

NGAPA Two Cultures One Country – Artists Notes

TIM NEWTH, core project co participant.

Written to compliment the NGAPA report and video.

Tim Newth is a founding member of TRACKS Dance, Darwin. He has had a relationship with the Lajamanu community since 1988. As a member of Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre he toured to Lajamanu with five one-act plays, one of which was written in Warlpiri language by the Senior Class of Lajamanu School. The performance of the play was the first ever contact for Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre with Warlpiri people. Their response was firstly to roll on the ground with laughter, but secondly they welcomed us with open arms. No other whitefellas had done this kind of thing in Lajamanu before, producing and performing plays in their language, (as incorrect as our pronunciation may have been).

A year later, Tim, along with Sarah Calver (founding member of TRACKS Dance) and Janet Robinson (then Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre director) who were also involved in the original tour, were invited back into the community for a three-month residency. The community wanted their kids to learn some of 'this dance and theatre stuff.' The resulting show toured surrounding Warlpiri communities and finally as far as Alice Springs and Darwin. Tim then stayed in Lajamanu for a further two months on the request of the council and school to conduct a banner and mural project.

A second touring show was developed in 1990 with Sarah, Tim and Robyn Laurie (then ex-Circus Oz). A third Lajamanu show was developed in 1992 in Darwin at Brown's Mart theatre. This show grew out of the request: "Why can't we work in a proper theatre with a wooden floor, lights and air-conditioning?" This performance involved 28 Warlpiri teenagers and adults and was directed by Tim and co-directed by David McMicken, (also a founding member of TRACKS Dance). Sarah Calver worked as choreographer and Annie Gastin as musical director.

Throughout this time Tim developed a strong relationship with the Patrick family, in particular with his 'father' Freddy Jangala Patrick. Together they collaborated on dance and theatre events in Melbourne, Darwin and Lajamanu. In 1989 - 1990 Tim received a development grant from the Australia Council to work with Freddy in Lajamanu and study links between people, place and art.

As well as the general community of Lajamanu, the Yawulyu women, (Ceremonial Dancers) have worked and performed with TRACKS Dance on many occasions. In 1996 they toured country Victoria and Melbourne as part of the International Dance Alliance and Greenmill dance Project.

The Ngapa Jukurrpa - Rainstorm Dreaming Project -was primarily sponsored by the Hybrid Arts Fund of the Australia Council. Further support -was given by The Northern Territory Office for the Arts and Cultural Affairs, Brown's Mart Community Arts,

Northern Territory Archives Services and the Lajamanu store. Photos by Francis Good, David McMicken, Steve Jampijinpa Patrick and Tim Newth.

DIARY EXTRACTS: PHASE ONE

Mid October 1995. I am informed that we have received the funding requested from the Hybrid Arts Board of the Australia Council for the NGAPA JUKURRPA RAINSTORM DREAMING Project. I am in Lajamanu, Freddy Jangala Patrick whom I conceived the project with is flown to Katherine hospital 600 kilometres away. Within the same week I am informed that Jangala has cancer.

Late October after many phone calls with family members, I am told that Jangala wants to do this project if it is the last thing he does. Hybrid Arts moves quickly to release the money and we move the starting date forward to mid-November. I arrange land permits for the white artists to travel across Aboriginal land, book four wheel drives and a satellite telephone, arrange with a helicopter company to be able to make an emergency pick up in case someone gets sick or is bitten by a snake, search out a gadget that will pin-point our position in such a case, arrange sound equipment to record stories on the trip and work with other TRACKS Dance artists to rearrange the year's projects within the annual programme.

November. A week before we are due to leave it becomes clear that I really need to speak to Jangala in person. I make the twelve hour drive to Lajamanu, picking up Steve, the younger Aboriginal man involved in the project, who is studying at bachelor College one hour out of Darwin. When I see Jangala he looks much sicker, but there is something stronger about his spirit. This night I take him to two other old men who spend the closing hours of the day singing into his belly which is now greatly swollen. I soon realise that we won't be leaving next week. Two weeks later we have not left for the trip and I leave Lajamanu. Within this time Jangala draws dreaming designs for me as well as placing two stories onto tape in Warlpiri. One is about Kurlpurlurnu. (I later learn while on the trip, and in performance, that this story and place is like the heart of the NGAPA Country.) The other is about his life story and how as a child with his parents and family he travelled from one water hole to the next as a means of survival. These water-holes are the sacred sites of the NGAPA Dreaming.

Each evening different groupings of elders would visit him and a ritual of healing would take place. The last night I was there he called me over; all he keeps saying in broken English is 'just don't think about it', don't think.'

Early December. We do not receive funding from the Aboriginal Arts Board. Jangala dies in Lajamanu on an open patch of dirt surrounded by over one hundred family members; his body simply stopped working. I return to Lajamanu.

The sorry camp is set up in the bush just out of the settlement. All family members camp there. Not much speaking is done, only at sunset. The women are painted up and howl out in grief into the night. We wait for two weeks for the appropriate

people to travel from communities around the Northern Territory to take place in the 'sorry' (funeral ritual.) I am told that one community are angry with Jangala's sons (of which I am one), as we should have taken better care of him. In Warlpiri culture there always seems to be someone to blame. Old men are scared that I might get speared as part of the 'pay-back'.

When the day arrives no one speaks to me. We are sitting in the 2 O'clock afternoon sun, painted up. About one-hundred-and-fifty Lajamanu people are on one side and visitors are on the other. I am told to stand up with a group of men who I call my brothers. We walk forwards toward the visitors who are also painted up and holding spears and boomerangs. An old man calls me, I turn and he hands me a large wooden shield ... We are not speared, but hugged.

Just before Christmas I leave Lajamanu again, this time with Steve, as the next day we fly to Melbourne where Steve will spend Christmas with my white family. This is his first trip out of the Territory.

The journey part of the project gets rescheduled for April. This process is awkward and I am not sure what is culturally appropriate knowing that Jangala's name can no longer be said and that some people have wanted a mural that we painted together on the water tank in the centre of Lajamanu to be removed, as it reminds them of him. The compromise was to cover the whole tank in blue plastic. I basically waited and sounded unclear to the organisations I worked within when asked what is happening. One day I get a phone call via Steve, the women from the proposed trip are asking for me. They had got their side of things ready and were waiting. Steve started negotiating as to which men should now come with us. Abe Jangala seemed the first choice, as he was the major painter of NGAPA and seen as the other NGAPA man next to Freddy. He was eventually to come on the trip but it was not a straight path. Through the ABC I was put onto Francis Good from the Northern Territory Archives Services and we make an arrangement where he will come on the trip to record people's stories and songs.

In the middle of this I get a telephone call from the Australia Council saying that the money for the project has been withdrawn and that I will be given ten thousand dollars to see me through. I am expected to resubmit next funding round. After negotiations detailing other appropriate elders who could work on the project this decision is reneged.

David McMicken and myself head to Lajamanu one week before Francis to make sure that it is all set to go. On the way in, after nine hours driving, it starts to rain. The dirt road that delivers dust and corrugations was turning into a river. We make it to Lajamanu and are one of the last vehicles to get in. We are stuck in Lajamanu for two weeks, like everyone else; no mail plane, no food truck. We eventually sit and watch the rain. This is after many phone calls to Brown's Mart and Francis. When ever the sun shines there seems to be hope, but no! The public phones soon fill up and so that puts a stop to that.

Back in Darwin we learn that there had been a cyclone close to the coast around the Kimberly area and this had pushed freak rains into the central desert areas.

May. We depart again, this time with Francis, David and myself, the satellite phone and all the other gear. Third time lucky. The time in the rain had meant that we had had time to talk to people about the country we were planning to travel. I felt really ready this time. As we enter Lajamanu, just on dark after the day's drive, we meet another car. We learn that someone else has just died. All the people that are involved in the trip are now in 'sorry' business, which from experience can take anything from a week to a month to move through.

We camp ten kilometres out of Lajamanu on an outstation called Lul Tju. I did not want to think what this all meant. I would have been very happy for the world to have stopped spinning there and then.

The next day we are searched out; Abe wanted to get going. "Don't worry about these women"; Abe is a very good, grumpy, old man when he wants to be. The women express to us (no talking) that they are happy to see us and they are wanting us to stay so that they can go too. They are excited and it is hard not to laugh as they grunt and sign their feelings and sneak in the occasional whisper when no one else is listening. The women who paint the top half of their bodies completely white are not allowed to speak for the first few days; only on sunset can they whisper.

Over the next week there are several community meetings, some with family members of the person who has died to ask for permission for the women to come out of the 'sorry' camp early. Other meetings are with the older men deciding which way we should go; through sand country meaning we will spend lots of the time digging ourselves out, the other is stick country and lots of punctured tyres. Both groups say that their way is shorter. Abe disagrees with every one else. He pulls me out of the meeting, most of what has gone on I do not understand because it is in Warlpiri. He explains that it is his country we are being taken onto, that it is where he had grown up, that it was his dreaming: now, which way do we want to go? In the end, (after two more days) Abe gets talked down and we go the punctured tyre country. The key factor to the final decision, particularly for the old men, was that it did not matter much which way we went because in Francis' car we had the 'magic' phone, the magic phone will save us.

We leave Lajamanu, this time into the Tanami desert. One of the two older men who was coming with us feels sick on the day and does not come. We depart in two vehicles. Steve, Abe, Francis, David in one; Rosie, Molly, Kajinarra, Gladys, Myra and me in the other.

The first day we drive the road to Rabbit Flat, (the most isolated road house in Australia), a tin shed which sells fuel, meat pies, cold drinks, and lends out tools so you can fix your tyres. Both vehicles have already had punctures and we learn how to repair tyres. It was now almost dark. Abe takes us to one camping spot, the women disagree as they say we will get attacked by drunks. Rabbit Flat also sells

alcohol. We are directed in the dark off the track to what appears to be a rubbish dump at night. This place, this country belongs to Gladys Napangardi. Two monsters used to live here. They would roam the country killing people and then tucking the dead people into their arm, head and waist-bands, saving them until they felt hungry. Before we go to sleep Gladys talks into the darkness, she tells the country who we are and what we are doing. We go to sleep.

Many of the stories that we were told on the trip were in language and I did not understand them until much later, until we were developing the performance. Also I was stressing out a lot. These people were some of the most important elders in Lajamanu and we needed to return them in one piece. Who was taking who on this journey?

In the morning, what still appears to be a rubbish dump is a bush supermarket. The women collect a drum of flour, and some billy cans. We find a few tyre levers. That morning David and I are shown a bush medicine bush and taken to two water soaks. We are told that they are two brothers. Later we learn that these two brothers are the two monsters who eat people.

We travel east of the main bush road. There are two major stops before Parrulyu. One is for Karnda (bush coconut), which grow on a tree with hard shells like coconut but smaller, when they are cracked open they are alive with small grey-brown maggots. This is what you eat. The other was because one car went the wrong way. This was a continual saga, as really there was no 'right' way of getting there. They were all just ways.

Parrulyu was the first place which Freddy Jangala Patrick had named as to where we should go. It is an out station with several living sheds, a tank of good water and a fuel tank, but no people. Also Parrulyu is a significant hill that we use as a reference point over the next days. There are not many bumps coming out of the ground in this flat country. Here we put out whitefella maps and draw Yapa (Warlpiri word for full-blood Aboriginal person) maps in the sand. The general direction seems clear, but the names of the places mean little at this stage. The women chase a goanna but miss it. We have lunch and move on. Just around the hill a little we stop. Rosie Napurrula digs and we are told of two Nangalas (two aboriginal women of the Nangala skin group) who came here for water and as they were drinking two snakes came up behind them and ate them. There are small rocks all around this area which is where the snakes 'made toilet' of those Nangalas.

We are now driving cross-country. I follow the women's pointing fingers as I drive. Francis is in the other car with the rest of the men and he follows Abe's directions. Unknowingly we head in two different directions. We are heading for a mining road. David on foot catches us up. This time Abe wins out and we head North-East again, through flat country covered in spinifex, small scrubby trees and ant hills. If you drive over the roots of a dead tree a flat tyre is inevitable. Over the next two days we travel only about 30 kilometres with Rosie Napurrula and her team 'bulldozing' in front of vehicles, ripping the roots from the ground and knocking down ant hills. Late

in the afternoon we get bogged in the sand. As night falls the women find an old camp-site. We stop here the night.

Francis and I come to loggerheads. He believes that I know where we are going and what is going on, that I am being the leader. I guess that I am not communicating well, but we are not even travelling in the same vehicle, and most of the time it is his vehicle in the lead directed by Abe. David does lots of running back and forwards, white politics.

The next day we are continually climbing on top of the vehicles. There are three small bumps on the horizon that I can barely make out. We are heading for one of them. The further we go the thicker the scrub gets. It becomes like a maze and we get trapped. In small groupings we head off on foot to find a way out. We lose each other in the process. Some time later we are driving around the scrub with three less people, they hear the sound of the vehicle and yell. We are a full team again. Ahead of us appears one of the bumps on the horizon, becoming a rocky outcrop. I feel excited, we have got somewhere. But instead the women are pointing in the other direction, we turn away from the outcrop. Not far and we are at the first NGAPA place, a very large flat rock with three small, oval shaped water holes within. Around to one side of it is a row of large square rocks spaced in almost perfect intervals around the edge. Across the large expanse of rock stretch long thin white lines. I understand them to be lightning. The women and Abe seem to tell different stories and give different names to this place. It seems not much can be said. Despite this, Francis makes his first recordings in language and song. Lots of seeds get collected. This place gets referred to as 'the lunch stop'. Sometimes a stop at a sacred site does not feel much different to a stop for fixing tyres.

Driving again, we come across the mining road of which the women had mentioned two days ago. In the afternoon we travel more distance than we have covered in the past two days. We stop and climb a rocky outcrop and things start to become clearer. There is a place called Kurlpurlurnu, which gets mentioned more and more. This is the place that Freddy Jangala put down on tape just before he dies. It was the last place on his list of sites and seems to be like the heart of the NGAPA country. Steve's father had also told us about this place in English while we were waiting for the rain to stop. You can tell this place because of the indentations on the ground. Many fires had been burning in the area, the surrounding water holes were turning salty. This old man, to protect Kurlpurlurnu, knelt over the water hole, leaving the marks of his knees and elbows in the ground. It is the only good water for a long way in any direction.

The further we drive the more the road deteriorates. It splits. It is not always clear where these mining roads go. They have only been made in the last year so not all people know them. This road takes us in a different direction to where we would go if we were just moving through the bush. We have punctured two tyres since leaving Parrulyu. The road runs out, but everyone is excited. It feels like we are getting there.

We have passed several NGAPA sites in the distance on the way. Abe does not want to go on, he wants to go back. His usual argument of "well it's my country" does not hold well but his expressed concerns of petrol and running out of tyres does. We agree to go back and climb a rise before deciding. From here everything seems to be laid out before us, bumps on the horizon and clumps of tree are named and their owners stated. It really feels close but "Abe Abe" (as he becomes known by the women) and his ownership of this country made Steve, David and I feel powerless as the decision is made to head back. I thought we were going for three weeks.

David later tells me of Steve crying in the car. This seems one of the most powerful moments on the trip. Continually old people tell me that young people do not care about their country, their culture, and here is Steve crying for something we cannot reach. We stop to shoot a kangaroo. Steve misses but wounds it. He missed a bush turkey earlier that day. We walk into the desert away from the cars and the elders to follow the kangaroo, but it is almost dark and it gets away.

We drive into the night, we stop once but "too many mosquitoes" the women say. We stop again, a flat tyre, we make camp. Later, after Abe is asleep, Rosie calls David, Steve and me over to the women's fire. She tells us a story. Throughout it she makes this funny noise in the back of her throat. I am entertained but I do not understand a word. The story is of Kurlpurlurnu again, of this hawk who picks up a snake and wraps it around and around its head. It keeps falling off. The places where it fell are significant. Finally it gets to Kurlpurlurnu. The snake is asked to leave, it is asked to go east, west, north and south. Each time it gives the same reply that no, it wants to stay right here. Finally, we go to sleep.

Molly Napurrula wakes early and catches a small goanna. The rest of us wake to be surrounded by the fires she has lit to force the goanna out of its holes. The other women make damper, which David delivers to us men. The tyre, which was flat on arrival last night is repaired. We talk a bit about the story from last night and decide to put some stories on tape in both English and Warlpiri. The word 'tape' or 'recorder' are Kumanjayi (no-name), meaning that someone has died with a similar sounding name and it can no longer be said out loud as a matter of respect. This always makes a taping session more challenging. Abe comes to life with the microphone in front of him and stands his own ground. After all, this is his country.

Even though Rosie appears to know the stories and the country better than anyone else, she does not have the right to tell the stories in this context. She could only tell the story last night because Abe was asleep. So, Gladys Napangardi talks into the microphone, Rosie sits with her back to us at some distance, she tells the story but it is Gladys in front of the microphone. So much of who can ask a question and who can answer it is caught up in relationship and ritual.

We drive to Piti Piti. There is a mining track most of the way. The site is easily spotted, a large hill with a smaller one behind it made up of white rocks. Later we are told that there is a waterhole somewhere, but neither Abe or the women climb

the hill so we don't know of it at this time. Again, from on top, the lay of the land seems clear.

Driving on, the women direct us towards some Yiniti trees from which they collect the red to yellow to maroon seeds to string onto hair string, which they exchange in initiation rituals or sell for money. We get a flat tyre on the way. They walk on while David and I fix the tyre. Again on the mining track the world seems to zoom by. At times I feel like it is a tourist trip. We stop, get out, see the site, take the photo, go, stop, get out, eat, go, stop, sleep, wake, go, get out, see the site, take the photo..

I know the place where we are heading to next and I get asked the way as much as anyone else. Parrulyu, the place we had visited a few days ago, is again along side us. We are now looking for Priti Priti. Three years ago we spent several days driving round and round trying to locate this site. There was no mining road then. I had not known where we were going. Freddy Jangala Patrick had just taken me here on a drive, no preparation, we just went. It is a Jangala Jampijinpa place. All the way I was told the same story of how I would see my father, (another Old Jangala) and my two mothers (two sisters, Nungarrays). This Old Jangala had been speared to death in a battle. I would see the hole left by the spears and I would still see the blood. His two wives had also been wounded, they were now cripples and lay near that Old Jangala. They were crying, crying for that old man.

Near a water hole stood a tall rock unlike any other, it was covered in indentations from which an orangey, red colour seemed to pour. In the long, thin water hole sat one large rounded rock, half covered in water. Her sister, who used to sit beside her, lay out of the water smashed into several pieces. The mining company had done this on one of their 'look around' explorations.

As Priti Priti now comes into sight you could see a sort of fence had been constructed with signs saying, ABORIGINAL SACRED SITE KEEP OUT. Steve and David, who had both heard many stories about this place, headed off with Abe to explore. The women hold back. I see Myra, (Freddy Jangala's wife) sit at some distance. The last time we were here was with him, this was his place. The women break off branches, which they sweep in front of them to enter this place. They move slowly, they sweep the ground and the rocks 'sorry way', a bit like smoking out a place in other cultures.

This is a lunch stop. Some of the women bottle some of the green-grey water. Abe tells us of Miss Pink, he was her mail boy. Miss Pink was the first white person most of these people had ever seen. An amazing woman who had set out alone and made her camp here to study arid plant life and be with Aboriginal people. I remember one old man describing seeing her for the first time. He was looking and the more he looked the more sorry he felt for her. He thought she was like a snake who had just shed her skin, which was still pink and raw.

We head back along the mining track and find the road which had first led us to Parrulyu. Stopping in the same place as before we collect Bush Coconuts. It's getting

dark. We drive back to Warryana, the two monster dreaming place. We get a flat tyre, it is dark, the car in front doesn't realise and keeps driving. They also have the jack. We wait. We only have one tyre left, which is not the right size. The travel is slow. Francis realises that Rabbit Flat is not open tomorrow. He uses the magic phone. He negotiates for us to be able to borrow the tyre levers and "whacker". Francis is also given his skin name this night. He is a Jupurrula. We go to sleep.

The next morning we work out what tyres can go with what tube, how many tyres we should repair to get us back to Lajamanu, and make sure the hire car has its original set of tyres. Before heading to Rabbit Flat we decide to set up the recording equipment again. Each of us put down our life stories. For everyone except Steve, David and myself the stories begin here in this country we have just travelled.

Repairing tyres seems to be hard work, whether you know what you're doing or not. An old Japanangka who must have been camping near Rabbit Flat with some of his mates last night appears. He humbugs the two Napurrulas travelling with us; they are his 'right skin' (for him to marry). We drive away from there with him sitting on the ground crying and yelling out "I love you, I love you".

Travelling back to Lajamanu there are mixed feelings; people wanting to stay on, others wanting to get back. We stop off at two outstations to carry out more 'sorry business', for the same reasons as at Priti Priti, and collect some bush tucker. The last stop is Jillbilly, dramatic landscape, small white gums within a red rocky outcrop from which the land drops away before levelling out into Lajamanu country. The sun is setting. Steve takes David and me to a water hole. The women drink tea, we laugh over and over at the 'I love you' story, which David and the women seem to have perpetuated in their travels. Abe sits in the car, eventually yelling at us for our silly carry on. We get going. No one talks much as we travel through the night back to Lajamanu, we are tired. We return people to their camps and their dogs.

PHASE TWO

Time spent in Darwin setting up publicity, venue, negotiating with Festival of Darwin, video shoots, budget, accommodation etc, then to Lajamanu. In knowing the past experience of trying to timetable this project, we are now locked into having a performance in five weeks time. In Lajamanu we talk of the idea of having two parts to the performance; the first drawing on traditional expression of the NGAPA Dreaming, the other to create a re-enactment of the journey. The job is to find out who can do this and what it really is. It is decided that there is a men's and a women's component to the first part. For the women it is a matter of deciding what dances and then who should dance them. Three of the women from the trip cannot dance the Ngapa dances because of their connections to Freddy Jangala who died, it being his country. For the men, the idea of Steve, David and me dancing is floated, but not all the men are in Lajamanu who need to decide. It is OK for us to learn those dances, but just which ones, which design and which song, and again who is the right person to accompany us? Abe leaves for a painting trip to Darwin towards the end of the week, so we appear to have gone as far as we can.

Steve, David and I travel to Darwin. We have decided on the elements for the second part, which include a 4WD, slides from the trip, sand on the floor, and a large rain cloud. Back in Darwin we construct the rain cloud amongst other things. Myra, from the trip, and several other women from Lajamanu are in town visiting their sons and husbands who are currently in jail here. Some of them help with the construction.

Towards the end of this week we run into Abe who tells us he has to spend another ten days in Darwin. Up until this point the plan has been to return to Lajamanu and spend a week learning the traditional aspects, then everyone in part two of the performance would travel back to Darwin for one week's rehearsal. Then the week before we went into the theatre the extra artists involved in part one work arrive and we would continue rehearsing putting the two parts together.

Steve and I drive around Darwin late at night trying to find Abe. Finally a young bloke who Abe has just given fifty dollars to get a slab of beer, points us in the right direction. There are many blokes with Abe who have had a good deal to drink. They have not seen me or Steve for a while and want to chat, so an hour or so later we explain our situation to Abe. Without him back in Lajamanu we cannot practice. He understands but he has been brought up and he cannot just get up and go tomorrow. Anyway, we have not got any room left in our cars. There has been nine Lajamanu people staying in my flat this week and all of them, plus David and myself, are expecting to travel back in either Steve's or David's car.

We return to Lajamanu three weeks before we open in Darwin. We cancel the planned rehearsal space in Darwin and change the accommodation bookings. Plan B: rehearse part two in Lajamanu first and then when Abe returns learn the 'traditional'. We invite everyone who went on the trip (except Abe and Francis Good of the Northern Territory Archives Services) to meet and discuss the creation of part two. David and I talk and try and show how we go about making a new dance. (Four of the women also travelled with David and I to Melbourne to perform at Greenmill. Although they did not see any other dance performances, their understanding of what TRACKS Dance does in terms of contemporary dance and dance making is good. All the women have been involved over a number of years, in one way or another, with other TRACKS Dance performances. We create a frame-work and tomorrow agree to talk through the details of the trip.

Two issues arise. One, where to rehearse? And two, many of the stories that were told on the trip were fine to be told in that context but in other public contexts other people may need to be given the first rights to tell those stories. The 'Seven Mile', a dried out water hole, is decided on as the rehearsal venue and negotiations begin with the owners of the stories.

We have talked about how things will be different from the actual trip in the re-enactment, deciding which parts to leave out and what needs to change, (because on the trip we had two cars and in the theatre we will only have one.) After driving out to Seven Mile in a borrowed car, (as David's car stopped dead on arrival to

Lajamanu and is in the process of being trucked back to Darwin), I scratch in the dirt four lines to represent the walls of Brown's Mart Theatre; a waste of time really. What happened over the next two hours was an amazing thing. We recreated the whole trip. The women had no problem in completely taking themselves back. In the bit where they went looking for goannas, all the women disappeared almost out of sight. Then, out of the silence, one yells "goanna, goanna" as she runs chasing it. The other women appear from all directions, all running. Swinging their sticks as they get close enough, they chase the 'goanna'. The imaginary goanna runs into an imaginary hole. They walk away in disappointment. The women's dogs also rehearse with us, which adds a little extra. They too chased the imaginary goanna and now also look disappointed, but maybe that is just confusion. We have rehearsed between 11.00 am and 2.00 pm, outside in the full sun. Tomorrow we decide to go earlier, and that we need to get it shorter, down to 45 minutes hopefully.

The second day of rehearsal seemed hard work and still hot. The story of the trip was a fine reference point, however our memory of which bits we needed to cut and the need to fit it all into a smaller performance space and shorter time frame seemed difficult. The women decided that tomorrow we would rehearse in the house that David and I were staying in. (We normally stay with family in Lajamanu but this time we needed a neutral space so as to avoid any avoidance relationships.)

Rehearsal three was again amazing. We have now found the need for some properties, which consist of bits of wood and rolled up bits of anything for swags. Again, when there was a need to wander, people did. This time it was down through the bedrooms, along the hallway, into the kitchen, making their way back into the lounge room perfectly on cue. We managed to cut the running time down to one hour. We get another rehearsal in before the end of the week and invite an audience of two; Topsy Nangala (David's mother and someone who is coming to Darwin as part of the ceremony in part one) and Gaye Hawkes, (a white artist resident within the school). Topsy rolls with laughter, while Gaye is taken on a journey despite the lack of English, a good response it seems at this stage.

It is now two weeks before we open. This week we have allotted to work with the men. Steve's father plays a key role in the arrangements, but we cannot make any decisions without Abe, who is to arrive back in Lajamanu on Monday night. We spend the day finalising travel and accommodation arrangements, even though we only have a vague idea of how many people will actually be in the final show. All the public telephones are out of use so the one remaining fax machine is our only communication to Darwin.

On Tuesday evening the meeting with the men happens. It is basically like the first meeting with the women, establishing clear context for what is going on and then allowing people the time needed to fill in the details. It feels positive even though Abe has had a fall in Darwin and is now not so keen in going back in a hurry. Steve's father Jerry Jangala Patrick, who works as a missionary, is committed to church business. We are told that we need to start collecting the appropriate materials for the dances that we are going to learn.

We spend most of the next day out bush. When the men 'paint up' to dance they use a small white seed, which they grind into a fluffy, wool-like substance which is then coloured with ochres and stuck onto the body. It is a long slow process.

The women choose the appropriate others to dance within the NGAPA Dreaming ceremony. As we grind up the seed and ochres late Wednesday evening, we realise that something is wrong as people begin to gather around the health clinic. Earlier this morning we had news that Topsy's son, who was living in Katherine, had fallen asleep in the grass the previous night, drunk. That grass was accidentally set on fire. Tonight Topsy's son dies, burnt to death. The community goes into mourning.

The following day most of the women from our group are back into the sorry camp. There is so much death and so often it is connected to drinking. For example, Myra Nungarrayi Patrick has lost her husband, (to cancer) her thirty-three year old son, and her thirty year old brother, all in the past twelve months.

David and I are not sure what to do. It feels like it has all fallen apart again. So close, only two days before we were to leave for Darwin. We send faxes, putting everything on hold. It is not appropriate for us to be active in town so we go out bush again and collect more seeds. People understand our predicament. Some say yes, these people will be able to come with you, while others say no. We wait, like everyone else.

Something, which up to now had felt like it was working against us, was that this weekend coming up was Freedom Day. Many people had planned to travel to Wave Hill for these major celebrations of Aboriginal Land Rights. Many of the men from Lajamanu were talking that they were going to dance. It was twenty years since the Gurindji stock workers walked out from Wave Hill station, demanding land rights. Even Gough Whitlam was going to be there. At the sorry camp, a major meeting was held. It was agreed amongst the family of the deceased that those who were not immediate family could be 'freed' and that the funeral ceremony would take place after our group had returned from Darwin and others from Wave Hill. This meant that all of our group, apart from Topsy, could travel with us.

The idea was that we were to have rehearsed part two of the show every second day of this week, but this had not been possible. All energy was now going into getting the men's component together. We meet again and we are shown some dances, given designs for our bodies, which include a large head-dress and attempt to write the Warlpiri words to the songs down. We keep grinding the seeds that we have collected. All of a sudden it seems that we now need nine male dancers, plus singers. We had planned on seven, including Steve, David and myself, a couple of older blokes, and a few more around Steve's age.

Getting the final commitment from any of the males seemed difficult. Jimmy Jampijinpa Kelly (a significant NGAPA Dreaming owner) agrees to come to Darwin. Old Henry Jakamarra Cooke's name is suggested but no one seems to be able to find

him. The day before we leave I am successful, Henry says yes straight away and tells us where to pick him up. That night it is still not finalised which younger men are coming with us. Matthew James and Peter Twigg (Twiggy) arrive from Darwin with the bus and trailer.

We start early the next morning as we knew we had at least a twelve-hour drive ahead of us. David, Matt and Twiggy head off to fill the trailer with Lajamanu red sand. Steve and I make a final, unsuccessful last attempt to get a commitment from a couple of young men. We leave Lajamanu with the following people: Henry Jakamarra Cooke, Jimmy Jampijinpa Kelly, Jacqueline Nampijinpa Patrick, Alice Napaljarri Kelly, Judy Napaljarri Walker, Jeannie Napurrula Birrell, Myra Nungarrayi Patrick, Molly Napurrula Tasman, Rosie Napurrula, Kajinarra Napangardi, Gladys Napangardi Kelly, Steve Jampijinpa Patrick, David McMicken, Tim Newth and drivers Matt and Twiggy.

In Darwin I feel that I finally have some control, as I am now in a position where the ball is in my court. Bussing people around becomes a major part of the day. Time frames that are set are largely stuck to. We only get to practice a full run about once a day due to the amount of preparation needed. The women's 'painting up' of their bodies leading into their dancing can take from two to three hours. Preparation of the ground, white seeds that were collected to decorate the men's bodies are now to be used to form a sand painting. The sand needs to be sieved from the last performance to separate the ground seeds. Then it needs to be raked, dampened down and allowed to set hard. This has to be done at a certain time so that when working the painting it is neither too wet, or too dry. Each time the seeds need to be recoloured, half with red ochre, the other half with white ochre, (later flour). Much of the rehearsing has to do with working out how long these preparations actually take.

The sand painting was Plan B, worked out to cover the possibility of not having enough men to dance. We had cleared this plan with the appropriate people before leaving Lajamanu. I was strongly attached to not wanting the design to change each night, which the men would have done. When a ceremony is performed it is done not to be repeated over and over. My reasons behind this were two fold. One, if it was a new design the timing would be different each time. Two, it was important that we used the Ngapa design that Freddy Jangala had drawn and instructed us to use. It was also the design we had painted together on a water tank in Lajamanu several years before, and it belonged to Kurlpurlurnu. In Lajamanu many people understood that what we were doing (this Ngapa show) was a tribute to Freddy Jangala, although I could not say this to the older people due to the custom of silence and respect for someone who has passed away. I knew that they too knew this. I feel that because of my relationship to Freddy as his son, the son of the Ngapa man, is partly why people respected these requests. It was not the original plan of the project for it to be a tribute, and it was not the major driving force, but it did act as a sort of boundary in which to place the performance. With the women, they too would have changed the dance each night, but they had agreed to keep it the same.

Both the men and the women joked that Darwin would be in for an early wet, that we would make it rain by doing all these Ngapa ceremonies over and over.

As we were making the sand painting for the first time, I realised that David was being asked to do every thing. In ceremony there are the workers and the Policemen. For this NGAPA Dreaming David and Henry Jakamarra Cook were of the worker relationship to Steve, Jimmy Kelly and Myself. I explain that the audience would find it hard to understand why only two people were working, that it is important that they see us working together. Not David and Jakamarra running around doing all the work, while we yell at them whenever they do something wrong. They meet and then agree that in this context we should all work on it together.

We do a preview for friends and invited guests. Nothing runs to the timing we were working towards. Jacqueline, who had decided to operate the slide projector, would get carried away with watching the show and forget to change the slides. From within the show, I tell Steve, who in turn yells at her in language. By the end, I just do the same in English. I let go of a lot in this preview, and realise it has to be what it is and stay within the knowing that really there is eight years of rehearsal backing up this show.

Steve and Jacqueline are of the same generation as David and me; we are more nervous about what we are doing than the older people. During the week, learning things like delivering language and action to the front, and other spacing issues, are naturally taken on board by the older people who seem to shine in the performance. Many audience members comment on their relaxed approach. We may be in a black box in Darwin but these people have brought their country with them and they are standing strong.

One thing that us men had not realised was going to happen was that the painting we had completed was going to be destroyed in the process of the women dancing. In the first rehearsal (which was being filmed by the ABC's Stateline programme) the women did this, after which all the Yapa started howling. David and I did not understand. What they were doing was opening the dreaming, the law, opening our rights into this law, to break the code of silence that had been placed on this dreaming due to Freddy Jangala's death. Every night, except one, this was done. The opening up the dreaming continued to take people into a deep state of sadness, but also release.

From this point each night we would go into the second half of the show, the re-enactment of the journey. Continually getting in and out of the car, pointing, looking, sleeping, eating, we re-travelled the land. Each night was like going to a deeper level. Because of the retelling a little more knowledge would slide into place, details about sites we had visited and Warlpiri names for things we had only known in English. It was only possible because of what had gone before, that the performance became one of the richest learning point of the project.

After three nights of performance we rolled up our swags and said goodnight to the audience for the final time. The doors of the theatre were removed again so that we could remove the 4WD, and the red Lajamanu sand was shovelled off the theatre floor into bags. The next morning, in the middle of a Darwin dry season, it poured with rain.

DAVID MCMICKEN, core project co participant.
JOURNAL EXCERPTS

Lajamanu feels empty, not many people. I remember this feeling - the need to just wait. We cannot force things to happen - Let it go.

Steve asks me if I am going on the trip. It seems an odd question. I do not know what Tim has told people. He also asks me about the Melbourne trip. It is clear that things are unclear. He says the women are excited.

xxx

Today is another day of waiting. Still no Myra. All day it looks as though it will rain again but it holds off. I feel hungry but do not know what to eat. On a trip to Pamta out station we hit a Wadilja (bush turkey). They were all happy to have fresh kill for supper. The river at Pamta is flooded, lots of ngapa in it. We eat Yupali, bush banana.

Talk with Steve about the trip, about the show, about A.I.D.S. and about weight-training.

Even though it appears to have stopped raining the creek is still rising rapidly... Maybe Myra will come back from Willowra tomorrow, if she can get through on the road. I sit with Topsy Nangala, My mother, and I see my father Dougie Jungarrayi. There are some women by the old Council building including Jeanne Herbert, and some of Tim's family including Myra's old mother.

xxx

I walk kakara, (towards the sunset) to the creek, the road is drier today, the water is going down. Had naliya (Tea) with Naomi - she has a camel, one Jangala. The football is on TV now. North Melbourne (Steve's team) versus hawthorn. The town stops to watch football.

xxx

The roads are not really passable and where we are going there are not even roads and that makes it even less passable for the 4wds. This might also mean the putting off of the performance until 1997.

xxx

Speak to Steve's Father, Jangala, He shows us some NGAPA Dreaming sites using a charcoal

xxx

Well it's two weeks later. I'm back in Lajamanu stopping at Lul-Tju. The good news? Another 'sorry' and the women that were going on the trip are in the 'sorry camp'. They are in 'business' and cannot even talk. Some things are just not supposed to fit into a time-table.

xxx

Drive to Parrluyu, collect Karnda on the way. Bush coconut. I have to eat one at Parrluyu, full of thousands of little grubs. I am not sure of this but a do not want to lose face in front of family. I gain points by eating these wriggling maggots.

Francis has a wobbly because he does not feel he is doing anything except driving. We try to arrange a taping of stories but this does not happen. Abe draws maps in the sand for Tim. The women hunt for goanna, they yell at me but I miss it.

xxx

It is very slow travel, walking in front of the car and clearing the trees and small sharp woody bits. Rosie is amazing (a miniature bull dozer), her energy is unbelievable. This is clearly her country and she knows it very well. She also comes alive here, the land sustains her. The other women also pitch in.

xxx

Francis loses it again, this time over a few metres difference in the way two vehicles are travelling. It is hard to calm him down because I know no more than he does. However, the women are so clear in what they are doing I have absolute faith and trust.

xxx

We stop for the night and Francis is at his wits end. He feels that he is not being told what is going on and that it is all Tim's responsibility. If he is not placated soon he threatens to turn around and go back. He is not Aboriginal and so why should he fit into this way of being. I am very tired of being the one who runs in between the two cars telling first the women what Abe wants, then the men what the women say, then back and forwards until the arguments are settled. I also seem to give it all to Tim who is the director and I assume he will have the final say about whitefella things. I think I expect Steve to know more than he does also. He has never been on this land before. Tim and Steve huddle together and whisper about I do not know what. I feel stuck in the middle. I try to placate Francis, I know he is having a large dose of culture shock. I try to help Tim solve the problem but he is also having some sort of culture shock. Steve has no solutions and I make myself busy and useful.

Steve asks me if I have any 'rumbuk" I think he says humbug and tell him I'm OK. Finally I understand he is saying rumbuk (biscuit). I have no biscuits, Francis does, and I do not want to be the go-between this time.

xxx

Nagatjirri - green grass parrot, belongs to Jungarrayi Nungarrayi Napaljarri, Japaljarri. Whenever a flock goes past Myra says, " look Japaljarri, they belong to you and me."

xxx

Going on we reach a point where Abe says we must turn around. We go to another hill and look around. We can see Wimpurdi and it is not far. The women say go on, Abe says go back. We must obey him as he is the senior land - owner here. This is such a sad moment. Steve says that it is not good enough, to come all this way and then turn back when so close is a failure. He is crying in the car on the return trip. I have never seen him so upset before. Abe sits staunchly in the car saying nothing. We see a kangaroo and Steve takes aim. He misses, but no one makes a joke about his poor hunter skills this time. He was lucky to see anything through his tears.

xxx

We find a spot and stop for the night. Francis informs me that we have another flat tyre. I reluctantly half fix it while all the time wishing he would help. I unpack swags and set up my Uncle's bed (Abe). Francis asks if I will do his also. I am fuming inside. I am not his slave. He does not understand the kinship obligations that I am serving

here, why I must assist my Uncle, (besides the fact he is a very old man,) and why some of the women make demands on me. He just sees that I am a worker and takes advantage of this. Although I have lived and worked in this system before, I have not ever really had such a clear role definition, (except during business time.) This dreaming belongs to Jangala, Jampijinpa skin groups, (Abe, Steve, Tim) and my skin group is seen as second boss or worker. Therefore I work. Francis is not in the skin system as yet, (although they keep talking about it). He cannot hope to understand and I cannot expect him to. However, I wish for more leeway, I do not see myself as an ambassador and yet the role falls upon me.

Jangala asks Steve if he is all right. Steve says yes. I find the exchange incredibly touching, perhaps because of its brevity. Jangala also changes his mind about going to Pidi Pidi and says we go tomorrow.

xxx

The following morning we have damper, Molly has goanna, fires are lit and the spinifex is burnt. 'She's gotta clean up this country' says my Uncle. He starts to tell stories and many place names are mentioned. We decide to put this down on tape. He again tells the story of the wamdija/wamarri rainbow snake and Kilkalunji. I think this is also the same story that Rosie was telling last night, I recognise some of the place names.

Abe draws in the sand and demands that I draw it in my book, proper way. Mungalarri, Papinya, Kulpurlurnu, Wimpurdi, Manarridi. The places are named and I draw the map. He tells of how the Kilkalunji carries the Warnarri and drops him in several places, finally resting at Kurlpurlurnu.

Another story of two men hunting kangaroos and lighting fires to chase them out of hiding.

Another story he tells is about Kurlpurlurnu and how there is a water hole there with fresh water. One day a fire was coming and one man threw himself over the water hole to protect it. He was very badly burned. The water hole was saved and that is why the Ngapa Dreaming people have fresh water, while the neighbours have salty one. He says you can see the indentations on the ground left by this man's arms, legs and head.

Everything starts to make sense. The stories are all linked, the land is coming alive. I am clearly latching on to something and Abe is getting excited. I feel the excitement as the revelations dawn on me. I feel for Tim who is struggling right now to understand. Some of this is because I hear more language or understand more perhaps and so can follow Abe's very thick accented Warlpiri/English mix. Some of it is because I am ready to understand. I feel so excited and privileged. Something big is happening here.

xxx

The entire Ngapa country is laid out before us. We are in heaven. It is easy to see why Warlpiri dot paintings are looked at from above, there is no Erich von Däniken mystery here. Tim goes off by himself. It is times like this that I feel so heavy. I do not

know if Tim just needs time or if he is falling apart. I seem to be the one who fills the gaps, that is my way. The women find an old dead kangaroo, how sad.

xxx

The Jangala rock has holes and blood. His wife is in the water near by. One Nungarrayi wife is missing. She has been taken out and broken. It seems incomprehensible that someone would do that, but then other people do not understand the significance of small things.

xxx

That night, on the way to camp, the women tell me that Francis is Jupurrula, him my Lumburra, my Father in law. He has to give me his daughters for my wives, maybe three. We joke and laugh about this all the way, wondering what his daughters would be like and if he has any brothers with more daughters. We have set up camp and it is my job to introduce Francis to his family. I am scared inside because although I have some idea about where I fit in to this system, I am expected to know it all for someone else with a different skin. Thankfully I get it all right.

xxx

One drunk Japanungka, who is the right skin relationship for the two Napurrula, wants to marry them. Myra tells me that it is my job to stop this man from humbugging my nieces. I am always reticent to butt in on Aboriginal business, let alone with a drunk Aboriginal man who might turn on me. Nevertheless, I tell him that we have to go and that my nieces are not interested. He starts howling at the back of the car, "I love you, you my wife, I love you." Rosie gets angry and shouts "No, get down, go away." We move off full of laughter. Joking all the way about Rosie and Molly's new husband. They going to marry a drunken' one. We joke about him running after the car chasing them.

xxx

The women do 'sorry business' and Abe forces me to stay in the car. He tells me about how I have a Yapa Auntie and a Yapa Uncle, that I have a Yapa family and that my actions can have consequences on them. If I do the wrong 'sorry business' then they might get in trouble. Old way was to kill them for transgressions. The weight of responsibility lays heavily on me. Everyone else has gone and had a look around. I want to look but Abe stops me.

xxx

We arrive back in Lajamanu and it is dark. We drop the women at their camps and go home. The trip has finished but things have only just begun.

STEVE JAMPIJINPA PATRICK, core project co participant.

RESPONSE

Ngapa Show

I thought it was a bit silly at first, seeing myself doing this play. Something we had never done before, doing this re-enactment of our trip going bush into the Ngapa country, (Rainstorm Dreaming country), in a whitefella way.

In Darwin, I felt so nervous, but the ladies didn't, they were enjoying it, none of them seemed to feel nervous or silly. They just wanted to get on with it. I knew I had to stop feeling nervous and be strong in myself too. The first night performance was a "try out". The second night was our first real performance. The third night was the best one we had. The fourth one was the same as the second night performance. All of the performances throughout, I felt I was out there again in the Ngapa country again, forgetting I was in the Brown's Mart Theatre. It was really something.

After the show, I've had a few people from the audience come up to me, saying the show was terrific, some said the traditional part was strong and powerful. One of the audience was a black lady from Africa. She was saying to David McMicken of how she learnt a little from the show about the central Australian Yapa, by watching the show. One other lady said she was on a similar bush trip in the Top End with the Top End Yapas. She said she was someways related towards the show. I've felt proud in myself about these two particular 'feedbacks'. Maybe that's what I've always wanted to do, to educate people who know nothing about the Yapa of this country, maybe this kind of show is one of the ways to do it.