Journeys in the Tanimbars:  
An audiovisual presentation  
beyond the ethnographic towards the aesthetic.

Exegesis

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Declaratio

I hereby declare that the work herein submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Honours Degree in Visual Arts at 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 exegesis and creative work has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not currently submitted for candidature for any other degree.

Signature of Candidate
I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my Honours supervisor, Dr Birut Zemits, who provided valuable feedback, advice and support over the course of the year. I would also like to acknowledge Dr Andrea Ash, Peter Houtmeyers and Josh Muirhead for their encouragement and guidance. I am also grateful to have had the passionate and adventurous duo of Matthew Baker and Higi Batmomolin at my side in the Tanimbars.
Abstract

*Journeys in the Tanimbars* has developed out of a creative and inclusive process between people of the Tanimbar Islands and a visual artist based in Darwin. The central project is an audio-visual installation work that attempts to embody both an intercultural ethnographic perspective and an artistic experimental aesthetic rooted in the notion of a pluralistic contemporary society. This work explores ideas about the relationship between traditional and contemporary ways of life and its impact on the Tanimbar society and surroundings. The installation work explores notions of perception and a society in transition and this exegesis provides background about the project, as well as theoretical and practical works that have influenced the artist.
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Introduction

Journeys in the Tanimbars


The video installation project supported and explained in this exegesis is titled *Journeys in the Tanimbars*. This creative work employs a trans-disciplinary approach combining and including visual art, film, history, ethnography and new media. Belonging to the realm of experimental ethnography, the video is a personal film experience, a documentary, an ethnographic representation and an installed piece of video art. *Journeys in the Tanimbars* was created in two stages. The first entailed fieldwork where I sailed for three days, in the catamaran *Lorna Marlise*, from Darwin to the Tanimbar Islands. There I documented contemporary life on Yamdena Island, recording video footage and audio over ten days. During the second stage I edited this source material in Darwin to create the video installation.
Journeys in the Tanimbars is an audiovisual work that investigates and attempts to emphasize both an ethnographic and aesthetic approach in creating cultural representation, as seen through my eyes and experience, with the intent of working with local communities, so that contributions to cultural representation are democratic, and the work shared with a wider Australian audience. Various communities and events in the Tanimbar Islands, including rituals, carvers, musicians and singers were filmed. Technology is used to share knowledge, create dialogue and emphasize both traditional and contemporary beliefs and spirituality.

The origin of the research project and the idea of a shared creative cross cultural experience began in March 2010, when I first sailed to Yamdena Island in the Tanimbars and met Higi Batmomolin, a local carpenter, guide, landlord and custodian responsible for adat (ritual). Although Higi is the same age as myself and lives only 200 nautical miles from me our experiences and opportunities are very different. His sophisticated perspective on the continuity of traditional aspects of life, and his serious responsibility to them and knowledge of them as a cultural custodian, combined with his keen interest in and outlook to the modern world with its technologies and global interactions, fascinated me. Witnessing his ability to straddle and synthesize the apparent incongruities of multiple cultures and beliefs such as ancestor worship and mythology, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, digital technologies, subsistence farming and capitalism both intrigued and inspired me. Here was an example of pluralism in action.

The journey further opened my mind to the riches of living histories, especially those of our neighbors. I was particularly fascinated to experience first-hand the coexistence and integration of what appeared to be disparate values and ways of life: ancestor worship, Christianity and technology. The film work is an extension of the perceptions of my first visit to Yamdena Island and evolved directly out of relationships I forged there. The installation component of this work aims to embody the convergence of traditional and ‘contemporary’ cultures, to highlight visual and audio perceptions of the relationship between traditional and contemporary life on the island. This culture includes a deeply devout modern Catholicism, traditional ancestor worship, beliefs and stories, traditional subsistence
This work seeks to explore processes of cross cultural engagement and negotiated participation using traditional knowledge and new media.

Part 1 of this exegesis, *Ethnography and Aesthetics: From frescoes to video installation*, introduces the topic and the artistic and philosophical influences on my work, Part 2 *Shifting Tides: The Production Journey* maps the tools and production and post-production processes explored in creating the installation. Part 3 *Journeys in the Tanimbars: A Framed Analysis*, provides analysis on the ethnographic and aesthetic influences that inspired the final work and the artistic decisions made. The conclusion, *Ongoing Journeys*, summarises the contents of this exegesis and provides insights into future work planned.
Part One

Ethnography and Aesthetics:
From frescoes to video installation

In creating an immersive artwork using moving images and sound that focuses on both the ethnographic (cultural representation) and aesthetics, I have drawn on the philosophies and practices of influential filmmakers, early image-makers and experimental video installation artists.

One aspect of the installation work focuses on cultural and social representation and belongs to a diverse history of ethnographic and experimental filmmaking, whose roots lie in anthropology and ethnology. Principles characteristic of the ethnographic films of seminal ethnographer and filmmaker Jean Rouch have guided me through the production. Firstly, an approach typical of ethnographic filmmaking (and inspired by Cinema Verite) is based on an extended period of ethnographic fieldwork with a small camera team in order to reach a high level of intimacy with the protagonists. Integral to Rouch's film work and practice were collaborative relationships formed and sustained through time spent with locals out in the field. Rouch also developed an improvisational approach to directing and cinematography. In dialogue with his environment the ethnographic filmmaker follows his protagonist into a fairly unplanned film production. The process of filmmaking was a discovery in itself - where the story was invented as it went along. Thirdly, Rouch believed in a shared anthropology, created in a collaborative spirit between the filmmaker and the protagonists, whereby, informant feedback secures and supports an ethical approach.

Rouch (2003, p.43) believed that 'ethics and style cannot be separated: le style est une morale. What is shown on screen results from a process of exchange: the product can be no better than the relationship.' Knowledge was acquired by conversation and not by observation (Ricard 2004). These principles informed my filmmaking and the way I viewed my own material. I wanted to keep the work simple and for the images, collaborative relationships and people in it to speak for themselves with minimal stylistic trickery, creating work that maintained a sense of aesthetic and ethical integrity. Rouch listened to the feedback of those he filmed and often made
changes to the films as a result (Cooper 2006). It is my intent that *Journeys in the Tanimbars* is also open to this fluid and flexible modification of representation.

Since the work of ethnographic filmmakers such as Rouch in the 40s and 50s, the field has been open to and undergone many investigative innovations. A key conceptual framework underpinning my work describes the interaction and consequent possibilities between the genres of experimental film practice and ethnographic film practice using video. As an artist, living and working in a pluralist society, which embodies multiple points of view, interested in addressing social and cultural change, I have attempted to create a video installation that is simultaneously aesthetic and ethnographic; work in which experimentation bears light on social representation. In her work ‘Experimental Ethnography: the work of film in the age of video’, the writer and theoretician, Catherine Russell (1999) explores the interplay between the two forms. As disciplinary boundaries dissolve, ethnography becomes ‘a means of renewing the avant-gardism of ‘experimental’ film, of mobilizing its play with language and form for historical ends. ‘Ethnography’ likewise becomes an expansive term in which culture is represented from many different and fragmented and mediated perspectives’. As an interdisciplinary interest in visual culture grows, Russell (1999, p.16) posits that ‘experimental filmmaking is flourishing within a postcolonial, post modern context’.

The contemporary filmmaker, Ben Russell shaped the way I approached fieldwork. Acknowledging Jean Rouch as an influence, he formed collaborative relationships and asserts that he is not interested in going to a different culture with the intention of capturing so called ‘objective’ information, in order to analyse and present it later. Rather he considers his work ‘within the experimental ethnographic sphere of art cinema’ (Bloom 2009, para.3).

Russell's 2009 film, *Let Each One Go Where He May* investigates ethnographic representation and documentary using artistic means. The film, shot in 13 extended shots nearly 10 minutes each, follows two Saramaccan brothers as they journey through various landscapes tracing the path their ancestors took to escape Dutch enslavement 300 years earlier (Image 2).
2. Let Each One Go Where He May (2009) by Ben Russell
viewed, 1 November, 2011

Russell uses the camera as a third eye (Image 3), both as a participant and an observer, shifting perspectives and gazes. This embedded and fluid use of the camera eye was also employed in the capturing of footage for Journeys in the Tanimbars.

3. Stills from Let Each One Go Where He May (2009) by Ben Russell
viewed 1 November, 2011
http://www.worldscinema.com/2010/05/ben-russell-let-each-one-go-where-he.html
Similarly I established a relationship with the participants that developed into a collaborative friendship. Both Russell’s and my own relationships to the films’ protagonists, which developed into collaborative friendships, were cemented prior to filming; his established when he was stationed in Suriname for two years in the peace corps and mine on a previous trip. Acknowledgement of the Dutch colonial past, the gaze of the Western filmmaker, and the traditional world’s relationship with the contemporary world are ideas that engaged me. We both work with locals to trace paths that are contemporary and linked to the past.

While Rouch’s ethnographic methods challenged filmmaking in the 1960s and experimental ethnographic film incorporated and innovated new methods of representation, the late 20th century saw immersive installations, pushing the boundaries of cultural perceptions of the audience. As technology developed, beginning with the advent of television and video surveillance systems, further innovations using the moving image and sound have evolved. Artists have embraced new technologies, and media such as video used in innovative ways differing to those intended and used to convey emotions and knowledge to a wider audience (Viola 1985). The video artists Sawa, Geczy and Viola investigate the role of formal aesthetics, social collaboration, art history and the synthesis of technology and the spiritual in their works. In the last 20 years artists have sought to include as part of their work, the actual space in which it is installed, actively engaging the viewer physically and psychologically. When we experience the ‘here and now’ constituted by our presence and actions participating in the work, art becomes life. The space we inhabit and the space of the images fuse. Vejlby (2005) suggests this process occurs firstly, when we ‘narrow down’ space, that is funnel universal experience through direct and simplified multisensory means. Hence, a strong sense of identification and empathy is created.
Another strong influence on my work was presented at the 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Hiruki Sawa’s multichannel audiovisual work, O, was compelling and inspired the formal set up of Journeys in the Tanimbars (Image 4). My senses were invigorated by the powerful combination of the form and the surround sound used in Sawa’s sculptural triptych. Responding to aspects of the Australian landscape it consisted of three large projections, laid out centrally in an irregular semicircle, surrounded by 10 small monitors set into the walls. Connecting the video works was an enthralling soundtrack by Organ Octet with Dale Berning, which directed the sound using spinning speakers. The triptych unfolded slowly, giving rise to a meditative feeling and creating dynamic narrative collisions. These ‘intimate physics’ (Woodcroft 2010, p.110), created an immersive and ‘contemplative space of encounter.’ Though moved by the immersive aspect and aesthetic beauty represented, equally important to my work is the human presence, voice, experience and collaboration, which was not explored by Sawa.

In 2009, I completed an internship at Nexus Multicultural Arts Centre in Adelaide. This project involved researching and writing about the 2009 video installation exhibited at Nexus, ‘Diaspora Gathered: Remember Forgetting’, a collaboration between the artist Adam Geczy and the Sydney Armenian Diaspora.

On three walls in a small white room, Geczy projected video of the Armenian participants opening and closing their eyes and placed articles of clothing given to him by the people he worked closely with, haphazardly but neatly overlapping, on the floor. In a column on one wall he inscribed the names of the participants in dark red chalk (Images 5 and 6). This installation work affected me deeply and emotionally, inspiring me to work with and give a voice to a specific group of people and to question social experiences using simple elements of sculpture and video. Histories and cultures are living and non-static, and therefore articulations and accounts of history should engage multifarious interpretations and insights. A work like this created an opportunity for non-mainstream voices to be articulated. The installation sparked my interest in the beauty of people individually and the power of the creative collaborative or shared voice. Researching Geczy’s process I understood that working together required profound cultural sensitivity and was a complex but rewarding methodology. The direct aesthetic simplicity of the personally confronting video, combined with the personal objects, imbued the space with a power that created empathy in the viewer.
(T-B) 5 and 6. Diaspora Gathered: Remember Forgetting (2008), a collaboration between the artist Adam Geczy and the Sydney Armenian Diaspora, viewed 2 November 2009, Nexus MCA Archives

Item removed due to copyright.
In considering the aesthetic dimensions of installation art, I referred to the view of Bill Viola (2002, p.92) who asserts that ‘the Scrovegni Chapel...is a giant three-dimensional image that you can physically enter...It is one of the greatest works of installation art in the world’ (Images 7 and 8).

As a novice filmmaker it was important for me to research both formative and contemporary ideas of the moving image. Seminal video artist, Bill Viola, has worked with video and sound since the 1960s, experimenting with and pushing media and technology to its limits at each innovative stage of development. His philosophical and spiritual relationship and insights into the meaning and use of technology, and his passionate interest in the historical precedents (origins) of the moving image and humanity’s relationship to and experience with it, have profoundly affected my own connections to technology. I recognize its potential and possibilities to create profound meaning. The early Renaissance *Scrovegni Chapel frescoes* (1305) by Giotto de Bondone have been a significant influence on Viola’s work, including his video installation *Nantes Triptych* (Image 9).
viewed 2 February, 2012,

The *Scrovegni Chapel frescoes* can be experienced as early examples of spatial and visual immersion, and in them the genesis of the narrative, aesthetic and psychological possibilities of the moving image in space perceived. The totality of Giotto’s work and the fact that the actual space in which it exists is part of the work is much like contemporary immersive installations such as *Nantes Triptych* and *Journeys in the Tanimbars*. Both frescoes and video projections permeate the walls - existing only when they are on the walls. Large emotive images, sound, and the viewer as an integral element to the work - spending *time* with the work and *moving in the constituted space* - are important components of the immersive experience of the *Scrovegni Chapel frescoes, Nantes Triptych* and *Journeys in the Tanimbars* (Vejlby 2005).

In order to feel immersed the viewer must identify with and have empathy for the work. Giotto’s *Scrovegni Chapel frescoes* celebrate realism, humans and the landscape. His unique style and many innovative techniques, including three-dimensional perspective, an authentic colour palette, illumination and shading, and the highlighting of facial expression, gesture and posture, aim to communicate, involve and connect viewers to the emotions and physicality of the people and themes in the scenes. In each of the three artworks, the *Scrovegni Chapel frescoes, Nantes Triptych* and *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, cultural sacred experiences and stories are interpreted; the lives and experiences of Mary and Jesus in the *Scrovegni*
Chapel frescoes, the universal experiential passages of birth, existence and death in Nantes Triptych, and ancestral animist beliefs in Journeys in the Tanimbars. Each work aims to represent something divine and sacred in a familiar and relatable way (Velby 2005). With empathy, borders become thresholds and through the viewer’s presence the work of art is completed or constituted.

Even so, immense experiences and the rich complexities of life such as those depicted in Giotto’s and Viola’s work are impossible to capture using a tiny lens and a machine that cuts out most of the sensation of being in the experience (Viola in Vejlby 2005). The way into representing the experience is to cut out all you see and narrow it down to a little portal. At this point the space of the viewer and the space of the video can fuse and the viewer is absorbed into the world. The picture surface becomes a portal. The vastness is consciously narrowed down to limited or compacted space. Both Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel frescoes and Viola in the Nantes Triptych present the bare essentials of a scene, so that the viewer stays in the scene. Immersive experience is also reinforced by sound ambience, where you hear things you can see in the panels and outside of the panels. Similarly in both Nantes Triptych and Journeys in the Tanimbars the viewer can hear sounds produced by nature and human activity that are not represented in the video but refer to the space beyond. The sounds of the viewer’s presence also blend with the sound ambience creating a free interchange between the work and the world.

The Scrovegni Chapel frescoes, Nantes Triptych and Journeys in the Tanimbars, each take the viewer on an evolving narrative journey, through time and space. Giotto’s cycle of images relate a complex emotional narrative through the physical lives and experiences of the individuals Mary and Jesus. The viewer experiences both a mental and physical journey as they move through the Chapel space. The Nantes Triptych evokes the fundamental passages of birth, life and death. Journeys in the Tanimbars immerses the viewer in the physical and narrative journey from Darwin to the village of Olilit, and into the landscape and ritual world of its villagers, which includes communion with the ancestral past and mythological time. Both installations compel the viewer to stay with the piece and immerse
oneself in the development. Both the *Nantes Triptych* and *Journeys in the Tanimbars* embody the renaissance devotional form of the triptych altar, where the central panel is the focus, creating interesting permutations.

While Viola expresses an interest in moments and places of instability: thresholds of transition between two things, such as birth and death; his execution of the works are intricately thought out and orchestrated, technologically immaculate, and extremely staged. In a sense there is little space provided for a ‘spontaneous’ magic to manifest. Filming is done with high-end cutting-edge technology on highly managed and super expensive sets with financial and time constraints. This is in contrast to *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, which relied on spontaneous and unstructured filming and strategies, utilising the spontaneity of nature and free form shared participation.

Though strongly influenced by western artists and their inquiries, *Journeys in the Tanimbars* keeps local Tanimbar artistic traditions foregrounded. Exploring the convergence of traditional and contemporary culture, I researched and drew upon the work and carving collection of local Olilit woodcarver Simon Batajeleri. Simon showed me carvings relating to Artuf the Tanimbar Islands creator hero and Wantamer and Mangajow, the ancestors of the village of Olilit, the original custodians (now embodied) of *Iban* the sacred fish pool, and shared the histories and stories that went with them. This knowledge is integrated into the installation work.
David MacDougall, an esteemed documentary filmmaker (visual anthropologist) and essayist, in reflecting on filming the documentary ‘To Live With Herds’ (1971) offers the astute insight,

‘that a filmmaker may start out with a certain film topic in mind, but when the filmmaker arrives at the point of making the film, the film may change according to the reality of the situation.’

This project has developed with such a fluid adaptation in all levels of the processes of production and post-production.

a. The use of Media in Production and Post-Production

Working outside in the extreme heat or rain, on sea crossings and jungle treks, demanded that the media and technology used (the setup) be hardy, portable and versatile. The basic setup employed was a Prosumer Sony HD camcorder with flip out LCD screen. It had surround sound built in and was attached to a tripod. This was supplemented with a portable Marantz audio recorder. The tripod steadied the video camera in the car, on scooters and on boats, allowing smooth movement through the landscape. As we never knew how long our excursions might be, in a place where electricity was very difficult to come by, three long lasting batteries replaced the requirement for electricity. Every night audio and visual footage was downloaded and saved on a Mac laptop, which was powered by a small petrol generator on our boat the Lorna Marlise (Image 10).

This non-intrusive and non-obtrusive setup allowed me to capture images, voices and sound quickly, as events unfolded, in as natural and informal manner as possible, maintaining an intimate relationship with my surroundings and the people I was working with.
10. The Lorna Marlise in which we sailed to the Tanimbar Islands, 2011
Photo by Kylie Walsh
Video allows real-time recording and playback. The flip out screen was used reflexively to show the participants footage as we went, which gave them the opportunity to question, comment on and evaluate it. This sharing of the audiovisual image created an understanding without the need for us to speak the same language. Video is a medium that suits representation of the everyday life, voices, actions and stories of a culture based on oral traditions and symbolic ritual. MacDougall (2001, p.24) proposes that video is ‘perhaps uniquely suited to analysing visible cultural forms, the immediacy of individual social experience, the kinaesthetics of people’s relationships to material objects and social interactions’. The local people I worked with showed a keen interest in still and moving image media and technology. In many of the sparsely furnished houses I went into, the main objects in the communal room were DVD players and massive speakers.

Post-production media available to me and finally employed were Final Cut Pro video editing software, projectors and three screens. Video and editing software permits the creative compositional layering of still and moving images, audio (music, language, ambient sound), and text (titles, subtitled translations), encouraging combinations that enhance the artwork’s potential for multiple meanings and transcultural understandings. ‘Films should seek to divulge in both style and substance, the ‘multiple voices’ that contribute in different ways to their formation’ (MacDougall 1998, p.81). Video supports artistic expression of the nexus of the physical with the metaphysical: the contemporary world of the village of Olilit and the custodian Boy, and the traditional world of the ancestors. The custodians that I met in the Tanimbars showed a profound respect for the media and material information about their cultural history given to them by locals and non-locals. The video triptych component of the installation can be recorded onto easily replaceable DVDs and distributed to the participants for their future reference.
b. Processes of Participation in the Audiovisual Production

Both cross cultural shared participation and collaboration were significant processes in the creating of *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, in pre-production, production and post-production. Many people were involved in this journey: sailing crewmembers, cultural brokers, translators, local participants and their village heads, mentors and sound engineers (Image 11).

11. Olilit Village. The crew from Darwin sit down in discussion with the custodian Boy Tanaty, his five sons and other family members, villagers, translator Higi Batmomolin and carver Simon Batajeleri, 2012. Photo by Claire Dandie.

In the Tanimbar Islands I sought to work collaboratively with locals but found that time constraints, new relationships and inexperience with media hindered true collaboration. Instead a democratic and shared creative participatory *modus operandi* grew out of the continually evolving process that relied on building relationships of trust and respect, in combination with the ability to comprehend the reality of situations and adapt quickly to them. Integral to the project was working with custodian and cultural broker, Higi Batmomolin. Higi facilitated our visit to Boy and the village of Olilit. He acted as interpreter in the field and translator for the edited video. The process of building relationships, fundamental to the Tanimbar way of doing and
experiencing things, was essential in working with Boy Tanaty, the custodian of *Iban* (middle of the forest), a sacred ancestral fish pool. Over the course of a couple of hours we sat, talked, smoked and shared *sopi* (ritual drink) until our genuine interest was ascertained and the right way to get to *Iban* became apparent. Preparations were made. Boy took me inside his home for a private blessing, boats were found and rented and his five sons were gathered. We found ourselves on a journey together.

As a democratic working method I embraced the idea of visual anthropologist, Sarah Pink, (2007) who draws attention to the methodology ‘walking with’, whereby the researcher/filmmaker, camera in hand, follows people, learning empathetically about their everyday lives and ritual routes. Walking along or beside a subject allows the ‘maintenance of the human scale and transferable proximity between subject and viewer’ (Jhala 2007, p.180). As the filmmaker follows the subject, entering into their ‘material, immaterial and social’ (Pink 2007, p.240) environments with the camera, closeness to the subject’s experience and a multi-sensory experience of place is created. This process seeks to capture a shared multi-sensory embodiment of place and experience, which is then shared in *Journeys in the Tanimbars* using installation techniques. Both the ‘walking with’ process and installation work aspire to evoke and communicate multisensory perceptions of ‘being there’ in the viewer, and thus create a connection to a wider audience.

Ethics clearance forms were used and willingly signed by participants and representatives of participants. Subjects were asked if they wanted to film and represent themselves, but all declined wishing instead to be in front of the camera, looking into the camera, talking and showing the filming crew around. Often individuals requested themselves to be filmed and placed themselves specifically. I then positioned myself and the camera according to those wishes. The music and songs recorded were offered to us by participants who wished to be documented. The cross-cultural shared process created opportunities for community members, including many children, to learn about their own culture. Participants, including Higi shared stories and information about their cultural traditions amongst themselves.
A key aspect to the process of filming was becoming attuned to the spontaneous and unpredictable nature of experiences. Participants, including Higi, could not lock in specific times and events. Time was not institutionalised. I could not plan or organise what or whom I was going to film beforehand. I rarely knew what was going to happen next, where we were going, whom we were going to meet or what kind of physical conditions our adventures would entail. We learnt to immerse ourselves in what came to be fondly referred to as ‘Tanimbar Time’. This created a free style of recording that combined with my inexperience in the processes of directing people and managing collaborations (with a reluctance to impose my wishes on others, preferring to ‘go with the flow’, especially in a cross-cultural environment) meant that problems such as background generators, over-enthusiastic crowds and errant crew members, at times affected the quality of both the audio and visual footage. This was compensated for by a spontaneous process, that created space for happy accidents and encouraged a loose and natural feel to filming.

Work in the editing stage included direct collaboration with a group of sound engineering students to produce the surround soundscape as part of their university coursework. As the sound and images are interconnected and the students had limited time the final audiovisual triptych work was created within tight time constraints. My editing work had to fit in with their schedule. This process of collaborative creating was exhilarating and exhausting especially as I had to learn the technical processes of video editing and facilitating sound collage from scratch, as I was actually creating the work. Unfortunately, as in the production process there was very little time for reflection and second-guessing. In hindsight it is important to allow oneself the time and solitude in the process of production for reflection, to record images and sound in quieter more solitary moments.

c. Processes of Post-Production: Editing Visual and Audio
Russell (Bloom 2009, para.4) claims that he is ‘generally more interested in art than science’ as a means to engage with ideas of representation in filmmaking. This statement acknowledges that there is no one truth in documentary work: that the subjectivity of the filmmaker is ever present, including in the process of making choices editing audiovisual material in
post-production. In the editing process I had to make decisions based on the themes I wished to develop, the feelings about my experience I wished to transmit, and the way in which I wanted to guide the viewer’s experience. Editing choices were made with both aesthetics and ethics in mind. Audiovisual choices were made that contextualised Boy and his ritual responsibilities. The village, Olilit and its community; their material, immaterial and social way of life are presented within the surrounding landscape. The editing choices express perceived relationships, harmonies and tensions, between the traditional ways of life in coexistence with the contemporary. Visions of the natural world, the countryside, the sea, forests and animals sit with visions of town life. I used the shots I filmed in the car, on boats, and walking into the forest to create movement, to take the viewer on a journey. This movement from one idea to the next, through a transition of physical spaces and places on the island, aims to reflect the coexistence of traditional and contemporary modes of living.

All songs and most of the music in the work were live recordings I made of the Tanimbar locals. In the editing process I chose a mix of the traditional and the contemporary: a Christian choir, a troubadour, Anthonie Watumlawar, the only one left who knew the traditional old songs and how to play and make his instrument, and traditional female welcome songs both formal and spontaneous (Images 12 and 13).

Everyday ambient sound is integral to the immersive quality of the installation. Sounds were edited together to create narrative flow and enhance the feeling of movement in the work. The music and ambient sounds are woven together, rising and falling to create and augment atmosphere. Darwin musicians were directed to reinterpret a simple traditional drumbeat to play over the introduction of the custodian Boy Tanaty, highlighting his dignity and importance as a protagonist. Some sounds such as animal noises were enhanced to make their presence more alive and noticeable.
(T- B) 12 and 13. Live recordings of Anthonie Watumlawar and the women of Matakus and their traditional welcome song are used in Journeys in the Tanimbars. Photos by Claire Dandie.
d. The Video Installation

*Journeys in the Tanimbars* is installed in a small gallery space and comprises a triptych of projected images, designed to stand on their own, and as a synchronised work in a synergistic relationship. Three large projection screens are arranged horizontally and slightly angled towards one another on the floor generating an immersive and enveloped visual experience, as well as fulfilling the requirements of the audio component, a surround-sound stereo set up, utilising five speakers. The installation form supports an immersive multi-sensory experience. Immersive installation experiences encourage movement in both space and through time – the viewer can experience the looped work from different angles and enter the work at different times in the cycle to realize multifarious understandings and for subsequent or successive responses to alchemically merge. Morse (2007, p.7) explains that the viewer is situated ‘inside the work as an active participant, connecting the body to a range of media based phenomena that were potentially and intentionally transformative.’

The triptych form was initially conceived in response to a favourite local Tanimbar carving I was shown. Artuf the mythological ancestor creator sits in a wooden triptych carving of a boat in the shape of a powerful bird (Image 14). The triptych form has also been traditionally used in multi-panelled Christian altars as a visual spiritual form for centuries (Svich 2004, p.73). The triptych symbolically embodies the sacred aspect of both traditional ancestral and Christian Tanimbar beliefs. This form creates the space for a poetic interplay of images; though three images are not always projected at the same time, pauses and negative spaces between the three images being as important as the positive/saturated spaces. Three projections in constant play would be overwhelming and distressing. The triptych produces an immersive panorama so that the viewer’s focus and experience is not static, but opened and engaged, multiplying the narrative choices for the viewer.

Surround sound is integral to multisensory immersion. Sound is a powerful inducer of feeling and empathy. Frances Dyson (2009, p.4) maintains that sound ‘affects the whole body as a vibration…and is felt, not just heard.’ Surround sound best allows the viewer to experience the live recordings of
the traditional and contemporary music of the Tanimbars as if they were there. Viola (2002, p.48) suggests this as ‘vastness of human experience expressed’. The big picture is contained in a snapshot of narrowed down life.

There are many layers to the film edit on material, aesthetic and philosophic levels. In the process of editing I sought to find a balance between a simple truth (my truth) of representation and placing moving images and sound in artistic and aesthetic collisions and juxtapositions.

14. Tanimbar Artuf carving, Collection and permission of Simon Batajeleri, 2012
Photo by Kylie Walsh
As detailed by Morse (1990), and embodied by the installations of Sawa, Geczy and Viola, on entering the darkened installation space of *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, the viewer transitions into a multisensory immersive experience. Various elements immediately work subconsciously and at a sensorial, visceral and tangible level, including a triptych of moving images, surround sound, and real plants and fishponds. These elements draw the viewer into and evoke the natural world of the Tanimbar Islands. The screens and enclosed intimate space share with the *Scrovegni Chapel frescoes* of Giotto a sense of community and invite the viewer into a stimulating, contemplative narrative experience. The scale and material of the sail like cloth screens evoke both the sailing experience to reach the islands, and the timeless symbolic and spiritual importance of boats in the Tanimbars (MacKinnon 1988).

Picard’s (Arts Emerson 2010, para.1) impression of Russell’s *Let Each One Go Where He May* (2009) – ‘the film opts for mystery and natural beauty over artifice. It absorbs the rhythms and sounds of life, landscape and legacy’, is a touchstone for my installation. *Journeys in the Tanimbars* begins with images of a boat sailing across the sea. The elemental forms and phenomenon of the sea and sky, the wind in the sails, the sun and the moon wash across the three screens. The translucent locally carved ancestral figure of omnipotent Artuf, the creator hero of the ordered natural world, islands, and people from out of primordial chaos, appears floating over the panoramic seascape, accompanying my crew and myself into the world and culture of the Tanimbar people. Reflected in the boat window, an image of myself filming is a reflexive visual reminder that ‘the researcher’s subjectivity is a central component to the conceptualization and production of the research process’ (Pink 2001, p.24). The crew, my self and the film, transition into a world ordered by local culture.
*Journeys in the Tanimbars* takes the viewer on both the physical and metaphysical form of an immersive journey, through landscape, culture and time. In line with Pink’s (2007) method of ‘walking with’, *Journeys in the Tanimbars* creates the sensorial nature of the experience as the journey or path through the film experience emerges. The immersive experience is supported through the use of the triptych form. This form encourages the viewer to actively participate in the journey rather than remain a passive observer. *Journeys in the Tanimbars* captures the local sense of time and flow of daily life, the landscapes and people in it. The viewer embarks on a narrative journey utilizing local modes of interaction including local transport: cars, boats and walking, at local rhythms. The work unfolds following the natural course of days and nights.

Central to the installation and its immersive quality is the inclusion of encounters with local people and Olili villagers. Fundamental to the editing process of *Journeys in the Tanimbars* was connecting people to people. The viewer is acknowledged and invited into the space of the subjects through their eye contact, smiles, gestures such as waves, and direct speech into the camera. As in Viola’s, Geczy’s, and Russell’s works described above, the subjects of the work behave in a temporal and natural way so that the viewer identifies with them, rather than just watching them. At the beginning of the work an older woman who has spent the morning harvesting bananas (Image 15) stops and sells us some of her produce, and a hunter who emerges directly from the forest, shares a cigarette and shows us the wild pig he has just trapped after 2 days of pursuit in the forest (Image 16).
15. A woman sells us bananas she has harvested.

*Journeys in the Tanimbars, 2012, by Kylie Walsh*

16. A hunter emerges from the forest as we pass by. He has just caught a wild pig using a trap.

*Journeys in the Tanimbars, 2012, by Kylie Walsh*
These encounters highlight the ongoing connection between the natural world – the plants and animals - and the Tanimbar people. Daily life in the Tanimbars still revolves around the age-old practices of subsistence farming and hunting in order to survive.

Tanimbar society is forged from strong family, community and spiritual bonds. These bonds are depicted in *Journeys in the Tanimbars* through the inclusion of the Olilit village Catholic community ritual, the Procession of the Cross (Image 17), and the ancestral animist ritual that Olilit custodian Boy Tanaty allows us to be a part of (Image 18).

17. The Catholic community of Olilit perform the Stations of the Cross

*Journeys in the Tanimbars, 2012, by Kylie Walsh*
18. Olilit custodian Boy Tanaty presents the Lorna Marlise crew to the ancestors of *Iban*, the sacred ancestral fish pool

*Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh
Respect for all generations (including ancestors no longer with them) is vital and central to contemporary Tanimbar culture. For this reason all ages and generations of Olilit villagers are portrayed in *Journeys in the Tanimbars*. In depicting the village of Olilit it became natural to use the triptych form in order to immerse the viewer in the lively atmosphere, communicate the sense of welcoming community and highlight traditional and contemporary aspects.

From a young age children are taught the importance of caring for community (Image 19). Early in the morning a young girl mimics her mother’s ritual of sweeping the village road with a traditional broom made of locally gathered brush. The triptych serves to place the viewer amongst the action on the road. In most triptychs I have carefully orchestrated movement so that the liveliness of the experience is translated without confusing the viewer. In this triptych the central gentle sweeping motion is offset by a static image on the left and the rapid approach of a dog on the right. These images show the varying architectural styles of the Olilit houses. The house on the left depicts influences from the Dutch colonial era with handmade woodwork windows and door and lace curtains.

A mother and baby show us a tiny puppy (Image 20). The mother of the puppy wants her baby back. This lovely parallel image of motherhood illustrates one of the advantages of spontaneous filming. This image of the dog and that of the little boy who is playing with his pet green tree frog portray the everyday close relationships of people and animals. Again movement is carefully balanced with the initial focus on the mother and child and their direct communication to the viewer whilst the left screen is static. The shy boy with the green frog then captures the viewer’s attention and moves with him down the street and into the next scene.

A multigenerational family asked that I film them outside their house (Image 21). The triptych form was used juxtaposing traditional fishing traps and chickens on either side of the house to immerse the viewer in the family compound and illustrate the customary daily practices of fishing and raising chickens to feed the family.
19. Olilit. A girl sweeps the road
*Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh

20. A woman and her baby with a puppy,
*Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh
21. An Olilit family outside their home,
*Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh
An elderly woman with her handmade walking stick came past wanting to meet us (Image 22). Though we could not speak the same language her engaging smile and face said it all. This image is played in slow motion, as in Viola’s Nantes Triptych, to create a meditative experience, where the everyday moment is augmented to reveal its true depth of beauty and also from necessity as it was fleeting. The triptych form is used in a different way, whereby the woman moves across all three screens from right to left. This technique creates an immersive connection with the woman and the space she is in with the space the viewer is in.

22. A village elder walks past,
Journeys in the Tanimbars, 2012, by Kylie Walsh

Animals are encountered throughout Journeys in the Tanimbars (Image 23), as they are a ubiquitous but important part of daily life and ritual, representing powerful ancient symbols. Dogs signifying the superior hunter and the rooster the virile and brave warrior were carved into the prow of war boats.
23. Dogs and roosters are powerful traditional symbols

*Journeys in the Tanimbars, 2012, by Kylie Walsh*
In common with Viola, Giotto and Russell Journeys in the Tanimbars can be read as a portrait of individuals in the context of their society. As the central figure, Boy Tanaty is male and the forest ritual male orientated. I have also ensured that females are represented throughout, as they have a strong role in Tanimbar society.

Some representational choices were made artistically in order to convey a subjective ‘truth’ or reality. Not all images stood next to each in objective reality. Though the sequence On the Road (Image 24) was filmed on the way to Olilit, it was recorded the day before and a little after the sun had risen. However the sequence had a truthful beauty to it expressing the profound relationship of the local people with the natural environment.

24. On the road
Journeys in the Tanimbars, 2012, by Kylie Walsh

Several of the triptychs of Olilit village were manipulated to contrast interesting aspects of village life with one another (Image 25). This triptych portrays women at their daily task of fetching drinking water in containers, a traditional sago leaf thatched roof with fishing net drying on it and a handmade clothesline. The old woman and the dogs seen in the central panel
move towards the viewer immediately drawing them into the scene. The abstracted almost static left and right panels envelope and ground the viewer.

Between the main scenes of the Scrovegni frescoes, Giotto painted faux marble decorations that are mirror inversions of one another. Inspired by this technical device I reversed the same moving image, in order to create a sense of harmony and consistency and keep the viewer immersed (Image 26).
25. Olilit village. Triptych depicting a woman fetching water, washing and a traditional thatched roof.

*Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh

26. Triptych inspired by Giotto’s mirror images

*Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh
Central to the work and its cultural representation, both ethnographically and aesthetically, is language. Boy Tanaty and the other participants talk to the camera in their own Olilit language. Their voices and what they want to say are their own. Higi, who is originally from Olilit, translates into English as we go and supplied the post-production translations. The film captures Boy Tanaty switching between languages, as he saw fit. He speaks to the camera, to myself in the moment and an assumed western audience, about his culture in an imported eastern Bahasa Indonesian dialect. When he speaks as a custodian and Landlord, he speaks in his local traditional Olilit language, culturally appropriate for ritual ancestor worship. In the segment Iban, audio captures the spoken language, whilst subtitles provide an English translation (Image 27).

Occasional English text juxtaposed next to images offers information about the scene, told to me in conversation not included in the film, which aims to contextualize meanings for the viewer (Image 28). Recorded sound conveys not only the spoken voices of participants but also the nuanced ambient sound essential to the specific location and culture supporting ethnographic integrity in the work. As the locals used the rituals of music and singing to welcome us into their culture, this is reflected in my incorporating it into the work. Musical episodes guide and deepen the viewer's experience.

The natural world, the sea, the forest and the weather are integral elements in the Tanimbar world. Movement through a panoramic triptych is used to immerse the viewer in a meditative experience of these powerful landscapes (Images 28 to 31).
The pool is sacred.
The fish embody the spirits of their ancestors.

Item removed due to copyright.

28. *Iban*. English text offers additional contextual information
*Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh

29. Triptych of seascape to *Iban*
*Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh
30. Triptych of sacred Iban (Middle of the forest)  
*Journeys in the Tanimbars, 2012, by Kylie Walsh*

31. Triptych of seascape from Olilit village  
*Journeys in the Tanimbars, 2012, by Kylie Walsh*
Images and sound are powerful communicators sharing humanities knowledge and stories, across all cultures and epochs and boundaries. The video installation *Journeys in the Tanimbars* has sought to find contemporary ways of interactive sharing and understanding between neighbors using new technologies whilst promoting conservation of traditional culture for the future. The work embodies cross-cultural participatory engagement in a democratic space of sharing and creating; as Higi Batmomolin sees it, ‘a link created in a long chain of links’. The work has sought trans-cultural understanding in using layered devices, tools and cultural perspectives to express the connections of the contemporary world with the traditional. It has not been my intention to analyze the Tanimbar culture, but to present my subjective experience of moving through it. I hope that the viewer comes away from the installation experience having felt for a short time an intimacy and connection with our neighbors, the Tanimbar people and their culture.

My awareness of an inherited historical and cultural western European perspective, European and U.S centric that includes exploitative colonialism, shaped both the way I approached cross cultural sharing and the ways in which I represented the people and culture of the Tanimbars. I tried to be ever mindful of local traditions and beliefs and their attendant complexities that I knew very little about, to assume as little as possible and to let the people I was involved with direct the course of events and speak for themselves as much as possible. In the contemporary Tanimbar world there are traces both strong and faint of past culture - both traditional and colonial. I was mindful that my artwork revolves around filming indigenous individuals, whose society and culture were directly changed and influenced by aggressive colonisation, which included religious, cultural and spiritual colonisation. Keeping this in mind I selected the things that matter to me; the beauty of simplicity, people and faces that I related to, that fascinated me and moved me at the time, in a way that is respectful of this past.
While the work has not embodied traditional ethnographic film practices or immaculate visual art installation practices such as that of Viola, it has created an informative aesthetic space in which the viewer has glimpsed the cultural lives of another group of people.

Though many of the aims of the project were fulfilled I found that the scope of the project envisaged was much too vast, considering my inexperience with both fieldwork and the technology used. This led to many challenges physically and aesthetically. Inexperience with the challenges of remote travel and production out in the field meant that I could not always source the raw material I desired, which contributed directly to the frenetic pace of editing, scene changes and loose narrative format as I sought to recreate what I desired in post-production. However, this tempo distracted from the poised, reflective moments achieved. Simply put, if the raw material is not there the space in the end is compromised. At times this overworked effect looked chaotic and overcrowded, dominating the work and working against the sense of time and immersive space I aspired to. At times it also conspired against the aesthetics of the triptych form. When the shots were too quick the three screens were distracting rather than immersive.

Another aesthetic concern was whether the audience would be bored with longer lingering video shots and whether this could be balanced out in creating a narrative framework to contextualize it. Again though, trying to wrought a narrative shape from footage that was simply not there worked against the piece in the end.

I found that true collaboration with the local Tanimbarese was difficult. I believe that this was due mainly to time constraints, a chaotic itinerary, my lack of experience in directing production and consequently the rushed approach to fieldwork. Still, the work created fruitful and lasting relationships and involved successful and democratic negotiated participation. Trying to be culturally respectful at all times and constantly meeting people for the first time meant that creativity and what was best for the film was not the priority, impacting on the final work. Next time I will create opportunities for both a more professional space in fieldwork production and a quiet reflective space to work alone in at the days end.
In post-production I found that most technical problems arose because I was creating something new. Having little experience with technology I was able to envisage and work freely with new ideas, as I was not constrained by the knowledge of technical limitations. However, this meant that the capabilities and effectiveness of several major technical ideas such as the integration of surround sound with a triptych of HD images were put to the test right at the end and did not quite work out as aesthetically planned.

In Part One of this exegesis I outlined historical ethnographic methods and their influences on representation in experimental ethnographic film and how the late 20th century saw immersive installations innovate and push the boundaries of cultural perceptions of the audience. In Part Two, I moved the discussion into how both the media and processes used in *Journeys in the Tanimbars* contributed to the final artwork. In the final part of this exegesis I considered my creative practice with regard to the practices and philosophies discussed in previous sections. Specific sections of the installation were discussed as conclusions into how my research of shared participation and collaborative and ethnographic methods of representation and aesthetics can be used to facilitate greater communication and understanding between people of different cultures and backgrounds.

Through organising the logistics of a sailing crew to the Tanimbar Islands, undertaking strenuous shared fieldwork, learning filming and editing skills and collaborating with sound engineers, I have gained much useful knowledge and experience as an emerging video art practitioner in how to work with different people and produce a final work.

Personally, the production of *Journeys in the Tanimbars* was enormously enriching and rewarding, friendships were cemented and creative relationships continued with renewed enthusiasm. Ongoing creative projects include the making of DVDs to give to each group of participants. The villagers of Olilit were but one of a group of four that we worked with. I hope to further develop my technical and collaborative skills, evolve my understanding of how moving image and sound can bring people together, connecting them for the greater good and working to conserve traditional cultural aspects.
Arts Emerson 2010, *Let Each One Go Where He May*, viewed 2 February 2012,
<https://artsemerson.org/Online/default.asp?doWork::WScontent::loadArticle::loadArticle::article_id=9B07E690-E0B5-4162-8B3F-8D10AB266694,> 


Nexus Multicultural Arts, Diaspora Gathered: Remember Forgetting, Adelaide, Australia.


5. Diaspora Gathered: Remember Forgetting (2008), a collaboration between the artist Adam Geczy and the Sydney Armenla Diaspora, viewed 2 November 2009, Nexus MCA Archives

6. Diaspora Gathered: Remember Forgetting (2008), a collaboration between the artist Adam Geczy and the Sydney Armenian Diaspora, viewed 2 November 2009, Nexus MCA Archives


10. The Lorna Marlise in which we sailed to the Tanimbar Islands, 2011, Photo by Kylie Walsh

11. Olilit Village. The crew from Darwin sit down in discussion with the custodian Boy Tanaty, his five sons and other family members, villagers, translator Higi Batmomolin and carver Simon Batjeleri, 2012, Photo by Claire Dandie

12. Live recordings of Anthonie Watumlawar used in *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012 by Kylie Walsh, Photo by Claire Dandie

13. Live recordings of the women of Matakus and their traditional welcome song used in *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012 by Kylie Walsh, Photo by Claire Dandie


15. A woman sells us bananas she has harvested, *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh

16. A hunter emerges from the forest as we pass by. He has just caught a wild pig using a trap, *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh


18. Oliilt custodian Boy Tanaty presents the Lorna Marlise crew to the ancestors of *Iban*, the sacred ancestral fish pool, *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh


23. Dogs and roosters are powerful traditional symbols, *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh


30. Triptych of sacred *Iban* (middle of the forest), *Journeys in the Tanimbars*, 2012, by Kylie Walsh