This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.

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KEEPERS of our STORIES

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Abstract

Storytelling is an integral part of life for Indigenous Australians. Before the arrival of Europeans and continuing after; gathered around the campfire in the evening stories were and are still shared; passed from one generation to the next. In modern times, in addition to a continuing oral traditions, another method of storytelling has risen from the ashes of the fire: filmmaking and multi-media production. In the past stories were verbally passed from one family member to the next. Sometimes these "yarns" were presented on a "message stick" and the modern form of the traditional message stick is the DVD or the internet. This paper will examine the importance and crucial element of re-representation of images, archives or productions that have in the past, and in the majority, portrayed Indigenous cultures and communities in a derogatory or less than flattering manner. Further, it will explain the main factors for appropriate manifestation of Indigenous perspectives within any film production that is portraying or capturing Indigenous individuals, narratives and/or communities. The paper relates the key elements that must be in place to ensure appropriate and robust Indigenous agency in any film production. Finally, the paper concludes with an affirmation of the need to creatively engage in the third space; between Indigenous values and priorities and Western formats and narrative structures, to arrive at a uniquely modern Indigenous telling that is accessible, firstly to Indigenous Australians, and secondly, to those with whom we wish to share our stories.

Introduction

Storytelling is an integral part of life for Indigenous Australians. Gathered around the campfire in the evening, elders, matriarchs, leaders and children would bed down for the night and stories were shared and passed from one generation to the next. Traditionally, the storyteller was born into the role. There was also the opportunity for the storytellers to earn their position – learning and telling the stories – this was the traditional way stories were passed on. These stories were based on the land and surrounding environments of the "tribe". They encompassed and embraced totemic belief systems, experiences derived from the seasons (traditional culture did not adhere to a calendar year but in most instances five or six seasons) and mythical stories from time beginning. These creation stories were varied across the continent with some commonalities present; all were integral to how the rivers, lakes, hills, mountains and plains were formed and how the animals, birds and marine creatures came into being and behaved the way they did, and the importance of the "tribal" law and ideological belief systems.

Within traditional culture there existed a number of story categories: open and public stories, stories of sacred practice, men's and women's stories (upon where the man could not share the story of the woman and the woman could not share the stories of the man), children's stories and stories of adventure and the hunt. This notion of guardianship remains relevant today. Beyond gender specific roles, all stories are attributed to owners who have the right and the responsibility for such stories. This ethic has continued into the modern context where people are loathe to talk about a subject for which they are not recognised as appropriate, and is an issue for filmmakers to consider. Despite the various categories and layers, one factor was to remain constant and that was that these stories were orally told and passed on around the night's campfire.

The true role of the storyteller is to teach; teaching the cultural values, passing on knowledge and belief systems within the stories and expressing the importance of these stories being passed on from one generation to the next in their purest and sacred form. Passing on these lessons from the beginning of time was perpetuated via song, chants, music, art, ceremony, initiation and/or dance. Stories were, and continue to be, used to educate, to explain the history of the land

and people, and give practical knowledge of nature. Traditionally, storytellers were born into the role, but, as stated, the role could also be earned.

These traditional stories are based on the "Dreamtime" and the respective spiritual belief systems and this complex overlay of the stories, their origins and respective place in the world, would be both respected and valued by the traditional storytellers. They would possess and have an understanding of the meaning behind the stories to be told. Passing from generation to generation parents, elders or aunts and uncles would gather around the campfire located within a favourite camping spot, waterhole or significant landmark and verbally utilise these traditional stories as part of the child's education and learning. Children had to listen to their elders and obey them for their survival These stories referred to the environment or the practices of everyday life. Aboriginal storytelling gave information of where the best game and water sources were to be found; where people could or could not venture; sacred sites, places of men's and women's businesses and initiation sites. Storytelling was a learning process – children learnt from an early age how to survive in their environment by listening to their elders. This was the elder's responsibility – this was their role and law.

It should be remembered that because these "Dreaming" stories have been handed down through the generations, they are not "owned" by individuals but instead they belong to a group or nation, and the storytellers of that nation are carrying out an obligation to pass the stories along. The elders of a nation might appoint a particularly skilful and knowledgeable storyteller as "custodian" of these stories and the same applies today with capable, gifted and respected (Indigenous) filmmakers given the responsibility and privilege to tell these traditional stories and community stories in a contemporary context and manner.

Indigenous films and productions – from Indigenous perspectives – are finally revealing intimate details of Indigenous histories and country, of Indigenous communities and family, of Indigenous experiences and knowledge. In the twentieth century the dominant white population actively discouraged Indigenous storytelling and many important tales were lost, but now the Aboriginal community (and individuals) are attempting to re-establish their cultural identity and vitality via modern means and without others negatively appropriating or exploiting the stories that carry it. Finally, language and culture are being respected, spoken and archived and being culturally protected through Indigenous production houses and acknowledgement of Native Title and traditional custodians of country.

For the modern age and as a reverse of the assimilation and Stolen Generations, it is now time for Aboriginal communities and the respective allotted Indigenous filmmakers and (modern) storytellers to declare: "Come share with us our stories as we replicate the campfire and the 'message stick' with the screen and the DVD ..."

This paper will examine the importance and crucial element of re-representation of images, archives or productions that have in the past, and hence in the majority, portrayed Indigenous culture and communities in a derogatory or less than flattering manner. Further it will explain the main factors for appropriate integration of Indigenous perspectives within any film production that is portraying or capturing Indigenous individuals, narratives and/or communities – namely:

- Consultation and consent
- Cultural integrity
- Authenticity
- Respect and truth
- Representation

Natural storytellers?

Until a few decades ago, more precisely the late 1970s, Indigenous Australians, via the mainstream media outlets and tools; namely film, television, radio and print media, were represented through the eyes of white Australia and the dominant colonial gaze. Aboriginal communities and individuals had very little (if any) influence on these outputs and productions and as a result the wider audiences of these media were subjected to Aboriginal stereotype and cliché. Fortunately this mostly negative mainstream representation was confronted and challenged by Essie Coffey's (1979) feature documentary *My Survival as an Aboriginal* (applauded as one of the first feature films to be made under the direction of an Australian Aboriginal person) and the formation of many, now renowned and successful, Indigenous media organisations. Film and television are a particularly powerful means for reaching a wide audience. Initially, while many representations of Indigenous stories attempted to provide a "positive" view, many were far from balanced, nuanced with Indigenous inside knowledge, or necessary complex. In seeking to engage in Indigenous narratives for a largely Western audience utilising Western conventions, such filmmakers were at risk of replicating, or in some way, replacing overtly racist or simplistic non-Indigenous myths with well meaning, but equally misleading non-Indigenous myths about Aboriginal peoples. This view is supported by Jennings (1993, p. 9) who writes:

> The media do not simply reflect or mediate reality. Rather, they utilize certain conventions and codes, both aesthetic and technical, to re-represent things to us. These things may then be accepted as "real" or "natural".

However, this new movement and phenomena of well meaning non-Indigenous filmmakers engaging with Aboriginal narratives began to highlight the need for Aboriginal "voices" to be central in making Indigenous media. In the decades since, (young) Indigenous filmmakers have lead the impetus for new self-portrayal in their own distinct cultural productions. In doing so, the stereotypes and clichés that have been created (at times ignorantly, and at times with good intent) are being refuted, and as a result the modern and traditional Aboriginal cultures are now being successfully presented and displayed to the world:

> Indigenous people and their culture have been subject to many films and television programs, from documentaries and ethnographic films, to drama series and feature films. For Indigenous people, the experience has been mixed. On the one hand, film offers the opportunity to use a popular medium to promote perspective; on the other hand, the filmmaking process can be exploitive ... (with) many productions made from a non-Indigenous perspective (that) reinforce negative stereotypes (Janke, 2003, p. 5).

In a sense this self-produced media (and its counteract against stereotype and cliché) is creating and manifesting a living Indigenous modernity. Sentiments expressed by Sally Riley the Director of the Indigenous Unit of the Australian Film Commission, who writes that these (Indigenous) filmmakers "have original and interesting stories to tell, with a fresh vision that offers different perspectives from those experienced by most Australians, and for that matter, most people worldwide" and that "with their long oral tradition, varied histories and experience, it has been argued, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are natural storytellers" (Gallasch, 2007, p. 3).

These stories relating to culture, spirituality, religion, family, colonisation, institutionalisation, repression, politics, family, love and socio-economic matters have consistently exposed to the (largely ignorant and naïve) Australian audience and to a global audience an expose of a culture that has long been forgotten about. These stories and depictions are often told and presented in a manner that is ruthless, fresh, truthful and honest – and allows audiences to view the Indigenous perspective and experience with the same honesty and vigour. Riley (cited in Gallasch, 2007, p. 3) substantiates this statement by asserting that "Indigenous filmmakers as a group have an uncanny knack for representing their stories with a truthfulness on screen that resonates with many different audiences".

This "truthful" notion is essentially derived and manifested from the essence of a "lived experience". Indigenous filmmakers more commonly portray their ideals and points of view, not through reading and theorising, but through first-hand experience and first order knowledge(s). Often these films and productions, with their original and compelling ideas, are not just from the seasoned filmmaker who has had his/her talent recognised through awards and critical plaudits but they are from individuals with Indigenous descent and background who have an artistic notion and simply feel compelled to tell their story and "channel" their ancestors and family heritage onto the "big screen". Riley quotes Sandy George who writes that "some of the most exciting new Australian talents are writers and directors from Indigenous communities, whose unique life experiences are rarely seen portrayed on the big screen from the inside out" (cited in Gallasch, 2007, p. 3); and Riley herself expresses this sentiment by stating that "the filmmakers intimacy with their subject matter generates a sense of immediacy for audiences (cited in Gallasch, 2007, p. 3).

Taking Riley's expressions further it should also be noted that storytelling is an important part of human experience everywhere, regardless of global location and circumstance, but that finally the opportunity and recognition for the Australian Aboriginal community to tell their stories, in their way, and from their perspective, is being afforded and nurtured and that the natural storytelling talents of these Indigenous filmmakers is being allowed to be seen and heard far and wide. Berndt and Berndt (1994, p. 4) point out the singular difference between the times of traditional storytelling and now, in the modern age, "in Aboriginal Australia [pre-colonisation] there were no professional storytellers who made a living from the task. Everyone was a potential if not an actual storyteller".

The reality now is that many fine and recognised Indigenous filmmakers (hence story-tellers) are supported by the film and television industry and are fiscally repatriated for their talent and output. In fact, Indigenous theatre, poetry, art, music, performance, film and research has become a recognisable and self-sustainable industry (or sub-industry) in itself. Operating within this modern industry requires Indigenous storytellers to engage in Western structures and (film) bureaucracy to create these distinct cultural narratives. As stated by Langton constructs of Aboriginality will continue to be remade over and over and non-Indigenous people will continue to want to make images and create narratives of Indigenous individuals and communities. The key now is to recognise the strength and distinctiveness that Indigenous filmmakers have within this industry and the role that they play in negotiating and/or collaborating with non-Indigenous parties within this new paradigm. This is why it is essential that the five elements of consent, integrity, authenticity, respect and representation be acknowledged and supported.

Why protocols are necessary

Many successful industry agencies (with Indigenous components and initiatives) have been established since Essie Coffey's 1979 seminal breakthrough. Nationally there exists the following:

- Australian Council for the Arts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board
- Australian Film Television and Radio School – Indigenous Program Initiatives
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) – Indigenous Program Unit
- Australian Indigenous Communications Association Incorporated
- Indigenous Screen Australia
- SBS Television – Indigenous Media Unit
- Screen Australia (formerly Australian Film Commission) – Indigenous Branch
- The Black Book Directory and Service
- Indigenous Film Services
- National Indigenous Television (NITV)

State wide there exist various production houses and industry recognised state funded organisations that facilitate and assist with Indigenous productions:

- ScreenWest's Indigenous Filmex Initiative (INDEX)
- Film and Television Institute, Western Australia
- Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA)
- Imparja Television
- Goolarri Media Enterprises
- Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association (TAIMA)
- Ngaanyatjarra Media

According to *The Black Book Directory* there are currently 2,700 listings of Indigenous organisations and individuals working across 95 professions in the arts, media and cultural industries. With this in mind it is imperative and crucial that national guidelines and protocols are established and embedded within these Indigenous media industry providers and filmmaking fraternity.

Indigenous culture, heritage, language, stories and character have become increasingly popular – evident by the recent success of *Samson and Delilah* written and directed by Warwick Thornton and winner of the Camera d'Or first film prize at the 2009 Cannes festival and recently the theatrical adaptation of Jimmy Chi's musical *Bran Nue Dae*, directed by Rachel Perkins, which has generated the biggest box office of any Indigenous themed film in Australian film history.

Indigenous communities and, to some degree individuals, are aware of the power and reach of popular media but they are also conscious of the lasting effect and legacy that film and television (and other such mass media) can create and deliver, as highlighted by Janke:

> Films can also exploit Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledge with little or no consultation with Indigenous people, and without any benefits to Indigenous communities (2003, p. 5).

Janke (2003) explores and ponders the following issues related to films containing and pertaining to Indigenous stories, themes and matters:

- Whose interest does the film serve?
- Who has editorial control?
- Who has distribution control?
- Are there employment opportunities for Indigenous people?
- Are sacred sites involved?
- What legal issues are involved?

The above questions form the basis and foundation for the setting of guidelines related to Indigenous filmmaking protocols and structure and it should be noted that in regard to protocols and guidelines that one rule for one community may not "transfer" amicably to another community and/or cultural situation. This is simply because Indigenous Australian cultures are diverse with differing dialects, custom and ritual. Though many language or land groups share certain commonalities, Australian Aboriginal culture is not, and never has been, homogenous in nature. Stories now derive from varied and peculiar sources and locations. They vary from elders or traditional custodians describing stories of the past and rooted in traditional "Dreaming" stories, which are located in remote locations or eclectic stories from living in and amongst the bush to reflective stories that express the experience of growing up on missions or reserves and finally stories expressing life experiences in the inner suburbia of major cities or towns. Janke (2003) describes the importance of these Indigenous stories steeped in variety and background as experiences that shape Indigenous cultures and are of heritage significance to current and future generations of Indigenous people:

> Indigenous people's heritage is a living heritage and includes objects, knowledge, stories and images based on that heritage, created today or in the future. For Indigenous people, the stories of their ancestors are their heritage, and so are the stories that recount Indigenous experience over the years of colonization (Janke, 2003, p. 7)

Protection of Indigenous cultural property and Indigenous heritage, in relation to film production and broadcast, occurred in 1993 when Wal Saunders,

a Koori of the Mirrimbiak nation, was appointed head of the Australian Film Commission's (AFC) Indigenous Branch. The AFC, with a charter to promoting cultural diversity within Australian film, took the initiative and set up the Indigenous Branch. Saunders was not interested in window dressing and set out immediately to shake things up. He called for the now famous moratorium on Indigenous film making which sent shock waves through the industry. Saunders in a non-descript manner addressed the audience and asked the immortal question: "Would you welcome being known by almost every other culture in the world as something that you are not?" Saunders (1993) adamantly instructed the audience that he and his people:

> do not want to suffer the fate of invisibility, as we have seen in the past; the same invisibility which sees us as the most incarcerated people per capita in the whole world ... We do not want to be invisible through others making images of us.

Suddenly the burgeoning Indigenous film industry (and its related industry) were under attack. Surely some agreed there should be some form of control, but complete control? Many were resistant and opposed to Saunder's proposal and this is exactly what Saunders wanted. Saunders felt that the (Indigenous) film industry had become complacent and he chose to question the recent practices and focus on the actual situation. In summing up at the time of the debate, Saunders considered possible solutions; stopping non-Indigenous filmmakers from using government funds to make films about Indigenous people and communities, or allow only collaborative projects which ensure that Indigenous people have the right to creative and artistic control. The future protocols and guidelines would focus and shift to the latter.

Michael Leigh (cited in Langton, 1993) writing in reference to celebrating a century of Australian cinema, estimated that a staggering 6,000 films had been made about Aborigines from 1893 to 1993. The first film images were of Murray Islander dancers in 1898, when filmmaking was first introduced to the Australian nation and public, and that these Aboriginal subjects, characters and/or communities have often been depicted with no or little say in how they were presented and portrayed. In fact it was common practice to ban Aboriginal people from picture theatres or, at best, reside them to the cheap seats at the front during the middle period of the last century. Even though Indigenous people and communities have for over one-hundred years been the subject of films, documentaries, news reports and productions the experience has been mixed and the norm was for these perspectives to be exploitive and stereotypical. O'Shane (cited in Thompson, 1990, p. 5) poignantly expressed that:

> For just on 200 years Aboriginal voices were, for the most part silenced; and others wrote about Aborigines. The strangers' voices were either romantic with various versions of the "Noble Savage", or strident with denigration of the Blacks.

Liz Thompson expanded this point further by claiming that:

> Contemporary Aboriginal arts are inextricably linked with the politics of being black in Australia. They examine Australian history and the Australian identity from an Aboriginal perspective – reviewing the historical "facts" which have been provided, re-selecting and re-presenting the information which has been made available to the public ... almost all of the contemporary art, drama, music, theatre and literature produced by Aboriginal people draws on Aboriginal social context, Aboriginal experiences and Aboriginal history (Thompson, 1990, p. 8).

Contemporary Aboriginal arts – including film production and multi-media – is encompassed by an entirely different viewpoint and perspective. More often than not the end result of the filmic work is also filtered through the film makers own dominant beliefs and ideologies – encapsulated by the artists family background, heritages and community life experiences. Therefore, instead of having someone else telling and documenting our stories it is now necessary – as a right of passage – to finally begin the process of re-constructing Australian Aboriginal histories and memory-scape by facilitating and nurturing the post-modern Indigenous storyteller. Supporting this notion is well respected performer and muscian Richard Walley who states:

> The first theatre that ever took place in Australia was Aboriginal theatre. Our corroborees are theatre, our storytelling is theatre. And so ... a lot of the history that was written about us was really a false history; and that's why Aboriginal people now have to go back to the elders and put the true story down of what's really happened (cited in Thompson, 1990, pp. 68-69).

For well over a century non-Indigenous filmmakers and archivists were exacerbating the negative perception of the Aboriginal Australian and his/her community. The problem has lain with the types of representation – or rather, misrepresentation – exhibited by film makers and their productions – which to the most extent were not negotiated with an Aboriginal voice or gaze in mind. As Langton (1993, p. 33) explained:

> Films, video and television are powerful media: it is from these that most Australians "know" about

> Aboriginal people, and Casey (1995) takes this statement further by motioning that "The majority of white Australians never actually engage with an Indigenous person, so ... storytelling is a very powerful form of sharing".

The principle of Indigenous consultation, consent, integrity, and authenticity, in relation to representation (and re-representation) of Indigenous culture, heritage and history, needs to be addressed and monitored vigilantly.

Elements to integrity

Consultation and consent is an integral and important part of the filmmaking process involving Indigenous people and communities. It is at this stage of the filmmaking process, whereby Indigenous cultural material is present and integrated in the production, the individual and/or community need to be informed of what is proposed to be filmed and why Prior to filming in a remote location it is imperative that consent of the local community and the relevant traditional custodian(s) (note there may be layers of approval sought). This may also apply for regional, urban or city Indigenous communities and locations. The process of consultation is fundamental to filming with Indigenous people or using Indigenous material and is a sign of respect and acknowledgement for the custodial stories related to the heritage of the area.

Of utmost importance to Indigenous people or communities is the upholding of *cultural integrity* – more particularly the assurance that an event, artwork, song, traditional ceremony and story is depicted in the correct and culturally appropriate manner and form. Communities, and individuals within those communities, have been and are concerned at the manipulation and distortion of images and stories related to their cultural heritage. Concern for heritage values, depiction, manipulation and distortion of images is a reality for communities and individuals as expressed by Jennings (1993, p. 76):

> The problem of "who should and can speak for whom" raises crucial political issues about representation, representativeness and exclusivity. It is necessary that people from minority groups begin to represent themselves and others and that dominant cultural institutions actively seek mechanisms to allow this. Such enterprises are established in literature and art, and have begun in cinema.

With this in mind it becomes apparent that a mutual exchange of respect between the Indigenous communities/individuals and the filmmaking fraternity will improve the likelihood of a harmonious production relationship. Ultimately, this will enhance the protection and appropriate embracement of the cultural heritage, histories and stories being depicted and broadcast. This can often transfer through to the screen and benefit the holistic embodiment of the film production.

Filmmakers, with little or no previous knowledge of Australian Aboriginal culture and heritages, often do not have the necessary skills or outlook to recognise the importance of *cultural authenticity* related to stories and cultural material. On the other hand these communities (and individuals) and the Australian Aboriginal nation can identify the false cultural references, for instance, where the names and languages are not from that particular area and the stories and the dances or locations are inappropriate. Esteemed director and Indigenous spokesperson Rachel Perkins proclaimed (cited in Janke, 2003, p. 10) that "Indigenous culture is bound by a highly developed system of Aboriginal law and social organization, so if filmmakers want to make films about us, our culture and our experience, they should do the work and find out about our law".

Taking cultural heritage material and connected stories out of context and utilising it in an inappropriate manner is highly offensive to Indigenous people and community. Respecting customary laws, cultural protocols and obligations is a much-required responsibility of filmmakers and production crews that want to work with and/or through Indigenous individual and community. This is regardless of the production phase – whether at the script or development stage of the film project – the actual production involving full cast and crew – or the post production edit process – it is imperative that consultation, authenticity, integrity and respect be given to Indigenous individuals, talent and/or communities attached to the cultural component of the project. As Langton (1993, p. 19) summarises, "they [Indigenous community] are now demanding representation that is not insulting or offensive."

It was during the 1920s, as anthropology was growing as a field of serious study, that documentary film began to play a role in the "documenting" and "rendering of other" cultures. This field of what is commonly referred to as ethnographic documentary filmmaking was primarily concerned with documenting Indigenous cultures that it was believed where doomed to extinction.

Film, particularly documentary production, is a powerful medium of constructed imaginings and filtered creations attempting to seek *respect and truth* and filmmakers should be mindful to deconstruct these intentions from the created text and assist the film text to be remade with new meaning, value and information. In this way, such film genres (say documentary or ethnographic archives) have propagated mythologies of Aboriginal culture and histories in an overtly simplistic and misleading sense. Where once

Indigenous body parts and living "specimens" were no longer the prey for overseas universities, museums or anthropological journal articles, Indigenous cultural spiritual practices, rituals, and lifestyles were ripe for the taking. Completed for white audiences, these films were commercially, racially, and imperially contrived constructions of Aboriginality for these "white audiences". Their enduring mythologies have been combated and de-constructed by Indigenous filmmakers since but the precedent has been set and the legacies of their constructions have crossed over into mainstream popular film-making, mainstream popular consciousness, and mainstream policy making with regards to Indigenous peoples. Langton (1993, p. 10) supports this notion by referencing (competent) Aboriginal filmmakers with the comment that "much of their representation is radically different from the usual images of Aborigines".

Representation and re-representation

Indigenous Australians have criticised their historical representation in film and television as often offensive or insulting and embedded in both stereotype and cliché. This has prompted recognition for, and a movement towards, control mechanisms and/or collaboration in the means of production with a view to Indigenous self-representation in film, media and television. This move from "being" represented to "representing" yourself, your people, your community and your own world-view is a formulation and desire for self-determination and the re-representation of image or narrative regarding the protection and cultural appropriation of language, custom, heritage and histories. Langton (1993, p. 10) takes this concept and theory further by stating that:

> It is clearly unrealistic for Aboriginal people to expect that others will stop portraying us in photographs, films, on television, in newspapers, in literature and so on. Increasingly, non-Aboriginal people want to make personal rehabilitative statements about the Aboriginal "problem" and to consume and re-consume the "primitive"... Rather than demanding an impossibility, it would be more useful to identify those points where it is possible to control the means of production and to make our own self-representations.

Langton identifies controlling the means of production as the crucial key point in the "balancing of the ledger" between being represented and re-representing one's own culture and people. She, however, also realistically and comprehensively understands that "to demand complete control of all representation, as some Aboriginal people naively do, is to demand censorship, to deny the communication which none of us can prevent" (1993, p. 10).

Further to this acceptance, Langton related that to expect complete disengagement by non-Aboriginal people from such dialogue would be erroneous. In part this relates to the fact that such engagement is necessary for non-Indigenous Australians to engage with their pasts, and for Indigenous Australians to realise that constructions of Aboriginality have been mitigated within the colonial processes that have consumed our nation. If we expect non-Indigenous Australians not to deal in any way with Indigenous issues and representations then we doom ourselves to the kinds of invisibility within mainstream discourses that we have been combating for decades.

While rallying against the dominant assimilationist constructions that Indigenous communities have had to endure, Langton argues that to simply create positive images of ourselves for the purposes of propaganda, would be to make naked emperors of ourselves. This argument is punctuated by Langton's statement that, "there is a naïve belief that Aboriginal people will make "better" representations of us, simply because being Aboriginal gives "greater" understanding. This belief is based on an ancient and universal feature of racism: the assumption of the undifferentiated "Other". Respected writer and poet Jack Davies expresses this sentiment and eloquently (re)defines the concept of Aboriginal representation and "ownership" as thus:

> Well, you can't write about blacks because you're non-Aboriginal. That's just ridiculous. Lots of people today think that Aboriginal literature should be classified as "Aboriginal literature" and written only by blacks. Well, that's rubbish; it's like saying that a black person can only be treated by a black doctor! In my opinion I can write about white situations, European situations – in the same way that white writers can write about black situations (Thompson, 1990, p. 16).

To this end Langton argues for the need to understand that for Indigenous peoples to simply adopt the same stance, and to make invisible non-Indigenous constructions of Aboriginality is to repeat the same mistake. This is not to say that this entire field of constructed imaginings by non-Indigenous peoples is to be ignored – far from it. Langton clearly understands, and relates the problems that these creations have caused for Indigenous communities being tied up in the colonisation of Indigenous countries, and in the control and manipulation of Indigenous peoples. What Langton argues for is the need for Aboriginality to be understood as a created "thing".

This being the case, if non-Aboriginal film makers wish to "allow" Indigenous involvement in the making of Indigenous stories, shouldn't Aboriginal people be happy to comply in any small way that may see a more negotiated and perhaps honestly considered version of Aboriginal life depicted in the media? Would it not

be prudent, regardless of the power relationship in play, simply to be happy to be "asked" to be involved? Clearly, it would not. Clearly, following on from our considerations of the right to self-representation, and the monstrous misrepresentations of Aboriginality that have preceded us, and still continue, this is not a preferable situation. However, this has in recent times been the sad and sorry state of Aboriginal involvement in the construction of Aboriginal stories.

Conclusion

Leigh (1988) stated that by 1993 when Australian cinema was celebrating its centenary, a staggering 6000 or more films have been made about Aborigines. However, the white community was still largely ignorant of Aboriginal culture. Sadly, this continues to be the reality in 2010. Therefore, self-representation and self-interpretation is an essential key focus for Indigenous filmmakers in this country. It is also imperative is that a creative film culture engaged by Indigenous filmmakers continue to cross the many diverse representations of Aboriginality that exists in this land.

It is in this modern context and paradigm that Indigenous filmmakers (in collaboration with non-Indigenous filmmakers and the filmmaking fraternity) attempt and promote the "pulling of the two worlds together – the Aboriginal and the (dominant) white world" – to begin the navigation of the "third space" – the area where "black and white" collide. This is made possible when protocols are utilised by all concerned, not as a constraint, but as a tool to creative expression, while respecting and expressing Indigenous cultures.

The issues of the right of representation and of self-determination are linked and intimately bound up in each other. The shift from being unrecognised and invisible within this land – as never having held inherent native title rights – to the recognition that such rights had and still do exist, was a major sift in the political culture of this nation. Issues surrounding the right to self-representation, that is, the representation of ones own people, identity and culture, are crucial elements of self-determination. To move from "being" represented, to "representing" yourself, your people, your own world-view, is a major shift in approach and not an easy ask in a country where representations of Aboriginality are so negatively entrenched and have not been negotiated with Indigenous peoples.

That is why it is essential that self-representation be a key focus for Indigenous filmmakers in this country, and that dogmatic ideals of what it, should, or must be represented be allowed to cross the many diverse representations of Aboriginality that exist in this land. This is the same challenge that has greeted Indigenous filmmakers dealing with self-expression of individual and collective Aboriginal identity. The diversity and range of representations is not a flaw in the pallet, but the key. The question will not be one of deciding on positive or negative images alone, but in engaging across the spectrum of what constitutes Aboriginal Australia. Otherwise we will be replacing one imagined stereotype of Aboriginal representation with another imposed agenda.

The concept of Indigenous (re)representation from filmmakers in this country is best summarised and validated by esteemed Indigenous creator and writer/director Michelle Torres who declares that (Indigenous) filmmakers and artists should tell and document Indigenous stories:

> ...that present a range of characters and experiences that moved beyond the cliché...and that you have to let us tell our own stories first or you make us voiceless and powerless (Torres, 1998).

Aboriginal storytelling is as old as the cultures themselves. Based on the Aboriginal practices of storytelling, it is not presumptuous to say that Aborigines all over mainland Australia and kept their respective cultures alive by passing on their beliefs, and their social and spiritual, cultural and economic practices to the younger generations. Storytelling is an integral part of Aboriginal oral cultures and histories. Not only were stories entertaining, but they enabled a learning process whereby the matter of survival became the basis of their telling. Children had to listen and learn; not to do so meant certain death. Consequently for thousands of years "Dreamtime" and survival stories were passed to the next generation. In contemporary times, with Aboriginal people becoming more educated by white standards, the next step is to write their stories for all Australians to read and/or record and document their stories for all Australians to view, learn and enjoy.

> Ngulluk Wangkiny Koora, Yeye, Boorda
> (We speak of yesterday, today and tomorrow)

Acknowledgements

To my beautiful girls, Rachel, Maya and Lowana, I thank you for your continued motivation and love. Acknowledgement is also offered to the staff and students at the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre, Murdoch University and to all of the Indigenous filmmakers nationwide. I would like to also give particular thanks and acknowledgement to Steve Kinnane for allowing some of his arguments and research to be utilised within this paper. Last, but not least, I would like to pay respect to my precious mum – may you rest in peace.

This paper has utilised original lecture notes completed by Steve Kinnane in the course of delivering a Unit at Murdoch University entitled Aboriginality in Australian Film and Television from 1996 to 2002. This

acknowledgement is to respect the research and some arguments offered by Kinnane that have been utilised in this paper.

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Glen Stasiuk is the Director of the Kulbardi Centre, and lecturer at Murdoch University in Media Studies, University Studies and Cultural Issues. Glen is a maternal descendent of the Minang-Wadjari Nyungars of the south-west of Western Australia whilst his paternal family emigrated from post-war Russia. These rich and varied cultural backgrounds have allowed him, through his filmmaking, research and writing to explore culture, knowledge and diverse narratives. This was evident via his film *The Forgotten*, voted Best Documentary at the 2003 Western Australian Screen Awards. He is currently completing his PhD which revolves around his latest film in production titled *Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground.*