Dreaming in motion: Maintaining community, culture and identity of First Australians

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DREAMING IN MOTION: Maintaining community, culture and identity of First Australians.

IAN RT COLLESS

In partial fulfilment of BA Honours (Dance)

Edith Cowan University

2009

Readers should be aware that this manuscript might contain images or references to members of the Australian Indigenous community who have passed away.
DEDICATION:

This manuscript is dedicated to my loving & supportive parents Paul & Joanne Colless.
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:
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a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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Signed: ........................................................................

Dated: 2.7.11/09
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Preamble

It is important to note that I will use the term ‘Indigenous’ within this manuscript as the collective term to refer to both mainland Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander peoples. When necessary I will explicitly distinguish between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. When discussing issues that are particular to a certain group, I will use the traditional nation’s name.

In this study there will be times where I am ‘an outsider’ of a particular Indigenous nation. My heritage is from the Gundungarra nation. As a result, it is important to make clear that I am interpreting concepts and events of that particular tribe from my personal modern Indigenous perspective rather than from a broad community perspective. Wesley Enoch too wished to respect the many cultures of my people when he wrote:

My experience of being a Murri\textsuperscript{1} artist is in the area of theatre ... Any written chronicle of an endeavour attains a sense of legitimacy and puts a responsibility on its author; both these facts give me an uncomfortable feeling. Indigenous theatre is an amalgam of experiences, specific to regions, and to people who have focused on creating their work rather than recording it. Hence, any one person can only reflect what they have heard about, seen, or been part of. What follows should be viewed as a starting point for further research, a testimony to those artists and their work, and to the collective nurturing of our [Indigenous peoples] voice in performance (Enoch cited in Kleinert & Neale, 2000, p. 349).

\textsuperscript{1} Murri is usually used to define a collective of Indigenous Australians of different tribes that traditionally occupy most of modern-day Queensland.
Introduction: Maintaining of community, culture and identity of First Australians.

General Cultural Background:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a blend of hundreds of multi-cultural communities and identities. However there are many broad similarities found across the different groups that construct culture, community and identity. Furthermore, Australia's Indigenous peoples have a continuously evolving culture. Today's Indigenous identity is a blend of ancient traditional and modern cultures. Their identity is a combination both of the old and new (Yunupingu, 1994, p. 2).

In the light of the ongoing evolution of identity, the research question to be addressed in this thesis is 'How does fusing traditional Indigenous dance with Western modern dance forms maintain community, culture and identity of first Australians?'

What is dance?

Margaret N. H'Doubler suggests that: "Dance as an art, when understood, is the province of every human being" (H'Doubler, 1998, p. 170).

Movement is something all humans share whether black or white. Dance, as a specific selection and organisation of human movement, is not just art for art's sake. Dance is essentially a non-verbal form of communication, a human activity that is common around the world. Dance is usually performed with music and can be used as a form of expression, education, social interaction, fitness, ceremony, entertainment, spiritual betterment, ritual and enjoyment. Dance forms are usually cultural embodiments of the society from which they originate (Miller, M. 2008).
Traditional Subsection
Community

Community can be defined as "a group of people living together in one place. A group of people with a common religion, race, or profession --- holding of certain attitudes and interests in common" (Ask Oxford, n.d.). Traditionally, an Aboriginal tribe forms a community with common attitudes and religion. Elders of a particular tribe use traditional dance to educate the younger people about their common stories, ancestors, and gender business. The passing down of traditional culture through dance helps maintain the shared attitudes and interests of a particular tribe, the communal "kinship, land and Aboriginal law" (Aunty Carol Cooper, personal communication, August 16, 2009) all of which are related to the tribal Dreaming stories. Because this knowledge is extracted from dance, its enactment is linked to the emotions of a living community. Mandawuy Yunupingu, leading singer of the Indigenous band, *Yothu Yindi*, writes about how his links to the land acted as his education system:

Each move was a change of context as far as my education was concerned. Each new place has new concepts associated with it. Each place is connected to other places in deep ways. And I learned about that, both from songs and dances of our ceremonies. In this way, the more abstract knowledge of how places connected was linked with practical and emotional knowledge of actually living place (Yunupingu, 1994, p. 3).

Traditional dance is not limited to ceremony but is a kinetic knowledge bridging generations of the community. In William Romaine Govett's notes initially recorded in 1836 he states that:

The men of the once hostile tribe were spectators; and these seated themselves, wrapped in their opossum-cloaks, around, in a semicircular form. The oldest of them, I observed, appeared to take their places nearest each end of the semicircle (Govett, 1977, p. 20).

It is evident in this early colonial response to a corroboree of the Gundungurra tribe that, while brief, Govett is describing a system of rank and standing due to age. Within traditional and some modern day contexts of tribes and clans, older members of Indigenous community act as cultural tutors to the younger generations of their nation:

Learning is a life-long process which takes place formally and informally. As people become increasingly knowledgeable, and assert their knowledge even
more vigorously, they also become increasingly responsible for teaching the new generation who will take over from them (Rose, 1992, p. 107).

Tutoring between generations is an important means of knowledge transfer. This has been a system employed by Indigenous peoples to maintain culture, community and identity for thousands of years, though it is important to stress that this system of education that exists in these communities is not restricted to dance. Communal cultural education extends to song cycles, stories and associated arts.

Community is the anatomy of a tribal nation, it sustains cultural knowledge, constructs gender relationships, builds tribal structures, promotes extended kin and so on. Each community holds a structural understanding of religion and belief tied to manifestations of the Dreaming passed on through the cultural tuition from the elders of that particular community. As before, each tribe or community has its own culture.
Culture

The Indigenous people are not identified as one culture. Prior to colonialism ‘Australia’ had been a multicultural country for many millennia. It is still multicultural today:

Australia is as diverse geographically as it is culturally. There are over 800 Aboriginal tribes within Australia, each with their own distinct culture and language. The Indigenous peoples of Australia are the traditional custodians of the land and have been resident since time immemorial (Cook, cited in Morris 2005, p. 5)

Each mob\(^2\) has unique cultural traditions, social cultural backgrounds and The Dreaming that are frequently related to near-by mobs. Though as stated previously, there are many broad characteristics shared by Indigenous communities, many of which will be discussed in this paper (The South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services, n.d.)

Culture can be seen as a system of beliefs regarding social life that relies on conventions, implicit assumptions, communication and shared identity amongst a social group (Holland, 2006), as such cultural traditions are particular to the tribe from which they originate and are usually a direct result of The Dreaming. Dreaming is the term commonly used by Aboriginal people (Stanner, 1979). “Dreamtime stories’ vary from tribe to tribe; nevertheless all tribes have a Dreamtime. The stories and totems of each tribal nation are the means by which Dreamtime acquires different cultural understandings of community identity” (Reed, 1969, p. 2). Many Dreamtime stories evolved over time into traditional Indigenous laws, which in turn determine the unique nature of a tribe’s rituals, religious behaviours and social functions within the context of different ceremonies such as weddings, deaths, births and initiation (Adshead, 1988). A. W. Reed states in his introduction to ‘An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal life’ that:

No matter how contradictory or confusing different tribal practices may at first appear to be, it should be made clear that beneath them is a basic pattern. In spite of the way Aboriginal man was affected by his environment, his religion or philosophy (call it what you will) it sprang from the noble concept of Dreamtime. Without some understanding of this important universal principle we cannot begin to appreciate the discipline of initiation ceremonies, the

\(^2\) A mob is a term usually used to define a collective of Indigenous Australians of a particular tribe
abandoned joy of dance, mime, and song, the intense loyalty to tribal land, the ceremonies connected with the power of the medicine man, the mythology and influence of tribal and totemic ancestors, the controlled social life, rigid customs, and kinship obligations of every tribe (Reed, 1969, p. 2).

These beliefs of the Dreaming form the basis of the knowledge system used in everyday life. Each tribe's culture of stories, dances, songs, rituals, religious behaviours and social functions all stem from the context of the Dreaming:

The boundaries of his [tribal person's] physical environment were defined by the extent of the journeys of the ancestor who was known to him. Every tree and hill and water hole had its intimate contact with the ancestor who made it, or who performed some creative act at that particular place (Reed, 1969, p. 57).

The land is where the Dreaming originates. In a study of the people of Yarralin and neighbouring groups (North West NT and WA):

Dreaming geography gains complexity in ritual. When the songs are sung the Dreaming are made mobile, and frequently in discussing ritual responsibilities people speak of carrying their Dreaming. One mob of countrymen carry The Dreaming though their country and hand them over to the next mob who carry them through and hand them over (Rose, 1992, p. 206).

Similarly, connection to the land is a fundamental characteristic of the Murris in Cape York:

The spiritual ancestors of the Cape York created the plants and the animals, rivers and hills the whole world in which they lived. When these spirit people died, they went down into the ground or sunk into a water hole. To the Aborigines these were [are] sacred places, totem centres known as hours. Here they [Murris] go to re-enact in their dancers, the way of life set down from their ancestors created in the Dreamtime ("Aboriginal Dance". 1978).

This quotation states the complex relationship that exists between the dances' link to the land and its Dreaming. Nevertheless each tribe and/or clan has its own knowledge of the land. "In the case of land ownership, language and music are linked as a complex amalgam through which individual and group identity are constructed, expressed and maintained" (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004, p. 20):

[F]or Pitjantjatjara men and women, their land is the central and inseparable part of their being... When [they] talk about themselves relating to the land, they express these relationships in a single concept known as ngura. Ngura can be a single camp or community, the places where people make a living and renew their existence in
dualge & song... [ngura] is a focus on day-to-day living and philosophical ideas and speculation. And it is a key to understanding the people, their culture and their rights to land (Toyne and Vachon, 1984, pp. 5-6).

As noted with the Cape York example, within many tribal boundaries, there are specific geographical areas of land that have symbolic importance for ceremonies; gender business, age, seasonal camps etc. These links usually result from the Dreaming, where the extent of the trekking of the ancestors is mapped out. Therefore the land also acts as a cultural instrument that allows different subcultures to come together at a specific geographical location (Reed, 1969, p. 57). Indeed, many Indigenous connections are "not limited to people but extend to everything in the environment: the animals, the plants, the skies, the climate, the waterways, the land and the spirits" (Martin, 2005, p. 29).

Through Martin's commentary we may infer that Indigenous peoples' connection is just as pertinent to the skies (astronomy) as to the land that Indigenous people trek on. The sky, like the land, was used to educate:

Astronomical observation and enquiry were not separate areas of knowledge in Australian Aboriginal communities; they were integral parts of everyday life reflected in storytelling, song, dance, art and ceremony. Astronomical objects and phenomena were aspects of the natural environment, just one stage in the ongoing theatre of mythological drama that involved the whole of the sacred landscape. The Sky world was seen as a dwelling place of many ancestral spirits and creation heroes and heroines, those personified sources of energy that inform and give meaning to natural and cultural life (Johnson, D, 2007, p. 29).

The spirits of the land/sky and its ceremonies, rituals and stories permit an individual to dance (Reed, 1969, p. 2). The ritual role of ochre is an important cultural element used in many tribal communities around Australia. Ochre is utilised in the ritual of 'painting up' and is a symbol of the land which assists in the dancers' spiritual connection to the earth (Productions, Ochres, Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.). In the ochre used to 'paint up' there is the soil of the ancestors' land and the water from the ancestral sky. In Dianne Johnson's research of the Gundungurra, she notes the importance of ochre in the context of ceremonial life:

Use of ochre was a significant adjunct to Burradorang (Gundungurra nation) ceremonial life and William Russell describes the process of mixing and painting the clay on the bodies of the participants, as observed on 'Craig-end', the property of Thomas Inglis snr:
The Aboriginals (Gundungurra nation) got their paint to decorate their bodies whenever they were going to have a Korroberry. The red earth there, 'Bulber' (oxide of iron), was roasted in the fire to give it a brighter colour, and then mixed with fat or grease, a paint brush would be made by bruising a green twig or young branch. Old Byone was generally an artist on these occasions, as he was good at different designs. White pipe-clay and yellow clay was used also (Johnson, D, 2007, p. 25).

Earthy soils vary according to environments, so naturally each tribe has its own way of 'painting up'. Like the land, the configuration of different ochre patterns on the body exhibits individuality and can show identity. Within the context of each tribe in Australia, ochre patterns are usually a cultural product of the value of the occasion and are rooted in gender, age, totem and Dreaming and, thus, can be a creative means of expression.

Aunty Merry King\textsuperscript{1} from the Gundungurra nation states that tradition is "everything darling! It is the heart - The culture. You get a feeling, it's like dancing. You need to see it, feel it and are proud of it", (personal communication, August 15, 2009).

Without the connection to the land, there is no dance form because traditional dance is usually performed on specific ceremonial ground. These places are a result of the culture of the Dreaming.

\textsuperscript{3} The term 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' is commonly given to elders of many Indigenous nations as a sign of respect from their tribal communities and other nations.
Identity:

Identity can be seen as “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is; the characteristics determining this” (Ask Oxford, n.d.). As noted before each tribe or community exhibits a unique identity, nevertheless, members of tribal communities also have many identities. The factors that determine this multiplicity are usually tribal identity, totem identity, gender identity, age identity and so forth. Traditional dance develops community members’ identities through ceremonies.

Beyond strictly performance-related ritual, identity is reinforced through hunting, gathering, other rituals and, ceremonies, gender-business, social life, laws and much more. Mandawuy Yunupingu’s experiences of learning from his father in the fifties, confirms the extent of generational transmission:

My father would teach me to be a man and take me hunting, spear fishing. He taught me all the fish names. And he would tell me off for doing naughty things too. I remember the night-times best. We would listen to stories at night by the campfire. All the stories had a strong lesson for kids. They would be stories to get us to stay put by the fire and not wander about. They would get us frightened and get us to sleep much faster (Yunupingu, 1994, p. 3).

One characteristic that applies to the breadth of this education system is the method of knowledge transmitted by oral means. Nevertheless all of these different contexts for learning are akin to cultural practice and are part of everyday life (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004, p. 21).

Many rituals, ceremonies and celebrations are gender role and age specific as is identified by ‘Men’s Business’ or ‘Women’s Business’. Both have their own songs, dances and rituals. Some ceremonies may be for initiation, while some are performed to express stories and celebrations. A fine example of ‘Men’s Business’ through movement could be spear fishing. Spear fishing is an identifiable man’s dance that is evident in a number of tribes across Australia. This example helps to create a gender identity within each community and is also a didactic form, teaching the basic principles of hunting (Yunupingu, 1994, p. 17).

In a personal dance class with Jo Clancy (former acting head of dance at National Aboriginal Skills Development Association (NAISDA Dance College), she talked about how different ways of ‘stepping’ are determined based upon the protocols of
gender. Generally in Indigenous Australia, women ‘step’ with an emphasis on the up step of the syncopated beat, whereas for men the emphasis lies on the down step of the syncopated beat. However there are also many ceremonies where people of any age or gender can participate like weddings, deaths and sometimes collaboration between tribal nations take place (Jo Clancy, personal communication, August 15 of August, 2010).

In William Romaine Govett’s notes on the corroboree of the Gundungurra tribe in 1835, he explains women’s behaviour in the ritual:

The women ... form orchestra, were placed on one side (of a semicircular spatial form of male dancers) and almost concealed from view, but so situated, nevertheless, that the yells of their shrill voices, and the horrid noises which they made by the clashing of sticks, and whirling in the air pieces of wood fastened to a string, could not only be distinctly heard, but added considerably to the wild effect and savage strangeness of this nocturnal revel. The man who take part in the acting, besmear themselves with a kind of white chalk or pigment, and seemingly endeavour to make themselves as frightful and as hideous as possible, by their painting mode (Govett, 1977, p. 18).

Even though culturally biased, Govett’s notes provide a picture of the identity through a gender positioning system. They also explain different ceremonial roles performed by opposite sexes. Furthermore they prove how dance is but one element of traditional culture. Music, painting and what Govett labels ‘acting’ (probably lyrical movement to create story) are all components that create the identity of a particular traditional ritual and ceremony and, hence, the individuals who enact those rituals and ceremonies.

The literal movements evident in many traditional dances have a striking individual style. Literal movement like the mimicry of animals is a strong stylistic component of traditional Indigenous dance common to many nations across Australia. This is evident in the hunting movement discussed earlier. In Govett’s notes, he explains:

The actions of the blacks [Gundungarra persons] in this scene were very good, and their positions and attitudes were a capital resemblances of the emu, - sometimes feeding, and again raising the head and neck perfectly erect, as if to observe if any intruder was approaching, then stalking a few paces as if to consider, and bend and feed again (Govett, 1977, p. 20).

Geographically each tribe has different lands upon which to perform ceremonies (Hall & Gibson 2004, p. 19). The movement of the Gundungarra and Darug tribes in
the Blue Mountains, New South Wales will be physically different from movement found within the Lardil tribe on Mornington Island, in far north Queensland. These differences in the environment express themselves through the cultural amalgams, noted above. The environment of the Blue Mountains is colder, with thick landmass and dense vegetation cover of branches and leaves. In contrast, in the Lardil country 'the land is covered by low scrub vegetation with ti-tree and swamp flats providing a habitat for many species of wildlife. There are windswept beaches lined with she-oak trees, rocky outcrops and mangroves' ("The Mornington Island Dancers". 2008)

While it is relatively easy to find stylistic variance, it is interesting to also find stylistic similarities between the tribes. For example Gundungarra, Darug and the Lardil all use low-level movement, 'stepping' and flexed feet. Many tribes are identifiable through their use of different 'steppings'. These 'steppings' become a motif throughout numerous traditional dancers in the tribe (Miller, M, personal communication, April 12th, 2008).

Each tribe's identity is as particular as the land they perform on. The community of a tribe is a universe of many identities, which link them to different ceremonies and roles within families and community.

The current culture in Australia is diverse with people spanning many heritages and like much of today's Indigenous culture blending old ways and new. Much of First Australians' culture has survived by using new forms of expression while maintaining links to traditional philosophies. Fusions of traditional Indigenous dance with Western modern dance can bridge urban and remote Indigenous cultural differences.
How Europeans have formerly looked at traditional dance forms: The issue of the ‘other’

‘Other’ dance forms appeared in Europe from the mid-nineteenth century onwards as a result of the emergence of ‘world fairs’. These ‘world fairs’ provided an avenue where the colonialists demonstrated their superiority by, amongst other things, putting what were seen as ‘exotic’ cultures on display. Because dance is a non-verbal form of communication and because the costuming and movement were considered strange and alluring, the imported groups were often featured as exhibits in a museum-like frame.

Sarkar Munsi writes about the first ‘exotic dance’ forms in France, some of which were in fact Parisian performances of four Indian dancers. She states:

The earliest performance of non-European dance forms took place in France and the rest of Europe around the middle of the nineteenth century. Until then these dances were known only through the narratives of travellers and explorers who, while describing these unusual physical practices, also testified to having felt strange while witnessing these dances (cited in, Decoret-Ahiha, 2008, p. 254).

The beginnings of universal and colonial exhibitions World Fairs from 1870 onwards allowed non-Western dance troupes to perform. The few dance troupes that performed quickly became a highlight in these colonial exhibitions even though these ethnological exhibitions presented deprived versions of the performer’s dance forms and cultures to the colonial masters. Sarkar Munsi continues to write that the performance of peoples coming from distant lands of Asia, Africa, and from the Americas took place behind a grill, following the example of a zoo. On the request of the organisers, these so-called ‘wild’ and ‘primitive’ people would enact the performance of everyday tasks, and simulate fights and dances such that their otherness was put on display as a spectacle. It was in this manner that the Parisian spectators had already discovered, for example, in 1877, at the Jardin d’Acclimatation de Paris, the dancers of the Ashantis of modern-day Ghana ... In that era, these [dance forms] were known in France as well as in Europe by the generic term ‘exotic dances’, indicating at once their distant origins and their undetermined nature, apart from highlighting their different character or ‘otherness’ – as both foreign and strange (the word in French has the same root) (cited in, Decoret-Ahiha, 2008, p. 254 - 256).

4 World’s Fair is the name given to various large public exhibitions held around the world since the mid-19th century.
Earlier in this manuscript and within the context of Australia, the notes by the colonial anthropologist, William Romaine Govett, about a corroboree by the Gundungurra tribe in 1835, reflects these same responses to 'other' peoples and their culture that coexist with the traditional dance form.

It is interesting to find that the so-called mothers of Western modern dance, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St Denis, sought knowledge of 'other' cultures in the development of their dance forms. This appropriation assisted in creating their individual choreographic identity which one could conclude constructed a bastardised or fused dance form. Duncan was heavily influenced by various aspects of Greek mythology, whereas the styles that influenced St Denis were from Indian, Egyptian dance and Asian cultures (Au, 2002, p. 93). The company Denishawn, founded by St Denis' and Ted Shawn earned a name for 'eclecticism' drawing on cultures like "Amerindian, American, Spanish, North African and so on" (Au, 2002, p. 94). The cultural influences on the work of Duncan and St Denis seemed 'exotic' to western audiences. In a performance of St Denis' *Radha* [1906] danced to the score of Delibes's Opera *Lakmé*, it was said that: "Her choreography made no pretence to authenticity, her supple bendings and ecstatic whirls seemed inexpressibly exotic to audiences of the day, particularly society women, who were fascinated by anything oriental" (Au, 2002, p. 92).

In the context of modern day Australia, Bangarra Dance Theatre (an Indigenous dance company that performs nationally and internationally) has earned a name for being 'exotic'. In reaction to the 1995 production of Bangarra's *Ochres* choreographed by Stephen Page (artistic director of Bangarra) in collaboration with Bernadette Walong, "[p]ress and audiences enthused about the 'spiritual' qualities of the work [Ochres], and non-Indigenous critics were not immune from romanticising Bangarra as an exotic company offering a peek at an ancient, reverential, and somehow more primal culture" (Meekison cited in Kleinert & Neale, 2000. p. 369). The use of the word 'exotic' by non-Indigenous critics reflects the notion of the 'other'. However the origins of Bangarra are steeped in traditional Indigenous culture that is fused with modern practices. This is an amalgam of different creative practices including music, dance, story, costuming and so on. One could contend that the critics use of the word 'exotic' echoes mid-nineteenth century European values and perceptions of what is believed to be the 'other', yet paradoxically Bangarra's unique fused dance style is what has caved their identity.
The use of the above 'exotic' cultures like Greek and Indian dance forms were not particularly popularised in Western dance except than in ballet, therefore, aspects of international cultures' otherness like their costumes, philosophies, stories, music and movement, whether bastardised or not, presented a new world of artistic exploration to their Western audiences. However it is important to note that Duncan & St Denis borrowed without restraint from other cultures, which is in strict contrast to Page's fused dance form where the company works in liaison with cultural consultants and traditional communities (Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.).

In the 21st century the Australian population is culturally highly diverse. The late Aunty Dawn Colless⁵, an elder of the Gundungurra nation, states that "[c]ultures in Australia now are so diverse and we have to get on, so understanding each other's culture is very important. It's like a good marriage – give and take. Roy and I have been married for 48 years and we still get on" (Johnson, D, 2002, p. 94). Fused dance forms, which are the next focus of this discussion, are akin to marriages, allowing cultures to gather in a 'marriage' of cultural knowledge and reconciliation that creates its own diversity.

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⁵ Aunty Dawn Colless was my grandmother and a respected elder of the Gundungurra tribe and has passed on the 13/06/2003
Conclusion of community, culture and identity in traditional modes

Prior to colonisation, Australia was a blend of many multi-cultural First Australian languages groups. Today the multi-cultural nature of Australia includes European, Asian, African and American ethnicities. Current Indigenous tribes all celebrate their own individual identity, as unique as the environments it births from.

Each tribe's culture is an amalgam of traditions that all have links to their Dreaming. Communities utilise the stories of the Dreaming to determine its amalgam of dances, music, and gender business and so on. In turn, the traditional amalgams work to educate and maintain community, culture and identity.

Traditional customs create community, culture and identity in a process which is not static but forever evolving. It is the responsibility of the members of the community to sustain the Dreaming and, consequently, their knowledge/s. How this might occur, especially through dance, will be explored in the following section.
The beginnings of fused dance form within Australia

"Koori modernity is the term use to describe the condition of contemporary Aboriginal people and their expressions of contemporary identity" (Russell, L. 2001, p. 74). In order for Indigenous dance to reflect a contemporary identity of First Australians, it will be argued there should some sort of blending of traditional and modern forms which is commonly known as fusion or fused dance. The process is an extension of the evolutionary cultural development within traditional philosophy.

The broader Australian public demonstrated a negative attitude to Indigenous people and this attitude did not begin to change until the 1980s. From the eighties, political history and Indigenous art have followed a similar path. Indigenous people have employed the power of arts to protest and educate and, as a result, the current identity of fused dance forms has strongly promoted social awareness. Fusing traditional dance with Western modern dance has become a good avenue for creative expression; echoing the past but celebrating the future of Indigenous identity. NAISDA has shaped the fused dance style in Australia and as a consequence, it may be assumed that a dominant fused style has emerged through the work of its graduates. It is important to note, however, that the identity of fused Australian Indigenous dance should be as eclectic as the plurality of Indigenous Australia.

Indigenous arts did not really start to gain cultural acceptance or alternative artistic legitimacy among the broader Australian public until the 1980s. Even though there were many Indigenous people before the 1980s who worked vigorously to gain expectance for their art form. However it was in the 1980s that an era of upheaval in Indigenous arts occurred:

First, in this period there was greater exposure of Aboriginal arts created for the purpose of protest, of declaring Aboriginal ownership of Australia, and of explaining Aboriginal histories and culture to non-Aboriginal people. This can be partly related to Aboriginal reactions to the 1988 commemorations of the Bicentenary of white invasion of Australia, galvanising protest movements that had grown over the previous decades (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004, p. 50).

From the early 1990s, Indigenous arts started to gain more support from both federal and state governments as a contribution to the development of reconciliation
processes. Support also came about to nourish "cultural tourism ... and representations of national identity" (Stevenson, 2000, p. 150).

Indigenous arts, among them music, have become an object of federal and state government policy. Indigenous perspectives, implied objectives of inclusiveness, and potential advantage to governments through being seen to support Indigenous people, have informed the agenda for arts management in Australia (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004, p. 51).

The "1992 Mabo decision, the 1993 Native Title Act and the 1996 Wik judgement" (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson 2004, p. 50) centred around Indigenous people's ownership of land. Bangarra's 1995/1996 production of "Ochres was a canny production to mount in the era of Native Title and awareness of Indigenous land rights for it provided a poetic and beautiful acting-out of affective relationships to land-relationships that are not always well understood by non-Indigenous people" (Meekison cited in Kleinert & Neale, 2000, p. 369).

These shifts in political agendas and the development in reconciliation have supported an evolution in Indigenous performance. The establishment of NAISDA, Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT), playwrights like Kevin Gilbert and musicians like Jimmy Little all emerged between the 1950s and the 1970s with modest support from the general Australian public and government. These artists had to continually prove their artistic legitimacy.

The history of Indigenous performance in Australia is both long and broad, with a traditional record spanning millennia and a growing contemporary practice which intersects urban, rural, expatriate, and sacred sites (Kleinert & Neale, 2000, p. 349).

The role of the fused dance form is echoed within actor/playwright Wesley Enoch's statement: "New skills and techniques are spliced and absorbed by artists to maintain the unbroken line of our cultures" (Kleinert & Neale, 2000, p. 349), and by doing so, fusion can promote social awareness of political issues. When fusion occurs it is an evolution of traditional dance, it does not restrict audiences or community; rather it allows people of many backgrounds to connect with Indigenous culture.

Because of the above history of Indigenous politics and arts, Western modern dance as promoted by African-American artists proved to be a perfect avenue for a fusion
and for creating social awareness. Carole Johnson, founding director of NAISDA, states:

The Visiting Eleo Pomare Dance Company from New York [of which Carole Johnson was a member], performing at the Adelaide Arts Festival and Sydney Conservatorium of music in 1972, opened the way for modern theatrical dance to become a form of expression for urban Aboriginal and Islander peoples of Australia. Indigenous community leaders saw Pomare's predominantly African-American dancers perform choreographic works relevant to Aboriginal experiences. Just as Kevin Gilbert's play *The Cherry Pickers* presented in 1971 by Nindethana Theatre in Melbourne, portrayed Aboriginal social issues, Pomare created dances on American themes that were exciting and visual, that heightened emotions, and challenged the intellect. The black Australian audience experienced the power of non-verbal dance images portraying dispossession, racism, cultural heritage, and aspiration (cited in Kleinert & Neale, 2000, p. 363).

Upheavals in the "international world of black peoples and Australian government attitudes and policies relating to Indigenous people were changing" (Johnson, C, cited in Kleinert & Neale, 2000, p. 363).

After Pomare's season, the Australian Council of the Arts invited Carole Johnson to remain in Australia, providing her with a grant to introduce Western modern dance to Indigenous artists. This was the seed planted that Carole Johnson nourished into the institution of NAISDA. In 1972, the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme (AISDS), NAISDA's predecessor, began to develop an emergent fusion between traditional Indigenous dance and Western modern dance, allowing a creative form of expression that was a gathering of personal, individual and political explorations that could preserve culture, community and identity of first Australians. This creative experimentation sprang from the collaborations of Indigenous Aboriginal dance creators, Western trained choreographers and traditional cultural owners, who came together in performance and workshops. And this led to workshops for young people keen to learn and perform this new dance fusion. This was the genesis of NAISDA Dance College.

In 1976 a small group of students from both town and country began the first formal year-long Careers in Dance training course. The performance arm of this program became known as the Aboriginal/ Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT) - a vibrant touring company employing students and graduates of the new Careers in Dance training program.

Very soon the theatre group was receiving invitations to perform at festivals
across over the world. And the training side evolved into the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Association – now known as NAISDA Dance College (In the beginning, the dreamtime, NAISDA Dance College, n.d.).


NAISDA’s promotion of fusion can also be seen within companies and institutions like Quinkan, Kurruru Youth Performing Arts and Aboriginal Centre of the Performing Arts (ACPA) and so on.

Fusion can act as a tool to reconnect Indigenous people to their own traditional culture. It can also work as a way to develop a better understanding of their cultural identity. “For more than 30 years NAISDA Dance College has been building long lasting links with traditional communities. It is through these links that NAISDA has been able to contribute so greatly and uniquely to the development of contemporary Indigenous dance in Australia” (NAISDA Dance College, n.d.).
NAISDA’s cultural bonds to communities that have created their identity

The NAISDA residencies program allows students to reconnect to their traditional culture. The residencies program consist of three different programs a 'College Residency 1', 'College Residency 2' and a 'Traditional Residency'. The 'College Residency 1' sees:

between four to six traditional tutors leave their home communities early each year to live on campus at NAISDA Dance College on the NSW Central Coast for between two and four weeks. During that time, NAISDA students immerse in all aspects of traditional dance and lifestyles, with a learning focus ranging from dance, song and cultural understanding to traditional prop and costume-making. When these traditional tutors return home, NAISDA's own tutors are responsible for rehearsing the dances throughout the year. This also greatly influences developing artists' introduction to choreography and their own individual dance styles (Cultural Residencies, NAISDA Dance College, n.d.).

Towards the end of the year NAISDA students attend a 'Traditional Residency'. This residency takes the dancers to the above tutors' community, which affects students in many positive ways:

The developing artists live in the community with their host, gaining in-depth experience of traditional life. They are accepted into the community, form bonds that last a lifetime and are immersed in a unique cultural experience that has a profound emotional and spiritual effect on them.

These field trips are life changing experiences that leave participants with a true sense of themselves and their culture. To dance on the land where the dances were created and passed down creates the essential close connection that grounds a developing artist's cultural dance understanding and technique" (Cultural Residencies, NAISDA Dance College, n.d.).

The 'College Residency 2' sees the above traditional tutors return to NAISDA for its annual end of year production:

This residency focuses on the performance and costumes aspects of the dance and its performance in a contemporary context while remaining true to its traditional form. This is when artist and audiences start to understand the value of the cultural residency program.

Traditional Torres Strait Islander dances are created for performance and so there is a natural transition. [...] But in traditional Aboriginal dance, the relationship is between the dancers and the musicians. To transfer this to a stage with an audience involves a delicate balance. It is the job of the director to work with the traditional tutors and developing artists to retain the integrity of the form while also entertaining a contemporary audience, which is the essence of this program (Cultural Residencies, NAISDA Dance College, n.d.).
A NAISDA dance student may not be studying their specific tribal culture, however, the experiences provide the dancer with an opportunity to connect with other Indigenous people from around Australia. These experiences can enhance the student's knowledge of storytelling through movement, bridging understanding between remote traditional and urban modern communities. All NAISDA students study different genres and styles including "studies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and Dance, Contemporary Dance, Ballet Technique, Jazz, and Tap" (Course information, NAISDA Dance College, n.d.). These experiences permit the dancer to learn many styles, which will develop their performance, technical and choreographic skills, developing new knowledge and continuing to promote the future profile of the contemporary Indigenous arts community. Such expertise allows the dancer to communicate with many audiences.

There are three main audiences with whom "Indigenous contemporary" (Blanco, 2005, p. 14) choreographers will need to communicate: remote Indigenous communities, urban Indigenous communities, and finally the greater Australian audiences. All these audiences should be reached in order to maintain various elements of culture, community and identity. This is why the links that NAISDA has to traditional tutors, their community and to Western modern dance are integral threads in the quilt that is the fused dance form.

Take Bangarra’s Page as an example. Page’s experiences of his ‘Traditional Residency’ demonstrates the significance of his re-connection as an urban Aboriginal to a traditional community, in this case to Yirrkala, in Arnhem Land. Page states “It was just an amazing moment to learn any form of traditional dance. I think when I did discover traditional dance, or the essence of it, and the groundedness behind it, it then influenced and inspired me to choreograph and to bring my experiences all together (Potter, 1997, p. 95). Further to this Page notes “That was the first time I came in contact with any form of traditional customs or values or lifestyle. So I was very culture shocked – It changed me completely” (Potter, 1997, p. 97).
Case study on Stephen Page's choreographic philosophies of fusion
Stephen Page’s personal, professional and cultural experiences have naturally shaped his philosophies and unique fused dance style. This case study will outline Page’s choreographic philosophies and biography. It will summarise how Page has employed the land as a tool for choreographic inspirations and finally will discuss shifts within his subject matter and choreography.

Page is an “Indigenous contemporary” choreographer who was born in 1965 in Brisbane (Blanco, 2005, p. 14). His Aboriginal heritage is from the Nunukul nation and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh nation from southeast Queensland, Australia. Page is an alumnus of the NAISDA from which he graduated in 1982. In 1983, he was accepted into Sydney Dance Company (SDC) under the artistic director of Graeme Murphy. His time as a member of SDC saw him performing in seven productions with the company (Page, Stephen, Australia Dancing, n.d.).

The time he spent at SDC, working with Murphy, assisted in his technical development and his own understanding of Western modern dance (Potter, 1997, 95). In 1991, Page choreographed Mooggarh for the company’s production of “Shakespeare’s dancers’ – along with choreographers Gideon Obarzanek, Kim Walker, Adrian Batchelor, Graeme Murphy and Alfred Taahi” (Potter, 1997, p. 100).

Page danced with SDC for eight years until 1988 when he toured to Germany and Finland with the (AIDT), the performing arm of NAISDA, and then acted as artistic director of the NAISDA’s end-of-year production Kayn Walu (Page, Stephen, Australia Dancing, n.d.).

All of the styles that Page was developing at AIDT, SDC and NAISDA, have naturally influenced his choreography. Page explains that his previous experiences with SCD was a time were he “learnt and listened” he also found the time there to be hard, due to being away from his culture and describes it as “floating” (Potter, 1997, p. 96).


At Bangarra, Page went on to collaborate with Walong to create a production titled Ochres, which was first performed in Sydney during 1995. This work was not initially
created as a production; it was originally presented as a work in progress, which accounts for Ochres' episodic overall form. The work used the ochre colours to create separate large phrases, which became the internal structure of the work (Company, artistic director, Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.).

Since Ochres, Page has produced ten productions for Bangarra, his most recent work for the company being Mathina (2008). He has also choreographed three collaborations with The Australian Ballet and Bangarra Dance Theatre. One of his significant achievements was his creation of Awakening – a part of the Opening Ceremony of the 2000, XXVII Olympiad in Sydney, Australia (Company, artistic director, Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.).

In Ochres, Page used Djakapurra Munyarryun from the Yirrkala tribe as the cultural officer/dancer (Productions, Ochres, Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.). Ochre's main role in the broad context of Indigenous Australia, is for ritual and ceremonial purposes. However ochre that can be used, has many diverse meanings within tribal rituals & ceremonies of each individual tribe (Reed, 1969, p. 116). Page employed the Yirrkala traditional theories of the role and value of ochre colours and fused the theories of Indigenous dance of the Yirrkala tribe with a style developed from Western modern dance. This is a great example of how Page utilises his philosophy of preserving Indigenous people's dance within his work (Productions, Ochres, Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.).

A strong characteristic of traditional Indigenous' dance is the grounded movement style with bent legs and flexed feet. This traditional stylistic feature is evident throughout all of Page's works and is noticeably identified in his production of Ochres in the 'Yellow' section. This stylistic feature is a choreographic outcome of the respect that all traditional Indigenous cultures of Australia have to the earth, and the power it has on its people. In reference to the land, Aunty Kaylene, who as a member of the lost generation and is still attempting to find her tribe, states knowingly "[t]he earth is where we all [Indigenous peoples] have come from where we live and where we go, it is the creator and it's where the spirits of the past, present and future generations stand" (Personal communication, April 29, 2010).

In many of Page's work with Bangarra the 'broken' foot or leg is evident. This stylistic feature is not just a manipulation of ballet as a result of western modern dancer's rejection of the genre. It is employed to show earthbound movement. The low-level
bent leg step design is a choreographic result due to Indigenous people's link to earth and its spirits. The bent leg is a stylistic feature that occurs frequently in traditional dance across Australia. This is a fine example of presenting the fusion of traditional characteristics of Indigenous culture within Western modern dance. Another modern choreographer who was inspired by the relationship between the dancer and the earth was African-American Alvin Ailey:

He [Ailey] always spoke of the fact that our strength came to us through the bottoms of our feet, through the earth, through the floor, and that was the way I always saw my art from then on, as though I were planted in the earth and trying to push the sound of my music up through my body, from the earth (Lena Horne cited in Ailey and Bailey, 1995, p. 2).

The early development of Page's choreographic influences and dance training, stem from his education at NAISDA. There he learnt what he titles a "fruit salad" of styles. He trained in the genres of jazz, tap, ballet and Western modern dance forms. His modern training saw him learn Martha Graham and Lester Horton technique. Through the NAISDA "Cultural Residencies Program" he also learnt traditional Aboriginal dance forms from around Australia and furthermore learnt traditional dances from the Torres Strait Islands (Potter, 1997, p. 95).

Page's choreographic influences have included his history with the Yirrkala nation. As noted before when Page was studying at NAISDA, he attended a cultural residency in Yirrkala, in north-eastern Arnhem Land. Most of Page's influence stem from "the dances and movements of the Yolngu people at Yirrkala...Bangarra's principal dancer Djakapurrara Munyarryun [previous], from Dhalinybuy near Yirrkala, also worked as cultural consultant to ensure the integrity of the dances and the appropriateness of their use in various context" (Meekison cited in Kleinert & Neale, 2000, p. 369).

Page's training in a collaboration of genres and styles along with his experiences of urban and traditional culture are all personal expressions of his identity. The expression of one's individual self through movement is a key philosophy behind Western modern dance. Page states: "I believe, when you choreograph and create - it's just a fruit salad of your experiences, and that becomes your style" (Potter, 1997, p. 95).
One of Bangarra’s major philosophies is to honour the collaboration of Indigenous cultures of Australia. The company maintains the integrity of tradition in their illustrations of new forms of modern artistic expression. For example in the Bangarra’s 2005 production *Boomerang*, Page interwove the past, the present and the future generations of Indigenous people together (*Productions, Boomerang*, Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.).

In a personal interview, Leonard Mickleo, a member of the Bangarra, was asked “What does Page’s work with the company mean to you?” Leonard said:

We are here to represent our people of the past, the present and through our practice. Page’s and Bangarra’s movement vocabulary is unique because of our (Indigenous peoples) 40,000 year old obsessions and creation of our dance. Page fuses traditional dance with Western modern dance to present people within Western society a perspective and understanding of our culture through dance (personal communication, April, 8, 2007).

It is evident that Page has shifted in his approach to choreography and the subject matter of his works. In *Ochres*, the movement was light and uplifting, while, in contrast, productions like *Fish* display movement that has evolved into a sharp and masculine movement vocabulary: “A lot of debating issues – contemporary issues today in our society. Before we do any form of physical movement it’s making sure everybody understands the dance language and the dance intention before we even practice” (Potter, 1997, p. 95).

Page states that he is in two frames of mind about the subject matter of his works. He favours creating works that deal with socio-cultural themes, which present issues that are going on within the modern world of Indigenous people’s experiences. This is in contrast to his parents, who prefer Page’s more traditional subject matters, like for example – *Ochres* (Taylor, 2007).

I have demonstrated that Western modern dance can function as a way for dancers and choreographers to communicate their own beliefs about their identity through movement. Page states that “the society and the way we live now [there] is all this pain and emotion there so I try to see if I can bring that into the work” (Humfress, P, M. Mahrer, A. Whitehead and E. Hay. 1998).

He employs his own emotion in the creative development of work he choreographies. Additionally this quotation reflects Page’s subjective concerns on
the current state of some Indigenous people. This concern with his community demonstrates a strong connection to Indigenous sensitivities to land “When I get any first muse and inspiration for any form or concept it usually is a sense of the landscape whether it’s colour, the light, what births from it” (Humfress, P, M. Mahrer, A. Whitehead and E. Hay, 1998).

Page is an Australian and “Indigenous contemporary” choreographer who fuses the genres of ballet and Western modern dance with traditional Indigenous dance to produce individualism (Blanco, 2005, p. 14). His ties to his Aboriginal heritage have affected his choreographic philosophies. His experiences with NAISDA, AIDT, SDC and Bangarra have all assisted in composing his choreographic individualism. He wants to maintain the integrity of Indigenous dance and peoples by fusing traditional forms with Western modern dance so that Indigenous people's knowledge/s can be maintained within Australia for future generations.

Page is Australian with Aboriginal heritage, and the connection to the earth and its peoples' knowledge is a philosophy he strives to approach and interweave in all of his creations. Page has had a bold influence in pushing the boundaries of “Indigenous contemporary” dance form both domestically within Australian and internationally (Blanco, 2005, p. 14). Page has created a style of his own that is unmistakable.
The importance of Indigenous community in the development of fused dance form

Fusion can be an important method of connecting Indigenous people to their communities. NAISDA and Page's work with Bangarra have forged strong bonds to remote communities with NAISDA's "Cultural Residency Program" and Bangarra's "Rural Touring Program", both of which continue to foster cultural evolution. Thus dialogues between urban and remote communities begin, arguably maintaining and extending upon current specificity of First Australians' communities. Through these establishments, Indigenous dancers and choreographers must learn many traditional and Western modern dance styles to reach different audiences, be they from the Indigenous communities or otherwise. The growth in Indigenous festivals affirms a strong national Indigenous arts community network showcasing fused dance and collaborative projects with various Indigenous communities.

The Australian Council supports eight Indigenous festivals held at many communities throughout Australia, "The Dreaming [QLD], Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival [QLD], Gulf Biennial Festival [QLD], Zenadth Torres Strait Cultural Festival [QLD], Garma Festival [NT], KALACC Law and Culture Festival [WA] and Blak Nite Festival [SA]" (Roberts, 2009, p. 17). These festivals like NAISDA's residency program are important tools to connect Indigenous communities. "Artistic Director of The Dreaming Festival [in QLD], Rhoda Roberts, said: '[a]t The Dreaming, one of the big things is for communities to embrace, acknowledge and respect each other, and to connect or develop collaborations" (Roberts, 2009, p. 17). Bangarra too keeps this link with their regional touring program that sees the company performing at numerous locations in regional areas (About, profile, Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.). Understanding the cultural significance of traditional dance forms the basis for understanding the community and its cultural vitality. A question that many "Indigenous contemporary" choreographers face is 'how [to] utilise a balance of traditional dance with Western modern dance that speaks to the above four audiences?' For instance, Indigenous choreographer, Vicky Van Hout asks "How do you help someone from an isolated community understand contemporary art in a day? Dialogue is crucial to maintaining mutual understanding and respect, and to avoid unwittingly offending people" (Van Hout, 2009, p. 23). If the fused dance form
can communicate with many audiences it does not limit itself, rather it can promote understanding, even if additional dialogue is needed.

Leigh Warren and Dancers' (LWD) production of Petroglyphs choreographed by Warren and Indigenous choreographer Gina Rings for a cast of non-Indigenous and Indigenous heritages was symbol of different communities working together. Gina Rings attended many Aboriginal schools around South Australia teaching children of different Indigenous communities a dance that they all performed alongside Indigenous members of LWD's production of Petroglyphs for The Yarnballa Cultural Festival at Port Augusta. This experience linked both urban and remote communities together through Gina Rings' facilitation dialogue (Repertoire, Leigh Warren & Dancers, n.d.).

Dance fusion can be a significant strategy in connecting urban and traditional Indigenous communities and facilitating dialogue which respects cultural laws and, at the same time, fosters cultural evolution. In turn, many institutions, companies and individuals with strong ties to communities have contributed considerably to the cultural growth and creative developments of fused dance which reaches audiences across the spectrum, contributing to the education of all groups and strengthening a more confident sense of identity for Indigenous Australians.
The current state of culture within Indigenous fused dance form

As Yunupingu suggested previously, today’s culture is a blend of old with the new (Yunupingu, 1994, p. 2). It is an embodiment of the culture that stood before, and the culture that stands in front of Indigenous peoples. Due to the effects of colonialism, Indigenous culture has evolved to maintain its “survival”. Indigenous art has continued its past philosophies but has fused with modern ways of artistic expression to talk to today’s audiences. Enoch, states that the current Indigenous theatre has adopted: “New skills and techniques [which] are spliced and absorbed by artists to maintain the unbroken line of our cultures” (Kleinert & Neale, 2000, p. 349).

Through this evolution, dance fusion has become a customary part of establishments like NAISDA, AIDT, Bangarra, Quinkan, Kurruru Youth Performing Arts, ACPA and Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) Aboriginal Theatre Course. These organisations support Indigenous people to learn more about their unique and related cultures in Australia. Therefore these establishments have become torchbearers maintaining Indigenous community, identity and culture, utilising elements such as music, visual arts, language, kin, gender business, connection to land and most importantly their stories.

AIDT too identified with the importance of preserving connection to traditional cultures by maintaining “the essence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through first-hand traditional studies, including dance, crafts, language, music and experience of various community lifestyles” (Dyson, 1994, p. 1).

Traditionally, connection to the land and the Dreamtime stories acted as a means of creative education; for example, the Gundungurra Dreamtime story of the ‘Gurangatch and Mirragan’ has underlying metaphorical teachings about working with the land (Johnson, D. 2007, pp. 172-174). This contrasts with a present day Indigenous dance work titled X300 (2008) choreographed by Francis Rings for Bangarra. This work still carries on the tradition of connection to the land, as fused dance it becomes a way to express the effects on the land, caused by the colonial abuses (Productions, True Stories, Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d). The connection to

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6 ‘Gurangatch and Mirragan’ is the Dreamtime creation story of Gundungurra nation. The story describes an almighty struggle between two ancestral creator spirits, one a giant ell-like creature, Gurangatch, an incarnation of the ancestral rainbow serpent, and the other, a large native cat or quoll, Mirragan. Their scuffling gouged out the land to form the river systems and some features of the landscape.
the earth is a fundamental characteristic of many Indigenous artists' works. Francis Rings explains that "you are rooted to the earth and everything comes back to that, we [Indigenous peoples] have that relationship" (Dunn & Rings, 2008, p. 9). Francis Rings' work titled *Belonging*, in collaboration with previous member of Bangarra Kathryn Dunn, echoed the same principles, utilising the earth as a muse for creation. "*Belonging* is a journey through Wet season to Dry season, exploring it through the body, thinking about the landscape of a woman's body and how this is reflected in our [Australian] landscape" (Dunn & Rings, 2008, p. 9).

Fusing traditional dance with Western modern dance is so much more than it sounds; it is a beacon of past meeting present, keeping dance in touch with today’s diverse audiences and educating the community and promoting awareness of First Australians' culture.
The current state of identity in the fused dance form

Much of the identity of today’s Indigenous theatre is a constant tension between traditional and modern philosophies and practices. Enoch states that:

The traditional practice of integrating art forms is being reinstated: a sophisticated rendering of design, and the use of body as the site for performance are replacing the conventions of earlier works which traded in currencies of naturalism and biography (Kleinert & Neale, 2000. p. 350).

Elements of traditional dance combined with Western modern dance can create new structures. Modern Western dance is not restricted to a specific formalised structure since each Western modern dance technique or choreographer employs any movement or structure desired. This freedom of composition operates within fused dance forms. However if choreographer wishes to create a work on ceremonies of a particular tribe, they would naturally need to consult with the protocols of that tribal nation. This might limit the choreographer’s treatment of the manipulation of movements, songs, narrative and so forth.

For instance, a choreographer who fuses forms may only allow particular genders to dance certain movements, as a result of the origins of the dance form. This can create individual structures within a dance work. Examples of these structures can be seen in numerous Indigenous contemporary choreographies by many independent artists like Marilyn Miller’s *Quinkan*, Vicki Van Hout’s *Briwyant* and *Wiradjourni* or many of Bangarra’s productions.

Bangarra has carved out a specific identity through their use of cross-cultural fusion of Indigenous dance with modern dance. Their mission statement articulates that they will endeavour:

To respect and energise the link between Indigenous cultures of Australia and new forms of contemporary artistic expression by maintaining the integrity of tradition while exploring the endless inspiration of dance and, in doing so, create theatre of excellence that resonates with people everywhere and speaks with a myriad of voices (Bangarra Dance Theatre, n.d.).

They have created works that deal with numerous issues to challenge stereotypical notions of Indigenous identity. Their dancers, current and previous, like Miller and Van Hout, act as agents for “reconciliation, educators, cultural ambassadors, role models and above all, innovative dancers. As Page has acknowledged, everything

Fused choreographic works seek to educate perceptions of many shades of Australians about Indigenous identity and to challenge political views and social conditions of their communities. This is a result of many factors: Western modern dance being a creative vehicle of political endeavours; Indigenous political history, dealing with political contemporary issues like drug and alcohol abuse, land rights and domestic violence; connection to culture; connection to community; stolen generation and deaths in custody issues; and traditional stories. Today’s contemporary issues presented on stage do not just challenge non-Indigenous peoples but also challenge First Australians’ to rethink their identity.

The current Identity of “Indigenous contemporary” dance community is a ‘fruit salad’ of different dance styles (Blanco, 2005, p. 14). This is a result of the many lineages of training and experience of the Indigenous dance community.

From the beginnings of NAISDA graduates have ventured onto many paths; some back into institutions, some working with Australia’s mainstream professional industries, some working with Bangarra, some teaching at their local dance schools, some teaching in remote and urban communities. In the past fifteen years, various Indigenous dancers have gained entry into university dance institutions like University of Western Australia (UWA), National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA), Queensland University of Technology (QUT Creative Industries), Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) and the WA Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA). A Western modern dance course, dedicated to the identity of Indigenous dance in the context of undergraduate or postgraduate study, has yet to be instigated. This is in contrast to the music course at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music/Wilto Yerlo (CASM), University of Adelaide in South Australia offering “a unique and exciting nationally focused program of tertiary-level music studies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians” (Wilto Yerlo and the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music, n.d.).

Furthermore, it is interesting to discover that the above universities and institutes like ACPA and NAISDA are all geographically located on the eastern states of Australia. One could assume that this is a result of establishments of AIDT and Bangarra that both have lineages from NAISDA which has shaped the cartography of fused dance form from its home in Sydney and Gosford. It may also be a result of “the capital
cities of the eastern side of Australia — Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney — [that] constitute a network through which much of the commercial and 'high art' [...] industry is supported" (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004, p. 21).

As a natural result of small availability of Indigenous diploma institutions and closely linked networks, “Indigenous contemporary” fused dance has developed a dominant style within the commercial dance arena. Raymond Blanco who was the artistic director of AIDT states:

For some of us exposure to contemporary Indigenous dance came from television. If we were lucky we had a group of dancers come to our town and teach and perform at our schools, and for the unlucky our only exposure came from Bangarra. I say it because these few people who only know of contemporary Indigenous dance from Bangarra — or only acknowledge the movement of Indigenous contemporary dance since Bangarra — have been robbed or are robbing themselves of a history that is filled with the rich and exciting, edgy, raw dance of the beginnings of a movement forward of our people (Blanco, 2005, p. 14).

This eventuality may also be linked to the maturation of fused dance forms in Australia wherein only a handful of Indigenous dancers have received a university level of understanding modern dance. However, now there are many well trained traditional Indigenous dancers who can instigate alternative manifestations of cultural identity. One can assume that the constant battle of many Indigenous dancers and artists will alter the current situation. The identity of fused dance forms is as wide-ranging as the present identity of First Australians. Dance fusion has become a good prospect of innovative expression echoing the past but celebrating the forthcoming Indigenous identity.
Thesis conclusion

Fusion arrived on the shores of Australia in 1972 when Johnson started working with AISDS which became NAISDA, this in turn spawned the development of AIDT and Bangarra, all of which developed an identity for the Indigenous fused dance form domestically.

Many Indigenous artists have fought for their traditional and fused forms of creative expression to be taken seriously by the dominant society within Australia. This struggle has seen a recent respect given to Indigenous arts in Australia.

The unique fusion of traditional Indigenous dance with Western modern dance celebrates the current community, culture and identity of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It honours the past by respecting what their forbears have created in their community. It represents the present by exhibiting contemporary issues on stage with movement that speaks to many communities. It finally maintains the future of Indigenous dance by fusing the old with the new, the traditional with the contemporary.

A fused work requires the adoption of new skills and techniques but also maintains strong ties to traditional understanding of community, culture, and identity, thereby connecting people of Indigenous modernity to traditional aspects of culture and vice versa. This is important because Indigenous culture is a community that goes back millennia. This ancient tradition, like many movements, comes from our feet, comes from the land, and goes back to land. It maintains a voice of people who have lived in Australian for millennia. It must be maintained for the future generations.

The risk is that the dominant styles will only represent one cultural identity of Indigenous Australia, and won’t celebrate other creative embodiments. Just as there are many tribes within Australia there are many dancing forms and therefore many forms of fusion. Dominant styles like Bangarra’s represent a paradox: they, like many other western modern companies have created their own style, they too have created a voice for many Indigenous Australians, however this is only one voice.
This thesis is a vehicle for learning more about cultures, and with knowledge of our past we can hope to travel to the future. This thesis is a celebration of past, present and future through dance. This thesis, like some Indigenous dancer's bodies or an Indigenous dance form is a symbol of reconciliation. It celebrates the identity of current Indigenous people by bringing cultures together. It is an evolution of 'black' cultures in dialogue with the varied nature of Australian ethnicities; it is an artistic form of expression that embodies a balance of different bodies of knowledge. This fused dance form is my lifelong aspiration and 'Dreaming', and I am hoping to give Indigenous people not one but many voices.

Stephen Page affirms that “Our dance form is over 40,000 years old, and by fusing it with contemporary dance, we can preserve it for the future generations, so that it can be here in another 40,000 years time” (Burstow, Walong, and Page, 1995).
References


Humphress, P, M. Mahrer, A. Whitehead and E. Hay. (1998). Urban Clan a portrait of
the Page brothers and the Bangarra Dance Theatre. [Video]. Civic Square, A.C.T: Ronin Films.

In the beginning, the dreamtime, NAISDA Dance College. [n.d.]. Retrieved August (2009), from the NAISDA Dance College site: http://www.naisda.com.au/who-we-are


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Interviews

Aunty Carol Cooper (Survey carried out, February 14th, 2008)

Aunty Merry King (Survey carried out, February 14th, 2008)

Jo Clancy (Personal dance class, February 14th, 2008)

Aunty Kaylene Akinson, (Personal interview, March 29th, 2007)

Leonard Mickleo, (Personal interview, April 8th, 2007).

Marilyn Miller, (Personal interview, April 12th, 2008).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACPA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Centre of Performing Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDT</td>
<td>Aboriginal/Islander Dance Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AISDS</td>
<td>Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>CASM</td>
<td>Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music/Wilto Yerlo</td>
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<tr>
<td>LWD</td>
<td>Leigh Warren and Dancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAISDA</td>
<td>Dance College National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUT</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology/Creative Industries</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDC</td>
<td>Sydney Dance Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>University of New South Wales</td>
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<td>UWS</td>
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