor. The work of editors is located at writing's many cultural interfaces: with the publishing industry and commercial markets; with audiences, and with social forces that contribute to public taste; and with conventions of appropriate literary form, language styles, and so on. Editors mediate all these elements through their work with an author and a text.

Editing is about establishing working relationships to develop or modify a manuscript. These relations can be highly variable in terms of relative power, degrees of collaboration and cultural perspectives. Hence, the editing process as an intercultural relationship may harbour an implicit cultural bias, a shaping of texts to conform to 'proper' language (a whitening of language); an appropriation of a writer's work for particular agendas; or the removal of cultural contexts from the published work. Jennifer Jones' detailed study of three Indigenous writers – Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Margaret Tucker and Monica Clare – and their relationships with non-Indigenous editors pointed to significant alteration and compromise of fundamental aspects of the work.¹

Is there an argument for enabling Indigenous editors and writers to work together, and for increasing the involvement of Indigenous editors in the publishing industry? According to Sue Abbey, this relationship is crucial for the development of trust, which is vital for the cultivation of an Indigenous writing space. In an interim report on the *black&write!* program (2011), Publishing Manager at Magabala Books Margaret Whiskin suggested:

An Indigenous editor can have an understanding of the nuances and cultural sensitivities that may be a barrier between a non-Indigenous editor and an Indigenous writer, and it can allow for freer communication and a greater trust to be built between editor and writer – there can be greater familiarity, ease and sense of connection. Also, there may be subtle changes, unconscious biases that creep in from a non-Indigenous editor, because of their cultural background – an Indigenous editor can have more awareness of some of the stereotypes of character and language.²

And beyond the immediate relationship, Whiskin (2011) explains, advocating the pairing of Indigenous editors and writers

gives precedence to the cultural context in which the work is edited – it goes towards giving a voice to another way of seeing that is an alternative to the non-Indigenous voice.³

According to Aboriginal author Anita Heiss, at the time of writing her book *Dhuuluu-Yala* (To Talk Straight): Publishing Indigenous Literature (2003), there were only four Indigenous 'industry trained' editors in Australia,⁴ and according to Sue Gough (2011), only two editors of Indigenous background had ever been trained to work specifically in the areas of fiction and poetry.⁵ A program to train Indigenous editors could be a way of enhancing relations of trust that would contribute to encouraging more Indigenous writers. What would be the best way to do this?

Editing takes many forms. Sue Abbey describes the form of editing in *black&write!* as ‘book development editing’. Developmental editors work much more closely with writers in the development of a manuscript. But while developmental editing may involve ‘significant structuring or restructuring of a manuscript’s discourse’,⁶ it is not a form of ghostwriting. To the contrary, developmental editing entails an open, collaborative process where author and editor work to develop the author’s manuscript to its highest potential. In supporting Indigenous editors and pairing them with Indigenous writers, *black&write!* tries to encourage strong dialogues between writers and editors in engaging with each unique manuscript to bring out that potential.

STAGES IN *black&write!*’s DEVELOPMENT

black&write! commenced as a pilot project at the State Library of Queensland in 2010. The *black&write!* program is comprised of two intersecting aspects: 1) the kuril dhagun Indigenous Writing Fellowships and 2) the kuril dhagun Indigenous Editing Mentorships. A third element is the Indigenous OnScreen Trainee Editors Program, which commenced in 2012.

In late 2010 two editors, Ellen van Neerven-Currie and Linda McBride-Yuke, were recruited to the kuril dhagun Indigenous Editing Mentorships. This would consist of on the job learning through developmental editing facilitated by Sue Abbey, focusing on manuscripts of the authors chosen for the Indigenous Writing Fellowships. By the end of 2011, both *black&write!* editors had completed their mentorship program as well as postgraduate diplomas at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Creative Industries Faculty. They became interns from late 2011 and in July 2012 both were appointed as *black&write!* editors, as State Library of Queensland staff.

In 2011 the first Indigenous Writing Fellowships were awarded, following the inaugural annual competition. The project is designed to select two Indigenous authors per year to develop a work to publication. The authors selected were Ali Cobby Eckermann and Sue MacPherson. The authors selected in 2012 were Jillian Boyd and Teagan Chilcott. This year (2013) Tristan Savage, Jared Thomas, and co-authors Scott Prince and Dave Hartley were awarded Indigenous Writing Fellowships.

The Indigenous OnScreen Trainee Editors Program began in 2012 with two interns: Sylvia Nakachi, based in Thursday Island in the Torres Strait, and Kamisah Bin Demin, who is based in Broome in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. However, this was only possible with an online program, as there are no accessible book editing courses outside of capital cities. The program aims to ‘expand the reach and depth of the program by facilitating the training of regional and/or remote Indigenous editors in their normal place of residence’.⁷

PART 2: PROCESS: THE black&write! FAMILY

The *black&write!* program aims to contribute to the vitality of Indigenous writing and publication in an ongoing and sustainable way. It hinges on successful relationships between Indigenous writers and Indigenous editors. This should entail a developmental process for both writer and editor who are involved in an intimate collaborative process to develop manuscripts to a high standard for publication. The editors' training combines on the job training in developmental editing of fiction and/or poetry at SLQ, formal qualifications through QUT's Creative Industries Faculty, and mentoring by Sue Abbey and other appropriate industry professionals. A key aim is to build a community of writers, mentors, editors and other literary professionals to encourage Indigenous writing and publication activity, both as a supportive network and as champions within the publishing industry.

The Indigenous OnScreen Trainee Editors, while not linked directly to developmental editing with authors from the Indigenous Writing Fellowships, aims to augment *black&write!*'s support for Indigenous editors with trained editors located in regional/remote areas. The Australia Council for the Arts, who fund the online program, wished to extend regional access to trained Indigenous editors.

THE FELLOWSHIP WRITERS

The first annual competition for the Indigenous Writing Fellowships took place in 2011. Manuscripts were invited in the areas of fiction, including young adult fiction and poetry. One area that was excluded was that of memoir: it was felt that memoir was already a strong category in Indigenous publication, and that fiction and poetry should be a priority for development. Sue Abbey feared that the competition could be flooded with memoirs, and felt that fictional work

should be prioritised in the program. Apart from this, there is no restriction regarding content. There is no insistence on explicitly 'Indigenous content', or the prescribing of particular subjects or genres, and so on. Hence Teagan Chilcott's science fiction novel *Rise of the Fallen*, which was selected in 2012, has no recognisable markers of Indigeneity. Young writers are often not beholden to the expectations of past Indigenous writing, for instance, in terms of geographical community or genre. Entries, therefore, featured genres and styles that have not previously been associated with Indigenous writing such as science fiction and fantasy. There has been a strong level of contributions aimed at young adult readership. Further, there was no requirement that the authors be unpublished (unlike the David Unaipon Award).

The two winners each year receive a prize of \$10,000, and professional manuscript development with the Indigenous editors from *black&write!* Fellowship holders sign an agreement to take part in an editorial development process. Finally there is a publishing deal with Magabala Books, an Indigenous-run publisher based in Broome, Western Australia. The relationship with Magabala Books is a key partnership for *black&write!* as a publication guarantee is an important incentive for writers. After investigating other possible publishers, Magabala proved to be the most viable choice: Magabala is a well-established, Indigenous-run organisation, a not-for-profit body that is concerned with caring for its writers and which, importantly, has good distribution networks. It is also an enterprise that is interested in developing partnerships and expanding its market, including its overseas market.

The fellowship writers commit to work closely with the *black&write!* editors to develop the book for publication. This involves working together to identify the potential in the manuscript, what strategies are required, and above all the parameters of the relationship between writer and editor. *black&write!*'s focus is on developing career writers and all that that entails. The writers' participation is not just about the individual craft of writing, but about becoming active in the literary community and becoming more aware of opportunities.

black&write! has maintained a familiar or 'grassroots' approach to relationships with writers, in wanting to form a community of writers, and to encourage dialogue between people in the program: writers, editors, mentors, publishers and others. Another dimension of the program is educating audiences on the breadth of Indigenous literature, in order to overcome stereotypes and limiting expectations. Hence, *black&write!* authors and editors are encouraged to take an active role in writers festivals, and educational and industry events.

THE *black&write!* EDITORS

The editors selected for the *black&write!* editing mentorships undergo very specific training aimed at developmental editing in fiction and poetry. The editors are 'fast tracked into fiction', as Katie Woods puts it: usually editors would work for many years in a publishing house before being entrusted with editing fiction or literary work. Under the mentorships the trainee editors each develop a manuscript of one of the fellowship authors. In the first year of collaboration, editor Linda McBride-Yuke worked with Sue McPherson on the novel *Grace Beside Me*, while Ellen van Neerven-Currie worked on Ali Cobby Eckermann's verse narrative *Ruby Moonlight*.

The editors are mentored throughout this process by Sue Abbey, and other professionals as appropriate. The training encourages editors to extend their reading and critical thinking, to discuss issues of fiction, and learn more about the publishing business through exposure to others in the industry. An important part of the training is working with Indigenous cultural advisers who provide advice on matters of protocol and community ownership.⁸ A placement at Magabala Books in Broome is a key part of the training, providing the editors the opportunity to experience the day-to-day operations of a small Indigenous publishing house.

The Indigenous Editing Mentorship should normally last for two years, including the completion of tertiary qualifications. The editors start out as trainee editors in the first year and become interns. Since completing the mentorship program, Ellen van Neerven-Currie and Linda McBride-Yuke have been appointed to the SLQ staff as *black&write!* Indigenous editors. They have since become mentors themselves, mentoring trainees in the online editing program. Ellen and Linda have instigated programs of their own. They are developing a style guide for Indigenous Australian writing. It will be a professional tool of use for editors or others working with Aboriginal English. Another initiative is the Story Well Writing Workshops, an idea of Ellen's. The first workshop involved 10 Indigenous writers from Queensland, some of whom had been entrants in the competition for the Indigenous Writing Fellowship. The second Story Well workshop, involving eight writers, took place after the First Nations Writers Network workshop being hosted by the SLQ – which allowed interstate writers from Tennant Creek and other states to take part.⁹ We have mentioned

black&write!'s desire to build a community of Indigenous writers, editors and literary professionals. We noticed the use of the phrase '*black&write!* family' in emails and conversations about the program. The Story Well event perhaps exemplifies the camaraderie that seems to have developed between participants in the program. The following section investigates the *black&write!* process in more detail by presenting the perspective of editor Linda McBride-Yuke.

AN EDITOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Linda McBride-Yuke was one of the first two people chosen for the *black&write!* Indigenous Mentoring program. She is from the Bandjalung nation on her father's side and from the Badtjala nation on her mother's. She lives in Brisbane but maintains connections with her country around Hervey Bay (Queensland) and northern New South Wales. McBride-Yuke has had more than 20 years experience as a public servant in the Commonwealth and Queensland public service, including producing protocol guides for public servants engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Politics and History.

McBride-Yuke first heard about the *black&write!* program from Aboriginal author Jackie Huggins: 'It was literally the Aboriginal grapevine'. She met Sue Abbey and then went through a more formal interview, before being selected for the editing mentorships beginning in 2011. Linda described the process of her mentorship and training. The first stage she was designated as a trainee editor, then she and Ellen van Neerven-Currie became interns of the State Library of Queensland. Finally, following the end of her mentorship, McBride-Yuke was appointed as an editor with the *black&write!* program at SLQ. She recollects:

We started as trainees. So in 2011, our first manuscripts came from the competition. In the second year, by that time we were interns, so we had our second lot of manuscripts to work with. And then this year, the third year, we're now fully qualified, so there have been these really interesting stages of our expertise and what we're able to deliver. Going literally from trainees to interns to fully qualified. And that's reflected in Sue's attendance, like she was here in the first two years of training, three days a week, but now she's a one day a week consultant because our skills are up.

The training combined on the job training and mentorship overseen by Sue Abbey, with an academic component supplied by QUT's Creative Industries Faculty.

For Linda, a highlight of the training was the week spent at Magabala Books, *black&write!*'s publishing partner:

We spent a week there to see the publishing side, when we're helping out people with their books, with their manuscripts. We may be very well trained in editing, but if we don't know the publishing side ... So that was a fantastic trip, because we learned so much about how the industry works. We met with the Aboriginal Board during the week. But it was just so great to see what they do with the manuscripts with regard to designers and distribution, and also with contracts between the author and the publisher.

Linda McBride-Yuke's pride in being part of *black&write!* comes across very clearly. She is aware she is one of very few Aboriginal people employed as an editor, and is part of their increasing representation within the publishing industry itself. She is even more pleased to be working directly with Indigenous writers in a process that is well organised and 'really outcome focused'. 'To be part of that first wave,' she says, 'that's just fantastic'. She continues:

That's my philosophy, when our people write stories, who better to edit it but an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island editor. And it goes through an Indigenous publishing house. The cultural thread begins on day one of the competition, when the manuscripts arrive. You've got Indigenous authors, Indigenous editors, Indigenous publishers. I just don't know of anywhere else where that exists.

The 'cultural thread' is important to McBride-Yuke. Her first experience working closely with an author was with Sue McPherson, who was working on her Young Adult novel, *Grace Beside Me*.¹⁰ Working with a first-time author, she felt on the same 'level of entry'. 'We actually learned together,' she says, 'like online editing, we went through that learning curve together'. The main thing for Linda was building a deep relationship of trust:

Her and I, I think I can say, are probably friends for life. It's like the dynamics in that statement reflect the kind of cultural slash professional, academic, it's all rolled into one. The cultural element is that post-production we still remain friends. And look for support for each other ... I think too, we're both Aboriginal women - it's the cultural threads that give the relationship a bit of extra essence.

This respect was surely needed for the intensive collaborative process of editing *Grace Beside Me*:

And if you go back to the original manuscript and look at the final product in the book that's now produced 'Grace Beside Me', it'd be an amazing journey just to see the changes that it went through. We went through about 14 or 15 versions of the manuscript. And so there was a lot of communication in regards to that, like emails, telephone calls, sending documents, online editing, meeting publishing deadlines, and stuff like that.

What Linda learned from the sometimes arduous process was, 'It's not my book, it's her story'. She continues:

It's really about bargaining and negotiating and what's best for the manuscript, and without me wanting to change it because of something that's from my background. So, it is a lot of up and down, and it can be frustrating because ... there were chapters that were completely deleted, and other ones that were put together. It's a lot of discussion and it can be stressful. And it can be definitely challenging to keep that relationship open, and have no kind of loose ends. You must agree, you must. You can't have anything laying around loose because it will affect the relationship.

A truly collaborative process can be glimpsed here, involving the necessity (and difficulty) of consensus in a myriad decisions. McBride-Yuke captures the positive dimensions of a difficult collaboration, where there is a thorough commitment to resolve problems through mutual agreement.

McBride-Yuke also enjoyed working on Jillian Boyd's *Bakir and Bi*, an illustrated children's book based on a Torres Strait creation story.¹¹ This collaboration presented different issues specific to children's literature: how to engage with a child's perspective and the specific age group a book is directed at, and working with illustrations and design elements such as fonts and colours. Abbey developed a program to support the project, involving a reading program and research in children's literature, mentoring with a children's author, and specific training on working with illustrated text. *Bakir and Bi* is also of interest because it incorporates elements of Torres Strait Island languages of Merium Mir and Youmpla Tok, languages spoken by Torres Strait Islanders.

In regard to the question of publication in Indigenous languages, *black&write!* has not received any entries 'in language', but would be open to that, as would the publisher Magabala Books. Working with 'Aboriginal English' (or TI English) is obviously one of the major issues for *black&write!* editors. As mentioned, Linda McBride-Yuke is working on the development of a *black&write!* style guide for Indigenous Australian writing. As McBride-Yuke explained: 'a style guide is an important professional tool for any editor, so it would contain all the standard material any style guide would, but it would be "culturefied" in relation to Indigenous English, punctuation and usage, etc'. To develop the style guide *black&write!* is largely drawing on its own experience and the manuscripts it has worked with, but they have also looked at other texts such as Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby*.¹²

Of the two Story Well workshops organised by Ellen van Neerven-Currie and Linda McBride-Yuke, McBride-Yuke says: 'we wanted to offer another alternative' - to writer's centres and book clubs - 'especially for our writers coming through the competition, but not limited to them'. This ongoing inclusive relationship with writers who were not winners in the competition - 'our writers' - demonstrates the kinship that is being established through the *black&write!* program. There seems to be little distinction between writers and editors, especially as it turns out that editors Ellen van Neerven-Currie, Sylvia Nakachi and Kamisah Bin Demin are also practising writers. McBride-Yuke says:

And to get back to that word family - you know it is really genuinely, sincerely a black&write! family. And we're growing - we started from four people, which is just us, the staff, then to two writers, then to four writers, now there's six writers, then there'll be eight writers, and ten writers. So we're getting bigger. I'm looking forward to the recruitment of the ones for this year from the Northern Territory and South Australia ... Also I'm looking forward to the recruitment of two more editors, because the project is expanding and needs to expand. And that way the skills keep flowing out. And the two new editors already have two established Indigenous editors to train them as editors. So, I think that with this project, there's no boundaries, it's just limited by the imagination.

If one of the aims of the *black&write!* program is to develop communal links and solidarities for writers, editors and other supporters of Indigenous literature, from Linda McBride-Yuke's account it seems to be succeeding. An obvious question is whether the good feeling and enthusiasm fostered within *black&write!* can be extended further into the Indigenous writing field and the publishing industry.

PART 3: black&write!: FUNDAMENTALS AND FUTURES

The *black&write!* program has made a strong start. The first editing trainees have completed qualifications and have worked with Indigenous writers to bring – so far – four titles to publication, with a further three in development, as at mid-2013. The work of 2011 fellowship authors Ali Cobby Eckermann and Sue MacPherson have been recognised by success in literary awards.¹³ Also the Indigenous OnScreen Trainee Editors Program is well on the way towards its goal of training four regionally based editors across Australia.

The *black&write!* program seems to be built on a robust model, based upon its dual focus on writers and developmental editors, with a strong focus on building capacities through ongoing skills acquisition and mentoring. *black&write!* is well grounded institutionally, nested as it is within the State Library of Queensland. SLQ has a progressive program concerning Indigenous cultural access, and supports the culturally appropriate *khuril dhagan* program, which includes a central located Indigenous Knowledge Centre and a network of the Indigenous Knowledge centres in far North Queensland and in the Torres Strait. This means that *black&write!* has a strong correlation with the Library's broad support for Indigenous participation in knowledge services. The institutional location within SLQ also helps to maintain links with literary bodies such as Queensland Writers Centre and the Brisbane Writers Festival. *black&write!* has developed strong key partnerships, particularly with Magabala Books (guaranteeing publication outcomes for the writing fellowship program) and Queensland University of Technology's Creative Industries Faculty (supporting academic training and mentorship). Publications in genres new to Indigenous writers will extend the publishing

field, as well as the readership for Indigenous writing, particularly young people. Interestingly, *black&write!*'s focus on fiction and poetry has not resulted in 'elite' literary outcomes, but in writing in popular forms, and in particular writing oriented to young audiences. Publications so far indicate new directions in 'Indigenous writing', which may not be so explicitly about Indigeneity as about intercultural experience and the plurality of possibilities for expression. As novelist Kim Scott wrote, on the difficulty of defining Indigenous writing in terms of stylistic characteristics: 'Personally, I hope it remains difficult to do so, and that the diversity and energy of Indigenous Australia resists easy categorisation'.¹⁴

black&write!'s key resources seem to be its participants, and its key work participant development. Firstly, in developing professional expertise which can feed into the publishing industry. Secondly, in fostering collegialities and solidarities: this is a basis for supportive networks into the future. And thirdly, in generating champions for the program, for Indigenous writing, and for *black&write!* itself is important for sustainability. *black&write!* has already gained a profile through involving participants as their active public face in key arts and literary events.

From the perspective of the implementation of UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the dual intervention of *black&write!* – linking Indigenous writing and the publishing industry via a developmental editing process – will be of interest. This strategy addresses the publishing industry as a whole, and works to develop Indigenous capacities within it. In the Convention's language, *black&write!* takes the special circumstances and needs of Indigenous people into account in the creation, production, dissemination and distribution of 'cultural goods and services'; that is, published books as well

as cultural events such as writers' workshops.¹⁵ The program builds capacity by establishing new professional positions within the publishing industry, and providing Indigenous writers with the experience of detailed developmental editing of their work, as well as a guarantee of publication. The Indigenous OnScreen Trainee Editors Program extends this editing capacity to more 'remote' parts of Australia, where editors should be able to work closely with writers in developing new work.

Thinking beyond writing and book publishing, *black&write's* model of collaboration between writers and editors suggests that other such intersections could be identified as suitable points of developmental intervention to increase the participation of Indigenous people (or another less-represented group), in other creative and production related areas.

black&write! is not without criticisms and challenges. Perhaps *black&write!* is too reliant on the experience and skills of its founder, Sue Abbey. This is not so much a criticism as an acknowledgement that questions of change and succession in the future are important to consider. Robin Bennett, an experienced editor and a former president of the Society of Editors, gave an encouraging report on the progress of the two *black&write!* editors, Linda McBride-Yuke and Ellen van Neerven-Currie, but was critical of the idea of them acting as peer-mentors. Bennett made the point that they were still lacking in hands-on editing and publishing experience and that, although they would be able to pass on very useful experience to new editor mentees, in her experience editors acting as mentors had at least 15 years experience.¹⁶

A broader point is that the key difficulties of seeding writing cultures are likely to be related to quite fundamental problems of economic, social and educational disadvantage faced by Indigenous people. *black&write!* clearly does not attempt to tackle these questions. However, the online training of editors placed in remote and regional Australia is an attempt to meet the geographical dimensions of disadvantage. While this part of the program is very positive, it is not clear how the regionally based editors would be involved in working with Indigenous writers, given that they will have significantly less support and hands-on experience and mentoring than the editors at the *black&write!* base in Brisbane. There would presumably be considerable logistical difficulties in identifying and working with Indigenous writers across very large regions.

Even more generally there may be limits to the program, for instance the question mark around the future of the book and existing forms of publishing. We spoke to Meg Vann, CEO of the Queensland Writers Centre (QWC), a partner of *black&write!*. QWC shares office space with *black&write!* at the State Library of Queensland and the two organisations work together and keep each other informed about opportunities that might be of interest.

For Vann, *black&write!* has a well structured program that equips it to deal with the uncertain futures of publishing, whether in print or digital form. Technologies are changing quickly: as one example alone, there is the Worldreader app developed by an Australian software developer that can make ‘dumb’ phones smart, allowing the installation of a reading device on a non-smartphone.¹⁷ In Africa this technology is being used to publish material directly through Worldreader so that ‘first nation writers can publish their content through the Worldreader app to first national readers of a nearby nation, without going through the traditional publishing chain’. Meg Vann mentioned working with some groups in the Northern Territory who were ‘interested in the idea of remote Indigenous communities who may bypass print literacy altogether, and who may go directly from being an oral storytelling tradition – to a digital storytelling tradition’. For Vann, *black&write!* are well positioned to take advantage of such new developments:

The pool of writers and editors that black&write! has contact with each year means that virtually a whole supply chain of Indigenous voices and practitioners can be informed about accessing digital publishing information and business models and tools and processes, in a way that’s very culturally well grounded. And so this could lead to some very exciting opportunities.

Being able to take part in the new forms of publishing in digital futures will rely on the development and maintenance of strong artistic and cultural practices, and being responsive to developments and possibilities in the creative, technological and community realms.

- 1 Jennifer Jones, *Black Writers, White Editors: Episodes of collaboration and compromise in Australian publishing history*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Sydney, NSW, 2009. Intercultural editing and literary collaboration do not necessarily result in bias and distortion. Jones positively mentions the editorial approaches of Gillian Cowlshaw and Heather Goodall, white academics working with Indigenous authors on biographical projects, who developed long-term relationships with Indigenous authors and others around them, and made editorial processes visible in the text by including a polyphony of voices, including that of the editor (pp 222–26). Nevertheless, Jones asserts that ‘best practice would see more Indigenous editors in the publishing trade’ (p 226).
- 2 Margaret Whiskin, cited in Sue Gough, *Interim Report on the blackandwrite! National Indigenous Writer’s Fellowship and Editing Mentorship*, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane, Qld, 2011, p 61.
- 3 Whiskin, cited in Gough, *Interim Report*, p 61.
- 4 Anita M. Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala (To Talk Straight): Publishing Indigenous literature*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, ACT, 2003, p 66.
- 5 Gough, *Interim Report*, p 10.
- 6 Scott Norton, *Developmental Editing: A handbook for freelancers, authors, and publishers*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009, p 1.
- 7 State Library of Queensland, *black&write! Indigenous Onscreen Trainee Editor Program Progress Report, January–December 2012*, progress report to Australia Council, 2013.
- 8 Gough, *Interim Report*, p 6.
- 9 See <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/133308/Longtime_Learning.pdf>.
- 10 Sue McPherson, *Grace Beside Me*, Magabala Books, Broome, WA, 2012, Australian Indigenous writing in the young adult fiction genre is now substantial and includes, for instance, the work of John Muk Muk Burke, Melissa Lucashenko and Tara June Winch. See Jeanine Leane, ‘Rites/Rights/Writes of passage: Identity construction in Australian Aboriginal young adult fiction’, in Belinda Wheeler (ed.), *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature*, Camden House, Rochester, NY, 2013, pp 107–23.
- 11 Jillian Boyd and Tori-Jay Mordey (illustrator), *Bakir and Bi*, Magabala Books, Broome, WA, 2013. For a review of *Bakir and Bi*, see <<http://anitaheissblog.blogspot.com.au/2013/04/review-bakir-and-bi.html>>.
- 12 Melissa Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, 2013.
- 13 Ali Cobby Eckermann received the Deadly Award for outstanding contribution to Indigenous Literature in 2012; the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry at the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards in 2013; and the Book of the Year Prize at the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards in 2013. Sue McPherson was shortlisted for the Deadly Award for outstanding contribution to Indigenous Literature in 2012. McPherson’s *Grace Beside Me* was selected for inclusion on the White Ravens List in 2013, and was shortlisted for the Young Adults Category in the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards in 2013.
- 14 Kim Scott, ‘Foreword: Publishing Indigenous literature’, in Anita M. Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala (To Talk Straight): Publishing Indigenous literature*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, ACT, 2003, p iii.
- 15 UNESCO, *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, webpage, Paris, 2005, Article 6 and Article 7, viewed 24 January 2014, <http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>.
- 16 Robin Bennett, cited in Gough, *Interim Report*, pp 53–56.
- 17 See <<http://www.worldreader.org/what-we-do/worldreader-mobile/>>.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW LIST

INTERVIEWEE	ROLE / ORGANISATION	DATE	INTERVIEW
VISIBLE			
Jess Fairfax and Jill Morgan	Multicultural Arts Victoria	27/02/13	phone
Jess Fairfax and Jill Morgan	Multicultural Arts Victoria	19/04/13	in person (Melbourne)
Anita Larkin	Multicultural Arts Victoria	08/04/13	phone
Bitsat Seyoum	artist	19/04/13	in person (Footscray, Vic)
Danny Atlaw	artist	19/04/13	in person (Footscray, Vic)
Aminata Doumbia	artist	23/04/13	in person (Parramatta, NSW)
Nicky Bomba	artist	07/05/13	phone
Helene George	Creative Economy	07/11/13	phone
ARAB FILM FESTIVAL AUSTRALIA			
Mouna Zaylah and Fadia Aboud	Arab Film Festival	12/03/13	in person (Parramatta, NSW)
Mouna Zaylah	Arab Film Festival	05/07/13	phone
Charles Billeh	Arab Film Festival Committee	17/07/13	phone
EDGE OF ELSEWHERE			
Lisa Havilah	Carriageworks	02/05/13	in person (Sydney)
Shigeyuki Kihara	artist	11/05/13	phone
Khaled Sabsabi	artist	14/05/13	in person (Casula, NSW)
Aaron Seeto	4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art	14/06/13	phone
METaverse MAKEOVERS			
Thea Baumann	Metaverse Makeovers	12/12/12	phone
Ben Ferns	Metaverse Makeovers	29/01/13	phone
Nail bar proprietor (anonymous)	iNails	19/06/13	in person (Sunnybank, Qld)
Shian Law	Metaverse Makeovers	26/06/13	phone

TRANSLAB

Antonietta Morgillo	Australia Council for the Arts	05/12/12	in person (Sydney)
Fiona Winning	Festival of Sydney	06/03/13	in person(Sydney)
Paschal Berry	artist	26/03/13	in person (Blacktown, NSW)
Deb Pollard	artist	16/04/13	phone
Carlos Gomes	artist, Theatre Kantanka	03/05/13	phone

ASSOCIATION OF NORTHERN, KIMBERLEY AND ARNHAM ABORIGINAL ARTISTS (ANKAAA)

Christina Davidson	ANKAAA	12/06/13	phone
Djambawa Marawili	ANKAAA	05/07/13	phone

KULTOUR

Julie Tipene-O'Toole	Kultour	13/02/13	in person (Sydney)
Georgina Sedgwick	Darwin Festival	03/04/13	phone
Angela O'Donnell	Artback NT	05/06/13	phone
Jade Dewi Tyas Tunggal	artist	26/06/13	phone

black&write!

Katie Woods	State Library of Queensland	18/06/13	in person (Brisbane)
Sue Abbey	black&write!	18/06/13	in person (Brisbane)
Linda McBride-Yuke	black&write!	18/06/13	in person (Brisbane)
Meg Vann	Queensland Writers Centre	18/06/13	in person (Brisbane)

APPENDIX B: USEFUL LINKS

1. Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions 2005

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

2. Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

