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MOVING *and* DANCING TOWARDS DECOLONISATION *in* EDUCATION: *an* EXAMPLE *from an* INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN PERFORMANCE CLASSROOM

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■ Abstract

In this paper I explore the special type of thinking, moving and dancing place which is opened up for decolonisation when students engage in an embodied pedagogical practice in Indigenous education. I examine what decolonisation means in this context by describing the ways in which the curriculum, the students and me, and more generally the discipline of ethnomusicology itself, undergo a process to question, critique, and move aside the pedagogical script of colonialism in order to allow Indigenous ways of understanding music and dance to be presented, privileged and empowered. Key questions are: What is the relationship between embodiment and disembodiment and decolonisation and colonisation? In what ways is embodiment more than, or other than, the presence of moving bodies? In what ways is performativity an aspect of power/knowledge/subject formations? How can it be theorised? What could the pedagogical scripts of decolonisation look like?

■ Introduction

After spending two hours teaching a contemporary dance workshop to a group of 25 university students, Wadaman/Yanyuwa choreographer and dancer Samantha Chalmers explained to me the significance of Indigenous Australian performance for creating a location of possibility, relationship and understanding. She commented:

Sometimes it's just not enough to talk about how wonderful a sunset can be, feeling the sunset is like so beyond words you know. So when they dance and I say "feel the water" or "feel the sand", "lift your arms up like the wings", "be a broлга" and bring it down. You know they identify with those images and therefore connect (S. Chalmers, personal communication, 2000).

Her words bring attention to the performing body, a body which moves while it thinks, feels while it imagines and senses as it understands, and in doing so engages in a knowledge process which is inherently and necessarily embodied. Her reflections provide a good starting point to explore the special type of thinking, moving and dancing place which is opened up for decolonisation when students engage in an embodied pedagogical practice in Indigenous education. In this paper I want to negotiate rather than negate a space where the challenges, complexities and "choreographies" of decolonisation can be explored by focusing on the embodied way in which teaching and learning can happen in my current ethnomusicological classroom context, a course called "Aboriginal music: Performing place, power and identity". By reflecting on what decolonisation means in relation to ethnomusicological classrooms, I have taken the liberty to embark on a theoretical, yet at times meandering and reflective personal, journey to consider the ways in which an embodied pedagogical practice holds the potential to work as a disruptive, deconstructive and decolonising educational practice.

■ Locating myself and the classroom

My desire to write this paper stems from a complex yet interwoven set of experiences and subjectivities – my identity as a teacher in Brisbane at the University of Queensland, my research work with Yanyuwa women in many different performance contexts at Borroloola in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, my bond with them as *kundiyyarra* (song partner and most necessary companion, see Mackinlay, 2005), and my relationship as wife to a Yanyuwa man, mother to our sons and family member to the Yanyuwa community in the Northern Territory. We have shared selves and worlds in diverse places in equally varied ways. I have sat with my Yanyuwa family – sisters, mothers-in-law, daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters – fishing by the banks of the McArthur River, talking and telling stories around campfires late into the night, sleeping away hot afternoons in the town camps and waiting by the roadside in Toyotas for business to begin. We have cried rivers of grief for the loss of our children, too many loved ones, and our heartache over broken relationships, just as we have shed tears over the wonder of new births and new beginnings. They have sat with me in staff meetings, amongst strangers and friends, in front of many students, with government officials and alongside their Murri (Aboriginal) brothers and sisters in Queensland, speaking and singing their experiences as Yanyuwa women. They have danced with me in Brisbane in the classroom, and I have danced with them on Yanyuwa country at Borroloola. My understandings of Yanyuwa performance traditions represent my lived, shared and embodied experiences in these contexts and have gradually awakened within me the understanding that they are always and already interlinked, interactive and intersubjective.

While intensely personal, my understandings are also inherently political – I am a White, middle class, woman, identified as an expert by the Western academy and one in a long trajectory of colonial female characters encountering Aboriginal women under the guise of anthropological and musicological research – I carry these subjectivities with me everywhere. Over the past five years this “whispering in my heart” (Reynolds, 1998) has grown increasingly loud and today I find myself driven to ask uncomfortable questions about who I am and what it is I think I am doing – to untangle my whiteness, the colouring of my pedagogical practice, and more broadly make visible the ways in which ethnomusicology too is a discipline marked by the power and privilege of race. This “laying bare the flesh of life on the bones of experience” (Holman Jones, 1998) is a dangerous and risky business, as poststructuralist and other “post” forms of scholarship readily point out. Yet the nature of engagement between self and Other, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, whether it be in the classroom, the field, a research paper or a personal

relationship is intersubjective (Shildrick, personal communication, 2005) – we live, change and effect self/Other through research, and, precisely because of this embodiment and performativity, I hold strongly to the belief that we have a responsibility to engage in such questioning to work towards an ethical, moral and socially just research and educational praxis. Aware that not all researchers and academics who engage in the business of making representations about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers and performance share the same subjectivities, experiences and research agendas as me, I do not want necessarily to position myself as preacher. Instead I hope that by interrogating colonialism and exploring possibilities for decolonisation in ethnomusicological classrooms, others in our discipline might too hear the whispering.

The educational setting is a course called ABTS2102 “Aboriginal music: Performing place, power and identity”, and I began teaching this subject in 1997 when I started working as a Lecturer in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland. The course has changed its name and focus over the past eight years and today aims to extend the understanding students have of Indigenous Australian music and dance by examining performance as education for living, as a reflection of cultural continuity and social change, and as expression, nurturance and maintenance of identity. Issues covered in the curriculum include:

- deconstructing categories of Indigenous Australian performance such as traditional and contemporary;
- situating Indigenous Australian peoples in terms of their social, political, historical and musical roles and identities;
- understanding the connections of performance to status, authority, ownership, power and knowledge;
- understanding the complex relationship between people, performance and country; and,
- re/presentations of Indigenous Australian performers and performance.

The pedagogical agenda of this course is achieved by combining traditional “chalk’n’talk” lecture material and the concretised Western texts about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s music and dance with a shared and participatory performance learning experience which engages students in an active reading of Indigenous Australian music and dance via the body as text. Indigenous Australian performers share their knowledge of various performance styles and genres through interactive workshops where students are provided with an opportunity to not only talk to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander singers, musicians and dancers but in many instances get up and perform alongside them. It is this dialogic and embodied

aspect of the course which opens up the possibility for students to reflect upon their own personal and political positioning in relation to Indigenous Australian peoples and which I am keen to explore as decolonising practise here.

Although not often discussed in such terms, the embodied way that teaching and learning happens in this particular course owes much to the discipline of ethnomusicology generally and more specifically the historical legacy of Australian ethnomusicologist Catherine Ellis, and to a lesser extent Helen Payne. Ethnomusicologists have long realised the value of participant/observation, or, as Hood (1971, p. 242) describes, "making music together". Cooley suggests that musical experience via "fieldwork is the observational and experiential portion of the ethnographic process during which the ethnomusicologist engages living individuals in order to learn about music-culture" (1997, p. 4). Kisluik (1997, p. 23) elaborates and asserts that renewed emphasis on experience in ethnomusicology is gradually shifting the discipline towards reflexive, non-objectivist scholarship and further away from historically colonialist approaches. For Rice (1994, p. 6), musical experience is defined as the "history of the individual's encounter with the world of musical symbols in which he finds himself" and "the dialectical movements between distanciation, which invites explanation, and appropriation, which suggests a new understanding" (Rice, 1994, p. 6) to enable the researcher and/or student to expand their own music symbolic system to include symbols referenced from the new musics studied. Dunbar-Hall (1998, p. 11) agrees and further suggests that in both music education and ethnomusicology, combining "an ethnographic approach and a focus on personal experience have become the means for leading students to a position from which to theorise". Participation in music-culture as a path to learning then has the potential to encourage students not only to theorise about their experiences, but also to actively engage with the political and ethical.

The relationship of ABTS2102 to the work of Catherine Ellis and Helen Payne is a little less easy and comfortable to articulate – partly because of their respective reputations and status as experts within the discipline, partly because of my own associations with each, and partly because of the similarities in our identities as White, female academics. Ellis founded the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) in the late 1970s at the University of Adelaide as a music school of Aboriginal people and a research centre for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people based on Aboriginal music and Aboriginal-style music teaching. Understanding the value of participation in Aboriginal performance alongside Aboriginal performers from her fieldwork in Central Australia, Ellis was keen to ensure that students also had the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal music via an interactive musical

and cultural exchange. She was a strong advocate of performance-oriented ethnomusicology in an academic setting and believed that engagement with traditional performers improved students' performance skills and understanding (Ellis, 1991). When I inherited the course ABTS2102 in 1997, it had previously been taught as a music subject by Helen Payne within the School of Music at the University of Queensland. A past student of Ellis and later Director of CASM, like Ellis she was proactive in making room for Aboriginal performers to participate as experts in their own knowledge systems in the ABTS2102 classroom.

As an honours student in ethnomusicology working with female students at CASM in the early 1990s, I was able to participate in the "tribal singing" class Ellis established which continued to be taught by Pitjantjatjara elders (see Ellis, 1978, 1979) and also visit the Pitjantjatjara community at Indulkana in the north of South Australia as part of that teaching and learning process. The memories I hold of this class and the fieldtrip are somewhat different than the moment of the experience. I wonder now how much interaction took place in those tribal singing lessons given that I did not ever speak with the performers who came to teach. Each week I simply sat and looked at them as they spoke and sang to us in a language I did not know. The same sense of "gazing at" the "extreme and the exotic" (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 14) remains with me as my mind shifts to remember the 10-day trip I went on to Indulkana where again huge voids of silence and immobility characterised what was meant to be a meaningful cultural exchange. The mirror moves reluctantly to an image of me. I see myself following the footsteps of Ellis and Payne into the ABTS2102 classroom for the first time. My head is held high and I can see from the determined look on my face that I am in no doubt about my right to be there, to speak and to assume the position of expert in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers and performances. As I look more closely I am filled with disgust at the naiveté, arrogance and self-righteousness I display – the colonial costume appears to fit me perfectly and I am deeply ashamed. It is in the horror of that reflective gaze that the whispering for me began.

There is no doubt that both Ellis and Payne ran on the linked agendas of inclusion and collaboration – Ellis went so far as to relate the involvement of traditional Aboriginal performers in the CASM curriculum to Freirean ideals of liberation and empowerment, a process, she wrote, "by which the 'culture of silence' can find an instrument to voice its growing self awareness" (1985, pp. 150-151). However, neither Ellis nor Payne publicly expressed or explored their own inclusion as representatives of a colonising knowledge system in this teaching and learning process. Neither discussed their White position and power which enabled them to open the

door and enter into the “field” and lives of Aboriginal peoples, to give voice to traditional performers in academic classrooms, and which sustained their ability to make representations of the knowledges they held as a result of their interactions with Aboriginal peoples. The classroom legacy of Ellis and Payne can be read as a paradox which on the one hand emphasised the positive aspect on “giving voice” – that “moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible” (hooks, 1989, p. 9). On the other hand, however, devoid of a critical understanding and resistance to engage with the difficult and messy politics of giving voice, inclusionary politics and collaboration in the classroom can in fact mask, maintain and sustain colonial and other relations of power, oppression and domination rather than enact an empowering or liberating pedagogical practice (see Ellsworth, 1992). The first question I am confronted with then each time I enter the classroom to teach the course ABTS2102 is how is my praxis the same and/or different to Ellis and Payne? The interrogation continues with more questions. How is what I do in that space linked to colonial legacy of ethnomusicology and how is it possible to resist the paradox in which Ellis and Payne were inadvertently located and perhaps positioned themselves? Is decolonisation the answer? If so, what is decolonisation and what might it look like in ethnomusicological classrooms? Does an embodied pedagogy hold the key to igniting the process of decolonisation in hearts, minds and actions?

■ Decolonisation in ethnomusicological classrooms

The word decolonisation is not yet familiar territory in ethnomusicological discourse – it is certainly relatively new to my own vocabulary but one which I sense holds much promise. Thinking about decolonisation in my discipline and classroom then requires me to understand the ways in which the concept has been defined and debated more broadly – by Indigenous scholars, researchers in postcolonial studies, and academics from a variety of disciplines such as literary studies, education and archaeology. Rather than paint a neat and definitive picture of what decolonisation is, here I am more concerned to highlight the complexities and the “unbounded promise” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 1) it holds as a process for deconstructing the borders and boundaries of colonialism in all its guises.

Linked to postcolonialism although not the same thing, decolonisation is a process rather than a product which is linked to processes of social justice and self-determination, informed by critical and feminist approaches to research, and grounded politically in contexts, histories, struggles and ideals (Smith, 1999, p. 4). Decolonisation projects assert that the languages of research and education exist as vehicles

of sustained oppression and tools of colonisation (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 14). Decolonising practice in research and education then recognises and exposes the ways in which the “underlying codes of imperialism and colonialism are both regulated and realized” (Smith, 1999, p. 7) but does not accept the myth that colonial discourses and practices exist in the past. Rather, decolonisation acknowledges that it does not occur in a tidy and linear progression from imperialism through to colonisation but happens in combination with them and once passed through can be revisited (Fox, 2004, p. 102; Poka, 2000, p. 159). The effects of colonisation are positioned as ongoing – as Cary warns, “everything is in danger of colonizing – everything is suspicious” (2004, p. 77) – and the aftermath of colonialism is necessarily contested (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods, 2004, p. 6). Such contestation manifests in multiple ways and decolonising texts are often described as those which “write back against imperial fictions” and “include alternative ways of seeing and living in the world” (Brydon & Tiffin, 1993, p. 11). Writing or researching back in this sense entails, as Smith (1999, p. 7) asserts, a “knowingness of the coloniser”; that is, deconstructing Western scholarship to take apart the story, reveal underlying texts, and give voice to things that are often known intuitively (Smith, 1999, p. 3). It means “having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research [and educational] practices” (Smith, 1999, p. 20) and in this way works to transgress, decentre and marginalise the academy as the exclusive locus of authority and power (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 4).

So far in my discussion of decolonisation I have emphasised the process as discursively located. However, both Smith (1999) and Mutua and Swadener (2004) maintain that a decolonisation project is two-fold. Certainly the first step is to produce counter-narratives to texts and contexts which sustain the dominance and power of the West over Indigenous peoples. But “completely” decolonising research and educational practice must go one step further to serve a “materialist function” (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 10), or as Smith puts it, decolonising practice should strive to change lives, stop people dying, and respond to reality (1999, p. 3). These authors draw attention to and privilege Indigenous presence by acknowledging that the lived experience of Indigenous peoples is often the “unfinished business of decolonisation” (Smith, 1999, p. 7) – colonisation is a process which Indigenous peoples live and breathe daily. In the enthusiastic rush to dive into deconstruction, we as non-Indigenous researchers may too easily forget or dismiss the lived realities of Indigenous peoples because they are not our own. Perhaps some key questions for us as non-Indigenous researchers and educators then are how do we live and breathe colonisation? How do we read and

respond to the multiple ways our White race power and privilege are embedded in our lived experience as non-Indigenous peoples, in our relationships with and responsibilities to Indigenous peoples? How do we begin to link our awareness and acceptance of this reality with “an agenda which does not accept the dichotomies implicit in the terms coloniser/colonised ... but rather explores the relations of power through dialogue, creating spaces for transformation, for new educational and methodological strategies” (Fox, 2004, p. 91)?

Embodiment: Linking the performative with the pedagogical

Like many others with an interest in empowering and liberating educational practice (e.g., Lather, 1991; Luke & Gore, 1992; McWilliam, 1999), the term “embodiment” has become somewhat of a conceptual home for me in my struggle to understand the experience of performance, the performance of subjectivities and the performativity of knowledge in the context of the ABTS2102 classroom and answer some of the questions I have asked above. Representing a challenge to the Cartesian split between mind and body and closely linked to the phenomenological work of French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, the concept of embodiment has been powerfully and passionately worked and reworked by corporeal and poststructuralist feminists as a means to deconstruct the ways in which discourses, ideologies and pedagogies operate as regimes of truth and produce particular regimes of the body (Gore, 1993, p. 60).

In Western culture the body has historically been regarded as a “source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason” (Grosz, 1994, p. 5). By emphasising the regulated way in which the body responds like a machine to causal laws and the laws of nature, Descartes removed consciousness from the world and “in short, succeeded in linking the mind/body opposition to the foundations of the knowledge itself, a link which places the mind in a position of hierarchical superiority over and above nature, including the nature of the body” (Grosz, 1994, p. 6). Cartesian dualism then is considered by contemporary philosophers to be responsible for the splitting of mind from body, the prioritising of reading mind over body (Orner, 1992, p. 78) and consciousness above corporeality (Grosz, 1994, p. 7). This easy binary asserted that because the body is the vehicle to express interiority and to interpret exteriority, it must therefore be tamed, controlled and reduced to a knowable predicability. Deconstructing the oppressive master narrative this aspect of Cartesian dualism represents has become the central project for much feminist work of the past two decades as scholars have undertaken to re/cover the body as a field of political and cultural activity and have shifted the availability of the body

as object of gaze to include the body as subject of discourse.

Agreeing with Gatens (1996, p. 67) that while there is probably no simple explanation of recent writings about the body, corporeal feminism offers some valuable insights to my discussion in relation to the ways in which the body is “interwoven and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification, and representation” (Grosz, 1994, p. 18). In this framework, the body becomes an active and performative locus of agency which exists as a surface that is historically, socially, politically, culturally and geographically inscribed and hence engages in constant dialogues with multiple discourses. Here, corporeal feminism takes much from Foucault’s understandings of the body as inscriptor where the relationship between the body, power and the re/production of knowledge is crucial. Gatens (1996, p. 67) suggests that:

One of the main benefits of Foucault’s approach is that its emphasis on the body allows one to consider not simply how discourses and practices create ideologically appropriate subjects but also how these practices construct certain sorts of body with particular kinds of power and capacity: that is, how bodies are turned into individuals of various kinds. In short, it allows for an analysis of the productiveness of power as well as its repressive functions. From this perspective one might also begin to appreciate how it may well make sense to speak of the body as having a history.

Foucault maintained that the historicity of bodies means that bodies are also involved in a political field where “power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies to emit signs” (1977, p. 25). Here the body-power-knowledge nexus in Foucauldian thought is made explicit. Embodiment then is a critical, reflective and analytical term which aims to collapse the duality of mind/body and reveal the way that the body acts and interacts as an inscriptive and discursive surface, and thereby the means by which power and knowledge are produced, reproduced and maintained. The link between embodiment and the performative lies in the way a subject is constituted and reconstituted; that is, “performs” within and in response to an act or experience. Weiss asserts that embodiment can further be described as intercorporeality in the sense that the “experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies” (1999, p. 5). Moreover, Butler suggests that:

The performative is not merely an act used by a pre-given subject, but it is one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called

into social being, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations ... In this sense, the performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated (1999, p. 125).

Returning now to the thinking, moving and dancing space of the ABTS2102 classroom, corporeal feminist notions of embodiment and the performative are valuable tools to understand the way that knowledge is constantly made and remade in the intersubjective and intercorporeal moment of engagement between me, students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers. They are conceptually priceless once migrated to pedagogical practice in order to make visible and privilege the body as an epistemological site. Combining theory with lived experience and adopting a pedagogy that embraces an embodied learning then functions to bring our knowing back to action and back to the body.

Embodiment in education: Moving and dancing towards decolonisation

The ways in which the body has been disciplined in Western discourses resonates with the ways in which Indigenous peoples have been regulated, monitored, controlled and made invisible under the broad project of colonialism. I am reminded of hooks' description of Black women's bodies on display as objects under a colonial gaze. She writes:

She is there to entertain guests with the naked image of Otherness. They are not to look at her as a whole human being. They are to notice only certain parts. Objectified in a manner similar to that of black female slaves who stood on auction blocks while owners and overseers described their important, salable parts, the black women whose naked bodies were displayed at white's social functions had no presence. They were reduced to mere spectacle. Little is known of their lives, their motivations. Their body parts were offered as evidence to support racist notions that black people were more akin to animals than other humans (hooks, 1995, p. 62).

The black female body as both object of desire and disgust is also described by Huggins:

as more sensual but less cerebral, more interesting perhaps but less intellectual, more passive but less critical, more emotional but less analytical, more exotic but less articulate, more withdrawn but less direct, more cultured but less stimulating, more oppressed but less political (1998, p. 36).

Both hooks and Huggins describe a still and silenced black body, docile and passive in Foucauldian terms, possessing no agency and completely expendable and their words expose the social, political, scientific and philosophical assumptions of the colonial era about the inferiority of Indigenous peoples. Engaging embodied learning in the classroom enacts a disruptive, deconstructive and performative response to colonialism as a regulatory authority which has control over the bodies and subjectivities of the colonised and colonisers, the ways in which these bodies engage with one another, and the types of knowledge and discourse permissible and possible from that interaction.

The bodies of Indigenous Australian performers, the bodies of students and my own come together as "dancing scholars" in performance workshops to "*experience* another system of knowledge by becoming subject *to* it and subject *in* it" (Gustafson, 1999, p. 266, original emphasis). This experience does not happen to each one of us singularly in isolation from one another – it is an intersubjective and intercorporeal process, particularly for the students. For example, senior Yanyuwa women Dinah a-Marrangawi Norman, Jemima a-Wuwarlu Miller and Rosie a-Makurndurna Noble from the remote community of Borroloola in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria have been coming to the University of Queensland since 1997 to participate in this course and run a two week dance workshop. The first workshop can best be described as an introductory session whereby the four of us spend the first hour in an informal "show and tell" type performance of Yanyuwa public unrestricted songs. As we perform we laugh, we catch up on news from Borroloola, and we bask in the memories and nostalgia of our shared experiences as we sing and dance. We then invite the students to enter into this intimate and shared performative space with us – each student is given a "skin" name by the Yanyuwa women and the door is then open for a relationship to begin. Joined together in skin groupings, the students sit down with the Yanyuwa women painting Yanyuwa dancing boards (*darladarla*) in preparation for performance of Ngardirdji (Mermaid Dance) the following week (see Mackinlay, 2000). In the second workshop the students, the Yanyuwa women and me initially prepare to dance Ngardirdji by "painting up"; that is, decorating our bodies in white ochre with the Dreaming marks given to Elma a-Bunubunu Brown by the Ngardirdji mermaid women for performance of this dance. According to gender and skin groupings, the Yanyuwa women and I then patiently guide the students in correct performance of several verses of Ngardirdji.

Being given a skin name, painting the dancing boards and ultimately performing Ngardirdji allows students to engage in an embodied way with Yanyuwa knowledge of performance. They learn about appropriate body designs, movements, behaviours and positionings. They come to an understanding of what their skin name means as an individual identity, what

it means in relating to and interacting with others, and what a skin name means when you want to get up to sing and dance. Sitting down and painting boards together importantly provides a moment of encounter where students can ask and be asked questions, spend time talking, and to begin to negotiate their own relationship with the Yanyuwa women. Some students never find the words to speak, silenced in fear and shame about saying the wrong thing or being misunderstood. They sit hunched over as the Yanyuwa women paint them up and when they get up to dance Ngardirdji they desperately try to cover the expansiveness of their now exposed White bodies. Others talk too much and without knowing it reveal a Western greed to have, possess and own knowledge because it is their right. They rush to sit as close as possible to their designated Yanyuwa skin sister; they are first in line to be painted up and stick their chests out proudly to show off their new identity marked by the white ochre on their White bodies; and they assume a position as leaders by dancing right out in front of the other students. There are others, however, who sit quietly beside the Yanyuwa women. They watch and carefully imitate their brush strokes as they paint *darladarlas*, they listen intently to explanations of kinship terms and then use them to address their teachers with awareness. They wait patiently to be asked to paint up and told when to dance.

The three sketches I have presented here about students' negotiation of and movement through an embodied teaching and learning process with the Yanyuwa women in the ABTS2102 classroom can be seen to represent the various ways the challenge to colonialism as enacted via an embodied pedagogy is responded to. Like the process of decolonisation itself, however, these three sketches are not mutually exclusive but rather can be experienced once, returned to again and revisited repeatedly – sometimes simultaneously. The student comments I now include here are taken from interviews, surveys and free-writes I conducted with them when they were enrolled in the course ABTS2102 in 2000 and 2001. Each student has been given a false name to protect their identity and confidentiality. The first student sketch depicts the difference, fear and paralysis which can be evoked once the power and privilege inscribed onto a White body is made visible through interaction with a Black body. For many students it can be the first time that they actually become cognisant of the fact that they are White. Talking to me about what she had learnt and experienced in the Yanyuwa dance workshops, one student described this moment of awareness as an awkward one “where being painted with white ochre ... did not look nearly as striking on our white skins as it did on the Yanyuwa women” (Rachel, personal communication, 2001). This attentiveness to whiteness can be incredibly confronting because it comes hand and hand with an acknowledgement of the oppression

and dominance over Indigenous peoples that White bodies implicitly hold. Guilt, shame and uncertainty soon follow about the right of a White person to be in a position where Indigenous people are giving and they are taking yet again. One student described to this awakening to the politics of his own whiteness via the Yanyuwa dance workshops in the following way:

In regards to participating on the more musical sphere, as a male, white Australian I feel a lot of guilt & shame about the treatment of Indigenous peoples, & I feel much of the cultural appropriation that is carried out is almost the final insult, I'm unsure about my personal participation in that process. I try to keep at the forefront of my mind that it is a privilege to participate in a workshop with the guests, but I feel my/the reciprocity of the experience is somewhat lacking (Gary, personal communication, 2000).

The second student sketch tells a different story however. Here whiteness and colonialism as subjectivity, discourse and power have remained invisible. Being given knowledge of kin, country and ceremony by the Yanyuwa women, hearing Brisbane-based performers such as Lexine Solomon and Theresa Creed tell their stories and life experiences through song, and moving alongside Samantha Chalmers as she teaches them her grandmother's journey as a stolen generation's child through dance, remains for these students a passive gazing. Their eyes look intently into the face of the Other, without ever recognising the Otherness of themselves and what that intersubjectivity means in terms of power, privilege and knowledge. When telling me about their experiences in the ABTS2102 classroom, these students say “Thanks for the opportunity to be exposed to such inspiring, entertaining Indigenous women ... It's so good to know that these women have a strong sense of identity and can express it through their performance” and “I really got a more in depth perception of women's role in “traditional” Aboriginal society and their changing roles in contemporary society and the way music creates and perpetuates identity of a culture”. These comments reveal no awareness of their White subjectivity; they can remain distanced observers as they readily take knowledge of the Other, and as a result of this gazing perpetuate a White construction and imagining of those Others divorced from the intersubjective and intercorporeal nature of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Reading these comments from students fills me with mixed emotions. I am satisfied that they have at least learnt something about the embeddedness of Indigenous Australian performance practice in the historical and contemporary identities and life experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – together we have achieved some of the key course objectives. I am also saddened, incredibly so,

that this is all they will take away from the ABTS2102 classroom because I had hoped for so much more. Through an embodied pedagogical approach I wanted them to have an experience which is inspiring, original, unique, practical, moving, educational, motivating, free and emotional. I wanted them to walk away with an embodied understanding of what it means to become passionate about learning, to transform that passion into social awareness, and to become engaged personally and politically. I wanted them to grab with both hands and step into with both feet the moment of performance to construct a dialogue between themselves and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers, non-Aboriginal and Indigenous Australian. I desperately wanted this thinking, moving and dancing place to provide them with the means to look inward and outward, to give greater awareness of Self through and in relation to Other, and to provide them with the skills to deal critically with these awakenings. Reading these comments I know that I have failed. I find some consolation in the thought that perhaps this is enough for these students for now and that maybe tomorrow, next week or five years from now their memories of this experience will open a door to critical self-reflection. However, the questions keep returning, as they have done many times before, why didn't these students hear the whispering? What could I have done differently to open their closed ears? I reprimand myself for searching for a reflection of me in them and I speculate once again, whose agenda is this anyway, this desire to decolonise my classroom?

The third sketch tells something of what might happen when students open themselves to the ABTS2102 classroom as a "location of possibility" (hooks, 1994, p. 207), that is, for deconstructing and disrupting colonial discourse about Indigenous Australian performance practice through an embodied and dialogic process between both non-Indigenous and Indigenous voices. They are prepared to lay aside whatever assumptions and anxieties they might have about who they are, why they are there in that moment, and what they expect to come to know to privilege the intersubjectivity and intercorporeality of performance and the potential new knowledges which might emerge from the experience. For them, the act of looking into the face, hearing the voice and moving alongside the body of the Other, brings the immediate response of turning back to see and experience themselves *as* Self and *in relation* to the Other. The following student's reflection reveals the dialogic nature of this inward and outward gazing: "What they gave to me was part of their identity, and that effected my identity because I realized that who I am as a person is about my race and gender and more" (Melissa, personal communication, 2001). It becomes then a relation of alterity where the differences between themselves and Indigenous Australian performers are lived and experienced as sameness in the shared space of song and dance. Such

moments of intercorporeality and intersubjectivity for many students place Indigenous peoples' experiences of colonialism, the discourse of colonialism, and the way that non-Indigenous peoples embody colonial structures and relationships as "real and existing in your face" (Diane, personal communication, 2001). The vast array of expectations, knowledges and assumptions that colonialism sets up are challenged through this embodied process of learning which in turn becomes "the window of seeing through the walls society puts up which inhibit open minds" (Alice, personal communication, 2000).

Lisa's (personal communication, 2001) pictorial reflection on her journey into and through the ABTS2102 classroom as a disruptive and decolonising thinking, moving and dancing place is particularly revealing (Figure 1). I asked her why she had chosen to use an image of the body as the locale for understanding and presenting these issues. She explained:

All of the issues placed inside the body are things which I have deemed the central, logistical focal points to this class. They all connect to culture & the body. The passing of tradition, sacred knowledge of both male & female roles, ownership, the performance; these have all been sanitized, analysed & have found a place in my own theories of anthropological studies. The four outside boxes are very important issues in my own mind. These are all things to consider for any member within the field of anthropology/ethnomusicology. The politics of representation, ethics, insider/outsider issues & contemporary issues are most likely the ideas I'll apply to the rest of my work in anthropology. I don't believe one can be a truly dedicated, industrious, beneficial anthropologist without considering these things. Most of these ideas were already present in my

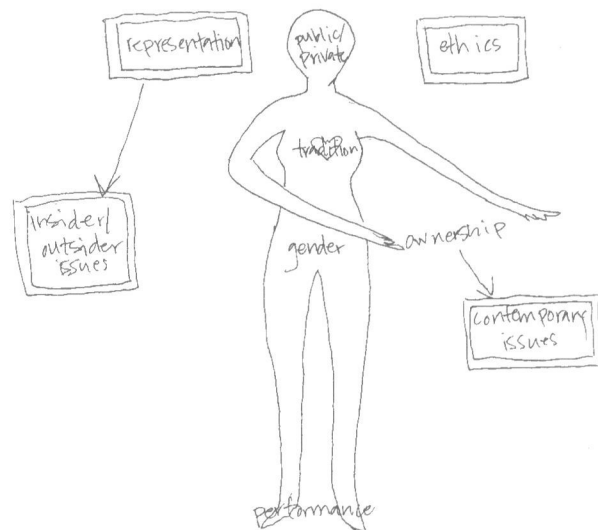


Figure 1. Lisa's pictorial reflection on her journey into and through the ABTS2102 classroom.

mind, however this class, through lectures & personal interactions with the subjects of study, helped me clarify & put definitions to these issues. Being able to put a face & some names to my own work gives me a much better understanding of the knowledge I've gained. Personal narrative & connection to a culture is very important to me & I hope to apply it in my own work in the future (Lisa, personal communication, 2000).

For Lisa, her body had become the medium for processing, storing, and ultimately owning knowledge. Her body was the vehicle for her to engage with not just the politics of owning knowledge but managing knowledge once it becomes embodied. An embodied learning process had allowed her to move beyond a passive reading of concretised Western ethnographic texts to confront and negotiate the race privilege and power inscribed on bodies of anthropological and ethnomusicological knowledge, and her own White body as a player in those frameworks and discourse. The embodied knowledge about colonial discourse, her place in it and her relationships with Indigenous peoples that she walked away from the ABTS2102 classroom with, ultimately filled her with a compulsion to disrupt, deconstruct and do discourse about Indigenous peoples differently.

■ Conclusion

Just as I was hesitant to begin writing this paper, I am equally cautious as to how I should finish – there seems to be so much yet to say and too many questions yet to be asked and answered about decolonisation, disciplines and dance. Does an embodied pedagogy really decolonise curriculum and classrooms? Does a performance experience enable us as teachers and learners to begin the process of decolonising our hearts and minds? About these things I am not sure. Each year as I see, feel and listen to the ways that experiencing Self in relation to the Other by thinking, moving and dancing leads students to a place of reflection, questioning and critique, I am more and more convinced of the limitless potential of an embodied pedagogy for chipping away, disturbing and deconstructing the formidable control and authority colonial discourse has on the ways in which we as non-Indigenous Australians imagine, encounter, interact with, and ultimately come to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and performance practice. The ABTS2102 classroom exists as an intersubjective and intercorporeal space where the semblances and differences of race, gender, class, age, size and shape are visible, where they can be positioned within and against each other, and because of this opacity can be named, explored and critically questioned. Perceptions of Self and Other, the divide between mind and body, entrenched structures of White

and Black power relations, discourse about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and musics are some of the binaries destabilised in this embodied, dialogic and deconstructive move across borders and barriers of colonialism. In these dialectic moments as we sing and dance as Self and in relation to Other, performance holds the possibility for us to experience, live and breathe what decolonisation might mean and gives us, if we are willing to take it, the power to transform our knowing into action. Not everyone who enters the ABTS2102 classroom will make these interpretative moves, and I do not know whether the discussion I have entered into here provides the necessary transparency for others to read embodied pedagogy as decolonising practice. However, what I do know is that my own dialogic experiences, political awakenings and personal transformations in this context tell me that if we are really serious about social justice, empowerment and self-determination for Indigenous Australian peoples in educational practice, then a performed, performative and embodied approach to pedagogy is a good place to begin thinking, moving and dancing towards decolonisation.

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