Building Bridges
+ Connecting Culture
Creative Collaboration with artists from the Tiwi Islands

Stephen Anderson

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Master of Visual Arts

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as an exegesis for partial requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by practice-based research of Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Signed: ________________________________

Stephen Anderson

Date:
Abstract

Working collaboratively is an attempt to transcend the continued polarisation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. This practice based research focuses on intercultural creative collaboration with artists from the Tiwi Islands. The process of participation of ten Tiwi artists is described and analysed in this project wherein collaborative works in multiple media were produced, culminating in an exhibition with the author who is a non-Indigenous artist. These works, in painting, print and sculptural form, are produced to extend the conversation about the concept of relatedness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in Australia today. It represents an alternative site that navigates a position between new narratives and cooperative endeavour within the field of creative arts practice.

This work seeks to challenge dominant power structures, acknowledging the practicalities of transitional social justice to include traditional Indigenous knowing systems as valid and equally contributing forces. A ‘third space’ is envisioned where collaborative performance based actions address the understanding that personal development is foundational in the healing process that begins with self and is developed with another.

Considered and developmental artworks were produced together in an attempt to determine a commonality based on developing trust. The resultant patterns woven together attest to artworks that intend to reflect mutual respect and a sustained commitment to working collaboratively. The notion of reciprocity as a way of developing relationships and building bridges of understanding is given a visual dimension through the works produced together.
Dedication

To Jean Baptiste Apuatimi, 1940-2012

To Giovanni Tipungwuti, 1953-1993

To Vivian Kerinauia, 1958-1984

To Mantanga Tipungwuti (Pukumani), 1985-2014

To Dr. Andrea Ash, 1962-2013
To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers

Although some of the images in this paper have already been published, I would like to respectfully advise that some people who are mentioned and whose images appear in this document have now passed away. Permission to show images of Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and her work has been granted by the family and the images are displayed after lengthy consultation with her daughter Maria Josette Orsto.
Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the Tiwi and Larrakia Peoples, past, present and future; upon whose respective countries much of this research cycle was completed. In particular I would like to thank the Tiwi People for their kindness and generosity in undertaking the research journey with me. Most significantly the following collaborating artists must be acknowledged; Jean Baptiste Apuatimi, Maria Josette Orsto, Alan Kerinaui, Vivian Walarpinni, Ita Tipungwuti, Bede Tugatalum, Jock Puautjimi, Danny Munkara and Osmond Kantilla.

A heartfelt thanks goes to my supervisors Dr. Andrea Ash, Associate Professor Bill Wade, Dr. Cornelius Delaney, Rodney Forbes, Dr. Curtis Roman and Dr. Birut Zemits. As my initial principal supervisor, Cornelius offered critical insight into the merits and potential pitfalls of the research project. Rodney, whom I had worked with previously as a Master’s student through Monash University Gippsland Campus, supported the research from the outset until completion and his considered feedback to my praxis was invaluable. Similarly as an associate supervisor Curtis brought an Indigenous perspective to the project that helped and was critical when framing research pertaining to collaboration in a cross-cultural environment. I would like to especially thank Birut who, as principal supervisor for the latter stages of the research, assisted me in collating a cogent document from material made with others. Her unfailing support for this research is highly appreciated. I am grateful for the technical support offered by Peter Dowling and Damien Cooper. Also Don Whyte must be commended on his, as always, splendid framing of the works for exhibition.

I acknowledge here my family who supported me through numerous cathartic moments when critical insights pertaining to how I could best engage with the collaborating Tiwi artists were gained. I admit this was an extended and difficult time for us and acknowledge here my deep appreciation for the kindness afforded me by my immediate family as I transitioned through the ‘long dark night of the soul’ that lasted for a four-year period. Without these foundations the research undertaken would not have been possible.
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Chapter 1: Toward Unity

1.1 Introduction - The Relational Interstice

Working collaboratively with Tiwi artists is an attempt to transcend the continued polarisation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. My research question from the outset of the project was - How do we embrace the concept of relatedness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in Australia today?

The project ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’ represents an alternative position suggestive of cooperative endeavour in the field of intercultural artistic practice. The project engages directly the indifference arising from fear and a lack of acceptance of difference that is centrally located in a denial of our past. The background of this work moves beyond the situation in which it was created and inhabits a somewhat grey terrain where the interrelationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is widened to embrace open discourse. I contend that while the hegemony of the west impacts upon the foundations of transitional social justice and the concept of freedom, an informed Global Indigenous population awaits the emergence of an alternative site acknowledging traditional knowledge as valid and equally contributing forces.

In managing a future based on the ability to thrive, not simply a struggle to survive, we substitute sustained effort toward the careless attainment of material gain for a relationship with each other that embraces care and compassion, including a sustainable future on planet Earth. My experience from living in remote Indigenous communities for over ten years has taught me that by acknowledging that Indigenous wisdom has a strong place within the wider community, we can grow together embracing models and new policies that consider the needs of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It has been my intention to actively participate in sharing culture with contemporary Indigenous artists in a spirit of reconciliation. In working this way I felt what was to be reconciled would be made clearer to me by undertaking the relational work over an extended period I would be better informed and the resulting research would inform ways to share this lived
experience. My field of research has focussed on one Indigenous community, Wurrumiyanga, (formerly Nguiu), Bathurst Island on The Tiwi Islands in the Northern Territory where I have lived and worked with my family since 2009.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to how and why I have collated this material. An overview of the motivation, theory and methodology employed is explored as well as my ethical concerns and personal reflections about my role in working collaboratively with the Tiwi artists. In determining a methodology, the practice based creative research undertook two distinct phases. These were aligned both ironically and metaphorically to government policies and five-year programs initiated in the Northern Territory in 2007-2012 and extended from 2012-2017. The first phase was titled ‘Intervention’ where Indigenous artists engage with designs presented to them made by myself. I hoped to develop understanding of how the artist works and the themes of particular interest to that collaborating artist. The second phase I titled ‘Stronger Futures’ as an extended development from the initial Phase One. This phase saw me engage with Tiwi design principles and iconography. The work produced during the two phases culminated in the exhibition titled ‘Walking and Working Together’.

A common discourse in Australia asks why the Indigenous vision should be denied a stake in modernity. Similarly, it is also asked why the non-Indigenous vision should not have access to ancient and relational knowing systems? All people have a right to uphold a strong identity. In challenging some of these stereotypes the project attempts to mobilise a group of people— an intercultural co-creative research group, who must at times resist, and at times comply with, the standard that is academic convention; to ultimately form a new site where knowledge is shared. Apps (2001 p. 10) comments,

If we strive to orchestrate more efficacious and effective ways of working co-operatively, sharing information and resources, we will have a greater chance of working together successfully.
It is by working collaboratively that the opportunity to better understand how we can share our respective life’s experience is explored. Black and White, Indigenous and non-Indigenous-polarity reveals the concrete reality that opposites both attract and repel. My own artistic practice has, since 2000, centred on the ability to harmoniously reconcile the symmetry within an artwork, and how this process relates to the viewer when the cognitive binary inherent in the process of seeing is engaged as in (Fig. 1.1). The artwork developed in this project integrates my past practice with a symbolic search for reconciliation in my current work with Indigenous Australians. In working with the Tiwi artists it became possible to share artistic skills that communicate a willingness to work together. Previously I attempted to pictorially focus the viewer’s attention on how ways of seeing are conditioned through experience and how we log those experiences as memories. By working collaboratively with Indigenous artists and employing non-objective subject matter in the form of patterns, I felt it could be possible to further investigate new ways of encoding memory in light of our turbulent history post colonisation.

![Image of artwork](image-url)

**Fig. 1.1** Stephen Anderson *Walking Chevron Red, Green, Purple*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 80, Photograph Stephen Anderson

While Nicholas Bourriard proclaims the death of postmodernism in his treatise entitled ‘Relational Aesthetics’, he sees contemporary artists as nothing “but markers of a profound evolution in our vision of the world and our way of inhabiting it” (Bourriard, 2009). I would argue that artists play a
much more active role in affecting change within the world. In this role the artist acts as facilitator. If we do this together collaboratively we have more impact and authority when our aspirations are aligned with ideas about how the world should be.

The project seeks to demonstrate that relations between many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people exist in a polar opposite state. This implied division is accorded Indigenous and non-Indigenous circumstance due to an existing lack of trust in communication. The project seeks to disrupt this state of paralysis by demonstrating the building of stronger working relationships through artistic practice on the Tiwi Islands. Spoken word artist Toi Scott (2013) declares that,

> It's probably no news to many that organizing tactics are affected by class and race privilege. Radicals frequently talk about these but, in my experience, I've seen few really, truly addressing them.

The unresolved anger has been palpable when addressing race relations and where we meet in this context. Many Indigenous groups have no connection to country through ritual ceremony, no knowledge of language, having to research their origins; the realised dark history where generational trauma may have been visited upon families, represents the current reality for many contemporary Indigenous artists. They have a voice; they are angry and forge an identity based on this history. This is not the case for many Tiwi who still have strong connections to language, land and ceremony. In an effort to decolonise, works created by some contemporary Indigenous artists generally represent a revolt against the stereotypical notion of what it means to live in Australia today. Ironically, this is what becomes re-established as a by-product of this very enquiry.

Having worked and lived in a number of Indigenous communities over an extended period and being a father and grandfather has meant the focus on the larger family oriented group embraced ‘family’ as a pre-existing and clearly integrated working principle in my life. I had successfully negotiated on behalf of Indigenous artists in the art system, and now a third space seemed to avail itself, one as facilitator. An established sense of trust allowed for the potential transition toward a relationship
that shared stories directly with each other through the making of artworks collaboratively.

The research conducted is art practice-based. It is accompanied by this written exegesis outlining how one is to engage with the thesis, the significance of the study, including limitations and implications of the research. Original contributions to new knowledge and existing literature pertinent to the topic of intercultural collaborative creative research methodologies are surveyed in this work. Initial confusion as to how to equally employ Indigenous and non-Indigenous research methodologies saw me not wanting to simply frame the project within an anthropological and thus ethnographic field, but focus on what could be relevant to a global perspective, a world accepting of subjects located in seeking shared and new ways to model consciousness.

It has been my good fortune to spend time working in Indigenous communities. I have witnessed the Australian Government ‘Intervention’\(^1\)\((Phase One)\) roll out and have lived and worked in remote Indigenous communities prior to, and post, the Northern Territory’s federally backed Emergency Response.

An extended five-year (Phase Two) of the Intervention ‘Stronger Futures’, introduced a legislation initiated by the former Gillard government that was keen to address the lack of consultation as evidenced by the Howard government’s response to the Little Children are Sacred Report (2007). The project attempts to explain how, with whom, and why I worked in collaboration with Indigenous artists during most of this intervention period. The events in place are reflected and used as themes informing the collaborative works and exemplifying alternative ways to ethically engage when working together during this difficult time in our history.

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\(^1\) On 21 June 2007, the Australian Government announced a ‘national emergency response to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory’ from sexual abuse and family violence. This has become known as the ‘NT intervention’ or the ‘Emergency Response’. The catalyst for the measures was the release of Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, titled Ampe Akelyerneman Meke Mekarle: ‘Little Children are Sacred’.
1.2 Walking and Working Together

*Ngarimikiyangulimayi - Walking Together* and *Ngawuyati Ngampamurrumi – Working Together*

Reconciliation Australia in a Position Paper (2009, p. 6) comments, “Working together is how many people describe the process of reconciliation itself”. This is a way for us to mutually repair the disparity between us. The design of the project used two distinct yet divergent patterns as foundation motifs. The artistic research practice culminates in two distinct phases that will be briefly summarized here and extended in later chapters. Phase 1 *Intervention* represents the Tiwi collaborating cohort engaging with the two contrasting designs (the curvilinear and zig zag motifs). Phase 2 *Stronger Futures* sees myself engaging with Tiwi Iconography (see Fig. 1.2). The images below illustrate some basic Tiwi design elements that indicate the plausibility of the Tiwi artists being able to readily engage with my design ideas. Similarly (Figs. 1.3 and 1.4) are examples here of my work where the design principles are expressly related to the circle and square. It is from these two distinct primary shapes that all the corresponding designs have their origins. Within the square two triangles are contained.

![Fig. 1.2 Tiwi Iconography, Painted Buildings at Wurrumiyanga Airport Bathurst Island, Photograph Stephen Anderson, 2012](image)

The representative theme was set; two designs, one being rigid, one flowing. One design is indicative of the square, the other the circle. Symbolically the circle is representative of the divine
nature in man, the square indicative of earthly precepts.

Fig. 1.3 Stephen Anderson, *Spirit /Sky*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90cm

Fig. 1.4 Stephen Anderson, *Land / Matter*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90cm

The underlying premise of the project has been the question of whether we can develop the ability to work through conflicting binary relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. An ‘us and them’ paradigm seems to permeate most of the human social contemporary experience, where borders clearly delineate a perceived difference however, as professor of evolutionary biology Marc Pagel (2012, p. 298) indicates, “Our species’ history is the progressive triumph of cooperation over conflict”. Our evolutionary path appears to value human relationships as an intrinsic part of our biological make-up. Pagel (2012, p. 297) posits we are hard wired to working collaboratively and that, “culture became our strategy for survival”.

The designs in (Figs. 1.5 and 1.6) work both symbolically and as metaphor from attempts at putting a round peg in a square hole, as a sustained and conscious attempt by government policies toward assimilation, to the age-old concept of squaring the circle. Within the two geometric shapes both forms reside. Both principles operate harmoniously with each other inferring duality is a governing and harmonious principle. It may be difficult to make one form become the other and vice versa, however in this relationship there exists a complementarity. Any marginalized group understands oppression from the dominant group. This is the polarized field in Australia today. This binary subject position with regard to first nations people as transparent, offers simply ongoing struggle.
Pioneer of Transpersonal Psychology Carl Jung (1959, p. 307) comments, that “the ‘squaring of the circle’ is one of the many archetypal motifs which form the basic patterns of our dreams and fantasies”. If a solid cylinder is located in space, illuminated, and is viewed from certain angles, it can be seen as a circle or a square depending on perspective. This also stands as metaphor for perspective, the whole picture being dependent on seeing both sides.

It should be noted that the works created collaboratively were in most cases reconciled as homogenous and realized works of art. This was the intended goal when working together, to reconcile the two dimensional picture plane and resultant co-creatively constructed image. As Bourriard (2002, p. 47) claims, “Relational art tends to draw inspiration more from the flexible processes governing ordinary life”.

The work in this project developed around community deliveries and interactions. As an outcome I hope to have demonstrated this working together could be achieved in a cross-cultural creative and collaborative environment and that this hope can also be realised in the context of the broader social structure.

The dichotomy between an exchange of traditional knowing systems and that of governments in a western democracy sees an emerging respect between the players at the hot face of change. In an era that now speaks of unity as a potential future, the old patterns of greed and self-interest are
‘outed’ on a global platform. Contemporary cross-cultural collaborative art remains problematic when it comes to equitable representation. We continue to encounter inequalities however it is also possible to envision and experience counter-hegemonic initiatives in curatorial practice. Academic and curator Reilly (2011, p. 2) asserts,

It is evident that sexism and racism have become so insidiously woven into the institutional fabric, language and logic of the mainstream art world that the inequities in representation often go undetected.

By having two dissimilar designs and two differing phases to the project, a permeating alternative site or ‘third space’ is common ground or meeting place – a talking circle. Lavallee (2009, p. 29) suggests, “Sharing circles use a healing method in which participants (including the facilitator) are viewed as equal and information, spirituality, and emotionality is shared”. Collaboration, or working together, acknowledges ‘Another’ as contributing with ‘each’ other. This transcends the notion of ‘Otherness’, experiencing the fear of difference where indifference in relation to ‘each other’ or ‘One–Another’, resides. As is applicable to issues of race and gender, this imbalance is addressed in the project.

The resultant artworks produced together suggest that by working collaboratively in projects it may be possible to transcend the continued polarisation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. Independent Filmmaker Ted Hope offers the aspirations encompassed within successful collaboration,

If change only occurs when the pain of the present outweighs the fear of the future, to get to that change perhaps we also have to make sure that the process is not solitary and by sharing we can help others recognise we are in it together. We have to embrace transparency and openness in all we do and adopt a community focus to all our endeavours. That is what collaboration is all about: shifting from an emphasis on the individual to one of community. After all, each and every one of us will benefit from it. (Hope, 2013, p. 23)
1.3 Bridge Building

Black and White in this project blend, not only metaphorically but also graphically, to inhabit and represent a grey area where difference is celebrated, representing diversity and embracing environments open to change. (Fig. 1.7) is a work made in 2008 during Masters coursework that investigates how the brain encodes memory, how we attempt to create balance when viewing images. This work is a direct reflection or mirror of the brain and the act of seeing. Each tone has its counterpart mirrored on the left or right side (hemisphere) respectively. Although representative of polar opposites, this gouache study intimates balance, complementarities. When viewing the work at the centrally located black and white squares in the middle, a subtle moving in and out motion occurs prior to the desire to locate each hemisphere or side, (left black square and right white square) each accorded its own measure or value.

Fig. 1.7 Stephen Anderson, Bipolar Field Drawing, 2008, gouache on rag paper, 52cm x 26cm

The concept of ‘liminal’ space and ‘the interstitial’ suggests a direction to navigate Australian history’s hostile terrain pertaining to Colonisation. Understanding that conception must be allowed to unfold organically, developing trusts - and established working relationships aided the project in forming an alternative space to existent dogmatic subject positions. A zone of ‘inbetween-ness’ emerged where “The questions of responsive and generative creativity lead to the question of power and hierarchies in collaborative endeavour” (Pearlman 2013, p. 54). Finding myself located in
between a field that is polarised became personally transformative when occupying the middle ground in an attempt to see both sides clearly.

Theories of relatedness and standpoint are utilised as research tools to underpin a methodology that is predominantly action and performative-based research. Firstly, declaring one’s standpoint, clearly indicating the subject position of the researcher, was vital in disclosing intentions. Where I was coming from was important in navigating a way through the terrain that is race relations in Australia today. Secondly, by integrating a theory of relatedness in the research project as Martin (2008, p. 138) indicates, a ‘coming amongst’ the research to the eventual ‘coming alongside’, led ultimately to a third space of ‘working together’.

It took some time before the theories supporting the intended research methods emerged. Qualitative research being the predominant method when engaging in practice-based inquiry, it was imperative the methodologies used needed to reflect and include strong Indigenous representation. Heuristic models inclusive of an inquiry that is genuinely self-reflexive necessitated the use of standpoint theories both feminist and Indigenist (Griffin 2009). It became necessary to employ a research design that spoke directly to the relational aspect of the project but simultaneously addressed a standpoint that declared the researcher’s subject position. Overarching and underpinning the methodologies were theories pertaining to relatedness.

Pre-existing and operationalized alterity or what was initially an outsider’s perspective, became over time, an integrated working methodology, what critic Ian McLean (2013, p. 18) describes as ‘awakened hermeneutics’, utilizing “theories of mimesis and simulation” that have their antecedents in “shamanistic practices of form shifting”. The main Tiwi creation story of Purukupali
and Bima² serves to frame the context in which new narratives are produced collaboratively. This work has posited a transcendent position, one where a shift in the research design sought to transform a power-over relationship model to a power-shared collective standpoint model. Thus both Eurocentric and Indigenous worldviews coalesce as personal experiences and practical knowledge.

The bridge as metaphor to span the divide between us had to be crossed. Walking through both the coloniser and colonised’s collective guilt and shame is necessary; if we are able to heal, it is necessary for us to feel. Only through working together can the distance between peoples be lessened. The project acts as a working model to this purpose. Allowing another to share in the story or telling of the story together bespeaks a developing trust. As Hawaiian bodywork practitioner Wayne Powell reveals,

A bridge connects two bodies of land (or people) over water. Water is a symbol for emotions. Emotions can have very strong currents that pull us one way or another, just like water. A bridge then, is a communication device constructed with the willingness to re-connect two people with sometimes treacherous currents (patterns) flowing between them. A bridge can create a greater ease and efficiency for love to flow over these strong currents.

(Powell, 2013)

²Long long ago there was a man called Purukuparli and he had a wife called Bima. They were the first people on the Tiwi Islands. Their son was called Jinani. One day Purukuparli told his wife that he was going out. He left his wife and Jinani at home on the eastern side of Melville Island and went looking for food. While Purukuparli was away, Bima went in search of her lover, Tapara, the moon man. She went for too long and left Jimani in the sun. He started to cry for Blodi (milk), he cried and cried until he died from the hunger and heat. When Purukuparli came back he found his son dead and he called out to his wife. Bima tried to call back but Tapara was blocking her mouth. Purukuparli called again and this time Tapara let her go. She ran to find her dead baby and angry husband. Then Tapara, the moon man, came and he said to Purukuparli, “give me our little boy, I’ll take him up with me for three days and he will come back alive”. Purukuparli said “no”. Then Purukuparli picked up a fighting stick and he threw it at Tapara. Tapara was hurt and went back up into the sky. Then Purukuparli picked up his dead son and walked towards the sea saying “my son is dead and now we shall all follow him”. Purukuparli kept saying over and over as they both disappeared into a whirlpool in the winga (ocean).When death came to the Tiwi islands we Tiwi had to start to have ceremonies to bury our dead and make sure they entered the spirit world in the right way. Purukuparli passed down information about how to do this properly and today we still remember the dances, songs and designs which go with our ceremonies. We also have other traditions for ceremony passed down from Purukuparli, this includes placing burial poles around the graves of our dead and placing a taboo on the name of the deceased.
Spirituality and healing are intrinsically linked to transforming our troubled history and how that impacts upon us today. It is through compassion for another that we begin to model new ways to meet the imbalance that exists between us.

1.4 Identity Politics – declaring Standpoint

The declaration of where I view the project from and what preexisting conditions inform how I see my role as co-creative collaborator in the project were significant ethical concerns. To what conscious or unconscious conclusions was I driving the project? These considerations were significant indicators in doing the appropriate relational work pertaining to a subject position. Seeing where I was located within the project enabled me some insight to the differences and relative standpoints between the collaborating Tiwi artists and myself.

Having worked and lived remotely in Indigenous communities with my family, I am positioned uniquely to contribute to this growing field of research. My initial relationship within the Tiwi community was as art centre manager on a full time basis. As the research commenced, my position changed to that of part time-studio coordinator, my partner took over the formal position of manager to allow for more flexibility when working collaboratively and conducting research. This shift meant I could dedicate more time and thought to the project. I was, however, still perceived as manager. This was partly because I was male and because this was how I was originally engaged within community life. Being together essentially dialogic and autobiographical, these entanglements merge as both subject and object. At this point it becomes clearer as to what is omitted, excluded in the view. In society today the tactics employed by patriarchal white sovereignty are subjective and it is clear, the premise for Indigenous standpoint theory is that, it has been forged through struggle.

My own standpoint being white, male and privileged became further entangled when working at the intercultural interface. It may have been due to me being perceived as an authority. This was to be considered in that the ongoing questions of power difference and equal working relationships
meant constant renegotiating of who did what and how it was done. This was done simply through posing the questions and asking what the artists thought about how the work could be created together.

From the perspective of an outsider looking in there could appear to be a conflict of interest. As an authority it could be perceived that the artists felt obliged to work with me, as are the requirements of the manager in operating an art centre. It was clear from the consent material given to the artists that this was not the case and my approach in working collaboratively was slowly developed over years. I suspect the artists complied with my request to sign a consent form to appease formal convention. I was continually asking them to sign forms. Ethical protocols that were verbalised and followed with actions were more important for the Tiwi artists in this case. Regardless of my attempts to interrogate my motives as being honorable, I am aware that this is an aspect to working in cross-cultural environments, that I am held accountable to and scrutinised thereby.

Standpoint theory (Griffin 2009; Wood 2008; Edmonds-Cady 2009) is a meaningful methodological tool, it establishes from which point we view the world around us. Situated knowledge suggests the Tiwi artists with whom I am collaborating have considerable insight to offer in our working relationship. Being allowed into this interesting working dynamic was for me always a privilege.

Given the project was practice-led, I felt it prudent the practice also be equally led by the Tiwi collaborating artists, always asking them what they felt about the work, was it too light, too dark, was there more input required? I wanted the artists to feel that they had ultimate ownership and authorship and that the intellectual property belonged solely to them. This stronger sense of objectivity supported the desired input from the Tiwi artists in the project. I invited them to participate in the project; however they allowed me significant insight into their lives and culture. It was only right that cultural and intellectual ownership of the work belonged to the Tiwi artists. When informed of this, the artists seemed to enjoy being acknowledged. Their interest seemed to be in standing behind what they contributed to the collaborative act. They mentioned to me if the
works were sold that we would be equal partners to this end. From the outset the collaborating artists viewed the working together as a partnership, a 50/50 affair. I informed them that all the proceeds of any sales would go to them less the expenses outlaid by me for framing and materials.

Not unlike Feminist Standpoint Theory (Harding 1987; Rolin 2009) Indigenous Standpoint theory (Moreton-Robinson 2013) embraces the life’s lessons one brings with them to the research. The acknowledgement of cultural obligations, filial piety, historical and political contexts talk to the concept of collective consciousness rather than simply individual personal experience. Indigenous ontologies (ways of being), epistemologies (ways of knowing) and axiologies (ways of doing) were of essential theoretical and practical importance when engaging in the project. An abiding respect for these foundational and situated knowledges was vital to working in an ethical way. Recognising that Indigenous ontologies or ways of being include ancestral connections, existent prior to colonisation, was highly relevant. The elemental activities, animals, plants, seasons and the ensuing responsibility in caring for country and maintaining the connection as an important lived reality for Indigenous peoples, are integrated as an intrinsic part of the methodology.

I approached this research with some understanding of Tiwi creation mythology and this meant some common ground could be discussed. This demonstrated that I was willing to learn about ‘Culture’. Ways of being inform ways of knowing and resultant actions... ways of doing. Mindful of the unique perspective offered by the Tiwi artists, the knowledge we would gather together became situated in a liminal space between the academy and the Tiwi community. This space emerged from a willingness to work with each other, to see another as contributing to the weaving of new narratives together was a readily embraced concept by the Tiwi cohort.

The willingness to engage in this way is part of the Tiwi character; as they are openhearted and gregarious by nature. These qualities were met with my own eagerness for us to work in this way together. A playful and innocent exuberance characterised the working environment. This space was wedged between the known and unknown and expressed itself with an ease and comfort that
seemed to take on a character all of its own. The Tiwi cohort seemed to navigate through this terrain without issue... it was something that I had to understand. Without the role of working in community and in this manner, the unique position and subsequent developing relationships would not have been formed. A theory of relatedness became critical in the expression of how our intimate working relationships operated. In many ways, I was the marginalised ‘Other’. Initially, I certainly approached my work in this way.

The initial scope of the project was to include artists from a broader demographic, however this original research paradigm, although ambitious, became problematic. Competing priorities within the group, both political and careerist became evident with the intended cohort. It had been my intention to enlist a cohort of collaborative co-creative spirits with whom I had worked, both personally and professionally over the past decade. Given this was an overambitious undertaking it became a prudent and practical alternative to centre this research work with the Tiwi artists.

How successful this project has been will be measured by the critique of the works that will be shown together in an exhibition. Naturally, the exegesis attempts to answer this question; however this space is also an alternative site from the initial collaborative event. The exhibition is a post-performance space that seeks to be essentially a ‘repeat performance’. Through the works being made available to the public, a retelling of the research story as ceremony is made manifest.

The viewer is seen as collaborating in the process. This completes the research cycle where it continues to resonate through the telling and retelling over time as is indicative and symbolic of Indigenous research methods. Artist and academic Robyn Stewart (2010, p. 123) speaks of creating new stories for praxis that mirror the alternative site, that is the exhibition environment and through this work I also seek to demonstrate an alternative site where new stories told together can exist not simply side by side but appear as woven together throughout the narrative to become “a place of hybrid practices that crossed cultural boundaries of language, visual codes, currency conversions and national customs”. Hence, it is anticipated that the major contribution to learning from this
research is the methodology employed. In this project I refer to non-Indigenous researchers using Indigenous research methodologies. In trying to answer this, searching for what was appropriate and what were the subsequent implications, meant the research only began when a suitable methodology and underpinning theories were discovered and employed in the project. At first, I felt excluded from being able to use an Indigenous methodology. Although I understood the principles that operate in this regard, I thought that this domain was in fact to be deemed ‘taboo’, inappropriate. Initially, I thought my whiteness had excluded me due to the very blindness that privilege determines in ‘Othering’ and retaining the dominant discourse. This viewpoint became nuanced through the research experience.

I had adapted many of the underlying principles of Indigenous research methodologies - respect (Moreton-Robinson 2013; Fredericks 2006; Brown 2012), deep listening (Hamm 2009), acknowledging kinship obligations (Smith 2001; Louis-Pualani 2007), understanding genealogical avoidance relationships (Sefa Dei, Hall & Rosenberg 2000), reciprocity (Martin 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2013), the circular and cyclical nature of time (Running Wolf, & Rickard, 2003; Holmes 2000), these principles were learned and experienced living in community. When the means of western academic traditions were employed, it appeared this aspect to the research was somehow suspect and not considered to be a wholly valid method; paradoxically, for a non-Indigenous research student.

By attempting to utilise Indigenous research methodologies, the tendency to validate methodologies in terms of academic convention was to be examined. To observe without intentions to classify meant that experience could be gained, reflected upon and shared as knowledge. This produced the need to develop inquiry-based skills exemplifying a thoughtful and considered balance. This approach was mitigated through a deep self-reflexivity toward ontologies and epistemologies that attempted to find a link between Indigenous and non-Indigenous research methods. As Kovach (2009, p. 171) explains, the non-Indigenous researcher should be “intellectually open and familiar with Indigenous knowledges (as a way of knowing distinct from thought)”. In my own attempt in
finding a voice through which I could clearly communicate ethical research findings, the initial stages of the project elicited ‘messy research’. Denzin & Lincoln (2005 p.1121) highlight that, “Experimental messy, layered poetic and performance texts are beginning to appear in journals and on conference podiums”. Both these perspectives have helped inform this work.

Oftentimes this type of research is difficult to assess and translate by traditional scholarly methods. . Multiple voices and locations, in short, research that appeared to be stylistically chaotic, did not produce a cogent and integrated nor balanced treatise pertaining to the research question. The end product of the research findings for the reader could be perceived as simply exploitative, whilst making apologies for one’s white privilege. There was a danger of paternalist benevolence overriding the aims of this work.

As you read this exegesis and consider my work please understand I was perceived as an outsider looking in. I inhabited a unique position of also being an ‘insider’ looking ‘upon.’ This position necessitated the sustained process of looking ‘within’ to see ‘without’. The Tiwi community had taken me into the fold, albeit on their terms.

On the other hand, when inhabiting the world of academic rigour I was unsure of how to negotiate this terrain. What voice? Whose voice? I could not talk on behalf of ‘Another,’ I had to clearly state my position. When viewed through the lens of the visual artist with a penchant for the poetic, it seemed a compassionate and well-meaning approach best suited to working with others. The aim was to include rather than exclude. What would appear to be celebrated today as the ‘cult of the individual’ is as Helene Cixous (1994, p. 16) intimates, “the infinite domain of the human subject, which is, of course the primary territory of every artist and every creature blessed with the difficult happiness of being alive”. I tried to balance this personal and public domain.

Whilst I had invited the artists to engage with me in the project it became clear I was invited into their daily existence, ‘on country’, living as an esteemed and welcome family member within the
Tiwi community. The requirement to create two distinct phases in the project became apparent. Any suggestions that the Tiwi cohort were simply engaging with my designs and that I was not engaging with theirs would be explored through these two phases that drove the overall research. This created much anxiety. To seek input based on foundation designs, sympathetic to the collaborating artist’s oeuvre was, I felt, respectful.

To act in any way other than the collaborating artist knowing in advance what they were engaging with, and contributing to, was, disconcerting for me. Of consideration was that I engage with Tiwi designs similarly as I had invited the artists to do with my work. This entanglement felt contentious and corresponded to everything I was at pains to avoid and distance myself from, as being less than ethical. How could this dichotomy be reconciled?

After a deeply reflective period, I felt that working in this manner could be beneficial to the project if I had the approval of the artists. This second Phase, Post-Intervention, would now symbolically represent or re-create the ascendancy of another’s culture. As mirrored in the delineating interventionist phases 1 and 2, the Tiwi cohort agreed that this would be ok. As I had explained my misgivings in working this way, the artists, because they were consulted as to my initial concerns and ensuing fears of what this represented, agreed that they could work this way. An ethical research protocol was established through ongoing and sustained dialogue throughout the project. In consulting with the artists each step of the way as to what I thought the work was about, they became informed as to my aspirations for the work. Mostly they made no comment about inherent themes in the work although they understood that these themes were important to us all. The artists acknowledged that I was directing the project and happily obliged. Phase 1 of the project Intervention has represented what I initially brought to the artists to engage with. In establishing a polarised environment; Stronger Futures (Phase 2), where a seemingly conflicted binary execution of artworks occurred, I felt this may well elicit new knowledge about something we already knew much about from daily interactions.
1.5  Weaving Ethics

To use the metaphor of weaving, collaboration is analogous to the warp and weft of the loom. Woven together they make the object stronger, through multiple repetitive actions. The process is exacting; the yarn maintains an order so that the pattern emerges. Through much preparation and process, a resolved unified work is created. A vision materialises witnessing the weaver dedicated to the outcome of producing that which is woven.

At a personal level, I have been afforded much grace and forgiven my all-pervading ignorance by numerous Indigenous brothers and sisters. I feel privileged in being accorded this respect. Reciprocity and consideration is vital in experiencing this ‘common ground’. Kindness includes, as Maura Reilly (2011, p. 2) explains further, an ethical role each stakeholder in the art world should foster so as to ensure that, “if not the past, then our present and future are more inclusive than exclusive”. Implications arising from the research, for other research students and the real contributions to new knowledge, focus on non-Indigenous researchers using Indigenous research methodologies.

Deeper thinking about one’s ancestral origins and our relationship to all time; past, present and future, indicated where I was culturally orientated. When compared to the oldest living cultural tradition, my personal genealogical history certainly required some thought. This contemplation usually became unsavoury when viewed through the lens of colonisation.

Where Indigenous wisdom acknowledges care for country the emergence of offshoot movements such as Occupy and Idle No More, speak for a growing resistance to major capitalist enterprise and the oppression of all but the very ruling elite whose insatiable appetite to consume the planet’s resources persists. However today, this wantonness no longer goes unchallenged. Marginalised First Nations and Indigenous groups understand the struggle to assert their rights to equality. This is an old and often repeated story. The question remains, where are we headed? Native American scholar and activist Leroy Little Bear comments,
When jagged world views collide objectivity is an illusion” and “Colonisation created a fragmentary world view among Aboriginal peoples.
(Leroy Little Bear 2000, p. 84)

I hoped that processes explored in ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’ offer the potential to represent Indigenous knowledge production and related methodologies as valid and sustainable forms of research. It would not have been possible for me to work in this way had an Indigenous standpoint not been centrally located in modelling a design that was collaborative.

1.6 All Our Relations

My research was obliged to focus on the rich living source material within my own direct living and working experience on the Tiwi islands. This allowed for more focussed and intimate working relationships to develop over an extended period of time. Immersing myself in island lifestyle, living ‘Tiwi time’ became the norm.

This means things will happen when they happen. I took the opportunity when it presented to be in this space as often as the dictates of my daily responsibilities would permit. The softness of the flora and fauna was juxtaposed by the menace of a three-metre mulga brown snake (highly venomous) that shed its skin annually under my desk in the office. It had been doing this for many years prior to my arrival. I have to date never met this creature in the flesh and its mysterious comings and goings represent some of that which I will never know. The diversity of Tiwi art inspired me to align my own artistic integrity following the Tiwi ethos of proudly representing culture. Rothwell (2013) comments about the Tiwi artistic aesthetic, “It is arcs and flowing dot-mark lines and angles, it portrays the world in patterns and in rhythms, in every bark, and every carved ironwood pole and canvas it asserts itself”.

Working with me was initially a novel experience for the Tiwi artists as the proposition of working together in the studio to produce works collaboratively was untested. We shared a sense of the newness of the association even though, I suspect, as colleagues and friends, this was never directly
discussed. Open dialogue cannot be achieved when a dominant voice exists that does not listen. This does not address the fundamental issues of reconciliation but continues to work from the principle of an, ‘Us versus Them’ paradigm, where one interest inevitably becomes exploited above the other.

A theory of relatedness (Martin, 2009) ensures the intention that one first enters the relationship by ‘coming amongst’ the experience. What also seems to be significant in relationship to one another is the concept of ‘mob’. For Indigenous peoples this is an expression of the collective and one’s innate connection to their group (Board of Studies, NSW, 2010). Imperialist structures have tended to focus on the cult of the individual supporting the maintenance of a difference between the ‘I’ and the ‘We’. Indigenous relatedness is not simply limited to the human element but embraces relatedness and abiding care for plants, climate, animals and skies. That which sustains us, we must also sustain.

Declaring in advance what we were likely to achieve by this associative process appeared counterproductive and would in effect place pressure on the artists, expecting the ability to ‘perform’. Marcia Langton in her essay for the exhibition ‘Roads Cross’ extrapolates,

that the subaltern can speak, and that Australian artists are venturing into a Creole Australia where the non-Indigenous artist is just as likely to be alienated or ‘unhomely’ as the Indigenous artist, and just as concerned to address the transformative power of culture by visual means.

(Langton 2012, p. 15)

Assimilation and its artistic counterpart appropriation, become a morality tale that no longer exists under the surface but screams, ‘I am here. This is now. And WE are deadly’. Without a charter of kindness underlying for the most part do-good intentions, clumsy attempts to reconcile issues of intolerance and apathy perpetuate hurt. The question of addressing a shared past in the current working relations between us can be at least tenuous and at best integrated. As we struggle to take form as a nation, our colonial history still strongly impacts on deeply unexpressed feelings and shifting values that have not fully investigated the dark history we share.
Part 2 of the Intervention, now termed ‘Stronger Futures’ points out the ongoing need for consultation. The research project in this case talks directly to this ongoing process. Repetition is used throughout the project. The two differing foundation designs illustrated below (Figs. 1.8 & 1.9) are repeated in order to make the topic of relatedness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people the subject that is cultural identity. This never ceases. By repeating the designs in different media and with different artists a consistency is maintained within our practice when collaborating.

![Fig. 1.8 Stephen Anderson, Curvilinear Flow, 2009, lino cut, 30 x 30cm](image1)

![Fig. 1.9 Stephen Anderson, Zig Zag Chevron, 2009, lino cut, 30 x 30cm](image2)

We needed to constantly and with sustained vigilance, ensure this active principle was a considered and moderating process with agendas that flowed from discussion rather than predetermined outcomes. How we ‘move alongside’ another in a related way that considers Indigenous research methodologies in this project, exemplifies the inclusive position that speaks to acceptance and forgiveness and invites one in. This is something that is done between us, this is the bridge we walk across together, and this is the bridge we meet in the middle of. This bridge we have built together.

### 1.7 Collaboration and the Self

What is brought to the relationship and in what context both personal and professional, and is there indeed a difference?
Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains how relatedness operates:

One experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory.

(Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 16)

As a consequence from working with others, one gains the insight that the ultimate outcome of collaborative practice is an extended awareness of relation to self. This is what I bring to the collaborative process. A self that is defined through relationship, that is curious to know how we can do this together, how we could relate to each other. The prescriptive or the ‘self-centred’ is supplemented here with a ‘centring of self’, within the construct implied in the research question of our relatedness. It became obvious that an egocentrically located standpoint constantly shifted from insider to outsider when attempting to locate myself as research student.

Vulnerability plays a critical role in effectively working in true collaborative relations. How we engage creatively when creativity is seen as something that has not been made before requires a leap of faith. In not acknowledging this underlying potentially explosive emotional component that is shame, our fears are likely to come upon us when we engage in relationship with one another. If we are not willing to have the courage to meet shame face to face in ourselves, personally each and every single one of us, it is unlikely that we can successfully connect. René Brown (2012) intimates, “We are neurobiologically wired for connection, this is why we are here”. Shame and fear makes us feel we are not worthy of this connection. Brown (2012) comments further when addressing significant issues relevant to our project, “You cannot talk about race without talking about privilege. And when people start talking about privilege, they get paralysed by shame”.

This interrogates the very nature of collaboration, what is it in essence and when does it begin? When working in a cross-cultural environment, Indigenous scholar Karen Martin suggests an alternative site that develops when framing Indigenist research using the “ontological premise of
relatedness”. Martin comments that, “It is another task of the Indigenist researcher to broker spaces beyond research models and methodologies of collaboration and participation as a means to address the inequities of research” (Martin 2008, p. 140). By availing oneself to ‘another’, it becomes vital to become familiar with concepts of reciprocity and relationality. As an ‘outsider’, one must develop the courage to engage with the hurt and resultant trauma as a result of colonisation, to become truly connected with others.

This first chapter asked the question of our relatedness and by agreeing to work together standpoint theory was used as an ethical indicator to subject positions. It was important to see where I was coming from. Where I was going would certainly depend on doing with others.

The literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 is socially situated, and examines some ideas about the reluctance to make this collaborative journey into reconciliation at a personal level on behalf of the larger group. Chapter 2 examines creative collaborative partnerships, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Investigating processes of collaboration demonstrated this is a multifaceted diverse experience and that it is more about being inclusive than exclusive. The idea of ‘inbetweenness’, liminal and third spaces located the research project as transitory, in the process of transformation.

Chapter 3 investigates the subtleties of what constitutes strong collaborative relationships. Indigenous research methodologies are examined and integrated within a qualitative framework that utilises both Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies.

Chapter 4 presents artists who have been formative influences in forging an artistic aesthetic, inclusive of spiritual dimensions and as a reflection on the power art has to bring people closer together. The principles of sacred geometry and some examples of contemporary Indigenous artists who work simultaneously in both ancient and modern modalities, demonstrates ways and means to span the perceived divide that exists between us.
Chapter 5 is a heuristic account of the journey our collaborations negotiated. I wanted to give a sense of how things worked in a relational sense in the studio and simply present the data as a working recording or ‘diary’ about making the works together. It is a less formal approach but I feel a more appropriate and inclusive one, inviting the reader into our shared reality.

Chapters 5 and 6 detail the two distinct practice-based phases of the project and introduce the collaborative works produced together. In a local and global context it is important to introduce the supporting background information that led to the research question...how do we work together in the spirit of relatedness? Chapters 5 and 6 introduce each artist and attempt to integrate the two specific phases of the practice-based collaborations. The illustrations are also delineated as Phase 1 and Phase 2 dictate. The concluding Chapter 7 answers the question initially asked as a hypothesis. A critical examination of whether or not the question can be answered is made.

1.8 Conclusion

I have been working collaboratively with Indigenous people for over a decade and still these feelings of shame and guilt, (most often others’ fearful projections) have threatened the ability for us to walk and work effectively together; not simply as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, but human beings seeking connection. Considering that “Shame is the gremlin that says you are not good enough (Brown, 2012)”, helps to frame the progress of my collaborative work.

This research is an attempt to address this condition of ‘shame’ directly, representing a practical and demonstrable example of how to overcome an immobilising denial that persists in many of our relationships with each other. I assert through this work that addressing these issues, confronting that which is unresolved, is where the healing can begin.

To be truly effective in working relationships with others one must have a functioning and healthy relationship with self. Spiritual development lies at the heart of an ability to grow beyond personal limitations to see the larger picture that is the human condition. Heartfelt exchanges with others are
important if a compassionate worldview is to be considered in what we do and ultimately achieve together. I believe this project can be seen as contributing to new knowledge in a positive way simply because the art projects actually refuse to represent one voice or positioning over another, and maintain that,” as research rules, they also fulfil personal conditions and communal protocols whilst also addressing some requirements of institutional research ethics” (Martin 2008, p. 130). It is controversial territory when one seeks to work collaboratively with First Nations people and attempt to speak with their interests prioritised. “In fully engaging research as dialogic and self-reflexive subject position new relationships of knowledge are also engaged” (Martin 2008, p. 145).

In asking the question of our relatedness a sustained focus on my own motivations to work closely with indigenous people had to be continuously scrutinised. Chapter 1 posits the question of our ability to navigate this terrain together and self-reflexivity became the overarching principle that directed the research enquiry throughout the project. As the project evolved it became clear that in working this way indigenous research methodologies supported the collective sharing of new knowledge arising from the research.

Two distinct designs are introduced to address the dichotomy concerning equitable representation. The circle motif in this context indicates the collective gathering of knowledge where the square motif is aligned with the individual standpoint dialectic. In this way the self is related to the whole and is informed through the relationships developed throughout the collaborative research cycle by individuals working together.
Chapter 2: Considering Collaboration

Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity—between art and politics, past and present, the public and the private—as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation. It is from such narrative positions that the postcolonial prerogative seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension, both within the margins of the nation–space and across boundaries between nations and peoples.

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 175)

In building a bridge together to traverse this complex ground, Bhabha suggests this divide can be spanned by moving into and across this space through the realisation and in the telling of stories affirming a collective ownership of shared experience. To review literature to accompany an artist’s audit of work that follows similar paths to mine, it has been necessary to research current Indigenous research methodologies and artistic practice that is collaborative.

2.1 Introduction

Firstly, I introduce the literature pertaining to artistic collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This also looks at how colonisation has been represented from both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous artistic viewpoint. Within this I reflect in part on how this relates to my project with Tiwi artists. Secondly, I describe and analyse International and Australian collaborative relationships and how these perspectives have strongly influenced my practice and helped develop thinking in this area. Whilst attempting to reconcile my own standpoint regarding the marginalization of Indigenous people in Australia it became necessary to establish common ground represented by the artworks that were made collaboratively. This chapter highlights influences on how I approached the work. Accordingly, Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) contend that we inhabit the eighth historical moment in qualitative research. This genre entitled ‘Fractured Future’, confronts a methodological backlash where the burgeoning field of practice based and led research methodologies emerge. A space where non-Indigenous researchers employ Indigenous research methodologies enters a pragmatic domain where considered, inclusive and ethical research
gathering exists. Messy, uncertain, multi-voiced texts and more reflexive forms of fieldwork elicit nuanced data and ask that “social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom and community” (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 3).

2.2 Collaboration: Liminal Space and Inalienable rights

This project asserts that individuals can contribute to repairing the damage in race relations in this country. Artists tend to dream large and this project affirms that a change in relations toward one of mutual respect is possible. Tamara Ho’okahi, wife of the late Hawaiian Kahuna Abraham Kawaii, talking about personal transformation considered,

When one makes expanded, compassionate statements, they open the doors of possibility not only for themselves but for the listener as well. With a modicum of respect for the other, all will gain excitement in looking for a possible solution. There is nothing so rewarding as cooperating on an ‘impossible’ situation and coming up with solutions.

(Personal communication, Nua Pau Olohe, Kailua, Hawaii, July 2009)

A new possibility emerges here where an alternative site is explored that confronts difficulties to be overcome. This third space is one where fears are faced, where personal boundaries are tested and in my case, remodeled. A three step methodology is introduced here - Placement, Refinement, Flight. Firstly one should be grounded or at a minimum committed to see where one is situated. Secondly this subject position can be refined toward becoming the final expression that is open to the transformative aspect of relationship.

The positioning of oneself in another’s skin is a physical impossibility, to walk another’s path also a somewhat misleading metaphor in an attempt to fully understand another’s reality. The painting below (Fig. 2.1) affirms one’s markings are codified and unique however this patterning illustrates a dialogue that represents a superficial entry over the initial foundation design. This independent work was produced whilst the collaborative works were also being performed and this painting
attempts to resolve questions of authenticity. In making this supplementary piece I was able to symbolically revisit Australia’s colonial origins. Invaded by text the design is superimposed over the original markings in an attempt to be more than it is. An implied invasive intervention exists. The text 'bbcc' is the abbreviation ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’, a semiotic graft upon the original and underlying pattern.

Fig. 2.1 Stephen Anderson, Impossible Skin, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 80cm

Positive affirmations and boundless potentialities are not intended motherhood statements but the logic underpinning the project and resultant research. How humanity arrives at this point is dependent on the choices individuals make. Meaningful collaboration is a real possibility given the
commitment to such enterprise now being undertaken on a global scale. Uniquely positioned, it is my privilege to undertake this process as is indicated in the project title. To better understand artistic collaborations it is essential to look at other ways this has been done. Conceptual and performance artists from the 1970s onwards sought new ways to express their concerns through collaborative endeavor. Performing collaborative actions together builds trust.

In reference to the iconic artistic collaborating couple Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) and Marina Abramovic, Green indicates that interrelationships are not devoid of drama and it is through these engagements that the audiences become voyeurs through viewing and inadvertently participating in the performance. The viewer establishes a third space as witness to the event.

Eliminating boundaries is not the same as eliminating difference. It implies travel and translation, not loss. Collaborative practice, and the specific demands and implications of performances that resembled ordeals, meant that there was considerable ambiguity around the edge of the personal and possible. (Green, 2001 p. 181)

The third space alluded to here by Green is specific to a ‘back to back’ comingling of individuals coming together as one, respectfully acknowledged by a sense of the virtue of belonging. Liminal space, or the space between spaces, was represented by a third transformative space in the performative aspect of collaborative relationships. In the project we meet face to face and walk hand in hand through the issues of relatedness. This is an unavoidable familiarity where back to back is united and facing outward and face-to-face represents the journey within where intimacy abides. Green (2001 p. 113) further states that, “Collaboration facilitated this reorientation and disorientation of self”.

The boundaries of relationship cannot be fully explored unless each collaborator is willing to make a commitment to the other. In so doing one must enter a new space that allows others in. This process can oftentimes be compared to a newborn ‘wobbly pony’ where balance and assurance
underfoot is as yet undetermined.

How to equally and effectively contribute when working collaboratively was always of concern in this project. I did not want to appear as the dominant contributor in any role artistically and tended to underplay my creative input when it came to mark making. Naturally the initial idea to work collaboratively was mine; however it was and continues to be a priority to encourage the Indigenous voice to be resoundingly affirmative in the ‘look’ of the picture.

Husband and wife environmental artists working collaboratively in the 1970s give another perspective. Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison (cited in Green 2001, p. 113) comment, “Much of our work...has no signature ... in fact, the larger the idea, the greater the anonymity”.

The artworks produced together have an undeniable Tiwi content. It was my intention to take a back seat in this regard. I explain where my input was in the work in subsequent chapters and attempt not to hide behind the Indigenous collaborating artist but to respectfully represent the cultural criterion of the Tiwi cohort. I am present in the work and we produce these works together.

Throughout the project a prescriptive third space becomes a meeting place where deeper relationships weave insight into the works made together. This is an intimate space. A space that is cherished and protected. The Tiwi artists are bound to faithfully represent their culture as is demanded by tradition through the interpretation of ancestral stories. There appears no slippage through translating the Tiwi artistic content in the work through collaboration. This process creates new narratives that speak to perceptions of what it is to live in the world today.

The conventional significance of metaphor, symbology and iconography employed by artists, in this case, the bridge, can be considered the “axioms of postmodernist art, - irony, double coding, allegorical fragmentation” (Green 2001, p. 117).
If images can be “read as texts”, what are we attempting to conserve or maintain between us? Mindful of the preservation and maintenance of Indigenous culture as vital, it appears cross-cultural artistic collaboration in this context, or how culture is shared, is where the contention begins. Maintaining an inclusive approach to collaboration, where should this new hybridised visual aesthetic be located? What would this artwork look like? If we dispense with memory, a non-objective rendering in reference to subject matter, one may bypass the corporeal and enter the realm of the psycho-spiritual. Green (2001, p. 173) maintains, “The mechanisms for adjudicating the importance of such collaboratively produced works is additionally complex”.

Dislocated and unsettled, an invader psychology has in the past harmed colonised subjects. A kind of ‘ghost image’ emerges from this shadowy third space, where real hurt and ‘phantom pain’ resides. This is what Indigenous curator and producer Hetti Perkins (2003, p103) refers to as a “hidden undercurrent of dialogue between artists and cultures”.

Well-known examples of two very different artists who critique colonial myths through their artwork are non-Indigenous modernist artist, Russell Drysdale and a postmodern Indigenous artist Daniel Boyd. Both artists depict the settler and the settled as unsettling subject matter that speaks directly of colonisation and the dispossession of Indigenous people’s sovereignty in an attempt to disrupt the planet’s oldest living continuous culture. Drysdale’s (Fig. 2.2) depiction of assimilationist themes as represented by an Indigenous family going shopping juxtaposes with Boyd’s (Fig. 2.3) depiction of Cook as pirate and plunderer. Both artists are relating the same tale, Dispossession.
We undertook a leap of faith, unsure where a drawing would ultimately end but we commenced a graphic dialogue through mark making. This was a to and fro process that employed mostly similar media to convey an aligned artistic statement, where individuality took a back seat to a resolved artwork made by artists working collaboratively. Collaborating artist couples Christo and Jean–Claude and Gilbert and George introduce the concept of the performative, which represents a “transition from traditional artistic identity to the identification of the collaboration itself as the artwork,” (Green, 2001 p. 125).

The concept of the performative is crucial in this project. Practice-led creative research implies development, a seeking and finding where the process “inaugurates movement and transformation” (Haseman, 2010, p. 150). The research is also action-based; where the collaborative act can be seen as symbolically reconciling the image or picture plane through the relatedness of working together to produce an artwork. Multiple methods inform social enquiry that reflects protocols and procedures dependent upon developing working relationships. From the outset of the project the topic of the artwork acting in this way was discussed in detail with the artists. Through sustained consultative dialogue, broached in an informal way, the potential of working together could in fact be realised. The enquiry cycle being wholly self-reflective necessitated a sustained re-evaluation of intentions regarding working collaboratively with Indigenous artists. Actions followed by deeper contemplations, realised progressive insight when discussing with the artists how they felt the work
was progressing. Seldom, at this stage, were any changes recommended by the artists.

Given the performative nature of the collaborative process, recording and documentation became an important aspect in detailing the creative process and producing a record of the event. As with Christo’s wrapping of a girl in plastic in 1963 (Fig. 2.4) or Gilbert and George’s endurance based ‘living sculpture’ performance (Fig. 2.5), these artworks are ephemeral. The artwork itself is impermanent, making for the documentation process as being the artistic material or evidence of the ‘happening’, where photos are seen as “no more than compensation for the project’s transience” (Green 2001, p. 136).

Although the outcome of the cross-cultural collaborative actions in this project has finished artwork as evidence, it is necessary to document the progress or evolution of the stages to gauge the lived ‘call and response’ process that existed over a sustained period of time in the making of the work. Throughout the project I documented the development of each collaboration. Most major changes and interventions within each piece were recorded. Photographs and video detailed each progressive step in our working relationship from initial design concept, until a final resolution of the artwork produced together.
Christo commented that in what he and other artists had in common, “The important thing was not that there would be some permanent object, but that there was another dimension that needed to be experienced” (Grosz cited in Green, 2001 p. 13). Similarly the documentation of the developing artistic process illustrates the physical acknowledgement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists “coming amongst” and “moving alongside” (Martin 2008, p. 138) one another to produce artworks together. In this sense ‘evidence’ is produced that demonstrates the collaborating artists are working together in an attempt to respectfully acknowledge each other in this unique relationship.

Whilst referencing Gilbert and George as living sculptures, Green (2001, p148) makes the point regarding collaboration as similarly self-reflexive and comments, “This is crucial: An initial performative gesture by artists – calling themselves an artistic collaboration – created a new artistic identity”.

The identity forged through collaboration with the Tiwi artists is akin to this process. Our separate identities are maintained, however a convergence occurs, aligning sensibilities that integrate our respective presences at the time of working together. Representational priorities are aligned in both the performance and the narrative elements to the work. The idea of Unity and working together, where historically, relations have been mostly strained, or at a minimum, have occurred on the periphery of society and have tended to be a contemporary phenomenon, motivated in part by a, “redemptive feel–goodism”(Sutton, 2009, p159).

One must be mindful that our audience will also inhabit this alternative site or third space that is the exhibition environment; and it is possible personal emotions could surface. As collaborating artists such as Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) and Marina Abramovic discovered in their series of relational collaborative performance works, a polarised social environment where tension between performers exists questions notions of personal space where subjective individual experience exists (Green, 2001).

Relative to cross-cultural relations stemming from our project, personal experiences pertaining to
guilt, shame, privilege and systemic long-term denial, are likely to be experienced by the viewer. Personally working in this way, created an underlying ‘Othering’, inherent in my own relational aesthetic. As with Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) and Marina Abramovic, I agree, “their collaborative teamwork was part of a radical redefinition of the edges of self” (Green, 2001, p. 157). The viewer is asked to participate in sharing that which is produced co-creatively. Participant observation establishes subsequent role-playing strategies that questions identity and in this case cultural ownership. Survival amidst extreme adversity has necessitated the art of resistance for Indigenous people. To comply with my request to work collaboratively, suggests a willingness to walk this road together.

Is working with others truly beneficial to either party or more so one over the other? The subtleties persist. If nothing else, the concept of collaboration asks us to look at specific origins, where we begin to work together to achieve our aim or intended goals. There also exists the by-product of collaboration that creates yet more evolving relationships, some negative, some positive. Brown (2012) comments further on exposing oneself to one’s fears, suggesting, “Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change”.

Again, aligned with the sensibilities of Ulay and Marina Abramovic, the work on Tiwi progressed as, “something beyond communication: non-material, non-verbal, pre-rational perception (Green 2001, p. 161)”. Having established working relationships with the Tiwi cohort facilitated similar working environments to Ulay and Marina. This atmosphere I had rarely encountered when working with others. It had, up until this point, usually been about ‘one-up-man-ship’ where professional artists compete for prize money, funding and gallery representation in an attempt to secure market share for their work. The question whether competition drives progression better than cooperation is investigated by Baumard et al (2013, p. 68) who conclude that the mutualistic approach “provides a possible explanation for the evolution of morality”. If two artists are exhibiting in a city simultaneously there exists the dichotomy for the viewing public visiting the work and making a comparison as to the merits of whose work is more appealing (Jones 2010). In this way the artist
competes for the attention of his or her respective audience.

2.3 Intercultural Artistic Collaboration: Homelands

My own experience in working collaboratively with Indigenous artists began whilst facilitating printmaking workshops in Lockhart River, Far North Queensland. I worked with art centre artists and both primary and secondary school students. Artistic practice in this community consisted of a strong carving tradition. This formative process assisted my ability to develop a working methodology for the translation of artwork into limited edition lino-block prints. In consulting the artists as to the size, orientation, use of colour and materials to be used, a reciprocal arrangement was created to best serve a result where I printed the works for the artists.

It became evident that the shared iconography of the zig-zag and curvilinear motif existed between all the practicing artists in this project. This has become my experience in other remote Indigenous communities as I developed further workshop programmes to deliver in other locations. The ability to offer technical assistance and participate in achieving the desired aim on behalf of the artists meant that the artists were ultimately pleased with the outcome of the artworks. This process also informed how I could further explore a two-way exchange when working with other artists.

Indigenous artist and academic Pamela Lofts, talking about the ‘bothways’ learning process in conversation with Bronwyn Fredericks (2009, p. 3) explains, “this allows me to create alternative story sites for identity and displacement, histories, sense of place and the effects of colonisation”. By using both Aboriginal and Western teaching and learning practices, new narratives are established that are respectful of difference. Where an acceptance of uniqueness exists, contributions can be made where one offering is not privileged over another. Fredericks (2009, p. 3), comments further on this extremely powerful sharing approach, “I am able to inform processes and techniques to position visual art as an educational experience and as a tool for healing, for both myself and others”.

Lofts, in finding a third space inclusive of both Western and Indigenous ontologies and
epistemologies, similarly acknowledges the opportunity to repair a divided and formerly unwelcoming approach; substituting inclusive methodologies that work in collaborative ventures. Neo-narratives in this case support reciprocity and receptivity where dialogue begins with recognition of another's equally significant contribution. Two-ways learning methods underpin much of the intercultural working relationships developed in the Northern Territory between black and white artists. Similarly the ability to listen deeply and share in moments of silence is a valid alternative site to epistemologies traditionally associated with Western scientific models. In borrowing from each other with informed and agreed consent and participation in weaving alternative new stories together, fears of appropriation are minimised.

Collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists is no new phenomenon. Perhaps the most notable forerunners being Albert Namatjira and Rex Battarbee, Tim Johnson and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Yolngu artist Johnny Bulun Bulun and Chinese-Australian artist Zhou Xiaoping, Rob Brown and Dion Beasley, Jonathon Kimberly and Ngipi Ward. These examples highlight collaborative efforts located in the Northern Territory. Examining these artists and their work has informed my work with the Tiwi artists.

One of the earliest collaborations between Albert Namatjira and Rex Battarbee engaged openly, making works ‘plein air’ in Central Australia. Rex taught Albert how to craft a watercolour in a Western tradition (Fig. 2.6).

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3 The act of painting outdoors in natural light.
The student surpassed the master in both reputation and skill as an artist. No doubt Battarbee in this exchange was allowed to paint the landscape of Albert’s country with him. Battarbee shared the skill of watercolour painting with Namatjira that evolved from Albert’s making of traditional carved objects to his facility as one of Australia’s most gifted watercolour artists. The two men would paint together the picturesque landscapes of the central desert. Writer and director of the Namatjira project, Scott Rankin (2013) comments on Albert Namatjira’s friendship with Rex Battarbee - the man who taught him to paint,

Here we had two vibrant traditions, each with their strengths, each able to appreciate, learn from, enjoy and support the other, while respectfully leaving alone – until asked – those things that are of a private cultural and spiritual realm. There is something of this story that speaks to the heart of the Australian community, from the heart of the desert.

Creating artworks in a western idiom legitimized Namatjira’s work at a time when assimilationist practices were commonplace. In many ways Albert was exploited and held up as an example as a model citizen worthy of the privileges that white society provided. Albert Namatjira is seen as Australia’s first famous Indigenous artist. Equally he was the first to be exploited and again alienated by his own people as crossing over to the ‘white side’ became evident, as his commodification as a token Aboriginal novelty was manifest. Celebrated for his ability as an artist, Namatjira’s rock star status and subsequent fall from grace was emblematic of the two very different social landscapes.
existent in black and white Australia in the 1950s (Kleinert 2000).

A most notable earlier intercultural artistic collaboration such as in (Fig. 2.7) was between Michael Jagamarra Nelson and Tim Johnston. The works produced collaboratively received critique ranging from the exploitative to the pure of heart in questioning Johnston’s intention. Johnston recalled in an interview with Richard McMillan:

> Essentially, I was interested in painting, the thing I’d been doing for years—buying canvas, stretching it up, and painting for days on end. But here it was happening in another world, another era, and the paintings were like nothing I’d ever seen. The artists’ approach to materials was totally devoted, in that every bit of paint was manipulated with love and care — and with awe. The approach to materials was perfect. Paintbrushes were treated like delicate objects; paints were used with a precision and delicacy I’d never seen before. This attitude the artists had to the materials leads to a really refined level of control. (McMillan 1990, p. 21)

Johnston’s impressions of the Papunya Tula men’s work indicate a devotion to materials and methods that bespeak serious intent and purpose in representing their visual stories. My experience sees the artist always taking time to prepare their painting space, be it to sit on a piece of cardboard in the shade or the focussed and concentrated preparation of working materials. When the work begins a serious mood pervades and it is understood culture is being performed. Once this seriousness of intention is acknowledged within the group, a light-hearted atmosphere then prevails. This is a sacred space.
Postmodernist painter Imants Tillers used a vastly different approach than Tim Johnston when working with Michael Jagamarra Nelson as represented in (Fig. 2.8).
The relationship raised controversy, giving rise to issues of appropriation or what Nelson termed, ‘cultural theft’. The very integrity of the relationships in working with non-Indigenous artists was compromised when Tillers appropriated the artist’s work ‘Five Dreamings’, without permission. This created for Tillers the obligation to acknowledge a source where true origins place authenticity as vital in the process of collaboration. Jagamara appropriated back his motifs from Nine Shots in a body of work exhibited in the third Asia Pacific Triennial in 1999. The artists agreed to collaborate further and added layers to each other’s works as long as Jagamara was given first and last say in the collaborative process.
Green (2004, pp. 606-7) also an artist who works collaboratively, comments of the liaison between Nelson and Tillers that both collaborating artists maintained their respective styles ensuring an equitable exchange that oddly became, “self-defeating because it is over-fastidious in its preservation of cultural difference”.

Tillers is collaborating always with the idea that the sentiment is perceived to be a focus on and with Latvian diaspora. This is a shared experience where the alienated are kindred, the dispossessed have something to rail against. The unsettled settler is, in reference to Tillers, a personal ascription that is not necessarily understood by his Indigenous collaborators. He is nonetheless indulged and identified as a willing participant in the history of Indigenous Australia and what that means moving forward in the 21st century in a post-colonial context.

The controversial collaborative event staged by Nelson and Tillers continues to engage an audience more receptive to the pairing of oftentimes-disparate elements. Drill Hall Gallery at the Australian National University held an exhibition curated by Michael Eather, Imants Tillers and Nancy Sever in 2012 titled, ‘The Loaded Ground: Michael Nelson Jagamara & Imants Tillers’. The exhibition highlighted issues pertaining to cultural and intellectual property (Australian National University 2012). Tillers was held accountable by artists, curators and critics as to his motivation in working this way. His apparent disregard for Indigenous cultural protocol necessitated a renegotiation of how the artists could work together in an ethical way.

Tillers, being the outsider is identifying with subject matter that is perceived as alien or at a minimum not understood. He further investigates the idea that separation unites. Here, Tillers misinterpreted the notion of collaboration and learned a valuable lesson in belonging, or what belongs to whom. Similarly, my experience was to be forgiven for my ignorance in matters of cultural hierarchy and ownership of work and what was and continues to be appropriate. Nelson took the opportunity to educate Tillers in the regulation of outsiders and how one in fact engages respectfully when working collaboratively.
In reviewing artistic collaborations, it is clear this field is troubling simply because it is contested terrain not from within the field but from without. Collaborative actions in cross-cultural environments are often deemed suspect because in helping each other to make the artistic statement, it is seen as lesser because each contributor’s ideas can be perceived as singularly weaker, initially somehow devoid of equal artistic sentiment and visual impact. This may be a perspective the viewer holds because the viewer is attendant or subject to, that which is performed. Indigenous and non-Indigenous artistic collaborative endeavour continues to evolve. Creative forces and receptive energies coalesce in what seems to be an enduring fascination in the potential of meeting each other as truly ‘Another’ (Green 2001, p. 125).

2.4 The Relational and Subject Position: ‘ Appropriately After’

Indigenous artists are not ‘victims’ to appropriation. Depictions of appropriated subject matter in Yolgnu Bark paintings by contemporary non-Indigenous artist Lucas Grogan (McLean 2013), demonstrated a lack of respect for others including a blatant disregard and failure to formally acknowledge the source material that informs the work in this case. This effort did not go unnoticed; the artist retreated after much criticism from Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists for his inappropriate depiction of Indigenous culture and its people (McLean 2013, p. 23).

Similarly, a non-Indigenous artist depicting Tiwi culture in an exhibition of artworks, in a seemingly derogatory light, was cancelled shortly after opening. In both cases, Indigenous arts groups brought the artwork’s intent into question (McLean 2013, p21). Disappointment in not being consulted as to the visual content of the works on view was the first response by the Indigenous artists. Not being consulted nor included in the process was seen to deny Indigenous voice and vision and were not tolerated.

These issues clearly demonstrate the requirement of full disclosure. It is possible in the project ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’, to enter the more pragmatic domain of poetic appropriation where Ian McLean suggests that,
Poetic appropriation is quite different. It does not use images without the owner’s permission and often for an unexpected purpose, but its practice descends from hermeneutics (from Hermes, the ancient Greek messenger of the gods): the ancient art of interpreting the world’s speech. Its methods derive from theories of mimesis and simulation that can be traced well beyond Plato to shamanistic practices of form shifting – of becoming animal through the use of the dance, painting and masks that mimic the animal in question. To dismiss poetic appropriation as theft is to miss its purpose. (McLean 2013, p. 18)

To identify with shamanic practices may be perceived as a valid pathway, akin to walking in ‘another’s shoes’. At a deeper level I consider I am walking two worlds simultaneously. Prejudice and polarised marginal opinion negates potential for developing a bipartisan approach in working together.

This is the very fertile ground, or field of ‘poetic appropriation’ alluded to by McLean (2013, p. 18). In essence, the space McLean hints at as being open for engaging with, I seek to inhabit. Who in fact owns what part of the artwork when the making is done with full commitment and consent by the collaborating artists? For me the most effective result of such endeavour is when this exchange is easy-going and the finished artwork documents the subtle interplay of the creative process. This is a space where a meeting of hearts, minds and spirits has taken place.

I consider this approach to be a humble and most sincere action, akin to prayer or at a minimum, the meditative process. I make the point that, such is the genuineness required before any true intent in working together can occur. In this project a deep contemplation was necessary and undertaken prior, during and post creative activity. It is not always the case that artists work in a disparate manner struggling to reconcile the image isolated in their studios. In creating a work that is both pleasing to the collaborating artists and the audience, the research cycle becomes an inclusive process, a process that is progressive and one that embodies the ceremonial.

The re-evaluation of personal identity for the non-Indigenous artist by acknowledging Indigenous
sovereignty can be deeply cathartic. When working in this environment there is no hiding place in another’s country. Feelings of insider/outsider can be all pervading and notions of homelands are irrevocably changed when extended time is experienced in remote Indigenous communities.

Jonathon Kimberley has worked with a variety of Indigenous artists collaboratively. In establishing the Warmun Art Centre at Turkey Creek, he developed trust and enduring friendships with the artists over an extended period of time, the results of which can be seen in Figure 2.9. The collaborating non-Indigenous participant is in this case open to the journey such experience will take him on. There is much to share and in allowing oneself to be drawn into the process, being invited in, a certain wondrous curiosity ensues. What I personally continued to realise, was that my position as novice meant I could be nurtured and that abiding relationships were necessary. The former Warmun Art centre manager and collaborating non-Indigenous artist comments,

By engaging directly with Indigenous people, through discussion, shared journey and collaboration, in the places in which I am living and painting, I am re-evaluating my non-Indigenous presence and working towards a post-landscape conception of place. (Kimberley cited in Izett 2005, p. 28)

Estimating one’s own artistic merit through self-appraisal had no place in this experience. Strong intention toward the attainment of a completed artwork, knowing oneself in possessing the commitment to see the project through to completion, and an ability to paint were the essential components required. In such intimate settings the outsider becomes insider, extraneous postproduction hyperbole simply drops away in the present tense experience of the ‘making’ together.
A certain status is accorded to the non-Indigenous artist; however, it is the status of a relationship that values a collective identity and also values all that one must learn about the self in relationship to the group experience. Izett (2005 p. 26) offers further insight, stating, “there has been little appreciation of this acculturation as a two way process”.

There is the criticism that the non-Indigenous artist is merely exploiting the collaborating Indigenous artist as a means to better understand personal identity. This statement is valid and can be addressed by making a longstanding commitment to the relationship ensuring trust and ongoing reciprocity is established. Any fears of exploitation are mitigated through a commitment of time. Many Indigenous people continue to inhabit a vastly different social reality to non-Indigenous folk in Australia today. By viewing this relationship and the isolating influence blindness engenders, Indigenous scholar Moreton-Robinson (2004 p. 75) comments that this view of difference helps us to “understand the silence, normativity and invisibility of whiteness and its power with the production of knowledge and representation”.

Indigenous disadvantage is not a choice. It is a state of being, a state that has been ascribed by settler society to a people that inhabited this land prior to colonisation. The concept of time, productivity and capital has meant Indigenous people must compete with mainstream ideology. This reluctant transition is being undertaken at an extremely rapid pace. The lack of historical acknowledgement in proclaiming Australia’s Frontier Wars as fact accurately reflects colonisation being measured by contact and context. As Marie Battiste (2000, p. 58) suggests, “Part of the renewal is understanding the colonisers strategy of Eurocentrism, epistemological diffusionism, and enforcement of differences”. Perhaps some of the successful art collaboration has been the questioning of this. Contemporary artists working closely with Indigenous people in the Northern Territory - Rod Moss, Wayne Eager and Marina Strocchi, Therese Ritchie and Chips Mackinolty acknowledge that “Indigenous artists have influenced how non-Indigenous artists navigate contemporary issues of representation inclusive of ancient knowing systems that assist to inform their practice” (Izett 2005, p. 26).

Indigenous artists operate from a source that is seemingly voluminous and also possesses the dual purpose of reinforcing other relative cultural activities that retell stories significant to the wellbeing of the whole group. The focus of the community rather than simply the individual or what Leroy little Bear (2000, p. 82) calls being “linear and singular, static, and objective” and is something that is reinforced, not challenged but celebrated (Isaacs 2012, p. 22). Both cultural identity and visual story is a personal standpoint and yet simultaneously also cultural capital belonging to the tribal group. This relevance and relatedness is the allure of Indigenous arts methodologies for many western artists.

The influence on these artists is often profound, necessitating a re-evaluation of approach. This transition lies with what is produced performatively; not simply what is taken away and reflected upon. This normally is the role of the viewer; the suggested intention of the artists in producing works together in such an intimate modality is that the audience may well make this journey with them/us, through the symbolic and physical gesture of the collaborative act itself. Central Australian
based non-Indigenous artist Rod Moss regards a major retrospective of his work entitled ‘Anatomy Lesson You.Me.Us.’, exhibited at the Araluen Art Centre in Alice Springs,

For nigh on three decades I’ve been making narrative paintings about my friendships with particular Eastern Arrente families. Such commitment expresses an abiding respect and hunger for human perceptions and experience of this astounding place in which we dwell, to establish a connection to place.
(Moss 2013)

Moss collaborates with the subject matter both off and on the canvas. He is an artist engaged in collaborative pursuits with Indigenous people and friends contributing equally to the artwork by allowing themselves to be painted by him. The subject matter (as in Fig. 2.10) is Moss’s cosmology, the world of relationship where family values extol lasting virtues that accept the good, bad and the ugly, where reciprocity abides. There exists no alienation paranoia in Moss’s works. These works, honed and created over a sustained period of time talk of affection, kindliness and presence.

Fig. 2.10 Rod Moss, Robbie Haye’s Breakfast Camp at Whitegate, 2001, 134 x 1998cm, Public Collection, Araluen Cultural Precinct, Alice Springs, <http://rodmoss.com/gallery/Robbie_hayes_breakfast_camp.htm> viewed 9-1-2014

A more recent and ongoing collaborative project closer to my Tiwi home is ‘Mamana Mamanta’ – ‘Gradual Friendship’ between Dutch born Canberra based glass artist Luna Ryan and Tiwi Design senior artist and master potter Jock Puautjimi as depicted below in Figure 2.11.
Referring to the work Puautjimi and Ryan produced together; Barbara McConchie (2007) suggests it is through creative collaborative partnerships that, awareness can be raised to create an “understanding and appreciation of different people and different views”.

A by-product of this collaboration was the sharing of new approaches to materials, a translation from original clay forms cast in recycled glass. Ceremonial objects (spears, Fighting sticks and Pukumani poles) were transformed into a transparent medium; glass, adding another innovation with regard to the transfer of traditional knowing systems (anecdotal and cosmological creation stories) in a new and formally resolved contemporary medium. As the title of the project ‘Mamana Mamanta- (Gradual Friendship)’ suggests, this relationship developed over almost a ten-year period. It appears that most successful collaborative endeavours are forged during extended periods of time. It has been my experience that exploring artistic working relationships takes time to develop a sense of trust and understanding between artists. The relationship between Ryan and Puautjimi is intimate with regard to the translation of materials and features the faithful translation of the Indigenous artist’s works. They produced the works together to make moulds and Ryan was...
attendant to the successful rendering of Puautjimi’s original idea toward realising the finished product. This could be seen as simply studio assistance, however, in this liaison, there existed hands on approach at every stage of the work’s evolution to produce the final pieces.

Another collaborative association that has been developed over years is the twenty-three year relationship between Australian/Chinese artist Zhou Xiaoping and Johnny Bulun Bulun from Ramingining in Arnhem Land. These two artists shared a deep deference for each other’s need to represent their respective landscapes and country and the resultant works that were shown in 2010 at the Beijing Museum (Ochre and Ink, 2012) are evidence to this longstanding friendship. These works are painted in their own styles and relationally juxtaposed, woven together creating a gentle fit within the foreground of the picture and meeting together in the middle or where the canvas meets edge to edge. Xiaoping positions himself as student, willing to learn from the masterful Bulun Bulun. Similarly the Chinese artist was only too pleased to share his traditional ink on rice paper techniques.

Fig. 2.12 Zhou Xiaoping, How Johnny sees me, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 169 x 265cm, Inc. in Trepang: The Chinese & Maccassan Trade with Aboriginal Australia exhibition, @ Melbourne Museum from 23 July, by permission Curator & Exhibition Coordinator, Sarah Morris, <http://voice.unimelb.edu.au/volume-7/number-7/enduring-friendships-forged-through-trade> viewed 9-1-2014

When entering the academic institution, Zhou Xiaoping was criticised over his depiction of
contemporary Indigenous life. His depictions of daily Indigenous remote community life were deemed ‘caricature’ and received as created in poor taste. This was upsetting for the artist who felt an abiding affinity for the Indigenous people who had welcomed him so warmly into their lives. What had become an annual pilgrimage to spend time with the artist allowed Xiaoping to develop closeness over time that evolved into a friendship, inclusive of the ability to learn and share respectfully together (Ochre and Ink 2012).

There existed a kinship relationship through cultural adoption between Bulun Bulun and Xiaoping represented above in Figure 2.12. When being adopted as a member of an extended family, certain kinship obligations are to be understood. There is sometimes a tendency for outsiders to somehow regulate these types of relationships thereby dismissing their legitimacy, as noted by Professor Marcia Langton in the film, ‘Ochre and Ink’.

The view in white advisor land is that any collaboration between any Indigenous and non-Indigenous artist is somehow suspect. This excluded the Aboriginal from modernity displaying no interest in art but a will to manage natives … being no more than a patrol officer.

(Langton, 2012)

In addition, Rob Brown and Dion Beasley as in (Fig. 2.13), formed an alliance in caricature in a well-resolved suite of lithographs and etchings made at Northern Editions print studio, Charles Darwin University in 2011. The works were evidently easy going and light hearted; a perfect fit in collaboration and a refreshing perspective in what may be considered a challenging environment. Humour, as often is the case, offers an alternative site to conflict. Dion is an Indigenous artist with a disability who lives and works in Tennant Creek. He is well known for his obsession of drawing the many camp dogs that live in his proximity. Both artists are long-term Northern Territory residents.
After a successful exploration into limited edition prints of his dog series, Dion started exploring a wider cosmology, referencing birds and many exotic creatures whose origins came from the African continent. I was fortunate to witness this project develop during extended periods at the Northern Editions printmaking studios at Charles Darwin University. It was suggested by staff at Northern Editions that perhaps Darwin artist Rob Brown could form a collaborative relationship with Dion to expand on his repertoire. An excellent draughtsman, Brown was keen to contribute to the project and assisted in grounding Dion’s fantastical depictions in a space that, although located in the phantasmagorical, also appeared plausible. With the help of veteran printmaking technician Leon Stainer, the trio created works of complexity that maintained an original freshness faithful to the original design intention.

A more contemporary conceptual collaboration can be seen where John Saunders and Anthony Spry (Fig. 2.14) formed an alliance in early 2012. Darwin-born, John’s Indigenous heritage fostered notions of identity using archetypal iconic cartoon imagery. This has antecedents from Warhol and Lichtenstein to contemporary Indigenous activist artist Richard Bells’ satirical take on race relations. Anthony, who was relatively new to Darwin, contributed by distressing the flatness of the posterised images of Saunders. Over the original painting, abstract brush strokes were made to create a veil or skein over the surface. The artists enjoyed working together (personal communication, Saunders...
and found the process helped inform their respective practices through the ability to share ideas and creative strategies. This capacity showed respect.

There have been a number of curated exhibitions that have aimed to encourage cross-cultural collaborative practice. One such showing, entitled ‘Gadawulkwulk means Shelter’ at Cross Arts Projects in 2012 by Barayuwa Mununggurr (as in Fig. 2.15) and Ruark Lewis (Fig. 2.16) bridged the “vastly different heritages and social realities of the art communities of Yirrkala and Sydney” (Holder 2012).

Fig. 2.16 Barayuwa Mununggurr, Mirinyunu at Yarrinya, (4051V), 2011, bark, 57 x 51cm, GADAWULKWULK means SHELTER: Barayuwa Mununggurr and Ruark Lewis - 15 March to 14 April 2012, Presented with Buku-Larrngay Mulka Arts, <http://www.crossart.com.au/index.php/mununggurr-a-lewis.html> viewed 8-1-14

The collaborative nature of the project alluded to the concept of place, and connection to the shared reality of impermanence. Art Historian Ian McLean (2013, p. 17) in locating Lewis as a relational artist, suggests, “It is an attempt to escape the teleology and baggage of Western art through the contingencies of dialogical exchange”.

This physical embodiment can at times be a hostile and alienating encounter. Somewhat esoteric by design, the collaborative aspect to the relationship between the two artists here plays itself out in a psycho spiritual dialogue initiating a poetic and somewhat interchangeable appropriation practice of thinking from both artists. Australian artist, critic and author, Charles Green (2001) and Indian academic Homi K. Bhabha (1994) suggest a third space is created through artistic collaboration. Green (2001 p. 179) states, “Another entity emerges in artistic collaboration, a third artistic identity superimposed over and exceeding the individual artists”.

An example of Indigenous artists from the APY Lands in South Australia demonstrates they are no strangers to artistic collaborations. (Fig. 2.17) a large painting from Tjala art centre artists indicates
the telling of a story about country, on country by countrymen and women.

A somewhat different perspective relating to intercultural artistic exchange could be seen in the exhibition titled ‘Roads Cross - Contemporary Directions in Australian Art’ (2012). This spoke directly to the influence Indigenous and non-Indigenous practicing artists and curators have had on each other over the past thirty years. The exhibition intimated how ‘influence’ is a collaborative act. The sharing of skills and an ability to listen to each other’s stories becomes the direct exchanging of culture.
In his speech for the opening of the ‘Roads Cross’ exhibition of November 2012 titled ‘Surviving Together’ at Charles Darwin University Gallery, Dr. Jack Ah Kit synthesizes how artists collaborated in this time,

Maybe what we have got to, and maybe what this exhibition is telling us is that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists have to survive together, just as the Aboriginal community controlled art centres have survived. And that’s the point. The influences of our people—the Aboriginal nations of Australia—have touched the lives of non-Aboriginal people in ways unimaginable a couple of generations ago. I am proud of the fact that the non-Aboriginal artists represented here have survived through learning and respect, and are more successful artists because of it.

(Ah Kit, 2012)

Curators Salmon and Thwaites, comment in the introduction of the ‘Roads Cross’ exhibition catalogue that “intercultural artistic collaboration can within working contexts, precipitate fresh thinking on many levels: identity, relationship with land and the possibilities of ‘engaged’ representation” (Salmon & Thwaites, 2012, p. 9). They comment further that the exhibition presents the underlying intentions of the artists engaged in working together in this way and explores how “the discourse of colonisation in this context has given way to a relationship of trust, and to the risks as much as the promise that this entails” (Salmon & Thwaites, 2012, p. 10).

What I took from the exhibition was a sense of legitimacy and validation in my collaborative relationships with the Tiwi artists during our project. It was obvious however, that we could critique these works in the context of standing beside each other or in some cases behind or in front of the other. The body of work exhibited in this case becomes the protagonist in the agency of appropriation or, ‘whose culture is whose’?

The question of what is culture is valid at this juncture. The inadvertent and resultant abiding respect reads as a ‘fear’, to engage directly. This trust must be earned ... that old elephant in the room again ... Shame. Something for me was missing; the next step in reconciliation is engagement
‘with’, not simply ‘around’ the issues of our colonial past. Marcia Langton describes this very liminal state quite eloquently in her catalogue essay for the ‘Roads Cross’ exhibition,

There is evidence of a transformation in the paradigm of perceptions, the boundaries of what is permitted to be represented, resulting in a rich hybridisation of experience, perception, theory and practice; a sense of being ‘in between’ belongs as much to those settler Australians who reject the dogma of ‘Terra Nullius’ as it does to Aboriginal people whose legal standing has been liberated from that particular form of racial discrimination. (Langton 2012, p. 12)

It is this ‘inbetweenness’ that I am interested in. This is the bridge to span the divide. It is timely for us to engage more directly with the issues that confront and tend to immobilise us, where fear-based truths of a violent not so distant past indicate an obvious grieving period is required. The call to talk openly and honestly will expose us to this unchartered territory. This work, as the works described above, can be the beginning of addressing the issues that confront us. Different dimensions to lived traumatic experiences from our pasts affect each of us differently. Grief however, is a by-product of trauma and this experience and its resultant qualities are particular to all and exclude no one. Where healing is needed a period to convalesce must also equal the injuries sustained.

Visual artists working in this field have the opportunity and obligation to share a lived experience that is respectful and inclusive of the facts faithful to a mutual and physical authenticity. Langton comments further in her essay,

We can move beyond the discomfort of the narrow confines of ideas such as ‘appropriation’ or ‘influence’ and consider the ways that artists address themselves to other artists and other artworks, and even collaborate with each other. (Langton 2012, p. 13)

The exhibition ‘Roads Cross’ was an alternative site where the influence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists on each other demonstrated that a compassionate concern for ‘Another’ existed.
History may well judge the exhibition as non-Indigenous artists with the ‘white gloves’ on, a softly-softly approach where curators mediate between intention and opportunity, whilst contemporary Indigenous artists today are ‘deadly’ and ‘in the face’ of what might be deemed ‘good taste’. I position myself most definitely somewhere in between these two states. This is my ‘liminality’ in this regard, a kind of betwixt and between. Or, as Charles Darwin University curator for ‘Roads Cross’ Anita Angel said, quoting Bernard Smith (1988, p. 299),

That which may converge may also diverge: the act of convergence does not imply the destruction of either tradition...At all times cultures in contact have borrowed styles and forms from one another, aesthetic form transcends cultural divisions.

Today the subtleties pertaining to appropriation or more specifically intellectual property and copyright, forms a foundation that implies the right to determine identity as being relational. Taking a positive stance assists with extending opportunities for reconciliation.

2.5 Conclusion

There exists an aspect to cross-cultural collaborative pursuits that remains suspect to some as being an authentic and shared experience. It is possible to work in this way; however there are numerous checks and balances that should be made to ensure appropriate and equal representation. This project is an attempt to explore how this process should develop.

Collaborations by couples yielded the insight that alternative spaces speak to a wider expression and can often communicate an absence and presence of the artists in the work produced together. Most collaboration reviewed was produced in the Northern Territory with Indigenous artists who displayed a willingness to work with non-Indigenous artists. Oftentimes the works produced remains identifiably Indigenous and where this is not the case this has been due to little or no consultation.

4 A term used by Aboriginal people in Australia to mean excellent or awesome.
There was no doubt that the most effective artistic collaborative liaisons were created through long-standing relationships. There seemed to be a two-way exchange between the collaborating artists that provided further insights about each individual’s way of working and how that impacts upon notions of personal space pertaining to identity. The influence on each artist by the other was significant when the work reviewed was analysed.

My own collaborative aspirations were in wanting to work more intimately with the question of our relatedness based on a willingness to learn how we might best heal mistrust between us. Ironically working with others continued to bring a focus on self. As with the work surveyed here it was more about the work produced together. I feel this may also have some relevance to the project at some stage however I feel with a strong research focus being on adopting Indigenous research methodologies as a necessary tool, this personal focus and deep self-reflexivity endured.

Contemporary French “Altermodern” philosopher Nicolas Bourriard speaks of a new movement in art, where:

Sacredness is making a comeback, here, there and everywhere. In a muddled way, we are hoping for the return of the traditional aura, and we don’t have enough words to shout down contemporary individualism.

(Bourriard 2009, p. 59)

To shift the ‘us versus them’ paradigm, the place to begin this transition must commence within the individual. Pointing fingers moves our attention away from any insights to be realised, where blame seemingly assigns further deceptions. Change in this dynamic is not possible if we do not look within ourselves first. Conceivably this search for identity may explain the proliferation of non-Indigenous artists wanting to work collaboratively with Indigenous practitioners. Again, it must be stated here, that the intention of the research in this project is to clearly acknowledge one’s intent or subject position from the outset. The standpoint of the individual indicates ones’ origins and authenticity in this regard. It is how we are bound ethically to behave that embraces a respectful approach to
working collaboratively. This can at times be treacherous terrain to navigate. Australian academic and critic Ian McLean reveals that,

Collaboration is a form of mutual cross-appropriation. This is why collective and collaborative art practices are a standard strategy in the post-appropriation art of relational aesthetics that dominate today’s biennales. Relational aesthetics is primarily about the relational agency of the various players in the relational experience.

(McLean 2013, p. 21)

I see myself as the student here. It is I who must learn new ways to model co-creative intercultural collaboration and relinquish the dominant Eurocentric worldview. The role of Shaman here is to navigate this terrain, embracing potential healing and acknowledging the broken trust between us. In embracing another reality that is perceived as wholly different, the shaman’s role is to die in a spiritual sense to the old so that the new may be born. Multiple incarnations are indicated in this ongoing process - the realisation that the self is simply a vehicle to inhabit other dimensional realities, ensuring transformation. It is during the literature review pertaining to Relatedness theory in Chapter Three that I will delve more deeply into the concept of research as ceremony.
Chapter 3: Collaborative Practices and Indigenous Contexts

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter collaborative examples pertaining to the film industry are reviewed. The metaphor in how films are made seemed appropriate when exploring the interrelationships between the collaborating artists and myself. Some of the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous creative research practices are examined with the view to finding commonality through our relatedness and how that is established. Situated knowledge continues to be a significant factor toward establishing objectivity and is further explored in this chapter. Indigenous research methodologies are surveyed including methodologies such as heuristic and self-reflexive approaches that have guided the research. Elements of reflection are included.

3.2 Collaboration by degree: Working Together

Collaboration in a creative project has some well-practised models to draw on. The film industry is well known for relying on the collaborative spirit to either make or break the successful outcome of the end product. A multitude of stakeholders contribute to realise what starts out as the will to communicate a story. ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’ is similar in this regard - direction, editing, performing - toward ultimate public consumption and review. This all takes place in the project, as would be the similar dictates when making a film. Actor, director, writer and producer Graham Thornburn comments, “When collaboration is successful, the completed whole becomes greater than the sum of everybody’s individual contributions”. Thornburn (2013, p. 82) also states that he counts, “Collaboration and its closest buddy ‘respect’ amongst its ‘core values’ in the inevitable mission statement”.

Generally, collaboration requires deep listening and communication skills that seem to be more successfully realised through long-standing creative partnerships. Vague and casual associations working toward undefined outcomes usually produce works that appear to represent more superficial elements of relationships. When working with another, a consideration that is measured
and open to negotiation is helpful and inclusive in finding a commonality. From the outset I was not sure as to what new knowledge would inhabit this space; however I had a sound working relationship with the artists and felt we could achieve something together. Of utmost importance to me was to ensure the collaborating artist was considered and consulted where creative decisions in the work took place. I understood the ‘connecting culture’ aspect to the thesis would certainly mobilize unresolved hurt from our troubled history. In considering that connections frame an ethical engagement in working relations, we could in some way share in this process and thereby contribute to the long awaited healing between us.

Established relationships developed over time with the Tiwi cohort have been inclusive of family relations. Husbands, wives, sons and daughters, grandchildren all play a role in the collaborative performance. Where one can be of assistance, one will simply take up this position. Inclusivity rather than specificity is the norm in a remote Indigenous community setting. This environment is indicative of the natural present moment, where spontaneity exists. Not unlike an ideal film set environment, where,

Performances that are manipulated to fit expectation rather than respond to the actual circumstances reduce the team’s ability to find out the real strengths and weaknesses of the script, and at worst, they lead to anticipated performances.

(Thornburn 2013, p. 84)

“Collaboration in this sense implies a sharing of the powerful, guiding and possibly unspoken vision” (Pearlman, 2013, p. 5). A point-counter-point or in the case of our project, call and response methodology, represented a dialogue that is informed without the need for verbal communications, although, by acknowledging a third space devoid of outcome, yet full of possibility, a natural affinity in working together developed. This third space emerged when the need arose to invite the collaborator ‘in’ to perform their part, and so back and forth the work evolved.

Collaboration in the creative industries has developed a particular cultural meaning. During the
Second World War the term had negative connotations, to be considered a ‘collaborator’ meant siding with the enemy. Today collaboration is seen as an extension of one’s creative talents. Dutch master Rembrandt van Rijn had many pupils. Over half of the work produced during his lifetime is attributed to many of these students. So much so it was difficult to tell whose work was whose in an exhibition held at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles titled, ‘Drawings by Rembrandt and His Pupils: Telling the Difference’ (Manning, 2009). To work across disciplines, utilising multiple media to highlight individual greatness is a move away from the essential meaning of what it is to have a collaborative relationship with others. There are “useful distinctions between collaboration, cooperation and simply making a contribution” (Pearlman 2013, p. 6).

One example here is artists working with printers to make limited edition fine art prints. Today the printer’s credits feature prominently with the artist as if by osmosis their contribution in printing the work somehow equates to initial concept and execution of marks to create the image. A printer prints the work for the artist. Mostly, they work together but do not collaborate artistically. It is more a kind of sub-contracted service arrangement to reproduce the artist’s image as faithfully as possible. Including one’s self in the credits, as collaborating equally and expecting acknowledgment is often divisive and self-serving in an attempt to embellish one’s contribution and “People on the whole, have a tendency to overstate their contribution to a project” (Peplow 2013, p. 28). The lines become blurred as all contributors seek recognition in their assistance.

Independent Film maker Ted Hope (2013, p. 23) enlightens us further in this context referring to the distinction between individual and community, in the case of intercultural artistic collaboration where “ontologies are grounded in the individual knowing themselves through a deep connection to country and kin”. It can be claimed that there is no separation or misidentification to be made between the work made collaboratively and the outcome also being a product for and of the community.

Even so, I cannot dismiss my role is also as facilitator. I drive the project to its ultimate conclusion,
readying the works that will ideally at some stage be exhibited pieces in a cohesive exhibition pertaining to intercultural artistic collaboration that aims to complete the research undertaken. I acknowledge the relations of power in this context; they inadvertently form hierarchies underlying the work. In this sense I am acting similarly to a film director. There is a choice that must be made as one immersed in the work; yet with a view also toward moving alongside the collaborative actions necessary to produce the work. Pearlman (2013, p. 54) comments,

Working together is not collaboration if the director is making all the decisions. But what about decisions made intuitively? Unspoken decisions that are the result of sensitised neurological and embodied processes rather than discussion.

The non-verbal aspect to working collaboratively with the Tiwi cohort realised works that allowed equal opportunity to engage with the work, where exactly what was made seemed to be intrinsically inspired and not individually directed. This concept is epistemologically located outside of knowledge boundaries where knowing is the prescription of wisdom, where knowing and being are inseparable and undivided elements.

3.3 Indigenous and non-Indigenous Creative Research practice: Difference and Treachery

Given the aim of the research in the project has been a practice-based exegesis, I came to the understanding that the only way to ethically engage in the work was to adopt Indigenous research methodologies alongside guidelines for research in my own creative practice. Experimental and action based research necessitates a heuristic approach seeing the production of art as a contribution to new knowledge. Practice based research required developing theories that would best support the artwork where “appropriation, pastiche and collaboration” accurately reflected praxis (Stewart 2010, p. 123). In translating what were seemingly innocent encounters where the curious aspect to creativity prevailed, the subject matter tended to lead to myself as instigator and ultimately as primary author in the initial stages of the collaborative process.
Naturally, identity forms the basis for any situated knowledge. Subjective and personal experience supporting a “rigorous self-reflexivity stimulates a plurality of views” (Weber-Pilwax 2001). Rather than being purely anecdotal, the stories told enlisting the bridge as metaphor, span the divide between the known and the unknown, giving the knower anonymity. This is where the difficulties were first encountered. The difference between tacit and explicit knowing systems was, in this case, Indigenous and Western research methodologies. In this way collaboration between the two approaches suggests a third space (Barrett 2010, p. 13, Stewart 2010, p. 12), or new knowledge, where generosity and sharing become the basis for disseminating research findings. Indigenous researchers Dei, Hall & Rosenberg (2000, p. 7) comment that Indigenous knowledges are “largely oral” and are communicated generationally by trusted elders. These ways of knowing are not learned in isolation from others and they are also not “learned in formal educational settings”.

In coming together to produce artworks, the non-verbal aspect of our studio time together was an exercise of sharing visual communication methods and techniques. I would not be instructed within the framework of an ancient knowing wisdom through oral communications. In this space a sharing of experience existed and lessons were learned through the foundations of trust and curiosity. This meant that a tacit language was woven within the work (as in Fig. 3.1). A subtle rendering of formlessness pervaded the often times highly structured pieces. Having laid down the formal design, it was possible for the artists to be more anonymous because the formal structure had been delineated. This allowed the collaborating artists some freedom and a creative input that identified other shapes and patterns intrinsically present within the original template.
In seeking new ways to model consciousness, the potential to embrace theoretical and philosophical paradigms as being performative through collaborative actions, cultural capital is disclosed progressively. Carter (2007, p. 17) suggests, “Interest is the desire to collaborate: and collaboration is a microcosm of the new relation or worldly arrangement we desire to create - not what is found but what is done”. A genuine interest and contemplative enquiry between the collective Tiwi collaborative cohort existed.

At times it was one-on-one, however the sense that a collective singular overarching collaborative event was simultaneously unfolding became clear as more works were produced over time. From the outset we shared the understanding that the work produced together belonged to the Tiwi People. The Tiwi collaborators and I were the researchers; the subject being the inhabiting of an alternative space together that seemed to drift in and out of any tangible objective knowledge production. This way of working meant there was little emphasis on the individual. We were simply doing what had always been done. The distinction between alternative and new indicates pre-existing relations that cannot be owned but are able to be accessed and shared. Here belonging is equated to the kindred of spirit.
If I am perceived at times to be absent in the works produced together, it has been so in an effort to promote discourse to flow, thereby facilitating a strong Indigenous contribution. Carter comments further with what he calls ‘Strong Collaboration’, “It is an imaginative breakthrough, which announces locally different forms of sociability, environmental interactivity and collective storytelling” (Carter 2007, p. 18).

Working together to produce artworks is the connecting of culture. This very connection could potentially be sinister, where one culture effectively assimilates the other. Hence my reluctance that any contribution may be in some way seen as self-promoting and dominant. I receive a PhD; the Tiwi collaborating artistic cohort does not. As the research gathers momentum, there exists the opportunity to share this new knowledge with the wider community. Future opportunities to work together in disseminating the findings exist. Equally, the surrendering lightly as a means to control the making through a perceived absence of myself in the collaborative act also needed consideration. The balance in power relations can oftentimes appear tenuous from an outsider’s perspective. From the standpoint of an established working friendship these issues are integrated within the developing relationship.

Careful application of ethics shows an abiding respect for the co-creative spirit that is fundamental in the practice research project. Working in this way is seen as performing acts of reconciliation. In this performance, the aim is for the collaborating artists to share equally. Walking and working together, rates of exchange are negotiated in a spontaneous manner to best represent the relational requirements of making a resolved artwork.

The performative role in collaboration is measured by the physical existence of evidence, being the artwork, however it is the interrelationship, or social process in collaboratively producing the work, that is the material, or in this case, cultural capital. Carter (2004, pp. 183-4) intimates that if handled correctly, “materials become material signs” when working creatively together. If the intention is considered and applied with care the outcome represents a new story addressing any potential
abuse in a renewed attempt to right relationships. This right attitude embraces the potential means and motive that “expresses the idea of a different social relation, in which people may inhabit their environment recreatively rather than destructively”.

Fig. 3.2 Painting up, Jean Baptiste Apuatimi getting ready to dance her paintings in at Chiasuro Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2012, courtesy Stephen Anderson & Tiwi Design

The photograph above (Fig. 3.2) is an example of this where the artist trusted me to paint her body painting design prior to attending an exhibition of her work. This represents an exchange where reciprocity becomes the simple act of giving and receiving. This is a two way process that is ongoing. This is relatedness.

Our project demonstrates the sharing and subtle interplay of mark making and exchange of material used to tell new stories based on ancient knowing systems. Patterns that represent a weaving together to produce a finished artwork emphasise a matrix that is used to guide our attention to this end. In this way each performance produces a work that engages with the weaver’s (artist’s) attention, mindful an underlying theme exists within the structure of the inherent design. This way of working is not an unusual method for Tiwi artists and I have learned that this ensures the work is
balanced and ordered. The artists seem to know when the last mark is made, that the work is finished, its story told.

Two designs have been used repetitively within the collaborative studio practice. The polarised field and resultant binary opposition that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia today are symbolically represented by these two divergent patterns.

Zig-Zag geometric shapes (as in Fig. 3.3) pertain to Western scientific models and natural curvilinear flowing designs depicted in Figure 3.4 indicate Indigenous-knowing systems establishing two different approaches to image production. The collaborating artists I worked with utilise both forms within their personal practice and find no dichotomy in working this way. An understanding of each collaborating artist’s themes, working methods and preferred materials is known after having an established four-year working relationship with the artists.

Academic and artist Stewart (2010 p.128) notes, “The bricoleur is positioned within the borderlands, crossing between time and place, personal practice and the practice of others, exploring the history of the discipline and its changing cultural contexts”. She affirms, “Bricolage is a hybrid practice”. Although the project works specifically with design that is sympathetic to the artists working together, the notion that we are patching something or weaving something together seems to
persist. Hybridity is in essence a secondary concern when making works together. We used a range of media to create the works together, explored new uses and applications of media and materials, however it is pattern and form that underlie the creative process. The working atmosphere is unhurried and relaxed.

There exists a liminal space that in this case can lead to positive intercultural creative partnerships, suggesting a gentle and relaxed approach to collaboration, which ensures successful outcomes. Ethical engagement means co-authorship between the artists is maintained and seen as vital in weaving new stories together. Throughout the project I, as the researcher, maintained a rigorous self-reflexivity.

3.4 Relatedness, Reciprocity and Alterity: Inside – Outside

Having identified my standpoint within the project, I became increasingly aware that this position became oftentimes difficult to maintain. I was uniquely positioned to undertake the research in this context and found myself simultaneously situated both inside and outside certain locations within this now somewhat flexible and changing position. It was difficult to maintain objectivity as I felt strong emotions pertaining to my white male privilege and the question of our relatedness.

There seemed to come a point when my initially perceived standpoint had to encompass perspectives that were more inclusive and accepting. In ‘Ways of Looking and Listening: Stories from Spaces between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Knowledge systems’, Brearley and Hamm (2009, p. 33) ask, how can a difference be made to decolonise research methodologies whilst simultaneously embracing “different ways of seeing and listening to each other?” I contend that by employing Indigenous research methodologies as a non-Indigenous artist-academic, this can demonstrate a practical example of how this difference may be ethically negotiated.

In ‘coming amongst’ (Martin, 2008) the Tiwi artists I had to become aware of what I had arrived with. In her research pertaining to ‘Situating Indigenous research in the Academy’, North American
scholar Kovach (2009, p. 172), comments with regard to doing the relational work that, “Non-Indigenous scholars who wish to engage with Indigenous knowledges need to connect with Indigenous scholars, people and communities. Those who try to side step the relational work will be forever frustrated by Indigenous knowledges, research and methodologies.”

Welcoming Indigenous knowledges as valid methods in new knowledge acquisition, the non–Indigenous researcher develops over time, the ability to listen deeply in an attempt to acknowledge a space where thoughts and feelings can be expressed. When one refrains from immediately offering input, the opportunity for a deeper contemplation enters between speaker and listener and that which is spoken and also, what in fact is perceived.

I am a willing participant in the research, as I am also researched, dependent on relatedness and open to co-creative partnerships and subsequent criticism arising from working in this way. Feminist and Indigenous standpoint theories helped to explain my frustration at not being able to find a commonality.

The use of patterns that encompass dualistic principles pertaining to symmetry establish a multiplicity of binary relationships- Flowing/Truncated, Horizontal/Vertical, Black/White. It is possible through visual creative practice, to demonstrate the position where binary opposition becomes integrated. For example, black and white becomes grey. Similarly, in scholarly methodological terms the “complex and paradoxical terrain” referred to by Brearley & Hamm (2009, p. 34) suggests it is most important to, “build bridges of understanding and acceptance between cultures and the best aspect of creating is that it connects people together in so many ways” (Brearley & Hamm 2009, p. 35). This quote embodies the essence of what the project title suggests. It is the major aspiration of the project; the word ‘connecting’ in this case, simply means ‘to be put in touch with’.

When we work together we find difference can be celebrated, this is our commonality and potential
meeting place. If we stop and listen deeply it is possible to hear the voice of Indigenous elder Kathleen Wallace (2009, p 5), who comments, “I want children and other people to learn from these stories. I want everyone to share the stories and learn about the land and life of survival”.

Holding a deep and abiding respect for Indigenous people and culture as a non-Indigenous white male of privilege, it is patently obvious that “some of us will need to find a space ‘in between’ where both the knowledge of our elders and the knowledge of our colleagues or professors may enter, live and be voiced” (Holmes, 2000, p. 50). Indigenous scholar Karen Martin (2008, p. 140) posits the significant question whether a non-Aboriginal/non-Indigenous person can do Indigenist research. She suggests this can be done through a “continuing process of self-reflexive interrogation”.

In an attempt to move beyond contested ground pertaining to the appropriate research methodologies at the nexus of intercultural relations, my research project has led me to the understanding that if a deep and abiding respect and a genuine enquiry were present, doors would open. Just as Martin’s (2008) research title, ‘Please knock before you enter’ suggests, an intention that acknowledges another respectfully, so too I have also attempted to acknowledge the concept that one’s burdens should be left outside when entering another’s home.

Two years into the research, I found myself with no authentic theories or methodologies to engage in a wholly ethical way with my Tiwi collaborative cohort. Beyond ‘messy’ research (Denzin & Lincoln 2005), I found myself entangled in a subject positioning that offered no clear or reasonable voice advocating for a modicum of ethical protection for the artists, nor myself, as researcher of the project. I was not sure if it was appropriate for me to utilise an Indigenous qualitative research lens. Attending a Master class in 2013 on Indigenous research methodologies presented by Indigenous academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson, my anxiety quickly abated. Not only was I encouraged to utilise this methodology; the position I now found myself in was one where I was in the minority. I was treated respectfully as a student and all possible assistance was afforded me in navigating a best-fit approach to entering what had until this point, been only through my imaginings, contentious
Firstly, it became necessary to clearly define my standpoint. It had become clear that by choosing to use Indigenous research methodologies, given my standpoint and my struggle to find a way into the research, I was indeed an ‘Outsider’. When I moved inside, feeling welcomed and invited into this approach and subsequent methodology by Indigenous ‘insiders’, it was clear my privilege now resided in having gained some insight into the domain of those commonly identified as outside mainstream power structures.

I could now share a different experience, one of oppression at my bidding. My own ignorance in identifying with the ‘other’ had blinded me from gaining insight into any authentic subject position. My white privilege had excluded me from seeing this. Simply because I was white did not exclude me from Indigenous knowledge. Until I was prepared to forgo this position, at a minimum symbolically, there would be no new knowledge produced. Heshusuis (1994) explains this succinctly,

We need to move from an alienated mode of consciousness that sees the knower as separate from the known to a participatory mode of consciousness. Such a mode of consciousness addresses a fundamental reordering of understandings and relationship ‘between self and other (and therefore of reality), and indeed between self and the world, in a manner where such reordering not only includes connectedness but necessitates letting go of the focus of self.

(Heshusuis 1994 p. 15)

This is a place of ‘stuckness’ where the world of duality is interpreted through the ego and its attendant survival mechanisms. This condition informs one that liberation from psychological fears and a feeling of alienation is subject to a self that operates in a world of opposites. By ‘stuckness’ I refer to being caught in the middle. Identifying with Indigenous disadvantage was (strangely for me as researcher) clearly advantageous as subject material. Until equity exists between us, this is where we remain. In this space we are ‘stuck’.
Similarly, ancient knowing systems, in acknowledging filial relations inclusive of a duty to care for country, kin and the elemental activities, sees relationships that are interconnected. In this way systems of sustainability are indicative of the knowledge that there is enough for everyone. Fear of a lack leads us to expending vital resources, where excess and ultimately waste abide. As part of the moiety\(^5\) system, the group, through kinship obligation, provides for the individual. This brings the individual inside.

To acknowledge the living records present in the Indigenous collaborating artists, learning is understood to be an active principle, not simply the head or words but the heart and feelings are used to convey the living cultural information that abides within. By watching, being attendant to the process of making artworks, proximity informed knowledge transmission between us. At times working in the studio together or being present when either party were playing their part in the collaboration, stories were told. Most often these stories were not directly related to what we were making at the time. Some news event or family issue could lead into numerous stories that spoke directly to the drama of human existence through the telling of what became symbolic morality tales. Brearley & Hamm (2009, p. 50) comment that if we gather research in this way there exists a “reframing how we learn, how we come to know and what we value as knowledge”. The anecdotal nature of this interrelationship informs knowledge production only so far as the ability to ‘open up’ is concerned.

Great care should be taken not to disclose information shared in confidence. This is a matter of trust and to have this trust one must invest of themselves by developing relationship over time. It was my fortune to be permitted the insight to a space where allowance and acceptance are not words that can explain a space that unquestionably ‘is’. Inclusion and exclusion mirror the fundamental

\(^5\) Moiety is a form of social organisation in which most people and, indeed, most natural phenomena are divided into two classes or categories. There are three kinds of moiety: patrilineal, where children at birth belong to the moiety of their father; matrilineal, where children belong to the moiety of their mother; and generational (where people of alternate generations are grouped together), <https://www.aboriginalartonline.com/culture/moieties.php> viewed 13-1-2105.
principles binary subject positions operate within and it is important we understand this space is incontestable.

My situation as insider, being uniquely positioned, living and working with Tiwi artists, is oftentimes conflicted by the predominant and potentially hegemonic influence pertaining to maleness, whiteness and privilege that form parts of my conditioning from childhood. Indigenous academic Aileen Moreton Robinson (2013) clarifies that Indigenous and feminist scholarships share a perspective in sharing knowledge as a struggle against “normative dominant patriarchal conceptual frameworks”. This space needed constant revisiting during the project.

Even so, I can leave the community at any time and stand to receive a PhD for my research efforts. I have frequently had to ask the question, “Are the collaborating cohort simply being exploited for my personal gain and the prescribed prestige that accompanies doctoral research?” In his essay on the Ethics of Invention, Carter (2007, p. 19) states, “the value of invention – which I maintain, as the distinct focus on creative research, is located neither after nor before the process of making but in the performance itself”. I feel this research is shared and ultimately returns to a source that is inherently reciprocal, whereby both the Tiwi cohort and I share new stories of relatedness, and without this connection no narrative exists. It is clear in this way that no ‘one’ exists without the ‘other’. Learning is a two way process. The collaborative process, in this case, occurred over a period of years. I was living in the community, not coming and going but situated within the group where, “The deepening of specific relationships is often the natural outcome of the research process” (Weber-Pillwax 2001, p. 172).

By living and working over an extended period this enabled deeper relationships to develop. We became familiar with each other’s personalities, roles and responsibilities including our particular strengths and weaknesses as adopted family members within the group. My partner works with me at the art centre and our two youngest daughters and eldest granddaughter all attend the local high school. Stories have been exchanged within the community as to our comings and goings and our
community engagement is as extended family members.

Non-Indigenous people working and living in the community comprise about 5% of the population on Bathurst Island. First hand insight into the daily workings of income management, community employment programmes, land management strategies and general issues pertaining to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people in remote communities all stir in me a deep sense of shame as to how we as non-Indigenous people have engaged with Indigenous Australians, the ‘First Australians’. “Oftentimes the struggle to discern the subtleties of institutionalised and systemic racism informed an internal conflict keen to distance oneself from this very self-awareness” (Martin 2008, p. 53). A heuristic approach elicited insights, seeing the self as judging and condemning my internal dialogue in relationship with another. The Tiwi artists with whom I worked, forgave me my fears and moved alongside to support me to learn how to engage with others in what seems to me to be with equity and authenticity. Reciprocity or ‘giving back’ was something that would be difficult to demonstrate simply in material terms. The respect I had been shown by the artists was humbling and placed me as intimately tethered to a tragic black history that seemed to fall away through a compassionate ‘allowing in’, during, and throughout, the collaborative art making process. Kovachs (2009, p. 124) comments, “Indigenous research frameworks have a decolonising agenda that involves healing and transformation. The door to healing is opened!” By working together collaboratively to produce artworks, the tangible evidence of a realised work documented the performative and reconciliatory nature and underlying theme of the project.

The receptivity on behalf of the Tiwi cohort in their willingness to join in the process of weaving neo-narratives in a graphic visual format was based on an existing relationship. My feelings of not being good enough to participate in an ancient knowledge transmission process were assuaged having been acknowledged as an equal contributor to the project. The issue of how a workable and socially just model could operate for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was intrinsically linked to our collaborative artistic endeavor. Feelings of inadequacy simply equated to the need to be better than the events of the past. Gradual development defined a process where trust and patience led to
a level of mutual understanding and ultimately, the sharing of wisdom.

Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, are “poly–rhetorical, contextually based and rooted in a specific place and time. Moreover, metaphysical phenomena are highly regarded and are integral to the learning process” (Louis Pualani 2007, p. 134). While I could not fully comprehend or be an insider I did gain some understanding through experience.

My unique position presented the opportunity to first observe the Tiwi artists at work and over time and by enquiring as to the meanings of some of the designs I gained a developing insight into the methods and material employed to construct artworks. Tiwi creation mythology has parallels with the book of Genesis and the Tiwi artists were aware of this similarity. We talked openly about the knowledge of good and evil or right and wrong and commenced an ongoing dialogue that spoke to the issues of duality I was keen to address in the project. Weber–Pill wax (2001, p. 173) also cautions that the, “Intellectualization of Indigenous ways of being and knowing can inhibit and/or distort opportunities for Indigenous people to experience connections and personal transformations.”

This intellectualisation was limited due to the fact the project was practice-led. The opportunity to work together collaboratively meant the knowledge being produced was being made together. The environment in which the work was made collaboratively was inclusive of Indigenous research methods embracing epistemologies and ontologies that accorded environment, season and ancestral beings, a preeminent place at all times.

Although mostly outgoing in nature, the Tiwi artists also found it easier for us to work together over a sustained period of time. The work as indicated in (Fig. 3.5) tended to become more refined allowing us to investigate new materials and ways of representing and explaining shared iconography.
3.5 I am not the ‘Other’ - simply ‘Another’: Decolonising Research Practice

‘Othering’, seems unavoidable when contextualising research findings, and is a term that tends to objectify the subject. If we substitute the term ‘Other’ for ‘Another’ in deference to intercultural creative collaborative pursuit, equity is more likely to form part of the relationship. Seminal research carried out by Maori academic Thuiwai Smith (2001, pp. 9-10), suggests that, when framing Indigenous research questions there are certain critical questions that can be asked. These questions offer practical answers to working in a cross-cultural setting. Questions of authorial, cultural and academic ownership arise. Although these questions are considered to be informed and ethical best practice qualitative research questions, they are today, still “debated vigorously”.

The two distinct phases of the research indicate an equal sharing of iconography; however I
acknowledge this was directed and introduced initially by myself to frame the research. The benefits are shared and the research results will be presented in an exhibition entitled “Walking and Working Together”.

In an effort to deconstruct ‘othering’, critical race theory as described by Ladson-Billings (cited in Martin 2008, p.51), is the “use of epistemologies informed by identity and culture that enable critical race theorists to see, understand and move beyond the positions of inclusion and exclusion, margins and mainstreams”. This project presents a body of work produced collaboratively that seeks to demonstrate equity in the collaborative process between the Indigenous artists and myself. Where performances are unrehearsed, new models of authenticity are explored through the understanding that individual input is valued as contributing to the realised artwork.

Smith (2001) as cited in Martin (2008, p.61) comments about fundamental characteristics needed for community based research. He suggests the qualities to view current Indigenous research models are best served through “self–reflexive, dialogic relationships”. An informed two-way critique demonstrates “how non-Aboriginal researchers can act on the critiques of Aboriginal scholars for different relationship to self, to knowledge and to research”.

In determining a methodology, the practice based creative research undertook two distinct phases. The first phase was titled ‘Intervention’ where Indigenous artists engage with designs presented to them made by myself. I hoped to develop understanding of how the artist works and the themes of particular interest to that collaborating artist. The second phase I titled ‘Stronger Futures’ as an extended development from the initial Phase One. This phase saw me engage with Tiwi design principles and iconography. The work produced during the two phases culminated in the exhibition titled ‘Walking and Working Together’.

Gibbs and Memon (1999, p. 4) as cited in Martin (2008, p.91) indicate that working collaboratively in cross-cultural environments requires a careful consideration of how knowledge is presented, by
whom and in what context. Being aware of Tiwi culture underpinned the practice as primary contemplation at all times, the question remained as to “whether these assumptions are congruent with the worldview of the culture of the research participants”.

Any attempt to avoid assumptions whilst working cross-culturally is mitigated through descriptive terms ascribed to people who are either Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Reciprocity and relatedness operate beyond the limitations of descriptors such as Black-White or Indigenous and non-Indigenous where the collective is inclusive of the individual’s contribution to the group. Dogma abates as terminologies are met with understanding through ongoing relationships.

Neo-narratives where visual collaborative language represents integrated creative endeavour, suggests an alternative site where responses from engaging with the work are not simply dismissed as ‘feel good’ exercises, but allowed to exist as new stories for changing social interrelationships.

For an advocacy toward social justice to be realised in the project, awareness must also exist to indicate the performative aspect in collaborative experience as possessing both individual and collective cultural significance. Culture is connected, not assimilated. Culture exists in a domain that is organic, co-creative and inhabiting a space beyond the limitation of structural hierarchies. Finley (2005, p. 686) argues that multiplicity and hybridity in creative based research forms a basis for the potential to address “social dilemmas” indicative of a burgeoning cultural and political awareness. This new narrative presents us with an alternative space that is interactive and mostly undefined where “roles reverse and participants lead researchers to new questions, audiences to questioning practitioners...as all interact with the text”.

A two-way approach to the project led to a shift from myself researching how intercultural working relations in Australia can be polarised, to becoming the researched subject material itself in an attempt to ethically engage in the process of how this bipolarised field operates.
3.6 Conclusion

In the chapters exploring collaboration, it was first necessary to look at what artistic collaboration is. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous creative working relationships were explored in chapter two, with particular focus on recent survey of intercultural creative collaborations emanating from the Northern Territory of Australia.

Initially, I had intended to draw most of the literature from this field of research, however, this proved somewhat limited. It became necessary to frame the collaborative experience as a growing artistic phenomenon; in particular exploring how non-Indigenous artists continue to explore the potential in collaborating with Indigenous artists.

A review of current creative research practice (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) provided insights in finding an appropriate methodology that would inform the project. This review brought to light the significant issues confronting non-Indigenous researchers using Indigenous research methodologies to lead inquiries. As this is new terrain the urging to tread carefully and respectfully in this growing field was heeded and enabled the research to continue when it, at times, seemed challenging working in a cross-cultural atmosphere. Underpinning theories of relatedness and standpoint situated me uncomfortably in the present, aware of the past and suggestive of a future that acknowledges our colonial history where much unfinished grieving and ‘sorry business’ remains.

The key reference in helping to achieve a workable model came in the research conducted by Karen Martin. A quietly authentic treatise, the Indigenous voice was always a considered priority in finding, and developing ways in which to ethically and respectfully engage with Indigenous peoples in Australia. The problematic always tended to reside in the location and ensuing distance between ancient and modern knowing systems.

Charles Green in his locating the third space in collaboration, presented a number of scenarios
whereby artworks produced collaboratively live beyond time based performance actions. Relational work in the Aboriginal regulation of outsiders is at this stage, a roadmap in a polarised field that addresses this dichotomy and offers directions in how to integrate simultaneously both knowledge systems. His analysis offers a grounded theory allowing for myself as a non-Indigenous person to be as authentic as possible. The spirit of co-creativity and the principal of a unity that resonates profoundly within us all is the gift we have to share.
Chapter 4: Negotiation

4.1 Artists Audit–Formative & Contemporary Influences

This chapter aims to inform the reader as to how and why I have come to work collaboratively with Indigenous artists. I summarise how a search to find the most authentic mode of expression as a visual artist led me to working in this way. I offer an overview of personal practice history and influences such as sacred geometry and the use of pattern in my work as a means to move toward the non-objective rendering of subject matter as a vehicle to realise this authenticity. I provide this detail in keeping with practice in standpoint theory on which the work is founded.

Given the major shift in my approach to arts practice just prior to commencing working in Indigenous communities around 2000, it is important to provide some background to my practice as it has suitably prepared me to work collaboratively with Indigenous artists. This chapter will briefly explore the modernist philosophies and other influences that informed my work from 1985 until the shift in praxis from the representational to a non-objective approach that occurred around 2000. More recent influences such as mandala forms and the principles of sacred geometry are also analysed.

Modernist precepts informed an aesthetic that attempted to pin down the way artists felt about spiritual subject matter and the subsequent organic response to the world around them. These formative influences are explored herein. Also included are some contemporary Native American artists whose working methodologies support the sentiment of my current concerns working in cross-cultural creative environments.

Art theorist Theo van Doesburg, commenting in the early part of the twentieth century, makes reference to an art practice that is multidimensional; an art that is not abstract but concrete, constructivist and non-figurative. These sentiments mirrored the intentions of artists such as Arp and Kandinsky, as in Figure 4.1.
We are inaugurating the period of pure painting, by constructing the spirit form: the period of concretization of the creative spirit. Concrete painting, not abstract, because nothing is more concrete ... than a line, a colour or a surface.

(Van Doesburg 1930 as cited in Stiles & Selz 1996, p. 63)

![Fig. 4.1 Wasilly Kandinsky, Untitled, 1915, watercolour on paper, 33.7x 22.9cm, New York, Museum of Modern Art <http://www.wassilykandinsky.net/painting1914-1921.php> viewed 1-2-14](image)

### 4.2 Negotiation-‘Appropriately After’

Prior to 2000, my approach to arts practice was figurative and landscape centred, what I would term the ‘lyrical narrative’ as can be seen in Figure 4.2.

![Fig. 4.2 Stephen Anderson, Woman with dog, 1996, oil on canvas, 80 x 70cm](image)
This was an attempt to understand the world and my place within it, a way to navigate what appeared to me to be a hostile inner terrain that was disparate, fragmented and conflicted. The journey of self-discovery as an artist meant certain uncomfortable psychological ground required critical exploration. Self-reflective artists influenced me, such as modernist Piero Manzoni (1960 as cited in Stiles & Selz 1996, p. 79), who suggested an artist should “immerse himself in his own anxiety, dredging up everything that is alien, imposed or personal in the derogatory sense, in order to arrive at an authentic zone of values”. Within the existential view I was attracted to, the concept of ‘self’ gave me permission to explore inner terrain whilst negotiating existential values pertaining to ‘being and nothingness’ as contemplated by Satre, in 1943 in his novel of the same title.

The process of using visual art as a vehicle, to express what I sensed as a true or untrue view of reality, created the foundations of an interest in social justice. I sought a voice to represent humanity, a voice that spoke an authentic language, one of connection to source. This connection to a divine source in nature asked the questions; “by what principles did life operate ... was there a code?” Another strong philosophical influence, reductionist painter Piet Mondrian (Fig. 4.3) below, posited the dilemma in viewing concrete reality, “…problems of system, intuition, and structure to nature, what he called “the laws that control the world” (Stiles & Selz 1996, p. 65).

Fig. 4.3 Piet Mondrian, Composition No. 1 with Grey and Red, 1938 / Composition with Red 1939, 1938–39. oil on canvas, 105.2 × 102.3 cm, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/3053> viewed 2-2-2014

The desire to reduce visual elements within a two-dimensional field (canvas) necessitated a shift
from the representational to a rendering of non–objective subject matter. A newfound minimalist sensibility required the emptying out of the picture plane removing depictions of obvious human narrative and subject matter. A direction intimating where my praxis would lead at this time is exemplified by the colour cerulean blue, used to great effect by Yves Klein (Fig. 4.4) and his monochrome palette of the 1950’s, implying, “infinite space and the immateriality of the void”(Stiles & Selz 1996, Ibid).


Contained within this ‘void’ there seemed to exist an expansive field of energy that unified all subject matter. Space became synonymous for mood or atmosphere when directed through the emotions and subsequent renderings of the artist. Sound and light determined either discord or harmony depending on how the space was arranged. By acknowledging a space that was seemingly boundless, it became necessary to develop a language to express these new found innate working principles. I made the choice to abandon representation as a means of artistic expression in favour of a non-objective modality.

Movement, form, sound - the human experience living harmoniously aligned with the principle of creation led to an interest in the humanities that embraced the means to express the poetic and
spiritual aspect in our divine nature as human beings. Einstein also postulated a ‘Unified Field Theory’ - “a formula or integrating principle by which all the different processes and functions of the universe are related” (Arguelles, 1972, p. 72). My work became more analytic and symbolic.

Undergraduate study at Art College in Brisbane and a strong interest in modernist expressionism produced a series of etchings entitled, ‘Fallen Angel’ (Fig. 4.5) below.

![Fallen Angel, 1985](image)

Fig. 4.5 Stephen Anderson *Fallen Angel*, 1985, etching, 8 x 16cm, courtesy Stephen Anderson

These works represented the notion of angels falling to Earth because of physical lust. Earthly desire and the delusional concept of artist as creator/god in fact isolated me from my fellow humans. I chose alienation and sorrow as vehicles to express my personal angst.

In hindsight, this facile view was simply a romantic fascination growing from a privileged narcissism. This rendered my developing character as a young man being solipsistic and eternally dissatisfied. It was not difficult to abandon figuration in my work; I felt I had exhausted these themes and was ready to explore terrain that was less representational and spoke to the dynamic operating principles underpinning the life force. I realised that there was no way to do this without
acknowledging the body as vehicle in which one could realise these operating principles.

Heavily influenced by Marxist philosophy, I felt duty bound, driven to expose the injustice of what we were being fed by the capitalist machine—‘Consume, Be silent and Die’ was the mantra abiding my privileged view and limited perspective. I railed against the comforts of materialism, aware there was a price I was paying for this very ‘cosiness’ whilst simultaneously living an upper middle class affluent lifestyle supported by hard working parents. During this time, I honed my skills as a printmaker and maker of drawings. Graphic black and white images as in (Fig. 4.7) reflected my interest in German expressionism, in particular the work of Max Beckmann as depicted below in Figure 4.6.

His work seemed to mirror the dilemmas that resided in me. Beckmann in his ‘Letter to a Woman Painter’ of 1948 (cited in Stiles & Selz, 1996) states that it is important to deeply understand the inner-self and to develop an authentic love of the visible world that is outside of the artist. Certainly external splendour realised internal corruption and reflected the disparity within and without.
The desire to take flight was predicated on what I perceived to be an all pervading cultural cringe that still existed in Australia at this time. The polarisation of such issues in my life would become a life-long theme. This feeling has culminated in this doctoral research with an interest in how to reconcile these issues with not only ourselves as the dominant western social structure, but with those whom we simply superimposed our Cartesian world-view upon. This was not a utopian ideology. The truth, I was realising, was something much different.

These questions elicited a sustained psychological and emotional melancholy. A vigorously renewed drawing practice that explored the concept of male sexual identity during a time when the feminist movement was gathering momentum opened my perspectives to include feminine artistic expressions. Previous attempts to elevate the feminine were simply objectifying desire and were met with the longing to create more Fallen Angels. Working collaboratively today with female Tiwi artists seems a world away from these formative times of my artistic development. Of positive influence, the collaborations have been highly nurturing and instructive for me in learning how to fully engage with others. Receptivity and patience guided a way into effective creative partnerships and satisfactory outcomes when working together.

During the 1980s, postmodern deconstructionist theories challenged my perspective of the artist as hero. To my way of thinking, most of these heroes were men. Seeing women purely in the region of the objective, the postmodern experience posited me as sexist, my work ethos instantly deflated. I could be described as a modern man living in postmodernist times. A crisis in confidence necessitated a major paradigm shift both physical and spiritual and this meant my approach to arts practice had to change. It was a post-minimalist sensitivity that awakened the need to abandon figuration and engage with the idea of clearing the mental and emotional turmoil that had been so troubling to me.

4.3 Spiritual Dimensions in the Visual Arts

I was unsure as to how this new approach to my practice would be achieved; I simply understood
there was no turning back to former modalities of expression. A new language more suited to my developing interest in spirituality ensued. The modernist works of Klee and Kandinsky in their attempt to find a new way to express their spiritual concerns as practicing artists led to a change in my own subject orientated figurative paintings. These artists inspired my initial shift in praxis towards the non-representational.

Inquiry into how best to communicate to an audience that was receptive to what lay outside the realm of subjective experience was pursued. Russian constructivist painter Kasimir Malevich defined the "additional element" as the quality of any new visual environment bringing about a change in perception. This radical depiction of existential concerns meant artists could further explore inner emotional terrain and subject matter. The black and white square paintings produced around 1915 attempt to project into a non-objective or non-representational space, a third dimension or alternative space beyond the concrete (Figs. 4.8 & 4.9).

As the protagonists of geometric abstraction these artists’ formative research inspired the minimalist movement of the 1970s. American artists Agnes Martin and Frank Stella both challenged prior perceptions of pictorial representation (Figs. 4.10 & 4.11). Seeking new ways of representing
an aesthetic of integrated purity, a deeply contemplated painting praxis stripped everything down to its essential quality to achieve simplicity. Martin’s planar surfaces, her structured grid-like geometric patterns, represented a quintessentially ascetic aesthetic in rendering a subject matter “epitomising unity and wholeness” (Haskell, 1993, p. 105).

Similarly, minimalist American painter Frank Stella searched for a method to construct resolved and integrated paintings. In ‘The Pratt Lecture’ held in 1960, Stella considered how this could be achieved where “A symmetrical image or configuration symmetrically placed on an open ground is not balanced out in the illusionistic space”. This appealed to my desire to integrate a repeat motif and patterns that could act as the narrative where “colour density, forces illusionistic space out of the painting at constant intervals by using regulated pattern” (Stella 1960 as cited in Stiles & Selz 1996, p.114).

These works acknowledge a space where stillness abides, where the formless indicates an alternative site allowing the viewer in. It is a place where the artist is mindful of a space within the concrete environment that is the painting, created for the audience to experience.

This quality appealed to me. Where the subject matter appeared to be non-objective I felt more able
to engage with the works and discover through a minimalist aesthetic, the means required to transcend my egotistic tendency. This seemed to be a quality that could not be defined, certainly one could talk about it but these works were to be ‘experienced’. A linocut produced in 2008 ‘Celestial Navigator’ (Fig. 4.12), represents this new aesthetic and shift away from figuration in my practice.

Fig. 4.12 Stephen Anderson, Celestial Navigator, 2008, linocut, 52 x25cm, Photograph Stephen Anderson

Conceptual artist Sol Lewitt (Fig. 4.13) maintained that in organising professional drafts people to produce his artworks. He saw himself as composer and emphasised the idea or concept of an artwork over its visual realisation. He asserted that his instructions are themselves the work of art. The instructional nature of this approach to creative pursuit is a good fit for working collaboratively. Through the use of diagrams or working drawings, the artists work together to realise the intended initial idea.
Lewitt (1972 as cited in Stiles & Selz 1996, p. 827) describes the methodology underpinning the project and to working co-creatively, "If an artist uses the same form in a group of works, and changes the material, one would assume the artist’s concept involved the material". This approach was evidenced in the way the Tiwi artists approached the use of new materials and methods. The imagery was usually based on the themes relevant to the contributing artist. This nuanced the underlying concept of the work through the use of varying media, methods and skills employed by the artist.

Lewitt, by limiting his material for each work whilst simultaneously working in numerous media and representations of his intended formulas for art works, allowed the materials to be equally represented in his work. The processes and choices of the medium employed were always considered variations on a theme that explored context and content through instruction. A subtle and highly nuanced interrelatedness is woven into the work of this highly innovative artist. This appealed to me as a legitimate methodology when working collaboratively.

In Australia, Robert Macpherson reduced the act of painting (Fig. 4.14) to its purest form, a key principle in minimalist sensitivities. A four-part work consists of a plain canvas, a primed canvas, and one with black paint on a white background and one with white paint on a black background. The
series is designed to a human scale. The span of each canvas from top to bottom and side-to-side is the distance that the artist could reach using a housepainter’s brush.

Fig. 4.14 Robert Macpherson, White/Black (Arago), 1975, synthetic polymer on canvas, 4 x 214 x176cm, Photograph Stephen Anderson, 2013

A large painting completed in 2010 by contemporary Australian artist Debra Dawes titled, ‘Complete with a question mark’ (Fig. 4.15) below, offers viewers a cognitive conundrum that must be resolved by the viewer’s brain when visiting the large work. Such works create an effect of movement that is sometimes unsettling to the viewer because there are no rest points where the eye can focus. This effect has its antecedents in British painter Bridget Riley’s oscillating linear and flowing offerings.
Riley, in an ‘Untitled Statement’ of 1968 acknowledges the polemic evident in her work and the realisation that the emotive as subject matter and the practical visual elements in her paintings must be reconciled. The painter establishes a two-fold dialogue where the development of the work moves in cycles to where initial intentions originate leading her to a “deeper involvement with the structure of contradiction and paradox” (Riley, 1968, as cited in Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 112). The tension alluded to here within the dynamic rhythm of Riley’s orchestrations as evidenced in (Fig. 4.16), establishes cognitive dissonance. Where the mind is confounded and subsequently seduced we are unwilling to believe and yet we must look again to somehow make sense of the dissonant visual arrangement.

These cognitive-led visual aesthetic effects have informed my arts practice in an attempt to engage the viewer in a psycho-spiritual dialogue alluding to a subject matter that is altogether non-objective. Numerous devices assist in communicating essential visual information that attempts to bypass the encoding of memory by the viewer. The visual representation of relationships that are dualistic and encoded as opposites are perceptually witnessed as “repetition opposed to ‘event’, repetition as event, increase and decrease, static and active, black opposed to white, greys as sequences harmonising these polarities” (Riley, 1968, as cited in Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 112).
The intended dualisms inherent in Riley’s works coalesce within the constraints of the image. As one integrated work, the apparent binary interplay is resolved due to our cognitive requirement to resolve this very two-fold occurrence. The brain whilst perceiving the subject matter attempts to reconcile discord. I construct grids or ‘fields’ that utilise sacred geometric principles that are closely associated with mathematics, music, light and cosmology due to its ratios, harmonics and proportion.

For me, this approach serves to more effectively communicate my observations. The triptych represented below (Fig. 4.17) is one plate progressively cut away or ‘emptied out’. The cutting away of the lino block is a progressive negation of space that ultimately reveals the essence of a positive image.
Metadiscourse and my creative works representing thinking about thinking aim to question the ways we categorise bits of chaos in order to convince ourselves they have meaning. The practical realization in transforming the mandala circle motif to patterns moving outside of a two-dimensional ‘field’ established for me a new direction in arts practice. I was now working in a non-objective and conceptual modality grounded in post-minimalist philosophy. (Figs. 4.18 & 4.19) are examples of mandala inspired imagery. (Fig. 4.20) by Jean Baptiste Apuatimi is also representative of this holistic device that in this case represents the ‘Kurlama’ or Tiwi naming ceremony. A centrally located reference point indicates the life force emanating from the mid-point within the artwork.
Contemporary Native American artists Joe Feddersen and Jeffrey Gibson work with similar designs. Their use of bold colour and dynamic geometric shapes rendered on natural deerskins as seen in (Fig. 4.21) has appealed to me in how these artists skillfully employ an innate sensitivity to materials. These images represent to me a departure from holistic depictions of subject matter to a spiritual symbolism that is inclusive of practical ways to include pattern and sacred geometrical principles within a two dimensional space.

Fig. 4.21 Jeffrey Gibson, Don’t Break the Spell, 2013, acrylic and oil paint on deer hide stretched over wood panel, 117.5 x 129.5cm, <http://jgibsonstudio.tumblr.com/post/55422975636/dont-break-the-spell-2013-acrylic-and-oil-paint> viewed 11-1-2014

Oftentimes Gibson does not stretch his work on the natural hides but allows the material to drape loosely when exhibiting the painted finished works. The medium used is as important as the surface to Gibson. He relates to other native histories pertaining to the woven blanket, quilt making and the nature of materials produced both by hand and machine. Tight weave and loose weave, primed and unprimed, each produce varying levels of accessibility to the work. Hard edge and loosely draped works indicate a masculine and feminine dynamic that is employed by Gibson in his finely crafted and delicate use of materials. Gibson states that he “consciously chooses not to create an image”, and comments further that he often allows the work to “breathe” and this connects the work to the “every-dayness”- he is happy not to chase the spectacle (Gibson, 2013).
Omak native Joe Feddersen also uses contemporary materials to represent native iconography. My attention was first drawn to his works with the simple and delicate chevron designs for which he is well known. Rebecca Dobkins, (2008, p. 17), in a catalogue essay on Feddersen’s work comments, “Patterns, as Feddersen understands them, are abstracted forms of nature, pulsing through our lives, a language for our connection to place.”

This inspiration can be drawn from woven baskets with chevron designs from the early 1900s as in (Fig. 4.22).

Feddersen also works in glass and revisited native weaving techniques in an effort to connect to his roots as a Native American artist. His ‘plateau geometric’ weaving designs of 1995 (Fig. 4.23) interpret a generational relationship to land. He tends to work his images through layering. He builds up the image, saturating the overlaying colours, creating multiples in the process. When working with geometric patterns the repetition of motifs creates the effect of layering where new forms or variations emerge and subsequently inform new works. I find in working this way each successive work tends to inform the next. This means the working with patterns inspires further developing motifs suggested by the working patterns themselves through repetition and layering.
Tremblay (2008, p.35), highlights the significance of Feddersen’s artwork and intimates that his work is not simply relevant to the now, but “addresses, encompasses, redefines and assimilates new aspects of the contemporary world by integrating them into old patterns of culture that sustain life”.

![Image]


Similarly, patterns in nature elicit geometric forms that can be retold as contemporary stories informing a connection to creation. This can often bring graphic results that seek to mirror sacred geometric principles and corresponding natural processes such as spirals.

By placing two concentric circles in a hexagonal pattern around one central circle, you form what is known as the “fruit of life” pattern. If you connect the centres of all those circles with straight lines it forms "Metatron's Cube" from which all the platonic solids arise. This image clearly shows each platonic solid laid over Metatron's Cube. By understanding the fundamental patters that the universe uses to create itself we can better understand everything.

(Harramein 2013)
Fragments of designs emerge, an infinite fractal flowering emanating from these mathematical precepts. Thus the working design store is without limit.

4.4 The Grey Scale-Dividing the Field

This project inhabits a grey space, a space located within a polarised field between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists (Black and White). Moreton-Robertson (2013) alludes to the dangers here and suggests, “Indigenous intellectual production might be inspired from a different understanding of the human subject because whiteness operates as an epistemological and ontological ‘a priori’ in their work”. ‘a priori’ in this context equates to dominant white culture being mainstream.

Working with the principles of sacred geometry inherent in the spirals of shells or the structure of pinecones references a storytelling that is not separate from the natural world. This understanding is a shared story embracing the relational. Pattern in nature precedes form. Notions that we are divided or separate from these operating principles are challenged by archaic patterns such as the double helix spiral.

To create collaborative artwork engendering equal participation with the artists involved is a balancing act. By utilising the grey scale depicted here in Fig. 4.24 as a moderating factor and contemplative site, the risk of unduly influencing the collaborative act and related mark making is minimised. This symbolic moderating filter assisted me in maintaining balance throughout the project.

The inherent design principles of original matrices utilise doubling, splitting and mirroring. Similarly, balance; proportion, rhythm, emphasis and unity become the structural elements that guide the creative working ethos throughout the project. The Tiwi collaborating cohort all tell me they utilise these precepts when making creative decisions in their art practice.
By utilising the circle and the pairing of both the enhancement of contrast and the theory of chromatic simultaneous contrast, I endeavour to establish an inner and outer dialogue between artwork and viewer as the shift from black to white gives the illusion of a moving in and moving out, both positive and negative. This visual effect can be viewed as directly engaging with the concept of binary opposition and is akin to a working cognitive dissonance, hard-wired and innately conflicting, working simultaneously within a unified field that is consciousness.

Feisner (2000, p. 96) indicates the law of simultaneous contrast posits that when the eye views a colour it requires its complement. This can be explained simply with the example of a green garden hose lying on the ground outdoors. If you blink your eyes, a red ghost image of what was encoded prior to blinking is seen. This can be experimented with to also affect shading where after images can be seen to correspond to successive contrasts of tonal variation.

The symbol of the bridge in the project is indicative of the idea that we must traverse personal unresolved emotions to better enable us to work with others. The person-centred mode sees this journey as accepting of difference and allows for spontaneity and the “honest expression of our whole uniqueness” (Silverstone 1997, p. 136). In seeking a vehicle to cross this bridge of personal reconciliation, the principles of sacred geometry informed a way to better understand ancient
knowing systems operating prior to Euclidean theories about form and the elemental activities.

4.5 Sacred Geometry & Mandala Principle (Tools for Understanding Self)

It is through this project that ongoing attempts to square the circle in a metaphysical sense can be made. Inherent design principles in the patterns made collaboratively arrest the attention of the viewer at cognition creating a dynamic interplay between subject and object. A subtle oscillation between the interplay of opposites and the mind’s requirement to compensate in an attempt to locate the mid or central point of the whole or overall picture is decidedly symbolic of the reconciliatory process itself. Our visual perceptions are aligned in such a way as to make order from what we see.

Robert Ferré (as cited in Moss, 2013) comments: “Sacred geometry is the act of studying the divine act of creation and then using that knowledge to create in the same way”. By studying nature, we find that the basic building blocks of creation are geometric.

A critical dilemma arose when trying to offer a critique of artworks pertaining to holistic principles and standards of flux, (see Figs. 4.18 & 4.19, p. 91). This research focused on how we impose structures on a reality that is ultimately unknowable. The mandala principle suggests that from the perspective of Art Therapy, one may engage the notion of healing and wellbeing (wholeness) through participating in the making of these motifs. I saw this as a valuable tool to assist with accessing deeper levels of the psyche. Making mandala forms helped focus on and around unresolved personality issues that had been previously hidden from my conscious mind. Through meditation and utilising the mandala and its infinite variations of form, my feelings of balance and well-being were increased.

By employing familiar iconography in the creative collaborations and by using the chevron and the curvilinear motifs, a methodology is established whereby both flowing and truncated design principles are employed. The father of transpersonal psychology Carl Jung (1964, p. 90) comments,
“Symbols are natural attempts to reconcile opposites within our psyche”. This is intended to establish a symbolic dialogue between two distinctly different elements as represented by the circle and the square.

The saying ‘you can’t put a square peg in a round hole’ is applicable as metaphor for how many non-Indigenous Australians, engage with Australia’s first nation peoples. This problem arose (squaring the circle) because of a need to calculate the area of a circle (Figs. 4.25 & 4.26). The solution was to find a formula or geometric construction that would enable someone easily to draw a square with an area that exactly corresponded to the area of a particular circle. Skinner (2006, p. 46) notes, “The difficulty of this problem has led many people to use the phrase ‘squaring the circle’ as a euphemism for something that was almost impossible yet mystical”.

Fig. 4.25 Stephen Anderson *Squaring the Circle*, 2007, lino cut, 15 x 15cm

Fig. 4.26 Stephen Anderson *Circling the Square*, 2007, lino cut, 15 x 15cm

In using the mandala principle, both linear and cyclical formal devices of representation are used to harmoniously integrate both primary shapes that subsequently exist within and without the confines of the space they occupy.

The ‘squaring of the circle’ is one of the many archetypal motifs, which form the basic patterns of our dreams and fantasies. However, it is distinguished by the fact that it is one of the most important of them from the functional point of view. It could even be called the archetype of wholeness.

(Jung & Hull, 1959, p. 357)
The making of these new works necessitated research into the principles of sacred geometry including the Torus⁶, golden spiral, vesica pisces and principles of fractal geometry, in an attempt to square the circle. Through repeating motifs and using pattern the problem of the difficulty in critiquing holistic imagery as represented by mandala forms was partially resolved at this time and the critical analysis pertaining to the research could resume.

I have continued to employ this strategy when making artworks preferring to call for design principles relating to a cosmology that can be found in the natural world both above and below. Perhaps this is also an indicator as to why some Indigenous artists have the ability to readily engage with my arts practice. Haramein’s (2013) work indicates everything in the universe is connected, from the largest to the smallest scale, through a unified field of gravity. He demonstrates that it is “the space that defines matter and not matter that defines space”. How this resonates with Tiwi artists has been of particular interest to me. This explanation seemed to answer in some way the Tiwi cosmology and creation mythology and the ongoing connection to the ancestors as celebrated through ceremonial practices.

In the four years between late 1967 and his decision to stop conventional exhibiting in early 1972, Australian painter Ian Milliss worked through all the preoccupations of formalism, minimalism and conceptual art to reach an understanding of the artist as activist that was unique in Australian art. This was not dissimilar to my own revelations in attempting to find a valid way in which to express my concerns as a visual artist. In 1973 he wrote, “Real creative activity is so natural and unselfconscious as to be invisible. The artist is unrecognised even by his or herself”. Whilst we attempt to understand the operating principles that govern the universe we must avail ourselves to societal operating philosophies that govern how we negotiate a space within the earthly realm. Milliss (1973) comments further that there are exceptions to the rules that govern our place within

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⁶ The torus, or primary pattern, is an energy dynamic that looks like a doughnut—it’s a continuous surface with a hole in it. The energy flows through one end, circulates around a centre and exits out the other side. <http://www.thrivemovement.com/the_code-fundamental_pattern> viewed 16-12-2014
capitalist societies and that “if we work in this way to destroy not only art, but industrial technology and formal hierarchical politics, we can create real culture”.

My own personal crisis in confidence necessitated a hiatus from visual arts practice (between 1995 and 2000), to reassess my ability to contribute to the field in any significant way. Milliss acknowledges the outsider simply seeks a panacea to alleviate the resultant anxiety caused by any real insight into how capitalist societies operate. In finding ways to live with imposed structures, authentic creative endeavour becomes one way to critically challenge these very impositions.

The symbol of the bridge in the project is indicative of the idea that we must traverse personal unresolved emotions to better enable us to work with others. The person centred mode sees this journey as accepting of difference and allows for spontaneity and the “honest expression of our whole uniqueness” (Silverstone 1997, p. 136). In seeking a vehicle to cross this bridge of personal reconciliation, the principles of sacred geometry such as fractals or graphs that produce organic shapes of infinite complexity helped inform a way to better understand ancient knowing systems operating prior to Euclidean theories about form and the elemental activities.

4.6 Pattern & Repetition - Impossible Skin

Pattern underlies that which organises surfaces or inherently organic structures in a consistent, regular manner. The nature of my own work and the work produced collaboratively with Indigenous artists employs elements and working methodologies similar to each other. We use predominantly dots and dashes or lines and circles to make patterns. We are kindred spirits in the will to represent a connection to place, and identity is maintained by retelling the story over and over again. The connection to place here is a theory grounded in relatedness. Pattern can be described as a repeating unit of shape or form, but it can also be thought of as the "skeleton" that organizes the parts of a composition (Jirousek, p. 4, 1995).
Formative studies commenced with a grid as the foundation for the ensuing structure of the image. The grids depicted above in (Fig. 4.27) are arranged in mathematical relationship, for example $9 \times 9 = 81$ squares. This method is how I also began a graphic dialogue with the Tiwi artists. The points where the grids connect form intrinsic classes of patterns relative to the intended design, being either zigzag or curvilinear motifs.

Symmetrical and asymmetrical balance determines where the tension within the work resides. The idea to create formal balance around a central point employs alternating linear rhythm and is not as dependent on pattern, but is more dependent on timed movement of the viewer’s eye following the artists’ hand-made renderings. The use of pattern in my artworks emanates from a conscious move from a figurative to a non-objective approach.

Pattern is everywhere in daily life. It is part of the visual complexity of contemporary existence. However, from a philosophical and scientific viewpoint patterns are a part of an underlying cosmic complexity, which may be conceived as being in a state of dynamic tension between order and chaos.

(Osborne 2012, p. 23)
Cosmology implies heavenly bodies or structures underpinning planetary dynamics. Pattern leads us to our origins. Many Indigenous artists, including the contributing collaborating artists in the research project, employ repeat design motif to represent body painting design for ceremonies, the transmission of culture through storytelling (Rothwell, 2013). Retelling the narratives of ancestors, topographical maps of song lines and tribal custodial connection to place are made manifest. I design patterns both zigzag and curvilinear seen here in (Figs. 4.28 & 4.29). The zigzag or chevron motif can be traced to the ancient Greek iconography embellishing ceramic ware. This motif is more truncated and less organic than its counterpart - the curvilinear or wave motif. These foundation drawings or ‘leit motif’ represent both truncated and flowing motion.

Gumatj clan design from east Arnhem Land employs the zigzag design and the resultant diamond patterning is the ‘minytji’ motif or sacred clan design. Senior Yirrkala artist Gunybi Ganambarr is from Yirrkala in Arnhem Land and he also speaks of the elemental activity of fire and water in his work as represented by flowing lines and repeated oblique diamond shapes as represented in (Fig. 4.30).
Fig. 4.30 Gunybi Ganambarr, *Milngurr*, 2011, ochre, earth pigment and acrylic binder on rubber, 97.0 x 77.0 cm, artwork and image courtesy of artist and the Buku-Larrnggay Centre, Yirrkala, NT, <http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/WAIAA11_Winner.asp> viewed 4-1-2014

The diamond design represents fire. Clans owning connected parts of this sequence of ancestral events share variations of this diamond design. Ramingining artist Johnny Bulun Bulun (dec), who often collaborated with other artists, also expressed a subtle variation on this theme as in (Fig. 4.31).

Similarly, Native American design in woven works from the Navajo tribal lands in New Mexico utilise the oblique triangle resulting in a repeat diamond motif that is translated as being inspired from a celestial origin (Liebenson, 2000). Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico is well known for the diamond designs and finely painted patterns found on their earthenware pottery.


Supporting visual reference material lies with history’s voluminous store of diagrams and theories.
pertaining to sacred geometry. The growth of all living things exemplifies harmonious design as investigated by the ancient Greeks and those individuals requiring answers as to how certain organic and cosmic principles operate.

How the planets move around the Sun, concentricity is an intrinsic operating principle creating elliptical orbits. From plant growth, crystalline structures, the flow of waters and living spirals, Nature’s innate sacred geometric principles operate within micro and macro realities. On a human scale the double helix of DNA is composed of two right-handed 3-D helices.

(Kawaii, 2000)

It is through the use of pattern that an attempt is made to merge both the topological and planar elements within the designs. In creating two-dimensional patterns from mandala inspired designs that are in essence multidimensional, space and time coalesce. Osborne (2012, p. 23) explains, “It is an open question whether all these manifestations can be contained by algorithms, or are metaphors drawing on scientific philosophy or visualisations of primal instincts”. Although seemingly visually complex, patterns in contemporary art have been for me about following a trajectory where each step simply informs the next. By successively dividing the picture plane, and in varying these divisions, inherent designs or patterns emerge.

One does not discover the inherent geometry in the patterns. By following the principles of division, one appears to be led to this space. This space is no different to the space of cellular division. The two examples below (Figs. 4.32 and 4.33) represent patterns both indicative of Tiwi design work that follow a pictorial arrangement divided by shapes that are repeated to form patterns. The Tiwi possess a limited number of marks, (either dots or dashes) which they arrange in a potentially infinite variation when making artwork. These designs are variations on ancestral body painting patterns that are applied to canvas in a very contemplative and considered way.
This also had similarities to my own art practice. An awareness of sacred geometry did not make my approach to representing my concerns as a visual artist any less valid; simply the approach or tradition and the physical making were different.

The destination was for me less significant, where the making became the all-important aspect of what was to become a social journey. Osborne comments further that, “This issue stands as an experiment to find out more about the way pattern operates in contemporary art and as a rebuttal of the tendency to trivialise it”. (Osborne 2012)
In presenting the collaborating artists with designs that were familiar to them, the potential for discourse to evolve during the actual making of the artwork arose. Discussing the merits or negatives post-performance seemed more inclusive and considered when working collaboratively. “Pattern, existing long before written language, has the ability to communicate something about our perception that is difficult to articulate in words” (Huppatz 2012, p. 52). Whilst watching the Tiwi artists at work, I observed a ‘knowing’ or innate understanding as to how they made artworks. One mark simply and progressively followed the other and rarely was there any hesitation.

4.7 Conclusion

My personal history as an artist impacted strongly on my willingness and subsequent ability to work collaboratively with Indigenous artists. In my search to find an authentic approach to express my concerns as a visual artist it seems to me that this very search has led me to this unique position. By moving away from a representational means to communicate my ideas, the focus on my inner spiritual development led directly to a non-objective rendering of subject matter guided by the principles of sacred geometry, including the precepts of Minimalism. Subsequent developments in my work necessitated the use of pattern, which prepared me suitably to work with the artists from Tiwi.

This brief artist’s audit provides some insight into how I managed to ‘come amongst’ the research group of Tiwi artists. It is significant that this is also a way of introducing my standpoint. This clearly indicates the need to work in a grounded way, searching for an authentic mode of self–expression. How I ‘come alongside’ the artists is investigated in Chapters Five and Six reflecting on when the co-creative practice commenced.
Chapter 5: Individuation (Phase 1)

5.1 Introduction

The initial phase of the research project took some time to develop imagery that we felt equally represented the spirit of collaboration between us. Although consideration of the artists when creating foundation designs to engage with was of utmost consideration, the ideas started with me. The artists were expecting something they could engage with. This chapter explores the artists working with my designs. It explains how most of the work was produced by the artists and myself in our homes or at the Tiwi Design Studio on Bathurst Island. Some works were created at Charles Darwin University print studio and The Tamarind institute in the United States. Although individuation as a title for this chapter may seem contradictory to the collaborative nature of the project, it must be stated that individual contributions allowed for a review of the collective contribution that is realised as a whole in the form of an exhibition of works.

Materials & Methods

Tiwi artists and I used a variety of methods and materials. The traditional natural ochres- yellow, red (from cooking the yellow to produce red) and white, were mixed with a PVA, (poly vinyl acetate) medium. Commercial acrylic paints were also used. Permaset inks were used in screen-printing processes and acrylic paint was then over painted. Commercial fabric dyes were used in the batik process as well as some homemade attempts to produce a natural palette by boiling plant matter traditionally used for dying pandanus fibre for basket weaving. 100% rag papers, hemp, linen, canvas, silk, viscose rayon, canvas boards and bark were also used as substrates to create the works together. Interchangeable mixes of modern and traditional materials were used to respectively depict traditional and contemporary design elements.

Mostly all work was done with little talk. The stage is set; the picture plane is the field of action where each contributor is aware of what they must contribute. Full of potential, this space is common ground we navigate together. Oftentimes colour may be discussed and sometimes what
could be termed the weft or weave of the work established between collaborators. All elements of the methodology are interconnected and thus part of an organic whole. Benham (2007, p. 514) explains,

Some stories are never written. Some stories are told only on certain occasions ... Researchers must not fall victim to Western appropriation of Indigenous knowledge through the narrative.

In working with Tiwi artists it must be said that I am immersed within a knowing system incrementally revealing levels of cultural insight over time. I do not feel I possess the right to speak about the stories that have been shared with me. At a superficial level this is possible however it is appropriate to seek permission to do this and I would suggest always these stories be told by Tiwi people.

Their approach to art practice is ordered, systematic and culturally sensitive to design stories as abiding principles in the Tiwi artistic production. Inviting, not alarming was always the underlying yet unspoken aesthetic intention. Oftentimes to be equal on the playing field we say to the other “It is your turn”.

Yorta Yorta artist and academic Treahna Hamm echoes what is the intended nature of the project ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’. She expresses that,

Through my art, my role is to be a conduit of healing for Indigenous people to regain strength, to follow an artistic journey in their lives and to portray their messages. Most important is to build bridges of understanding and acceptance between cultures. The best aspect of creating is that it connects people together in so many ways.

(Hamm 2009, p. 35)

Whilst in Yirrkala Print studio with Tiwi artists in Arnhem Land in 2012, I created some rudimentary designs for later inclusion in collaborative works. The artists preferred to work in their own time
after hours. In the case of the designs made on silk and other various fabrics and the batik process, these were made over a period of time during 2014 at the Tiwi Design studio on Bathurst Island. The templates that were printed on fabric and worked into later by me were printed at Tiwi Design and further painted at my home studio on Bathurst Island.

5.2 The Ceremonial - Cycles + Circles

The cyclical nature of the research method ensures the revisiting of the core intentions of the project and keeps the research question alive. Running Wolf and Rickard (2003, p. 43) indicate, “Talking circles, as a unique instructional approach can be used to stimulate multicultural awareness while fostering respect for individual differences and facilitating group cohesion”.

Sharing circles tend to be cyclical and rounded arrangements rather than a linear top to bottom methodology. They are chronologically orientated ways of knowing and being, indicative of a ‘season’ that will return. Anishnaabe scholar Lyn Lavaelle (2009 p. 23), talks of sharing circles and incorporating Indigenous values and beliefs, where, “The core values, beliefs, and healing practices of the Indigenous community are incorporated throughout the research process”.

Karen Martin says her research methods are akin to ceremony. This is inclusive of an acknowledgement of ancestors and accompanying wisdom that assist to inform the research. In establishing ways on how to engage with the thesis Martin states,

The major purpose is to prepare for and acknowledge change, establish its effects and make necessary adjustments and reparations. Certain protocols are to be observed and certain responsibilities must be respected and fulfilled for the ceremony to be a strong one. (Martin 2008, p. 19)

In acknowledging the ceremonial aspect to the project as preparation to receive and transmit information receptive to ancient knowing systems, it became necessary to create a process for myself as non-Indigenous researcher to clear intentions when working with Indigenous research
methodologies. I decided to make ‘talking sticks’ (Fig. 5.1) throughout the research project. These were pieces of ironwood, 20-30cm in length with a diameter of 2-3cm gathered to whittle whilst contemplating the thesis and accompanying collaborative performances with the Tiwi cohort. Carol Locust, a Native American employed at the Research and Training Centre in Tucson, Arizona comments that “Talking sticks are used in Native American ceremonial life to enable the talker as being acknowledged in ‘sacred ceremonial space’ whilst speaking” (Locust 2013).

One person talks at a time and is given the talking stick to do so. This ensures the speaker has spoken and been heard. This is why I have included this process in the research, to be duly noted as contributing to the research, acknowledging both physically and symbolically the Indigenous research paradigm. Locust (2013) comments further,

> Whatever the object, it carries respect for free speech and assures the speaker has the freedom and power to say what is in his heart without fear of reprisal or humiliation. Whoever holds the talking stick has within his hands the sacred power of words.

Fig. 5.1 Stephen Anderson, *Talking Sticks*, 2011-2013, carved ironwood, approx. 30 x 30cm

Having encountered much difficulty in how to integrate Indigenous research methodologies in the
project, the crafting of talking sticks gave me a way forward. The making of talking sticks was, to my thinking, valid studio practice, and to be seen as a significant contribution toward the ability to work collaboratively. I felt this was an ethical way to present the argument and I am keen to acknowledge the virtues of such practice. Not a ‘side project’ but a vital tool aiding one’s ability to consider the approach to working in cross-cultural environments. Not dissimilar to a working journal, this process has offered the chance to reflect and connect with ideas as they developed.

The collaborations are made with others; the ‘talking sticks’ are something that I have made for myself at home in preparation to working with others. This process was not unlike preparatory sketches however the whittling of pieces of wood felt to me as if a space was being cleared that would enable the collaboration to take place. I anticipated that a ceremonial space was being prepared where latent emotional feelings could arise. The opportunity to become aware of these emotions assisted in bringing any unresolved feelings into my conscious mind. In this way the making of talking sticks cleared any psychic debris and helped keep it outside of future collaborative working environments. This activity afforded me a focus that gradually permeated all my working relationships during the research cycle.

5.3 Change

I have chosen to introduce the significant event of the passing of senior artist Jean Baptiste Apuatimi prior to talking about our following creative collaborative pursuits in an effort to accent the relationship and subsequent friendships that preceded the making of artworks together. In this way I attempt to highlight our relationship and the ceremonial aspect that is the funerary ritual being a deeply heartfelt initiation for me into Tiwi family custom. I preface this introduction with [Section 5.2] pertaining to the cyclical and ceremonial aspects of traditional Tiwi cultural life.

Jean Baptiste Apuatimi initiated the research cycle by her inquisitiveness about my own art practice and her desire for us to ‘do something together’. The research journey would ultimately lead to these very latent qualities and expose me to aspects of my personality that impeded my ability to
work effectively in a cross-cultural environment. For me the passing of the senior Tiwi artist was a deeply saddening experience. I was touched by her grace and generosity and feel indebted to her for recognising in me qualities that had long been underemployed and neglected.

**Note from my Journal:**

*My heart is sore:*

Jean passes away 19th February 2013 - 3 30pm.

She collapsed outside of the shop at Nguiu (Wurramiyanga) Bathurst Island and was taken to the clinic by ambulance. She died later that afternoon. Her grandson Francis called and told me his grandmother had passed. He passed me on to his mother who asked me to see the body before it left the island.

Having done so I reflect simply on the small space her body took up under the nylon sheet on the single frame bed stationed on Jean’s veranda and attended by family from the father’s side of the family as is customary for a pre-mourning period (Hoff, 1988). With such stature and esteem in her physical life, her diminutive frame belied a steely resolve to make paintings about her people, her culture. We had all prepared for this day. This was a shocking event, going through the motions of what was alas, inevitable.

Checking emails at this time the condolences were numerous and media attention was large. News of her passing spread quickly. So many considerations flooded my mind, I was deemed by her immediate family to be the responsible person to act when dealing with non-Tiwi communications. Family arrived and we all went to the church where we commenced the process of receiving each other’s heart-felt grief...to and fro the sobbing was palpable. I was asked by the immediate family to talk at her funeral about her standing in the community as a senior artist and woman who possessed strong traditional cultural values.

**Eulogy: March 2013**

Esteemed guests, family members and Tiwi people, friends; we come together on this day to witness the funeral of our beloved elder, friend, mother, grandmother and mentor to us all, and a shining example of what the human spirit can only describe as dignified and kindly. Generous with her time as arguably the Tiwi people’s greatest artist, our friend will be missed.

* I am sure each and every one of you here today has some story to tell, a memory of old lady, her
smile ... the laughter.

Her early marriage to Declan Apuatimi produced a large family and realised a sound apprenticeship with the prolific Tiwi Culture man, a carrying on of Tiwi art and culture as a senior painter working to share her culture through a dedication to her painting.

Hard working, light hearted, devoted and loving, others were placed before her needs. Seldom requiring little for herself her generosity seemed to be boundless.

As an artist the work produced during a long career acted as an example for the community and her influence reaching as far as the oval office in Washington where one of her paintings was gifted to President Barak Obama in 2011 on behalf of the Chief Minister.

It must be noted the family has been very generous in allowing her work to be exhibited as per the planned exhibition schedule. The major supporters of her work over two decades sees the collecting and art loving world much richer for access to the artist’s works that have yet to be seen by the public. ‘Maternal Lines’ an exhibition with daughter Maria Josette Orsto will go ahead as scheduled in April at Alcaston Gallery.

True to the artist’s innovative approach to arts practice three-dimensional prints representing Tungas (traditional bark carrying baskets) will be exhibited, an example of an artist working with traditional themes in a contemporary and ground breaking medium, pushing always the boundaries of what is possible. This naturally is what makes an artist remain true to her art, the ability to take risks.

Such was her true compassion and love for her people.

The following observations made on the fourteenth of March 2013 are a reflection on the funeral service of Jean Baptiste Apuatimi. These words were included in the thesis after the customary mourning period of twelve months was observed.

We buried ‘Old Lady’ today. For one year we are not permitted to say her name. The family asked me to dance widow dance as my adoptee relation to her is brother in law. According to Tiwi custom this is appropriate. It is a simple dance where the feet alternate double time to a regular clap by the group and the right hand makes a cutting up and down motion. I was motioned to take up my
ground very close to the coffin that was placed in the recreation hall due to the burial grounds being too wet. Standing directly opposite the ceremonial singer Eustace Tipiloura, I acted as timekeeper keeping the beat with my right hand in unison with his voice.

Three times the other dancers or particular family members of that totem dance\(^7\) would circle the coffin. They asked me to remain for what seemed to be at least half a dozen dances. The sweat poured from my body. I had loosened up considerably as the performance drew to a conclusion and the coffin was loaded into the hearse to be taken to the burial grounds.

As is custom I embraced the coffin covered atop with hundreds of plastic flowers. Her youngest sons embraced me simultaneously as my body slumped over the coffin. I started to sob and began the process of allowing her to leave. We cannot speak her name now for one year. Then we will dance again and celebrate her having left our earthly realm returning to the ancestors. I return to the art centre and read a message by a young graduate filmmaker from Sydney, Agathe Champsaur, who seems intrigued with the artist and wants to make a documentary. I inform her of the news and we agree to talk further about honouring the spirit of ‘old lady’ in film.

\(^7\) Tiwi Dreaming-the dreaming or totem of a Tiwi is inherited from their father. A Tiwi may not kill or eat their dreaming- it has a significant relationship with them that must be observed and respected. Each dreaming has its associated dance that is used to identify Tiwi at ceremonies. Some totems are: Crocodile, Buffalo, Horse, Turtle, Shark and Jungle Fowl. \(<http://www.tiwicollege.com/culture.php>\) viewed 17-12-2014
Jean and I had a very productive collaborative relationship that typically set the scene for other Tiwi collaborative relationships to follow. A collaborative etching, ‘Merdi’ (Pandanus) (Fig. 5.2 & 5.3) was made together in early 2012.

With the permission of her daughter, Maria Josette Orsto, I used her wooden comb and traced a grid in a sugar lift medium that translates as a positive mark when etched in nitric acid upon the etching plate. Jean assigned her ‘miyinga’ (lines, scars, marks) within and without the basic grid worked dotted lines. The zinc etching plate was then to be processed, the sugar lift solution coming away easily in the warm water that revealed the artist’s brushstrokes. I took a proof of the plate in a scarlet red and it was clear that no extra work was required; the print design was bold and consistent within the plate or ‘polarised field’ area of the zinc plate.

A couple of days later Jean arrived for a cup of coffee and a glass of water having walked about three kilometres to make the trip to my house. I showed her the finished proof in bright red (we discussed making a small edition in black). When asked what the title should be, she replied ‘Merdi’
which translates to Pandanus.

Fig. 5.4 Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and Stephen Anderson, *Tapalinga (Star)*, 2012, processed lithographic Stone

Fig. 5.5 Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and Stephen Anderson, *Tapalinga (Star)*, 2012, lithograph, 30 x 75cm

Fig. 5.6 Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and Stephen Anderson, working on lithographic stone together at Northern Editions, Charles Darwin University, 2012

A lithograph, ‘Tapalinga’, as above in (Fig. 5.4), produced together in the print studio at Charles
Darwin University was intended to represent Jean’s interest in ‘Tapalinga’, or star designs. I prepared a ground including a grid foundation and drew in the oblique angles forming the diamond motif, holding in my mind’s eye Jean’s Tapalinga series that has been an ongoing motif for the artist for some twenty years. We worked on the lithographic stone together, both drawing and painting freely without conversation for some time. There came a point when the work simply ceased to present opportunity for further input. The stone had been processed and I was yet to pull a proof for Jean’s approval.

I returned one week later to proof the lithograph⁸, to discover how the marks made previously had translated after the second processing of the stone. In rolling the image up it was apparent that one particular part in the image area was filling in with progressive passes of the leather nap roller. Jean rested her hand in this area and the grease from her hand had acted as a drawing medium. While not intended, it was however serendipitous, the images took on a richer and more formal presence as subsequent proofs were made to create a small edition to be printed in a rich black.

One day when she was painting at Tiwi Design I asked her as I nodded indicating to the dark space that appeared to be a small objective field or portal beyond the image area … “Home”? Jean’s response was, “Kuwa” (Yes), with a short reverent nod in the same direction. She paused for a second and smiled … she acknowledged that I knew her departure was imminent, and that she was about her business!

Works simultaneously ancient and contemporary presaged her imminent departure- a symbolic reference to the central dark circle that all marks emanate from and return to, a vanishing point with presence. As an Indigenous elder and a mother of eleven children (five surviving), Jean was an

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⁸ Fine art lithography is a hand process used to create original works of art that can be printed multiple times. Lithographs differ from etchings, engravings, serigraphs, and woodcuts in materials and process. For example, etchings and engravings are printed from a metal plate with incised lines, while a lithograph is made from a chemically treated flat surface. A serigraph is a silkscreen print, and woodcuts are printed from blocks of wood carved in relief. <http://www.tamarind.unm.edu/about-us/20-what-is-lithography> viewed 21-12-2014
exceptional provider of nourishment both spiritual and practical. The often-used terms of ‘marginalised’ and ‘disadvantaged’ were tags that did not apply to Jean! Art historian and friend to Jean, Jennifer Isaacs, described Jean as, “A tiny, bird-like woman, she appeared dwarfed before her bold, simple paintings until, inspired, she would break into performance” (Isaacs 2012, p.226). She negotiated large pictures; two metres square ochre on linen works that speak authoritatively of the Tiwi culture to which she is custodian as senior artist in a unique oeuvre of artwork spanning some three decades.

Demand for her work and invitations to ‘dance her works in’ meant her time was busy spent painting. Jean’s totem dance was March Fly. As her diminutive figure celebrated the arrival of Tiwi art to most exhibition openings, both domestically and overseas, the senior artist imbued an authentic presence as cultural ambassador for the Tiwi people at these events. Similarly, painting was something she continued to love to do as a direct working connection to her late husband Declan Apuatimi. Jean comments,

I love my painting, I love doing it. My husband Declan Apuatimi taught me to paint. The designs are ones he taught me - he said ‘one day you will be an artist, you will take my place’. Now I am doing that. Painting makes me alive.
(In conversation with Angela Hill- Tiwi Design archive, 2006)

Our collaborations were always respectful exchanges. Jean was willing to oblige when engaging with my work. Her energy was amazing for one so old and frail in appearance. She required my assistance to navigate the art world terrain and seemed proud to introduce me affectionately as ‘her manager’. When we were outside this domain, I was referred to as ‘aliaminni’ or grandson.

We travelled together in 2012 to Santa Fe New Mexico in the US where we were invited to produce a collaborative lithograph together. The space we shared was unique indeed. As her negotiator, minder, carer, student and friend, all feelings of white privilege were diluted. It was because of her reputation that I transited as a practicing artist of some consideration. I felt a little awkward;
however I was pleased to be guided and acknowledged by the artist. We shared the process of creativity and the marketing or business side of the art world together. This was what was basically a cultural practice for ‘old lady’\textsuperscript{9}. What was it then that I am doing, inhabiting this space? ... 

This is what was called a bridge building exercise - that would not be possible without patience; tolerance and forbearance accorded me by Jean. And yes, these are also the qualities I had to possess in acting on her behalf as broker of her output and subsequent standing as a contemporary artist.

Senior Curator of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Victoria, Judith Ryan comments on examples of Jean’s work included in the inaugural Indigenous Art Triennial ‘Culture Warriors’,

These works – rich in the rhythmical patterning of Tiwi jilamara, which is used to disguise the bodies of Pukumani participants from mapurtiti (malevolent spirits of the dead) – are characterised by a reduction of the figure to the grid. Jean, however, expresses her cultural activism by depicting important ritual objects encoded with meaning on black, sepia or red ochre grounds.

(Ryan, 2007)

I had the privilege of watching Jean work also; I could see and gain some understanding of what she was doing when painting the different themes she repeated in her work. From time to time she produced a painting that spoke directly to her returning home. She was leaving behind clues that referred to her childhood and a way of living when she was a young girl. Her work becomes more powerful as the works act like a ‘portal’ or window that allows us to see directly through the void to space beyond time where the ancestors await us. Ironically, the circular and ovoid central dark motifs become smaller as she draws closer to her passing; the more prepared she became, readying to passage to the other side ... home. More of her material reality is left upon the painted two-dimensional surface, remnants of a life lived.

\textsuperscript{9} A respectful term of endearment for a senior Indigenous woman.
Collaborating with Jean was simply an excuse by me to ‘hang out’ with her as evidenced in Figure 5.7. To be acknowledged by her as an artist inspired me to maintain my resolve to complete the research cycle when it seemed this project would not gather the required momentum and become a realised contribution to new knowledge. Her willingness and openness to engage in the project validated the process and encouraged others to join. This was the way things worked at the art centre. If Jean thought it was ok, then others could also join. Our collaborations were about the joy of sharing, without judgement of the outcome; the process of relationship was what was important.

All our faults aside ... we accepted each other.

Fig. 5.7 Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and Stephen Anderson, working together at Tamarind Institute, New Mexico in July, 2012
Fig. 5.8 Jean Baptiste Apuatimi *Winga Miyinga*, 2012, second colour transfer for lithograph, 35 x 55cm

Fig. 5.9 Stephen Anderson, *Winga Miyinga*, 2012, first colour transfer for lithograph, 35 x 55cm
Fig. 5.10 Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and Stephen Anderson, *Winga Miyinga*, 2012, final state, lithograph, 35 x 55cm

During a visit to Tiwi Design art centre by director Marjorie Devon of The Tamarind Institute,
Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2011, Jean and myself were invited to make a collaborative lithograph in Santa Fe New Mexico the following year. As the print studio was only one hour’s drive from the exhibition venue, we confirmed that this would be possible during our visit. It was discussed with Jean that I produce a foundation design that was related to her ‘Winga’ (sea) designs using concentric lines (Figs. 5.9 & 5.11). The long flight left us jet lagged and the move across continents facilitated a geomantic reality that made us feel everything was at a 180-degree turnaround.

As I usually use compass and ruler to create an exacting drawing I felt the need to change my usual way of working and that I would make the initial drawings freehand, a bold departure for me. Jean’s lyrical approach to mark making and the assurance of her line work inspired me to make the initial drawing that I felt would somehow complement her direct approach to mark making.

The Tamarind institute possesses state of the art equipment and we were assigned a master printer for our project together. This meant we only had to create the imagery and welcomed printer Kellie Hames’s input in the process of making a lithograph. The pressure of having to print the work alleviated, I felt a sense of freedom and privilege given Jean’s standing as an artist and Tamarind’s support of cross-cultural collaborative ventures. It created an atmosphere in the studio that was welcoming and supportive. My approach to the foundation graphic was somewhat ambitious. As Jean requested something that would serve her ‘Winga’ motif, I employed the zigzag design but arranged the oblique diamond motif to be aligned with concentric circular designs rather than the usual vertical and horizontal grid arrangement.

I was nervous, anxious to see if this would work. We were not working on a large scale and this restricted the intended motion of the pattern to move beyond the picture plane. Both Jean and I were pleased with the design. Jean’s input being the use of her trademark ‘pwanga’ (dots) and ‘miyinga’ (lines), as in Figure 5.8 to obliquely chequer board across the design in a twofold gridwork pattern.
New Mexico being one of the highest altitude states in the US, the hour-long drive from Santa Fe to Albuquerque offered the opportunity to view the ancient pueblos and mountain ranges that were impressive and vastly different to the Tiwi Islands landscape. I was pleased that Jean could see a different landscape and meet some of the Indigenous peoples from New Mexico. She took in the vistas and appeared very lively and attentive to the landscape. She seemed to be immersed in the landscape and was charged by this.

Whilst editing the works intended for exhibition it became obvious to me the volume of works we had created together over the year. Jean held court in the studio; she went quietly about her business. By her working with me, I was validated as worthy of consideration, some kind of cultural approval. Before our working collaboratively in New Mexico, the first works we made together were based on paintings I showed to Jean prior to undertaking doctoral research. She said she liked the paintings and commented to me that I ‘was a clever painter’. What I feel she was intimating here (and this she commented on numerous occasions when introducing me to others) was, ‘he is painter’, that this very fact afforded one some dignity and welcoming, a nobility of sorts. Inside I was pleased, perhaps she recognised my insecurities.

My desire to contribute something unique by following the rules and breaking them simultaneously, visited new ground in my own right and mirrored the senior Tiwi elder before me. Jean has achieved this effect with grand command and authority, but in a very quiet, humble and unassuming way. In her acknowledging me as a colleague, I felt I had been given permission to pursue this difficult terrain. Jean seemed to know what I was aiming for and the difficulties I would encounter, even if I were not aware.
Not long after this I presented Jean with one of the finished works I had shown her previously. It was a simple rainbow coloured offset square design (Fig. 5.12), a metaphoric gesture in an attempt to access the spirit of dreamtime that white and black as opposites could somehow coexist within a dreaming that was unified, integrated. Jean gestured for me to leave the painting on her table. I left her at this point. I did not want to be present, did not want to interfere with her input into what I had thought was a fully resolved image. In consideration of my minimalist sensibilities, Jean found a way to enter the work and also respectfully and inclusively leave a trace or memory of the foundation design. It became a transformed image, softened by Jean’s confident and bold brushstrokes countered with the hard edge of the linear marks I had painted previously. It became underpainting for Jean to do her ‘thing’.

I thought that two worlds collided in a way, one of artifice and symbolism countered by the natural ochre overlay of the senior artist ‘dancing’ with the piece (Fig. 5.13). Her counterpoint lent a depth to the work that added a physical presence because of the texture of the painted marks over the thin skin of the acrylic underpainting. Prior to her mark-making the painting operated with a clearly delineated foreground and background. I felt Jean’s rendering had brought the work together as a whole. Of all our works made together I find this the least visually appealing. Due to the intended rainbow colour palette, the translation of symbolic rainbow stripes is diluted by Jean’s direct
brushwork rather than highlighted and therefore an unresolved element within the work.

Friends and colleagues have viewed the work and feel it works very well as a collaborative piece. Having had some time to reflect since making the work with Jean, I feel my ambivalence was due to the colours being primary and this is not something Jean would do. The fact that she did this with me perhaps makes this work more significant than first realised.

I showed Jean the grey monotone zigzag design (Fig. 5.14) that had been divided into four equal sections and had been tonally graded in a diagonal offset pattern. She explained that the 60-degree break up where the zigzag pattern intersected looked like leaves. I presented her with the image and allowed her time and space to weave her magic.

Unlike the Rainbow Jilamara (body painting) image Jean had previous collaborated with, this new work that was to become ‘Leaves body painting - Wiyiini Jilamara’ (Fig. 5.15), being monochrome, appeared easier for Jean to engage with. I felt she had an easier access to the painting due to the grey tones used. The rainbow element of the previous work was stronger in design and not as easy
for her to negotiate. The initial design was quite vigorous; however the tone of the painting was less
dynamic. This allowed Jean to mix her palette somewhat higher in key to bring out the leaf design
she had intended to use. In particular her use of soft muted pinks and the addition of higher key
greys certainly lifted the sombre mood of the initial design. The entire original pattern had been
maintained. I thought Jean had created a joyous skin to adorn what formerly existed as a rather
meek skeleton.

![Fig. 5.16 Stephen Anderson, Central Tendency, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 110 x 120cm](image1)

![Fig. 5.17 Jilamara, Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and Stephen Anderson, Circle and square Jilamara, 2012, acrylic and ochre on canvas, 110 x 120cm](image2)

I feel this work is perhaps the most successful given it is the larger of the three works and working
with Jean’s painting was best when big and bold, however circumstances often dictated that this
was not possible. I did not want to overburden Jean. She painted with me that which she enjoyed to
do given how she was feeling. Although her vivid brush strokes remained bold to the end I was
aware she could get confused sometimes and that she only liked to paint when she was clear
headed.

Jean Baptiste Apuatimi’s painting routine was consistent. She came to the studio at Tiwi Design from
9-4 daily, and painted all day. This is how she liked it....to be busy. Her bold and gestural marks
danced authoritatively on the surface of the canvas. Jean was recording ancient stories for future
generations. Her finished works when viewed even now, have a strong presence that tends to swell
beyond the canvas substrate. Dots and lines woven in a ceremonial ordering within and without of her personal cosmological space. To be invited into this environment was transformative for me because it validated my original underpainting as forming a sound foundation for her to make works that had vigour and a dynamic that existed in her expression as an artist. It gave licence to the work presented to her to come to life in a way that was hitherto unseen by me.

Once Jean finished painting, the life of the work would emerge over time. It seemed that after completion a kind of gestation period was evident where the works gathered a momentum or a potency that continued to grow in the work post creation. These works demanded more attention when revisited and possessed character and personalities that required a period of time where one became acquainted with the picture. Jean explained to me that she had liked my work. She shared with me something that preceded the work and seemed to follow it. This was a connection to the source from where her humanity exuded.

5.5 Maria Josette Orsto

Daughter of Jean Baptiste Apuatimi, Maria Josette Orsto is the recipient of her mother’s stories when she passed. Also, she has forged an identifiable style on and in her own terms. Given her mother’s passing there was much for Josette to organise in her role as eldest surviving daughter.
Fig. 5.18 Maria Josette Orsto and Stephen Anderson, *One Way-Together*, 2012, lithograph, 34 x 70cm

Fig. 5.19 Maria Josette Orsto, applying gum acacia stop-out wooden comb for the lithograph, Charles Darwin University, 2012

I have worked closely with Josette since 2009, and she always asks me for feedback on her latest works. I feel very special to be consulted by an artist for whom I have great admiration. Always inventive and exploring new ways of making her ‘mark’ she has a personal yet definitive design ethos that is undeniably and quintessentially Tiwi. I have travelled with Josette to exhibition openings with her husband, renowned carver Greg Orsto and her late mother. We are friends. There exists a subtle difficulty for us as culture dictates; a modicum of modesty in our relationship is required as is the case for siblings, and yet Josette also has the optional status as ‘Mum’ in relationship to me. When this is invoked by other family members we blush given her understanding of my western lineage and genealogical origins but this works both ways for us. In all my Tiwi relationships I feel truly blessed ... to have it both ways is at times the strangest yet comforting positioning.

My comment to Josette is usually that she knows what she is doing and that to interfere with the initial design work is usually a direction to resist...best to start another painting and see where that will lead. Like her mother in the inaugural Culture Warriors triennial (an exhibition from the National Gallery of Australia programme where independent Indigenous curators are asked to represent the best of contemporary Indigenous art every three years), Josette represented the Tiwi people in
Highly competent with the use of her wooden comb, a painting tool appropriated over millennia as a by-product of Maccassan contact (Morris, 2001), Josette is skilled in representing dynamic nature-inspired patterns that speak directly to elemental activity. I prepared a simple arrowhead design that Josette suggested appeared as a one-way traffic sign. The title for this work is One Way Together (Fig. 5.18). This was the second lithograph that we had made together during a workshop held at Charles Darwin University in 2012. Josette had made a small study of ‘Kurlama Ceremony’ at the Australian Print workshop some years previously, however she had had more experience with etching and linocuts than with lithography.

Josette agreed to make another lithograph with me at Charles Darwin University during a week-long workshop with her mother during the making of works for the exhibition ‘Maternal Lines’ for the Darwin Festival period in 2012.

Josette used the comb to place both positive and negative dotted marks on the limestone substrate that would form the initial drawing to be processed for the next element within the design work for Morning Star (Fig. 5.21). Gum acacia was used as a block out material and is somewhat invisible when applying and yet it seemed to cause no issues for Josette when it came to the application of the gelatinous substance. Creative changes were made due to mistakenly following a different angle...
within the design. This was serendipitous as the changes made added an unexpected formal element to the print intimating a foreground. The finished print was a pleasing outcome for Josette and me. We decided to title the work ‘Morning Star’ as Josette suggested to me it looked like a star twinkling in the daylight, hence the attribution to the morning star reference.

The morning star image is often used in Indigenous graphic iconography representing the first visible star on the horizon when looking to the east. Further enquiry led me to understand that this was in fact the planet Venus (Salisbury 2009). We sometimes talked about the stars being represented in the Indigenous visual canon. An often-depicted theme in Indigenous art also being the constellation the Seven Sisters ¹⁰. Josette and myself talked about the morning star, about how it could be sometimes seen in the daytime. There existed a commonality of interest with this theme and I was very pleased to work with her in the realm of cosmological shared interest.

Often at the painting studio both Jean and Josette would reflect on the passing of traditional knowledge. They would recall who did what and how it was done in earlier times. It was obvious they belonged to a long tradition handed down from forebears. “They used to paint the Pukumani pole for ceremony with that comb,” commented Maria Josette Orsto. Her mother Jean responded, “I taught her to do that one!” Josette continued, “They used it a long time ago”.

Josette’s latest work (May 2012), a black and white painting, is of fronds or ‘wiyiini’ (leaves) in her native Tiwi language. The spiral manoeuvrings of her comb work belies a connection with the gestural movement and interplay of the dotted lines. Masterfully controlled yet meditative in gesture, she orchestrates a kind of painterly weaving with this simple tool. Josette can often spend up to six hours in a continuous application of paint to canvas in this way, attesting to her expertise

¹⁰ The Pleiades are among the first stars mentioned in literature. In Greek mythology, the Pleiades were seven sisters: Maia, Electra, Alcyone, Taygete, Asterope, Celaeno and Merope. Their parents were Atlas, a Titan who held up the sky, and the Oceanid Pleione, the protectress of sailing. Some Native American tribes, namely the Kiowa and Navajo have legends that speak of the Seven Sisters constellation. <http://www.pleiade.org/pleiades_02.html> viewed 18-12-2014
One day in late August 2012 I asked Josette if she would like to make a canvas with me based on the
‘Winga’ or sea design both she and her mother were fond of and always seemed to include as part of their artistic repertoire. The theme of the sea is a living memory that forms part of the Tiwi Islander nature and identity. Not unlike the changes within the emotional cycle, this poetic reference when used as a pattern in art practice becomes an autobiographical reference to people and place. She accepted the offer and I dropped the canvas (Fig. 5.22) around to her house. We discussed the fact that the underpainted designs were in various opposing tones of grey and black and white respectively. Immediately Josette mentioned that she would like to use the comb and natural ochres to counterbalance the opposing tension within the painting.

Traditionally Josette uses the comb in a symbolic way that is referencing the scarification ritual held some centuries previously on the Tiwi Islands as part of cultural ritual (Hoff, 1988 & Morris, 2001). Today the Tiwi use body painting or ‘Jilamara’ designs to emulate what would have been previously used to denote different rites of passage for mostly Tiwi men (Rothwell 2011). For Josette, her recollection of the use of scarification, (Miyinga) - within her culture was equated with loss. When great sorrow befell an individual or family, a cutting of the flesh ensued both to simultaneously numb and feel the grief pertaining to the trauma experienced.

It was easy for me to identify with the patterns formed on the surface of the sea by Josette’s comb work. Josette confided to me that this was the best way she knew how to make this effect of the tide, wind and the interplay of light upon the water. This theme ‘Winga’ (The Sea) seemed to represent an element that embodied ceaseless change and diversity in its expression. Josette seemed to like this and this shared design tended to stick and achieve consideration as a legitimate body painting design that introduced a common history. This is what Tiwi also develop with their dance or ‘Yoi’. It is a way to interpret histories and integrate them into cultural practice so as to not be forgotten (Isaacs, p.160, 2012).

Naturally I realised this would not be the case with this painting; however the principle was maintained, shared and understood in a natural way. I was not being patronised or indulged on the
level of a personal whim but respected for my seriousness of purpose in meeting the collaborating artist’s creative fidelity. My curiosity and approach in working with others necessitated the relinquishing of control. The ability to solve problems and start to share in the process of seeking and finding ensured the feeling that we were undertaking a journey together. The finished piece (Fig. 5.23) is indicative of a shared interpretation of the sea (Winga) motif. This motif held deep associations for both of us. The painting produced together as seafaring travellers is representative of this.

Given Josette’s constant use of the comb, I became fascinated in its use and wanted to give it a try. I was not sure if Josette would approve and asked her if she thought this would be ok. She looked at me rather quizzically and explained that, if this was what I wanted to do, how would she mind? The Tiwi artists with whom I collaborated were never hesitant about what they would contribute or how it would be done. This assuredness I also wanted to emulate in our working together.

Fig. 5.24 Maria Josette Orsto and Stephen Anderson, Shell design, 2014, ochre and acrylic on canvas, 80 x 30cm
Initially the shell design composition (Fig. 5.24) commenced with me using the comb to make a rudimentary orange zigzag pattern over a purple primed surface. I had fashioned my own comb having sanded a comb tool used for ceramics (commercially made), and adapted for the purpose of painting lines of dots onto the canvas. Unlike the hard edge geometry of my former work I wanted to put the ruler and compass away and focus on a more intuitive and less structured effort when working collaboratively. Using the comb gave me insight into how Josette used this tool to make marks. I felt a little clumsy at first but soon found a way that worked in its application.

I showed her the basic orange comb work and she requested that I leave the painting with her; she would take it home and answer what the marks were ‘speaking’ to her and bring it back so that I could see. Josette brought the work into the studio a couple of days later, having worked both white and red ochre into the design. She said that she felt the work now represented a shell and when you looked deeper into the painting many different patterns emerged. I voiced my concerns that I felt one more element was missing and suggested I pull all the line work together. This could be achieved if I used the comb and applied a darker tone to unify the design. After a couple of days I brought the work to Josette at the studio and showed her. She was pleased that all our initial contributions remained and that the work was not ‘over done’. In her words, “It is still fresh”.

I continued to make some small studies with the comb. I liked the treadlike pattern it made and one could cover a vast area quickly with this tool. It freed me up from the hard edge I formally applied in my own design aesthetic. This small painting (Fig. 5.25) started as a test with me familiarising myself with the use of the comb. I simply made horizontal and vertical lines across the canvas in the colours purple and orange over a yellow ground. I brought the work to Josette in the studio and asked her if there was something that she saw in the small and at this stage, unassuming canvas. She smiled to intimate that there was in fact no true image there but acknowledged that I had been learning to use the comb. She laughed and said she would see what she could do. The next day she brought the work to the studio, it was complete.

Josette had found a design within the lattice framework of the rudimentary comb work I had presented her with. I questioned ..."Wiyiini?" The wiyiini (leaf) design happened to be a theme she was working on in her own painting practice. This theme was alive in her creative expression and I was pleased it had entered into mine through this collaboration and become our shared expression.
She nodded her head. She had used only a minimal palette of black, white and red ochre. She had cleverly managed to bring the circular or rounded element into what had been a gridded and flat exercise. The work came alive and her pattern work with the leaf design seemed a most appropriate response relative to what I had initially given her to work with.

Threads

Fig. 5.26 Maria Josette Orsto, Vector Equilibrium inversion entropic, 2013, ochre and acrylic on canvas, 30 x 50cm

Fig. 5.27 Stephen Anderson, Vector Equilibrium Entropic, 2010, acrylic on board, 30 x 50cm

I include these images (Figs. 5.26 & 5.27) to illustrate how artists can be working in a connected way without the knowledge of doing so. These images represent the meeting points where lines intersect and connect ... gestures to the collaborative act.

Tiwi artists like to work in theme and series. My aim to work in this manner was well received by the artists. A work by Maria Josette Orsto, (Fig. 5.28) representing the patterns of the carpet snake (Yalinga), demonstrates the strength of repeating an idea, a variation on a theme that weaves a story.
Significantly a work by me from 2009 (Fig. 5.29) indicates a predisposition to working this way.

Fig. 5.29 Stephen Anderson Clear days, 2009, gouache on rag paper, 3 x 55 x 77cm
King Plates

Fig. 5.30 Maria Josette Orsto, Vivian Warlapini and Stephen Anderson, *Untitled*, 2014, etching aquatint, 50 x 30cm

Fig. 5.31 Maria Josette and Stephen Anderson, *Body Painting design*, 2014, etching aquatint, 25 x 30cm

In May 2013 we visited Yirrkala Art Centre, the heartland of Yolgnu culture in Arnhem Land, as stage
one of the Landmarks project, a collaborative print project involving four Indigenous Australian artists and four Native American artists. During this time the opportunity arose to make some work together.

The king plate images produced during 2013 define a broader collaborative event that involved Vivian Walarpinni also making a contribution to complete a unique artwork (Fig. 5.30). He was asked to contribute a small work that could sit in between Josette and my breastplate shaped etching plates for an exhibition that was to be held at the Tanks Art Centre in Cairns later that year.

At this juncture perhaps the notion of what constitutes collaboration should be explored. Having a good knowledge of each other’s approach to art practice we worked closely for the two-week residency period to make some triptych aquatint etchings and linocuts. I acted as technician, however the translation of colour and tonal areas as discussed with Josette at each stage of the plate’s development meant a call and response modality operated between us. In processing the plates for printing and preparing the various materials required, I had to work ahead and sometimes behind Josette as she concentrated on her mark making with the comb.

I often work this way back in the studio on Bathurst Island, sometimes preparing canvas for Josette, sometimes mixing colours. I am often asked for some feedback as to the direction an artwork is taking and have found a way that re-presents the image to the artist. Talking to what is positive about the image and confirming the artist’s original intentions through dialogue nurtures a receptive environment for the artist to work in.

We trusted each other and this was and is a very heartfelt dynamic between the translators of someone’s creative ideas. This is quite a different dynamic to working solo in the studio. One makes

11 The Land Marks project was conceived to give diverse indigenous artists the opportunity to work as a community, share experiences and artistic styles, and explore a common spiritual connection to the land. Tamarind Institute brought together two groups of artists from opposite sides of the world to participate in the experience of collaborative printmaking.
creative decisions usually without critique or feedback when alone in the studio. Working collaboratively with another artist requires considered and informed consensus, it is important for the development of the working relationship these ingredients are included.

I brought some shaped zinc plates or ‘king plate’ designs from an exhibition I had participated in called Imprint 8 in Dundee Scotland in late 2013. I discussed the potential of making a work together that we could submit as a collaboration and Josette agreed this would be a good idea. She scratched her design as a dry-point etching with the etching needle into the plate and suggested I should fill in the background with some tones or what is technically referred to as an aquatint. I stopped out the plate (Fig. 5.31) successively in three tonal gradations, light, mid and dark. She left this to me as we had been using this approach to stop-out other plates that had yielded pleasing effects of tonal variation that afforded the image some depth. Our comfortable working modality together in the studio elicited a response from the other artists that seemed to lift the spirits of the group. We commenced working more cohesively and sharing skills and approaches to our intended mark making that was initially lacking. I guess we broke the ice in relation to what was possible in defining ‘collaboration’.

Present as technical guide on behalf of the Native American contingent, Master lithographer Bill Lagattuta was a little intimidated by the ‘bush type set up’. The mediums we were using, etching and lino block printing, were not his area of expertise. Bill stated quite openly he had not seriously worked in these media since undergraduate school some three decades earlier. Despite his misgivings and his perplexed demeanour, we felt that simply his presence as one of the most senior living lithographic technical masters alive today was very reassuring to the group.

His humility demonstrated he could ‘adjust in flight’ and avail himself technically to the participants.

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12 In 19th and early twentieth century Australia, Aboriginal people who distinguished themselves in the eyes of the non-Aboriginal population, were honoured with an inscribed metal plaque to hang around the neck. 
The tiny studio accommodated six working artists. All tended to push the boundaries of what was possible together whilst simultaneously working within cramped conditions. All artists were highly competent and successfully established artists in their own right and yet a student type atmosphere pervaded, we were learning from each other in situ.

Stage Two of the Landmarks project was held in July 2013 in Albuquerque New Mexico at the Tamarind Institute, renowned as the world’s foremost lithographic print studio where Bill has worked for over two and a half decades. State of the art presses and work environment with attendant printers to assist the artists to produce artworks was a luxury rarely afforded elsewhere. The artists wasted no time in getting to work. The exhibition of these works opened to the public during the months of August and September 2014.

5.6 Alan John Kerinauia

Alan John Kerinauia and myself have worked together as artists and also worked closely in the ongoing governance of the Tiwi Design Art Centre. He is a softly spoken man who has been an ally when negotiating the oftentimes-complex issues that are a part of the day-to-day operations of a well-established business. Alan would definitely qualify as the face and hands behind the Tiwi Design brand. As an artist his assured line is commensurate to his affable character. It makes me feel happy when I consider our friendship over the six years I have known him. A 2014 trip to Canberra together, accompanied by another collaborating Tiwi artist and co-worker Vivian Walarpinni, to produce new designs for screen-printed fabrics elicited excellent results. Alan has a strong tradition as an artist. As he expresses it; “I became an artist because it was really in the blood” (AJK in conversation with Jennifer Isaacs (2012 p. 233).

Alan (‘Oba’) was the first local I met from the Tiwi Islands. He was wearing a Barak Obama t-shirt someone had brought back from America for him. That Obama the US president was black and of African American descent, impressed Alan greatly. Alan had worked at Tiwi Design through the seventies when he wore an Afro hairdo, and was an avid fan of the Rolling Stones. He knew we were
arriving as incoming managers, and acted as guide in showing my family and myself around the Tiwi
Design Art Centre, introducing us to the awaiting artists and community, who appeared keen to
greet us.

Alan’s job is ‘floor manager’ for Tiwi Design, helping with screen-printing. A painter, he has usually
been the first person to offer some assistance when translating cultural protocol for the ‘muruntawi’
(white person). He would embellish the colourful stories only where appropriate for his historically
accurate rendering of Tiwi life events.

Alan’s depiction of the local flora and fauna is prolific and there exists a strong demand for his
animal paintings, in particular ‘Ampitji’, Water Serpent dreaming (Fig. 5.32). The refined and
exacting diagonal cross-hatching designs employed to embellish the artwork or ‘tell a story’ are
Alan’s trademark as both draughtsman and cultural ambassador.

![Fig. 5.32 Alan John Kerinauia, Ampitji (Water Serpent), 2014, acrylic and ochre on canvas, 30 x 80cm](image)

An early example of how one series of work developed is the triptych with Alan Kerinauia titled
“Pumpuni Chevron Walk” (Figs. 5.33-35). The initial drawing made by me was (Fig. 5.33) a white
ochre zigzag pattern on black gesso primed rag paper. Alan interwove his design with yellow and red
ochre during a two-week period.
I left him to his work and when the work was finished suggested that the same design could be repeated by me in a yellow ochre and a red ochre base template design that he could engage with similarly as he had done with the black work. Alan thought this was a good idea so I prepared the work for him to engage with. I also initiated the triptych presentation. His subtle variations complemented my original drawing. The three works on paper (Fig. 5.35) produced one cohesive work. He is well known for his detailed line work, as evidenced by the initial artwork given to Alan. We shared this interest in mark making.

Fig. 5.35 Alan Kerinauia & Stephen Anderson, Pumpuni Chevron Walk, 2012, triptych, ochre on arches rag paper, 165cm x 231cm
The triptych as a formal device is used to effect subtle variations on a theme that employs a traditional Indigenous colour scheme—red, yellow, black and white. Numerous collaborative works were presented for viewing this way. When Alan first viewed the initial design I sensed his hesitation. All the marks were in the right place. The geometry was intact. Any further engagement with the work was open to potential mishap. The design would be disturbed. I assured Alan this was okay and that I would only be too pleased for him to work further as he saw what could be done from the design work before him. In this way Alan’s interest in doing a good job was evident. It took approximately six weeks for the works to be completed.

The first colour down was white ochre pigment on black acrylic gesso. Alan worked for over a two-week period on the first part of the triptych. He usually has a few paintings on the go at once. When he works he is absorbed in the painting process. I also find the process of painting a meditative one. Having spent the foundational part of the work in the drawing of the design, each element can be seen as contributing to the whole. Having a design to follow allows for a developing approach to working that is considered and will lead to a definitive and final ‘end point’. Thoughts may come and go freely and nothing diverts one’s attention from the endpoint. One can stop and start at will and return always to the point to recommence where one left off. This is the innate nature of working developmentally with patterns that are successively overlaid. We shared this approach with our practice.

Naturally there are some interesting rest stops where Alan has placed accents in areas where even he could not remain one hundred per cent consistent within the rigid framework, following the hard edge geometric design. His hand, so assured within the repeat motif that was originally drawn with brush by hand, allowed for some intuitive input creating a sense of space to the tension within the design. The slight movement away from the strict format added warmth that gave the three pieces a sense of cohesion.
Alan and I looked at the three works together and found it hard to decide on the way the finished work would hang, which piece would go where? Should it be horizontal or vertical? The works on paper read in a portrait orientation. We agreed the human scale compared to the more expansive horizontal landscape view was preferable. The title is ‘Pumpuni Jilamara’ (good body painting design) or ‘well executed’ in the Tiwi translation ‘good’ meaning well crafted. Our collaboration together was about sharing a love of process. To work with him in this way was very pleasing and strengthened our friendship. We had woven a new narrative together, one of curiosity, realising the making of artworks collaboratively in the spirit of playfulness.

5.7 Douglas Vivian Walarpinni

A somewhat different example of a collaborative effort was made on Bathurst Island, during July of 2012. I approached Vivian Douglas Walarpinni, emerging apprentice screen-printer of the iconic Tiwi design fabric, to engage in the project. He is the youngest of the Tiwi collaborators I worked with and is a member of the ‘Sistagirls’ community.  

![Fig. 5.36 Vivian Walarpinni and Stephen Anderson, printing Intervention, Bathurst Island, 2012](image)

13 The very existence of the word provides some indication of the inclusive attitudes historically extended towards Aboriginal sexual minorities. Colonisation not only wiped out many indigenous people, it also had an impact on Aboriginal culture and understanding of sexual and gender expression. As Catholicism took hold and many traditions were lost, this term became a thing of the past. Yimpininni were once held in high regard as the nurturers within the family unit and tribe much like the Faafafine from Samoa.

Vivian broached the concept of printing one of his father’s designs. As he was keen to represent his family story with the ‘old bark design’, an ongoing dialogue ensued. My idea was to bring a heavier material to be screen-printed.

A canvas painted half white and half black was pinned to the screen-printing table. I suggested that Vivian print with black ink on the white half and I print white ink on the black ground. A meeting with our squeegees in the middle where the black and white ground meets or intersects was choreographed (Fig. 5.36). It was then mutually decided to blend the black and white ink or inter-mix our opposing colours respectively to create a grey tone at the midpoint. It is interesting to note from the finished artwork that the intended harmonious design outcome was somewhat chaotic and roughly rendered.

Fig. 5.37 Vivian Walarpinni and Stephen Anderson, Intervention, 2012, acrylic screen-print on canvas, 175 x 75cm
This work became a symbolic representation of the hastily planned government intervention into Indigenous community life. Being present for the ‘roll out’, I witnessed directly the effects of this invasive procedure. The resulting artwork (Fig. 5.37) expressed our misgivings toward what we mutually felt was an undesirable effect. Vivian agreed...we had both experienced a consistent pattern of events where Indigenous people were not consulted and how this was again another symptomatic representation of dominant interests maintaining the status quo.

We understood at this point that in fact we would have to mix the grey for the midsection of the artwork in advance and locate the plastic medium at the midpoint. By working intuitively in this case the similarities were noted about how mistakes can be made if prior discussion or consultation is not made. Having talked ourselves through the process of what was explicitly required, it was more likely we would achieve what we had originally intended. We talked openly about the fact that I felt this collaboration had some deeply political undertones and was a truly symbolic example of the project ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’ as a whole. I expressed the view that we could perhaps see the action of printing together as being on opposite sides of the table, a clear metaphor for the Black and White race relations in Australia today.

I felt Vivian could see my urgency in getting it right and I was concerned I may have created an imposition that he felt obliged to commit to, given the growing symbolism and obvious political content as the first work being representative of ‘Phase One of the Intervention’.

Was Vivian compliant to my request in working with me because I was the manager and he felt obliged to do so? This question is valid and I discussed with Vivian that he did not have to commit to the project if he felt uncomfortable. Vivian nodded affirmatively that he would like to do this print work with me. I had passionately discussed my concerns about the Northern Territory Intervention with him. We spoke of how we could make a work that addressed the problems associated with the

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14 Each artist was given a consent form that clearly indicated they could withdraw from the project at any time without prejudice. See Appendix #1.
agency of self-determination. Vivian is a proud Tiwi man and I am sure that he complied with my offer to work collaboratively because he wanted to make a contribution to the issues confronting Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the context of how we relate with each other today.

The second effort or ‘Phase Two’ in this collaboration undertaken in November 2012, saw Vivian printing white on black (crossover), and me printing the black on white part. It was intended that locating the grey ink centrally prior to printing would yield a more integrated and acceptable finished artwork (Fig. 5.38).

This collaboration was digitally recorded and although an artwork was realised, the accompanying video will be exhibited with the painting. This work offers insight into the performative aspects of such artistic collaboration. This work is an example of action-based research that gathers momentum post performance. The working title of our work had become The Consult. There was much talk prior and post consultation and we were aware some trial and error would be undertaken but confident in our abilities and working relationship, we acknowledged that an ability to respond existed.
Vivian asked if we should use a different screen for this second attempt to realise a cohesive and integrated effort that we would be pleased with. He selected Danny Munkara’s *Stone Axe* print, as there were visual similarities with his fathers’ *Old Bark* design. Given the desire to avoid a messy meeting in the middle, Vivian suggested we mask out the canvas substrate so as to define the middle ground, the actual area to be printed grey, a warm mid-tone grey. I mixed black and white Permaset ink evenly and placed the screen ready to charge with ink and apply pressure to the screen with the squeegee.
Vivian wanted me to do this part; he appeared a bit nervous and didn’t want the responsibility of the mistake ... excitingly, a positive outcome was important to him. After printing this section we removed the screen, washed out the ink and waited about an hour for the screen to dry before we could print the black and white information on the canvas.

At that time I took a phone call that seemed to last the length of the drying time and when I returned to the print table the dry screen had been reset in place, now prepared for the final stage of printing. Vivian had masked the appropriate area for printing; we charged our side of the canvas equally with our respective black and white inks- (black for Vivian and white for myself). We each printed simultaneously with two squeegees meeting in the middle as the squeegees arrived at their intended destination within the field of the large silkscreen frame (Fig. 5.39).

![Fig. 5.39 Stronger Futures meeting point](image)

We removed the screen and proceeded to the wash out area, peeking over our shoulders as we spied the printed canvas. “Yes, perfect”, Vivian, commented. We were pleased. This second work was a symbolic variant of the second phase of the Intervention with the new title of ‘Stronger Futures’; this work documented what seemed to us to be a sustained attempt to control and limit Indigenous autonomy in their own affairs. Given the hasty and swift emergency response as a result of the Northern Territory Intervention, we are only now, some years later, beginning to look at the
need to have conversations that include informed consultation.

As outlined in the Report on the Northern Territory Emergency Response Redesign Consultations some years after the initial implementation of the then Howard government initiative, Future Directions for the Northern Territory Emergency Response (Australian Human Rights Commission 2007), notably revisits the feelings of discrimination and lack of consultation experienced by Indigenous Australians living in remote communities. Vivian and I have both shared the understanding and often discussed the sentiment that we are optimistic as to future relations between us.

Vivian, a strong advocate for social justice and gender equality, felt best suited to engage in a work that spoke to the issues affecting us directly in community life, and the ensuing longer lasting influence this creates beyond the prescribed areas under the ‘Stronger Futures’ legislation. The action of printing together, building a bridge with our screen and squeegees, meeting in the middle of the canvas was, for me, a kind of ‘Yirrkala Bark Petition’ moment where a painting becomes a document attesting to mutual understanding between interested stakeholders.

Given the sentiments in the wider Australian community and the Reconciliation Australia’s Reconciliation Barometer 2010 report talking of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians see each other, trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is low and despite the difficulties many are optimistic for the future of the relationship. It is intended that our working collaboration can indicate a way forward, a process symbolic for the ongoing process that is reconciliation.

We clearly demonstrated that the ability to discuss the process of working together is vital if we are

15 The 1963 Yirrkala Bark Petitions marked the first formal petition from Aboriginal people to be received by parliament. Two bark paintings were created to represent each moiety of the Yolngu people (Duwah and Yirritja) and on top of them was placed a formally typed and printed petition, calling for recognition of land rights. <http://www.abc.net.au/local/videos/2013/07/05/3797036.htm> viewed 18-12-2014
to be able to work effectively in creating a stronger future together. One may critique this as idealist as we put our hearts and heads together and made ourselves vulnerable. Some may consider this foolish. Vivian’s ease in communicating his concerns as a younger Tiwi person has made it possible for others to do the same. The methodology employed to achieve our aims was to use the screen printing medium to graphically document the act of making work together that was in our small way a protest against stereotypes, where moving outside of normalised boundaries of gender, race, hierarchical structures and political views. These actions are not always supported and in some cases can be seen as hostile. Our working environment offered a safe space for us to consider these issues and attempt to integrate them into our collaborative works.

As a community role model, Vivian demonstrates that his voice is heard when offering new ideas and approaches to issues that concern him. He voices his opinion and is open to listening to those of others with a non-judgemental and discerning poise. He has always embraced the opportunity to gain more skills and engage directly with the wider community outside of his Tiwi homeland. He has a good idea of the challenges and opportunities that affect his people and therefore by my working with Vivian, respectful engagement with each other offered us the opportunity to lend agency to intercultural collaborative endeavour. This was balanced and relevant to a space beyond the binary and thus polarised field.

5.8 Jock Puautjimi

Jock Puautjimi is an established painter and became well known as a potter of finely crafted wheel-thrown ceramics during the mid-1970s. Jock, in a conversation with Jennifer Isaacs (2012, p237) during an Interview on Bathurst Island in 2010 remarked, “I like doing some painting—painting is prayer for Tiwi people”. He is an accomplished draughtsman who has the ability to produce representational imagery alongside traditional Tiwi design iconography. Stephen Mueke eloquently explains the connection between ancestral knowledge and contemporary existential reality that is representative in the artistic practice of Jock Puautjimi.
So many Aboriginal stories seem to culminate in metamorphoses, beings turning into trees, star or tracks. But these are not everyday stories; they are magical stories that are part and parcel of the strong beliefs and rituals that intensify the (bodily) energies of the participants in the ceremony.

(Mueke 2002, p. 5)

Jock works mainly at the Tiwi Design pottery studio where his paintings, carvings and ceramic pieces are brought to completion. I first became aware of Jock’s artwork through his depiction of a black Mary Magdalene located in the Church on Bathurst Island. Jock is no stranger to working collaboratively. His long collaborative association with Dutch glass artist Luna Ryan, generated wheel thrown and handmade terracotta master moulds for translation to crystal glass (as described in 2.3, p. 49).

Fig. 5.40 Stephen Anderson, Crossroads template, first state, 2012, acrylic and ochre on canvas, 115 x 53cm

Fig. 5.41 Jock Puautjimi and Stephen Anderson, Crossroads, second state, 2012, acrylic and ochre on canvas, 115 x 53cm
The canvas I presented to Jock is again influenced by an attempt to square the circle. If you squint your eyes when viewing the unfinished template (Fig. 5.40), in the middle it is possible to see the subtle circular design emerge from the rectilinear boundary or field in which it is located.

Jock having commenced his input, worked on the piece at home and explained to me from time to time when asked how the work was progressing, “it is going slowly”. Having made a connection with the underlying geometrical principle that underpins the work, Jock seemed mindful to retain the evident subtle and intended interplay in the painting. He is a disciplined artist. His assured line work is exemplary; I placed an ultimate trust in his ability to achieve this outcome. He remarked to me that he was “trying to work out a puzzle”.

At some point the second-guessing and constant questioning of intention gave way to an understanding that my intentions were honourable. I gauged this by how the artist’s body language responded accordingly to what we were doing and if I sensed any reluctance or a willingness to do something or that they were otherwise engaged, I would simply leave it, drop the prospect of working at that moment and return to it when appropriate or wait until the collaborating artists...
suggested further engagement with the work themselves. We had the time to work this way. Usually the sign for not engaging was to look down, say nothing and keep working. This signalled the artist was busy. Sometimes they would simply say, “Just leave it, till tomorrow”. Tomorrow could mean one day or one week.

During October 2012, I asked Jock how the picture was developing. He had taken the canvas home to work on. Jock is a very softly spoken man, seemingly internalising his thoughts, he appears a generally happy soul. As is too often the case in the close knit Tiwi community, the sorrow of loss visited Jock with the passing of his wife in 2012.

As anticipated Jock had done little work after the initial design was made. Jock was in a grieving state and I felt sometimes it best to leave him to this process. When I visited him at his home he appeared happy to see me and to talk about painting and our collaborative work. He also needed something to focus on and when I visited, it seemed to motivate him further to engage with the canvas that I had left with him. When I first visited, the central point of the canvas had been engaged with (see Fig. 5.41), in yellow and red ochre squaring background infill.

I asked Jock if he had any issues or difficulties in continuing with the painting and why he could not seem to find a way in to the painting, mindful of maintaining both the circular and squaring dynamic inherent within the design of the work. He indicated that he did not want to flatten the circles and he was not sure what would happen. I guessed at some point he would have to dive in. After our discussion the painting progressed more steadily, weaving a subtle yellow and red ochre checkerboard pattern in the work. This design gave the effect of the grey oblique diamond floating in the foreground. Having overcome the initial obstacle of starting, Jock’s confidence grew; he had found a way into the painting. When I visited the pottery shed one day, the opportunity presented itself to decorate some earthenware dishes and prayer bowls that had been cast in slip mould form and pressed into existing moulds with earthenware clay bodies. I made the initial design drawings and left Jock to make his marks, as he liked to work alone when painting.
Jock is somewhat of a loner by nature and seemed sad on this occasion. I left him and returned a couple of days later. He informed me that he had glazed the works and that they were in the kiln being fired. I had discussed with Jock that it was my intention to exhibit the ceramic pieces like paintings hung on the wall. His response came slowly; he tilted his head to the side and stated, “I would like to see that”.

When the works were pulled still warm from the kiln, I was awaiting eagerly to see what Jock had done. All he had done was to glaze and fire the pots...this was to be his contribution to the works. He explained that they were fine as they were and he was happy to bring them through the glazing and firing process for me. At first I was a little disappointed although I did not show it. I was feeling that this effort was not indicative of what I conceived as a ‘true collaborative effort’. An inherent geometric solution within the design started to appeal to my post minimalist sensibilities and given our initial conceptual difficulties in producing an artwork that attempts to square the circle, my disappointment abated.

This was somewhat of a breakthrough in being able to actually produce a work together without the difficulty of what had become a task. The feeling I might have compromised Jock with the expectation of how the work should be, arose. I had expected him to do more than simply fire the work for me. In truth I was disappointed. I certainly did have expectations. I learnt a valuable lesson here that allowed me to take yet another step back from needing to control the collaborative experience. My logic prior to this insight had been obviously weighted by a projection as to outcome, a kind of blind control as researcher, forgetting the collaborating artist as equal stakeholder in the finished work.

A few weeks passed and it became obvious from Jock’s body language that I should ‘help him out’ for his efforts in our collaborative ‘happenings’, a ‘performance fee’ if you will. He asked “What would a collaborative painting like ours be worth if it was sold? I replied that I did not know—perhaps one thousand dollars. Jock’s shoulders and eyebrows seemed to shrug in unison. He needed money
and suggested I advance him five hundred dollars for his input and that the painting should be placed ‘on the market’. Naturally I had explained numerous times to him that the works would be exhibited together along with other contributing collaborating artists sometime in early 2015. I explained that this work belonged to him and that he was a researcher also.

Jock knew his standing as an established artist meant his talent as an artist was required, that he was not simply to be viewed as a research subject in an academic capacity. I was aware of the long-standing history of artists being exploited and the allure Indigenous art practice has for the ethnographer. Given we were making this work together, Jock was insistent about what was reciprocal and what was not. I did not know if the artwork would sell but that the painting had been expressly created with the initial intention to contribute to new knowledge as a part of my PhD research conducted as a research student at Charles Darwin University. Again I explained that the aim of the research was to see how Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists can work together in the spirit of relatedness, given our stained histories as colonised and coloniser.

Jock understood this as he had been given a consent form explaining the study and its aspirations. He understood this but made the insightful point about compensation and ownership. The “who, would get what, when”, part? I informed him that if the work sold, then 100% of the money would be his for the keeping, less the outlay of materials costs that we would negotiate if the works were sold.

He agreed and this made me reflect, I was keeping the works until exhibited as part of the doctoral thesis presentation in a practice-based research degree and the artworks ultimately belonged to the collaborators post-presentation. The question arose what would be my responsibility post-research submission. Had I simply been telling the collaborating artists what they wanted to hear in order to achieve my aims? I had considered what would happen after the PhD research but with the pressing workload to complete, certain aspects were perhaps glossed over. Jock had acted as a mirror enabling me to see the subtle yet pervasive need to drive and direct the study. Moving to
completion where issues of relatedness were concerned may have seemed trite to him.

There existed for Jock two quite separate issues pertaining to art practice, one the making and two, the marketing. The making was highly skillful. His innate design sense and drafting skills produced assured lines and detailed representations of Tiwi creation stories and the numerous totemic animal designs so indicative of the Tiwi aesthetic. I worked closely with him in his representation in projects and the marketing of his work. It seemed he could differentiate between the two roles in this collaborative context. It was pleasing for me that our relationship could deepen due to making an artwork together. Being involved in this process with each other tended to strengthen the trust between us due to the making of this unique artwork. Jock was unique in his collaborative association with me in that he felt the commercial aspect to the work preceded any academic interest in his work as research.

This (research) is what happens after the work is made and then sold. I made a point of informing the artists that the works certainly had a commercial value and that after they were exhibited as part of my research submission then they could be sold. The artists all agreed that this was acceptable. Jock however was reluctant and felt that perhaps the opportunity to make a sale of the work had been missed. I explained to him this could happen after the exhibition.

5.9 Ita Tipungwuti

Emerging Tiwi artist Ita Tipungwuti and I started a dialogue about working together. Ita and I are about the same age. Ita is a dedicated artist who comes in daily to the art centre to make her finely crafted body painting designs depicting Tiwi ceremonial life. Tiwi body-painting design is referred to as ‘Jilamara’ (Isaacs 2012 p.43) and Ita is prolific in her numerous interpretations and subsequent depictions of her related kinship markings.
In November of 2012, I brought the painting (Fig. 5.44) ‘Reflections’, into the office to show her and to wonder if she felt she could work with me. Ita paints various versions of ‘Kurlama’ (Isaacs 2012 pp.43-5), the main ceremony for Tiwi to initiate young men, give Tiwi names and pay respects to the ancestors. The circular mandala-inspired image is indicative of the persistently diagrammatic and graphic renderings of Tiwi artists. It is a map that indicates the four skin groups (Pandanus, Rock, Sun and Fish). For the Tiwi these skin groups indicate whom one can and cannot marry. “To go ‘wrong skin’ is not good”, Ita, commented to me.  

Adept with the comb or brush, Ita likes to be inventive with materials, yet remains faithful to traditional iconography and the relational colours associated with family groups. “The way Old Lady paints” inspires this playfulness she informs me, a reference to Jean Baptiste Apuatimi. Ita was very attentive to the way her mentor painted, in particular her mixing of colours and how her work

16 The skin group, or “yiminga” of a Tiwi is matrilineal; it is inherited from the mother and determines the marriage line. The word “yiminga”, means skin-group, totem, life, spirit, breath and pulse. There are four skin groups, namely; “wantarringuwi” (sun), “Miyartiwi” (pandanus), “Marntimapila” (stone), “Takaringuwi” (mullet), Each of these has many sub groups. The skin-group into which Tiwi is born determines whom they may, and may not marry. <http://www.tiwicollege.com/culture.php> viewed 8-1-2015
always appeared new and fresh...always “proper culture way”. She explained that the design I presented to her looked like water reflections and her approach to the diminishing zig zag pattern in light grey design was respectful of the initial drawing. In the making of the work, she appeared determined to leave some space between our respective marks; hence a kind of external dialogue emerged. Ita took the painting to the studio and commenced with the application of her prepared ochre ground, firstly with the wooden comb and then a fine brush was used to apply subtle hatching where deemed necessary. In silence, I watched her for some twenty minutes. She certainly seemed to know what she was doing, focussed, and about her business as an artist with integrity to her mark making. I returned periodically to see how the work was progressing, noting that Ita looked at me for some kind of approval or comment. The best I could muster was a raised eyebrow and positive nod with a softly and slowly spoken ... “very nice!”

Ita continued to apply light natural ochre marks, following the drawing and yet all the time allowing her input for an intended depth of field in the under painted design to emerge. This created a less flattened effect as Ita suggested to me, “more rounder”. When I returned she had commenced work on a new picture and turned to tell me that the painting was finished ...“do you like it?” My reply to her was “yes it is lovely” and “Thank you Ita”. I took the painting home to study it further in the privacy of my studio. I did not know what to make of the work. Yes, we had worked the brief in the title of the work ‘Reflections’ prior to Ita’s input, which may have determined an outcome. I was somehow unaware as to what was being reflected back at me. I still am not sure how this painting works for me visually, as a picture and at a personal level. I have had some very positive comments from people who have viewed the painting, the usual comment being, “it is beautiful Steve”.

I guess this is something I search for in my own work and personally find this quality difficult to attain. The process of working collaboratively offers the artist an ability to reflect on authenticity both creatively and perhaps more deeply, as a spiritual entity or something divinely inspired. Yes, it was Ita’s painting that was beautiful, her gestures possessing a lightness of touch. Our collaboration became an expression of the artist as author rather than as simply a willing participant in a research
study. Charles Green offers some insight,

Whatever the motive, artists saw collaboration as a way of re-creating themselves as non-alienated subjects and as a free action by individuals who wished to step outside the boundaries of personal expectations and conditioning.

(Green 2001, p. 18)

As I was still pondering my collaboration with Jock, Ita had so effortlessly expressed without words what was happening in the collaborative act. In the painting that we had made together or moreover the painting that we had not made together but allowed to occur without the need to have an expected result, a projection conditioned by a need to perhaps impress an audience, a work that would no doubt be judged by others. At this stage of my collaborative endeavours, the process itself was more valid than the outcome (a finished art work), which tends to become the mission of the solo painter in expressing the singular view on behalf of the whole. Collaboration serves here as fertile ground worthy of an attempt if the intentions have some allowance for and ability of the individual’s ego, if only temporarily, to be subsumed.

Fig. 5.46 Ita Tipungwuti and Stephen Anderson, *Walking Jilamara - Variations #1*, 2012, acrylic and ochre on canvas board, 30 x 30cm

Fig. 5.47 Ita Tipungwuti and Stephen Anderson, *Walking Jilamara - Variations #2*, 2012, acrylic and ochre on canvas board, 60 x 50cm
Extending on the ‘Reflections’ experience, the suite of works *Walking Jilamara* (Figs. 5.46-49) was an exercise in scaling down the grid by increments of fifty per cent. I had simply repeated the design in orange and purple attempting to break down the pattern and to continue the design beyond the border. I asked Ita what she thought the work needed. There was flatness to the work. It was a foundation painting or ground for further work. I asked Ita the question, “How could you bring this to life?”

We discussed the fact that in working this way there were many repeated designs that grew from the zigzag motif. The square, the diamond, and the triangle, all of these basic shapes could repeat smaller and larger within the design. This is why I had repeated the motif and asked Ita if she could find some design elements that linked all four paintings together. This work is to be seen as an exercise in exploring design potential...how ideas develop.

Ita brought the works back to the studio one week later having made her marks at home. She explained that I should also do some comb work to bring the work together. She went on to say that she had made black and white marks with the comb, and now, more comb work was needed in the orange and purple areas to integrate the work...tidy it up. I did this by applying 45-degree orange tangential comb lines and vertical purple lines to complete the design.
Ita stated that the works were now finished; she smiled as if I was perhaps a bit strange at wanting to engage in this way. She knew we were simply ‘playing’ because the works were on a small scale. To me, these small ‘exercises’ nonetheless contain the seed of the collaborative process and certainly lend themselves to be likened to scales in music, a ‘warming up’ for more complex works.

The artists respectfully maintained the integrity of the initial design foundations, contributing elements of their own that enhanced the initial foundation designs presented in the initial working drawings. I note here that this was a similar exchange when I engaged with the Tiwi foundation designs. I found myself bound by the inherent strength existent in the initial drawing that I would engage with. What is interesting to note is that as a cohort of collaborating artists, we managed to maintain a communication acknowledging the initial foundations of the design. We contributed without disturbing the initial idea in an attempt to subtly enhance rather than overtly dominate the other collaborating artist.

5.10 Conclusion

Chapter 5 being Phase One of the practice based collaborative research resulted in our initial meeting as co-creative practitioners. This initial phase started strongly in the works produced with Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and her daughter Maria Josette Orsto. The gravitas of working with ‘Old Lady’ certainly gave the project some legitimacy and I learned a great deal about reciprocity and relatedness from this particular relationship. Working with Maria Josette Orsto was equally engaging given her standing as a senior artist who uses a unique technique with such assured skill. Initially I felt intimidated in working outside of my comfort zone; however the Tiwi artists were accommodating and supportive. The works produced were varied in both theme and look. From Alan Kerinauia’s walk with me through body painting design motifs to Vivian Walarpinni entering into addressing the political question of how we as non-Indigenous people engage with Indigenous people living in remote communities today? Both Ita Tipungwuti and Jock Puautjimi offered a stimulating contribution to collaboration where equal input was offered by ensuring I retained a right of reply in the authorship of the artwork. I had no ideas on what the finished work would look
like in advance. The collaborating artists acknowledged the initial foundation designs offered to them by me as being plausible designs for sharing and so the work began without difficulty. Where the problems arose was pertaining to how these works might ultimately be viewed in a cohesive exhibition and how this could be achieved. This was a concern for me in wanting to ensure equal representation of all the contributing artists in the project.
Chapter 6: Stronger Futures (Phase 2)

This most transformative sentiment is echoed in a letter that Guru Swami Vivekananda wrote to his devotee Miss Josephine McCloud in April of 1900.

I dare not make a splash with my hands or feet, for fear of breaking the wonderful stillness that makes one feel sure the world is an illusion. Behind my work was ambition. Behind my love was personality. Behind my purity was fear. Behind my guidance was thirst for power. Now they are vanishing, and I drift. I come, Mother, a spectator, no more an actor. Things are seen and felt like shadows.
(Swami Vivekananda 1900)

6.1 Introduction

These words by Swami Vivekananda acknowledge most poetically some of the qualities a person should possess to openly experience and engage authentically in relationships with others. In this way the individual can lean into the difficult aspects that thwart connection in an attempt to understand the higher nature of the self.

Initially the project was intended to produce one comprehensive body of work with images that had been instigated by me. This second phase and this subsequent chapter is considered to be a response to Tiwi iconography. This I had considered as an ethical way to acknowledge the artists. I had initially felt for us to be able to weave works together, a call and response dynamic could help establish a point-counterpoint relationship to the practice. I felt that the works produced in this second phase were stronger in that by engaging with the Tiwi design aesthetic I could give more of myself in the response to their iconography. With the first phase I felt more restricted as the initial response came from the artists to my initial designs.

In this second phase we were able to explore different materials and techniques be it the use of heavy hemp or light silk materials and the use of painting over printed silkscreen or the use of Batik and overdyeing processes. Some new artists are introduced, in particular senior artist Bede
Tungatalum whose graphic style and formidable reputation as an artist I was keen to collaborate with.

6.2 Osmond Kantilla and Vivian Walarpinni

Fig. 6.1 Osmond Kantilla and Vivian Douglas Walarpini, printing 3rd state, overlay painting, *Jilamara*, at Tiwi Design, 2014

Fig. 6.2 Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and Maria Josette Orsto, overlay painting, *Jilamara*, third state, 2014, 170 x 90cm

Fig. 6.3 Osmond Kantilla, Vivian Douglas Walapini and Stephen Anderson, overlay painting *Jilamara 2*, 2014, screen-print and acrylic on canvas, 170 x 90cm

Fig. 6.4 Osmond Kantilla, Vivian Douglas Walarpini and Stephen Anderson, overlay painting, *Jilamara 1*, 2014, screen-print and acrylic on canvas, 170 x 90cm
My initial reluctance to work in a way that might be perceived as appropriation led to a discussion
with senior printer Osmond Kantilla and apprentice screen printer Vivian Walarpinni. We talked
about successively overlaying screens with different designs onto a stretched piece of canvas that
would sit at the end of the print table (Fig. 6.1). We could build up an image depending on whether
we felt this worked. What colours would relate to each other would be determined as the piece
evolved. The day to day printing of fabric progressed and when it suited, Vivian and Osmond would
print an overlay colour design on the isolated canvas at the end of the print table. It took a while to
build up a surface successively. The image commenced with a light yellow Jean Baptiste print, then a
green Maria Josette image, then an Osmond pandanus in red (Fig. 6.2).

Up to eight different screens were used as ‘tones’ to build up a design until a finish point was
realised in a dark blue Yuwurlu (mangrove worm) design by Angelo Munkara (Fig. 6.3), being the last
image that pulled the work together. Osmond and Vivian both considered the work was ‘finished’ at
this point. The finished works had taken some three weeks to complete. Each successive printing of
the canvas piece was placed at the end of the printing table and it was up to the printers to print the
image they felt appropriate for the next layer that would work with the previous one. I was not
always present when this happened, however with each successive layer both Osmond and Vivian
were keen to show me the result so we could talk about which design and colour might be next.

We created another work (Fig. 6.4) in this same way by successively building up the image. Both
works appear similar and form a kind of diptych. Given the printers were ‘drawing’ with the screens,
some notable effects emerged- bleeding edges of the design and transparencies with colours were
interesting. A purely intuitive approach meant we had to be patient and allow the image to emerge
organically. These works appeared more gestural and abstract. Tension existed within the dynamic
of the canvas. This was something that I was keen to avoid when working collaboratively. In
engaging in this way, less control existed, freeing up our working relationship and allowing for
invention.... playfulness. As a process it was chaotic and somehow liberating. In working this way
something less abstract and more integrated could suit when placing a final layer of design over the
initial layers to bring the work to a state of what we could determine as completion.

Creating tends to be the act of the whole person. He is then most unified, most integrated. In moments of here and now we don’t reject or disapprove, we become more accepting. Spontaneity allows the honest expression of our whole uniqueness. The person-centred mode, both being non-judgemental accepting and existential, makes for a harmonious partnership.

(Silverstone 1997, p. 136)

As an exercise it was about relationship building. We knew it was simply a means to an end until the intended dynamic of a representative image that pleased us emerged. I could contribute in the way of the two varying patterns, both flowing and hard edge geometric design work. These patterns could somehow be woven into screen printed designs and foundational drawings offered to me by the Tiwi artists. In building these bridges to understanding through working with each other, I continued to reflect on the shape of the bridge that was made when the two screen printers held the squeegee to pull it through the silk screen to create an image.

This quote is mostly applicable to the collaborative process when talking about an individual’s best practice contribution to working with others. Similarly, when printing together in this way we were connected through the sharing of the tool that would create the impression. By moving the squeegee with downward pressure to meet in the middle across the printing table, we spanned the divide or space between us and bridged it with the creation of the printed image together. This action became for me a symbolic gesture that represented and underpinned the aspirations of the project. The screen-printing process is by nature collaborative and therefore became an extension of how the work evolved through making marks together simultaneously.

6.3 Bede Tungatalum

Bede Tungatalum is a senior Tiwi artist. With Giovanni Tipungwuti he started the Tiwi Design Art Centre in 1969. Although Bede now works from home as an independent artist his screen-printed
designs are still in use today. From modest beginnings with small woodblocks and hand cut stencils for screen-prints, the Tiwi Design business grew rapidly as Bede’s iconic Tiwi imagery found its way to a wider audience due to the commercial applications associated with the screen-printing process. Many of Bede’s designs are today printed on large screens (100 x 150cm) and are used in making apparel for numerous applications in home-wares and furnishings in commercial enterprises. Bede, now in his mid-sixties is still very active as a carver of ironwood sculpture, woodblock prints and ochre on canvas paintings (Isaacs 2012, p. 7).

I approached Bede to see if working with two of his designs with my intended designs (curvilinear and zigzag), would be OK. He got the gist of what I had planned and was, as he enthusiastically stated ‘looking forward to the results’.

The screen-print used originates from a design made in 1974. I wondered how many metres of this design had been printed to date, also reflecting on images of people clad in Bede’s design wearing newly fashioned garments. The title of Bede’s design is ‘Body painting design’. I intended to work a zigzag chevron motif into the design. Over the initial red – brown – blend print pulled onto the primed canvas tacked onto the screen-printing table, the chevron motif was painted in a light magenta to complement the brown and red blend (Fig. 6.5). I decided to break the rhythm of the white zigzag next to the magenta with a black; this gave the black and white areas a tension creating a polarising effect. The border surrounding the design suggested the symbolic use of a green intimating an external landscape beyond the design ‘field’. This tended to configure the pattern motif as figurative within the landscape, being symbolic as metaphor for the concept of ‘connection to country’.
The colour scheme employed is indicative of the human body as is evidenced in the title of Bede’s design. The black and white tension between settler and settled is juxtaposed by the browns, reds and purples of the native skin tones that charge the scene with the warmth of a human presence. Geometrically, the break-up of the design in groups of four is a reference to the four skin groups; Sun, Pandanus, Rock, and Fish.

I decided to use a different colour scheme in this work that was indicative of islander life, blues and turquoise, the bright use of colour that is representative of Tiwi designs (Fig. 6.6). I used secondary and complementary colours. I left the border unpainted and found this work required more contemplation as each successive colour choice created an energetic dynamic within the work. I had asked Bede for his input here and he commented that, ‘You would know’. In this second study, I was attempting to create a companion piece for the first study. This seemed to mirror the process of making a work collaboratively with Bede and supported our work as a partnership, more than simply
a singular effort. In the first work #1(Fig. 6.5), no changes were made during the painting. In this work #2(Fig. 6.6) the appropriate changes had to be made to create the balance intended. To me there still exists a subtle tension in the work that I have left unresolved.

During the painting of this work scores of white cockatoos were screeching in my back yard in unison. They became at times extremely loud and then at times small groups seemed to commune together. These sounds located me in a place that was the Tiwi Islands; I had never experienced such a cacophony anywhere else. Whilst painting this work, these sounds were not simply arresting my attention but also memorable, and in this case, noteworthy.

Given the contemplative and meditative practice of painting in my zigzag design within the original Bede body-painting design, I became acutely aware of the sounds of my environment. Also during this time a focus on breathing was accentuated, on the breath in, and the breath out. Contemplating the non-linear reality of time whilst painting created an atmosphere where chronological time ceased. Space became expansive where the timeless and the infinite became subtly perceived through this state of awareness.

In an attempt to extend the original design I wove my pattern through his. My collaboration with Bede was about how we could work our designs together. I felt this was a bold move and asked Bede what he thought. His feedback was that it was interesting to see our designs working together and that they achieved what they were intended to do which was tell a story together. The work started with an underlay or zig zag underpainted design by me. Bede’s design was then screen-printed over this underpainting and then I embellished his design with colour in an attempt to integrate the (at this stage) competing imagery.
The design work for this painting (Fig. 6.7) was placed on the canvas prior to printing. I felt the designs worked well together, so thought it might appear more integrated if the chevron design was laid down in a simple tone and the body painting design pulled over the top of the canvas. I was interested to see if there would be any transparencies as the ink and the paint mixed. The effect was minimal and further painting was required to enhance the tonal depth but I felt it worthwhile to have an attempt.
6.4 Pwoja

Fig. 6.9 Bede Tungatalum and Stephen Anderson, *Pwoja*, 2014, state 1, screen-print and acrylic on hemp, 140 x 34cm

Fig. 6.10 Bede Tungatalum and Stephen Anderson, *Pwoja*, 2014, states 2 & 3, screen-print and acrylic on hemp, 140 x 68cm

Fig. 6.11 Bede Tungatalum and Stephen Anderson, *Pwoja*, 2014, states 4 & 5 screen-print and acrylic on hemp, 140 x 68cm

Fig. 6.12 Bede Tungatalum and Stephen Anderson *Pwoja*, 2014, states 6, 7, & 8 screen-print and acrylic on hemp, 140 x 102cm

The word ‘Pwoja’, pronounced ‘pwotar’, has many meanings in the Tiwi language. For example my Tiwi nickname is Pwoja. This means ‘an original’ or good in this context, I was given this endearment because I liked the sound of the word, my friends called me ‘Pwoja One’. Pwoja can also represent a
fine painting, to represent the bones of something. It can also be considered small change...a little money. Or again the fineness of bones, the smooth surface and detailing in bones themselves. I continued to see this term used in varying nuanced meanings over time.

Fig. 6.13 Jean Baptiste Apuatimi painting *Jirtaka* (swordfish), 2011, Photograph Stephen Anderson

Bede’s Pwoja design is in this case for me, a dedication to the late painter Jean Baptiste Apuatimi. The nature of the long painting panel quality of the images lent itself to memories of Jean’s *Jirtaka* or sawfish painting as in (Fig. 6.13) above. The design was subtly embellished in Bede’s design. I consider it a fitting tribute to a great lady who had died a year prior to commencing this collaboration. I talked to Bede about this and he said he would like to see the triptych stretched and hung as I had indicated to him in conversation.

The colours I used were minimal and apart from some of the grey tonal variations I used a simple earth palette of natural ochre tones—ochre yellow, red oxide and white. Within the design a spinal column stabilises the works and integrates the three panels forming a triptych that will be presented as one cohesive work. The bridge in the unified format is the tones of grey that situate the image in
the body. The image is corporeal and graphic in essence as evidenced in (Figs. 6.9-12) which details the progression and developmental states of the three panels. As a graphic mark maker, Bede understands how one can say more with less. He cuts to the essence of that which he depicts and reveals the very nature of what he sees in his own inimitable graphic style. I was mindful to enhance this graphic interplay and attempt to bring some warmth to the work as a dedication to our late mentor. To use Bede’s imagery in this way acknowledged his authority as an exemplary custodian of Tiwi iconography. I certainly became aware of this when working with his designs.

6.5 Wanaringa (Sun)

![Fig. 6.14 Bede Tungatalum and Stephen Anderson, *Wanaringa Sun Shadows 1*, 2014, screen-print and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90cm](image1)

![Fig. 6.15 Bede Tungatalum and Stephen Anderson, *Wanaringa Sun Shadows 2*, 2014, screen-print and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90cm](image2)

This design first appeared in 1974 as a screen-print for fabric design. The two smaller studies used the curvilinear flow design that overlaid Bede’s Wanaringa (Sun) design. A pattern containing repeat motif mandala or wheel shapes by the senior artist was printed onto canvas to engage with my own design over the top.

I initially chose this design because I felt it would work in with Bede’s sun motif as a good
counterpoint to the zigzag motif as seen in the Chevron Body painting print collaborations (Figs. 6.5 & 6.6) by including my curvilinear motif. The sun image lent itself to a curvilinear flowing design that I approached as a body painting graphic, using the concept of the skin’s surface as the inspiration for colour. Study one is indicative of the body and its connection to land. Study two is related to the sea and the reflections relating to the water body that surrounds the Tiwi Islands. The palette used is saturated with pure pigment. There exists a shadowy dynamic or an above and below tension maintained within the counterbalanced curvilinear design I imposed on the work. There also exists a subtle black and white binary structure that weaves through both these studies that is fully explored in the larger work (Fig. 6.16), *Curvilinear Body Painting Design (Sea Waves).*

![Curvilinear Body Painting Design (Sea Waves)](image)

Having completed the studies for this larger work my selection of designs from Bede’s folio was motivated by the two designs I had originally showed him. He agreed this would be more sympathetic and seemed to be quite keen to see how I would develop the collaboration. Master screen printer, Osmond, printed the base design supplied by Bede, and then it was my turn. I realised the design was very graphic. Osmond chose the colour to print, a scarlet red. How was I to
proceed? Given the nature of the project, polarised fields are representative of the binary dynamic between colours black and white. The brown tone here represents indigenous skin tone, red the blood that runs through all our veins. The black and white colours employed can be seen as metaphor in the question of relatedness between us. The polarised field is the area contained within the perimeter of the painting. The pattern is indicative of the interplay between the positive and negative curvilinear horizontal shapes.

Posters and graphic messages utilising this palette - black, white and red, have accompanied much social struggle throughout history. This colour relationship communicates with force the underlying political message that is intended. Curvilinear lines intersect creating eyes that follow the viewer; the solar and flowing design work tends to gather momentum arresting attention that evokes a symbolic and subversive undercurrent or intended sinister intervention within the dynamic structure of the work.

I feel this was a successful collaboration that was not laboured and represented in essence what the project attempts to convey. That is, the ability to accept difference, celebrate diversity and share in our uniqueness.

The artworks produced together exist as an authentic measure to the bonding process, a kind of formalisation of our friendship and developing trust with each other. By becoming vulnerable to the truth of my whiteness and subsequent privilege, and by accepting this undeniable fact, an underlying sense of shame in me became apparent. Because our working relationships were mostly easy-going this gave rise to the subtlest of unresolved anxieties expressing themselves in how I felt emotionally and that these feelings had been repressed. I had come with an agenda; to make lovely pictures together, to focus on the positive and demonstrate harmonious working relationships, however, my objectivity had become sullied, and in truth, I was hurt and felt my aspirations may well have been simply utopian notions. I had been living in a state of denial.
Sutton (2009, p. 200) explains the dichotomy stemming from the desire to assist,

The non-Indigenous reconciliationist’s desire to engage in self-blame must seem unreadable, or at least merely exotic, to many Indigenous Australians. Blame in the classical Aboriginal scheme of things is consistently directed outwards to others, not inwards to the self.

Bede certainly represented the father figure for me. I wanted to please him and was perhaps more forthcoming in my artistic expression and more daring when working with him. He was patient and accepting of my contributions to our collaborative relationships and his acceptance of me as an artist and not simply the ‘white manager’ was heartening and validated my requirement to maintain integrity within the project. This gesture was accepting and subtly instructive, a relationship of kindness.

6.6 Batik

During the mid-1980s Tiwi Design artists produced a number of batik\textsuperscript{17} works that were popular and now reside in numerous major collections both in Australia and overseas. Maria Josette Orsto asked me if the workshops could produce more batik works. I engaged the services of a batik facilitator with some thirty years’ experience. The initial weeklong exercise elicited results that were not pleasing to the group due to the colours being cooked out when boiling out the wax. Due to limited time, the workshop facilitator mixed too many pieces together in an attempt to complete a body of work. The results were muddied and the artists appeared disappointed. I decided to continue working with batik after the initial creative misadventure and take on the role of workshop facilitator even though the artists knew more about the process. They agreed this would be a good idea. It was understood we would learn together in making batik works.

\textsuperscript{17} Batik is a method of dying fabrics in which some areas are covered with wax to keep dyes from penetrating the fabric. Typically the wax is laid down in a pattern and then the dye is applied and allowed to dry. The wax is then removed. The area under the wax keeps its original colour with an occasional line of colour giving it a somewhat crackled look.
We had plenty of materials and another major motivating factor was to bring artists back to the painting area. It had been a rather solemn place since the ‘Old Lady’s’ passing. The bright colour of the dyes and a new process seemed to bring a new focus to the painting area at Tiwi Design.

Eventually the group managed to produce some very pleasing and innovative work. During this time the collaborative experience indicated we could trial certain effects and processes without the outcome being seen as the end point alone. This meant we could experiment collaboratively, allowing individual artists to take from these experiments and apply the results to their own work. It was not always necessary for the collaborating artist to be present during their input into the piece. Mostly the artists were present. However, the batik process involved successive stop outs with the wax and we tended to follow each other as we would relate to our own marks, we had become one in the work due to the multiple processes and a ‘blending’ of marks ensued. This meant the works started to take on a personality of their own, inhabiting a new space, a space where hybrid integrations became visible when looking at the completed work.

Josette and I made the initial design on a light green silk. Using a fine inexpensive thick bristle brush dipped in hot wax to act as a resist or stop out for the dye, Josette gridded up the silk and filled in half the squares. The other half was for my input. I tended to mirror her initial mark making and the designs I painted were based on my iconography. This was refined in an intuitive way and did not
take long to complete. The colour I dyed the initial design was a cobalt blue. Overdyeing the silk with a second bright blue colour elicited a pleasing result as evidenced in Fig. 6.17. After discussion with Josette it was decided another colour was required. We chose to use red. For this work I boiled out the wax from all the initial drawing made by Josette and myself and then re waxed the areas we wanted to keep as green and blue colours, exposing the material to allow for the red to highlight the initial drawing as in (Fig. 6.18) above.

This process was different. Normally we would continue to successively block out the artwork and dye the material successively. The effect enhanced the original graphic intention implied in the design and delineated the colours making for a crisper definition of the image.

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 6.19 Maria Josette Orsto and Stephen Anderson, Zig Zag Chevron, 2014, batik and ink on viscose and silk, 50 x 55cm

The work above (Fig. 6.19) was made on the lighter and sheerer material of viscose mixed with silk. The design was a complementary work made with Ita Tipungwuti using both curvilinear and chevron motifs. Josette again broke the surface area into a series of grids that suggested the zigzag motif I so often employed in the collaborative work. All the artists were familiar with this way of working and simply adopted the design as a part of the co-creative process. We used a very earth based palette of colour mixing yellow ochres and red iron oxides.
To and fro we worked on the image together with very loose brushwork knowing the batik wax process is sympathetic to working this way. This work is certainly a departure from the hard edge works on canvas I had made previously with the collaborating artists. The medium and the material were softening my working methods. I allowed myself to be led by the artists in the process, relinquishing the need to control or overtly guide the works to a predetermined outcome. The batik process itself gives so many surprises outside one’s control.

Fig. 6.20 Maria Josette Orsto and Stephen Anderson, *Oblique Chevron Jilamara*, 2014, batik on silk, 90 x 120cm

The larger work (Fig. 6.20) was drawn on a thicker silk material. Firstly, Josette again divided the surface area into a series of squares. She created a large border area and broke up the squares by again bisecting them into a patterned arrangement of triangles. Haskell (1993, p. 105) notes, “borders create dissonance and lighten the weight of the square” and this effect seemed to be applied to the batik work.

The lighter tones in this work are Josette’s marks. Her marks in fact are what is negated or blocked out by the wax. After two block-out sessions where the colour became deeper shades of red ochre from the initial golden yellow dye, she asked me to complete the design with a final darker key stop-out design. I simply bisected the drawings she had initially made. This created a pinwheel design as a
result. When the wax had been boiled out Josette and I noticed that this work was peculiar. It was as if we had not made it. The pattern belonged to an origin that seemed ancient, having been used by many cultures over centuries. Again the mark making is loose and uncontrolled allowing the pattern to take on a more organic character. This was a pleasing change from my usual way of working.

The studio is often a lively space. When the ochre is crushed and the materials prepared a sense of excitement pervades the room. Artists start talking softly and slowly, new designs appear on the canvas. A happy environment means play and experimentation can enter into the game that is art practice.

### 6.7 Diamond Silk

![Fig. 6.21 Maria Josette Orsto and Stephen Anderson, *Diamond Silk*, 2014, first state, batik on silk, 90 x 120cm](image1)

![Fig. 6.22 Maria Josette Orsto and Stephen Anderson, *Diamond Silk*, 2014, second state, batik on silk, 90 x 120cm](image2)
It should be noted that when we made the batik works together we completed the work as a series and as a group. We were all working together on the painting tables at the Tiwi design studio. We had become a small community of batik makers. In the three-colour work *Diamond Silk* (Fig. 6.23), the developmental process is illustrated in Figs 6.21 & 6.22. As per usual protocol for this phase of my research, Josette drew up the initial grid work design.

Haskell (1993 op.cit) describes how, “Agnes Martin’s grids of rectangles accomplished several things, the most important being an over-all pattern which eradicated the hierarchical balancing of parts”. Similarly, in this instance the squares are offset and not in any way uniform and this introduces a subtle spiral into the design logic. The wax crosses in the Fig. 6.22 are my marks that demonstrate the point-counterpoint type of the way we work. The next stages develop by simply following the design and stopping out the drawing (negating space by adding wax).
Josette and I had previously worked with this design, (as is evidenced in Fig. 5.17) One Way–Together, a lithograph forming part of the initial research design in Phase 1– Intervention. For this work we used a much denser hemp material. We needed to make sure our wax was hotter when attempting to make marks that would resist the dye. This time I marked out the gridded surface and produced the arrow shape. Each time we dyed this material the colour effects were very subtle.

In order to create distinctive tonal delineations, this process required multiple overlay designs and subsequent dyeing, boiling out the wax and repeating the process in succession. This continued boiling out tended to wash out the design and give the work a natural effect due to the use of roots to dye the fabric that were normally used to dye pandanus for weaving baskets. This effect pleased both Josette and myself. The numerous marks made by us are present if one looks closely at the
work. The main chevron motif design was striking with a watercolour effect to the designs within the major theme. This work inhabits a space that is not batik nor painting, print nor watercolour and nonetheless represents an authentic interpretation of our collaborative efforts as being experimental.

This work is to be hung like a rug. The loosely hanging work emits a feminine aura that honours process and patterning. The work could sit in a less formal environment without the need for a stretcher. To see this work in the context of a domestic or homely environment is preferable to that of the institutional setting. I feel these works sit well in both environments- fine arts and crafts fields alike.

A large batik work with Ita (Fig. 6.25), also took many successive dyes and boil outs to produce a work we were both pleased with. Using the chevron zigzag motif, mirroring a design within a design, produced a dynamic that was subtler due to the batik process.

Fig. 6.25 Ita Tipungwuti & Steve Anderson, Zigzag Body painting, 2014, batik on hemp, 140 x 70cm
Successive blue and red dyes were used to build up the design work with highlighting marks bringing a formal tension to the surface of the hemp material. When dying the material between waxing I attempted to maintain the colour produced due to mixing. This elicited light purple and jade tones that tend to weave in and out of the design work.

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 6.26 Ita Tipungwuti and Stephen Anderson, *Flow*, 2014, batik and ink on viscose and silk, 75 x 55cm

This work above (Fig. 6.26) on viscose and silk is the companion piece to the zigzag chevron design made with Maria Josette Orsto (Fig. 6.19). Ita chose to work with the more flowing pattern. We simply stopped out a curvilinear freehand design in an earth-toned palette. Working very loosely with the brushwork the image emerged after successive masking outs that became successive calls and responses between us whilst drawing with the wax. A ‘Tjanting’, the traditional Indonesian tool used to apply wax in thin lines was used to make the marks in this batik piece.
Using a light chocolate base silk colour (Fig. 6.27), Ita commenced the brushwork with a simple grid pattern. We discussed whether she would make a basic design that I could work with each time we applied new wax, ensuring a new colour would materialize. She used both zigzag and flowing designs, knowing these were also the designs I had been using. She applied the design work akin to variations on a theme. There was ample space for me to engage with her open design work.

This meant working counterpoint with the initial mark making could follow progressively. It was like we were tightening the image down. From an open-plan drawing, successive infilling occurred until the work was balanced and we both agreed it was complete. This work expresses an authentic co-creative partnership between us as collaborating artists. Not one above or below the other but side-
by-side, aware of each other in the process, prior, during and post-performance. By using the iconography I introduced initially in the first phase of the study, we encountered no difficulties in working together with the foundational designs.

Similarly, when I engaged with the Tiwi design work, this was an exercise of relatedness, not simply a formal or loose comingling of individuals, but a story we all belonged to. “Presenting findings congruent with Indigenous inquiry holds much promise in bringing Indigenous epistemologies into western sites of research” (Kovach 2009, p.140). This assists in being able to translate both micro and macro narratives. The patterns or designs used, introduce a foundation to engage with creation stories in the here and now. “Enfoldment is a process of incorporation, of maintaining autonomy whilst establishing, building and sustaining relatedness” (Martin 2008, p. 69). This is how the works produced emerged as new stories that were made together collaboratively.
I asked Vivian if we could work together with his father’s design ‘Old Bark’. His father is deceased. I explained that I could ‘see’ a zigzag chevron design within his father’s work and asked if he could print the design on hemp then I could bring this design out in the work whilst maintaining the design. He understood what I wanted to do and printed the images onto the hemp. It was my intention to produce a design that was the same but change the tonal values within the work and I decided to use a grey monotone palette (liminal scale of contrast), to create this effect. I felt this variation could add some depth to the image as screen-printed tones can appear quite flat given the initial positive image was printed in one colour.
The work became simply an exercise of slow painting in a meditative way. The arrow designs presented themselves; they were evident in the work. All I had to do was employ oppositional tones between the two works that would form a diptych for exhibition. Feeling somewhat ambivalent about the work, we discussed the fact that we could not truly ascertain how we felt about them until they were stretched and on the gallery wall. We reserved the right to critique the work at this stage. After some time thinking about these works I asked Vivian what he thought about hanging the works together like a curtain as in Figure 6.28. The painted hemp would drape and serve as a decorative covering for a window opening.

In our context the work would be exhibited in a gallery context. The work would now have a new title, “Window of Opportunity”. Vivian thought this could be “interesting to see”. This reframing of the work to be exhibited in this fashion suggests a third space beyond the boundary of the wall on which it is hung, something that one would have to project through and beyond to see further afield. In taking the opportunity to imagine alternative space beyond areas of conflict, potential resolutions are envisioned and subsequently open for interpretation and ongoing discourse.

6.9 Pandanus Bricolage

Fig. 6.29 Vivian Kerinauia Senior and Junior and Stephen Anderson, Old Bark-New Skin, 2014, screen-print and painting on hemp, 148 x 78cm
Fig. 6.30 Alan Kerinauia and Stephen Anderson, printing *Pandanus Bricolage*, screen-printed design, foundation image and colour

Fig. 6.31 Osmond Kantilla and Stephen Anderson, *Pandanus Bricolage*, initial screen-printed design
The initial design printed by Vivian and Alan is the design *Pandanus*, by Osmond Kantilla. This screen is seldom used. The print is a two-screen/colour image. However, over the years simply one screen has been used and is more popular with purchasers (see Fig. 6.32). Speaking with Osmond I commented that I was not sure what I wanted to do with the design. I could see triangles within triangles and felt that I could somehow continue to enhance the design by weaving alternate sympathetic shapes within the motif. As I did this using various shades of grey I noticed the design did not line up. There was an inconsistency within the pattern that meant continuity within the pattern was arrested by a change in direction. At this point, I did not know how to proceed.

I decided to continue creating a design that emerged dissimilar to the initial intended triangular design. I had been reading about the notion of the artist who works collaboratively as being a ‘bricoleur’ and recognised a design reminiscent of this concept. This is the section of the work that is painted in a pink/red tone that rests on the surface of the hemp material. The idea of piecing works in concert, progressively weaving the design elements assists to create a cohesive unified work. In bringing different media together- hemp, print, and paint are displayed in a manner reminiscent of domestic interior design aesthetics; traditional methods of displaying the work can be reinterpreted. In this way historical forms of representation are not simply viewed in a formal space as fine art but may also inhabit a more intimate interior world that is representative of a domestic environment.
This could be viewed symbolically as a journey from the head to the heart.

An opportunity that was initially viewed as problematic somehow informed the work as patchwork, with various pieces being woven together to produce the whole. This work developed slowly over time and when shown to Osmond, he tended to say little as he recognised the work had been patched together from a screen that could not be used with its counterpart to produce the initial two-colour print. In this instance he acknowledged how this could be achieved but for Osmond this had now become an entirely different proposition seen in the context of creating a one-of-kind collaborative artwork. He simply stated that, “It is nice”.

Figs. 6.33 & 6.34 Osmond Kantilla and Stephen Anderson, *Coat of Many Colours*, 2014, screen-print and painting on hemp, work in progress, 200 x 140cm
This painting is derived from the initial design used for *Pandanus Bricolage*. The image is repeated and conjoined to form a square version of the Pandanus design. Figures 6.33 & 6.34 illustrate the development of this larger painted work. The work tended to represent a drape and it was decided that the work could either be draped for exhibition or could also be stretched. This suggests that the works having been stretched are ‘formalised’ within a structure compared with the informal presentation of the painting that represents the domestic application of blankets, throws for furniture, curtains and more ornamental art objects.

The paint was applied very thinly having been watered down and it was built up as a watercolour, staining the hemp material. This painting took many months to complete.
Osmond’s Pandanus design is a good introduction to Tiwi creation stories\(^{18}\). Stories of coming into being are related to the creative process and parallel stories of relatedness. How the Tiwi Island came to be or the story of their creation is similarly determined by the need to maintain culture through mythologising ancestral belonging. This is for the Tiwi people, maintained through dance, ceremony, language and oral story telling traditions. My contribution in identifying with this process is by producing artworks with a relatedness that acknowledges these belief systems.

### 6.10 Walking Chevron

![Fig. 6.36 Maria Josette Orsto and Stephen Anderson, Walking Chevron Red, Green & Yellow, 2014, mixed media monoprint, on arches paper, 3 x 55 x 77cm](image)

This monoprint and drawing triptych made with Maria Josette Orsto evolved over a two-year period. The initial collaboration took place when working at the Tamarind Institute. We had some down time in between editioning other works and the opportunity to use the monotype printing press availed itself. The initial zigzag design was applied to a linoleum block in black ink and both Josette and I built up a simple pattern within the motif using lines and dots.

\(^{18}\) Mudungkala - An old blind woman arose from the ground at Murupianga in the South East of Melville Island. Clasping her three infants to her breast and crawling on her knees she travelled slowly north. The fresh water that bubbled up in the track she made became the tideways or the Clarence and Dundas Straits, dividing the two islands from the mainland. She made her way slowly around the land mass and then, deciding it was too large, created the Apsley Strait dividing the Islands. She then decreed that the bare islands be covered with vegetation and inhabited with animals so that her three children left behind would have food. Nobody knows where she came from. Having completed her work, Mudungkala vanished.
Each successive monoprint used a different colour variation, however the design format was maintained throughout. Josette and I then painted with natural ochres, both with the comb and with a paintbrush, introducing a warmer palette from the initial austere graphic rendering. This triptych demonstrates the integration of multiple media, applications and formats that operated together as a cohesive whole. This demonstrates a method whereby we are both simultaneously working on the monoprint plate and colouring the prints after printing. The results are unique and yet the triptych orientation, the concept of multiples is still evident.

6.11 Celestial Navigator

A work started by Maria Josette Orsto - Celestial Navigator, (Fig. 6.38) was initially inspired by a linocut produced by me in 2008 (Ch. 4, Fig. 4.12). It is subtly different in collaborative approach to this work as illustrated in the developmental states 1-4 (Fig. 6.37). She used the comb to grid up the canvas and then painted in the white ochre diamond shapes within the border of the black primed canvas. I proceeded to use the comb in a succession of white and yellow ochre comb lines continuing to bisect the innate diamond design initiated by Josette.

Fig. 6.37 Maria Josette Orsto and Stephen Anderson, Celestial Navigator, states 1-4, 2014, ochre on canvas, 80 X 30cm
From all the myriad of detailed comb lines, she extracted a final design that was strong and yet allowed the traces of the successive design to show through. We had collaborated on a few images together that told of the stars. These higher inspirational works seemed to be always tempered by a grounded approach when it came to using the materials to tell this far reaching story about expansive and infinite space as suggested by the title. This was to be the last work completed together prior to making ready in preparation for the exhibition and submission of the exegesis. I had discussed with Josette on numerous occasions if she would like to help me put the work up in a gallery space and that I would definitely be honoured if she could help me. Given we had produced much collaborative work together and seeing she could assist with the display of her mother’s works, it seemed only fitting she assist in the hanging of the works. Her eye for detail and deeper
understanding of how the artists related, as family dictated would be more culturally appropriate when inhabiting an exhibition space together.

6.12 Conclusion

*Phase Two* produced many such ‘multiple’ diptych and triptych representations of our collaborative encounters. The artists seemed more comfortable when working from their own motifs. This made for more experimentation and freer flowing marks when working together. I could understand they were somewhat hesitant in the initial *Phase One* as they were engaging with my foundation designs and were somewhat nervous in getting it right. Similarly when I worked with the artists in *Phase Two* it became necessary for me to move through any anxiety about competency outside of normal cultural working parameters and enter the relational domain, immersing myself completely in the collaborative process. Using different materials occasioned a softening of the aesthetic appeal of the works; they appeared looser and less formal. This subtle shift appealed to me and offered future directions that I could potentially explore in my own work. In down playing the role of one artist over another as supported by the two specific phases, a third space emerged as a much quieter space where the works produced were perhaps more accessible to the viewer. It became evident that we had become more comfortable working collaboratively by this stage and as a result more inventive in how we continued to engage with each other.

Chapter 7: Working and Walking Together

7.1 Dis-Unity - Urgency to change

At the end of this research journey I remain a white male of privilege with a job that partly requires me to speak on behalf of an Indigenous voice that is heard in a specialised art world but not in mainstream Australian life. In most cases for one to speak on their own behalf would be considered more suitable. I feel obliged to talk up and stand accused as being part of the problem, knowing also this can equate to being a part of the solution. Standpoints that are inclusive, embracing another’s point of view, are to be declared openly and often when working collaboratively. If there are issues that require redress then adjustments should be made. It has been my experience that this can be
done if a dialogue continues that touches on what defines us as being different and also where our similarities meet. This is achieved through ongoing relationships as exemplified by the works described herein.

Working together became a matter of creating neo-narratives that shared stories experienced together and told together. One story told with two voices is difficult to understand when attempting to listen. The intention to weave stories together that communicate as one without diluting either contribution was where a developed trust became fundamental. This was possible due to a willingness to work together, to collaborate. Any potential discourse remains contested terrain when viewed from outside of this relationship.

For myself as a non-Indigenous artist, I have attempted to undertake this journey of healing and have come to understand that each individual wanting to transform this relationship must look within. This is where the healing begins. As successive layers of psychological conflict are revealed through the research journey, a process of individuation or self-awareness is made. Individuation in this sense is the individual’s integration of the understanding that they belong to a larger group. In this project this dichotomy is represented by the application and differences in using Indigenous and non-Indigenous research methodologies. Self-reflexivity became the key here, extending my personal spiritual development, and this became a by-product of the research. It became clear the lens used and subsequent reflections particular to binary research paradigms, could contribute to new insight into how to respectfully engage with another.

The project ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’ started with a question - What are the new narratives or genuine inquiries for conversations that seek answers in Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations? Dominant stories tend to shape and define events. In Australia, the stories of colonisation and our dark settler past are only now beginning to be told more often.

In this project, a new narrative has embraced alternative stories, told together, communicating
descriptions relative to a broader social context- a cultural space we are yet to inhabit. American scholar Robert Coles (1983, p. 30) comments, “We owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them”. In creative collaborative performance, bridges are built. This demonstrates a space where culture meets, where healing begins.

It became obvious as the research model drew to a close that my aspirations in the project toward integrating seemingly disparate elements, appeared to many, an insurmountable task. With such strong reactions and talk of contentious territory pertaining to the merits of such undertakings, I had been informed throughout the project by other research students and academic staff that this area of research was fraught with difficulties when in fact the subsequent practice of working collaboratively in a cross-cultural setting was a mild and gentle affair. We had an established and friendly working relationship that grew more deeply over time. Even though the issues of race relations figured prominently in the study and seemed oppressive when talking to those outside of the collaborative circle, we sincerely enjoyed making art together. As I became more aware of my personal blind spot pertaining to privilege, I began to understand that others, who were also of the same privileged position, were keen to bring my attention to the sensitive issue that is race relations and the consequent ethical challenges arising from the project. I could only be my authentic self. This self is one who has the ability to adapt and change in the face of adverse conditions when oftentimes that which is reflected in the mirror is difficult to accept.

In a survey of the literature and a personal history in the form of an artist’s audit the research was located firstly through theories pertaining to standpoint and secondly to relatedness. How collaboration operates by degree was explored in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts. This determined a commonality expressed by the term collaboration. Collaboration that included a respectful consideration of self in relation to another is critical for equitable outcomes.

Having divided the research phases in two sections, Phase 1: Intervention and Phase 2 Stronger Futures; the works illustrate a ‘before and after’ aspect within the overall conceptual framework to
the project. Initial reluctance to engage with the Tiwi iconography created works that were in some cases initiated by myself, some by me engaging with the Tiwi subject matter. For me the works that inhabit a third space aspiring to equal representation appeal the most. In some artworks I believe this has occurred. A good example of this is illustrated in Chapter 6, Fig. 6.16. *Curvilinear Body Painting Design (Sea Waves),* on page 169, made with Bede Tungatalum.

My fear of the Tiwi voice being somehow muted abated as the works amassed, alleviating the latent anxiety associated with the desire to be true to the concept of equal representation. With the formalist ‘slogan mirroring’ alluded to with the titles of the Phases in the project; ‘Intervention and Stronger Futures’, I have attempted to express the subtle changes in myself as subject to the process of working in a creative cross cultural remote environment during times of significant social change for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The artists rarely encountered difficulty when working as prescribed by the themes of the two distinct phases. For me engaging with Tiwi designs initially created some difficulty. The Tiwi artists did their ‘thing’ regardless. I had to adapt, find a way to ensure harmony and balance were maintained in the developing artworks. I was happy to allow the Indigenous voice to be ‘overly represented’ in *Phase One.* This research was an opportunity to address the voice and vision of people on the periphery of western society. These voices and visions should also be heard and their subject positions openly declared.

Underrepresented people are best served when the ability to listen is combined with a compassionate resolve to resist judgement. In approaching the issues pertaining to fellowship Sutton (2009, p. 214) suggests what this type of Reconciliation might look like. “It will require the spine to break down not only the walls of mutual disregard and ignorance, but also the walls of kindness. Only persons can do this”. Certainly this aspect in collaborative working relationships is equal to bridge building exercises that facilitate a necessary healing.
Whilst establishing collaborative working partnerships together, the third space alluded to by Green (2001, p. 125) representing “a transition from traditional artistic identity to the identification of the collaboration itself as the artwork”, was realised. Consideration for another and the requirement that the artwork be a pleasing visual statement showing faithfulness to the collaborative event was paramount. Given the artists were happy with the results, ongoing creative collaborative pursuits were envisaged. Ongoing trust was being developed as we continued to work together in this way. “A relational approach to research highlights many dimensions of who we are and how we relate to our world” (Brearley 2009, p. 46).

The process was never strained nor difficult, the working together tended to flow when works were being made. There was no discernable display of power relations entering the creative space as each artist contributed their part toward the respective whole, and resultant completed artwork.

In spite of my role as art advisor and there being the understanding of my capacity in negotiating on behalf of the artist and the art market, our collaborative practice tended to be reasonably free of this association. The collaborating artists saw the commercial aspect to the works we were making together and that the artwork produced as new knowledge contributed to academic research. Our working relationships were more analogous to simply something we enjoyed doing together. We were artists working together. When I was talking with the artists about their individual contributions, each association was measured by its relatedness in what we felt we had achieved together. My relatedness to the collaborating artists being complex and varied meant our relatedness was embedded in working together in a wide range and numerous capacities. This tended to strengthen our relationship due to a shared and lived experience.

At times it is simply a matter of ‘filling in’ the prescribed areas. Mindful of the developing design, one can spend time thinking creatively about not thinking. My thoughts during the making stages or the production of my input to the collaborative pieces were mostly contemplative of the work before me and with whom I was collaborating. The pattern or design oftentimes seems to have an
internal rhythm that informed the theme of the work.

Mindful the work made together would be exhibited in a public space, an awareness developed that was inclusive of the viewer. The Tiwi artists and I often worked as one, understanding our collaborative efforts would be critiqued by others. Given the initial and most important aspect to the research had been the collaborative working relationship being seen as performance, our unified attention included the reality that the works created together would be exhibited and documented for assessment. A pragmatic affair methodologically, we had come amongst the research, moved alongside each other as researchers, come together as artists and moved outward as performers.

It was not possible to truly engage the concept of intercultural artistic collaboration without a reciprocal intervention with the artist’s iconography. In my readiness to advocate on behalf of the artists’ equity, I continually needed to remind myself to see how power relations between us created a difference where I considered none existed. This was how I approached the project. I was simultaneously aware that we were talking directly to power relations, a polarised field and binary relationships.

7.2 Third Spaces – Alternative sites toward common ground

The ability to experiment, as seasoned choreographers overprinting multiple designs, created some rewarding effects. There was a chaos lurking beneath the surface of some of the more investigational works, a kind of dread that intimated abstraction was something I was not interested in exploring.

The project led me to numerous distinctive understandings other than originally conceptualised. Through the foundations that belong to the coloniser, (separation, dispossession and isolation), I found it difficult to identify with the archetypal role of ‘researcher’ in the project. This was premised by the ‘good work’ I had been doing in the community as an advocate for Indigenous social justice issues. In scrutinising approaches from outside sources and interest groups concerning Tiwi artists’
interests, I felt the concept of ‘best interests’ had to be renegotiated in the light of our artistic liaison as collaborators in this project. For me this was personal. I was a direct stakeholder in this relationship with the collaborating Tiwi artists.

It was important to do this the right way, necessitating sensitivity to the entanglement inherent in intercultural research and empathise with author and social activist Gloria Jean Watkins, (2003, p. 169) when she laments,

I am troubled because our institutions are conservative and they confine our voices and our imaginations more than we know. Unwittingly we become our own gatekeepers, representatives of an institution, and not devotees to the sacred world of the imagination.

Over years I have been indulged and forgiven my ignorance time and time again by the Indigenous people I have worked with. Significantly, academic scrutiny and ethical research protocols that perpetuate the development of inclusive research methodologies ensures equity. The desire to contribute in addressing the imbalance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people indicated that intense self-reflexivity is vital for caring individuals living and working in this field.

My personal misgivings and the well-considered view concerning privilege wondered whether these types of relatedness be defined as acts of decolonisation, the means being artistic collaboration? Implications for a non-Indigenous researcher using Indigenous research methodologies, questions the notion of ‘Othering’. Consequent social conditions imposed through difference and subsequent indifference, do not represent equity for the colonised. Honesty and integrity imply one’s word being significant in establishing trust. What Martin (2008, p. 140) refers to as, “having and maintaining a moral, spiritual and emotional compass to regulate the research”. In this way personal reconciliation (self-awareness) is vital. If the researcher rigorously examines intentions and motives whilst gathering data through self-reflexivity it is more likely less bias will exist.

The question after this extensive collaboration remains...whose research is it? The artwork produced
collaboratively belongs to the collaborating Indigenous artist. Inclusivity being an underlying and given premise to the research, allows that the dissemination of research findings be broadcast as widely as possible.

The project has had intentions toward advancing harmonious race relations in this country. It further recognises Indigenous knowledge systems and methodologies as significant contributions to sustainable knowledge production. Through deep listening, two way learning systems and knowledge production that returns to original source material as guided by ancestral connectedness, new ways to model inclusivity and Indigenous agency are established. By embracing relatedness between people, place and the elemental activities that in turn sustain us, we have acknowledged the ability to share research.

### 7.3 Implications

The work produced is to be seen in the context of working documents, gestures that would nurture kindness and compassion...consideration for another. In this case it is difficult to speak on behalf of others, the artists involved in the project were invited to commune with the work in their own way, there were no expectations or intended outcomes. You will not find conflict in the work. Any reference to indignation suffered by Indigenous peoples is symbolic and metaphor is employed as a by-product, and is considered ancillary to the physical coming together to produce the artworks. I negotiate on behalf of the collaborating artist on a daily basis in representing their best interests within the art system. What they do acknowledge is the making of works together with someone they would allow into a circle of trust. This is based on a commitment that could be deemed by those outside of the relationship as suspect because that is my job, and I am paid for this. This is simply one example of the ethical grey zone or ‘polarised field’ as represented by the illustration (Fig. 7.1) below.
I am indulged because of an established relationship and seen as a facilitator by the Indigenous cohort. For the artists there is no line to cross, no identifiable distinction… it is all related. To engage respectfully when listening, to apologise when mistakes are made, to accept No as an answer, to talk little, to be patient and above all, enjoy what it is you are doing. These methodologies combined with an authentic ability to self-evaluate are the most appropriate skills to working in this field.

This is how I have been able to passage in this difficult terrain, by not rocking the boat nor pushing buttons, but by contemplating the ‘Other’ as ‘Another’. I have spent much time in states of anxiety realising my innate denial and isolation at the fear of being exposed as the ‘white coloniser’. The willingness to engage may well be high priority for me, however my over-expanded self-importance has inadvertently focused a critical lens upon me also. I am way down the list with regard to my co-creative cohort and their competing priorities. I have experienced the privilege of having to get out of my own way to become a part of something larger. This belonging to something larger is one’s relatedness to the group. A lack of self-respect and a resultant polarising sense of shame stemming from unresolved issues from our past, create conditions for a societal malaise regarding the concept of reconciliation in our society. Is denying empathy contributing to this form of psychic and spiritual
immobilisation?

To be received so readily, embraced as an equal in the process of making artworks together, I felt the most cathartic moment during the research experience was the death of a significant contributor to the project, Jean Baptiste Apuatimi. Making the artworks together was the easiest part of the project, and I must confess the most enjoyable. Established and heartfelt connections with the artists demanded that they be acknowledged as equally contributing to the research model.

7.4 Reconciliation and the Self

Given the warm reception extended to me by the Tiwi artists, I felt like an imposter masquerading as a benevolent benefactor, simply waiting as to when it would be discovered that I felt ashamed of being a white person. I was aware many non-Indigenous people had made great contributions in the past however this was a personal rite of passage that was necessary for me to undertake. By focussing on others, my role tended to vacillate between perpetrator and redeemer, anything that would deny my true relationship to our settler history.

Some humility is born when this tipping point is reached. Yes, a perceived coloniser conflict within existed. The tacit residue of our dark past, anger and guilt fuelling the shame that had exposed me to myself as indifferent, immobilised to this very history meant there was no residual hiding place to my origins as a settler in this country.

My Indigenous brothers and sisters understood this truth, whilst being mindful of this truth as equity and vital to our working together happily, I had taken much for granted. This was not how I had envisioned the collaborative process in this research project. A subtle paternalist ghost image haunted the project as I attempted to reconcile firstly with myself to the fact that reconciliation with the First Australians was not a destination but a journey that started with self.
A third space beyond the polarised field of indifference emerged during the collaborative process, one of a developing trust with each other. This I embraced wholeheartedly as an honoured gift—a privilege, to be integrated within my developing character, transforming any previous notions of self.

The research project created the feeling that I had become the very polarisation suggested in the initial problem statement—a ‘polarised human field’ now accountable to the agency of our ability to work collaboratively with each other. In locating this space within the context of Bourriard’s (2009) altermodernist precept, the age of globalisation impacted significantly upon me in negotiating multiple roles and duties as an arts administrator working for the Tiwi artists with whom I was also collaborating artistically. It seemed to me that the Tiwi artists had no conflict with this and viewed the making of artworks together as related, not separate to or from.

Shadow vulnerability intimated that I was driven by the need for successful outcomes. What became an implied receptivity or being comfortable in another’s company allowed for me to participate more fully when engaging with others. In my case the focus group has been a group of Tiwi artists. To become part of that world was difficult, coming from a position of privilege. I felt exposed, my intentions stripped bare, an oddity with no true function in another’s home.

Reilly (2011, p. 5) asks the question,

What can each of us do, as curators, artists, educators, gallerists and museum directors, to difference the art historical canon, and to offer a more just and fair representation of global artistic production?

To my thinking the project offered a very local focus on more equity for artists in the context of a wider global community. The willingness to engage with each other was the first step toward differencing this very historical canon. Reilly offers some insight and values further inquiry regarding what is required to nurture a more ethical framework,
Should we all be working towards a global art history, an art without borders? This will involve rethinking methodologies and iconographies for what they say, and do not say, about the constructions of race, gender, class and nation. In such cases, critical theory is not enough; we must re-examine cultural objects and social practices to understand the patterns of everyday life that shape the past and inevitably imprint the future.

(Reilly, 2011, p. 5)

For me, a rite to passage had been undertaken. This was a journey through the landscape that is cultural conditioning in a global political arena, where gender, race and class establish identities that tend to be fixed and dogmatically aligned to paternalist ideology.

By continuing to revisit the feelings associated to engaging in cross-cultural discourse my own limited cultural conditioning and subsequent worldview gave way to a more egalitarian perspective inclusive of the principles of diversity and compassion.

7.5 Collaboration as Therapy

To begin the research from a unified position, the pieces certainly had to fall apart. By the time the conclusion had been reached, I had to pick up the pieces and create cogency. My concerns of mixing it with the Tiwi artists meant my input was tenuous at best. Could the two cultural distinctions somehow reflect a new space where reconciliation could at least be sensed through our relatedness and working together or was this simply a fanciful idea?

The words of Bhabha offer some insight here,

Hybridity reflects the evolving dynamics of creativity in plural societies. Hybridization does not weaken or dilute heritage or tradition, as is often claimed. What it reveals is that any cultural tradition has multiple lineages of influence and inference, opening it up to diverse interpretations and revisions, which enhance its creative potential.

(Bhabha, 2013)
Of course this was always my intention to contribute to knowledge by working collaboratively with Indigenous artists. It was anticipated that a humble approach best serves an ethical underpinning to the research. An underlying tension existed throughout the project, having myself question myself in continuum, as to my primary motives in undertaking this kind of process.

Unquestionably, the collaborating artists have equal authorship with this type of research. As a process, the ability to subjugate fear is most significant when working collaboratively in a cross-cultural environment. In fact feeling the imposter and subordinate is vital to gathering evidence (producing artworks) that represent a legitimate equity between stakeholders. Postcolonial assimilationist policies prevail today within the day-to-day machinations of Australian society. “Art no longer seeks to represent utopias; rather, it is attempting to construct concrete spaces” (Bourriard 2009, p. 47).

Undeniably, these spaces are emotionally charged, if they are concrete as Bourriard suggests, It is my position that it will require a more considered and compassionate repose when meeting the challenge of reconciling that which is seen as unfinished business between us. This means the ability to listen deeply, to realise Indigenous ways of being and doing are related to a custodial connection to place. This means a responsibility or a duty of care for land, environment and community. This has been my experience working and living with Indigenous people. This very receptivity in asking what could be done and how this was to best take place, afforded me the insight to change my perspective and undertake the required relational work.

It is not so easy being gentle with ignorance, especially from within; an emotional disruption takes place. Just as fraught with suspicion are the words that appear so readily, the platitudes. I have integrated the Indigenous grieving protocol in expressing my emotional pain, understanding I was best served to feel in order to heal. Bringing it home to the issues of the heart whilst remaining still and not trying to get too ahead of ourselves is where the transformative resides. In confronting an authentic and sincere desire to demonstrate sound working relations, support often arrives when
one is spent emotionally and spiritually by the challenges to working collaboratively. I know no other way, to give and take and give becomes a methodology that encapsulates persistence and forbearance. After sustained effort, repetitive actions can weaken resistance to a change in perspective, a moment where possibilities enter.

I have discovered that “profound reflection” in a Jungian (1928, p. 242) sense aids in identifying what is truly individual about the self. If the first principle is to know one’s self and we see this tenet mirrored in our external environment, we begin to realise the healing process is simultaneously personal and collectively inspired.

A unified teleology predicates acceptance. Levin (1993, p. 12) refers to how Thoreau, who asks “Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for an instant?” As we begin to develop a deeper self-awareness that comes from doing for others, the focus on self shifts to a centredness in self where more understanding allows space for forgiveness and compassion to surface from within.

7.6  Ngarimikiyangulimayi Ngawuyati Ngampamurrumi - Old Tiwi Language (Walking Together and Working Together) The Exhibition

I deliberately use formal titling for the project and in particular the two phases of the research to bring attention to how government policy and the sloganeering that frames policy is most often misleading and usually alarmist in tone.

Ironically, the seriousness of the government’s intervention into remote Indigenous communities turned out to be premised on misleading and falsified statements that predicated what the government of the day felt was an appropriate measure to address an issue that was both over-inflated and patronisingly alarmist. Similarly the work produced collaboratively could be said to truly inhabit the space suggested by the titles and that our relationships were based on actions that did occur.
The project title, ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’ consciously intends to ring of paternalist sloganeering and the attendant overtones produced as a by-product. One line throwaways and jingoistic sentiment pervade the context of ‘re-branding’ or telling the story a different way. The word intervention implies interference in the affairs of others. A stronger future also suggests the strength required exists somewhere else. I argue that rather than intervene, assistance is required. Rather than a tomorrow, the strength resides within us today. Similarly, talking on behalf of another implies a lack of equity on behalf of those spoken for. To manage others’ affairs for ‘them’ is reminiscent of oppressive dictatorships that seek to divide and conquer. This is the language of assimilation, not sovereign and self-deterministic acknowledgement and support. This is not collaboration and I suggest that the processes I have explored could help extend understanding.

The project represents a site where complex perspectives coalesce. The impact of working collaboratively in cross-cultural environments has for me been life changing. I have become more tolerant and accepting of myself. This quality extends itself to others. We need to ask the question of our evolving identity while we grow together as a community within the context of globalization.

My understanding posits the future is not ahead of us but is located behind us where we usually perceive the past to be. Each step brings the future into the here and now. Life is not simply a beginning and an end but a life cycle, a continuum.

We can know our past, it is directly in front of us, and the future is unseen. This way of seeing one’s physical reality runs counter to popular Western contemporary knowing systems. This is why I have chosen to align myself to a research methodology embracing Indigenous knowledge systems which are also practice based and therefore “socially constructed by embedded, embodied people who are in relation with each other” (Thayer-Bacon 1997, p. 245).

### 7.7 Inhabiting New Spaces - Poles Apart

Poles define the field where binary relations reflect difference. This space is charged with
possibilities. The bridge to be crossed in this context is the simple allowance of difference and not attempting to subvert or change one relation for the other. It is through this very dynamic that difference exists; in fact no bridge is traversed in this relationship. The bridge we cross is the understanding that duality does not impede unity and is by definition linked to multiple relationships. Given “we are hard wired to collaborate” (Pagel 2012), it seems inevitable that the reality of a view encompassing plurality is re-emerging.

The identity of the collaborative relationship must be negotiated, the rules of engagement defined. If one artist employed fine line work, I would also attempt to complement the linear aspect to the work, if another artist was adept with the wooden comb, similarly I would also attempt to adopt this technique. Possessing a sound working relationship with the Tiwi cohort of collaborating artists was not simply defined by kinship obligations but through an aligned artistic affiliation with style, execution and temperament. A curiosity and willingness to explore collaborative endeavour became vital in developing creative relationships. In “the creation of ephemeral, highly speculative projects, this enterprise depended on a leap of faith” (Green 2001, p.131).

The collaborative works produced together demonstrate willingness for gradual friendships (mamana mamantua) to flourish. This developing relationship is one of reciprocity. In healing the well-founded reservations between us given our recent settler history, the project demonstrates that we are working together and walking together in an attempt to share new narratives. Through gradual development, deep listening and a respectful acknowledgement of Indigenous research methodologies, it is possible to project toward a new space where discourse is both inclusive and considered of another in telling the whole story. In the context of our project, trust was not given to another but shared between the groups. As a cohort of willing participants this valued commodity continued to develop over an extended period of time.
The work being exhibited together can appear somewhat overwhelming; so many voices and visions are represented. It is inevitable this will impact on the viewer as being perhaps at times over-stimulating. I encountered this feeling, however as I sat with the works these feelings dissipated and by quietly focussing on each work this effect abated. How could I leave some artists out? I certainly felt I could not simply view the work in the context of hanging a show that spoke to the aesthetics of art practice; I also had an obligation to represent the artists I had worked with. Naturally some of the works that we felt were unsuccessful did not make it into the exhibition however each contributing artist was well represented according to their unique inputs.

7.8 Conclusion

At a trial hanging and viewing of the collaborative works in October 2014, a reflection on the effectiveness of the project in answering the research question of our ability to engage collaboratively in the spirit of relatedness was made. The prescriptive Phases 1 & 2 of the project
seemed less obvious when exhibited together in the one space. It became clear that within the
dynamic of engaging with each other’s works respectively, a new space emerged where subtleties in
the work speak beyond the confines of each individual picture. Dialogues between the works
informed numerous conversations that were clear and bold in declaring a presence within the space.
Places where lines meet and, where borders gently blend to expand narratives encompassed fields
beyond the image.

Comments of myself being less present in the work than the collaborating Tiwi artists continue to be
made by viewers. After sitting some time with the work it was clear that I had a rather large input in
the production and design of the work. Being sympathetic to the artists’ marks and definitive Tiwi
style of mark making meant this would be a major characteristic in the look of the work. My input is
subtle and considered and intended to defer to the collaborating artist ensuring representation is
equitable. It was me who was learning and me who held the research question. It was undeniable
that Tiwi ways of knowing were an important and vital contribution to the research project.

Not only did we manage to document our ability to work together in the spirit of relatedness but
also to be considered were the subtleties pertaining to personal development that must also be a
priority when working in cross-cultural creative environments. In working with others this somewhat
cathartic process was not initially fully considered. The research became a journey toward self-
realisation that was to play a much larger role in effectively working collaboratively than initially
envisioned.
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Appendix 1: Consent Form (Confirmation of Commitment)

PROJECT TITLE: ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’ Contemporary Indigenous art practice and collaboration

Name of Collaborator:

Name of Research Student): Stephen Anderson – PhD candidate Charles Darwin University

I consent to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which I have been made aware of and have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

I authorise the researcher to use for the purpose of research the information collected during the making of artworks together.

I acknowledge that:
Adequate consultation has been made before commencing.

I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

(a) The project is for the purpose of research. Proceeds from artwork sold will belong to the collaborating artist. An agreed amount for cost of materials, freight and framing will be determined between the researcher and artist and apportioned the researcher for the exhibition costs associated with the exhibition of artworks.

(b) Intellectual Property and Copyright belong to the collaborating artist.

(c) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.

(d) I give consent to interviews being audio taped, and acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to the participant for verification, participants to be referred to by pseudonym or identified by name in any publications arising from the research.

Signature: _________________________________

(Participant)

Date:
Appendix 2: Project Statement

PROJECT TITLE: ‘Building Bridges + Connecting Culture’ Contemporary Indigenous art practice and collaboration

Researcher: Stephen Anderson (PhD candidate Charles Darwin University).

Working in Collaboration with Indigenous Artists.

The project will involve working together to create artworks (paintings, prints, sculpture).

The work will be produced together collaboratively either in the artist’s studio, art centre or designated printmaking studio.

The project is about walking and working together in the spirit of reconciliation. The context of constitutional reform, the current Intervention and the existing disadvantage between Indigenous and Non Indigenous Australians underpins an approach in working together in an informed and ethical way inclusive of open consultation.

Proceeds from artworks sold will be given to the collaborating artist. An agreed Fig. for cost of materials, freight and framing will be determined between the researcher and artist and apportioned the researcher for the exhibition of artworks.

Intellectual Property and copyright will belong to the collaborating artist.

Collaborating artists have the opportunity to participate in a question and answer style informal interview. Each artist has the right not to participate in the interview process and is free to withdraw from the project at any time.

An exhibition of the works created together will be shown at a yet to be determined venue sometime in early 2015.