

Conversing tradition:
Wägilak *manikay* ‘song’ and the
Australian Art Orchestra’s *Crossing Roper Bar*

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Declaration

This is to certify that this thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated, that due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used and that this thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, excluding footnotes, tables, figures, maps and appendices.

Samuel John Curkpatrick 30/8/2013

A further declaration

The present author is no philosopher, he has not understood the System, nor does he know if there really is one, or if it has been completed. As far as his own weak head is concerned, the thought of what huge heads everyone must have in order to have such huge thoughts is already enough [...] The present author is no philosopher, he is a *poetice et eleganter* (to put it in poetic and well-chosen terms), a freelance who neither writes the System nor makes any *promises* about it, who pledges neither anything about the System nor himself *to it*. He writes because for him doing so is a luxury, the more agreeable and conspicuous the fewer who buy and read what he writes. In an age where passion has been done away with for the sake of science he easily foresees his fate.

Søren Kierkegaard 1843, *Fear and trembling* (1985, 43)

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of tradition as event in the present, realised through the dynamic expressions of *manikay* (song) in contemporary contexts. Particular focus is given to the collaboration between Wägilak songmen from Ngukurr in Australia's Northern Territory and the Australian Art Orchestra, known as *Crossing Roper Bar*.

Inquiry into various musicological, performative, narrative, philosophical and historical aspects of Wägilak song and *Crossing Roper Bar*, draws together abundant examples supporting the thesis that tradition exists as a dynamic interplay, a conversation, between the past and the present, between individual subjects and situations, and amid ongoing iterations of performance. Through involved, creative articulation, tradition is known and sustained into the future. This is true of conservative performance contexts and those dramatically envisioned.

Crossing Roper Bar is a laudable approach to musical engagement amid diversity in Australia and this thesis documents some of the history, intentions and achievements of the project. Descriptions of the differing musical cultures of individuals involved mirrors my exploration of tradition as substantiating, *effective history* (Gadamer) shaping our horizons of performance. Consecutively, the creative possibilities of unique, vocative expression within orientations of situation and orthodox form are also appraised. A dynamic picture of tradition as discursive play emerges, engaging individuals amid an excess of perspectives, forms, motivations, contexts and technologies.

Musical and contextual analysis is directed by an interpretation of the Yolŋu hermeneutic of tradition resonant with philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. This allows the development of an explicit understanding of *Crossing Roper Bar* as a part of Yolŋu ceremonial tradition, present articulations of performance shown to be legitimate iterations within an ongoing, orienting ancestral groove. Challenging prevalent notions of *intangible culture*, such tradition is not ossified heritage: the ancestral text is known as it is tangibly engaged and disclosed within the lives of present generations. Investigation into the musical and personal interactions between different individuals and cultures in *Crossing Roper Bar* begins from musical

analysis that pursues: textures of sound, textures of situation and layered media; the animation of musical forms; the vocative expression of individuals.

This thesis draws on diverse sources including extensive fieldwork and ongoing relationships with the Young Wägilak Group and the Australian Art Orchestra, as well as the writings of Yolŋu leaders and other academics. The conversation generated presents, itself, an image of discursive engagement with diverse perspectives — a key motivation behind the *Crossing Roper Bar* collaboration. Subsequently, a rich demonstration of tradition emerges as something more vocative than essentialist, as something that speaks uniquely into our lives and is simultaneously sustained by creative articulation and performance.

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Conventions

Australian Art Orchestra: Used to refer to the improvising, non-Yolŋu musicians of this group, even though the Wägilak musicians in *Crossing Roper Bar* are a part of the Australian Art Orchestra. For the sake of differentiation, Wägilak musicians are referred to as the Young Wägilak Group.

Figures: All figures, including tables, maps, images and diagrams, are identified by their chapter number followed by a sequential letter. For example, (Figs. 2a, 2b). All images are by Samuel Curkpatrick unless otherwise noted.

Listening examples: This thesis is concerned with music as an experienced form and audio examples are essential rather than supplementary. Examples have been carefully selected and edited so that their content can be readily identified by considered listening, aided by select notation and time codes. Listening examples (LE) are indicated with the chapter number followed by a sequential example number. For example, (LE_7.1) indicates Chapter Seven, listening example one.

Paraphrase: Commonly heard and widely understood Yolŋu expressions, like ‘mission times,’ are indicated with quotation marks without any direct reference.

Song names: These are capitalised, non-italics — even in the case of non-English words. For example, the song Birrkpirrk (Plover) is differentiated from references to the bird, *birrkpirrk* (plover). Titles of musical works appear in italics.

Song texts: Transcriptions are recorded as they have been interpreted to me by Benjamin Wilfred, Daniel Wilfred or Andy Peters. Translated texts are generally rendered in a narrative form, rather than a literal and more fragmented word-for-word translation. All song texts transcribed in this thesis are collated in Appendix One.

Spelling and orthography: Author’s original spellings have been kept in all direct citations. Conversely, original text uses standard Yolŋu orthography, based on Zorc’s Yolŋu-matha dictionary (1996).

Acronyms and abbreviations

AAO	Australian Art Orchestra
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
<i>Convention</i>	<i>Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage</i>
<i>CRB</i>	<i>Crossing Roper Bar</i>
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
Indigenous	Treated as an abbreviation of the proper noun <i>Indigenous Australian</i> , as opposed to the adjective <i>indigenous</i>
NT	Northern Territory of Australia
SC	Refers to the author Samuel Curkpatrick in interview transcriptions
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
YWG	Young Wägilak Group

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one

Introduction

Basic issues and dynamics

Performance traditions are the foundation of social and personal wellbeing, and with the ever increasing loss of these traditions, the toll grows every year [...] Indigenous performances are one of our most rich and beautiful forms of artistic expression, and yet they remain unheard and invisible within the national cultural heritage. (*Garma Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance*, National Recording Project 2002)

Art speaks to us down the ages, across time, from ages past when, although things may have been vastly different, human beings nevertheless faced the same existential challenges as we do. (Australia Art Orchestra artistic director Paul Grabowsky 2011)

The *manikay* ('public' song) tradition of the Yolŋu people and the particular *manikay* repertoires and narratives belonging to the Wägilak clan offer rich and poetic illuminations of human existence that are simultaneously dense, abstract, philosophic, law-containing, tangibly corporeal and creatively engaging.³ The Wägilak *manikay* series represents one of dozens of repertoires across Arnhem Land. While the songs tell of the foundation of the estate at Njilipidji and Wägilak public law, the series ties into larger Dhuwa moiety narrative sequences, linking together related estates and clans, parliamentary *ringitj* (embassies) and sacred sites across the region in a complex of intercultural relations.⁴ These vital cultural expressions represent an accumulated wealth of experience, passed down through successive generations from origins beyond definitive human knowledge and agency, forming traditions inherently concerned with questions of orthodoxy, perpetuation and sustenance.

³ The Wägilak clan (or *mala* 'group') to which I refer throughout this thesis is in fact one particular patri-lineage within the greater Wägilak linguistic and cultural grouping (see Chapter Two). This is the *bäpurru* (father's group) descended directly from Sambo (Djambu) Barabara, whose *wäŋa-ŋaraka* ('bone-country'; clan estate) is at Njilipidji, South East Arnhem Land. The majority of this group currently reside in the town of Ngukurr, NT.

⁴ Yolŋu society is divided into two moieties: Dhuwa and Yirritja.

Realities of situation often confront any desire to carry cultural forms and ideas through the generations: cultural expressions like *manikay* (song) may become irretrievably forgotten or irrelevantly redundant as time passes. Yet as the future meets us amid new situations, there is the possibility for new meanings to be created as traditions evolve to engage unique individuals.

There are great and legitimate concerns over cultural loss among many Indigenous Australian communities, brought on by the rapid and unprecedented changes avalanching from European settlement.⁵ Such anxieties must always seek to recognise complexities within particular situations if they are to translate into real, present engagement between cultural traditions and people today. A degree of urgency, as expressed in the call and challenge of the *Garma Statement*, does however inspire sentiment and action that can drive the practical agendas of individuals working toward the revitalisation and continued transmission of traditional ceremonial practices (National Recording Project 2002). Implicitly founded on similar sentiments — from the perspectives of both the Wägilak singers and Australian Art Orchestra (AAO) — the *Crossing Roper Bar (CRB)* collaboration has evolved as a unparalleled approach to bringing the *manikay* tradition of the past into new contexts of engagement and expression.

Crossing Roper Bar is a musical collaboration between the AAO and the Young Wägilak Group (YWG), leading Wägilak songmen from Ngukurr, NT — namely Benjamin, Daniel and David Wilfred. In one sense, *Crossing Roper Bar* is a demonstration of Yolŋu ingenuity in the perpetuation of traditional cultural forms and ideas, and a celebration of the great indigenous performance traditions of this land. In another, it is a groundbreaking experiment in the role of creativity in cross-cultural engagement. Some of Australia's foremost proponents of contemporary improvisation and leading jazz musicians, under the auspices of the AAO, strive to forge a new *manikay* that coalesces the *manikay* of tradition with new contexts of performance and media of expression — the instruments, musical ideas, sounds, perceptions, responses and

⁵ As noted in the abbreviations section, *Indigenous Australian* is capitalised as a proper noun, as opposed to the adjective *indigenous*.

histories — that unique individuals bring to the engagement. This thesis tells the story of *Crossing Roper Bar*.

The music of *CRB* is based predominantly on the collective improvisations of all musicians gravitating around the performance of a public Wägilak *manikay* series, particularly the liturgical program for smoking and purification ceremonies. As a result of this fluid improvisation, performances are always shifting within and between each iteration of performance as new ideas and sounds emerge, multimedia elements are incorporated, *yuṭa manikay* (new songs) are composed and knowledge about the song series and the musical intricacies of the *manikay* style grow. Yet while the music and ideas within the project are always on the move — in a conversant, exploratory sense that avoids illegitimate appropriation through definitive reification — the sentiments expressed by artistic director Paul Grabowsky during the AAO's first trip to Ngukurr in 2005 remain: 'What I'm hoping is that we'll together be able to create a work over time in which we are equals, which is a reflection and a record of the specific situation [of engagement and encounter]' (Australia Broadcasting Commission, Murray McLaughlin 2005). This thesis considers *CRB* an event of possibility for the present iteration of tradition; a unique utterance that is both a novel and orthodox reconciliation between the past and the present.

As does *CRB*, this thesis responds to the tradition of Wägilak *manikay* as a valuable, dynamic and resilient ceremonial practice. This thesis also responds to general anxieties over cultural decimation by broadening out the academic discussion from the techniques and challenges of archival safeguarding, to engaging with tradition through active participation and creative articulation. My writing is grounded necessarily in Western histories of thought, method and expression, especially through my use of language and reflexive, theoretical critique.⁶ Beginning from my own particular voice, I

⁶ *Western traditions* are referred to in this thesis simplistically. By extension, I include in this designation intellectual thought and cultural expression that, despite having strong foundations in European/American culture and history, is nevertheless replete with influence and relevance in times and places outside of any imagined *monolithic* Western culture. Use of the term should not be taken as essentialist designation but understood as a generalisation of historical emergence. In referring to the background of AAO musicians as Western, I do not wish to ignore the complexities of jazz, for example, as a tradition born of African-American roots with significant histories in Asia and South America; nor

understand this thesis as one thread within a greater, multimodal conversation that *CRB* also participates in; one aspect of a dynamic play of expression beyond the limits of either dissertation, musical performance or the situations of a particular generation.

The following passages introduce some of the general issues that pervade this thesis. It is important to draw attention to them here as they are not necessarily pursued with discrete arguments in the coming chapters but rather orient my approach to musical and contextual description.

Raki (string): The Yolju hermeneutic suggests that the present is sustained and constituted within the great tide of tradition, the continual weaving of *raki* (string) through the maintenance of law and ceremony. *Raki* concerns the active realisation of an orientating blueprint of life established by the actions of ancestral progenitors in the great and ongoing *animation*.⁷ Similarly, as something that speaks into human lives — substantiating individual existence — expressions of tradition prompt us to respond, recognise and consider our place and purpose. The YWG engage with tradition through actively performed music and ceremony. Weaving the *raki*, they take on the responsibility to ‘keep culture strong’ and sustain those things regarded by Yolju as essential to continued human existence.

Performing or recognising something as *tradition* engages individuals with elements of the past inextricably interwoven in the present. Tradition is not something discrete but something that exists as it is brought to life through present articulation: multiple threads weave through many different situations, drawn and extended by many different individuals. The event of *CRB* happens within various traditions of *manikay* and jazz histories; quite different strings that extend back into their own unconnected pasts but also into an increasingly interwoven future. Through participation in performance, these strings continue to be extended and individuals come to

the reality of these musicians as twenty-first century Australians engaging with, and influenced by, cultures in Asia and India, globalised technologies and the multicultural fabric of contemporary Australian society. While I do not wish to abandon the terminology ‘Western’ in moving beyond rigid definitions, the term is used with caution.

⁷ I here use *animation* as a replacement for the commonly used *dreamtime*.

understand their place within the great movement of tradition far beyond their own individual agency. This is *raki*.

Ethics of encounter: In any form of encounter there is always something about another that we are not justified in maintaining, perhaps a significance or complexity we do not yet see. This is a reality of subjectivity, necessary if we are to be intersubjective. The false self-assurance of an objective gaze denies this reality. A seriousness of purpose is needed in any encounter, a seriousness recognising that the past, a tradition, an interlocutor or a cultural system, does hold certain values and meanings not presently revealed to our limited understanding. We should, rationally, recognise that our interpretations are provisional and not immutable.

Another form of encounter occurs between an individual and articulations of tradition. For Yolŋu, ceremonial performance is an encounter with tradition that holds the present to account with perennial human questions of death, existence and identity. Performance is existential in that it invokes response and action from the current generation in whatever life situation they find themselves in.

Such a conception of tradition resonates with the prominent Yolŋu advocacy for a 'two-way' bi-cultural approach and their historic openness to cultural adjustment within relatively autonomous Yolŋu cultural systems (see Morphy and Morphy 2013). Here, difference is seen as complementary (Yunupinju 1993) and responsibility to ancestral law can be carried into new contexts through engaging action and response. Performance of song within this hermeneutic is a necessarily dynamic interaction and not the reproduction of static musical forms. The past and the present must come together in the generation of a future engaged with ancestral law.

In the encounter of *CRB*, the AAO seek to allow the YWG to hold their conceptions of music to account, the avoidance of cultural appropriation at the forefront of their liberal consciences. Within cross-cultural encounter, appropriation can be understood as traditionally illegitimate reification or theft from another cultural context. Approaching such collaborations as ongoing conversations seeking understanding —

by treating current understanding as provisional — is one means of avoiding appropriation, even if new contexts and media are used to engage this dialogue.

Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics concerns interpretation and the way we come to understand. Human understanding is confronted with diversity of expression and hermeneutics is a pertinent focus when coming face to face with largely unknown cultures, where one does not inhabit another cultural world full of its unconscious assumptions, inferences and subjectivities. These things work on an individual by actively shaping the perspectives they hold, constituting their very orientation in the present. Further, a subject genuinely open to understanding must consider their situation in relation to a particular text or utterance and how their subjectivities influence understanding. Reading is interpretation, looking is interpretation, thinking is interpretation; interpretation is not a special activity confined to the unravelling of difficult texts but an aspect of all forms of human understanding (Lawn 2007, 9).

Issues of hermeneutics are central to investigation into the performance of traditional songs and contemporary improvisation, dynamic expressions that have the potential to be shaped into meanings, identities, knowledge of the past and conceptions of the present. As in reading a text, music is known and heard through interpretation: understanding and interpretation are indissolubly bound together (Gadamer 2006). To perform or listen is to interpret; to interpret brings subjectivities into being, influencing what one plays, sings or hears. An individual's hermeneutic of tradition directly shapes musical results and patterns of engagement across temporal or cultural distances.

Tradition's value: Tradition is a handing over, explicitly or implicitly. It is very much an event known through its happening. Where tradition is an explicit practice, way of thinking, belief or method, such explicit tangibility often renders apparent tradition's connections with the past. Where tradition is implicit in its unconscious constitution of present subjectivities, orthodoxy and conservatism often rally to the defence of values imbued within tradition, values beyond the scope or realisation of limited present understanding. Heritage often deals with *explicit* traditions, walking a knife-edge in seeking to avoid the dangers of immutable cultural representation. Conversely, the

implicit sustenance of traditions and the fostering of healthy, culturally engaged communities is tied up in the complex politics of health, wellbeing, education and autonomy: 'Man cannot live by bread alone, but he does need bread' (Pearson 2010a).

These somewhat polarised notions of explicitly and implicitly fostered tradition are brought together in performance. In singing *manikay*, iterations of tradition are sustained as ongoing heritage realised in the present — explicit forms from the past carried into new contexts. Performance allows individual creativity to drive the dynamic process of mediation between a tradition's historic and contemporary relevancies: tradition speaks into present lives with inspiration, pride and healthy, lively activity; a sense of community between people within a particular context and across time; a sense of historical constitution or identity.

At the heart of this continuance is the paradox of orthodoxy: for traditions to remain the same, cultural realisations and media of expression must change — understood from a new time and place. In the face of stagnant reification, a vital conversation with tradition is entered into. In *manikay* performance, this is certainly true of local contexts as well as intercultural collaborations such as *CRB*. Importantly, the orthodox desire for essential elements of tradition to engage meaningfully with contemporary situations does not preclude dynamism of expression. Creativity and orthodoxy are not contradictory.

Objective investigation: Objectivity is often sought through the rigorous questioning of traditional authority, seeking truth beyond the interpreting subject. Objective investigation seems like a reasonable, accurate approach that moves beyond orthodoxy's deferral to perceived and inherent authority within tradition. Yet modern hermeneutics questions the neutrality of objectivity, suggesting that *any* understanding is already an interpretation: freedom to question traditional orthodoxies is ultimately limited by situation, as the questions posed are themselves

bound up in agendas and prejudices (Gadamer 2006, 271).⁸ Chesterton puts it humorously in an essay titled *Science and the savages*:

The obvious truth is that the moment any matter has passed through the human mind it is finally and forever spoilt for all purposes of science [...] Science can analyse a pork chop [...] and say how much of it is phosphorus and how much is protein; but science cannot analyse any man's wish for a pork chop, and say how much of it is hunger, how much custom, how much nervous fancy, how much a haunting love of the beautiful. (Chesterton 2007, 79)

In an amorphous and experienced form like music — much like a pork chop — a qualitative approach to understanding is limited: we can point to objectified elements or indicators, but ultimately music's reason for being resonates with its corporeal realisation as a performed phenomenon. Taking a perspective on *manikay* beyond exclusive objective investigation opens up new modes of understanding: we consider *manikay* as something experienced, more than an article over and apart from us. Likewise, *CRB* presents us with a cross-cultural and cross-temporal conversation in which meanings are understood from individual, situated bodies.

Recent directions in the discipline of ethnomusicology attempt to move away from a dominating objective gaze, using rich description to foster engagement on a phenomenological level. More akin to the way tradition speaks into human experience, this is musicology concerned with language beyond the careful notation of form and function. Recent writing by Corn could be considered an important example of this emerging direction and will be considered in further detail in the coming chapters:

⁸ The use of the term *prejudice* throughout this thesis plays into contemporary philosophical discussions on subjectivity. Contemporary use of the term is often understood as a critique of the Enlightenment's idealistic branding of subjectivity and prejudice as a barrier to rational, objective *truth* (see Chapter Six). As Kant describes, 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another' (Kant 2009 [1784], 1). While liberating the individual to come to their own understandings, Enlightenment philosophy also condemned the unique perspectives of situation (prejudices) that makes understanding possible. Understanding, in the contemporary sense, is more of a paradox: one begins with prejudice, but by freeing oneself from prejudices, an individual can achieve a more valid understanding; yet objective understanding can only ever be imagined, as subjectivity and perspective form the very preconditions of our understanding.

There is a [*manikay*] song in my mind that takes me to a place of great beauty and antiquity [...] I can sense this place anew. I can feel the fine white sand squelching between my toes [... Yet] at this pivotal moment, I can offer no evidence whatsoever that any such thing is going on in my head. No proof of a song, nor the place I say it describes. (Corn 2010)

Thesis narrative and objectives

Outside of local curatorial contexts, there has been scant documentation of the *manikay* and *bungul* (dance) repertoires from the Wägilak estate at Njilidji in South East Arnhem Land. This thesis begins to establish a documentary record of Wägilak *manikay*, introducing some forms, themes, narratives and significances belonging to the song series, as well as the connections between these and the repertoires of closely related family groups and countries. Chapters One through Six set out the necessary background and language which orient my perspectives on *CRB*, explored in the Chapters Seven through Nine.

A basic history of Wägilak people from Njilidji and the township of Ngukurr introduces the world of Daniel, Benjamin and David Wilfred (Chapter Two) (see Figs. 1a, b, c). Direct parallels between contemporary contexts of performance and historical practices from the twentieth century, indicate the continuity of ceremonial performance in local intercultural settings. The thesis goes on to explicate a Yolŋu hermeneutic of tradition (Chapter Three) and how this shapes understanding and performance of ceremonial expressions such as *manikay*. I define the *ancestral text* as the foundational underpinning of Yolŋu cultural, ceremonial, familial and legal practices. This text is known as a tangible inscription read in the land and people, exuding a richness of interpretation that generates inseparable narrative expressions in multiple media such as song, dance, design, narrative and language (Chapter Four; Appendix Two).

The idea of engagement with tradition as an ongoing conversation is also broached in this First Part. *Manikay* is shown to be: a performed realisation of the ancestral Wägilak narrative; an ongoing interaction with orthodox forms of cultural traditions; the ongoing sustenance of the present as an image of the past. A general introduction to the layering of cultural knowledge in Yolŋu society supports the definition of an ancestral text that is realised through movements of revelation — the performance of public iterations that form necessary prolegomena portending to deeper ancestral realities (Chapter Four). The *ŋaraka* (bones) or orthodox structural forms of *manikay* are shown to carry integral narratives perpetuated in any culturally legitimate

performance of *manikay* (Chapter Five). Here, the place of *yuta manikay* (new songs), innovation, individuality and improvisation, is not ignored.

Yolŋu conceptions of tradition resonate with contemporary European hermeneutical discourse, especially Gadamer's work concerning tradition, history and interpretation. An examination of Gadamer's conceptions of *effective history* and *prejudice* show that every understanding is already an interpretation and that, subsequently, in any understanding (intercultural, historical or otherwise) our subjectivities are the very preconditions for dialogue (Chapter Six). Here, my thesis that tradition must speak with creativity into unique and situated lives is given considered theoretical grounding. Chapter Six also lays the foundation for the applied musical analysis of *CRB* and the assertions about safeguarding heritage and creating records that conclude this thesis.

A number of Yolŋu voices, including those of Narritjin Maymuru and Manduwuy Yunupiŋu, are brought into the theoretical discussion, further challenging any notion of the past as something reified over-and-apart from us (Chapter Six). My method of drawing on diverse voices mirrors my contention that understanding exists beyond any original iteration of meaning within a particular cultural situation or milieu. Here, as in *CRB*, a new and engaging — even if provisional — understanding of *manikay* is broached. This understanding is a novel compilation of voices, linguistic expressions and ideas.

The Second Part of this thesis turns explicitly to the music and contexts of *CRB*, providing rich descriptions of this contemporary engagement with Wägilak tradition. Analysis of a number of key rhythmic, melodic/harmonic and formal features within the music, illustrate assertions about the Yolŋu hermeneutic of tradition made in previous chapters. The various grooves of *bilma* (clapstick) modes are examined as a nexus between corporeal expression and form, suggesting that tradition is necessarily sustained through a combination of formal transfer/imitation and mediation into subjective experience (Chapter Seven).

Structural vitality within musical elements — the performance of movement — is explored as a back-and-forth play that sustains momentum, a *happening* through

performance (Chapter Eight). This recurrent play, as in dialogue, is demonstrated to be essential in animating musical performance and reception, interaction between players, improvisation and innovation. Further analysis looks in particular at the use of timbre, multimedia, textures of sound and textures of situation in *CRB*, suggesting that the music reflects the Yolŋu aesthetic of *bir'yun* (shimmering brilliance), an often discussed dynamic of Yolŋu painting. These chapters draw heavily on the voices and perceptions of different players and musicians involved in *CRB*, documenting the history and progression of the collaboration since its beginning in 2005.

Not to deny the situations of the AAO, the *CRB* collaboration is also grounded within histories of jazz, free improvisation and cross-cultural collaboration (Chapter Nine). Particular emphasis is given to the liberal prejudice of allowing space for individual musical voice and utterance to emerge and evolve. I further suggest that it is through the creativity of individuals that tradition speaks actively in the present, and that the multiple voices within *CRB* create an engaging, productive tension between individuals and the collective that shapes the course of the collaboration. Through the *technology* of the AAO and creativity of individuals involved, the Wägilak *manikay* tradition is shown to be held (sustained) in the present as relevant and engaging, even as it is articulated in dramatically envisaged contexts of performance and sound.

Finally, this thesis looks to some wider relevancies of the underpinning theoretical discussions concerning records and heritage (Chapter Ten). I argue that the concept of *intangible cultural heritage*, a distinction developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as an idealistic response to cultural difference, is theoretically insufficient for dealing with the complexities of ceremonial performance and interpretation in the Yolŋu world. Nevertheless, a positive approach toward the possibilities of heritage is outlined as it develops from this thesis, arguing that records should become *involved* in the present, enriching the ongoing creation and realisation of tradition in performance.

The conclusion affirms central observations of this thesis: tradition is dynamic and vital conversation, sustained through its realisation in performed iteration and unique articulation. Through creativity, tradition is engaged and given voice in the present —

it is vocative rather than essentialist. This is demonstrated in the musical structures and ceremonial hermeneutic of *manikay* and the novel articulation of tradition that is *CRB*. Ultimately, tradition is a conversation of possibility, the very openness of the future to new articulations of the past.



Fig. 1a Benjamin Wilfred (upper image)

Fig. 1b David Wilfred (centre)
In Goolwa, South Australia,
standing in front of artwork by
Simon Normand. 16.3.2012

Fig. 1c Daniel Wilfred (lower) in
Brunswick, Melbourne. 10.4.2011

Fieldwork

Primary sources in this thesis are multiple. First and foremost, my fieldwork experiences have encompassed upwards of eight months intensive work, over a three year period, with Daniel, Benjamin and David Wilfred, and members of the AAO. This has included five separate trips to the remote community of Ngukurr — arriving there by crossing over the Roper River at the Roper Bar Crossing during the dry season (Figs. 1d, e).

Frequent periods of observation and participation in music-making, dance, educational workshops, recording sessions, exhibition openings, conference presentations and interviews have taken place across Australia and overseas, especially in Ngukurr, Darwin, Melbourne, Adelaide, Canberra, Paris, London and Cambridge. Alongside performances of *CRB*, public presentations have been helpful as forums where ideas about the music are discussed and new angles on player's perceptions emerge. I have collected audio recordings, video and photographic images from ceremonies and performances of *manikay* in Ngukurr, Numbulwar and Njilpidji, using these as primary sources and the basis of most transcriptions and translations.

Materials taken directly from the AAO archive have been of great value, especially their recorded collections of every performance of *CRB* prior to my involvement since 2010, studio recordings and takes, copious photographs (particularly those by Tobias Titz), videos, media releases, news reports and reviews. The commercial release of the *CRB* album is the source of many audio examples contained in this thesis (AAO 2010). Other key materials have been found in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) archives, including historic video footage from Ngukurr, recordings of *manikay* (see below) and Wägilak/Ritharrŋu language lists. Visiting the archives with the YWG proved illuminating and fostered a greater mutual understanding of the world of institutions from which I come.

An AIATSIS research grant allowed me the funds to significantly extend my creation of recordings of *manikay* (see Curkpatrick 2010–2012).⁹ One particular trip to Ngukurr, as an assistant to Dr. Aaron Corn as part of the National Library of Australia’s Oral History Project, allowed me to participate in over twenty hours of interviews with older residents from the town, many of whom are directly related to the Wägilak clan. Other important discussions of ideas with Yolŋu people have taken place with delegates at conferences around the country, especially sessions held by the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia, and at events such as the annual Garma Festival and Barunga Festival. Finally, weekly and ongoing phone conversations with my friend, Daniel Wilfred, have been vital in following up and confirming many ideas — although this has never been their primary purpose.

⁹ A major aim of my recording work through this grant was the creation of additional commentaries about the songs recorded, documentation of narratives, language, images of related sites on country and video footage of dance. My extended, layered approach sought practical means to enrich the record making process.



Fig. 1d Road sign at the Roper Bar Crossing. 8.7.2012



Fig. 1e The Roper Bar Crossing during the dry season (Image: Virginia Curkpatrick). 8.7.2012

Situating this research

Within this thesis, multiple strands of voices merge, like singers improvising independent lines in *manikay*, to create descriptions of song, sound and narrative that exude an excess of significations. While I necessarily engage with the *manikay* tradition from a variety of perspectives, including established Western discursive frameworks, I do not use these culturally extraneous methodologies to definitively reify a particular iteration of Wägilak cultural experience. Rather, my use of diverse perspectives contributes to rich and complex descriptions that afford Wägilak *manikay* a seriousness of attention worthy of that given classic Western academic disciplines.

My methodological approach resonates directly with the arguments about culture and tradition that I make through the thesis: I try to put into practice my theoretical positions in the way that I write. Here, I do not wish to demonstrate academic authority drawn exclusively through the *authentic*, anthropological exposition of an *other*, presenting an autonomous *system* of culture as if my own ideas were removed from the engagement. Rather, I write from my position as a unique individual and engage multiple subjectivities and traditions in conversation. In a way, I too am performing within the *CRB* collaboration — a dramatically envisioned iteration of *manikay* in new media and contexts of presentation.

As Nakata suggests, academic engagement should actively seek to draw out the depths and complexities of indigenous people, culture and history, rather than creating simplifications through the imagined necessity of applying neat theoretical framings: ‘The indigenous position must be *complicated* rather than simplified’ (2007, 12). The following sections will examine a number of key authors and performers, identifying some of the implications that each author’s work has on this research and its *complication* of Wägilak ceremonial practice.¹⁰ The juxtaposition of diverse ideas, intellectual traditions and cultural metaphors allows conversation to be generated and new ideas to be broached. Different and unique understandings are, after all, understandings.

¹⁰ As indicated, Chapter Six will provide a focussed methodological grounding for my theoretical approach and thesis conclusions.

My approach to *CRB* frequently returns to a focus on the collaboration as a performance that works within Yolŋu cultural systems independently of the AAO's agendas. This approach emphasises the complexity and agency of the Wägilak position, avoiding a predominant focus on the ways in which Wägilak song is rendered intelligible to, or perceived by, the *mainstream* Australian public through *CRB*. While this thesis does not explicitly interrogate anthropological conceptions of *the intercultural*, my approach resonates with Morphy and Morphy's critique (2011; 2013) of the prevalent terminology of *the intercultural* as a focus on the 'locale of interaction' between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous peoples. They argue that this focus 'risks relegating those relatively autonomous groups to the status of epiphenomena' (2013, 8) at the side of any privileged synergism. Morphy and Morphy instead advocate for a discourse of 'relative autonomy' that places more emphasis on Yolŋu agency within autonomous cultural systems, as Yolŋu 'change in response to external pressures [or influences] while maintaining their own distinct trajectories' (*ibid.*). In terms familiar to the content of this thesis, Morphy and Morphy assert that:

The changing trajectory of Yolngu mortuary rituals [involving *manikay* song] has been multiply determined by the operations of factors that are relatively autonomous from one another. The changes have been influenced by articulation with the wider Australian society and involve the incorporation of new technologies, but mortuary rituals are far from occupying an intercultural space; they remain categorically Yolngu and are integral to the reproduction of Yolngu society. (2013, 16)

Following this approach, it is necessary that an understanding of intricate and subtle Yolŋu ceremonial practices develops. Much of my introduction to Aboriginal music and art in contemporary contexts came initially through accessible literature on popular music (for example, Dunbar-Hall 2004). Although interesting from a musical perspective, such literature is quite thin on more complex areas of kin, country, law and ceremony. Corn's doctoral thesis (2002) and subsequent publications on Yothu Yindi (Corn 2010, 2011; Corn, Yunupingu and Langton 2009), offer a more comprehensive and focussed exploration of the way traditional musical elements and

epistemologies are brought into contemporary expressions in the music of Arnhem Land. Further ethnomusicological literature is discussed below.

High profile, popular Yolŋu performances continue to create a vibrant image of song and dance traditions within wider Australian awareness, particularly the success of Gurrumul Yunupingu. Heralded as ‘Australia’s most important voice’ on the cover of America’s *Rolling Stone* magazine (Fig. 1f; Rolling Stone 2011), Gurrumul — as he is widely known — played for Queen Elizabeth II’s 2011 Australian tour and welcoming reception at Parliament House, praising her with the accolade, ‘She has been a *manymak* [good] person in our lives for a very long time’ (Walker 2011). The Chookie Dancers webcasts of Nurrumilmarmiriyu (Wrong Skin; lit. ‘Knife Ceremony’) and the Mulka Project’s burgeoning and creative multimedia productions — for example, the film *Yiki Bunggul* by the Dhaŋwaŋu clan (Deveson 2011; Morphy with Deveson 2011; The Mulka Project 2011) — demonstrate the importance Yolŋu place on continued, creative interaction with tradition. The energy with which Yolŋu recreate traditional forms in new media is a theme that runs through this thesis, clearly resonant with contemporary Yolŋu cultural activity in the ceremonial and popular spheres — modes of expression by no means independent of one another.

The contemporary situation of diverse, high-profile and prolific Indigenous Australian cultural production across the country demands research that seeks to understand just how traditions are carried forward into, and through, contemporary expression. Such Indigenous driven assertions of cultural creativity lack the appropriative sense of music that is more commonly categorised as *world music*.¹¹ Not a recent phenomenon by any means, the appropriative musical creations that fall under the rubric of *world music* lack foundations and legitimacy within the cultures they represent. Similarly, popular attempts by Australian composers to imitate Indigenous Australian song styles are present throughout the twentieth century, especially within the Jindyworobak school¹²

¹¹ Appropriation is here understood as taking something to be an *object* of culture and using it in a way not anticipated or sanctioned by that culture, usually without any form of dialogue taking place.

¹² Composers influenced by the Jindyworobak School of poetry, founded by Rex Ingamells, wanted to connect European-Australian music in the mid-twentieth century to the Australian land itself, through the use of musical elements drawn from Aboriginal music and especially the imitation of melodic structures and instrumental timbres (Symons 2007).

and film and orchestral composers like Mirrie Hill, who wrote a number of scores for C.P Mountford's documentary films on Arnhem Land alongside similar symphonic scores (Linden Jones 2011).

Contrary to *world music* and appropriative symphonic scores, performers like Gurrumul are not removed from their intrinsic and essential cultural situations, and continue to assert the deep foundations of their culture, unchanged by novel iterations, media and contexts of performance. Feld identifies this paradox of popular music rooted in deep indigenous cultural foundations, amid the apparent flux of contemporary media of expression.

Music's deep connection to social identities has been distinctively intensified by globalisation [...] accelerated by transnational flows of technology, media, and popular culture. The result is that musical identities and styles are more visibly transient, more audibly in states of constant fission and fusion than ever before. (Feld 2000, 145)

Today's music from Arnhem Land might superficially match Steven Feld's diagnosis of global music trends, 'actualities or immediate predictions at the end of the twentieth century' (Ibid. 145), in that performance contexts and media are more visibly transient. However, what is most significant in the Yolŋu context is not the intensification of plural social identities — as each and every individual finds novel expression through new forms and media — but reconnection with the traditional, ancestral text that seems to subsume the Yolŋu individual in a greater ancestral constitution.

The essential meanings and significances, the *ŋaraka* (bones) of traditional Wägilak expression in song, persist through media that allow it to speak anew. This will be shown to be the case in *CRB*, a collaboration that is confronting in its paradoxical stability amid creativity and orthodoxy amid innovation. As is often written concerning Yolŋu visual art, 'the Yolŋu concept of tradition admits the actuality of individual variation and innovation as a proof of its continuing vitality and authenticity, passed from leader to leader through the successive generations' (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 26).

One of the key authors of the past two decades writing on contemporary Yolŋu renderings of ancestral narratives is Howard Morphy. His work on the opening up and incorporation of outsiders into Aboriginal art and the ceremonial world (1983; 1991) has directly shaped my understanding of *CRB*. I draw on Morphy's work in considering this collaboration within the history of Yolŋu education and political assertion through art and performance, and the sharing of public aspects of ceremony even as it continues to conceal deep religious significations.

Knowledge of traditional Yolŋu societies, law and ceremony are central to such discussion, and these areas are perused through the recognised classic anthropological works of the past few decades (Keen 1994, 1995; Williams 1986; H. Morphy 1983). Contemporary understandings, beginning from an aesthetic perspective, are not ignored (Caruana and Lendon 1997; Corn 2002, 2008, 2010, 2010a; Magowan 2007; H. Morphy 1989; 1981; 2005; 2008; Toner 2001). These works comprehensively demonstrate that Yolŋu epistemologies and systems of knowledge and law are interconnected and constituted through multiple, interdependent modes of cultural expression, such as dance, design, song and story.

Significantly, Howard Morphy raises questions about the conceptualisation of art within Indigenous Australian philosophies, as well as the representation and interpretation of Indigenous Australian art from the perspectives of European heritage: 'Are Aboriginal views about art and creativity best framed as they conventionally have been, as ethnography, cultural background or cultural context' (2008, 144)? Such questions have shaped the methodologies of this thesis, informing specifically the conversational approach taken in drawing together diverse voices to create rich descriptions from which novel perspectives emerge. This method allows my thesis to present, itself, an image of discursive engagement with diverse perspective — to engage understanding through creative and considered juxtaposition — a key motivation behind the *CRB* collaboration that is more vocative than essentialist.

Rather than looking for dominant structures and key institutions, it may be more productive to construct a thick description of the event or object. Such a description would allow for

the interconnections necessary for interpreting the event to be seen, without at the same time imposing a structure on it. (H. Morphy 1991, 16)

While Chapter Six itself contains critique of the literature surrounding the work of Gadamer, a key source of ideas and expressions within this thesis, I here consider briefly my use of texts concerning hermeneutics. First, there is an apparent lack of any significant body of literature dealing with music through the dominant conceptions of hermeneutics established in the twentieth century or earlier by writers such as Hegel, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida, Levinas and Marion (Bruns 1992) — even though this field of studies has wide ranging significance, most prominently in literary studies and the humanities. ‘Hermeneutics belongs to multiple histories and so cannot be made into any one thing that begins and ends and suffers conceptual revolutions along the way’ (Bruns 1992, 213). Even in areas such as historical performance practice — a discipline based upon interpretation and questions of tradition, history and authenticity — there is scant reference to philosophical hermeneutics. This is predominantly the case even when a writer, such as Kivy (1995, 2002, 2007) or Bowman (1998), take specifically philosophical approaches to their investigations.

The use of hermeneutics in this thesis complements my methodology of rich description. I do not set out to present a systematic critique of Gadamer’s thought, rather, a number of key ideas are allowed to speak into the content of this thesis and cast an interesting and reciprocally illuminating gaze. Through this method, *Wägilak manikay* and thought are allowed to assert unique and valuable perspectives within greater discourses on hermeneutics and tradition.

In Chapter Ten, I return to a discussion of the inexhaustible richness of phenomenological experience, drawing on the key term *excess*, used by French philosopher Marion (2002, 2004, 2008). Marion’s thought offers an interesting parallel to the great variety and richness of existence celebrated in Yolŋu cultural expression: excess in creation, phenomena and human perspective stemming from the ever-giving ancestral text, itself tangibly present in the land and existence.

An early interest in the writings of Marcia Langton (1993, 2003), Noel Pearson (2009, 2009a, 2010a) and Peter Sutton (2009), has had an influence on my conceptions of culture. While these writings are neither focussed on music or artistic expression, nor Arnhem Land as a region, they conceptualise Indigenous culture as necessarily dynamic in the face of societal change; culture that must change to address those things which present challenges to it.¹³ While these issues tied up in history, policy, social realities, aspirations and agendas are not the explicit focus of this thesis complex of issues, my assertion that creative pragmatism must engage traditions in the present is significant: culture must grow through radical, synthetic performance into the future (Pearson 2011). Similarly, I conceive tradition as a dynamic force — driven by individuals — for enriching lives in the present, in ever-expanding contexts.

Tying into similar political issues, literature on indigenous heritage and *intangible* heritage has been important in locating my thesis in the global, altruistic push to safeguard endangered and localised minority cultures. Chapter Ten draws heavily on the plethora of literature emerging over the last decade in response to the 2003 UNESCO *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Arzipe 2004; Zanten 2004; Logan 2007; Kalay 2008; Aikawa-Faure 2009; Kearney 2009; Kreps 2009; Seeger 2009; Smith 2006, 2009). This literature includes a wide range of cultural, legal, philosophical and political perspectives. Here, it will suffice to note that Smith's (2006, 2009) works have been used primarily to establish knowledge of the background and history of issues and events regarding intangible heritage, although it has been the voices of reaction to common convention definitions that I have found the most engaging. Many of these voices come from within the UNESCO project itself. Davis (2007) provides a solid historical grounding in the history of heritage, collections and writing about similar issues within the Australian context.

¹³ Such as passive welfare and substance abuse, poor education and lack of appropriate government action and recognition (Pearson 2009, 68).



Fig. 1f Gurrumul Yunupingu on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine, April 2011. Reproduced with permission. © Rolling Stone, 2011

(Ethno)musicology

Early recordings and writings from the mid-twentieth century concerning *manikay* were extremely important in establishing the ethnomusicological discipline in Australia (Corn 2009), of irreplaceable archival and historical value (Barwick, Marett and Tunstill 1995) and laudable in their interest in Indigenous Australian music. However, the particular ethnographic gaze of the time shaped publications as relatively dry, structuralist descriptions attempting to catalogue and classify everything observed and analysed (Elkin 1953; Ellis 1963; Clunies Ross 1978; Moyle 1972, 1981) — an approach consistent with Merriam’s foundational method for the fledgling discipline of ethnomusicology (Merriam 1964) (see Chapter Seven). ‘Well into the 1970s, the dominant argument for ethnographic research on Indigenous Australians was to salvage whatever of the languages and cultures remained before they were swept away in an inescapably Anglocentric tide of progress’ (Corn 2009, 24). In contrast, contemporary writings represent a shift to exploring *manikay* as performed event within human experience and as a rich expression of nature and humanity (Tamisari 2005; Magowan 2007; Corn 2008, 2010).

The shift of focus toward contextual embodiment and corporeal expression in ethnomusicology has led to the discipline taking a more applied and collaborative focus. Academic work has become occupied with the knotty, political and practical issues involved in repatriation, collection management and Indigenous engagement (Toner 2003; Gumbula 2005; Corn and Gumbula 2006, 2007; Verran and Christie 2007; Gumbula, Corn and Mant 2009).¹⁴

Further, ethnomusicology as an academic discipline fundamentally inseparable from an ethnographic gaze, seeks to ameliorate many questionable motivations and methods from the recent past. Contemporary scholars adopt an approach ‘driven by

¹⁴ Other important initiatives in this movement, outside of Arnhem Land, include distinct projects such as the Murrinh-patha song project in Wadeye (see Barwick, Marett, Walsh, Reid and Ford 2005), and the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia. The large field of scholarship on indigenous ecological knowledge and indigenous knowledge management (see Nakata and Langton 2005), although relevant, is beyond the current scope of this thesis, which is focussed on *manikay* and ceremonial knowledge in Arnhem Land.

an ethos of research engagement that seeks to deliver applied and relevant outcomes for the musicians and communities whose lives and cultures ethnomusicologists examine' (Corn 2009, 22). Ethics of encounter are considered throughout this thesis in relation to cross-cultural musical interaction and appropriation.¹⁵

Nevertheless, while a strong focus on human experience is necessary, the current reconstruction of historical ceremonies and languages around the country (Amery and Buckskin 2011; Gummow, Giacon and Tighe 2011; Marett and Barwick 2003; Treloyn 2006) attests to the importance of documentary fieldwork and the creation of comprehensive records. Comprehensive and technical analysis of song not only forms invaluable records but demonstrates the richness and human ingenuity and creativity through demonstrably complex structures. While this thesis does not move along the highly analytical, technical lines of other significant research (such as Marett 2005, 2007; Treloyn 2006, 2007; Turpin 2007), I do not suggest that such study is unnecessary. Chapter Seven considers, with applied examples, the importance of technical and reflexive engagement in the transmission of cultural forms.

Further relevant literature, recordings and performance

With the exception of a volume on Ritharrŋu grammar, texts and a dictionary (Heath 1980) and a few short Wägilak wordlists (Wood 1972), only a smattering of references refer specifically to Wägilak culture, law or country in any of the literature on Arnhem Land. More recent literature on the history of the town of Ngukurr and clans related to the Blue Mud Bay area can be found in publications primarily concerned with governance, policy and social wellbeing. Notable examples are Corn (2001), Morphy and Morphy (1984, 2006), Frances Morphy (2010), and Taylor, Bern and Senior (2000).

¹⁵ More collaborative, applied, and less anthropological, partnerships are forming between university researchers (notably musicologists, linguists and historians) and Indigenous colleagues who are, in their own right, academic and social leaders, professional musicians, esteemed cultural curators and philosophers. I have tried to be as practical as possible in my fieldwork, working to deliver concert performances, presentations, classes and joint publications.

Publications on art and exhibitions from the Roper River region, and Dhuwa moiety country and ceremony in Arnhem Land, have provided useful clarifications in making links between familial relations or meta-clan narratives and larger inter-moiety ceremonies, notably Caruana (2010), Caruana and Lendon (1997), Buku-Larrnggay Mulka (1999), Hamby (2007), West (2008), Normand (2004,2012) and Bowdler (2008, 2009). While such publications provide many useful explanations for understanding the greater ceremonial complex of interrelated music, design, country and dance, some similar publications contain contradictory assertions and conflation regarding, especially, Yolŋu inter-clan narratives of *mokuy* figures with similar but different ancestral figures from ceremonial complexes outside of Arnhem Land, even outside of the Northern Territory. Regarding such inconsistencies, Wägilak people I have spoken with will often assert that such information is simply incorrect. It seems that those with closer, ongoing relationships with Yolŋu people — coupled with research experience — tend to have more correct information in their publications.

There has been no comprehensive documentation of Wägilak song and so, on a basic level, this thesis begins to address this gap. There are no (known) transcriptions of Wägilak song language and recorded material is limited to minimal, although valuable, archival material — predominantly from the collections of Bernhard Schebeck (1965–1966),¹⁶ Jeffrey Heath (1974–1976)¹⁷ and Greg Dickson (2006–2013)¹⁸ located in the AIATSIS archives and Ngukurr Language Centre. This thesis will catalogue, discuss, analyse and unpack as much to do with traditional Wägilak *manikay* as space allows, leaving some form of record. From 2013, a comprehensive record of Wägilak *manikay* in multi-track audio and video can be found in my own collection archived by AIATSIS (Curkpatrick 2010–2012 in bibliography).

Also of direct relation to my research are the collaborative efforts of communities and individuals such as Genevieve Campbell and the Wangatunga Strong Women’s Group from the Tiwi Islands (Campbell et al. 2008). The efforts of this group to re-cognise

¹⁶ Wägilak narratives only, no songs; in AIATSIS collection SCHEBECK_B08. See bibliography.

¹⁷ About 40 song items recorded in AIATSIS collection HEATH_J04. See bibliography.

¹⁸ Limited *bungul* items and a number of *manikay* recordings, held privately and in the Ngukurr Language Centre.

historic song styles alongside instrumental accompaniment have reinvigorated community interest in cultural activities, spawning interest in further investigating of old, archived recordings and documentation, in turn used in the revival of particular songs and stories: 'It's not a type of exotic or ethno-defined music. Tiwi music is vital and relevant. It is, after all, Australian contemporary music' (Ibid.). The project is about participation, creation and re-invention: 'Perfect performance — that's not what we're aiming for and there's no such thing anyway' (Ibid.). Projects like this demonstrate many of the contentions of my thesis, especially the necessity of active participation in tradition — *conversing* with new possibilities for tradition rather than reifying tradition as immutable heritage.

A number of performance initiatives in Arnhem Land have begun to combine Wägilak songs with other forms of music styles.¹⁹ This reflects a burgeoning trend within Wägilak families not only from Ngukurr, but also Beswick, Donydji and Yirrkala, who recognise the importance of engaging with new contexts and materials in the perpetuation of traditional cultural knowledge. While frequently occurring in rock band settings and through organisations such as the Mulka centre, one notable collaboration is that founded by actor and musician Tom E. Lewis with Wägilak elder Roy Ashley.²⁰ Since 2002, this pair have performed at Djilpin Arts annual *Walking with Spirits* festival at Beswick, alongside a number of musicians from Melbourne (Lewis and Hohnen 2007). Adopting Roy Ashley's bush name, Muynḡarnbi [sic; Muynḡanbi], as the title of their commercial CD, this collaboration focuses on a different but closely related Wägilak *bäpurru* (father's group) and a set of similar *manikay* songs. Since 2012, Daniel Wilfred, a key member of *CRB*, has also been involved in the project, touring with Lewis to Melbourne in 2013. Four elders from Wägilak, Dalabon and Rembarrḡa clans are also represented with independent tracks on this album.²¹

¹⁹ Wägilak visual art, as practiced by notable artists Sambo Barabara and Djardie Ashley from the 1980s–2000s, displays a similar willingness to innovate with new materials, especially the use of dynamic, sometimes fluorescent, colour (see Bowdler 2008, 2009; Normand 2004).

²⁰ Lewis has a successful career in the Australian film industry, acting lead roles in feature films such as *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, *We of the Never Never*, *A Town Like Alice*, *The Proposition* and *Red Hill*.

²¹ Micky Hall Dugurrun from Donydji, another Wägilak elder, also features on the *Muynḡarnbi* recording.

One clear difference between the *Muyngarnbi* collaboration and *CRB* is that one of Lewis' clearly stated aims is to replace the *yidaki* (didjeridu) and *bilma* (clapsticks) of *manikay* with guitar and electric bass accompaniment. Each track juxtaposes ceremonial song on top of a conservative popular music accompanying style, including country, Hawaiian guitar style, 1970s rock and blues rock. The result is a completely different feel and sound in each song, over which the voice of the singer is permitted to feature. Indeed it is the voice quality of the elders singing on this album that is the highlight. As a juxtaposition of styles and traditions that have little correlation, the music takes on a bi-tonal, bi-conceptual feel: the melodic/harmonic constructions of the songs continue unaltered and independent from the diatonic tonality of the accompaniment. The accompaniment never dominates the voices and the transience of styles avoids settling into a definitive identity: the album is characterised by flux between individual tracks. Lewis describes the project:

A new platform for the old people — a CD, going to use *munanga* [whitefella] instruments like our instruments to carry the song, no *bambu* [didjeridu] or clapsticks [...] This song is really flamboyant. What about a bossa nova or something? (Lewis and Hohnen 2007)

The *Muyngarnbi* collaboration is not considered further in the thesis because examples of the musical interaction between musicians and singers are limited. Attempting to incorporate as much ceremonial expression in the collaboration as possible, *CRB* does not consciously jettison any musical or instrumental elements from the *manikay* tradition. Nevertheless, there remains a clear sentiment in *Muyngarnbi* to preserve traditional culture as it is brought into new contexts and forms of expression — this is the underpinning philosophy which has most resonance with my own thesis. Irrespective of the content of such collaborations, they are happening: recordings are being made, festivals are being played and new audiences are developing appreciation of ceremonial music and tradition. Further, the voices of ageing elders are being recorded and preserved, in most cases, for the first time. Lewis clearly wants to generate greater interest and awareness of the great song traditions belonging to this land:

Everywhere you look, there is music. The wind blows, water runs, in the grass you can hear it. Sometimes we forget, but if you stop and you listen. Maybe that's the frightening thing, is to stop and listen — because you can hear things. (Lewis and Hohnen 2007)

It is perhaps telling to note that the most active areas of cross-cultural engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal musicians have occurred within popular music idioms and improvised forms. Here, *CRB* stands out as a collaboration that bridges the traditions of *serious* Western art music — displaying, in particular, high levels of musical complexity and technical development by performers — as well as popular and improvised music. Many of the individuals in the AAO are seasoned performers from the jazz, popular and classical musical worlds. In this sense, the collaboration posits Wägilak *manikay* as a great, classical tradition worthy of considered engagement alongside formidable Western music traditions.

While the last decade has seen few examples of collaboration between composed orchestral music and Aboriginal song, the following brief passages discuss two recent examples of the relatively limited collaboration between these musical traditions in Australia. Both have been seen by large audiences in a number of capital cities. First, *Kalkadungu* (2007) for orchestra, voice, didjeridu and electric guitar was composed by Matthew Hindson and didjeridu virtuoso William Barton. It is based upon songs written by Barton when he was a fifteen year old child and depicts something of the bloody contact history between the Kalkadungu people and the Queensland police. In this work, Barton is given much freedom to shape his solo singing and didjeridu improvisation. An album featuring *Kalkadungu* won the 2012 ARIA (Australian Record Industry Award) for best classical album.

Unfortunately, program notes published on Hindson's website fail to recognise Barton's music and creativity as contemporary, stating that the electric guitar was included in the score in order to create a 'link with the present day,' with 'contemporary culture' (Barton and Hindson 2013). The didjeridu is described as forming a 'primal duet' with the bass drum in 'Spirit of Kalkadungu,' the fifth and final movement of the work (Ibid.). On this theoretical level at least, it seems that collaborations between symphonic orchestral composers and Aboriginal song have not

moved far beyond naive, romantic conceptions that consider Indigenous Australians as a part of a timeless landscape otherwise to contemporary culture. This is historically apparent in orchestral compositions by Peter Sculthorpe, such as *Mangrove* (1979), *Earth Cry* (1986) and *Kakadu* (1988) (see Chapter Seven). Perpetuating such romanticism, Sculthorpe once stated, ‘Perhaps we now need to attune ourselves to this continent, to listen to the cry of the earth, as the Aborigines have done for many thousands of years’ (Sculthorpe 1989).²²

Second and perhaps more legitimately, composer and violinist/violist with the AAO, Erkki Veltheim, has recently composed a work titled *Tract* (2010), that attempts to mirror the heterophonic textures and dynamic intensity of *manikay* song — as well as the rough vocal textures of singing — within the formal constrictions of composed orchestral music (Veltheim 2011). Commissioned by Paul Grabowsky and premiered by the London Sinfonietta and YWG at the Adelaide Festival in 2010, Veltheim’s score is performed parallel with the Wägilak *manikay* singing, which uses the same song series as in *CRB* — the two ensembles are relatively autonomous. It is possible that *Tract* is the first and only composed orchestral work in Australian history that allows Aboriginal singers the freedom to perform ceremonial songs in the way that they deem appropriate and largely unrestricted by composed structural frameworks. Further, this work is laudable in that it began from strong and ongoing personal and musical relationships between composer and performer, connections that initially came about through the *CRB* collaboration.

In order better to understand the historical significance of the sympathetic and non-appropriative musical forms and intentions of Australian works like *Tract* and *CRB*, it is important first to examine Wägilak *manikay* in its local and ceremonial contexts. The following chapter begins a brief history of the Wägilak people and homeland. Subsequently, a documentary record of Wägilak *manikay* is established through the introduction of forms, themes, narratives and significances within the song series.

²² Sculthorpe had not even been to Kakadu when he wrote his orchestral work by that same name. He ‘knew the place only from books and photos and, perhaps most important, in his imagination’ (Hayes 1996, 1029).



Fig. 1g Paul Grabowsky and David Wilfred crossing Roper Bar. 26.5.2010



Fig. 1h Musicians on the 2010 CRB tour, at the Roper River: (l-r) Niko Schäuble, Wesley Wilfred, Benjamin Wilfred, Tony Hicks, Philip Rex, Steve Magnusson, Daniel Wilfred (passenger seat) and Paul Grabowsky. 26.5.2010

FIRST PART:

‘THAT’S THE WÄGILAK CULTURE’

Chapter two

Setting the scene

Nilipidji

My country, it's beautiful country, called Nilipidji. And the blackfella name, called Lärä, the stone spear — that's Wägilak country. So it belongs for me and my kids, and the sisters, grandpa, dad, sons, no matter who. It belongs for me and my group, the Young Wägilak Group. So I love my people, Wägilak. I'm holding it now, strong. (Benjamin Wilfred 2010)

Not far from where we sit is a spring, bubbling through thick foliage and running away over earthy red-rock into dark pools. These pools are soft underfoot with thick black silt, making it hard to see any shy, little snappy ones — freshwater crocodiles. The Quiet Snake lives here in this spring, an ever flowing source created when the Djaŋ'kawu Sisters plunged their digging stick into the ground. Throw in a lump of meat, the water will churn and the quiet snake will eat.

These wells are where conception spirits of *djamarrkuḷi* (children) originate, before entering the body of a woman. I look at the water and know that it is the place of Daniel Wilfred and his daughter, Brianna. Quiet Snake is their story, their part in the whole; this is their spirit-conception place. Brianna's toothy grin, over eight hours drive away in Ngukurr, comes to mind. A long time ago the Wägilak Sisters also travelled through here — but that is another story.¹

We go fishing in one of the freshwater pools. It is full of *ŋatban'* (rifle fish) and huge *madhpuna* (black bream), a fact that always causes Benjamin Wilfred's eyes to light up. We are not strangers and the land recognises the presence of the *wāŋa-waṭaŋu* (country-holders; estate owners), giving up an abundance of natural resources for our sustenance and pleasure. I am told that if I feel like eating some *walpurruŋgu* (plains

¹ The Wägilak Sisters, important creative ancestors for many clans across Arnhem Land, got their name as they travelled through Wägilak country (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 9).

turkey), I should rub my sweat on a stone before replacing it on the ground. This will bring them out of the scrub. Plenty to catch.

An old rope extends across the deepest part of the stream, a playful remnant of the abandoned outstation where we are camping. A few hundred metres away, the stream joins Wunungirrna, the Walker River (Fig. 2a). No one has been here for over a decade. Since a number of elders passed away the weekend trips from Numbulwar and Ngukurr stopped. Now back on country after a few years absence, tales circulate about the seriousness of Wägilak law: in this land it still holds. On entering Wägilak territory some thirty kilometres back, we stopped to smoke fresh *many'tjarr* (leaves) for the spirit of a recently deceased relative and to announce our presence to the sentient land (Figs. 2b, c).

That's my land. I used to walk around with my mum and dad, getting bush tucker. And my dad took me around to get didjeridu, *yidaki*. And we went to get *bilma* — call that 'clapping sticks.' And I start singing myself [...] just live there, eating bush tucker, learning *manikay*. (Daniel Wilfred 2011a)

Nilipidji, about thirty-five kilometres inland from Blue Mud Bay, is widely known as the site of a cluster of open-ground stone quarries, reputedly famous for their greasy feeling, pink streaked *ɲambi* (stone spear heads) and knives (see Figs. 2d; 2e). These were manufactured in the hills surrounding the present day outstation and traded across Arnhem Land.² Nilipidji stone was used in preference to metal tips well into the twentieth century because of its particular *märr* (spiritual power; essence). Ritharrŋu elder Dhulutharama recalls that wetting the spear tip with your saliva guides it straight to its mark (McKenzie 1983). *Ųambi* were prized as *gerri* (commercial valuables), lethal in hunting and combat, penetrating deeply — even into bone — and causing excessive loss of blood (Jones and White 1988, 52–4; 71).

² Thomson details that boulders in the ground of the quarry were uncovered and then either levered up and broken, or fractured with fire. These more manageable pieces of stone were worked by pounding with quartzite, 'and only two or three old men remain who are considered skilful enough to make the fine heads and knives [...] Of hundreds of flints that struck off, all but a dozen or so would be rejected. These fine flints were wrapped separately, in bark sheaths, tied into bundles of a dozen or two to be given to people not only for tipping of spears but also for fighting picks and the knives which are still used in circumcision' (Thomson 2010, 105–6).

Donald Thomson refers to Njilipidji in writings from his travels there in 1935, apparently accessing the area through Ritharrŋu country in the Mitchell Range, close to present day settlement of Donydji. Thomson also visited Lutunba at the mouth of the Koolatong River during this trip (Thomson 2010, 34), a sacred site for the Wāgilak and other clans (see Chapter Four).³ Thomson writes of Njilipidji's remote location, a long way from the more densely populated North East Coast of Arnhem Land:

The famous quarry at Ngilipidji in the hills of the blue distance — a quarry that no European had seen. I had long known that the quarry was remote for very few, even of the oldest men on the northern coastline had even been there [sic] although they knew and cherished, lovingly, the flint spear-heads from it. (Thomson 2010, 100)

Njilipidji is covered by rocky river beds and scattered stone outcrops, surrounded by low lying hills covered sparsely in eucalypt and ironbark trees. Yolŋu (lit. 'people') have lived there for generations, although the outstation buildings are, today, somewhat dilapidated. Rotting blankets, some fishing reels and spears, colourfully painted but extremely dusty huts, a defunct solar panel and one large water tank are all that remain of the settlement. The grass grows very high and paths have to be slashed and burnt between the huts.

After eating some of the stewed *ŋanaparru* (buffalo) shot on the way, we lay out camping mats and mosquito nets on a huge tarpaulin — the underside is still covered in buffalo blood — and the sun sets. Benjamin Miyala Wilfred, Andy Lukaman Peters and David Yipininy Wilfred prepare to sing the *manikay* which recalls poetically the foundation of this homeland. David, an Yirritja moiety Ritharrŋu man and *djuŋgayi* (manager) for the Wāgilak singers plays *yidaki* (didjeridu).⁴ He ensures that the Wāgilak singers perform *manikay* in the correct context with a legitimate song-sequence, an

³ McKenzie's (1983) film follows a trip from Donydji to Njilipidji made by Wāgilak elders, recording the process involved in making *ŋambi* (stone spear heads). It is most probably that historic trade routes connected Njilipidji to the coastal groups via geographically convenient and navigatable features of the country — much more directly than the road today (see Fig. 2e).

⁴ Although David Wilfred shares a surname with Benjamin and Daniel, he is not of the same moiety. In Ngukurr, Wāgilak and Ritharrŋu families share the surname Wilfred. In traditional marriage law, Wāgilak typically marry Ritharrŋu; a Wāgilak mother's children are born as Ritharrŋu, and vice versa. Wāgilak and Ritharrŋu still intermarry today, although not exclusively.

obligation returned by Benjamin and Andy who act as *djuṅgayi* for Ritharrṅu performances (see *Wägilak connections* below). David addresses the ancestral beings in the Ritharrṅu/Wägilak language, naming everyone who is present. Benjamin continues to talk before the singing begins (LE_2.1):

DW: There is no elder in the Wägilak clan for the *buṅgul*.

BW: We are going to start from Butjulubayi.⁵ *Yidaki* player is David, and his land, where he came from, is *Bunḍuḷum*.⁶ Where I'm standing now is my home, *Ŋilipidji*. Tomorrow we are leaving, walking to Warpani.⁷ My song is Wägilak. We will start with [the songs] *Yolṅu Man [Djuwalpaḍa]*, *Gara [Spear]*, *Mälka [Dillybag]*, *Wadawada [Wire Spear]*.

Long-time ago our grandfather's father, grandfather's mother, they used to walk everywhere, travel around with the *Yolṅu* song, *Djuwalpaḍa*. This song we are going to start from is where we are now. *Ŋilipidji*. *Ŋilipidji, Lärä [stone spear country]*. This is my home, me, *Miyala*.

All my grandfathers and my in-laws, they are all gone now. All our grandfathers, father's fathers, all passed away. We are the only people that know the culture and the secret singing. Only us mob now. Andy [Peters] is the only elder in the Wägilak clan.⁸ This is me talking, [Benjamin] *Miyala*. I'm doing this recording for all my children to listen and learn, and move along with our culture. And we always think about bush tucker when we are walking.

This is me now, talking. I'm the only person that knows the traditional songs. All the rest are gone. This is for you mob; you mob got to listen properly, learn and carry on. Only then can I stop.

(Benjamin Wilfred 2010b)

LE_2.1	Djuwalpaḍa 'Walking': Benjamin Wilfred, Andy Peters, David Wilfred (<i>yidaki</i>). <i>Ŋilipidji</i> , 25.8.2010	01:43
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⁵ Butjulubayi, where this particular song line starts, is located north of *Ŋilipidji*.

⁶ In Central Arnhem Land on the Central Arnhem Road, not far from Bulman.

⁷ Warpani, an important waterhole in *Ŋandi (Miṅgiri)* patrigroup country, some 50km south of *Ŋilipidji*.

⁸ Andy Peters' mother's mother, his *gagu*, was Wägilak.



Fig. 2a Wunungirna (Walker River) at Nilipidji. 26.8.2010



Fig. 2b Benjamin Wilfred smoking *many'tjarr* (leaves) as we enter Wägilak land. 25.8.2010



Fig. 2c Benjamin Wilfred at the spring near Njilipidji. 25.8.2010

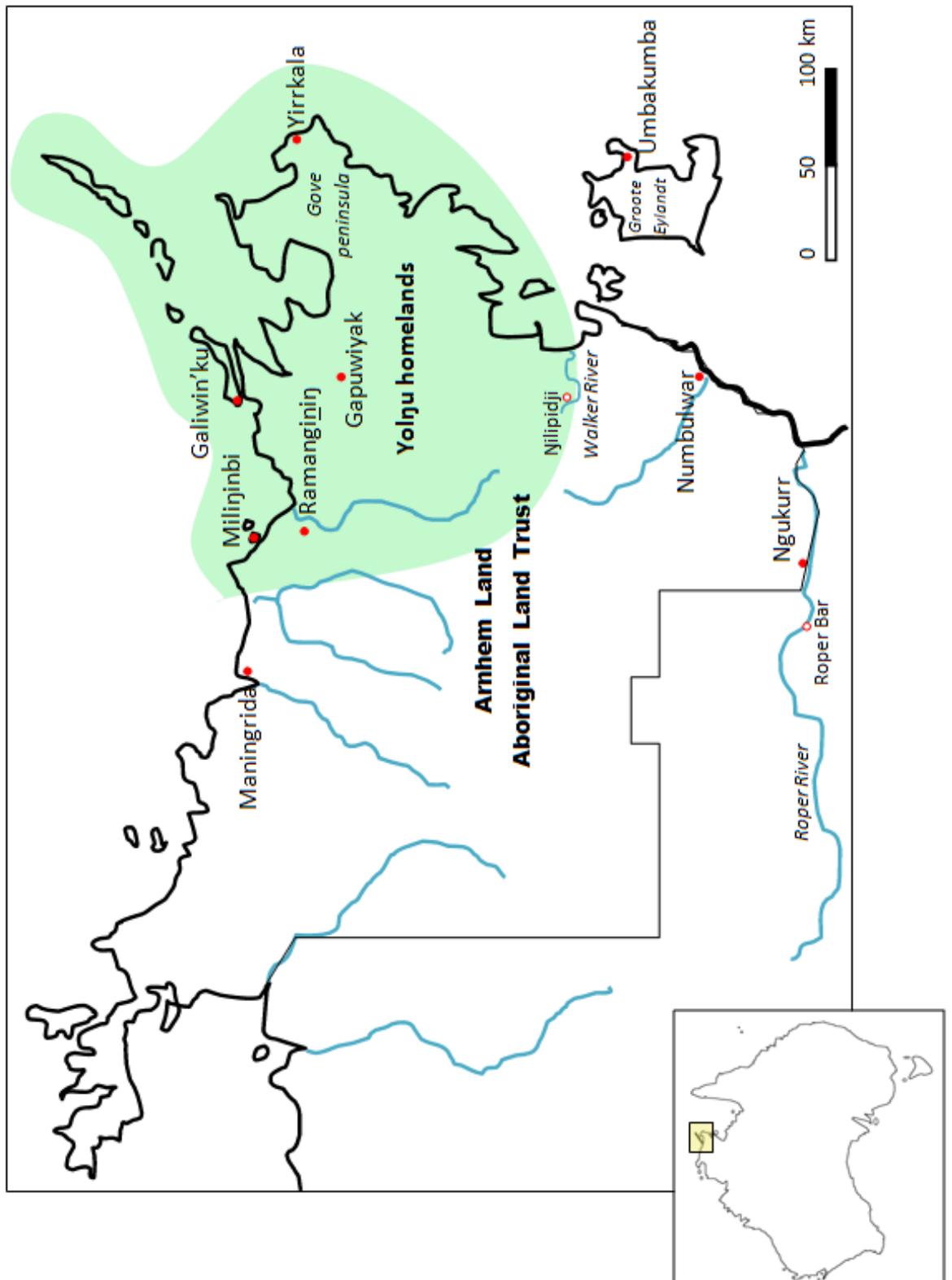


Fig. 2d Map of Arnhem Land showing Njlipidji on the southern border of the Yolju homelands

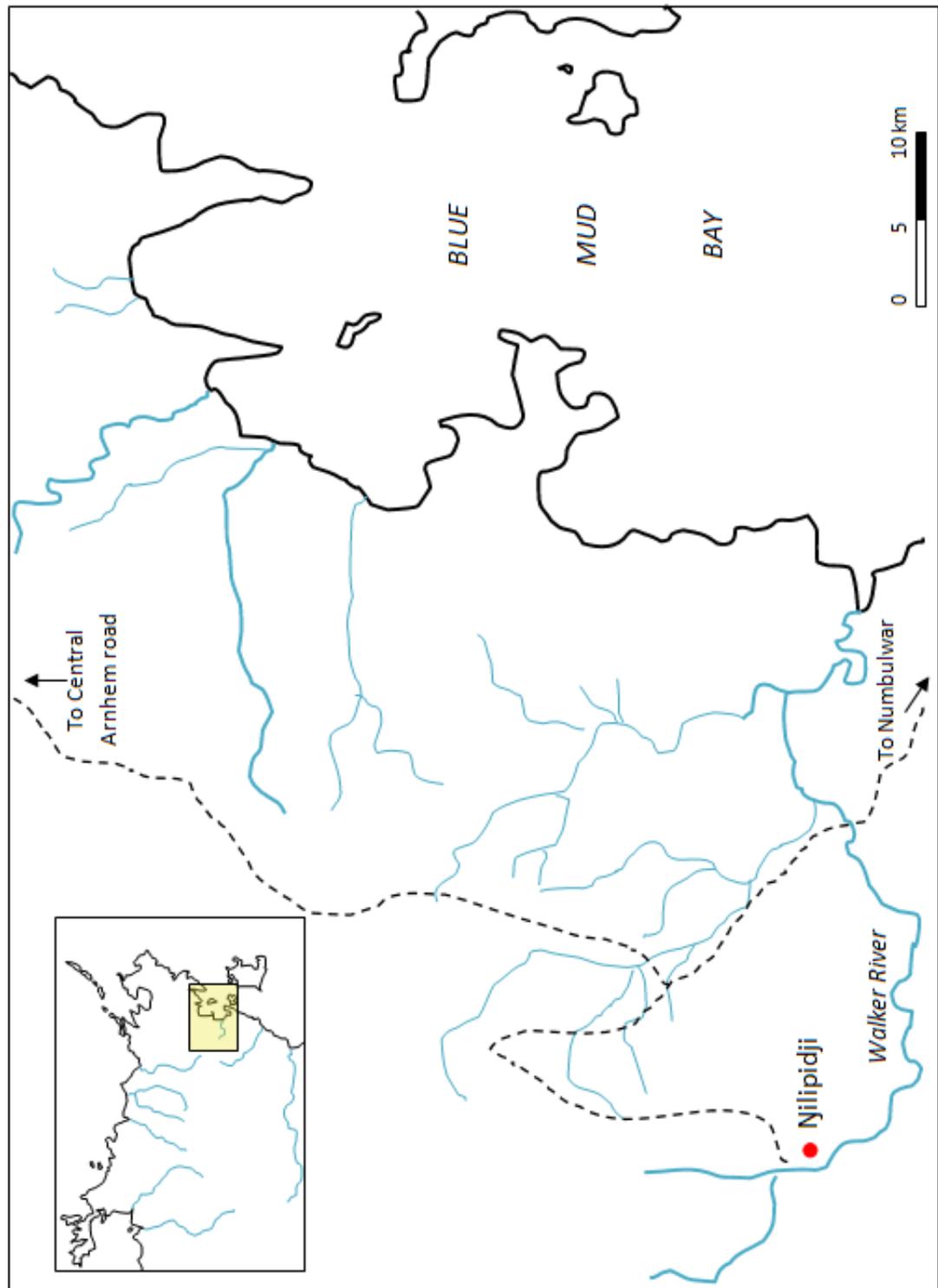


Fig. 2e Map showing location of Njilpidji in relation to Blue Mud Bay and present day roads

Brief history of Ngukurr

Early colonial contact in the Arnhem Land region was relatively limited, compared with South East Australia (Dewar 1982; Thomson and Allen 1996; Berndt 2004; Davis 2007; Bowdler 2008; Thomas and Neale 2011). The Arnhem coast line was mapped by Mathew Flinders in 1802. Between 1844 and 1845, Prussian explorer Friedrich Wilhelm Leichhardt was the first European to walk through the area, crossing Roper River at Leichardt's Crossing, later Roper Bar (Fitzpatrick 1958, 210). This was a significant point in Leichardt's journey from Moreton Bay in Queensland because at the Roper River he lost three of his horses, which were unable to clamber up the muddy banks (Leichardt 1958, 244). Leichardt's journal entry of October 19, 1845, is perhaps the first written description in English language of the Roper River and its surrounding country. The abundance of food here was evidently feast-worthy:

I found myself on the banks of a large fresh water river from 500–800 yards broad, with not very high banks, densely covered with salt water Hibiscus (Paritium) [...] The water was slightly muddy, as if a fresh [sic] had come down the river; and the tide rose a full three feet. It was the river Mr. Roper had seen two days before, and I named it after him, as I had promised to do [...] Natives, crows, and kites were always the indications of a good country. Charley, Brown, and John, who had been left at the lagoon to shoot waterfowl, returned with twenty ducks for luncheon, and went out again to procure more for dinner and breakfast. They succeeded in shooting thirty-one ducks and two geese; so that we had fifty-one ducks and two geese for three meals; and they were all eaten, with the exception of a few bony remains. (Leichardt 1958, 246)

The construction of the Overland Telegraph in the 1870s saw the significant expansion of European presence into many previously unmapped and unknown parts of the area, and a supply depot was established at Leichardt's Bar (Taylor et al. 2010, 13). The following decades were marked by intermittent incursions into Arnhem Land by surveying and speculative parties. A small settlement was eventually established at Leichardt's Crossing by European and Chinese Gold Miners in 1884, drawn to the area when gold was found nearby at Pine Creek (Dewar 1992, 12).

In the 1880s, cattle farmers began establishing major stations in the region, and in 1903 the African Cold Storage Supply Company established a station based at the Arafura swamp and at Eley and Hodgson Downs. This company was notoriously violent toward the local people, sending out murderous punitive parties following apparent misunderstandings or minor 'injustices.' 'From the Yolngu perspective these expeditions were arbitrary acts of violence perpetrated by hostile invaders' (F. Morphy 2008, 118).

The development of Christian missions in Arnhem Land, beginning in 1908 with the Church Missionary Society's (CMS, Church of England) establishment of a mission settlement on the Roper River, set in motion a gradual movement of Aboriginal peoples from their hereditary estates to residence at these establishments: supplies of flour and tobacco, and protection from violent pastoralists, were the major drawcards (Dewar 1992, 23).

In the Roper Valley the period of the 1930s to the 1950s was portrayed [by Aboriginal people] as a Golden Age sandwiched between the killing times of the African and Asian Cold Storage Company and the confrontational relationship that developed in the 1960s, after equal award wages. (H. Morphy 2005a, 42)

As Dewar details (1992, 24), the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) moved progressively northeast, up the coast from the Roper mission — relocated due to flooding to the present site of Ngukurr in 1940 — establishing a presence at Numbulwar, and then the Emerald River Mission (1924) and Umbakumba (1938) on Groote Eylandt (Fig. 2g). The Methodist Missions Society (MMS) began its foray into Arnhem Land through Goulburn Island (1916) off the north coast, moving east to Milingimbi (early 1920s), then through Elcho Island (Galiwin'ku) to Yirrkala (1935) (ibid.) (see Fig. 2d). Life at the Roper Mission was often strictly regimented with work duties:

We used to work very hard and get breakfast, dinner, supper. Salt beef and rice and porridge and treacle [...] Talk about vomiting from that porridge! That porridge used to have grubs and weevils. We used to go foot-walk to *Ngudjuli* and *Walmudja* for bush food [...] At six o'clock in the morning the children used to go out collecting wood for the cookhouse.

Then a quick breakfast then down to the river for bogy [swim/wash] then back for church.
We used to work from six to six, straight through. (Garadji 1996, 8)

Wurrjtjumun Dinah Garadji, a Yugul lady whose ancestral country was framed on either side by the Rose and Roper rivers, tells some stories of her grandfather, Dungulurrama, who lived along the banks and billabongs of the Roper River. Garadji's parents were children when the Roper Mission was established on Yugul land in 1908, and her mother's father's people — the 'Blanuganuga' — lived in the hills on the upper Walker River (possibly Wägilak country in the Parsons or Mitchell Ranges):

My uncle was a stockman and my father was a mission man. He brought in the Nandi and Ritharngu people [by extension and inclusion, Wägilak]. He used to go out by himself. He went out to the Thompson mob,⁹ who were staying at Mission Gorge. He used to tell them to come into the mission to the school. My uncle didn't like the missionaries. He was a stockman at St. Vidgeons.¹⁰ (Garadji 1996, 8)

The Anglican approach to establishing missions in Arnhem Land has been heavily criticised, especially in comparison with the approach taken by the Methodists, whose missions were more oriented toward engagement with local languages, cultural expressions and social systems. Methodists Theodore Webb at Milingimbi and Wilbur Chaseling at Yirrkala, believed that effective engagement and communication with Aboriginal people could only transpire if there was a knowledge of traditional cultural practices that informed the transaction of Christian ideas and ideals (see Berndt 2004, 47) — indeed that allowed Christianity to be meaningful and relevant.¹¹ Webb developed a burgeoning art and craft industry with the locals, which he used to

⁹ Perhaps the Wulngari patrigroup, an Yirritja moiety group of Nandi people (see Corn 2002, appendix 6.6).

¹⁰ The following also gives us an indication of the types of messages that were reaching Aboriginal groups, like the Wägilak, who were still living out bush and on their hereditary homeland during the early decades of mission settlement: 'The next visitor [...] came as a messenger from the missionaries. His message was, 'Come to Roper River. There are school teachers there who love us as we are. They are very good people who won't hurt others, they won't hurt anyone. They want to teach children about the white man's ways and tell stories about the big spirits up in the sky' (Garadji 1996, 26).

¹¹ For example, Chaseling is quoted by Berndt as saying: "'We can now see properly where they [the Yolŋu ancestral figures and stories] stand,'" they are "not gods but prophets," equal in status to those of (for example) the Old Testament' (Berndt 2004, 72).

generate external income by selling the bark paintings and objects produced to people in the southern states (H. Morphy 2005a, 2008).

Conversely, the Church Missionary Society at the Roper River Mission focussed on instilling discipline and a regimented work ethic into the Aboriginal inhabitants, practicing segregation of children from their families through a dormitory system, sending *half-caste* children to Groote Eylandt — which was much more remote and separated from their own direct kin and language groups — and banning traditional ceremonial practices (Dewar 1992, 26). Perhaps because of this, the average population at the Roper Mission remained quite small: prior to the 1940 flood, the population averaged around seventy (Taylor, Bern, Senior 2000, 14).

The contrast between missionary approaches and their legacy is today apparent: the towns in North Arnhem Land at Milingimbi, Elcho Island and Yirrkala poses vibrant, synthetic and ecumenical forms of Christianity (Magowan 2007). Traditional beliefs and ceremonial practices continue to play a dominant role in the lives of most Yolŋu people. However, there is an obvious discrepancy between the complexity and quantity of traditional public ceremonial practices and maintenance of language in North East Arnhem Land today, compared with the relatively dilapidated practice of similar traditions from south of Arnhem Land and the area of Ngukurr:

To this end, the Anglican Church did much throughout the twentieth century to destabilise local religions and languages, and even though there are now few devout Christians among Ngukurr's male youths, the relevance of ceremonial experience to community life has eroded radically. (Corn 2001, 10)

Settling relatively late (around the 1970s) in Ngukurr, the Wägilak clan frequently express the sentiment that they are the 'only ones left' in the region who can practise ceremony — their busy performance engagements attest to such high demand. Perhaps more precisely, the Wägilak/Ritharrŋu clans are the only Yolŋu clans in Ngukurr and so they are already cultural *outsiders* in terms of ceremonial practices. Other clans in the town and region do hold ceremonial repertoires of song and dance, although it is true that these are performed rarely if at all. Further, many of the forms

of musical expression in Ngukurr today do not contain the complexity of significations and beliefs which, for example, a repertoire of *manikay* song does. Benjamin Wilfred often states, perhaps in slight exaggeration but with a large degree of truthful feeling, that 'at Ngukurr, those young people, they lost their language, and culture; everything. Young Wägilak Group helping them, with me. They're just lost. Only the Wägilak helping them' (Benjamin Wilfred 2010).

This chapter, while considering similar polarising assertions from Wägilak people, will present a picture of cultural activity in Ngukurr which is a little more subtle and dynamic. Large, regional ceremonies still exist and popular music does assimilate elements of clan song and ceremonial practice, although this is clearly not as pervasive as in North East Arnhem Land. By looking at the historical situation of the Wägilak clan's relations, language and ceremonial practices, I will demonstrate how, despite polarising rhetoric from Wägilak themselves, their own ceremonial performances have strong historical precedent for involvement in diverse and intercultural contexts.

Presently, Ngukurr is an amalgam of seven different language groups, representing the population which comes from regions surrounding the town within an approximate 200km radius: Mara, Njandi, Alawa, Nungubuyu, Ritharrŋu, Wandarrang and Njalakan (Fig. 2c). In 1968, increasing federal and state government involvement in Arnhem Land saw the Church Missionary Society cede power of the Roper Mission to the government, and by the mid 1970s the Ngukurr township had been formed. In 1988, the Yugul Mangi Community Government Council, an Aboriginal body representative of the different language groups in Ngukurr, was established (Taylor et. al 2000; Northern Territory Government 2010).

Ngukurr today is under the governance of the Roper Gulf Shire as well as the Yugul Mangi Aboriginal Corporation, whose directors represent the seven language groups (see Edmunds 2000; NT Government 2010). In 1997, this council became an elected 20 member panel with one chair-person (Taylor, Bern, Senior 2000). The Yugul Mangi Aboriginal Corporation has recently begun developing plans for increased tourism to Ngukurr and permanent motel accommodation for visitors. The general population at Ngukurr continues to increase rapidly and it is identified by the Northern Territory

Government as one of a few designated *growth towns*, having almost doubled in size in the last 30 years from the 1980 population of around 600. Only around 5 percent of Ngukurr residents are non-Indigenous (Taylor, Bern, Senior 2000, 15–17). Outside of Ngukurr, Wägilak people also reside in Numbulwar and Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella) in significant numbers, and to a lesser extent in Beswick, Barunga, Katherine and Darwin, as well as smaller towns along the North Coast of Arnhem Land and at Yirrkala.¹²

¹² Much significant history regarding the establishment of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Trust and important legislation such as the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, has not been broached in this thesis.



Fig. 2f The relocated Anglican Church in Ngukurr today, high above the floodwaters. 21.8.2010



Fig. 2g The Roper River at the Roper Bar Crossing (Image: Virginia Curkpatrick). 27.6.2012

Languages within the distinct Yolŋu-matha group of languages are usually designated on the basis of the different words used for the demonstrative *this*, forming the following divisions: Dhuwal/a, Dhanju/Djanju, Dhay'yi, Djinaŋ, Djinba, Nhanju and Yakuy (or Ritharrŋu). The language furthest to the south and southwest of this Yolŋu-matha grouping, bordering on the substantially different non-Yolŋu prefixing languages Rembarrŋa, Ŋandi and Nungubuyu, is most commonly known as Ritharrŋu, even though the word *yakuy* (in older texts *tjiyakkuy*) is used for the *this*.¹³

Heath designates the following *matha* (tongues) as belonging to the Yakuy language: Maḍarrpa, Bunan̄atjini, Buwarrpuwarr, Min̄ingiri, Ritharrŋu, Bid̄inal and Wägilak (Heath 1980, 2).¹⁴ Heath, who wrote the first comprehensive grammar of the Yakuy language (1980), asserts that speakers were predominantly Yirritja, with Wägilak and Mangurra, if it is included, being the only Dhuwa dialects.

According to the National Indigenous Language Survey, between 1996 and 2001 'Ritharrŋu' [Ritharrŋu] moved from an endangerment rating of 5 to 2: 'strong/safe' to 'severely endangered' (AIATSIS et al. 2005). This report details that there were approximately 94 speakers in 1996 spread over all age groups, declining to around 61 speakers in 2001, and that these speakers were predominantly older people forty years and above (Ibid. 31). Younger children in Ngukurr predominantly speak the lingua-franca, Kriol, in day-to-day interaction.¹⁵

The Yakuy speaking peoples are inland groups, stone country people, separated from the coast by other clans and languages. This is reflected in the lack of saltwater and coastal themes within their *manikay* repertoires. Heath does not include Mangurra in his Yakuy categorisation because of claims that they are also bilingual in Nungubuyu,

¹³ Heath (1980) generally uses the term *Ritharrŋu* to refer to both Ritharrŋu and Wägilak.

¹⁴ Heath is here referring to the inland Maḍarrpa, as opposed to the Yithuwa Maḍarrpa clan of Baniyala on Blue Mud Bay, who are Dhuwala speakers.

¹⁵ The NILS report states: 'Central Torres Strait and Ritharrŋu have slipped into the "endangered" category after being strong in 1996, and this may be a realistic assessment' (AIATSIS et al. 2005, 70), although such estimates are usually fraught with difficulties and rely on numerous, varied sources of data.

and therefore bicultural. Mangurra today live on and maintain land around Anhdhanangi, the mouth and estuaries of the Walker River on the coast of Blue Mud Bay, directly north of Nungubuyu country.¹⁶ Both the Mangurra and the Wägilak clan know the Walker River as Wuungirrna, and the Walker River estuary as Anhdhanangi. Benjamin Wilfred's mother, a Bidijaal (Madarrpa) woman, grew up and spent much of her life in this area. The country of Daniel Wilfred's *ḡāndipulu* (mother's group) is Donydji, north of Njilipidji. Wägilak familial relations extend both north and southeast from their hereditary estates.

The Wägilak and Ritharrŋu clan groups (of the Dhuwa and Yirritja moieties respectively) have many ceremonial and familial connections with the non-Yolŋu clans bordering their estates to the south. This has important ramifications for the responsibilities in *manikay*, as well as land management. An important trade route ran south for about 60 kilometres from Njilipidji, linking it to the large body of permanent water at Warpani, a centre of the Nandi Miningiri patrigrp (Fig. 2h).¹⁷ Historically, Wägilak people would frequently travel on this route to attend ceremonies and gatherings at Warpani, and many births took place there (Benjamin Wilfred 2010).¹⁸

It should be noted that the clan name Miningiri can also be applied to a Ritharngu-speaking clan. It appears that the clans based at Warpani (Nandi), Ma:ruru and Rargarb (both Ritharngu) are closely related totemically and geographically, and are not rigorously distinguished as far as clan name is concerned. It would be more specific to refer to them as the Warpani-based clan and so forth. (Heath 1978, 3)

Nandi man Madulpu (Sandy), born sometime around the 1930s, was living at Numbulwar when Heath recorded a number of interviews with him, discussing the situation of culture and competence in ritual in these areas around 1970. From

¹⁶ Frances Morphy clarifies that Mangurra people generally regard themselves as 'originally Yolŋu. Like the Wägilak they went south rather than north during the colonial period [...] Anhdhanangi is clearly a Nungubuyu, not a Yolŋu place name' (pers. comm. 2013).

¹⁷ Benjamin Wilfred and Andy Peters undertook a walk from Njilipidji to Warpani with the Yugul Mangi Rangers in 2010, the first time anyone had travelled this route for many years.

¹⁸ 'Avoided by the first explorers and subsequent police patrols, the first white person to visit here [Warpani] was Ruth Heathcock, the Roper River nurse, guided by local Ngandi [Nandi] people on horseback in 1956' (Normand 2009, 62).

Maḍulpu's narratives, 'it is clear that in pre-contact days the Nḁandi and Ritharrḁu groups were particularly closely associated' (Heath 1978, 184). One narrative told by Maḍulpu elaborates on the ceremonial connections between Ritharrḁu and other clans, especially in relation to the *maḍayin* (secret ceremony) that was performed at Warpani by the Wägilak and a number of other clans now extinct:

They stayed there (at) the ceremonial shade [...] Now they are unable to properly perform the thing, the what's-it?, the *maḍayin* ceremony. They cannot do it properly; they can neither sing the *maḍayin* (with tapstick accompaniment) nor call out the names of the countries, not at all. Because the old men have died off. (Maḍulpu in Heath 1978, 232–48)

The *gagu* clan or *märipulu* ('mother's mother group' in Kriol and Wägilak languages respectively) to the Young Wägilak Group (YWG) was the Nḁandi-speaking Nunydjirripi clan, a Dhuwa group whose clan estates were north of the upper Rose River and south of Nḁilipidji. This important relationship will be discussed further in relation to ceremony and the *looking after* of repertoire. As Evan Wilfred makes clear, the Nunydjirripi were a key intermediary clan linking the Wägilak and other southern, non-Yolḁu groups, especially the Nungubuyu speakers — joining 'my mother's country and grandfather's country' (Normand 2009, 30). Donald Thompson writes, in 1935, of the wide ranging nomadic lifestyle and well connected relations between Ritharrḁu (and we can assume Wägilak) people and other clans with distinctly different languages. It is worth quoting him at length:

I have mentioned that both were Ritharrḁu men — members of a group that occupies a very large stretch of country in the interior, behind Blue Mud Bay. This language differs somewhat in vocabulary, but not in structure, from that of the Dhay'yi-speaking people of Blue Mud Bay, but they can understand one another and can converse in Ritharrḁu. These people are the most strongly nomadic of all the Arnhem Landers. Their territory lies in the region of the upper Walker River and extends northwards, inland from Blue Mud Bay, but I found members of this group quite at home, and still making themselves understood in their own language, in localities as far separated as the Roper River and the Crocodile Islands [Milingimbi]. Their language, therefore, is understood over a wider area than any other in the whole of this country. (Thomson [1935] 2010, 58)

The above sources suggest that the Wägilak people were historically engaged in cross-cultural exchanges and associations with different language groups, social structures and forms of ceremony outside of the Yolŋu cultural bloc, quite possibly for centuries.¹⁹ Benjamin Wilfred today speaks about his responsibilities for the repertoires of a number of these clans. He states that he is now the owner and teacher for the *manikay* of the (inland) Maḍarrpa, Nunydjirrpi, Wägilak, Ritharrŋu and Biḍiŋal people: a precedent to his intercultural engagement with jazz musicians from Melbourne, where Wägilak *manikay* continues to be a tradition realised in contexts of social and cultural diversity. Such collaboration also mirrors the constant process of change and adjustment to context, frequently written about with regard to Yolŋu painting: ‘When a new public association occurs between design and social group, it will soon be recast in the form of something that always was’ (Morphy 2005, 165). Yet even amid intercultural engagement and relationship, a sense of orthodox perpetuation always ensues within the Yolŋu hermeneutic.

Daniel Wilfred tells of his introduction to Wägilak *manikay* and how Nunydjirrpi (Ŋandi) and Nungubuyu songs were not only repertoires known and performed by the Wägilak, but were performed side by side, ‘mixed together’:

When my dad pass away, Sambo [Barabara] bin [has been, did; *Kriol*] come pick me up from Numbulwar and started teaching me more *manikay* [...] He bin know all the songs, from my father, who taught him [...] And I always listen and go every night and we make fire, we get a didj, clapping stick outside the fire, and I start to sing along with him. Start singing all the songs. He teach me Wägilak songs. He teach me my grandpa’s songs, Nunydjirrpi. He sing those Nungubuyu words, mixed together with Nunydjirrpi singing. I still got those words. Sing along. And now, when I’m here now, telling my kids now; you need to learn about these songs. (Daniel Wilfred 2011a)

Until about 1995, Wägilak people from all over Arnhem Land travelled frequently to Nilipidji for ceremony, where large gatherings brought everyone from Donydji, Numbulwar and Ngukurr together. Daniel and Benjamin Wilfred’s fathers, Popmi and

¹⁹ For a discussion of cultural influence and tradition which goes beyond the polarisation between the preservation of *cultural autonomy* and its oft-presumed antithesis *intercultural production*, see Morphy and Morphy (2012, 51).

Old Cookie, were brothers and often sung together. Led by their elder Sambo Barabara, this family also met with other Wägilak families for funerals at Gapuwiyak and Donydji.²⁰

Sambo (Djambu) Barabara (c. 1945–2005) and Andy Lukaman Peters (c. 1957–), two significant Wägilak elders and ceremonial leaders from Ngukurr, grew up as young adults in the bush around the 1950–1970s, travelling through the country, hunting and living in bark huts. Barabara settled at Ngukurr early 1980s, bringing ‘specific and valuable cultural knowledge to the Roper region [...] a different set of experiences and ritual knowledge to most of the Ngukurr artists’ who predominantly came from country south of the Roper river (Bowdler 2009, 57). After marrying Amy Jirwurlurr Johnson — whose mother was Njalakan and father Rembarrŋa — in the 1970s, Barabara spent time at Costello Outstation before settling in Ngukurr in the 1980s (Bowdler 2009, 70).²¹

I was born in the bush [around 1945], no doctors, no whitefellas. Mother carried me in a paperbark coolamon. No anything, just piccaninny. Goanna dreaming country, Stone Spear country, Nilipidgi [sic]. Stayed there and grew up. (Barabara in Bowdler 2009, 57)

From oral history interviews with elders from Ngukurr recorded for the National Library of Australia (with Aaron Corn; see interview listing in the bibliography), it is evident that older Wägilak and Ritharrŋu people in Ngukurr today were some of the last to trickle in from life on the land to town settlement. Many stories of extensive travel on foot — ‘foot falcon’ — between towns, outstations, river camps and cattle stations reveal that many of the Wägilak people were still living out bush until the 1970s. Most Ritharrŋu people settled north of the Wägilak estates at Donydji, whilst many Wägilak people, who had significant connections and marriage relations with clans around Ngukurr and Numbulwar, settled in these communities. Benjamin Wilfred

²⁰ Today, Benjamin calls Barabara *māri’mu* (father’s father); Daniel calls him *wāwa* (brother). David Wilfred, who is *djungayi* (ceremonial manager) for the Young Wägilak Group married Barabara’s daughter in Ngukurr.

²¹ Johnson’s hereditary estate was at Marrkalawa, a crossing of the Walker River used by those travelling south from Nilipidji.

grew up in Ngukurr, making frequent trips on foot around South Arnhem Land. In the 1980s, he helped to construct the road to Njilipidji and build the houses there:

BW: Yeah, he [Old Cookie, Benjamin's father] walked from Njilipidji to Donydji, Numbulwar. They bin walk before. Long way, you have to pass Walker River and then off to Numbulwar. Yeah. They walked with mum. When I bin small I walked with my dad and mum, from Njilipidji to Walker River, but if the water was still flooded at Marrkalawa [Walker River crossing] we have to stop there. And from that time I bin start to learn my knowledge from my father.

SC: When you walked from Njilipidji to Numbulwar, you must have passed through a lot of different language groups?

BW: Wägilak, Ritharrŋu, Maḍarrpa, further down, and then we go Nungubuyu.

SC: Did Old Cookie [Benjamin's father] speak Nungubuyu as well?

BW: Yeah. Little bit. He understood. And then we bin stay there [at Numbulwar]. And then we have to come back here [to Ngukurr].

(Benjamin Wilfred 2011b)

Prior to settling in Ngukurr in the 1970s, after the 'mission time,' Wägilak people were already engaged with non-Yolŋu clans through ceremony, travel, trade and residence in country outside of their traditional homelands. These dynamic relationships and responsibilities continue in the town of Ngukurr today, a home away from the Wägilak home at Njilipidji: 'When I go out to other places, I always think of Ngukurr. Because we all bin grow up here, even my brothers and sisters. And I miss my home' (Benjamin Wilfred 2011).

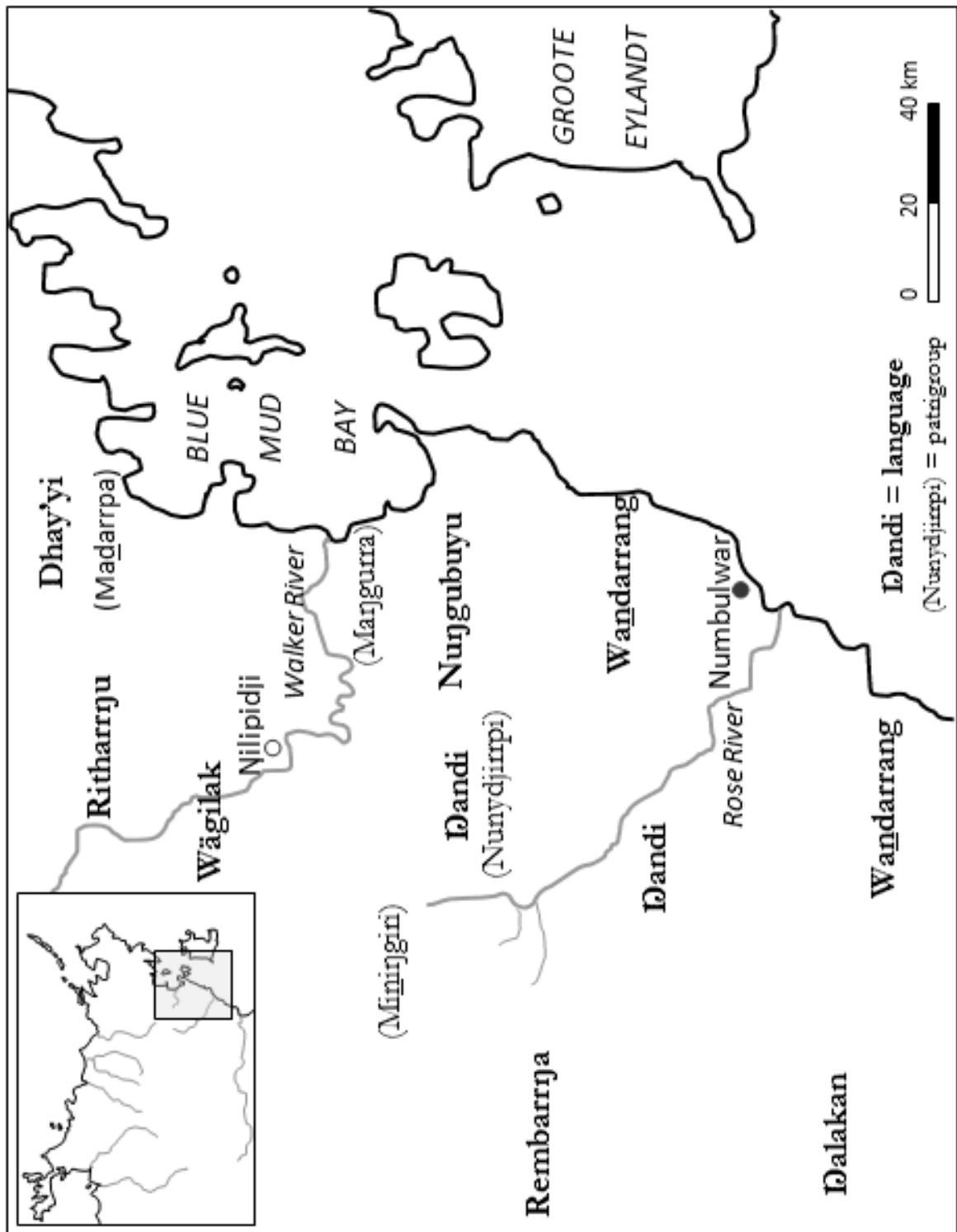


Fig. 2h Map showing language groups and a number of patrigroups in South East Arnhem Land

Full-time ceremonial practitioners

In Ngukurr today, the Wägilak clan are in constant demand at funerals, smoking ceremonies, circumcisions, building openings, entertainment events and festivals as practitioners of public *manikay* from Arnhem Land.²² The contexts in which they perform are diverse and are not limited to those with direct connections to Yolŋu culture: they perform their ancestral songs for all of the language groups in Ngukurr and beyond, including the Mara, Nandi, Nungubuyu, Anindilyakwa (Groote Eylandt), Marraŋu²³ and Murrungun²⁴ people. A sense of authority in singing these songs stems from their generational perpetuation through the father's line and an explicit assertion that the Wägilak today are of a remaining few from the south and inland areas of the Yolŋu region who have the knowledge and mandate to perform *legitimate* ceremony — especially for events such as funerals.²⁵ Importantly, the clans for which they perform (outside of Eastern Arnhem Land) are non-Yolŋu clans and so most performances of *manikay* already occur in a local intercultural setting.²⁶

Despite these diverse contemporary settings of performance, a sense of deep and explicit connection with the ceremonial authority of generations past is frequently expressed. Daniel Wilfred explains:

Only two songs in Ngukurr now: Wägilak, Ritharrŋu and Maḍarrpa. The clans that came here to Ngukurr, they got that ceremony [...] They come here and married here and stay here,

²² Daniel Wilfred often complains that funerals 'take too long — two days is all you need, like in Ngukurr' (pers. comm. 2012), and the Young Wägilak Group often become stuck with no transport home after participating in funerals hundreds of kilometres away from home. This phenomenon, where huge responsibility is placed 'on the shoulders of ritual experts' and has 'disrupted normal life to the extent that it had *become* normal life' for those experts, has been a change in Yolŋu society and mortuary ritual in recent decades, explored in detail by Frances and Howard Morphy (2012, 62).

²³ Marraŋu are a Dhuwal-speaking patrigroup.

²⁴ Maḅgurra are another 'bi-cultural' Yolŋu group that have many close ties with the Djapu clan.

²⁵ It seems that, amongst the non-Yolŋu speaking clans south of Arnhem Land, skin-section subdivisions of society are important for organising ceremony: Wägilak people in Ngukurr express ceremonial rights and responsibilities not only in terms of *bäpurru* (father's group) lineage but also by reference to skin group, especially Daniel and Benjamin's classification as Wamut.

²⁶ Heath makes another interesting observation: 'The Ritharngu are doing remarkably well in preserving their camp songs (*buḅgul*) and ritual life. Some of my own informants not only carry out their normal rituals, but are in great demand and frequently travel as far south as Elliot to perform rituals at the invitation of other Aboriginal groups' (Heath 1980, 3).

find kid [...] They don't know what we sing, they don't know the words [the clans in Ngukurr]. (Daniel Wilfred 2011a)

Wägilak elder Andy Peters also perpetuates a sense of polarisation between the Wägilak and other clans in Ngukurr today, affording a particular *ancestral* legitimacy to the practise of ceremony by Wägilak people:

SC: So the Wägilak people, they came into Ngukurr quite late didn't they?

AP: Mmm, quite late.

SC: Everyone else was already here...

AP: Mmhmm.

SC: Do you think that that's the reason you have still got lots of ceremony?

AP: Yeah.

SC: Everyone else forgot it in the early mission days?

AP: Mhmm. Already [forgotten]. I don't know about Ngukurr mob — they haven't got the authority from their old people. Like my group, they got authority from me and I got authority from my Grandpa and from my Dad.

(Peters 2011)

Arriving relatively late in Ngukurr in the 1970s, Wägilak people have maintained many of the important elements of ceremony, a complex web of associations and relationships that constitute ceremony as: connection to elders; connection to land and hereditary estates; continued practice of the Wägilak language; close relationship with ecology and the environment (Chapter Three and Four). All of these things contribute to a sense of polarisation with the clans in Ngukurr who arrived during mission times, increasing the Wägilak sense of cultural legitimacy in performing, and responsibility toward maintaining, ceremony. As I will show, *CRB* draws much of its cultural legitimacy directly through the original invitation and approval to perform *manikay*, given by elder Sambo Barabara before he passed away (Chapter Seven).

General musical activity in Ngukurr today consists mainly of: popular bands, a history beginning with the hugely popular and fondly remembered Yugul Band which formed in 1969 (Yugul Band 2003); discos on the basketball court, run by the sport and recreation arm of the Roper Gulf Shire; a women's choir at the Anglican church;

children's action songs with pre-recorded Christian music at the outdoor church stage; traditional *bungul* and *manikay* at festivals, smokings, funerals and circumcisions.

Regional ceremonies still occur and there is participation in these from all clans within the town — although the music and dance from these ceremonies cannot be used in public events. For example, the Yabaduruwa²⁷ ceremony still occurs, occasionally, at a site down near the Roper River. The Gunapipi²⁸ ceremony occurs at locations such as Numbulwar and Bulmun, to which Ngukurr residents travel to participate. Wägilak people now have responsibilities in these ceremonies which have had, historically, little to do with the Yolŋu *maḏayin* religion. Daniel Wilfred's marriage to a Mara woman has given him direct responsibilities in the Yabaduruwa, which his father-in-law jointly organises. Wägilak youth are also sent north into West Arnhem Land to participate in Gunapipi ceremonies. Yet there is a separation between these ceremonies and popular musical activity in Ngukurr. Ceremonial practice seems to continue in a stream parallel to popular music forms and performance, with few intersections between the two.

Corn writes on the popular music of Arnhem Land (2001, 2002, 2010a, 2011), demonstrating how, despite the adoption of new media and technologies of music production, music is still largely rooted in traditional themes, constructions and epistemologies — most prominently in North East Arnhem Land where songs that 'specifically incorporate and promote ancestrally-given themes, concepts and identities accounted for more than half of this repertoire' (Corn 2002, 75). It is difficult to locate such numerous parallels between popular music forms and traditional ceremonial practices in the music of bands from Ngukurr, such as The Yugul Band, T-Lynx, Broken English, The Lonely Boys, especially within musical structures (see Corn 2001, 26). In battle-of-the-bands competitions held in Ngukurr (2010, 2011), it was largely the bands from outside Ngukurr, from places such as Numbulwar, that made

²⁷ A three month long Yabaduruwa ceremony occurred in mid 2011 at the Roper River. It is still considered a 'hard' and very strict ceremony.

²⁸ Over the past century, the Gunapipi ceremony has, by many accounts, been slowly expanding its reach and influence into Western Arnhem Land and across the southern borders of Arnhem Land at places like Ngukurr and Numbulwar. Garde contributes to this discussion in his reference to Gunapipi's arrival at Oenpelli in the 1950s (Garde 2007, 37).

overt connections to ceremonial traditions in their dance, costume and inclusion of instruments such as the *yidaki* (didjeridu) and *bilma* (clapsticks).

The current local bands from Ngukurr such as the Big River Band, the Lonely Eyes Band and The Lonely Boys, play standard rock and reggae music featuring narratives concerning love, life experiences, road and alcohol safety — although there is still some ceremonially oriented content. For example, The Lonely Boys occasionally begin their songs with the inclusion of a short *manikay* item as introduction, at the insistence of Benjamin Wilfred (who had also played bass guitar in The Yugul Band). Their hit song, popular with hundreds of screaming youths every time I heard them play between 2010 and 2012, was *Baby come back!* Even though this song began with a *manikay* item, there was never any further *conversation* with the *manikay* tradition once the electric guitars and drums had started.

While there is little blending of contemporary rock and *manikay* traditions in Ngukurr, the most common ancestral idioms can be found in the sentimental longing for country, characteristic of many popular songs. During 2010, I worked with The Lonely Eyes Band for a period, helping them to record a CD. Of the six songs performed, the lyrics of five were recollections and descriptions of a particular family's country and kin; the sixth was a song about Berrimah Jail in Darwin. Justin Nunggarrgalug sang about his *gagu's* country (mother's mother) at Marrkalawa and the lyrics of the chorus were: 'My grandmother passed away; the place was lonely. Ohh-ahh, Marrkalawa; *gagu* country' (Nunggarrgalug 2010). Other songs were about Bickerton Island and Nungubuyu country.

Interestingly, each musician switched roles between different songs, from keyboard to vocals to lead guitar — much like the way a *manikay* singer is quite competent leading a song or playing *yidaki* (didjeridu), although these roles are more rigidly defined in *manikay*: 'When doing [pop] songs, there is no *djungayi* [ceremonial manager]. You can just sing about your homeland' (Nunggarrgalug 2010). While these observations are significant — traditional clan songs, as I will show, are expressions relating directly to hereditary estates and sentiments about country. *Manikay* performance in Ngukurr

exists side-by-side with popular and mainstream traditions, performed in different contexts with little cross-fertilisation of musical form.²⁹

In the 1980s, the Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) was important in exposing Ngukurr residents to rapidly changing cultural influences from mainstream Australia via radio and television. The previous few decades were also characterised by growing access to new technologies, which changed the way music was performed, heard and conceived:

For many young people in Ngukurr, the late 1960s and early 1970s were defined by their introduction to commercially-recorded music, electric guitars, the music and dance styles of rock 'n' roll [...] The late 1980s saw developments in telecommunications as Ngukurr was provided with its first telephone, and it became possible for the community to receive relayed radio and television signals under the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Community Scheme (BRACS). Through the 1990s, televisions and home videos, audio cassettes and discs, and video-game consoles all became part of the cultural milieu in which Ngukurr's young were raised. (Corn 2001, 3)

The opening up of Ngukurr to mainstream popular cultural productions was accompanied by an increased exposure to new technologies, something embraced by practitioners of ceremonial repertoires. In the 1980s, Sambo Barabara created cassette tapes of his *manikay* singing and sent these to young relatives who were learning ceremony outside of Ngukurr. Andy Peters was singing *manikay* alongside Barabara in Ngukurr at that time: 'Me and Barabara, we were singing into that cassette, and send them to Daniel [Wilfred]. And then he get that idea from that cassette. And then I bin want all the young people to come and help me sing' (Andy Peters 2011).

Daniel Wilfred recalls receiving the tapes with excitement, working hard to develop his singing skills in the hope that he would sing with his elder relatives one day: 'My big

²⁹ This is quite a polarisation when compared with North Arnhem Land, as made clear by Corn's research: 'During the period of my fieldwork, popular bands from Arnhem Land boasted a growing collective repertoire of more than 300 original songs [...] songs that specifically incorporate and promote ancestrally-given themes, concepts and identities accounted for more than half of this repertoire with their highest concentration in the oeuvres of popular bands from northeast Arnhem Land' (Corn 2002, 75).

brother used to stay in Ngukurr, Sambo. When I grow up, maybe ten [years old], he had to record my cassette, send it down to Numbulwar. I learnt about it [*manikay*] from cassette too' (Daniel Wilfred 2011a). Here, technology was used as a means for elders to retain connection with the dispersed Wägilak population — constantly shifting between towns and outstations — and to teach young boys like Daniel Wilfred the traditional *manikay* repertoire:

Sambo bin doing recording at Ngukurr, and he sent that cassette for me in Numbulwar; 'and this is for you, to learn more.' And my mum pick it up, take it back to Njilipidji. We move from Njilipidji, we stay at Walker River, and my mum bring it: 'This your big brother, do that recording for you.' 'Well, mum, can I listen?' And my mum bought a small tape recorder, and my mum give me. I listened; I didn't stop listening, you know. And I tell my mum, 'When you go to Numbulwar, get me a headphone tape.' And my mum got that headphone tape and bring it to me. When we go fishing, driving with car, and I was still listening in the car. That's how I bin learn about [*manikay*].' (Daniel Wilfred 2011a)

Daniel and Benjamin Wilfred spent much of their childhood at Njilipidji, living at the outstation built by the Wägilak clan (Fig. 2i). The construction of permanent buildings at Njilipidji in the 1980s occurred soon after the growth of the Yolŋu homeland movement in Arnhem Land, which had spawned in Yirrkala in the early 1970s, largely 'precipitated by the social trauma that followed the building of the mining town and the introduction of alcohol to the area [Gove peninsula]' (F. Morphy 2008, 120).³⁰ Further, this Yolŋu driven movement formed residences on ancestral clan lands, where connections to law and country could be better maintained, where custodianship might be exercised. Many homelands have been culturally successful, becoming '[...] bastions of Yolngu identity, where people have the power to filter the influences of the outside world' (Kerins 2010, 121).

³⁰ Frances Morphy points to the complexity of this social movement: the establishment of outstations at Gapuwiyak, Galiwin'ku 'predated the exodus from Yirrkala' (pers. comm. 2013). The Donydji outstation, where many Wägilak settled, was built by Ritharrŋu and Wägilak families in 1968 (McKenzie 1983, 5). It seems that inland groups like the Wägilak never settled in larger townships like Yirrkala in large numbers (although some Wägilak live in Yirrkala today).

But it was not until 1983 that Wägilak elder Diltjima expressed his desire to establish a settlement at Njilipidji, 'to keep an eye on the country' (McKenzie 1983, 8).³¹ Not so much an exodus from Yirrkala, Wägilak people — who had never really settled in any towns in large numbers — desired to make more frequent visits to Njilipidji, travelling from smaller communities dotted through South East Arnhem Land such as Donydji and Numbulwar. Although most Wägilak people today desire to spend at least a part of every year at Njilipidji, one of the main difficulties remains access to a reliable vehicle for transport.

Importantly, the growth of access to technology in the region, detailed above, allowed those elders who had settled in Ngukurr to remain connected to the younger generations growing up some distance away or staying at Njilipidji. Further, elders such as Barabara and Peters continued to travel widely to participate in ceremony and to visit their hereditary estates. The new marriage connections with non-Yolŋu clans ultimately pulled Wägilak people back to Ngukurr but also provided important connections and emerging obligations for the performance of important rites such as mortuary rituals, especially for the clans residing in Ngukurr who were no longer active practitioners of traditional ceremony. These connections are also at the heart of Wägilak involvement in ceremonies for Ritharrŋu, Mara, Njandi, Nungubuyu and Marranŋu people on a weekly basis, and participation in regional ceremonies a few times every year. Andy Peters recalls the early days of Wägilak settlement at Ngukurr, again reasserting the direct connection of Wägilak ceremony today with that performed by elders past:

AP: [In Ngukurr, we were] smoking for everyone, smoking all the women and girls and boys [smoking ceremony].

SC: So it was the same then [as now], in the 1970s, with the Wägilak doing all the smoking and ceremonies in Ngukurr.

AP: Yeah, all the time. When that old people bin pass away, we still got that knowledge. Havn't got that book and pen, nothing. Have it in the knowledge. Not like that

³¹ There was no outstation at Njilipidji at the time of McKenzie's research trip there in 1983. At the end of the film he made of the journey, Wägilak elder Diltjima expresses his desire to establish a settlement at Njilipidji.

computer [...] I was listening to those old people: taping them, in my mind. Taping them, where their song came from, from top or from bottom. Every time when they go singing I'll be there, watching them. How the people singing, how the people there smoking. Where they start off from, start that *bungul* [ceremony].

(Peters 2011)

The YWG is presently, and have been historically, engaged with new technologies, new contexts of performance and intercultural situations of ceremonial engagement (Fig. 2j). As late arrivals at Ngukurr, after 'mission times,' Wägilak people have retained ceremonial and cultural practices from outside the region. Their family relations extend outwards to include non-Yolŋu people, bringing expanded ceremonial obligations especially with the Mara and Nungubuyu people.

While there are multiple forms of cultural expression in Ngukurr today, such as the prolific and popular rock bands, these forms of musical expression are not regarded by the YWG as highly as the generationally perpetuated *manikay* and *bungul* traditions persisting within Yolŋu families. While Wägilak families engage with and enjoy bands such as the Lonely Boys, such music is considered secondary to ceremonial practice that is underpinned by ancestral connection and laws of country and kin.

Performances of *manikay* in Ngukurr and surrounding communities happen within dynamic contexts where different cultures, technologies and traditions come together. Even though Wägilak *manikay* is as creatively contemporary as anything else in Ngukurr — as this thesis will show — the Wägilak performers draw a sense of strength and purpose from the polarisation with more popular, mainstream cultures. In all of its contemporary manifestations, including the new technologies and relationships of the AAO and CRB, *manikay* remains an ever legitimate expression of connection to land, history, language, ceremony and ancestral law.



Fig. 2i Njilipidji outstation, built in the early 1980s. 29.8.2010



Fig. 2j Daniel Wilfred (front) plays around with a digital 8-track 'headphone tape' in the Ngukurr Arts Centre; David Wilfred (rear). 9.7.2011 (Image: Sidha Pandian)

Chapter three

Yolŋu hermeneutics: Piecing together the text

Most of the choir and furniture of heaven and earth are regarded by the Aborigines as a vast sign-system. Anyone who, understandingly, has moved in the Australian bush with Aboriginal associates becomes aware of the fact. He moves, not in a landscape, but in a humanized realm saturated with significations. Here 'something happened,' there 'something portends.' (Stanner 1965, 227)

The *Dreamtime* is not simply a designation of historical events with great religious significance, a creative period delineated in the thought of persons or in time.¹ It is something directly experienced as it is encountered in the present; an encounter between a life and its very existential animation as a life within history, society, ecology, body and knowledge. The dreamtime *is* animation.

It was a *there and then* but is also a *here and now* — of the past but also continually efficacious in the present. It is both connection to ancestral precedent and the contemporary embodiment of ancestral presence. It is connection to land, kin, between the young and old and between the past and the future. Ongoing ancestral presence is known tangibly like a text, interpreted and understood discursively by corporeal, situated and conversant beings. In looking out to the world, this text is read onto all existence.

To perform *manikay* is to read this ancestral text (see Appendix Two for definitions). Carried through performance, the ancestral text articulates a narrative — for the past, for the present and for the future — handed down through the generations and underpinned by a conservative imperative to transmit and retain. For Yolŋu, the

¹ The *Dreamtime* was originally a translation of the Aranda word *alcheringa*, made by Spencer and Gillen in 1896 (Stanner 2009 [1953], 57). While not specifically Yolŋu, the *Dreamtime* is a common expression used by Indigenous and non-indigenous people across the country. The concept suggests a 'sacred, heroic time long ago when man and nature came to be as they are' (Ibid. 57). Yet the *Dreamtime* is not fixed 'in time: it was, and is, everywhen' (Ibid. 58). Corn suggests that a Yolŋu equivalent is perhaps *madayin* (sacred natural beauty), something eternally present through time and giving substance to every possible variety and natural manifestation (see Corn 2008, 5; 2010a, 85).

performance of *manikay* is an encounter with tradition that holds the present to account through perennial human questions of death, existence and identity. It is existential in that it invokes response and action from the current generation in whatever life situation they find themselves.

This chapter explores how a *manikay* singer today might sing ‘with the voice’ of the Wägilak ancestor Djuwalpada — how performance gives voice and substance to an underpinning reality. I suggest how the Yolŋu hermeneutic might allow one to dance a painting, paint a song, sing a place into being, or how country might be a person. I play with words, with mere terminology, to try and conceptualise something of the Yolŋu world, its being in time and the place of *manikay* in it. Of course, I cannot objectively prove what my words are pointing towards, as Corn has also implied (2010). *Manikay* also portends, poetically, and as Stanner suggests, carries a ‘patent truth about the universe that no one in his right mind would have thought of trying to bring to the bar of proof’ (Stanner 1976, 19).

Metonymic equivalence is a term useful in beginning to grasp after the Yolŋu hermeneutic.² Use of the term, while not terribly poetic, accounts for an attribute of Yolŋu narratives in which there is the *change-of-a-name*, where one entity directly refers to another. A common example of the change of a name is the signification of *law* as *honey*. This is not merely the change of a sign, but the equation of that tangible thing as co-substantial with the signified: honey *is* law. Metonymy is ‘not merely a referential device; it also serves the function of providing understanding’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 36).

In referring to this linguistic and conceptual device, I prefer to use the term *metonymy* over *metaphor*, for in singing *manikay* there is also a sense of direct substitution involved in the change from an everyday voice to the singing voice of the ancestor Djuwalpada. This is a metonymic substitution with ‘direct physical or causal

² Metonym grounds language and concepts in experience, and ‘symbolic metonymies are critical links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterise religions and cultures.’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1990, 40). They are also an integral part of the ‘ordinary, everyday way we think and act as well as talk’ (Ibid. 37).

associations' and not an allusion as the term metaphor would imply.³ The singer's voice is not just an imitated voice, nor a suggestive voice, but *the* voice of Djuwalpada. This is poetic truth concealing a depth of meaning; authority beyond the justification of immediate understanding; linguistic expression in which signs 'are not things, but concern things' (Ricoeur 2006, 12). In Wägilak song, it is the tangible encounter with the ancestral text — with the present voice of Djuwalpada — that engages an individual with concepts beyond the mere structures of language, music and ecological form:

When we were little, we went down to the river [at Njilidji], and we sing this song, Wata [Wind]. And this wind was blowing. And then we heard a bird coming towards us. The bird called like this: *ki-ol ki-ol, ki-ol ki-ol*. And we stop for a little while and listen, and he's still coming, that bird. And we have to run back home [scared]! When we were kids. And when we go up in the hill, Justin [Nunggarrgalug] had to run, get my shirt pulling me back, 'don't run, listen this bird.' And we went back there to sit and start singing again, the wind [song].
(Daniel Wilfred 2011a)

The *manikay* tradition is not an object from history transported into contemporary contexts, like a stone artefact carried through time in the cradle of a museum display. The Young Wägilak Group's performance of *manikay* song with the Australian Art Orchestra is not an exercise in postmodern juxtaposition or pastiche, for the songs are not at all removed from the pervasive, ancestral voice, even in the concert hall. Performance of *manikay* today is the articulation of a particular narrative, the realisation of a facet of the ancestral text that addresses the listener and performer, giving voice to perennial existential observations.

Following these opening remarks, I begin with an exploration of what a Yolŋu hermeneutic might be, in order to come to a better understanding of the way *manikay* is conceived as tradition living through contemporary performance. I consider processes of exegesis and how a Yolŋu frame of interpretation shapes and contains understanding of ancestral narratives. A definition of the *ancestral text* continues to

³ Other common designations of this attribute in the literature include *consubstantiation*, *trope* and *intangible* (see Chapter Ten).

build, understood as a 'core mnemonic that can generate a series of alternative images' (H. Morphy 2008, 78), replicated in song as figurative narrative and structure that transpires ever new iterations and creative realisations.

The revealed, tangible text

The country is the songs; country got the songs. And even the rivers got the songs. Dogs, no matter what animal, got songs. Songs coming out from your land and from your walk. Songs coming out from your ground. Songs coming out from water, and from the ground, and from the spirit. No matter where, songs can come out. Culture really strong. So you have to hold your culture strong like me. (Benjamin Wilfred 2010)

Yolŋu song and dance is understood as an emanation of the ancestral text. In all of its realisations, *manikay* is constituted by the ancestral text: an 'eternal blueprint' (Corn 2008) reified in the traces left by ancestors in the land,⁴ animals, natural phenomena, *raŋga* (sacred objects representing ancestral beings or their paraphernalia)⁵ and *maḍayin* (corpus of ritual knowledge, sacra).⁶ This blueprint extends to govern the relations between people through *gurrutu* (kinship) proprieties and responsibilities, custodianship of the land by *wäŋa-waṯaŋu* (country-holders), and *rom* (law and correct practice). Understanding of song, dance and human relations extends outwards from these central tenets, these *luku* or 'footprints' of the progenitorial *waŋarr* (ancestral beings). All understanding and human action should look to these footprints as precedent to mirror and genesis to reconnect.

Lyrics to the successful Yolŋu band Yothu Yindi's song *Tribal Voice* (1991), allude to an active presence and connection to one's 'tribal voice,' this ancestral text or blueprint for law, kinship, country and ceremony:

⁴ Morphy and Morphy suggest that 'perhaps it is simply that land has greater stability and outlasts a human lifespan. Yolŋu represent the relationships between people as following the ancestral pattern manifest in the landscape (2006, 69).

⁵ Berndt writes of *raŋga*: they are 'the fundamental linkage between man and the Creative Beings in a spiritual sense, expressing the basic notion of the interdependence of the past, present and future' (2004, 64).

⁶ Wägilak *maḍayin* singing is known as *dalkarra* (Benjamin Wilfred 2012).

Verse 2: Well inside my mind there's a tribal voice

And it's speaking to me everyday

And all I have to do is to make a choice

'Cause I know there is no other way

[...]

You'd better listen to your Gumatj voice

You'd better listen to your Rirratjinu voice

You'd better listen to your Wangurri voice

You'd better listen to your Djapu' voice

(Yothu Yindi 1991)

Raymattja Marika-Munungiritj explains a similar view:

The part of a Yolngu education described as *lundu-nhāma* means identifying the pattern and the style of the past. This refers particularly to our forbears, our ancestors, but also to the elders of the present day. First we must recognize what has gone before and know exactly how it fits in with the whole way of meaning which makes Yolngu life — *dhin'thun*.

(Marika and Christie 1995, 61)

Life as a following of the *right way* is living in response to, and awareness of, the ancestral text. The term *text* carries with it associations of a degree of permanency, of rigidity or substance which can become the basis for further reflexive and constructive transactions of meaning. *Text* is both orthodox through its reification, and vital in its interpretation and iteration. My use of the term does not suppose exclusive province to the written word, from pen or typewriter — technologies of symbols production — but considers text as any referential use of symbol in the transaction of meaning, for ultimately the *ancestral text* imparts direction, meaning and significance. Where there is narrative, where interpretation has potential to produce meaning, there is text.

Through this framework, I consider the excess of signification emanating from the *luku* (footprints) of the *wanarr* (progenitorial ancestors) to be a text read by Yolngu people. As new interpretations or manifestations of this ancestral text come to light through

progressive knowledge and revelation, these interpretations in turn effect projections of further understanding.

In Yolŋu hermeneutics, as in any understanding (as Chapter Six will show), the parts shape the whole, and the whole the parts (Gadamer 2006, 267). Yolŋu knowledge of ceremonial significations is strongly conditioned by an individual's location within the gamut of rights to restricted and unrestricted interpretations. The public *manikay* tradition, open to all, is in essence a prolegomenon portending to deeper meanings.

This hermeneutic system of revelation is expressed in the Wägilak song Guku (Honey), which, on one level, imagines the flight of the bee toward the honey in its hive — a movement from the outside to an essential centre (see Chapter Four). Another illustration of this process of revelation is seen in the construction of a *yidaki* (didgeridu). The peeling off of the bark to reveal the internal and essential *bones* turns the mundane eucalyptus log into one of ceremonial importance: 'In reaching the white inside, the didgeridu becomes part of the Law, part of the sacred identity of the land' (Magowan 1998, 195). Public iteration in song and dance not only emanates from the essential ancestral text but portends towards it.

The whole process of life in Yolngu terms can be seen as one movement from the 'outside' (the mundane and unrestricted) to the 'inside' (the sacred and restricted). As a person follows along this continuum, he moves from a position where meanings are defined for him to one in which he in turn influences the way in which things are presented to others; he moves to a position of potential creativity (H. Morphy 2005, 161).

The ancestral activity of progenitorial *wanjarr* (creative beings) formed the land, seas, ecological movements and people, leaving behind tangible traces of their work imbued with their presence. From a Yolŋu point of view, 'the layer of sacred geography is ontologically prior and underpins all else' (F. Morphy 2010, 368). The world of the present is a reflection of these metaphysical activities (Keen 1994, 103).

In the Yolngu ontology, the originary ancestors moved across the country singing, dancing, talking, crying, hunting, cooking — doing everything human — and leaving behind the knowable features of the world and its people with their distinctive languages, histories, totems, and truths in place. Thus the world we see and know contains — in fact it *is* — the

visible, identifiable traces of this work, the ongoing translation from idea/action to reality/place. (Verran and Christie 2007, 219)

Indeed Yolngu metaphors of relationship with the past all emphasize following the ancestral beings, fitting into pre-existing footprints (*djalkiri, luku*) visible in the landscape. It is part of a process that makes human relationships stable at the centre. (Morphy and Morphy 2006, 69)

When explaining these traces in the land and society, Yolngu speak with what I term literal *metonymic equivalence*. Daniel Wilfred will point to the hills in the distance and say, ‘See where that lightening struck? That *is* the snake.’ For Yolngu, ‘such tropes are actually evidence of consubstantiation,’ and continual ancestral presence is an observable fact. This is expressed through a language of equivalence: the *birrkpirrk* (lap-winged plover) *is* the voice of Djuwalpada. The sandbank in the coastal shallows *is* the body of the ancestral shark, *Bulmanydji* (Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 91). The boulders in the ground at Njilipidji *are* the fat of a kidney in the earth; these boulders are also pregnant as they give birth to *nambi* children (stone spear-tips), which are in turn fashioned into a finished *lira* (tooth), also known as penetrating *gurrka* (penis) spear tips (Jones and White 1981).⁷

Magowan’s discussion of song in North East Arnhem Land explores aspects of this continued and embedded ancestral presence through the language of *sentience of place* (2007). Despite the ultimate limitations of such terms, I will continue to use *metonymic equivalence* to refer to the phenomenon discussed here.⁸ This term seems more connected, the signifier in metonymic expression seeming to be a direct transposition of the essence of the signified (for example, the *leg* of the chair), rather than the layered literal/non-literal two-tier representation of a metaphor (this thesis *is* a breeze). As Howard Morphy states, ‘the use of *representation* would suggest a gap

⁷ Corn makes a similar, multi-layered exploration of Yolngu understanding of the body (2008).

⁸ Frances Morphy suggests that the Yolngu sense of ancestral presence goes beyond any ‘figure of speech’ such as *metonym* (pers. comm. 2011). My use of the term describes the way in which language is necessarily used to contain complexities of signification and co-substantial realities within expression.

between signifier and signified that is not consistent with Yolngu ontology' (H. Morphy 1991, 189).⁹

Metonymic equivalence in expression allows a complex of components to form the orthodox, revealed substance of a text while progressive revelation of further significant associations and meanings build onto mundane components — even if these mundane, public iterations are equivalent and integral parts of the whole. At the physical, everyday level, the long-nosed bee collects pollen and produces honey. This is a necessary, literal foundation for additional meanings. Further revelation produces interpretations suggesting that the bee's nose *is* phallic; another layer again and the honey produced by the bee comes to signify knowledge itself. The mundane bee is a public iteration necessary to carry more essential meanings. The layering of meaning onto mundane images is an assumed and readily enacted process of interpretation undertaken by Yolngu, just as visual designs are indigenously understood as possessing multiple, simultaneous meanings: the shimmering of cross-hatching in a painting, for example, can be simultaneously fire, heat, glimmering water or honey (H. Morphy 2008, 94; see also H. Morphy 1989, 1991, 2005; Caruana 2010).

Williams offers a detailed explanation of this layering of knowledge with the example of a mosquito ancestral being (1986, 23–24): 'A person may simply indicate a significant feature of an act, or an object, and that may be sufficient in itself to convey much more information: the agent, if it is an act, the manner or stage of its use if it is an object, and its location' (Ibid. 23). I refer to this layering as an *excess of signification*, inherently orthodox because of the stability of the root image, tangibly embedded in the land, nature and people (see Chapter Ten).

This root image — the tangible text inscribed in creation — is a direct reflection of the ancestral: the natural world is, integrally, not a refined schematic model, but a rendering that contains an excess of possible complexity and aspect within its unity. Existence is a heterophonic *manikay* song, where each voice — with its own unique

⁹ Lakoff and Johnson argue that we should not understand metaphors as poetical or rhetorical embellishments. 'Ontological metaphors' in particular, 'are so natural and so pervasive in our thought that they are usually taken as self evident, direct descriptions of mental phenomena' (1980, 28).

inflections, intricacies and contours — combines with all of the others, offering an equivalent but distinct realisation of the underpinning text.¹⁰ In its layered complexity, everything in the Yolŋu ceremonial, social and natural world is interrelated and portends to the presence and precedent of an eternal ancestral blueprint.

Revelation

Within this hermeneutical system are key components of secrecy and progressive revelation, a hierarchy of power and knowledge built upon stages of access to knowledge. Keen (1994) outlines Yolŋu age-gender categories, a progression through life and maturity where knowledge is governed by status, and in which the leaders of sibling groups are the first-born males: 'Categories of females tended to relate to the reproductive cycle, while those of males related to initiatory status and age' (Keen 1994, 92). The categories for males can be summarised: *gaḍaku* (uncircumcised male); *gurrmul* (bachelor and circumcised male); *wurrwiliny* (mature man, in thirties and forties); *yindi yolŋu* or *ŋalapalmirr(i)* (big man, grey-haired man) and *liya-ŋarra'mirr(i)* (learned and wise with restricted knowledge) (Ibid. 92). Frances Morphy (pers. comm. 2013) adds that *ŋalapalmirr(i)* also includes grey-haired women; grey hair connotes wisdom, which is not gender specific.

Pedagogical sequence also mirrors the Yolŋu hermeneutic of revelation. Age and progression through the continuum of knowledge relates directly to distinctions between public and secret *maḍayin* (sacra): *garma* (public), *dhuni'* (peri-restricted) and *ŋarra'* (secret-sacred) (Corn with Gumbula 2007). These categories govern access to esoteric knowledge, sacred manifestations and interpretations of the ancestral text. The more knowledgeable an individual becomes, the more layers of meaning they can read into tangible phenomena, social structure and cultural expressions. The Yolŋu

¹⁰ Corn and Gumbula introduced this concept into Australian ethnomusicology using an illustration of variance among natural forms (2007, 116). The above paragraph suggests that the *essential text* of a Stringybark tree contains within itself all possible variations; an individual living tree being only one possible iteration of this blueprint.

world is one 'in which people learn deeper meanings as they pass through life' (H. Morphy 2008, 109).

Knowledge of deeper significations is shrouded by secrecy and preserved by wise elders who ultimately regulate its transferral, and the most restricted (*ḡarra'*) interpretations held by senior men are the *ḡaraka* (bones) of a clan.¹¹ 'Only shortly before old men [and women] know they are going to die will they reveal to their successors the full extent of the meanings of what they have stored and guarded in their memories' (Williams 1986, 24). Likewise, only as Sambo Barabara was nearing death did he pass over to Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred the authority to continue to perform Wāgilak *manikay*: 'Sambo come in my dream and give me that clapping stick' (Benjamin Wilfred 2010a). As further meanings are revealed, understanding is reformed in light of revelation.

A central locus of the complex of ancestral metonyms is the human body, a tangible trace expressing the ancestral text's most fundamental tenets (see Keen 1995; Tamisari 1998; Corn 2008; F. Morphy 2008). Like the collectively functioning yet individual parts of a body, these metonymic parts come together to express a greater ancestral reality beyond constituent arms, legs and elbows. The human body, as manifestation of the ancestral text, is present through an individual's entire life and progression through levels of initiation and the acquisition of knowledge.

The body provides a central constellation of tropes in the constitution of country and group. Yolḡu model the *wangarr* ancestors on the person as well as on other species and entities; the ancestors are embodied or objectified in land, waters, and sky. These domains consist in part of such substances of the ancestors as their fat, flesh, blood or faeces. (Keen 1995, 509)

The body becomes a tangible manifestation of tradition, of ancestral agency and origin. It is also an individual's unique *mode* of existential constitution. Ancestral

¹¹ Those who *hold knowledge* are also leaders in decision making. A leader's authority is deferred to, their decisions respected, because they would not hold their status unless they were worthy of it and proven to be effective leaders (Williams 1986, 99–100).

presence is sustained in the bodies of Yolŋu people who are more than just collections of referential symbols, or ears, eyes, hands and feet. In the body, as in the land, ancestral presence is seen, felt and tangibly known in its corporeal embodiment and existential animation. Through the body, the ancestral echo finds a voice.

An important stage in the life of Yolŋu male is the rite of *dhapi* (male circumcision); a rite ‘which marked the divergence of a boy’s life from that of a girl, and the beginning of his admission into men’s secret religious knowledge’ (Keen 1994, 172). Albert Djiwada suggests initiation is ‘just like grade one when you go to school, *dhapi* is first step, lesson for how to behave’ (Lendon and Caruana 1997, 72).¹² Initiation into this covenant of male esoteric knowledge leaves a tangible record on a boy, carried for the rest of his life. Here, the realisation of ancestral law is constituted through ceremonial performance: the essence of the climactic moment of an initiation ceremony accompanied by *bilma* (clapping sticks) playing a rapid rhythmic mode accompanies other physical sensations of pain and the feeling of warm blood — a reality most tangibly present.¹³

Through circumcision, a body is brought into the active realisation of the ancestral text, a corporeal following through life. The flesh is cut, written or marked by the ancestral text. Such corporeal tangibility, significant to the *manikay* tradition, defies the terminology of discourses concerned with *intangible* heritage (Kearney 2009; Seeger 2009; Smith 2006, 2009). As well as being a permanent record of the separate roles and responsibilities of a male in society, Yolŋu circumcision is a covenant or summons to maintain ancestral law and knowledge, coupled with a necessary increase in autonomy and responsibility; an imperative to realise the ancestral text in the contemporary present and to read the ancestral text in the tangible, living world. The performance of *manikay* song, as we will see, sustains this covenant.

¹² Andy Peters still performs a dozen-or-so circumcisions each year in Ngukurr. For the Wägilak, the liturgical set of *manikay* beginning with the song Dhanjarra (White flower) is used for *dhapi* (see Chapter Four).

¹³ Tamisari elaborates on the climaxes of ceremony: ‘Transformations occur during these [climactic] phases: the deceased body becomes his or her ancestral being, his or her bone-soul [*birrimbirr*] is finally dispatched to its place of origin [...]’ (Tamisari 2005, 52). The climactic song items where law is given are known *yindi manikay* (big songs), in contrast to *wana manikay* (lit. arm song) (Ibid.).

I here republish the words of Joe Neparrŋa Gumbula, from a 2001 lecture on the Garma Festival. This was given at the University of Melbourne as part of Aaron Corn and Marcia Langton's Yolŋu studies course (see Corn 2009, 2012). The passage below alludes to the complexity of the Yolŋu web of knowledge and law, a blueprint expressed in the tangible form of the human body. Interpretation and understanding occurs within the embedded excess of significations and transferral of knowledge that begins from these *luku* 'footprints.'

In life, I am Neparrŋa Gumbula, but in death, I am already named by *waŋarr* (ancestral progenitors). My feet and legs are those of the *wurrpan* (emu). My knees are fruit from the *narrani* (native apple) tree. My front is that of the *mokuy* (ghost) hunter, Muyaŋana. My back is the *djalumbu* (hollow log coffin). My heart beats as *wurrpan*'s (emu) and my stomach, like his, is *butulak* (yellow). My spine is the *waymamba* (pathway) worn in the scrub by the *guwak* (koel cuckoo). My mouth is the entrance to the beehive. My nose is beeswax. My eyes are nuts from the *warraga* (cycad palm). My hairs are the fine roots of the *mayku* (paperbark tree) and the *wulu* (white foam) that they produce in the swamp at Djiliwirri. My head and my knowledge are *guku* (honey) from the *waŋarr Birrkuda* (Short-Nosed Bee). In death, my name is no longer Neparrŋa. It is Birrkuda. (Gumbula in Corn 2008, 1)

Understanding through a Yolŋu frame of hermeneutics is an emergence; it is a process of the progressive revelation of meanings. From central, tangible tenets read from the body — the emu, the apple tree or the honey — emerge progressively brilliant interpretations, pointing to meanings beyond the mere reification of symbols and signifiers. There is always progression: from dull to brilliant (H. Morphy 1998), raw to cooked (Corn pers. comm. 2010), *garma* (public) to *ŋarra* (secret), *manikay* to *madayin*, singing to deep name elicitation. Revelation sequentially uncovers the underlying beauty of existence which is inscribed in creation but largely hidden to those without the requisite knowledge, all the time portending to even greater meanings.

Like a figurative painting with no infill, *manikay* song is just an outline, a public expression, a mundane image. The basic form is there but it has yet to be filled with brilliance, with the elicitation of the deep names of a clan and the kinaesthetic

excitement of climactic rhythmic modes. Everything alludes to this brilliance, but brilliance eludes those who do not know.

Disclosing the text

We can see all those things because we can read them in the land, and they have been passed down to us through their songs. (Marika 1995, 61)

Connection to ancestral precedent is sustained in the present through realisations of the ancestral text in performance; similarly, the Yolŋu hermeneutic is that which *animates* the ancestral text. In this sense, performing *manikay* is considered a correct continuation of law, expressed by Wāgilak elder Andy Peters as *ŋalabuluŋu rom* (following correct practice). Speaking about his father's father, Peters states, 'He was giving me story for culture side, for skin, for ceremony. Gave me a lot of experience to understand my foot-tracks from my father — [in the] old days' (Peters 2011).

To diverge from the tracks of previous generations and to break the continuation of performance is to rupture the *yarraṯa* (string line) joining the present to the past; a disavowal of one's ancestral connections which sustain the present as an image of the past. Performance of *manikay* today allows the ancestral text to address listeners and performers in the present. Through performance, ancestral presence is realised in and through corporal bodily experience. The substantial presence of the ancestral blueprint is known and sustained through performance, connected to its foundations through the *yarraṯa* (string line). Where this presence is performed into being, the essential purpose of *manikay* has not changed: 'Reworking the truths we have learned from the land and from the elders, into a celebration of who we are and where we are in the modern world' (Marika 1995, 61).¹⁴

¹⁴ Applying pervasive notions of tradition as neat, observable processes of continuity and change to Yolŋu epistemology is bound to result in a confusion of concepts. Narritjin Maymuru (Mangalili clan leader in the 1970s and 1980s) challenges this view: 'You want to show us that our art has changed, we will show you that it has not' (Maymuru in H. Morphy 1991, 182). See also the discussion of Mandawuy Yunupingu's concept of *gularri* (floodwaters) in Chapter Six.

Benjamin Wilfred teaches that this connection with ancestral foundation, the string line, extends through agnatic descent — the passing of law and culture through *bäpurru* (the father's line): 'Whenever I sing, Grandpa [father's father] is there; he always follows on my back. He's there, Grandpa's spirit' (Benjamin Wilfred, 2010). Williams also relays how this concept was explained to her: 'Bäpurru is something important in our lives; it is like the soul, you can't see it. It means something we share before we are born, and keep on sharing during our lifetime and after we die' (1986, 66). Similarly, Daniel Wilfred conveys his understanding, relaying what his older brother Sambo Barabara always told him:

You have to hold this song. When you grow up. And when you're married, and when you find your kid. And your kid can follow your track. Like you're following my track. I'm giving you all the words for the songs, and for the bush tucker and bush medicine. Keep telling them [...]

And we making noise when we were kids, and my dad used to chase me with a stick: 'Alright, go get your didj and clapping stick, start singing.' And then we went down to the big shade and sit. I have to ask my little uncle to play me didj, and I ask my two sister, 'You want to come? We'll sing songs, and you two dance.' And my sister ask me, 'What we going to sing?' 'I'm going to sing. You know how to sing.' 'Yeah, I know how to sing. What song?' 'This song called Djuwalpada. He's pointing with his elbow.'

And my uncle get the didj and we play and my sister listen: 'Hey, when you grow up, maybe we will listen to you leading these songs.' 'Yeah,' I said, 'When I grow up you can listen. We can do recording when we're singing,' I tell my sister. (Daniel Wilfred 2011b)

Manikay song is a technology of continuation, a form and media filled with expressions of connection to ancestral activity — even as many deep connections are obscured in this public form. *Manikay* contains within it the *maḍayin* (sacra), *yäku* (significant names) and the *luku* (footprints) of the ancestors. Embedded in these songs are the confirmation of title to land, constitution of clan identity and *ringitj* (embassy) relationships with other groups, and poetic expression of Yolŋu metaphysical thought (Chapter Four).

From beginning to end, in the correct, legitimate, lawful progression of song subjects (Chapter Five), a performance of *manikay* song and *bungul* dance is one iteration in

the present of this underpinning text; performance articulates one aspect of tradition which sustains the present in ancestral image, in reflection of ancestral reality. The very act of performance — and the experience of that performance in the body — sustains a language of comprehending existence that has been passed down through the generations, father to son, father to daughter, since the foundation. The ancestral text of the Wägilak people is disclosed in *manikay*.

It is the transmission of these songs between generations which continues the *yarrata* (string line), transferring vital elements of knowledge for interpreting and understanding the ancestral text. Yet the importance of *manikay* extends beyond the continued expression of its legal, cultural and religious attributes (Chapter Four). *Manikay* becomes a fundamental experience of the world and the world is experienced through the sounds, songs and voices heard in *manikay*.

Corn and Magowan's writing reflect a *phenomenological turn* in Australian ethnomusicology. Their approach to the interpretation of ceremony privileges active experience, positing this as inseparable from understanding and meaning — where truth lies in the doing of the thing. Magowan (2007) contends that Yolŋu music is embedded in a sentient landscape, where sensory experience, ecology and social relationship determine musical content and emotion. Corn also alludes to this embedded synaesthesia between culture and environment, a 'Yolŋu acoustemology in the school of Steven Feld' (2010, 7), through the constant refrain in one keynote presentation: 'Imagine me, reflected in a sound' (Ibid. 12). A key component underpinning these phenomenologies of Yolŋu sound worlds is a conceptualisation of ancestral precedent continuing through the experience of the natural and cultural worlds of the present.

Magowan includes in her book a designated, detailed chapter on children's modes of learning, children's songs, and music and dance education in Yolŋu communities (2007). This is a vital contribution to the literature, which has tended to gloss over Indigenous song learning processes: perhaps the last serious attempt to discuss children's learning of music in an Indigenous Australian culture was Kartomi's work with Pitjantjatjara children (1980, 1999). Magowan conceptualises *enskilment* (2007,

44) as the path through which music becomes a part of Yolŋu experience of the world: the development of ability to read ecology and environment through song; to hear a song as a place and to see a place as a song. She discusses the socialisation of children into this hermeneutic, chiefly through children's songs: 'From knowing how to walk, hear, see and think about the environment, children's bodies are disciplined into a sensory *habitus* that relates to the ancestral law' (Ibid. 15).¹⁵

Children learn to interpret Yolŋu culture and knowledge through indigenous modes of engagement. Music — and today we can include the music of mobile phones, rock bands, DVDs and the internet — is central to this frame of interpretation, conceptualised as something both in the landscape and of the landscape. Daniel Wilfred, in an interview with Aaron Corn, describes another childhood experience of song:

DW: I was staying back at Njilipidji. Go everywhere with my mum, go Numbulwar shopping, go back Njilipidji. From Njilipidji to Walker River, we walked. Carried the *yidaki* [didjeridu] too. I bin have the small *yidaki*. And we used to play, when we were kids; play, singing, dancing. We bin have a little corroboree — and then my dad started listen what we were singing. We were singing that song, Yolŋu, that's where my dad tell me to start up. And when we were finished we walk, shooting birds with the shanghai. But we didn't stop singing. Walking, shooting birds, keep singing song. That's what I learn about, and I listen.

AC: [...] the *manikay* really do tell you how to move through the country itself.

DW: Yeah, that's right.

AC: The *manikay* almost take you where you're going, because they point out places.

DW: Yeah, that's what I bin learn about.

(Daniel Wilfred 2011b)

Imitation is a universal tool of learning and this is evidently the case in the Yolŋu world. Children imitate their parents: boys and girls begin their education in law and culture through dancing and singing to the same *dāmbu* (melodic/harmonic) and *bilma*

¹⁵ In the remainder of this thesis I consider a similar concept of *effective history*, which describes the way traditions work upon one's subjectivities and hermeneutic approach.

(clapstick) patterns as their parents.¹⁶ Girls and boys are ‘taught to dance long before they are taught to sing’ (Magowan 2007, 49) and are often seen, in between energetic play on the *bungul* ground, dancing alongside older men and women (Figs. 3a, b). It is not uncommon to be sitting and chatting when a parent whispers, ‘look over there,’ and in the periphery of vision a three or four year old is dancing a *manikay* subject; if you turn and look they will run away in shyness. Ngukurr community elder and lead singer in the original Yugul Band (see Chapter Two), Kevin Rogers explains:

And teaching, it’s a structured way of learning. Of finding out what is yours as an individual. Finding out what your abilities are. You have people who have skills in singing, dancing, playing. Finding out who you really are and what your abilities are is being passed down cyclically through generations. So that gradually, learning from an elder to another young fella, upward like Benjamin [Wilfred] now. In his dreams there’ll be a song-man down the track from his children. And it’s a cycle of experiences that are gained innately. (Rogers in Corn et al. 2009)

Children dance and sing in all public ceremonial contexts, learning the basic figurative narratives of *manikay* songs, such as *Galpaṅ* (Dillybag) or *Wäkwak* (Black crow), internalising the structures which, in the future, will contain deeper and more elaborate meanings. This music and dance enskillment is similar to the way children learn to paint: ‘Although people are instructed to produce paintings by following their elders, what they learn is a technique and the boundaries of what is permissible in a particular painting’ (H. Morphy 2008, 153). The public expressions of song and design become a framework which will be filled in with greater brilliance and revelation as a child grows and learns. Benjamin Wilfred recalls learning to sing from his *māri’mu* (father’s father), Sambo Barabara:

¹⁶ Learning to play *bambu* or *yidaki* (‘didjeridu,’ in Kriol and Yolŋu-matha respectively) is also common at an early age and is achieved through direct imitation of playing styles and the agile elicitation of the vocables which are the foundation of *yidaki* rhythmic accompaniments. Short *yidaki*, about a metre long, are made for children who often demonstrate impressive skill on these instruments. As they grow older, gender distinctions will come to the fore and boys will learn to sing *manikay*, while girls learn *ngäthi* or *milkarri* (crying/keening songs) — women’s *manikay* which use the same words and narratives, and generally are sung following a men’s *manikay* song item.

BW: When I bin growing up, I didn't think I'd be doing this stuff [leading ceremony]. I didn't know what I gonna be [...] As soon as my uncle and grandpa bin show me a ceremony here [in Ngukurr], then I think. When I bin see the one ceremony, that bin make me come into the...

SC: Find a purpose?

BW: Yeah. Soon as I bin see men's ceremony, then I just keep going from there. That bin on my mind. From that day I bin on my toe, following my Grandpa. Just following him, following. And he bin here. They go sing, my grandpa always go — sit down one-side to him. I reckon I wouldn't get this knowledge [...] I really respect my Grandpa, what him bin do. I thought I can't teach [learn] properly, but he bin just touch my heart and I bin be with him. All the time, everyday, singing. I bin just keep going. Sit down one-side. And hear him and keep singing. And I bin put my ears to him singing.

SC: When you sing today, do you use Sambo's voice or have you got your own voice?

BW: Own voice. But I got power for Old Sambo and the spirit. No matter where I go, he's on my back.

(Benjamin Wilfred 2011b)

The structuring of Yolŋu narrative described above — containing layers of signification — allows young children to readily engage with this ancestral law through its exoteric stories. Education here is not 'accumulated specialist knowledge,' but much more akin to the 'ancient idea of education as initiation into cultural reference points' (Lawn 2007, 18). While the deeper significances of metonymic equivalences might only be apparent to older participants in a ceremony, children can still engage with the dancing of *wäkwak* (black crow), who is 'looking for a feed,' or laugh at the *wat̩u* (dog), who scuffs out the fire after a smoking ceremony. Through participation, children accumulate and come to know these elements of ceremony as central to its realisation. Such tenets become the prior or prejudiced established facts of future interpretation and elaborations, and they inform all subsequent knowledge about *madayin* and the sacred (Chapter Six investigates the role of *prejudice* in interpretation). Participation in performance is at the foundation of the Wägilak hermeneutic.

Ecological knowledge is constituted through song, and song in ecological knowledge.¹⁷ After learning the *wäkwak* (black crow) dance, and hearing the interjections of dancers imitating the sound of a crow (the name is onomatopoeic, like many bird names in Yolŋu languages), I myself always *think the crow* — wherever I am — as a *wäkwak*. The name, the song, and its rhythms imitating the crows strutting, are forever ingrained in my experience of that bird.

Yet this is just one layer of knowledge for one dance; for Yolŋu there is a much larger accumulation of song and dance repertoires embedded within their experience of the world. Here, I recall Stanner, quoted at the beginning of this chapter: ‘He moves, not in a landscape, but in a humanized realm saturated with signification’ (1965, 227). *Manikay* as a record or rearticulation of the ancestral text is both diverse and comprehensive, far beyond an outsiders grasp: ‘From the way that its lyrics; its melody, rhythms and form; and matching choreography reveals intimate details of place accrued through generation upon generation of dutifully curated knowledge’ (Corn 2010, 1).

Constitution of knowledge in environmental fact is not limited to the imitation of animals. The cyclical punctuation of time by seasons features prominently in songs: ‘Seasonal features characterise all Dhuwa and Yirritja songs beginning with winds that bring either rain or dry heat, each associated with a particular flora and fauna’ (Magowan 2007, 46). The Wägilak songs of Njilipidji, which form the basis of the *CRB* collaboration, are referred to as *wind songs*, linked to the *wulma* ‘build-up’ season (November-January) when *guku* (wild honey) is abundant and the *gadayka* (Stringybark tree, *eucalyptus tetradonta*) is in flower (*dhanjarra* are the small white flowers). During *nyirlak*, the heavy rains (January-March), the *birrkpirrk* (plover) and *Djuwalpaḍa* (the Wägilak *mokuy* ‘ghost’) search for yams, impregnated into the earth by the rain (Ngukurr Language Centre 2000; Magowan 2007, 46). To find the yam, one

¹⁷ Magowan also writes of the detrimental effects of today’s limited and declining access to the hereditary estates, country related to particular *manikay* repertoires, for many Yolŋu people: ‘Decreasing degrees of intimacy with the environment has had serious ramifications for the reproduction of song knowledge as all songs entail a critical understanding of the intricate sounds, movements, smells and feel of ecological forms’ (Magowan 2007, 37).

also searches for its white flower, *banbalari*, just like the white *dhanarra* flower. These are all themes and references within the Wägilak *manikay* narrative.

Wägilak elder Andy Peters sings the song *Wukun* (Clouds) in the set of *manikay* directly preceding the YWG's songs of Njilipidji:

Nyalk, galkanan nyalk	Rain, falling down
Gumurr nhäwurlanapu	I see the clouds forming
Gel-gel-gel likanangayi nyalk	The rain is coming, cooling rain
Balanayi nyalk mala	Falling on the country

(Andy Peters 2012)

The cycle of the seasons governs ecological patterns and this calendar is known through events relayed in song, for example: *yagyag ga wirrupu madalag* (white currant collection time); *walu ga natha* (big wind rain season time); *murl* (black snake comes out, signifies start of *dharra dharra*, the 'dry season'); *birrkpirrk* (lap-winged plover nesting time, time to begin burning-off); *gadhunymirri* (heavy fog during *midiwarr* 'cold weather' season) (Ngukurr Language Centre 2000) (Fig. 3c).¹⁸ Important narratives are directly related to weather: the Dhuwa moiety tale of the Wägilak sisters, associated with the monsoon season, tells of the raging rain, thunder and lightning, as the giant python ate the sisters who had bled into a sacred waterhole (Keen 1994; Berndt 1974, vol. 2).

Seasons are not only metaphors for complex metaphysical thought; they do not simply illustrate but constitute a fundamental and tangible textual component of knowledge. The present events of the world and everything under the cycling of the seasons, are a mirror of the ancestral past and a direct iteration of that past in the present. The songs of *birrkpirrk*, the dance of *wäkwak* and the coming of the rain are all iterations of active ancestral agency in the landscape and the continued reality of the ancestral past sustaining the present.

¹⁸ As noted in the introduction to this thesis, terminology quoted directly from outside sources uses the original orthography of that source.

Just as a performance of *manikay* emerges out of the many intertwining strands of voice, the present too is just one continuing woven strand in a greater reality that encompasses the lives of the past, and the ongoing ancestral conversation continually enacted in the present and future. The singer's voice merges with that of *Djuwalpada*, the *Wägilak mokuy* (ghost), and the spirit of the ancestors are constantly 'on one's back' (Benjamin Wilfred 2010). *Manikay* performance today is a reading of the ancestral text and also illuminates tangible components of that text present in the natural and social world. Through their development of skills in ceremonial performance, Yolŋu learn to read the ancestral text evidently inscribed and disclosed in all existence.

In nature, in song, dance and human performance, ancestral presence is tangibly known like a reified text, interpreted and understood by corporeal, situated and conversant beings. In looking out to the world this text is read onto all existence, an ancestral sentience that was *then* and *there*, but it is also *here* and *now* — a contemporary embodiment. To diverge from the tracks of previous generations is to disavow this reality. *Manikay* becomes an iteration of that text through which one knows the land, the people, the past, present and future.¹⁹ Corn recalls a *manikay* song in the mind's ear and, although physically far from the hereditary Gupapuyŋu estate at Djiliwirri, the song takes him there:

Though far removed from the nearest city or town, other people surround me in this place. Generation upon generation of them, and they watch me as I sit. I can see them paddling a canoe back to the shore after a long day of hunting. My hunger piques as the aromas of roasting fish and boiling turtle eggs waft over from their campfires [...] I now dance with them amid these abundant environs, and with the song in my mind, my voice becomes theirs. Though this is not quite right. It's not really my voice at all. Rather, it's that amorphous yet familiar voice of the one made of many. (Corn 2010, 1)

This chapter has introduced ways in which Yolŋu undertake hermeneutics, the ways in which they come to interpret and understand the ancestral text and its excess of

¹⁹ Toner (2007) makes some pertinent observations on Dhalwaŋu *manikay* texts and their power to evoke, even create, place through performance despite the physical location of the singer.

significations — a text read from and onto the tangible, natural world and the people in it. I have argued that progressive revelation emerges from a number of figurative, central tenets, layering a complex of meaning and signification that in turn points to an underlying blueprint of abundant, heterophonic meaning.

Through metonymic equivalence, integral tenets of the ancestral text contain a constellation of possible iterations. Children become *enskilld* in this hermeneutical approach to the world — an effective history or tradition of interpretation — and participation in performing public music and dance forms is central to this process. Interpretation of song and dance is grounded in experience of tangible ecological precedent or fact, known in the body, in the environment and its seasons. The ancestral text discloses and is disclosed in a tangible, experienced world of human perception, emotion and relation.



Fig. 3a Daniel Wilfred with his son Isaiah, listening intently at a smoking ceremony in Ngukurr. Daniel and Benjamin's children often perform *manikay* together for fun during lunchtimes at the local school, using plastic piping for a *yidaki*. 16.8.2010



Fig. 3b John Wilfred, Benjamin's son. 15.8.2010



Fig. 3c Burning off near Ngukurr during *birrkpirrk* nesting time. Along with *manikay*, country and ecology are essential components of the disclosed ancestral text. 15.8.2010

New expressions

Learn from these words like we have learnt from you. Your knowledge, your education, your background, we are using it. Some of the law and some of the culture is yours. OK and in the same way you must learn [Yolŋu culture] [...] so if we are living in the way of reconciliation, this is how we should live. (Djambawa Marawili in Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 15)

Before moving into a detailed exploration of the Wägilak *manikay* narrative relevant to *CRB*, I will briefly detail how the Australian Art Orchestra have come to this hermeneutic world as outsiders and how the progressive opening up of Yolŋu culture from the mid-twentieth century onwards has provided strong precedent for such collaboration.

When the AAO first arrived in Ngukurr in 2005, they began the process of learning about Wägilak culture through active participation in *bungul* ('dance' with *manikay*), hearing the songs and connecting the physical embodiment of rhythmic form and structure with the narrative subjects. They did so with stated seriousness of purpose and came to know songs within a Yolŋu oriented frame of imitation and participation, as Andrew Blake, Art Coordinator at the Mulka Centre in Yirrkala suggests, 'by way of slow osmosis and orchestrated dissemination of knowledge' (Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 8). To Paul Grabowsky, then director of the AAO, 'it was clear that *the process* had begun' during that first trip to Ngukurr (Grabowsky 2010).

Benjamin Wilfred patiently taught the actions of the dances to the AAO, representing the very deeds and movements of *Djuwalpada* moving through the land (Chapter Four). Benjamin occasionally chastised those who forgot any element of this multifaceted expression too readily. This was an opportunity for him to 'teach those fellas from the orchestra' the Wägilak way of ceremony, song and dance (Benjamin Wilfred 2010). His continually expressed desire to 'keep culture strong' through new forms and media of expression resonated with the visitor's desire to explore and respectfully collaborate with a musical tradition indigenous to Australia.

Significantly for Australian musical collaboration, the AAO came with open ears, wishing to learn from their hosts before putting forward any specific agendas for collaboration (see Chapter Nine). Under the quiet guidance of Sambo Barabara, the Wägilak clan were prepared to share their musical and ceremonial traditions; the ongoing legacy of concerts, workshops, master-classes and annual lecture-demonstrations that makes up *CRB*, has facilitated this desire to educate the wider Australian public in Yolŋu ways.

This revelation of law in its manifestations of song and dance, opening out to the non-Yolŋu public, is in some senses a Wägilak outreach program to the *kinless, country-less* masses running mainstream Australia. Such opening outwards of cultural expressions is part of a long tradition of Yolŋu outreach. Even as traditional ceremony is carried into new contexts and through new technologies, ‘the Yolŋu socio-cultural system remains relatively autonomous [...] it maintains structuring properties that are in direct continuity with the precolonial past’ (F. Morphy 2010, 366).

The shift over the last half century, characterised by a greater openness of Yolŋu culture toward outsiders, has been driven by intelligent Yolŋu leaders in response to the pressures impacting on Yolŋu systems of knowledge, aimed at creating awareness of the ongoing value and significance of these cultural systems. Such engagement with outsiders is a strong political and cultural assertion that *tradition* (read *ancestral constitution*) constitutes and affects lives now, in the present, and is not some discrete object of the past. There have been a number of prominent events within this movement of overt and express cultural demonstration: adjustments that creatively incorporate traditional knowledge into contemporary forms and forums.

As suggested (in Chapter Two), North East Arnhem Land has seen a proliferation of popular music interwoven with ancestral themes. Corn (2002) and Gumbula (Corn and Gumbula 2005) evidence the growing local permissiveness and acceptability in the 1970s and 1980s for Yolŋu bringing *manikay* themes and musical elements into rock and reggae music, lyrics and video-clips. Festivals such as the Garma Festival invite the wider Australian public to celebrate Yolŋu traditional culture in all its contemporary forms.

New technologies of presentation and performance are also embraced through the efforts of individuals to adapt or mediate a position of engagement between historical and contemporary cultural practices. Despite new forms of expression emerging, ancestral directive — correct practice or *ḡalabuluḡu rom* (following law) — remains at the core: ‘Yolḡu intermediaries can and do follow ancestral precedent through their creative, ceremonial and other endeavours while simultaneously engaging with new media and technologies’ (Corn 2002, 65). As I will argue in the coming chapters, the AAO is one technology through which the YWG mediate expressions of ceremonial law, handed down through the generations.

Artist Banduk Marika, a Rirratjingu woman, discusses the significance of widening performance contexts — into presentations, performances, exhibitions and publications — for the continuation of Yolḡu culture. This statement refers to a national art exhibition, *Yalangbara: art of the Djaḡ’kawu*, which has travelled around the country since 2010:²⁰

This is our country, our inheritance and our responsibility and we must look after it. This is our law and our strength. You could say that by showing the art, we're entering into our parliament — the Rirratjingu people's parliament. We are giving public access to information that has been forbidden for thousands of years because it's time to show the public that Yalangbara is important [...] And so we want to tell their stories properly now and hopefully through this exhibition Yalangbara will get the protection and the recognition that it deserves. (Marika 2011)

Howard Morphy details how processes of opening up sacred and secret aspects of culture have defined Yolḡu and Balanda (white person/people) relations in many different times and contexts. Morphy considers the ‘Elcho Island adjustment movement’ as the earliest, explicit attempt to reveal to outsiders some deeper meanings of Yolḡu culture: ‘In 1957 at Elcho Island (Galiwin’ku) in North East Arnhem Land, a set of carved and painted sacred objects were erected in a public place

²⁰ See West (2008) and Morphy with Deveson (2011).

alongside the church' (1983, 110), the display of these *ranga* objects demonstrating a 'united front in their [the Yolju's] negotiations with Europeans' (Ibid. 111).²¹

This historically significant event at Galiwin'ku was a demonstration of ongoing Yolju law, 'the first and only time these law symbols have been revealed' (Gondarra 2011, 26); a radical adjustment to contemporary, intercultural realities of politics and culture. Yolju hoped that recognition and an equal meeting of representative legal figures from both cultures, Balanda and Yolju, 'might end up in some form of a legal treaty or a statutory harmonisation of both legal systems' (Ibid. 26). Such a portentous act by the elders of Elcho Island preceded decades of land rights struggles and high-profile legal clashes between mining companies and Yolju clans.²²

One further Yolju *adjustment movement* captured my imagination and has itself been useful for consolidating some of my writing about ceremonial knowledge in this thesis. The *Saltwater National Tour* of paintings (1999–2001) sought to educate outsiders through creative response and took the form of an exhibition of paintings from saltwater clans in Blue Mud Bay, expressing the significance and ownership of tracts of sea, coast, waterways and intertidal zones.

In 1996, Wäka Munungurr found an illegal fishing camp at Garranjali, a sacred area of his mother's clan homeland, near Bäniyala on the coast of Blue Mud Bay. This is an important site for the Yithuwa Maḍarrpa (Dhuwal speaking coastal Maḍarrpa group) as it is the home of Bäru, a progenitorial crocodile ancestor. It was here that Munungurr found the mutilated head of saltwater crocodile, the very Bäru of his mother's genesis and identity:

²¹ The Elcho Island adjustment movement was first discussed by Berndt in 1957. He writes: 'The *ranga* are taken as visible proof that the North East Arnhem Landers are all one. On one hand there are the complementary mythological cycles of the Djanḡawul [Djan'kawu] and the Lajndjin [Lany'tjun, an Yirritja law-giving ancestor], belonging to them all, on the other the fact that certain *ranga* designs are held in common by affiliated *mada* [*matha*, 'tongues']' (Berndt 2004, 64).

²² There is no space here to consider the decidedly political decades of the 1960s, characterised by similar cultural adjustments such as the Yirrkala Church panels of 1962 and bark petitions to the Australian Parliament, 1963 (see H. Morphy 1991, 19; 2000).

Disgusted and frustrated at the continual invasion of his sacred area and the sacrilege of the dismembering of Bäru in his own nest, Djambawa [member of the Yithuwa Maḍarrpa clan and community leader at Bäniyala] sought to channel those feelings and sat down to paint the sacred designs (*miny'tji*) of the area in order to educate strangers about the law that Yolŋu live by. (Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 6)

Following Wäka Munungurr's lead, local artists produced close to one hundred bark paintings, which became the travelling exhibition *Saltwater National Tour*, as well as a book documenting the ancestral law of different clans from around this area — a region where the important *ringitj* (embassy) site for the Wägilak clan, Lutunba, is located (Chapter Four). This exhibition was a performative response to a political issue; an act of sitting down and painting ancestral narratives, bringing them into new contexts. 'Yolŋu do not neatly separate the functional purposes of rituals from the performative — art from political action [...] Yolŋu use ceremonial performance as a means of setting the agenda or conveying an important message (H. Morphy 2008, 79). Indeed, Yolŋu retain control of cultural expression by asserting their ideas within new contexts. This is not only creative and pre-emptive, but highly conservative in the orthodox desire to retain cultural identities and meanings.

At the beginning of the *CRB* collaboration, players from the AAO were brought into the world of the Yolŋu ancestral text and performed Wägilak expressions of it: not only a complex aesthetic world, but one of kin, country and responsibility to continue traditions of ceremonial performance. In accepting to perform and learn about *manikay* — with appropriate deference and respect in the face of the unknown — these musicians were also accepting the responsibility to participate in the continuing mediation of ancestral reality through present media of iteration, a process at the heart of sustaining culture in the Yolŋu world.

Ever increasing revelation and familiarity with the significances embedded in the Wägilak narrative and musical forms continues to deepen the orchestra's appreciation of this world. 'In order that Balanda should value the inside [meanings of knowledge], they too have to experience it through its release, and their inclusion' (H. Morphy 1991, 98). His motives resonating with the Elcho Island adjustment, Barabara desired

to promote Wāgilak culture and the irrefutable proof of land ownership apparent through the performance of *manikay* (Chapter Five); to engage with outsiders who realised the Yolŋu seriousness of purpose and respected Yolŋu legal and cultural processes; to promote mutual understanding and a better future for all.

As this thesis demonstrates, processes of intercultural engagement and use of new media are embedded within the Yolŋu hermeneutic and ceremonial traditions. Yet it would be simplistic to say that the dozen or so performances of the collaboration at significant Australian festivals have done nothing except to bring Wāgilak ceremonial knowledge and law into Western frames of performance (see Appendix Three, *Tour and performance history*). While audience appreciation of cultural complexities is relatively limited, the act of performance remains a willing assertion of goodwill. Benjamin Wilfred explains:

And I love my job when I do it. Sharing my knowledge in community and in the city. That's why I do it. I have never let my Grandpa down. So I told Paul and the orchestra, I will just go for it. No matter where I tour with the orchestra, I will share my culture and talk — no matter where I go. We toured last year from Darwin, right up to Broome. Then flew over to Perth, played in the Perth Concert Hall with my grandpa's painting [projected on-stage; Sambo Barabara's 2005 *The Dead Ones*]. We talked about him and his stories; what he did. And I want to be like you, [Grandpa]. (Benjamin Wilfred 2010)

Yolŋu processes of revelation make collaborations such as *CRB* possible. The inbuilt public-secret continuum of expression permits basic, mundane elements of culture to be shared and perpetuated, even as they retain obscured complex and essential meanings. Interpretation through a Yolŋu hermeneutic occurs in the elaboration and *making brilliant* of a basic narrative, creatively perpetuated through ever new iterations and contexts, local and beyond. The Yolŋu hermeneutic is this process of realising, revealing and animating engagement with the great, underpinning reality of the ancestral text.

Yolŋu history of cultural adjustment displays strong precedent for the mediation of traditional knowledge in contemporary, intercultural situations. Wāgilak *manikay* is a text of tradition that can be reinvigorated and sustained through its mediation into

new contexts and technologies; performance of *manikay* is the Wägilak narrative coming into being, its various public iterations necessary prolegomena portending to deeper ancestral realities.

Wägilak *manikay* is existential in that it invokes responses from the current generation, in whatever life situation they find themselves in; *manikay* is known through tangible, corporeal and social experience within place and ecology. As I will show in the coming chapters, the music of *CRB* has become, itself, yet another iteration within the ongoing conversation between people today and the ancestral text; a conversation dramatically fired through rapidly shifting horizons since the colonisation of Australia but nevertheless still governed by degrees of Yolŋu control and direction.

Chapter four

The Wägilak narrative

One person's ephemeron is another's foundations. One person's art is another's law. Paintings on bodies versus books bound in leather. Song versus scripture. Our minds, embodied in words and deed, versus theirs. (Corn 2010, 12)

Dirri pala (Birrk Birrk) luyun bawuda	From the island to the shore
Ngulalang Lutunbuy lapa budapurru	the Plover [Birrkpirrk] waded,
Dunubawuy	reaching the mainland at the rivermouth
Gapu da jindi gunmawili	where the bay is wide.
Mayrikbirrk budapurru	Plover crossed over.
Mayrikbirrk budapurru Ngulalangba	Where saltwater met fresh,
djinbananawuy	the water swirled.

Birrkpirrk song text sung by Wägilak elder Diltjima (in McKenzie 1983, 9). Orthography as in the original.

In this chapter, I document some of the key elements of the Wägilak narrative pertinent to the *manikay* series performed in *Crossing Roper Bar*. This narrative is the source of diverse expressions in music, dance, painting and storytelling, an intricate, rich web of knowledge and signification. Understanding of this narrative complex is always emerging amid ever expanding layers of allusion; presentation of a complete, objective account of the Wägilak narrative is both logistically impossible and culturally illegitimate.

Even a nuanced, layered iteration of the Wägilak narrative, such as that performed in *manikay*, is a limited iteration bound by particular structures, media, methods, intentions and subjectivities. Nevertheless, the continued performance of *manikay* sustains the greater Wägilak narrative which is, itself, a particular component within Yolŋu-wide expressions of the ancestral text. Through the particulars of the Wägilak narrative, individuals converse with the greater ancestral text through performance.

This chapter is itself a limited iteration that nevertheless resonates with the Wägilak narrative, offering one perspective that alludes to richer meanings. I elaborate on some of the public understandings of selected elements within this narrative, beginning with the central *mokuy* (ghost) figure Djuwalpaḍa, sacred sites and various song subjects such as *raki* (string), *galpan* (woven basket) and *gara* (spear).¹ Here, the *Wägilak narrative* refers to the expressions of fundamental tenets of the ancestral text particular to Wägilak ceremonial practice.²

As Paddy Dhathanju states about paintings of the Wägilak Sisters story, an ancestral narrative is a ‘true story, no bullshit [...] It is a true story from my father’ (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 56).³ Ancestral action was and is true, honestly self-disclosed in country, kin and existence: it is law that must be responded to, ‘no bullshit.’ *CRB* is claimed by Wägilak to be a legitimate expression of ancestral law primarily through its creative and persistent retelling of the Wägilak narrative. Without performing into being an iteration of this narrative replete with its essential images and significations, the collaboration would fail in its orienting commission as collaboration: the basic public narrative that carries a constellation of profound reference and meaning is the very *reason for being of manikay*.⁴

The Wägilak narrative is, essentially, an ‘ontologically-prior’ fact (F. Morphy 2010, 368). Here, Morphy refers here to the ‘layer of [Yolŋu] sacred geography that is

¹ Except where referenced, the following sections are based on narratives recorded directly through fieldwork. New pieces of information continue to emerge, as is the Yolŋu process. Some of the concepts in this chapter are my own interpretation: for example, my use of the term *telos* (see p. 148). It has often been the case that Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred ask me to tell a version of the narrative in my own words during a presentation on *CRB*. This fits with the somewhat titular skin-name I have been given, Godjok (*banji* [Kriol] ‘brother-in-law,’ to Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred): ‘Ask *banji*, he is your boss. We do the singing, he does the book work.’ The Australian Art Orchestra have been assigned to the skin section Wamut, legitimating their performance of the songs as ‘brothers’ to Benjamin and Daniel. Such a focus on skin names as important identifications for organising ceremony is not a traditionally Yolŋu approach but common among other groups of South Arnhem Land.

² At this point, it is important to refer the reader to Appendix Two, a table that clarifies the terminology used to discuss and describe the *ancestral text*.

³ The Wägilak sisters are Dhuwa moiety ancestral beings who travelled through Wägilak country (Caruana and Lendon 1997). They are not to be confused with the narrative of Wägilak *manikay*.

⁴ Even if this constellation is a complex of literal, metonymic equivalences beyond any objective presentation.

ontologically prior and underpins all else' (Ibid.), especially Yolŋu social structures but, by extension, ceremonial practices. I have interpreted the phrase 'ontologically-prior' to suggest that the Wägilak narrative can be read in this geography as a permanent reality. This geography is a permanent, physical record of ancestral action and creation, a record that exudes narrative demanding performance.

The Wägilak narrative is a particular component or limb within the greater body of Yolŋu-wide ancestral narrative, a component repertoire that is the responsibility of the Wägilak *bäpurru* (father's group) of Njilipidji. Just as ecology consists of different environments, events and places, society and ceremonial practice also build on this 'ontologically-prior' record. *Manikay* as performance interacts with this foundation, drawing out the engaging dynamics from a constellation of signification, image and narrative. Performance or creative articulation of Wägilak *manikay* is legitimate where aspects of the particular Wägilak narrative are realised, enlivening continued engagement with the greater ancestral text beyond its own particularity.

Prefacing the main content of this chapter, the following theoretical comments warn against a simplistic understanding of the term *narrative*, here used inclusively of musical and textual narrative. The term is misconstrued if understanding is limited to recorded reification outside of performance, such as the conventionally inferred relations between patterns of ink on manuscript.⁵ While *manikay* does not possess a media of notation similar to that of a scored manuscript — Corn's 'song versus scripture' (Corn 2010, 12) — it would be naive to state that the *manikay* narrative lacks reified trace or record, as does any scripture. Nor is *manikay* inhibited because it is not stored with the type of permanence offered by a national archive such as AIATSIS — a permanence that must stave off an ever encroaching decrease of pertinence. The Wägilak text is known tangibly in land and people and is simply written in a different way, read and performed by people with different forms of literacy (see Chapter Ten).

⁵ This chapter avoids reifying a particular iteration of the Wägilak narrative as *the work*. Notionally, locating *the work* might be considered anathema to perceived realities of fluctuation — the self-renewing play between a text and its actualisation in performance. Different approaches within Western discourse to locating the essential *work* have changed over the decades (see Bowman 1998). Moves away from the structuralist thought of musicologists — dominant in the development of ethnomusicology as a discipline — such as Meyer (1957) and Nattiez (1990), are relatively recent.

Intimating Derrida's explorations of textual interpretation — deconstructing the great narratives of Western thought (Derrida 2002) — one might suppose that it is, perhaps, a *Western* reading of Aboriginal culture that desires to privilege recognition of speech over notation; aural over textual narrative; a sense of direct, *natural* communication over construed or abstract conveyance; immediate over impending; presence over absence. Yet our inclinations to look toward cultural difference as necessarily *other* than ourselves creates a compromised oppositional construct between Western and non-Western cultures (Honderich 1995, 637). In understanding the Wägilak narrative expressed through *manikay* as dissimilar because of aspects of oral and aural predominance, we deny the rich tangible traces recorded indelibly in the world from which *manikay* speaks.⁶

The relationship of Yolŋu people as corporeal beings within the environment is a permanent reality; people always exist within the movement of seasons, sustained and reliant upon the land. *Manikay* celebrates the natural world and human situation and relation with and within it. To read the land as a record emanating narrative requires literacy and implicitly fostered modes of understanding (Chapter Three) — a particular hermeneutical approach and cultural norms of interpretation. Comparatively, the permanence of the archive, or ultimately ephemeral materials such as paper and ink, are relatively transient.⁷

Rock art photographed by artist Simon Normand (2012), shown to him by Wägilak elder Andy Peters in a cave south of Ngukurr in Mara country, depicts an ancient

⁶ Similarly, many authors suggest that 'the permanence of bark paintings was apparently not important to artists' (Caruana 2010, 25). Yet such permanence is located elsewhere than the particular iteration of a design. Through multiple iterations in the natural world, a richer and more engaging text emerges that is tangibly present in many more lives, known through regular participation in the recreation of that narrative. This is something more present and relevant than a solitary painting hung on a gallery wall and the Yolŋu hermeneutic opens up the possibility to read this narrative in all existence.

⁷ There has been an increasing recognition of the reality of Yolŋu narratives being evident and present in the land within practical ethnomusicological initiatives. The National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia suggests, in its fieldwork protocols, that the recording of GPS coordinates as necessary metadata be undertaken in any song recording initiative (on its website, <http://www.aboriginalartists.com.au/NRP.htm>, accessed January 16, 2012).

manuscript of Wägilak ceremony (Fig. 4a).⁸ This artwork portrays the figurative designs of the Wägilak *manikay* subjects *birrkpirrk* (lap-winged plover) and *wata* (wind). These were subsequently redesigned as the logo for *CRB*, used on recordings, program notes, T-shirts and in advertising (Fig. 4b). In Yolŋu culture, design, ecology, country and people, can all be understood as manuscripts for the performance of *manikay*.

Fundamentally, the tangible Wägilak narrative is located in the land itself. This chapter continues by retelling the tale of the formation of Wägilak land by progenitorial ancestral action, an event achieved through song and dance. Djuwalpaḍa danced when he founded the Wägilak homeland at Njilipidji and Wägilak today dance this narrative when performing *manikay*. The ground at Njilipidji is the essential manuscript of Wägilak narrative.

Manikay bin coming out of that ground. Comes from that ground at Njilipidji. *Manikay* is for country, for leading new generation. *Manikay* is for using in funeral, *wata* [wind], smoking [purification ceremony]. Learn about country. *Manikay* means spirit for the country, and songs; where he walked, Wild Blackfella [Djuwalpaḍa]. *Manikay* means for the land and for the ground, tree, no matter what animal. Everything. *Manikay* means for the countryside and for land, land and sea — no matter where you go. (Benjamin Wilfred, 2010)

⁸ The location of the cave south of Ngukurr demonstrates just how far reaching the *wata* (wind) purification ceremony was, and how widely spread the relations and travels of the Wägilak clan. Peters states that the designs are, evidently, Wägilak.



Fig. 4a *Birrkpirrk* (plover) and *wata* (wind) design in a cave south of Ngukurr (Image: Simon Normand)

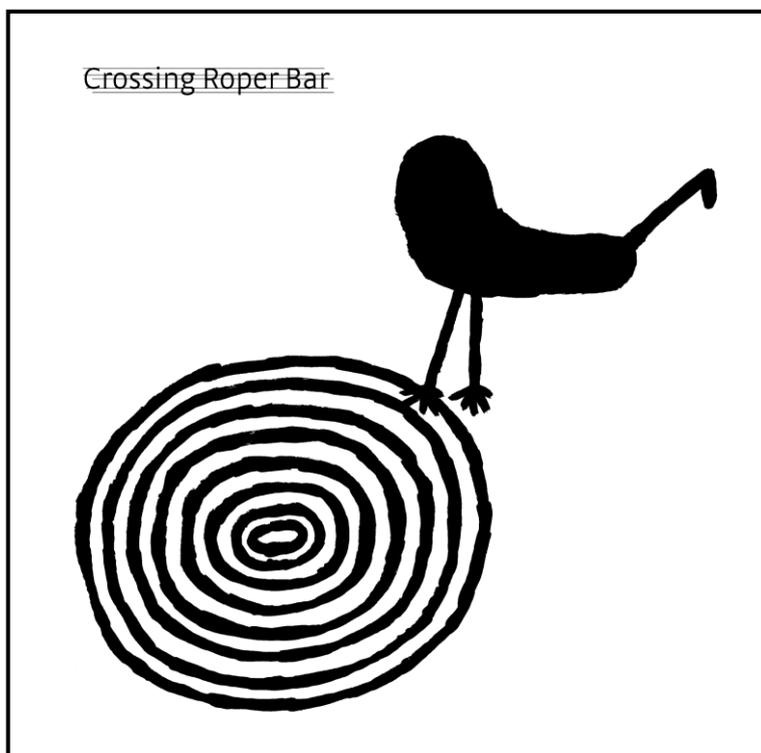


Fig. 4b The logo used by the AAO for CRB

The narrative of N̄lipidji

Wurrpu dilyunayi, dhaŋarra bādun

Buluwulu gupurranayi, milimili bādun dilyunayi

Flowers are starting to come out, white Eucalyptus flowers

Seeds falling down, flowers withering and dying

Dhaŋarra (White flower) song text⁹

Setting out from Butjulubayi, that Wild Blackfella named Djuwalpada, a Wāgilak *mokuy* (ghost), travelled through the land looking for a home (LE_4.1).¹⁰ The land was dangerous and full of wild animals. Djuwalpada shook his spear, moving backward and forward in an intimidating pose to warn these dangers off, yelling, ‘Waahh!’ He travelled far and wide, making his way through the country. Up on the Gove peninsula, he left a spear in the ground, creating a site for *madayin* (ceremonial law).¹¹ At some places he left a *galpan* (dillybag), and at others he left some *bilma* (clapsticks). These are sites where the wind ceremony blows everyone together, gathering places.¹²

Djuwalpada N̄irriyinjirriyi Dhawal-wal duy’yun

Likandhu-ŋupan Djuwalpada

Marrayunmara gara guthanbiny

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations and transcriptions in this chapter were recorded with Daniel and Benjamin Wilfred, 2010–2012. They are not literal, word-for-word translations but reflect an appropriate explanation for the context.

¹⁰ Djuwalpada is sometimes referred to as Yolŋu Man or Wild Blackfella. Other names for this *mokuy* include N̄ānuk (another general term), N̄irriyinjirriyi and Birriyinbirriyin (specific names for Djuwalpada).

¹¹ Where a spear is left in the ground, something will ‘come out and grow from that place’ and *galtha* (a course of action) has been set in motion (Marika 1995, 60).

¹² Much readily available information about Wāgilak *garma* (public) narratives is contradictory and possibly confused. It is possible that Bowdler (2008), for example, conflates the Wāgilak *mokuy* Djuwalpada with a similar ‘Devil Devil’ figure from the Yabaduruwa ceremony: ‘This is the ceremony that Sambo Burra Burra [sic] paints and the actions of its main protagonists, the Goanna and the Devil Devil, figure largely in his paintings’ (Bowdler 2008, 43). The goanna is also a prominent totem of Yolŋu N̄arra ceremony and the Djaŋ’kawu Sisters story, in which goannas are manifestations of the Sisters and symbolise fertility (see West 2008). As Jim Wilfred states: ‘Just Wāgilak has Djuwalpada. Other clans have other *mokuy*. Djuwalpada starts at N̄lipidji and ends at Lutunba. Birriyinbirriyin [*mokuy* name], that’s the same as Djuwalpada; one mob, Wāgilak’ (Jim Wilfred, pers. comm. 2010).

Yarrarra, yarrarra, yarrarra
 Gulyunmirr galpu, maḍayin-marrayi

Djuwalpaḍa, Njirriyinirriyi, walking across the country
 Djuwalpaḍa, with elbows pointing
 Aiming, shakes his spear, runs towards the country
 Aiming the spear, ready to throw, aiming
 Thrown from the spear-thrower, making the sacred law.

Djuwalpaḍa and Gara (Spear) song texts

LE_4.1	Djuwalpaḍa 'Walking': Benjamin Wilfred, Roy Natilma, David Wilfred (yidaki). Recording made during sessions for CRB album (AAO 2010), 13.4.2009	00:44
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Djuwalpaḍa had to keep searching for somewhere safe to live. With elbows pointed, he looked high in the treetops of the *gaḍayka* (Stringybark tree, *Eucalyptus Tetrodonta*), searching for some *guku* (honey) — he had to find the honey before he could find his home. Following the *sugarbag* (bees) and the *dhangarra* (Stringybark flowers), he spotted some high in a tree. Djuwalpaḍa tried to climb the tree but the blades on his elbows were so sharp that the tree was accidentally cut down. After an energetic fight with some very angry bees, he got to the honey anyway. And the honey was good. He sung, 'Hey, gu gu gu gu gu gu, gey gey!' Dancing with joy at having found the honey, Djuwalpaḍa put it in his dillybag and kept on searching for a home (LE_4.2).

LE_4.2	Djuwalpaḍa 'Dancing': Benjamin Wilfred, Roy Natilma, David Wilfred (yidaki). Recording made during sessions for CRB album (AAO 2010), 13.4.2009	00:22
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Djuwalpaḍa carried with him many items used for hunting and collecting food, accoutrements representing knowledge, law and sacred *maḍayin*: *gara* (spear); *galpu* (spear-thrower); *galpan* (dillybag); *raki* (string); *mälka* (string bag).¹³

Galpan galpan wandina
 Birrinyinbirrinyin maninyala

¹³ Elsewhere in Arnhem Land, *mälka* refers to ceremonial string.

The woven basket

Carried by the ghost Birrinyinbirrinyin

Galpan (Dillybag) song text

He got the spear, he got woomera, he got dillybag. He walks with that and he will always get bush food and fish and put it in his dillybag. That's where he put honey. And he's always walking: Yolŋu, Wild Blackfella, Djuwalpada we call him. He's travelled around the country. Place to place. Djuwalpada. We sing about him. (Benjamin Wilfred in Corn et al. 2009)

In Sambo Barabara's paintings, these items usually accompany any depiction of Djuwalpada.¹⁴ Barabara's painting *Medicine Man*, sometimes titled *Devil Devil*, is the image used by the YWG to illustrate this narrative when giving presentations about their songs, as it clearly shows these objects, surrounding the *mokuy* (Fig. 4c). Wally Wilfred's (Benjamin Wilfred's brother) recent painting, *Devil Devil*, shows a more recent rendition of these designs (Fig. 4d). The reification in image of these narrative tenets is a record from which interpretation can begin, a manuscript for performing *manikay*. These tangible objects, which are central to the Wägilak narrative, exude an excess of signification and many in the Wilfred family speak of the songs and stories coming 'out of the painting' — something more than just synthetic polymers on canvas. The painting encodes multiple meanings behind the visual representation of these objects. Beyond embedded narrative, Howard Morphy suggests that:

The designs are an integral part of the ancestral beings themselves. By painting the designs in ceremonies, by singing the songs and performing the dances, Yolŋu are re-creating ancestral events [...] the designs themselves possess or contain the power of the ancestral being. (H. Morphy 1991, 102)

Like *manikay* subjects, the *miny'tji* (designs) of Yolŋu painting are not just fanciful but integral elements portending to deeply held beliefs about ancestral foundations, law and the wellbeing of the living and dead. There is a direct correlation between the elements of Wägilak painting, song, dance and objects like the *galpan* (woven basket),

¹⁴ For a comprehensive study of Barabara's paintings, see Bowdler 2008.

an inter-dependence of distinct forms that coalesce as multiple expressions of the same narrative. Benjamin Wilfred alludes to this metonymic equivalence:

Collaboration bin coming out from the painting, from the Grandpa's painting [...] Every story and song coming out from the painting and from the heart; and from the country and from the land, and from the ground. (Benjamin Wilfred 2010)

The ground out of which the songs come is the land at Njilipidji, the Wägilak homelands — *wäŋa-ŋaraka* (bone-country; see below) — containing the clan's sacred essence and power; the traces of the progenitorial ancestors left in the land as well as the clan's *raŋga* (sacred objects).¹⁵ Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred are both *wäŋa-waŋu* (estate-holders) for Njilipidji. Through the continuing practise of their songs, the Wägilak assert their legal ownership of this land, identifying their ongoing connection to it through agnatic descent responsibilities extending back into the distant past, to the foundation of this homeland by the actions and observations of Djuwalpaḍa.

Mokuy (ancestral ghosts) such as Djuwalpaḍa also give *garma* (public) aspects of law concerning country ownership, hunting, resource harvesting and other human activity.¹⁶ As Yolŋu today live on the land, performing activities such as hunting, they affirm ancestral laws and the ongoing relevance of *manikay*. Corn explains:

How to harvest the honey made by nesting bees in tree trunks. How to hunt macropods (kangaroos, wallabies) in the late afternoon. How to locate buried yam roots by searching for the bright flowers that grow along their exposed creeping vines. This is the type of knowledge for human existence that ancestral *mokuy* (ghosts) of both patri-moieties codify in [ceremonial] liturgies [...] Ancestral *mokuy* associated with forested areas also provide law for harvesting, making and playing *yidaki* (didjeridu) which are conventionally used by living humans in the accompaniment of *manikay* series. (Corn 2002, 103–5)

¹⁵ In the Wägilak *manikay* series, the *watu* (dog) buries some of the clan's *raŋga* (sacred objects). This action is mimicked in the choreography.

¹⁶ Keen (1994, 138) lists a number of ceremonies included in the *garma* category, although it is important to remember that these have additional secret/sacred components: circumcision and initiation; disposal of dead and mourning; purification after death or conflict; exchange of sacred objects or goods; greetings, partings, dispute settlement; entertainment. 'It is convenient to think of the basic building-block of *garma* ceremonies as a complex of related stories, songs, dances, designs and objects. Each such a complex was built around a series of a dozen or so songs which evoked journeys around, and associations with, country' (Ibid. 146).

As Djuwalpaḍa was searching for a home, he felt the wind blowing toward him. And he heard music: the music of the wind and the music of a bird, the *birrkpirrk* (lapped-wing plover). The wind was frightening. Djuwalpaḍa called to the *birrkpirrk*, ‘Birrkpirrk-birrkpirrk, where am I going to stay [live]. I’m staying now at this place but I don’t want to stay here because otherwise a big wind [hurricane] will come’ (Benjamin Wilfred 2011). The *birrkpirrk* was frightened by the big wind that was coming and flew away.

But Djuwalpaḍa knew that his spear would show him where to go. The moment builds as he dances, getting ready to throw. His spear breaks, flies, and its path is struck as it enters the ground (LE_4.3).¹⁷ Wägilak law *is*, now and here. This is their place, their path is established. ‘He was long time ago and he’s still here today. What those elders hand over still going to be there for the young people’ (Daniel Wilfred 2011). This was the foundation of Wägilak responsibility, the constitution of the Wägilak as a people. Today, the land at Njilipidji remains a tangible inscription of that ancestral action, read as it is performed through ceremony.

LE_4.3	Gara (Spear) ‘Throwing’: Benjamin Wilfred, Roy Natilma, David Wilfred (<i>yidaki</i>). Recording made during sessions for <i>CRB</i> album (AAO 2010), 13.4.2009	00:31
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These things happened in this place, Njilipidji, a long time ago, during the great animation; the great foundation. This is stone spear county, called Lärra. ‘Ah yeah. This is my land. Alright then, I’ll stop here. This is where Njilipidji is. That’s how the Young Wägilak’s *bungul* [song and dance] goes. From the beginning to the end’ (Justin Nunggaragalug in Curkpatrick et al. 2010).¹⁸

The following table details many of the public *manikay* songs belonging to the Wägilak clan, in their correct sequence (Fig. 4e). These were observed and recorded during fieldwork in Ngukurr, especially during the lead up to a number of funerals and

¹⁷ The spear entered the ground in the low lying hills to the south of the Njilipidji outstation. Andy Peters (2011) suggests that his estate, Wulku, was also founded by Djuwalpaḍa with the same spear. The site where Djuwalpaḍa’s spear went into the ground at Njilipidji is a sacred place, protected by the dangers posed to any person going there: you cannot touch any of the bushes or break any sticks. If you do so accidentally, you will get sores on your arms and legs, boils and lice.

¹⁸ In the Ritharrŋu language, *lär*r refers to chips from a stone spearhead (Zorc 1996).

smoking ceremonies.¹⁹ As well as forming distinct liturgical sets for different ceremonial contexts, these discrete groupings reflect the ownership of *manikay* by different Wägilak sub-groups.²⁰ The songs of Njilipidji, a record of the Wägilak narrative ‘from the beginning to the end,’ progress in the order that follows. Additionally, each individual subject has its own series of *bilma* (clapstick) modes which translate the physical actions of Djuwalpaḍa — stalking, dancing, walking — into sound and rhythmic patterns, and these become the basis of rhythmic cadences for each particular song item (see Chapter Five).

The *manikay* that I heard during my fieldwork in Arnhem Land (2010–2013) was mostly performed in the days immediately preceding funerals, at the house of the deceased and for a few hours duration before sun down. These ceremonies would often begin with ‘set four,’ designated below and beginning with Dhaṅarra (White flower). A smoking ceremony would climax with ‘set three’ on the final day — the set used in *CRB*. Finishing with the purifying *wata* (wind), this set of songs would ‘wrap it up — finish it now. All good and bad feelings finished’ (Benjamin Wilfred 2010). *Bungul* (song and dance) at festivals for entertainment generally drew upon any subject listed here at whim, occasionally alternating between Wägilak *manikay* items and the *manikay* of different but closely related clans, such as Marraṅu, Murruṅun, Mandhaayung (Nungubuyu) and Nunydjirpi.

¹⁹ Much fieldwork was dedicated to compiling as complete a list as possible.

²⁰ Similar to the Djapu clan, split into the Dhudi Djapu and Gupa Djapu. Explored below, these are two separate lineages within Dhuwa moiety families of the Wägilak clan that stand in a *māri-gutharra* relationship to one another.



Fig. 4c *Djuwalpaḏa*, c. 1997 by Sambo Barabara. The songs come out of the painting. Reproduced with permission



Fig. 4d *Devil Devil*, 2012 by Wally Wilfred. Reproduced with permission

SET 1 owner ANDY LUKAMAN PETERS**homeland – Wuḷku***Clouds*

(passed on by Paul Wulkakin)

- Wukun Clouds
- Gapu Freshwater rain
- Nänuk (Djuwalpada) *Mokuy* (Ghost)
- Damala Eagle hawk
- Duduḷudu Frogmouth owl
- Guruwuḷuk Small magpie, possibly a butcherbird
- Rimu/Waḷkara Archer fish
- Yolḷu dancing People dancing; *ringitj* wind ceremony
- Bonba Butterfly
- Yolḷu Man stands for punishment, spearing
- Dhaḷarra White flower, of the *gaḷayka* (Stringybark tree)
- Dhaḷara King brown snake

SET 2 owner ANDY LUKAMAN PETERS**homeland – Njilipidji***Meeting*

- Naku Canoe
- Walpurrungu' Plains turkey
- Birrkpirrk Lap-winged plover
- Birrkpirrk/Duduḷudu Meeting of plover and frogmouth owl
- Wata Wind
- Djuwalpada *Mokuy* (Ghost)
- Yolḷu dancing *Ringitj* ceremony for *wata* (wind) songs

SET 3 owners BENJAMIN MIYALA WILFRED & DANIEL WARRATHUMA WILFRED

homeland – Nilipidji

Wind

(Especially for *wata* 'wind' smoking ceremonies and the set used in *CRB*;
passed on by Sambo Barabara)

- Djuwalpada (Nirriyinirriyi) *Mokuy* (Ghost)
- Gara Spear
- Galpu Spear thrower
- Galpan Dillybag
- Raki String
- Mälka Woven basket
- Wata Wind
- Birrkpirrk Lap-winged plover

SET 4 owners BENJAMIN MIYALA WILFRED & DANIEL WARRATHUMA WILFRED

homeland – Nilipidji

Wind

(Especially for *dhapi* ‘circumcision’ ceremonies;
passed on by Sambo Barabara)

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| • Dhaŋarra | White flower, of the <i>gaḍayka</i> (Stringybark tree) |
| • Mäḍawk | Silver crowned friarbird |
| • Wärrarra | Red sunset |
| • Waṭu | Dog |
| • Gurtha | Fire |
| • Guku | Honey |
| • Wäkwak | Black crow* |
| • Bewiyik | Black-faced cuckoo* |
| • Wata | Wind |
| • Birrkpirrk | Lap-winged plover |
| • Guku | Honey (repeat) |

* Wäkwak and Bewiyik are often replaced in this series by their corresponding Nunydjirpi versions

SET 5 owner ROY NATILMA WILFRED Dhuwal Djambarrpuyŋu

homeland – Gupawupa

Rain

Although Djambarrpuyŋu songs, these *manikay* use the same melodic and rhythmic constructions as the songs belonging to Nilipidji.

- Set of songs based on Rain²¹

Fig. 4e Table of song sets within the Wägilak *manikay* narrative

²¹ This thesis limits itself specifically to Wägilak songs. I allude to the content of the Djambarrpuyŋu songs and their connection to the Wägilak narrative. It is outside of my scope to detail this repertoire in significant detail.

Manikay connections

The above *manikay* subjects (Fig. 4e) represent the basic narrative that Wägilak *manikay* explicates, in its strings of names, words, actions, rhythmic modes and vocal interjections. These narratives are primarily concerned with the birth of the Wägilak homelands, and as I will show, the receiving of Wägilak *rom* (law) and *maḍayin* (sacra), which constitute knowledge beyond the basic, figurative story of the subjects listed above. Yolŋu music is much like Yolŋu art, in that it:

Condenses and expresses extremely complex relationships between things — between social groups, and in the seasonal cycle between fresh water and salt water, fire and water, between life and death, and male and female — and underlying all is the template of the ancestral past. (H. Morphy 2008, 109)

There are many possible iterations and layers to this narrative, meaningful in different contexts. These sets of songs abound with relationships between distinct component parts and greater narrative wholes, which operate on a level above the detail of individual songs. The text for the Wägilak song Birrkpirrk (Plover), for example, concerns the cry of the plover, the sounds of its voice heard crying on the wind: ‘Yawilila, yawilila.’ While this is reflective of the actual cry of the plover, it is also part of a greater ontology concerning the destination of *birrimbirr* (souls) of the recently deceased.

A close relationship exists between the Wägilak country of Andy Peters at Wuḷku and the Wägilak country of Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred at Ŋilipidji: Peters is *māri* or *gagu* (mother’s mother’s brother, in Wägilak and Kriol) to the Wägilak singers involved in *CRB*. Frances Morphy suggest that this distinction, between what might be termed the upper- and lower-Wägilak, most likely came about as the clan grew in size and natural fission occurred along the *māri-gutharra* line (pers. comm. 2013; see below).

Manikay ‘set one,’ above, belonging to Andy Peters, sings of the *duduḍudu* (owl) (LE_4.4) and ‘set three,’ belonging to Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred sings of the

birrkpirrk (plover) (LE_4.5).²² These individual sets represent independently discrete narratives, yet on another plane there are integral relationships between the song sets. This relationship is legally formalised in the song *Birrkpirrk/Dudutu* from ‘set two’ (LE_4.6). After flying away from its meeting with *Djuwalpada*, the *birrkpirrk* meets up with the *dudutu* and they sing a duet together (that is, the song *Birrkpirrk/Dudutu*),²³ forming a close *ringitj* (embassy)²⁴ connection between the two Wägilak clans and country from Wuḷku and Njilipidji. Benjamin Wilfred explains:

BW: When *dudutu*, night owl, and plover bird [*birrkpirrk*] bin meet one another, from there they bin find song.

SC: Yeah, that’s where Njilipidji meets Wuḷku?

BW: Yeah, that’s where Wägilak meet Wuḷku mob. From there they bin sing rain, from there. Right up to my place. All the way down [across the countryside]. From there, from Wuḷku, im bin start, that rain. That’s where Andy [Peter’s] bin start from there — where that night owl and plover bird bin meet together.

SC: Before Andy, where does that *wukun* [cloud] come from? From Blue Mud Bay?

BW: Yeah, travels through there. Come up, right to top. All the way from coast, right up to fresh water; all the way down [...] Nunydjirpi and Mangurra mob, and Djambarrpuyṇu mob, and we all bin meet together then when the two birds bin meet. All the totems now, from those two animals — that song bin spread from there. And all the elders and old people just keep travelling and sing along from those two animals. From there, all the songs bin spread out, from each animal’s totem. From each clan. (Benjamin Wilfred 2011).

²² The *manikay* of Andy Peters, which directly precedes the series for Njilipidji, tells of *Djuwalpada*’s search for his deceased ‘mate — dead body, bones hanging in that tree, hang up in that table [platform],’ after he sets out from Butjulubayi. This is the narrative depicted by Sambo Barabara in his painting *The Dead Ones* of 2005 (Peters 2011). ‘And he is going to cry when he sees [those bones]. For smoking ceremony, to open that house. Maybe he’s going to put it in that hollow log, the *larrakitj* [hollow log coffin]. Paint him up’ (Peters 2011) (see Figs. 8c, d for image).

²³ Recordings of Peters’ *manikay* can be found in the Curpatrick collection at the AIATSIS archives (2010–2012).

²⁴ The term *ringitj* designates the satellite camps and preparation grounds of different clans that are separated from the Njārra ceremonial ground in that ceremony. This ground is the central point where different groups come together for important ceremonial and political activity. *Ringitj* is commonly translated as ‘embassy’ by Yolṇu people (Njārra as ‘parliament’), reflecting a desire to interpret their own cultural, legal and ceremonial practices in ways that assert equivalences with the social and political structures in Australia.

LE_4.4	<u>Duḍuṭuḍu</u> (from Wuḷku): Andy Peters, Andrew Wanambi and David Wilfred (<i>yidaki</i>). Ngukurr, 11.7.2011	00:28
LE_4.5	Birrkpirrk ‘Dancing’ (from Njilipidji): Andy Peters and David Wilfred (<i>yidaki</i>). Ngukurr, 12.7.2011	00:28
LE_4.6	Birrkpirrk/ <u>Duḍuṭuḍu</u> ‘Duet’: Andy Peters and David Wilfred (<i>yidaki</i>). Ngukurr, 12.7.2011	01:32

The Birrkpirrk/Duḍuṭuḍu song (LE_4.6) is based on a *bilma* mode shared by the Wägilak clans from the homelands of Njilipidji (Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred) and Wuḷku (Andy Peters). The song is in a double rhythmic mode consisting of two different *gumurr* (chest) sections (see Chapter Five).²⁵ The first *gumurr* (chest) is the song Birrkpirrk, bound by the characteristic cadence for that song (Fig. 4f). The second *gumurr* is the song Duḍuṭuḍu, continuing the same *bilma* mode but bound by a different cadence. The meeting of these two songs represents the close connection between the Wägilak clans based at Njilipidji and Wuḷku (see *Märi-Gutharra* section below):

Andy Peters: Those two, *birrkpirrk* and *duḍuṭuḍu*, have to face together, those two have to play together, dance together.

Daniel Wilfred: Double one now [a song with two *gumurr* ‘chests’]. Different — it changes. Duḍuṭuḍu, change, Birrkpirrk. You have to listen. (Andy Peters 2011)

Section of song	<i>Bilma</i> mode (about 66 beats/minute)	Cadence pattern
Birrkpirrk from Njilipidji		
<u>Duḍuṭuḍu</u> from Wuḷku		

Fig. 4f *Bilma* modes and cadence patters for the song Birrkpirrk/Duḍuṭuḍu (LE_4.6)

²⁵ Note that the first *gumurr* (chest), Birrkpirrk in this example, is actually repeated again after the Duḍuṭuḍu *gumurr* (LE_4.6).

As in the meeting of the *birrkpirrk* and *duduṭudu*, further layers of narrative connections underlie all of the individual song subjects above (Fig. 4e), connecting these in complexes that extend through different clans and countries across Arnhem Land, forming ceremonial and legal relations within the Yolŋu Dhuwa moiety. ‘Yolŋu mortuary rituals are not hybrid creations made up through combining elements that history has brought into contact. Rather they are the product of a regional ecumene’ (Morphy and Morphy 2012, 53). The prevalent parlance of *songlines* refers to this characteristic of ceremonial practice.

Manikay narratives often represent these connections between clans and country with images of natural events. Extending over the country of different clans, the *wukun* (clouds) form out at sea in Blue Mud Bay (*manikay* ‘set one’), before they are blown over the land by the *wata* (wind). The wind gathers all the clouds together in a great storm (‘set three’ and ‘set four’), eventually falling as rain and running through the freshwater streams and rivers such as Wunungirra (the Walker River). This fresh water flows once again to the sea (‘set five’), finally resting in saltwater country (Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 14). Observing similarities in *bilma* (clapstick) modes between one clan and another is a key indicator of a shared narrative connection (see Chapter Five).²⁶

This and similar ecological cycles, which govern and enfold all life within nature, can be understood as a metaphor for the Yolŋu concept of *tradition*. The concept of *gularri* in particular, the continuous flowing of the waters from rain to stream to sea, can be understood as a great flow connecting individuals through time and place (explored in Chapter Six). Andy Peters speaks about his country at Wuḷku:

I’d like to tell you one more story. I bin start off from my country right back at Wuḷku. And we can see Gumurrnama Waltjana [rain season], we see that cloud coming towards us. And the cloud make himself rain fall down. Wukun [clouds]. Comes from Luṭunba [in Blue Mud Bay] towards my country, to Wuḷku [...] Wata [wind] come from Luṭunba. Come to Njilipidji

²⁶ For example, the Djambarrpuyŋu clan (*rain songs*) use *bilma* modes and rhythmic sequences very similar to the Wägilak patterns.

way, goes to *ringitj* country [through country connected by ‘embassies’]. Then to my place, Wuḷku, then Djilpin. (Peters 2011)

The sets of *manikay* belonging to Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred are colloquially referred to as ‘those *wata* (wind) songs,’ and Andy Peters’ *manikay* as ‘those rain songs.’²⁷ The clans who hold rights for the performance of these songs might be referred to as ‘that *wukun* (cloud) mob.’ In *CRB*, those *wata* songs are sung (‘set three’). This is the specific liturgical programme used specifically for wind related ceremonies such as smoking and purifications (Fig. 4i; see below).²⁸

Yet further connections between these song series transpire in other, apparently mundane, aspects of ceremony. The white paint applied by Wägilak singers to their bodies in a splattered pattern represents a narrative element from Andy Peter’s *manikay* (Fig. 4h). This paint, known as *gamuruṅgu*, is said to be the eagle droppings from Peters’ *Damala* (Eagle hawk) song subject. Even though *manikay* series are sequential and conform to an orthodox narrative structure, they are highly inter-referential and densely layered.

Manikay repertoires connect clans and homelands throughout the Yolŋu world. These connections begin with traces of ancestral presence in the land and the activities of *wanjarr* beings that travelled through many different areas, as well as governing ecological phenomenon. The land and ecology are tangible manuscripts permanently inscribed with the actions of ancestral creation (Chapter Three), a canvas of narratives painted in song.

Complex layers of signification emerge out of the basic tenets of the Wägilak narrative, expressed in the figurative subjects of public *manikay* song. Just as the individual sets of songs belonging to a particular clan are unique iterations specific to a distinct place

²⁷ Andy Peters was eager to record the *manikay* songs listed above because he feels that the Young Wägilak Group ignore these when performing in *CRB*: ‘They are missing *manikay*, their half. We are losing a little bit of *manikay*. They miss lots of *manikay* in the back [of the sequence]. They are going for the front all the time. Miss big mob, lot of songs up the back [...] — all stuff belonging to Old Paul Gundakta. They know, but they all the time go for this song here [*manikay* ‘set four’]’ (Peters 2011).

²⁸ This ecological cycle can be extended further: smoke becomes cloud, then wind, rain, freshwater, brackish water, saltwater.

such as Njilidji, these songs are nevertheless bound within greater narratives moving, like the seasons, over everything else. A *manikay* singer is ever caught up in the greater song beyond his own individual voice.



Fig. 4g *Manikay* singers preparing to move a body from the morgue in Ngukurr: (l-r) Andrew Wanambi, David Wilfred, Graeme Wilfred, Lennie Wilfred, Daniel Wilfred, Andy Peters, Benjamin Wilfred. 18.8.2010



Fig. 4h Benjamin Wilfred painting up for *bungul* at the Ngukurr Festival. Every aspect of ceremony carries narrative: here, the white droppings of the *damala* (eagle). 20.8.2010



Fig. 4i The cover of a story book created by the YWG and the author, depicting the larger narrative sequence that Wägilak *manikay* fits within: clouds, wind and rain. The circular design represents a ground sculpture of the sacred waters of Luṭunba (see below). The Kriol text translates: ‘A good story that comes from the homeland [Kriol — *kantri*; Wägilak — *wäŋa*] of Njilipidji.’

Elaborating key elements

This section points towards complexities of signification and layering of meaning within the Wägilak narrative. While everything contained below comes from a basic, public reading of Wägilak *manikay*, the richness of possible interpretations suggests the way ‘figurative representations [or public song subjects] obscure the multiplex relationships between things by orienting interpretations in a particular direction’ (H. Morphy 2005, 162). Chapter Five will explore how these complexities are reflected within the musical structures of *manikay*.

Wata (wind) – Purification after death

Djiŋaḷa gurru yalagarayi Mawululayi

Gumurr-wuma wākura dādutj-manayi

Gumurr yabalayi gumurr-wuma gumurr-gumirriḷa balayi

He’s going up to Ŋilipidji

Pulled to the country by his chest

Walking back to his place

Wata (Wind) song text

When singing begins from the Djuwalpaḍa subject, a performance must climax with the song Wata (Wind), slowly picking up from a gentle breeze to a cyclone as it carries the *birrimbirr* (soul) of the deceased back to the deep, profound waters of Luṭunba (see section below).²⁹ Through the air the *birrimbirr* flies, travelling to where it finishes its journey, flying to Luṭunba (LE_4.7). That is it, from the beginning to the end: Wägilak *manikay* starts with Djuwalpaḍa and finishes at Luṭunba.

The song of the *birrkpirrk* (plover) is heard carrying on the wind, and the dancers mimic Djuwalpaḍa as he dances like that bird (Daniel Wilfred 2010). The *manikay* song

²⁹ The *birrimbirr* (soul) is associated with the creative *waŋarr*, the great ancestral beings (such as the Djaŋ’kawu sisters) that moved across the land, forming ecological phenomena and geographic features, and transforming themselves into animals, sacred places and sacred objects. The *birrimbirr* is different from the *mokuy* (ghost), a particular malignant ghost associated with death, the specific *wāŋa-ŋaraka* (bone-country) of a clan, public ceremony and law.

is carried on human breath like the wind. The *yidaki* (didjeridu) is played with the same wind, the breath that rushes through the *dupun* (the Wägilak's hollow log coffin — much shorter than those in the rest of Arnhem Land), the container for the bones replicated in the design of the *yidaki*. A breeze is felt blowing, tickling the hairs on the necks of the *manikay* singers: the *mokuy* Djuwalpada is present. Djuwalpada is carried in the smoke, also blown by the wind back to his home, to his *naraka-wäŋa* (bone-country) at Njilipidji.³⁰

LE_4.7	Wata 'Picking up': the YWG leading a funeral in Ngukurr. The wind picks up from a gentle breeze, carrying the <i>birrimbirr</i> (soul). 18.8.2010	01:47
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Manikay repertoires throughout Arnhem Land focus on the *mokuy* (ghost) figures responsible for the establishment of the *naraka-wäŋa* (bone-country) belonging to each clan. This is where the ancestral narrative of the Wägilak begins and this is the ultimate destination of the ghost Djuwalpada, sent back to its homeland following the death of a Wägilak person. 'He always lives there. He got a hole there; *mokuy* at Njilipidji' (Daniel Wilfred, 2010). Njilipidji is called with sacred *yäku* (names), a climax toward which the entire *manikay* series and rhythmic sequences build in increasing musical intensity and energy.

The calling of sacred *yäku* (names) accompanies important ceremonial action during funeral ceremonies, orienting the *mokuy* and present generations towards Njilipidji. As the names of a clan's *naraka-wäŋa* (bone-country) are intoned, green *many'tjarr* (leaves) are placed on the small campfires surrounding the *bungul* (dance) ground, billowing thick white smoke over the premises and family of the deceased, the singers, dancers and audience (Fig. 4j). Flour tins full of smouldering leaves are taken through and under the house itself, as well as into any vehicles and the Toyota Landcruiser hearse. This purification ceremony is about looking after the deceased, carrying away the malignant *mokuy* on the smoke and wind.

Djuwalpada (see Figs. 4c, d, k) is the central protagonist in the Wägilak narrative, the originator of public law, ceremonial responsibility and title to land. Sambo Barabara

³⁰ The *mokuy* felt in the breeze, after Corn and Gumbula's description of ancestral presence sensed in ecological movements (2007, 124).

painted many works and significantly, 'of all the paintings executed between 2003 and 2005, Devil Devils [*mokuy* figures] feature in 30 out of 51 paintings' (Bowdler 2008, 257). A *mokuy* (ghost) is one classification of a spirit of a deceased person, the other being the *birrimbirr* (soul).³¹ The *mokuy* returns to a person's *ṅaraka-wāṅa* (bone-country) or hereditary estate. The *mokuy* is the 'cheeky' (literally evil), unruly and malignant spirit, the type that makes a 'mess in the kitchen while you are asleep' (Justin Nunggarrgalug, pers. comm. 2010) or cuts the fuel line of the boat when you are out at sea. 'He'll bite you too' (Benjamin Wilfred 2011a). Wally Wilfred paints the *mokuy* figure *Djuwalpaḍa* with dangerous blades on his pointed elbows and an aggressive pose (Fig. 4k; also see 'elbow-pointing' section below).

Commenting on one of his similar paintings of *Djuwalpaḍa*, Sambo Barabara gave the following description, emphasising the danger of *mokuy* figures:

He [*Djuwalpaḍa*, is a] fighting man with blades on knees and middle place on his arm. They can rip you open. Also feet can kick you. He fights with blades on elbows and knees — to kill whitefella or blackfella. The claw hands are same way used as weapons, they can tear away the ribs. And the teeth and the feet — they can cut. When he gets you by the ears you can't know anything. (Bowdler 2009, 62)

Mokuy represent the ongoing presence of the deceased, ambiguous in their liminal state between life and death (H. Morphy 1991, 280). If the *mokuy* of a recently deceased person is not sent away through a purification ceremony, it will hang around, getting up to no good, bringing its malignant nature to bear upon people.³² There is much responsibility resting on those who perform the purification ceremony. 'Just as songs are produced by breath, their sounds carried in the air, so the smoke of the purification ritual fire combines with the sounds of the words to push the spirit away' (Magowan 2007, 90).

³¹ Discussed below in the section *Luṭunba*.

³² Traditionally, Yolŋu would paint the designs of a particular clan's *mokuy* on the body of a person nearing death (Williams 1986, 33).

Funeral ceremonies which I attended in Ngukurr all climaxed with the singing of Wata, which blows away the *mokuy* of the deceased. For the Wägilak clan, the songs Birrkpirrk (Plover) and Wata (Wind) provide a liturgical programme for purification.

Wata buthun marayi	The wind is blowing
Läplap mirriñani	The <i>mokuy</i> is walking with the wind
Djulgarram buma	He is dancing on the ground
Mokuy mali nhangu	He is looking at the shadows
Gangul gangul buthun marayi	The <i>mokuy</i> flies now

Wata (Wind) song text



Fig. 4j Smoking the house of the deceased with *many'tjarr* (leaves), Ngukurr. 19.8.2010



Fig. 4k *Devil Devil*, 2011 by Wally Wilfred. This painting of Djuwalpaḍa emphasises his dangerous, malicious character. As in Barbara's painting, he is surrounded by his accoutrements (see Figs. 4c). Reproduced with permission

Likandhu-ŋupan (elbow-pointing) – Connections

Likandhu-ŋupan Djuwalpada

Djuwalpada Ŋirriyinjirriyi, Dhawal-wal duy'yun

Djuwalpada, with elbows pointing

Djuwalpada, Ŋirriyinjirriyi, walking across the country

Djuwalpada song text

The phrase *likandhu-ŋupan*, literally 'elbow-with pointing,' is a prominent reference in the Djuwalpada song subject (see LE_5.5; Figs. 5e, f, g). The phrase is situated at the very beginning of most *gumurr* (chest) sections, the large structural segment of *manikay* song items defined between rhythmic cadences. It is frequently the last text sung at the end of each *liya-waŋa* (head-speech or coda). The dance accompanying the Djuwalpada *manikay* item mimics the *mokuy* who walks in search of honey, forearms raised to shoulder level and elbows bent, pointing to where the eyes seek (Fig. 4k, l).

Likan is best understood as a *connection* like the elbow-joint, or as Deger refers to it, *betweenness* (2006, 90). The junction between branch and trunk, the crescent shape of a moon or bay, a bend in the river (Corn 2008, 2), are all referred to with the term *likan*: a joint that connects. As opposed to the embedded, secret *ŋaraka* (bones) of a clan, *likan* express extended relations such as those between family groups. In song, *likan yäku* (connecting names; power names) are invoked over climactic *bilma* (clapstick) modes, the point of the ceremony where ceremonial naming of the powerful *waŋarr* (ancestors), individual persons or places, occurs (Keen 1995, 511).

The Wägilak clan invoke multivalent *likan yäku* while moving a body or coffin during a funeral ceremony, and these are the shared names, public connections between different but related clans. This either occurs to the accompaniment of *bilma* with no *yidaki*, or rhythmically over the top of the *birrkpirrk* subject during a smoking ceremony (LE_4.8 below).

Invoking *likan yäku*, shared between different clans connect those groups to a common genesis and ceremonial complex; that is, the interrelated narratives and

interactions of particular progenitorial ancestors are connected to a shared narrative body (such as the phrase *ganga-mäwulmirr*, discussed below). ‘In this sense, the different groups who trace descent from a common *wanarr* are quite literally like the branches or *likan* (literally ‘elbows’) of a tree or a river system’ (Corn 2008, 11).

Further, *likan yäku* might be, simultaneously, the name of a particular ancestor, person and place (Keen 1995), connecting various named manifestations of the same thing through metonymic equivalence (Chapter Three). The invocation of names is said to connect a clan directly with the *wanarr* which they invoke. The caller of these names in ceremony is known as *djirrikay* (F. Morphy, pers. comm. 2011). The elbow-pointing dance and songs of the Wägilak *garma* (public) repertoire link the clan directly to the *mokuy* Djuwalpaḍa, a manifestation made evident in the choreography: elbows bent, eyes seeking, the dancers stalk around looking for honey.

When being photographed for publicity on a *CRB* tour, the YWG will often assert their connections to ancestral law and the country founded by Djuwalpaḍa at Njilipidji by pointing their elbows (Fig. 4I). Further, by invoking sacred names in song — connecting a performance directly with an ancestor, person and place — the singer asserts their own personal and clan rights in country ownership. At moments when a body is being moved or other climactic points in a ceremony, one leader calls the *likan* names of a clan, directing the *birrimbirr* soul of the deceased to the correct hereditary waters (LE_4.8).

LE_4.8	A funeral in Ngukurr with <i>likan yäku</i> invoked over <i>bilma</i> patterns, 2010	00:29
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Through the invocation of *likan yäku*, the Wägilak narrative asserts laws of social obligation and responsibility within interconnected polities. Calling sacred names also connects the present to those past generations and creative ancestors who invoked the very same names, literally shaping the social and natural world around them as they did so.



Fig. 4I David Wilfred *jikandhu-gupan* (elbow-pointing) (Image: Tobias Titz). 18.3.2011

Märi-gutharra – Social backbone

Märi and *gutharra* are also key terms sung throughout the Wägilak *manikay* series and denote a reciprocal kinship relation: *märi* (or *gagu* in Kriol) is one's mother's mother ('s brother); *gutharra* (or *greni* in Kriol) is one's (sister's) daughter's children. This is an integral structural relationship within Yolŋu society. *Märi-gutharra* — the genetically closest same moiety relationship aside from direct agnatic descent — is the relationship between Andy Peters and the Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred. This relationship is mirrored in *manikay* repertoire, evident in the close narrative dependence between the *manikay* series (*clouds, meeting, wind*) discussed above (Fig. 4m, n). Andy Peters is Sambo Barabara and Daniel Wilfred's *märi*; they are Peters' *gutharra*.

Märi-gutharra is a reciprocal pairing that forms a 'set of interlocking rights and duties and provides the structure for a comprehensive set of checks and balances in the control and use of land' (Williams 1986, 52). Further, if the continuation of direct agnatic succession within a clan fails, the responsibility to 'look after' one's *märi's* land and its related sacred objects is enacted. Reciprocally, there is legitimate claim of a male *gutharra* to the marriage bestowal of his *märi's* daughter's daughter — closely related but of opposite moiety.³³

Following of this social structure is confirmed as the following of ancestral precedent, constantly reinforced in the performance of *manikay*, which perpetuates laws of kinship as a component of *ŋalabulungu rom* (following ancestral law). 'If a relationship is real then it must have an ancestral precedent [...]' and relationships such as *märi-gutharra* are 'stable underpinnings that are reproduced on a daily basis' (Morphy and Morphy 2006, 74). This stability is fostered by the orthodox perpetuation of connected elements within the essential narratives of *manikay* sets, passed on for generations (for example, the song Birrkpirrk/Dudutu above; LE_4.6).

Manikay repertoire and the unique song structures and forms belonging to each clan are both moiety and clan specific. As in the sequences of song subjects, there are

³³ Yolŋu patri-moieties are exogamous so that each individual marries into the opposite moiety.

similarities between the musical structures of closely related clans, especially within the *märi-gutharra* relationship; the set of same-moiety songs closest, musically, to those handed down directly through one's *bäpurru* (father's group) are those belonging to one's *märi* or *gutharra* (Chapter Five looks to the musical forms of *manikay* in greater detail).

I suggest that the strong similarities between musical forms — especially rhythmic forms — allow for a greater degree of competence if responsibilities to 'look after' a repertoire ever need to be exercised: 'If a clan becomes extinct important rights of succession are vested in the *gutharra* clan' (Morphy and Morphy 2006, 81). One's *märipulu* (*märi* group) also share in *maḍayin* (ceremonial law) (Corn 2002), a fact often expressed through language which accounts for closely related *manikay* or *buṅgul* series as 'the same but different' (Keen 1994, 127).

Today, Benjamin Wilfred holds responsibilities in looking after the *manikay* repertoire of the Nunydjirpi clan after '*greni* [*gutharra*] bin getting old and die' (Benjamin Wilfred 2010c). Custodianship of these songs and dances was passed on to Sambo Barabara from Nunydjirpi elders who feared that these repertoires would be forgotten.³⁴ These songs, presumed to be the last remaining Njandi language in active use, are today included seamlessly into Wägilak performances at *buṅgul* events.³⁵ For example, while there is a Wägilak version of Wäkwak (Black crow), it is often the Nunydjirpi version — with the same rhythmic but different melodic constructions — that replaces it in performance without any disruption to the narrative (LE_4.9).

LE_4.9	Wäkwak (Crow) 'Feeding': Nunydjirpi version sung by the YWG at a funeral in Ngukurr, 19.8.2010	00:41
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³⁴ There are recordings of Barabara singing and playing *yidaki* for these songs in the Heath collection of the AIATSIS archives (1974–1976).

³⁵ Heath writes, with ominous portent in 1978, about the declining Njandi language: 'There are probably about six persons who speak Ngandi well now. My principal informant, Sandy (Maḍulpu) is probably in his forties, and so far as I know, persons younger than him do not speak the language well [...] Since the Ngandi speakers are scattered at several settlements (Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Roper Valley etc.), there is no likelihood that the language will survive much longer' (Heath 1978, 3).

Today, Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred also sing the songs for their mother's clan — if no other singers can be brought in from a nearby community like Numbulwar — for funerals or other ceremonies. This would have been highly unorthodox in historical Yolŋu communities, as rights to sing ceremonial repertoires are passed down the father's line (*bäpurrū*). In the Yolŋu kinship system, Wägilak people should act as *djungayi* (managers) for their mother's group (Ritharrŋu clan), playing *yidaki* and overseeing performances but not singing.

Those Nunydjirrpi kids didn't pick up those songs. Now we share the song [...] we [also] lead our mother's songs. Sing along because not many people know. Teaching the older ones, some married. Teaching Maḍarrpa boys. We are right to lead our mother's songs. Ritharrŋu and Maḍarrpa. (Benjamin Wilfred 2011a)



Fig. 4m Andy Lukaman Peters recording *manikay* at the Ngukurr Language Centre. 11.7.2011

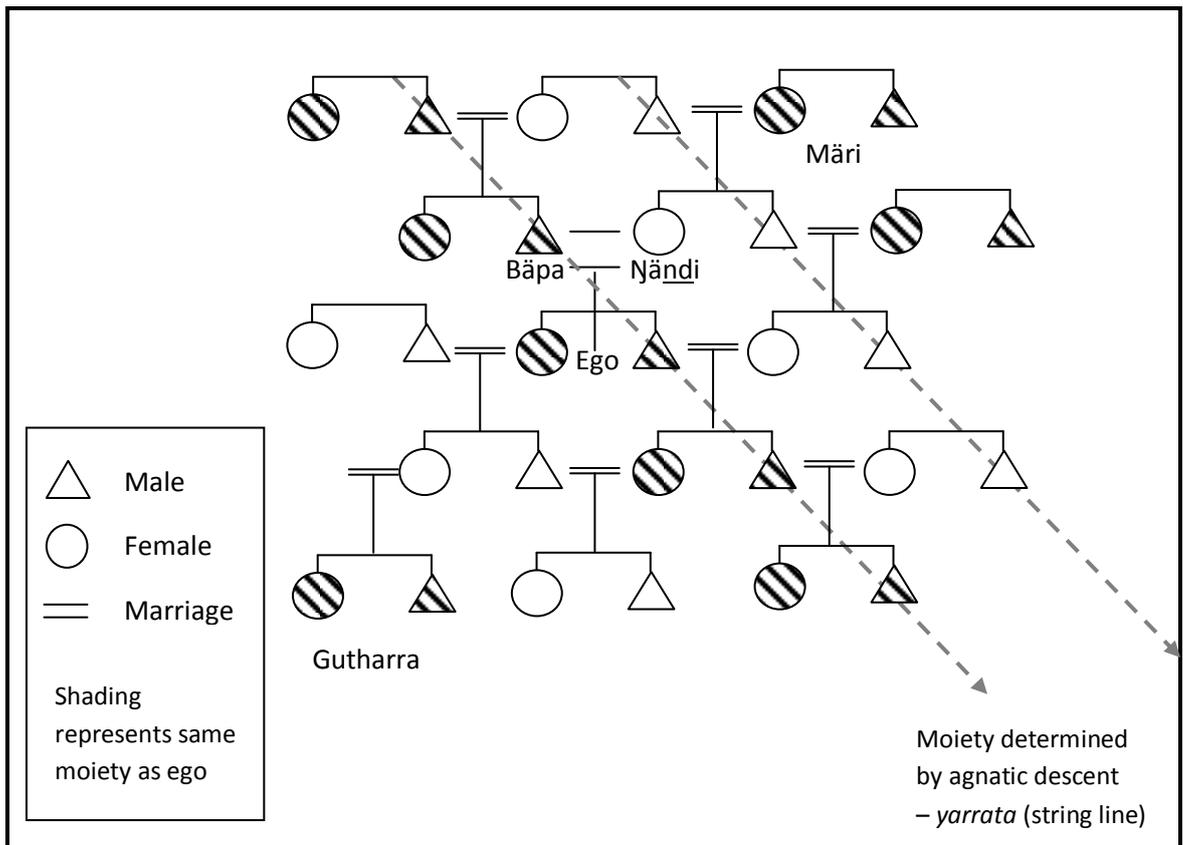


Fig. 4n Diagram representing the reciprocal *māri-gutharra* relationship. In this diagram, Ego is the *māri* of Gutharra, and Ego is also the *gutharra* of Māri.

Guku (honey) – Life's path

Lirrawaya banburr mayipa

Guyu-guyu, guyu-guyu, ahhhh, ohhhh

Rawarraray, bulunyrri dalgumirri

The toothed bee [with stinger] is flying, starting to make a hive

Buzzing, buzzing, ahhhh, ohhhh [sound of the wind]

Like the sound of the wind, it flies a long way to make another home

Guku (Honey) song text

The bee Yarrpany, with its protruding stinger, enters the beehive with its long, protruding entrance tunnel. This entrance is known as *dhapi*, a term which also denotes the important male circumcision ceremony that begins with the song Dhanarra (*manikay* 'set four' above). The *guku* (honey) inside the beehive is extracted with long thin sticks, and this sweet substance itself is the law given by the *mokuy* who extracted it: 'Honey (*guku*) and [the bee's] hive teach us how to live [...] A bees' hive is a symbol of excellence that can be achieved both in individual and community life' (Corn 2002, 106). The honey is the sweet essence of law — something inherently good and life sustaining. In the Wägilak narrative, Djuwalpada finds the *guku* and carries it with him in his dillybag.

That flower for Stringybark tree, those white flowers make the honey too. The bee goes eat them flowers and then he fly. He goes to make that sugarbag [honey], makes that nest. Makes one there, makes one there, camp [home] for the sugarbag. Then he flies back, feeds more. Then he makes the song [*manikay*]. This sugarbag [bee] bin fly from the other place. He bin hang around there [Nlilipidji]. Sometimes he goes to Yirritja country. There is a different Yirritja honey-fly too. Dhuwa and Yirritja got sugarbag; for men's business, men's ceremony. (Benjamin Wilfred 2011a)

A length of *raki* (string) is used to surround the house of a recently deceased person, marking a perimeter, outside of which people remain until the purification ceremony is completed (*manikay* 'set three' above). Cloth tassels are tied on to this string (or rope) at around one metre intervals, and these represent the flight of the bee and the

bubbles in the honey (Williams 1986, 32).³⁶ ‘Every feathery marking is a sign of place, a focus of becoming, an ancestral event of the emergence of life’ (Magowan 2003, 304).

For the Wägilak clan, the bee begins its journey at Njilipidji and ends at Raymangirr in Arnhem Bay, where many close relations to the clan (Marraju family) have traditional homelands. The bee’s journey represents the life path of humankind, a journey of following law (*ṅalabulungu rom*; see Chapter Three). This path is established at circumcision, an initiation into law during which the chests of the boy initiands are painted with the *dhaṅarra* (white eucalyptus flower) white-dot design (Benjamin Wilfred 2011).

As the seasons turn and the *dhaṅarra* flowers begin to bloom, boys begin their journey into ancestral law. Beginning with the *dhaṅarra* flower, boys follow the bee’s flight from flowers to hive, a progression from outside to inside meanings, external phenomenon to internal ancestral law and power (LE_4.10). Those oriented toward this journey, brought into Yolḷu law, not only follow the path of the *raki* (string; bee’s flight), but through performing ceremony continue to weave fibres into its ever-extending length, perpetuated through the generations (Chapter Six).

LE_4.10	Guku: YWG singing at a funeral. Andy Lukaman Peters sings the coda. Ngukurr, 18.8.2010	00:52
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Yarrpany, the long-nosed bee, is a *waṅarr* (ancestral being) associated with the formation of inter-moiety *maḍayin* (ceremonial law) (Keen 1994; Corn 2002). *Gaṅga-māwulmirr* is key term sung throughout the Wägilak Djuwalpaḍa song subject and is a shared Dhuwa-moiety name for honey. Corn notes that *māwul* is ‘a Golumala *yāku* for honey’ (2005 appendix, 88), and confirms that ‘it is connected through a shared multi-clan smoking purification ceremony, [...] a shared name for honey from the Dhuwa *yarrpany* ‘long-nosed (i.e. stinger; long-tailed) bee’ (Corn, pers. comm. 2011).

³⁶ Cloth tassels, as a substitute for using feathers in ceremonial contexts, was most likely introduced by the Macassans, who brought cloth to Arnhem Land prior to European contact (H. Morphy 2008, 61).

The connections between clans and country created by the flight of this *sugarbag* (bee) shows, as Evan Wilfred suggests, ‘where that Dhuwa country finishes’ (Normand 2009, 30) and greater responsibilities begin. The bee’s flight through various tracts of country connects Dhuwa moiety clans in relationships above the immediate family level: the bee brings these clans together within a greater polity established through initiation and circumcision.³⁷

When a purification ceremony reaches its climax with the *wata* subject, the house of the deceased is smoked and the string is taken down. This is the end of a particular journey, the bee has reached its destination in the hive: ‘The honey is the water and clean flowing lifeblood of the person that has just oozed back into the spiritual vein of the earth to be taken home to the pool of spirits to be reborn’ (Magowan 2003, 305).

Strings, baskets and bags

Mälka dil’yun marrayi bulunyrri

Rrr, rrr, rakirri; Rrr, rrr, gawudju

That string bag — now we are painting up

Rolling that string; rolling and making it longer

Mälka (String bag) song text

Raki (String) and Mälka (String bag) are songs performed and danced in the liturgical set for a smoking ceremony (LE_4.11). The dancer’s actions accompanying this item mimic the pounding and rolling of plant fibres into string, extending it as each new fibre becomes a part of the whole. The song is a metaphor for *manikay* as an expression of tradition: each performance of *manikay* is one fibre woven into that ongoing string.

³⁷ Howard Morphy (1991, 130; 186) writes of the journey of the Wägilak Sisters, recreated in the Djunguwan ceremony. As they journeyed north of Cape Shield, they cut down a giant Stringybark tree to reach the honey at the top. When the tree crashed to the ground it sent splinters flying, landing in various Dhuwa moiety country ceremonial grounds as *djuwany* posts. These posts are central to circumcision ceremonies performed on these public ceremony grounds.

This string was sung, danced and rolled by Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred’s father, their father’s father, and their father’s father’s father — extending along the *bäpurru* (father group; agnatic descent). *Raki* encodes the way knowledge, song, dance and design are passed down in the Yolŋu world. One takes on the responsibility of sustaining ones father’s repertoire, the responsibility of sustaining narratives and elements within a greater ceremonial constellation. To continue to roll and extend the string down the *yarrata* (string-line; patrilineal descent) connects a particular clan to its creative ancestors (Hamby 2007, 211) and country.

LE_4.11	Mälka (Sting bag) ‘Dancing’: Jim Wilfred leading the YWG at a funeral in Ngukurr, 18.8.2010	00:55
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The string *is* tradition and individuals are very much one small part of it. In performing song, the string might be rolled in an individual way, with creativity and improvisation, character, style and voice. Yet ultimately, any subjectivity is subsumed by ongoing tradition: the greater string is a blueprint above and beyond the individual fibres. The ancestral reality is above and beyond the individual songs and the individual singers performing. Yet the greater ancestral reality is nevertheless sustained in the present by those very iterations of performance, the individual fibre of *today’s* performance heard in the above listening example. As it is crafted, the string grows in length as these fibrous strands are interwoven and twisted together — a metaphor for life which extends out from its origins.³⁸

Raki can be woven into string dillybags and used as a thick fishing line or rope. Historically, *raki* was believed to possess healing powers and was often wrapped around the limb of someone suffering a muscular or skeletal injury, or an aching head or belly (Hamby 2007, 209). *Raki* is also central as ceremonial paraphernalia,

³⁸ This image is recalled throughout the thesis. It originally comes from Corn and Gumbula’s description of *manikay*, especially the Baripuy *manikay* series subject of *wunybul* (possum-fur string) spindled together from separate stands (2007, 122).

frequently made more sacred by the weaving or tying on of parakeet feathers along its length.³⁹

As well as surrounding the house of a deceased with string, connecting the deceased with their *bäpurru* (fathers group) and *yarraṭa* (ancestral line), *raki* connects people of the same generation together. In *mamaru* exchange ceremonies — especially around the Roper Valley and Hodgson Downs — a length of string is held above the heads of a procession, suspended by a *djuṅgayi* (ceremonial manager) at each end of the line. This string connects all the family of the same moiety underneath it as they sing the songs of their country.

In *CRB*, the YWG wear belts made from red, yellow and black wool, hanging down to their knees in long tassels. These are known as *balku* (Fig. 4o) (Daniel Wilfred, pers. comm. 2011). Similarly, a simple armband worn around the bicep is known as *ṅanbak*. String worn in ceremony represents each individual's 'development of ritual knowledge signifying the relationship that each individual has towards his or her homeland(s) and reflecting their rights and obligations' (Magowan 2003, 304).

These string adornments are not always during performances of the Wägilak *manikay* series. Yet whatever costume is worn, it is always related back to some form of ceremonial knowledge or reference. When wearing a black pin-striped suit during performances of *CRB*, Daniel Wilfred says that he has 'put on the black crow, *wäkwak*' — another Wägilak *manikay* subject (Fig. 4p). In the wearing of *balku*, *ṅanbak* or Daniel's pinstriped 'black crow,' ceremonial dress is seen as an integral element in the realisation of the Wägilak narrative as a constellation of metonymic equivalences.

Raki is also an important ceremonial element as it is woven into various baskets and bags, such as the *mälka* (loosely woven string bag) and *galpaṅ* (woven basket; dillybag). These have much significance for Yolṅu as containers of knowledge and law, told about it stories.

³⁹ *Raki* is made from the strands of vegetable fibres, usually from the Kurrajong tree, *Brachychiton megaphyllus*, 'which is found throughout Arnhem Land and known as *balgurr* or *balwurr*' (Hamby 2007, 209). Howard Morphy also explores the symbolism of ritual string in the Djunguwan ceremony (1991, 129–30), in which the white feather adornments on string are the white larvae in the hive of the bee.

Long ago, the Djaŋ'kawu Sisters emerged from the sea foam in the east, travelling from the sacred island Burralku to the east of Gove Peninsula (see Berndt 1974; West 2008). These *waŋarr* (ancestral beings) came to the mainland at Yalaŋbara, carrying with them the *maḍayin* (sacra) for the Dhuwa moiety, including *mälka* (string bag), *galpaŋ* (dillybag) and digging sticks, 'the public equivalent of men's secret *raŋga* sacred objects' (Keen 1994, 49). The Sisters were adorned with decorated string, bright feathers and beeswax and performed the first regional Njorra ceremony that connects Dhuwa clans together. As they travelled around the land, plunging their digging sticks into the ground at many different locations, they formed the different Dhuwa language groups, named places, plants and animals, and gave birth to the inhabitants of these places.⁴⁰

The *galpaŋ* basket carried by the Djaŋ'kawu Sisters is similar to the *ŋanymarra*, the woven conical mat, discussed by Berndt (1974 v.3). The *ŋanymarra* (container of life; womb; West 2008) was used by the Djaŋ'kawu Sisters to carry their *raŋga* (sacred objects), representing title to land, which they plunged into the ground at certain places to create the wells from which conception spirits emerge. These mats are also the wombs of the Sisters; the tufts on their edging are female pubic hair. Similar to the Wägilak Sisters narrative, men manage to steal the *maḍayin* (sacra) that the Djaŋ'kawu Sisters are carrying, establishing a precedence whereby men have control of sacred objects and restricted knowledge.⁴¹ As a result, objects like the spear, digging stick and basket have, and 'are associated with the gendered division of Yolngu society' (H. Morphy 2008, 37). The *ŋanymarra* mats however, remained the property of women even after men had stolen the other sacred objects.

By his acts of stalking prey and spear throwing sung in Wägilak *manikay*, Djuwalpaḍa is associated with traditionally male characteristics. 'Yet men explain that the profoundest and most sacred meanings of many of the spirit-beings are female or else have an important characteristics (or property or activity) that is associated with

⁴⁰ Benjamin Wilfred's totem is the *bidjay* (goanna, sometimes *djanda*), a manifestation of the Djaŋ'kawu Sisters.

⁴¹ Although as David Wilfred prophesies with a degree of humour, 'the day will come' when the women steal those ceremonial objects back (David Wilfred 2011).

women [...]’ (Williams 1986, 50).⁴² In Wägilak *manikay*, this is apparent in the feminine rolling of string and carrying of the *mälka* (string bag), described in the song subjects.

Djuwalpaḍa also carries his accoutrements and the *guku* (honey; law) with him in a dillybag (*galpan*) hung around his neck. This basket is a public symbol of the sacred law governing the Wägilak clan. The dillybag holds *ranga*, sacred objects made of ‘bone-like’ hardwood, the *ḡaraka* (bones) of the clan and its ancestors — just like the mats in the story of the Djaḡ’kawu Sisters. These bones are today manifest in the *ḡaraka-wäna* (bone-country) of Njilipidji, where topographical and ecological features contain ‘the transformed substance as well as the powers of the ancestors’ (Keen 1994, 103).

In the *manikay* represented by ‘set four’ above, the Waṭu (Dog) song and dance re-enact the covering over of the Wägilak *ranga*, hidden and buried by *waṭu* who also covers over the fire at the close of a smoking ceremony. Just as the clan’s foundational *ranga* (sacred objects) are covered over by the dog at Njilipidji, Djuwalpaḍa’s dillybag also holds the secret-sacred (*ḡaraka*) interpretations. These are protected by the most senior elders even as they are carried through public ceremonial contexts in songs like *Galpan* and *Mälka*.

⁴² Berndt and Berndt contrast the feminine *mokuy* equivalent with flesh and blood, with the masculine *birrimbirr* equivalent with bone and semen (1988, 213).

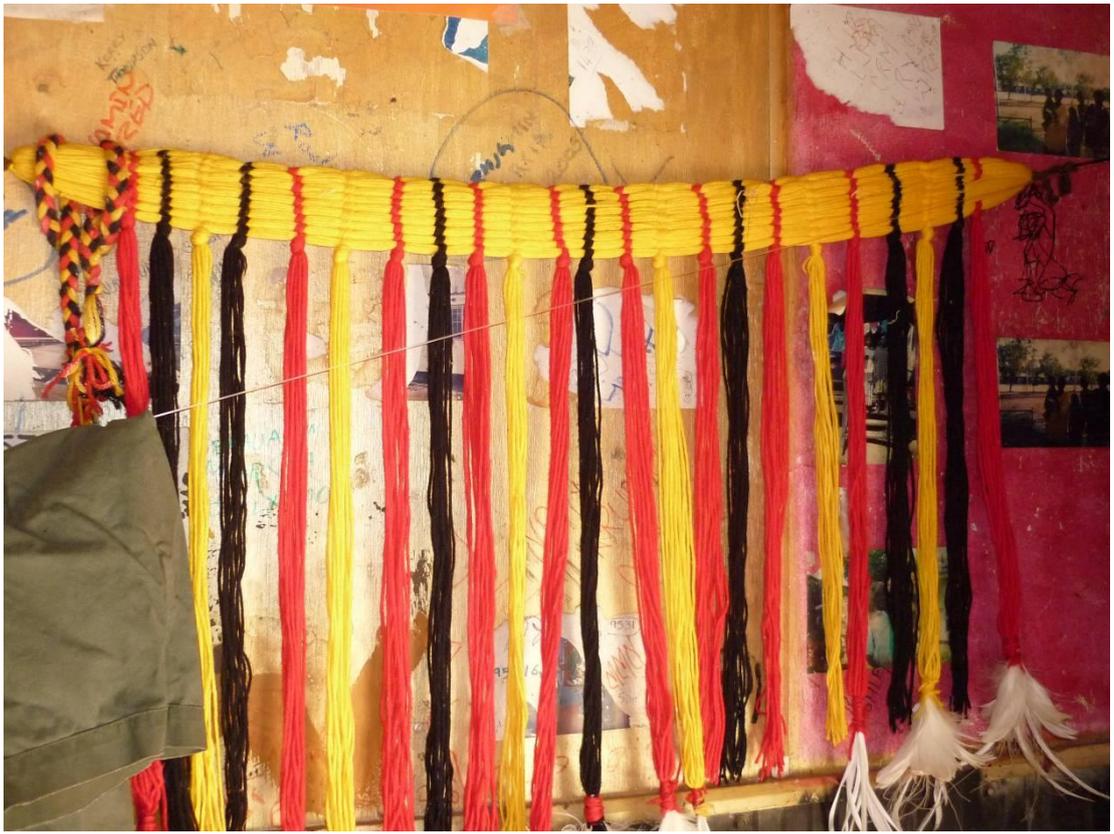


Fig. 4o Benjamin Wilfred's *balku* (waist band), hanging in his home. 21.8.2010



Fig. 4p Members of the AAO in Melbourne, with Daniel Wilfred (front left), wearing *the black crow*. 21.3.2011

Luṭunba – Deep significant waters

Yawilila yawilila, moyṇu moyṇu

Birrkpirrk ṅäthi Luṭunba nhaṇa Gawirrinydji

Plover, plover, Djuwalpaḍa dancing, Djuwalpaḍa dancing

Plover crying for Luṭunba, looking toward Luṭunba⁴³

Birrkpirrk (Plover) song text

The multiple clans who share in the *wata* (wind) *manikay* complex are connected through their songs to Luṭunba, a sacred site of deep, profound significance for all Yolṇu. Here, a number of Wägilak families own a particular *ringitj* site, an ‘embassy’ in close proximity to a secret multi-clan Njërä (‘parliamentary’) ceremony ground. Many days walk from Njilipidji, this site is looked after by the Wägilak’s *djungayi* (manager), in this instance, the Maḍarrpa clan (Peters 2011).⁴⁴

The *wukun* (clouds; see *manikay* ‘set one’) begin forming out at sea beyond Luṭunba, before moving over the land, blowing through all of the countries connected to this site. Daniel Wilfred explains:

DW: That wind there; see it blowing? Just the wind [pointing to breeze] — come up from nowhere. Cyclone.

SC: And it starts blowing when someone passes away?

DW: Yeah. Blows through all that country — *ringitj*.

(Daniel Wilfred 2011)

The plover, *birrkpirrk*, cries for the death of a relative. In chorus, the Wägilak group sings, ‘*Yä wäwa, yä märi’mu*’ (‘oh brother, oh fathers’ father), and call out the name of

⁴³ This particular translation was begun by Aaron Corn, May 26, 2010.

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive overview of the complex and interlocking ownership of Blue Mud Bay, see Morphy and Morphy (2006). This article is an explication of a map which they produced as part of expert evidence to support a land and sea claim by the Yolṇu people of Blue Mud Bay. Interestingly, ‘in relationship to the ownership of sacred law, or *maḍayin*, the coast seems to be an arbitrary boundary,’ (Ibid. 74) as clan estates cut across the coast and ecological patterns are not contained by the boundaries of salt and fresh waters. Presiding over this land claim, Justice Mansfield found, in October 2005, that native title over Blue Mud Bay did exist but that it be limited because of a need to recognise the general public’s rights of access (Ibid. 83).

Luṭunba, where Dhuwa-moiety *birrimbirr* souls of the dead return to the deep, sacred water (LE_4.12). The naming of this place exudes significations of which the following are just a part (refer also to LE_4.8).

LE_4.12	Birrkpirrk 'Goodbye': YWG singing at a funeral in Ngukurr, 18.8.2010	01:05
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Luṭunba is the sacred name given to the northern side of the Baykultji River mouth [alt. Baygurrjtji; Baiguridji] and the saltwater beyond (see Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 29), which enters the Gulf of Carpentaria in the northern waters of Blue Mud Bay at a cove known as Fowler's Bay (Figs. 4q, r).⁴⁵ Other clans hold rights to similar sites in this area, including the Dhuwa moiety clans Gupa-Djapu, Dhudi-Djapu,⁴⁶ Marrakulu and Wanapuyṅu: 'The top and bottom Djapu meet with the top and bottom Marrakulu clans at Lutumba [sic]' (Ibid. 90). At Luṭunba there is a series of *ringitj* sites, common in highly significant places and at the location of restricted ceremonial grounds. At such 'embassy' sites, clans share rights and responsibilities to a sacred place within the boundaries of another particular clan's estate.⁴⁷

For the Dhudi-Djapu, the waters at Luṭunba are protected by Mäṅa, an ancestral saltwater shark and her small children, some growing inside her *djukurr* (liver) and some already born.⁴⁸ The sacred locations of deep meanings and powerful connection with ancestors are protected by potential danger for those coming too near. Djutjadjutja Munuṅgurr, a Gupa-Djapu man, cautions:

Mäṅa hunts around here then goes into his *wäṅa* [country; homeland]. *Martaṅa* (boats) do not go too close to here — its *yindi bathala* (too big). If the shark takes your hook you must cut the line or a bad accident will result by you being there. (Munuṅgurr in Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 29)

⁴⁵ Referred to as the Baykultji River on maps. *Baygurrjtji* is actually the name of one place at the river belonging to the inland Maḍarrpa, at which there is a small outstation (F. Morphy pers. comm. 2013).

⁴⁶ Gupa-Djapu was Sambo Barabara's *māri* (mother's) clan.

⁴⁷ It is important to recognise that 'joint ownership of estate areas needs to be distinguished from other kinds of relationship that a clan can have with an estate area of another clan of the same moiety' (Morphy and Morphy 2006, 77).

⁴⁸ Mäṅa also protects areas belonging to the Gupa-Djapu and Djambarrpuyṅu clans.

According to Zorc (1986), *māna*, the generic Yolŋu-matha term for *man-eating shark*, is synonymous with *bul'manydji*, a term used in the Wägilak language. Benjamin Wilfred speaks of an ancestral shark, *Bul'manydji*, swimming inland and forming *Wuṇungirrna*, the Walker River⁴⁹ — perhaps in a great flurry after being harpooned, as described by Howard Morphy (2008, 95) — a significant waterway on the upper reaches of which the Wilfred's *wāṇa* (estate), *Ŋilipidji*, is located.⁵⁰ After forming this river, and others, *Bul'manydji* returns to the coast and 'goes into the ground' at *Luṭunba*.⁵¹

Just like the *yarraṭa* (string line) which represents connection back to a person's ancestral origins, *Bul'manydji* is often depicted in paintings as connected to her subterranean world by a sacred rope, '*bundhamarr*,' which pulls her and any returning *birrimbirr* (souls) back into *Nambatj'ŋu* or *Rinydjalŋu*, the deep profound waters of *Luṭunba* (Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 29, 90).

At *Luṭunba*, *birrimbirr* transgress the barrier between the world of humans and the metaphysical world of the *waṇarr* (ancestral beings). *Luṭunba* is the destination of these *birrimbirr* after they travel from a person's body and through the *wāṇa* (estate, i.e. *Ŋilipidji*) of that person's *yarraṭa* (string-line; patrilineal descent):⁵² 'Travel from *Raymangirr*, past *Dhudi-Djapu*, go through *Luṭunba*, all the way down' (Benjamin Wilfred, 2011a). *Birrimbirr* enter the brackish water which is the medium of this transgression, through which this soul is released from worldly embodiment and constitution back to its original conception state. The amorphous, liminal state of salt

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that 'rivers are not named as unitary wholes' (Morphy and Morphy 2006, 78). Walker River is named differently at various locations, beginning as *Wuṇungirrna* at *Ŋilipidji*, then *Marrkalawa* about 15 kilometres from the coast where it broadens and becomes mixed with salt water, and *Anhdhanṅgi* (not a Yolŋu name) at the estuary and river mouth.

⁵⁰ Howard Morphy describes an interpretation of a shark painted on a coffin lid at a *Djapu* moiety burial. He suggest that the *bir'yun* 'shimmering effect' of the fine cross hatching in this painting conveys the 'passion of the shark and its pent up energy and aggression' (2008, 95–6). The 'shimmering brilliance' of *Māna* (ancestral shark) in paintings represents 'the flash of pain and fury in the eye of the shark as it tries to escape from the hunter [Murayana] and lashes out in anger. Its fury is also reflected in the energetic steps of the dancers in ritual as they re-enact the stages of its journey' (1998, 190).

⁵¹ *Bul'manydji* also formed a sandbar near to the coast at *Luṭunba*, where it basked in the shallow water (Buku-Larrnggay Mulka 1999, 91). Other accounts expand this narrative, telling of the ancestral shark travelling to *Groote Eylandt* and *Umbakumba* (Ibid. 92).

⁵² Keen (1995, 511) describes how Yolŋu do not speak of *descent*, the metaphor I have used here, but rather the branching off, the joining through *lġkan* (elbow; connection).

and fresh water mixing — brackish water — is known as '*dhä-weka-nha-mirri*, "giving taste to each other"' (Morphy and Morphy 2006, 76).

Like the shark *Mäṅa*, *birrimbirr* are pulled by their connection to the deep waters with *garram* or *balku* (rope) (Daniel Wilfred 2011). During *Wägilak* ceremony, a ground sculpture representing *Luṭunba* is sometimes made in the sand. 'We put a stone in middle. Draw circle now. And everyone sits in that hole and make clear for self [purification]. Called *Luṭunba* now. Later on, we do that smoking' (Daniel Wilfred 2011).



Luṭunba

Ultimately, *Luṭunba* is a meeting place where fresh water meets salt water, the echo of ancestral precedent returns to ancestral reality. This conduit is designated as a sacred site and ultimate destination — the essential orientation and meaning — of the entire *manikay* series that 'finishes at *Luṭunba*. We sing along from here [*Butjulubayi*, the beginning of *Djuwalpaḍa*'s travels]; finish at *Luṭunba*' (Benjamin Wilfred 2011).

Luṭunba is the supreme locus toward which the *Wägilak* narrative orients itself, toward which all the referents and significations eventually point. In this sense, *Luṭunba* is an orienting *telos*, the end of an existential journey: 'This is the end of the story. Everything stops there [at *Luṭunba*]' (Daniel Wilfred in Curkpatrick et al. 2010). While the *mokuy* (ghost) is sent back to its homeland at *Ŋilipidji*, the name *Luṭunba* is called out at the climax of a smoking ceremony, directing the *birrimbirr* (soul) to the sacred waters and sending it off on its final journey — a teleological transgression from life, through death — to where it finally reaches the essential, sweet *guku* (honey).



Fig. 4q (i) The mouth of the Baykultji River, centre, and waters of Luṭunba (indicated below)
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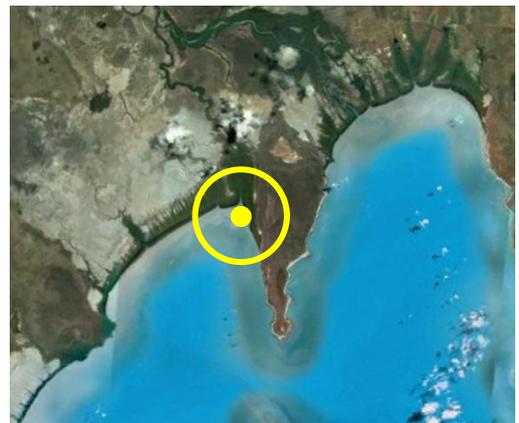


Fig. 4q (ii) Location of Luṭunba
(13°15'25 S, 135°56'34 E)

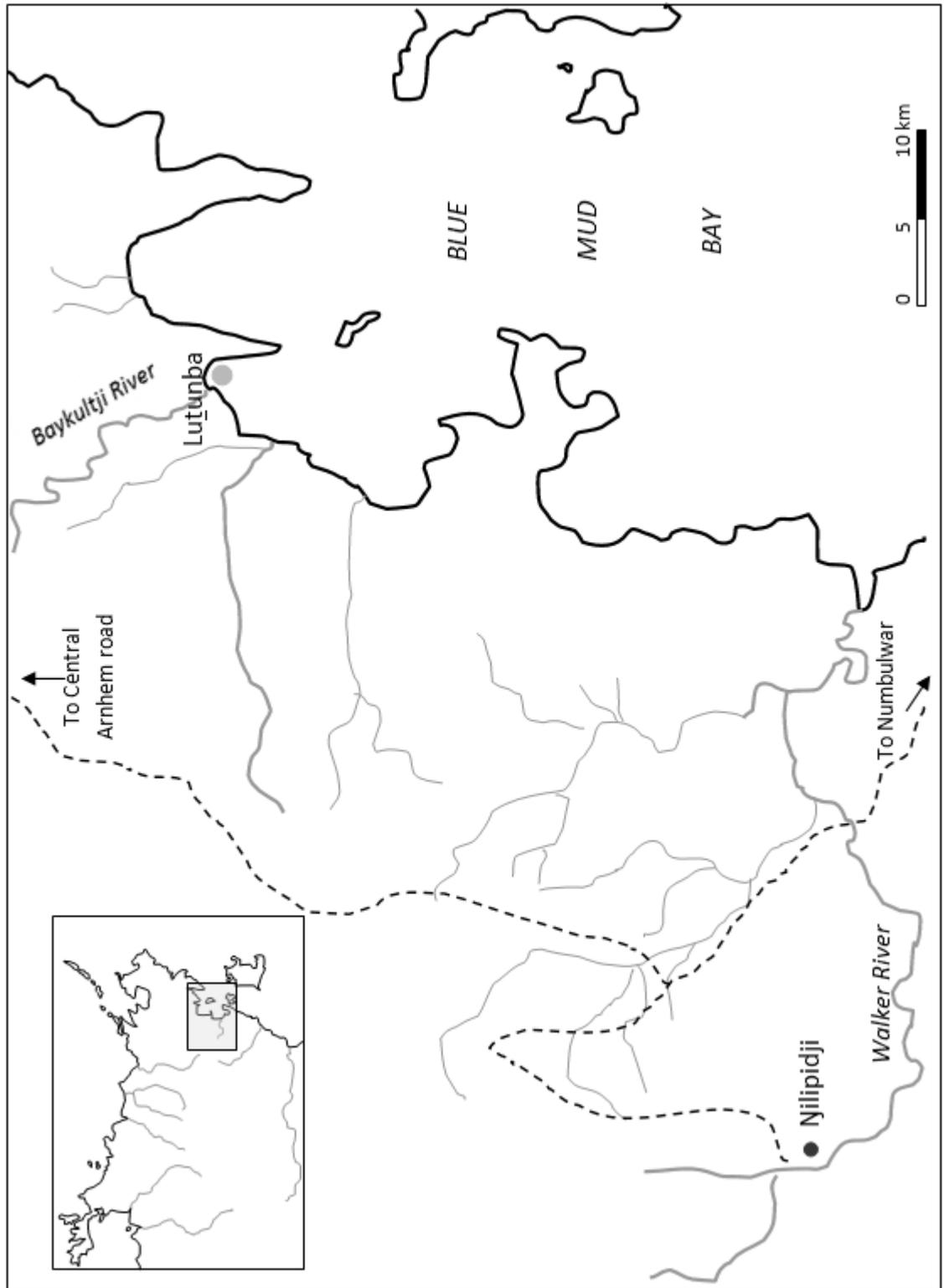


Fig. 4r Map of South East Arnhem Land and Blue Mud Bay showing location of Luṭunba

Rich articulation

The Wägilak narrative, manifest in song, dance, design and language, alludes to greater significances, richer subtleties and saturated excess beyond any particular interpretation, iteration or identification. Tangible traces of the ancestral text (see Appendix Two) are known through ceremonial performance and are also recorded indelibly in the world, a manuscript that inspires performance.

Articulations of the ancestral text are known in: the movement of the seasons, *wukun*, *wata* and *gapu*; the smoke that is carried on the *wata* to Niliipidji; the same *wata* that blows together connected clans and country; the *raki*, *galpan* and *mälka* that carry law into the present; the land, *naraka-wäŋa*, that contains the bones of the ancestors and the foundational *ranġa* of a clan; the people, one's *bäpa*, *märi* and *gutharra*, whose relations are very corporeal expressions of the ancestral text; regional ceremonies and celebrations of greater community; the *gara* which stands firm in the ground of Niliipidji, today and in the ancestral past; the flight of the *sugarbag*, towards the *guku* in its hive; the *dhanjarra* flowers, blooming at the beginning of initiation into law; the branch of a tree, a watercourse or an elbow, and the invocation of *likan yäku*; the profound waters and liminal conduit of Luṭunba, an orientation and destination which gives shape and perspective to everything else.

This ancestral text is dynamic and relational to every individual who participates in life and ceremony as a continued rolling of *raki*, performed connection to ancestral law and constitution. Even as knowledge is limited and deeper expressions remain hidden, basic public iterations and associations carried in ceremony portend to an essential locus of meaning. *Manikay* songs interact with a vibrant constellation of signification, image and narrative; each performance illuminates a specific component of the Wägilak narrative, a perspective of a much larger complex. Creative, contextual, subjective and temporal performance sustains life's direction, oriented toward the underpinning ancestral text.

In coming to know elements of the Wägilak narrative and Yolŋu hermeneutic, the world becomes rich beyond saturation, bursting with the expressions and tangible

implications of ancestral reality present and active. By performing aspects of this narrative in *manikay*, these expressions and their implications are sustained, reverberating effectually through the generations. Connection is sustained through the *yarraṭa* which joins Wāgilak people today with ancestors past; this string-line also pulling towards the essential, profound waters of Luṭunba.

Chapter five

The bones of *manikay*

We can't follow a new way — the new way I cannot do that — I go backwards in order to work. I cannot do any new things because otherwise I might be making up a story — my own thoughts you see — and people over there, wise people, would look at my work and say, 'Ah! that's only been made up by him.' (Narritjin Maymuru in Morphy 2008, 148)

Manikay grasps at stability in its generational perpetuation of recurrent musical forms tied inseparably to important social and legal interests, to family groupings, country ownership and hereditary rights and responsibilities: 'At the core [of Yolŋu ceremonial practices] there is a persistent emphasis on conformity to pattern' (Morphy and Morphy 2006, 69). These are the *ŋaraka* (bones) of Yolŋu ceremonial practice, foundational components of legitimate performance.

Today, Benjamin Wilfred's brother Wally Wilfred paints the *ŋaraka* (bones) of the Wägilak clan as an assertion of ancestral law (Fig. 5a). These bones represent the essential constitution of the Wägilak clan, a structuring *inside* carried through ceremonial practice. The bones of *manikay* manifest in the musical structures and forms themselves, which carry the central tenets of the Wägilak narrative (Chapter Four). Even as the materials and composition of music and painting change through the generations, the continued performance of these expressions within traditions of ceremonial practice asserts the ongoing relevance of ancestral constitution:

While paintings from the past [and *manikay*] may demonstrate formal differences, for the Yolŋu they demonstrate with equal force that things are as they have always been: the authority of their forbears is confirmed by the painting as a record of the performance of that authority. (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 26)

The Yolŋu imperative to maintain law and the correct way of living is today translated into an imperative to ‘keep culture strong,’ to keep it alive.¹ Yolŋu culture has an inherently orthodox hermeneutic: *manikay* song is valuable in its sustained perpetuation and as it is passed on to younger generations, an explicitly fostered connection with the past and an irrevocable sense of stability. Just as *yothu* (children) are connected, by virtue of their very existence, to their *bäpa* (father) and *ŋändi* (mother), so too does Wägilak *manikay* extend backwards as a musical form established in the ancestral past, ‘found’ or first conceptualised, sung and danced by Djuwalpada. Present constitution as Wägilak people is an animation emanating from Djuwalpada’s original action and song, the present generation singing *manikay* in order to animate life as a reverberation with that past (Chapter Six). Similarly, the forms of *manikay* are animated through performance; central tenets or narrative expressions carried in the *ŋaraka* (bones) of *manikay* are brought to life in present realisation (Chapters Seven and Eight).

Yet *manikay* is not an archaic body of irrelevant, primeval knowledge that is preserved as archive through performance; performance is more than a curatorial process. In the realisation of musical forms, *manikay* draws performers into their situation of being in the world, of belonging to a homeland and to kin. It is a celebration of place that draws the performer into the very perpetuation of that place as a homeland. *Manikay* draws people into the active perpetuation of ancestral law as a responsibility to be lived.

The huge variety of *manikay* repertoires across Arnhem Land attests to this celebration of situation: there are dozens of distinct melodic and harmonic structures, song languages, *bilma* mode sequences and *yidaki* (didjeridu) patterns belonging to different families, clans and homelands. These complex and unique repertoires of poetry and song celebrate specific places, narratives, genealogies and events. At a superficial level, this could easily be misunderstood as partisan *tribalism*: each clan fostering separate identities expressed through *manikay*. Yet *manikay* abounds with

¹ Frances Morphy suggests that the imperative to ‘keep culture strong’ was not necessarily as explicit or self-conscious in the past as it is today, as orthodox cultural practices are today relatively fragmented and can no longer be taken for granted (pers. comm. 2013).

corporate *ringitj* (embassy) relations embedded in musical forms, such as the *wata* (wind) song complex discussed above (Chapter Four), and interdependent narratives.

Despite its local particularities, *manikay* declares a very being in the world that is universal, a reality of being bound by time and place, country, ecology and tradition amid relations with others in different geographic and temporal places. 'There are many Aboriginal peoples with their own unique places. We as Yolŋu are separate from them, because we are connected to them. And we keep making new connections and new separations' (Yunupingu 2003).²

Beginning with the structural particularities of Wägilak *manikay*, this chapter explores some of the meanings carried by the orthodox *ŋaraka* (bones) of *manikay*. Performed as relevant and engaging expressions in the present, these structuring frames are *filled-in* with musical realisation and creativity.

² *Ringitj* (embassies) bring different clans together through ceremony, narrative and musical structures (see Chapter Four). Here, recognition of unity amid diversity is expressed by the Njërä (parliament) ceremonial ground.



Fig. 5a *Bones*, 2012 by Wally Wilfred. Image orientation has been adjusted: the top of the painting is the left margin. Reproduced with permission

Orthodox elements

For Yolŋu, pervasive concepts of tradition as mere custom or inherited pattern might ring a little hollow. The term *tradition* is perhaps insufficient to encapsulate the entirety of *maḍayin* (ceremonial sacra and law) and *rom* (way of life) in the Yolŋu world, for these present an entire constellation of cultural and social interrelatedness that is born of ancestral precedent, a central referent and ‘supreme locus of connection’ (H. Morphy 2005, 163). This is the ancestral text to which all iterations of *manikay* portend and under which the distinct repertoires of particular clans are subsumed. As *manikay* is performed in unique situations, ancestral precedent is shown as an ever-pervasive and present creative agency through which daily life moves and functions; an effective history which is beyond the bounds of a temporal past ‘immune to the deceptive rigor of carbon dating or the tyranny of the time line’ (Dussart 2005, 113).

Tradition requires response and action because its substance and power very much substantiate the present, recognised in *maḍayin* and *rom*. ‘Not only are the Yolŋu the direct descendents of the original *wanŋarr* (ancestral beings), they are also mirrored physical consubstantiations of the original *wanŋarr* presences that remain eternal and sentient in country’ (Corn with Yunupingu 2010, 86). Yolŋu music and dance are manifest means of creatively expressing *maḍayin*, a celebration of creation and the sacred law given by the *wanŋarr*; ancestral observations and laws are embedded in the musical structures of *manikay*.³ *Manikay* is a cultural form perpetuated with a sense of responsibility toward generations past, present and future.

The structures of *manikay* performance mirror this thought. In the correct, legitimate, lawful order of songs and dance, a narrative unfolds which brings into the present knowledge necessary to interpret the tangible living and breathing existential world, its ecology and society. Rev. Dr. Gondarra outlines the centrality of the *maḍayin* tradition to Yolŋu law, religious thought and social constitution. He explains that *maḍayin* is the

³ Similarly in painting, ‘within the culture of the Yolngu, the role of painting is established through a reiteration of origins, of place, of ownership, authority, and identity through the rendition of a particular narrative’ (Lendon and Caruana 1997, 36).

system of law, 'which most English people call *ceremonies*,' the complete legal processes and practices for Yolŋu society (Gondarra 2011, 24). *Madayin* governs: corporate clan rights; processes of parliament and dispute resolution; life processes such as harvesting, birthing, health care, economic and environmental processes. 'Our Madayin law comes from time immemorial, and was handed down to us from the Wanarr, the Great Creator Spirits [...]' (Ibid.).

Gondarra demonstrates the insufficiency of the term *tradition*, conceived as mere inherited custom of cultural framework, arguing that *manikay* and *bungul* (dance) are not merely cultural niceties or creative embellishments.⁴ Ceremony is integral to life; it is law and this law still holds today; any conceptualisation of it as simply myth or material culture, 'treated as artefacts' or religious object, is anathema to the concept of *madayin*: 'These ideas [concerning *tradition*] do not fit or make any sense to us; in fact they are repulsive' (Ibid. 24).

An accomplished knowledge of *rom* (law; correct living) is a necessary prerequisite for leadership and *manikay* is a medium to sing this knowledge into contemporary presence, into relevance (see Chapter Ten, 'Living heritage'). 'The Madayin Law is the defining standard and law that we all live by. So Yolngu people are ruled by the rule of Madayin Law, not by man' (Gondarra 2011, 24). *Manikay* traditions are bodies of knowledge necessary to interpret the tangible living and breathing world of ecology and human relations. Continued performance is responsibility to this law but also a privilege of which to be proud: 'I'm proud of the songs Grandpa gave me' (Benjamin Wilfred 2010).

⁴ A preoccupation of understanding popular and classical culture seems to be the desire to perceive processes of *change* and *continuity*, identifiable and quantifiable, within the structures of music or art. Much discourse is premised on identifying change through historical epochs and of objectifying these changes as styles — an oscillation between convention and counter-convention (McClary 2000) and orientations of periphery or centre, classic or popular, commercial, alternative or mainstream. Appropriate identification of these attributes bears directly on musician's performance and interpretation, indeed 'it is not at all clear that art criticism would even be possible without the attribution of style categories; if there were such a thing, it would be very different than the sort of criticism we actually have' (Meskin 2005, 499).

Singing *manikay* is also a source of strength: performance is connection to the very substance of ceremony as a statement of existential constitution, a connection to continued ancestral agency reverberating in the present. In ceremony, the here and now is connected with the ancestral past: ‘Yolŋu believe that they accumulate *märr* (inner strength, ancestral power, social harmony and spiritual wellbeing) by diligent following of *rom*’ (Corn and Gumbula 2004, 108), but also through the participation in the creation of *märr* through *manikay* performance.⁵

Manikay repertoires are orthodox in their expression of ancestral identity because their performance is the legal demonstration of rights to, and ownership of, hereditary estates. The songs express directly this ancestral connection with specific homelands throughout Arnhem Land, as well as structuring links between related clans. The bones of *manikay* are sacred, performed components of *madayin*.

In a pragmatic sense, these sacra [*madayin*; ceremonial expressions] function as title deeds, and represent the ancestrally-bestowed proprietary interests of each *mala* [group] in the discrete tracts of land and sea that comprise their hereditary *wäŋa* (estates, homelands). (Corn and Gumbula 2001, 32)

Manikay progresses through a narrative encoded in a series of rhythmic modes — ‘everything begins with the *bilma*’ (Daniel Wilfred 2011c). This pair of carved hardwood sticks are known as *bilma* collectively, individually identified as *bäpa/gäthu* (father/child) or *wäwa/yapa* (brother/sister), the larger stick being either the father or brother of the pair. Within each particular song subject there is a progression of different *bilma* patterns. Each song subject consists of multiple repetitions of thirty to sixty second-long song items, each song characterised by a particular rhythmic mode. A full performance might consist of a few hundred song items progressing through a dozen or so rhythmic modes.

Djuwalpada, the first subject in the Wägilak narrative, is initially accompanied by the *bilma* pattern known as the ‘walking mode’ which is, throughout the entire song set,

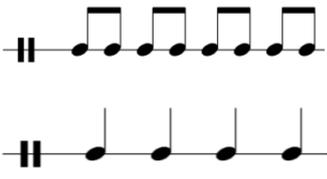
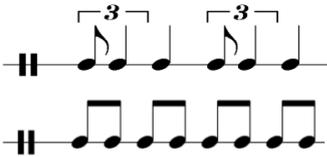
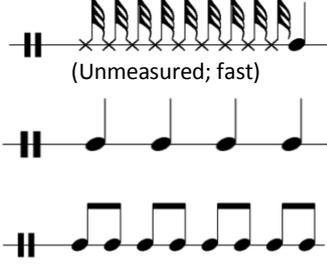
⁵ Tamisari details how *märr* is an affection created through performance, characterised by ‘appreciation of an unexpectedly spectacular dance performance’ or song rendition; an ‘encounter between the inner feelings’ of the performer and spectator (2005, 53).

associated with Djuwalpaḍa walking through the countryside, looking and observing the world. The accompanying mimetic dance actions are performed in synchronicity with the repetitive rhythmic structure of this mode, translating sound into movement, form into corporeal expression and bringing narrative action into being.

Each rhythmic mode is characterised by its speed and length: ‘For Djuwalpaḍa, first that long one [mode], then the short one, then double one. Then Woomera [Ga|pu ‘Spear thrower’ subject]: first that long one, then the short one, then double one. (Daniel Wilfred 2011c; see Fig. 5b). When the rhythmic mode changes to the ‘stalking prey’ mode, Djuwalpaḍa (and the dancers) stalk prey with a spear; when Djuwalpaḍa finds the *guku* (honey), he dances in celebration accompanied by the ‘dancing’ mode. In the ‘running’ mode, the more frequent the alterations between the different rhythmic components, the closer Djuwalpaḍa is to reaching his country (Benjamin Wilfred 2012). The beginnings of all subsequent subjects or events in the narrative action of *manikay* are clearly identified by a change in the *bilma* mode, as are the climaxes anticipated with building momentum.⁶

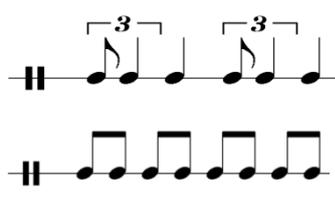
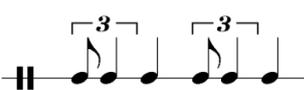
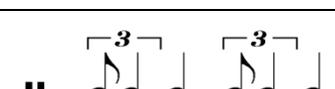
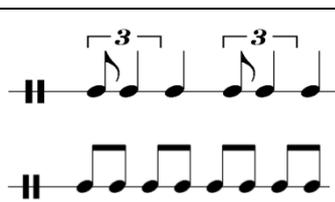
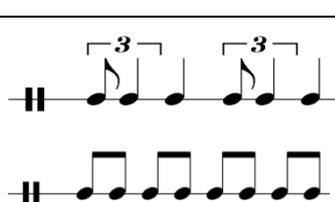
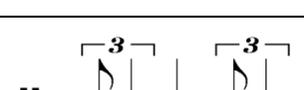
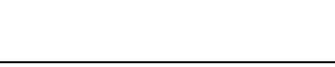
The following table (Fig. 5b) represents the rhythmic modes used in the liturgical song set for smoking ceremonies by the Wägilak clan. This set also represents the narrative performed in *CRB*. The rhythmic cadences are specific to each individual *bilma* mode, concluding each song item and demarcating large structural divisions within items. The ordering of modes here represents the legitimate progression of modes through a subject, although singers will make a smaller selection of modes appropriate to the context of performances. Within *CRB* for example, only sixteen of the thirty-four modes here recorded are used.

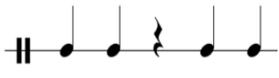
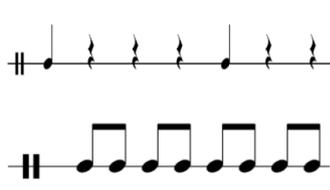
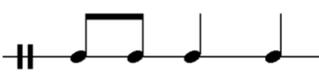
⁶ Each clan employ their own specific nomenclature for rhythmic modes in *manikay*. Corn (2002, 43) and Knopoff (1992, 148) list four pervasive and distinct modes commonly known in Yolŋu-Matha as ‘*bulnha* (slow), *ŋarruŋa* (travelling), *yindi* (big, important), and *barka* or *bandja* (arm)’ (Corn 2002, 43). Although the Young Wägilak Group does not refer to their *bilma* modes with these terms, they generally understand them as comparable, especially *bulnha* as ‘long one’ and *ŋarruŋa* as ‘walking.’ The terms listed in the table below (Fig. 5b) are the common designations used, most often in Kriol or English as the Wägilak terms have been ‘forgotten.’ Corn also lists five modes specific to Gupapuyŋu *manikay* along with their characteristic speeds (2007, 121) and Toner’s PhD thesis provides comprehensive analysis of the structures and nomenclature of Dha|waŋu *manikay* (2001).

	<i>Bilma</i> mode ⁷	Rhythmic structure (where two different patterns exist, these alternate throughout the song)	Cadence pattern (where relevant)	Beats per min ⁸
Djuwalpada	Walking*			106
	Walking (ii) – getting closer to Njilipidji			106
	Stalking prey*			88
	Dancing double*		No change; syncopated vocal interjections	102
	Running double*			86; 94
	Brothers and sisters double [†]			102
Gara	Throwing* 		112	

⁷ *Double modes* are discussed below. These are songs that contain two *gumurr* (chest) segments.

⁸ Typical speed of *bilma* modes when measured in crotchet beats per minute.

	Dancing*		No change; syncopated vocal interjections	98 or 120
	Running			96; 106
Galpu	Stalking prey – double*			88
	Dancing – double		No change; syncopated vocal interjections	98
	Running – ‘short one’			96
	Running – ‘long one’			96; 106
Galpan	Weaving*			88
	Running – double			96; 106
	Dancing		No change; syncopated vocal interjections	110
	<i>Gathu wuyunbi</i> – double [†]			84
	Brothers and sisters – double [†]			102

Raki	Slow			about 68
	Rolling*			94
	Fast			158
Mälka	Slow			about 68
	Dancing – double*			132
Wata	Gentle breeze*			about 68
	Picking up strength – double*			about 68 or 108
	Strong wind*		No change; syncopated vocal interjections	102
Birrkpirrk	Slow			about 68
	Looking for yams			46
	Walking			66
	Singing			66
	Dancing*		No change; syncopated vocal interjections	112

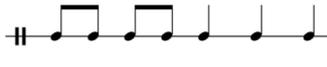
Mother – double*		faster 	126– 134
Brothers and sisters†		faster 	112
Goodbye – double*† (or <i>Märi'mu</i>)		faster 	66

Fig. 5b Table of *bilma* mode patterns and sequence for Wägilak smoking ceremonies

* indicates the rhythmic modes that appear on the *CRB* album (AAO 2010)

† indicates the songs that are *yuta manikay* (new songs; see section below)

The above *bilma* modes also tie in closely with the construction and cadencing of the *yidaki* (didjeridu) patterns (see Chapter Seven), acting as an orthodox skeleton structuring all performances. It is interesting to note that, in comparison with recordings of Sambo Barabara made by Jeffrey Heath in 1976 (see Heath 1974–1976 in bibliography), the *bilma* modes used by performers today have not changed in speed at all, measured in beats per minute (LE_5.1). This is significant as it clearly shows that traditional means of transmission are highly stable in their reproduction of particular musical elements.

LE_5.1	Djuwalpada 'Walking': sung by Sambo Barabara and, thirty-four years later, by the YWG: a) Sambo Barabara and Roy [Natilma?] (<i>yidaki</i>), Ngukurr, 1975. Recorded by Jeffrey Heath (AIATSIS archive tape HEATH_J04:04803; Heath 1974–1976) b) Benjamin Wilfred, Roy Natilma and David Wilfred (<i>yidaki</i>), Melbourne, 13.4.2009 (AAO 2010)	01:34
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This amazing rhythmic consistency is probably supported and reinforced because *bilma* modes are shared between clans with close *ringitj* associations. Despite having different *manikay* narratives, closely related clans all dance to the same groove. While

performing Marraju *manikay* at the Ngukurr Festival in 2010, David Wilfred explained: ‘Same this one, not different — *bilma* same’ (pers. comm. 2010).⁹

Each set of *manikay* songs is also based on the particular melodic and harmonic pattern specific to a clan. There are more than sixty distinct clans in Arnhem Land and each has its own repertoire of *manikay*, which uses a unique *dämbu* (head), a term used to refer to the pitch structure of the entire song series (see Corn with Gumbula 2006; Corn 2008; Knopoff 1998; Toner 2003). Voices improvise independently around the *dämbu*, weaving words and phrases selected from the text of that song subject into a melismatic, interwoven cascade of sound. This begins high and falls downwards, through the pitch series, over the course of a *gumurr* (chest) segment (see Fig. 5d). A song item will usually have one or two *gumurr* between the introduction and coda, making up the main *body* of the song. In *manikay*, the *gumurr* ‘leads you, pulls you towards country’ (Daniel Wilfred 2011c). In the table of *bilma* modes (Fig. 5b), *double* indicates songs that have two *gumurr* sections, the second immediately following the first.

The *dämbu* (head) is simultaneously melodic and harmonic, in that the pitches are set to text horizontally (melodically) by the individual voice and vertically (harmonically) through the combination of voices singing different pitches (LE_5.2). This pitch set, or perhaps more appropriately, this interval set, is fixed relative to its starting pitch — no matter what note the song begins on, the intervals remain the same relative distance apart as the voices descend. While the starting pitch may shift over the course of a performance, often moving slightly higher towards the climax of a ceremony, the intervals remain consistent in their span (see Toner 2003). Represented in a scale, the *dämbu* unique to the Wägilak clan might approximate to the following (Fig. 5c). Within *CRB*, the sound of the equal temperament instruments of the AAO inevitably shift the singers’ voices toward a natural pentatonic scale, although in local contexts the interval here represented as a *minor third* (F–D; C–A) are quite flexible and more ambiguous than any fixed tonal orientation.

⁹ The Marraju clan living at Gapuwiyak use a set of *bilma* modes similar to the Wägilak clan. A number of song subjects are also shared, especially Guku (Honey). A mobile ringtone commonly heard in Ngukurr is the Marraju version of Guku.



Fig. 5c Approximate notation of the Wägilak *dämbu* (LE_5.2a)

LE_5.2	<p>An example of two different <i>dämbu</i>. The first (a) is Wäkwak (Black crow), from the Wägilak <i>wäŋa</i> (homeland) at Njilipidji. The second (b) is Dhałara (King brown snake) from the Wägilak <i>wäŋa</i> at Wułku.</p> <p>a) Wäkwak: Benjamin, Daniel and David Wilfred, Roy Natilma, Andy Peters. Ngukurr, 8.7.2011</p> <p>b) Dhałara: Andy Peters and David Wilfred (yidaki). Ngukurr, 11.7.2011</p>	01:26
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The entire Wägilak *manikay* series is set to this intervallic construction. The *dämbu* is instantly recognisable on hearing one song item, and hearing a familiar *dämbu* leads to direct recognition of the particular clan or estate to which those songs belong. Each Yolŋu clan has its own unique *dämbu* (never easily represented by the pitch gradations of established musical notation) and this is the clan’s musical signature, identifiable with a particular narrative, people and estate.

Within the framework of *dämbu* which has been passed down the generations, an individual has freedom for creativity (see Chapters Seven and Eight). Further connecting the generations, a singer might decide to sing with the voice of, in imitation of, an elder past — often an elder who was a significant teacher of that *manikay* or an important ceremonial leader. Daniel Wilfred joined the *CRB* tour after Roy Natilma Wilfred decided he was too old to keep on going. During my research, Daniel was instrumental in directing and initiating some audio recordings of Natilma, before he got even older or passed away. He was eager to have a record so that he could keep listening to what he regarded as an amazingly nuanced and beautiful voice — one that he imitated frequently in singing:

I got different voices. I got a voice for Sambo [Barabara]. [Did] you hear me? I sing with Sambo’s voice. I sing with Roy’s [Natilma Wilfred] voice. I got my own voice too. Sometimes I go high, sometimes I go low [...] You have to sit next to those elders. They have to sing

right into your ear, first left, then right. You have to sing with them and you learn that voice — right into your head. (Daniel Wilfred, 2010)

Through the use of different voices, rhythms and interval sets from the past, *manikay* is connected through the generations as an expression of ancestral continuance. By singing *manikay* correctly with regard to its orthodox musical forms — its structuring *naraka* — important laws concerning estate ownership, *ringitj* obligations and kinship relations between clans are sustained. *Manikay* perpetuates essential elements of *madayin* law, substantiating present life and society in reflection of the ancestral text.

Productive ambiguity

A *manikay* song item consists of three basic, distinct sections. These provide different frames for a performer to realise individual creativity within the particular, orthodox elements characteristic of a clan's *manikay* repertoire, such as the forms of rhythm and pitch described above. This section introduces the typical content of these sections, the *introduction*, *body* and *coda*, following Corn's designations of these as *ɲurru-waŋa*, *yutɯŋgurr* and *liya-waŋa* (Corn 2008, 8; Corn et al. 2009, 152).¹⁰ Within these frames, productive space is given for the realisation of song held by individual choice, improvisation and elaboration.¹¹

The *ɲurru-waŋa* (nose speech), a short hummed introduction, is used by the lead singer to orient the pitch and establish the *bilma* mode and song subject (LE_5.3). It is akin in freedom and fancy to what might be hummed while walking along in daily life, thinking about a song. The lead singer locates the beginning pitch of the song (usually an octave lower), drawing the other singers into a performance that emerges from the general chatter and cigarette smoking. Here, the lead singer is able to make an

¹⁰ *Yutɯŋgurr* (thigh) is also known as *makarr*.

¹¹ My use of the term *improvisation* emphasises the real-time, individual decision making at the heart of *manikay* performance. Further, individual expression contributes to the ensemble responsively and is not the isolated selection of phrases from a stock of possible permutations. As discussed elsewhere, Yolŋu do emphasise the unique creativity of individuals, who bring their own voice and style to *manikay* performance. A great singer is renowned as one whose improvisations frequently break out of the basic structures of *manikay*, giving life to the basic forms maintained by the rest of the group.

individual judgement as to the correct or ideal subject and mode to perform according to the context. They also tap out the *bilma* mode in the *ɲurru-waŋa*, establishing whether the song will follow the previous in rapid succession or in a more relaxed manner. The intensity of the singing to follow is indicated with appropriate strength of voice, timbre or accentuation.

Songs are governed by an overarching, mandated subject order, overseen by the *djungayi*, the ceremonial manager who plays *yidaki* for his *ɲändipulu* (mother's group; opposite moiety). While the overall order of songs is fixed, there is ambiguity in the selection of particular songs and modes, drawn on in different contexts. Song selection is especially flexible during *bungul* (song and dance) entertainment events, such as festivals. The ambiguity allowed by the larger, mandated narrative progression — filled in with numerous song items and repeated rhythmic modes — allows for individual discernment within the structuring framework. The *ɲurru-waŋa* is where such choices are made.

LE_5.3	Dhanjarra (White flower): YWG singing at a funeral in Ngukurr. This example begins with an extended <i>ɲurru-waŋa</i> (nose-speech; introduction). 8.7.2011	01:09
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The *yutungurr* (thigh), the lyrics and song proper of a *manikay* item, allow individual singers to improvise within the established modalities of the rhythmic, harmonic, melodic, textual and structural characteristics of a clan's repertoire. The *yutungurr* section may be divided into a number of *gumurr* (chests), which often segment the section neatly into two repeated halves separated by a cadence. While individuals weave their own melodic line at will, the multiple strands of different voices come together in a dense heterophony which gives a complex brilliance to the music.

The *yutungurr* is characterised by a cascading descent of pitch leading toward a rhythmic *yidaki* and *bilma* cadence. Through this descent, each singer selects their own strings of words set to rhythms, and these poetically express the underlying narrative, its significations and images. Below is a graphic representation (Fig. 5d) that shows the

structural sections of the listening example (LE_5.4); the time code is given above the graphic.

LE_5.4	Djuwalpaḍa ‘Brothers and Sisters’: Daniel Wilfred leads the <i>ḡurru-waḡa</i> (nose-speech). Two <i>gumurr</i> (chest) make up the main <i>yutḡurr</i> (thigh) of this song. The first <i>gumurr</i> has <i>bilma</i> tapped on the ground; the second <i>gumurr</i> begins when the <i>bilma</i> start to strike (see Fig. 5d). Benjamin, Daniel and David Wilfred, Roy Natilma, Andy Peters. Ngukurr, 8.7.2011	01:51
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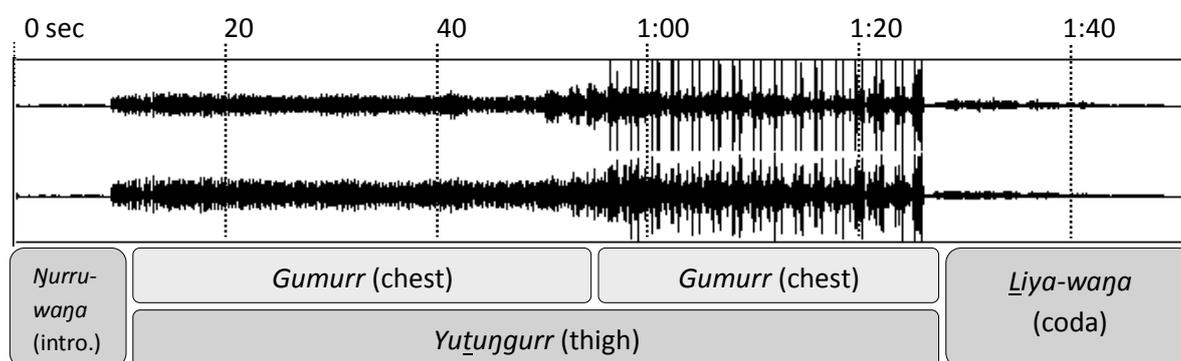


Fig. 5d The different sections of a *manikay* song, corresponding to the above listening example (LE_5.4). Note the spikes in amplitude created by the *bilma* strikes at around 55 seconds

Within a performance, individuals make active selections from an established repertoire of phrases belonging to a particular song subject, such as the phrase ‘*Yawilila yawilila*’ (plover crying, plover crying) used in Birrkpirrk (Plover). Phrases are somewhat ambiguous or fragmentary when taken on their own, but are constituent of a greater narrative running through the entire *manikay* series.¹² These short phrases then become the basis for musical improvisation. ‘Even the lyrics of Manikay are explicitly designed not to offer straightforward narratives. They instead comprise cryptic strings of names and archaic words that can be ordered quite differently with each new performance’ (Corn 2010, 9).

Productive ambiguity, a term borrowed from Gadamer, refers to the structural space that allows a renewing *play* of movement, allowing the work of art continually to become a new event (2006, 198, 498). Choice and elaboration within the space

¹² For example, the rich and descriptive poetry of song texts form ‘not only a *description of* a place, but also a sense of *belonging to* a place, an inalienable and populated landscape’ (Toner 2007, 176).

allowed by a governing structure, permits an individual to actively realise a particular text within the course of a song. Not one vocal line dominates and so productive ambiguity exists also for the listener, whose attention is free to shift between points of interest or follow particular individuals or lines within the ensemble, creating or producing the music in his or her own mind and body by participation in active listening.¹³

The bellow listening example (LE_5.5) and tables (Figs. 5e, 5f, 5g) demonstrate the word selection made by Daniel and Benjamin Wilfred as they sing *Djuwalpada* together. The individual vocal lines of these singers have been extracted out of the overall audio mix so that word selection can be heard; these excerpts follow one another in the example. At the end of this example, the selection is repeated with the full complement of voices in the mix.

LE_5.5	<p>Different text selections performed in the same song, in four parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Daniel Wilfred speaking the text of <i>Djuwalpada</i> (Fig. 5e) b) Daniel Wilfred singing <i>Djuwalpada</i> (Fig. 5f) c) Benjamin Wilfred singing <i>Djuwalpada</i> (Fig. 5g) d) The overall mix with b) and c) together <p>Ngukurr, 8.7.2011</p>	02:43
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¹³ *Productive ambiguity* in aural reception has parallels with Howard Morphy's notion of the aesthetic brilliance of *rärrk* (crosshatching in painting), known to Yolŋu as *bir'yun* (lit. shimmering) (H. Morphy 1989, 1991, 2008). This aesthetic concept might be applied as a metaphor to illustrate the shifting of the ear (musical attention) between elements within the music (see Chapter Eight for a detailed exploration of *bir'yun* in *manikay*).

Djuwalpada	Nirriyinirriyi	Dhawal-wal duy'yun	ɲopurr-ɲopurr	Burrwanyila
Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	Arriving at his home place	wrist or forearm	Name called by <i>mokuy</i>
Likan-dhu	garrarr'yun	Mokuy-u	ɲupana	Dhawal-wal duy'yun
Elbow-with	dance	<i>Mokuy</i> (ghost) [ergative]	follow, pointing	Arriving at his home place
Gandjalala	Mokoy-u	ɲupana	Nirriyinirriyi	Dhawal-wal duy'yun
Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	<i>Mokuy</i> (ghost) [ergative]	follow, pointing	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	Arriving at his home place

Fig. 5e Text of Djuwalpada spoken by Daniel Wilfred (LE_5.5)¹⁴

Likan-dhu, likan-dhu	Djuwalpada	Dhawal-wal duy'yun	Likan-dhu, likan-dhu	Djuwalpada
Elbow-with [repeated]	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	Arriving at his home place	Elbow-with [repeated]	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>
Garrayaṇa, garrayaṇa	Wakura	Gurrumirri	Duḷumirri	Gumurrmirri
Place where Djuwalpada walked	Place where Djuwalpada walked	Place where Djuwalpada walked	Place where Djuwalpada walked	Chest-having
Wakura	Gurrumirri	Likan-dhu	gara'yun	
Place where Djuwalpada walked	Place where Djuwalpada walked	Elbow-with	spear	

Fig. 5f Text of Djuwalpada sung by Daniel Wilfred (LE_5.5)

¹⁴ Completed with suggestions by Frances Morphy (2013).

Likan-dhu	Djuwalpa <u>ḍa</u> , Djuwalpa <u>ḍa</u>	Nirriyinjirriyi, Nirriyinjirriyi	Djuwalpa <u>ḍa</u> , Djuwalpa <u>ḍa</u>	Nyagulnyagul
Elbow-with	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	Name for Mä <u>ḍ</u> awk (Silver crowned friarbird)
Butjulubayi	Likandhu-ḡupan	Djuwalpa <u>ḍa</u>	ḡäkirri, ḡäkirri	Dhawal-wal <u>ḍ</u> uy'yun
Place where Djuwalpa <u>ḍa</u> began walking	With elbow- pointing	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	cover [fresh meat in ground oven]	Arriving at his home place
Likan-dhu	Djuwalpa <u>ḍa</u>	Nirriyinjirriyi		
Elbow-with	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i>		

Fig. 5g Text of Djuwalpaḍa sung by Benjamin Wilfred (LE_5.5)

Finally, the *liya-waḡa* (head speech), a sung melismatic coda, takes a song item to its conclusion. Following the *yidaki* and *biḡma* cadence at the end of the *yutḡgurr* (thigh) and the egress of all other singers from the song, the solo lead singer will most often improvise a reiteration of the important song words and the *ḍämbu* cascade (LE_5.6). As I will elaborate in further chapters, the *liya-waḡa* (coda) extends the song item with the same energy as the *yutḡgurr*, keeping it strong and powerful, leading on to further songs.

This coda, more often than not, consists about half the overall length of a song item. It is significant because it is the section that allows virtuosic demonstration of individual ability and prowess, drawing the audience into convivial communal approval — cries of ‘Yo!’ often follow an impressive coda. Through the ability of the lead singer in improvisation, a song is extended energetically through this section, clearly engaging an audience and other performers.

LE_5.6	Guku (Honey): An extended <i>liya-waḡa</i> (coda) finishes this song. Benjamin, Daniel and David Wilfred, Roy Natilma, Andy Peters. Ngukurr, 8.7.2011	00:32
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The inherent ambiguities in the structuring forms (*naraka*) of *manikay* — that here allows for individual creativity and the energetic engagement with a song through melodic improvisations and text selection — pulls individuals into the conversation of tradition, into the realisation and performance of ancestral narratives. The *manikay* form's inherent and productive ambiguity engages the performers, drawing them into a text which becomes known in the present through active participation. Treloyn explores a similar concept in her discussion of *songs that pull*, research into Junba song from the Kimberley region of North West Australia:

Patterns of interaction that are laid down by ancestral beings are manifested in song conception — in a mutual 'pull' between composers and the song-giving spirits of their deceased relatives. This 'pull' is shown to draw in wider groups of people through song transmission and performance, maintaining and re-invigorating connections between people and country. (Treloyn 2006, i)

Of course ambiguity within structure is not simply a void that anything at all can fill. Every improvisation, every selection of song item, text or rhythmic modes, every performance context, is itself constituted within an effective history — a tradition that works on the present and effects the way people participate in performance. This effective history shapes, consciously or not, the approach of a performer through convention, style and context. Not only does the form of *manikay* pull a singer into performance, as it demands musical *fleshing out* and creative engagement, but the constitution of that singer within particular traditions of response and creativity pull him into the very perpetuation of that tradition. By being pulled into the Wägilak narrative, indeed by creating this narrative as a substantial and embodied presence, a performer is connected to the ongoing tradition of *manikay*. He performs an iteration that is both unique and constituted within an ongoing history of musical iterations and responses.¹⁵

In painting, ochre forms a body of ancestral presence: red ochre for the blood; black for the skin; yellow for the fat; white for the bones (see Curkpatrick 2012, 14). *Manikay*

¹⁵ Tradition as *reflexive form* and tradition as *discursive response* are distinctions that guide my musical analysis in Chapter Seven and Eight respectively.

song also has a body structured by *ḡaraka* (bones), just like the performer's bodies: the *gumurr* (chest) pulls a song toward country through text and melody; the *yutungurr* (thigh) inspires dance and action; the *ḡurru-waḡa* (nose speech) leads the song, as the nose leads the body; the *dämbu* (head) provides a beautiful, structural pattern for action (melodic/harmonic form); *likan yäku* (elbow names) connect a song with people and country; the voice of the singer gives voice to the ancestral song. Long ago, the *bilma* were carried by Djuwalpaḡa and today 'through the clapsticks we carry the law' (Narritjin Maymuru in Dunlop 1998, 34:00). The body of *manikay* song is a tangible organism, the living presence of ancestral action moving and singing, fleshing out the structuring *ḡaraka* of the Wägilak narrative.

Yuḡa manikay (new song)

Yeah, new songs come in the dream and Grandpa is always following me, no matter where we go. He's always following and telling me new songs. No matter where I go, he's always there. My Grandpa, he was the head leader with the most knowledge and the most songs, and the most spirit in his life. We go everywhere with him, his spirit and his songs. Connection to the land and country, and families. (Benjamin Wilfred in Corn et. al. 2009)

Too long to sing now [...] I found this one [these new songs]. My brother passed away, and I sing, 'Ya yo, ya yo, brr brr, brr brr brr brr, gey gey.' (Daniel Wilfred 2010)

The bones of *manikay* are forms passed down through the generations, carrying essential law fleshed out through participation in performance. These orthodox forms of *manikay* also allow for the creation of new songs based on the same frameworks examined in the above section. *Yuḡa manikay* (new, composed *manikay*) are also dependant on orthodox productive ambiguities and are an active realisation of tradition's relevance in the present. These new songs are included in liturgical sets for public occasions where *manikay* is performed, forming relevant and poetically juxtaposed elaborations of the basic narrative sequence.

In finding (dreaming or composing) a new song, the present is formed in the image of the past: *yuḡa manikay* are invented which are 'the same' in their conferral of orthodox

musical elements. But orthodoxy is not anathema to creativity, and ‘Yolngu art has always been diverse, dynamic and changing, despite an ideology of conservatism, and Yolngu on the whole have been the main agents of change’ (H. Morphy 2008, 72). Through *yuṭa manikay*, tradition emerges as something more vocative than essentialist, as something that speaks into present lives and is simultaneously sustained through creative initiative.¹⁶

Knopoff uses musical analysis to identify elements of continuity and change within *yuṭa manikay* (new songs), arguing that there has been an ongoing bias toward treating *manikay* as an unchanging, conservative form: ‘In a number of cultural areas, a bias among researchers towards perceived conservatism was influenced by both Indigenous and Western beliefs’ (Knopoff 1992, 138). This section makes it clear that both conservatism and innovation are necessary to a tradition’s ongoing and dynamic presence in contemporary lives, avoiding any rigid binary polarisations between *orthodox* and *creative* elements within the music. Traditions must change to stay the same.

Within the *CRB* collaboration there have been at least five *yuṭa manikay* song subjects sung in either performances on stage, on the *bungul* (dance) ground, or discussed and demonstrated in rehearsals and workshops. All of these songs originated during the course of the collaboration, although not necessarily as a result of the collaboration. AAO musicians recall the ‘finding’ of some *yuṭa manikay* on tour from Darwin to Perth in 2008:

Tony Hicks: Well, the first thing that I knew was that they said, ‘We have to go to the beach’. We’re in Broome, it’s six o’clock in the morning: ‘There’s a new song!’ ‘Where’s the new song come from?’ ‘I dreamt it. My grandfather gave it to me, last night.’

¹⁶ This is not just the case in traditional settings and collaborations such as *CRB*, but extends much wider into genres further removed from traditional *manikay* song structures. Corn and Yunupingu discuss how *manikay* is brought into Yothu Yindi’s rock music, discussing traditions relevance through terms such as *durability* and *applicability* to ever widening contexts: ‘Yothu Yindi’s music also demonstrated how the rock idiom could be commandeered to communicate durable traditional Yolngu ideas across cultures, and to encourage audiences worldwide to dream of a future Australia in which ‘the waters will be one’ (Corn with Yunupingu 2010, 101).

Paul Grabowsky: In front of the caravan park in Broome. ‘Good morning’ to everybody in the caravan park was this extraordinary concert [of *yuṭa manikay*], which went for about an hour.

(in Corn et al. 2009)

In late 2010, Daniel Wilfred dreamt a *yuṭa manikay* subject which he called ‘Brothers and sisters,’ characterised by a distinctly new *biḷma* mode (refer to LE_5.4). Prior to rehearsals in March 2011, Daniel constantly expressed a desire to use these new songs in performances of *CRB*, especially as he had taken, since 2009, an increasingly important role in leading the YWG on stage as their main singer. The theme of this *manikay* subject is the travels of a brother and sister, represented by the pairing of *biḷma* strikes, side by side (Fig. 5h):

Yolṅu brother and sister. Double one. Brother walking with spear; sister walking with *many’tjarr* (leaves), hitting bushes and dancing. I just woke up, dreamed a new one. Went down to do ceremony, and I asked David [Wilfred], ‘Hey, you want to play with me a new song?’ (Daniel Wilfred 2011c)

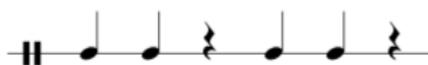


Fig. 5h *Biḷma* mode for Daniel Wilfred’s *yuṭa manikay*, ‘Brothers and sisters’

The AAO’s willingness to incorporate these new songs into the second *CRB* album recorded in May 2011, at Alan Eaton Studios in St. Kilda (yet to be released), affirms the collaboration as historically significant. The desire to increase musical interaction between the YWG and ‘White Wāgilak Group,’ as the Melbourne musicians are affectionately called, has become a reality not only in the intricate on-stage musical interactions but in the general shape of a collaboration, which inspires the creation and incorporation of new, traditional repertoire.

Two other significant *yuṭa manikay* compositions have resulted during the *CRB* collaboration: the ‘Goodbye song’ (discussed below); the AAO’s own *yuṭa manikay*, based on Mälka, which originated independently of the YWG (see Chapter Seven). The *yuṭa manikay* within *CRB* are known as the following:

- ‘Goodbye song,’ based on the Birrkpirrk subject
- ‘Football song,’ based on the Mädaw̄k subject
- ‘Brothers and sisters,’ a new *bil̄ma* mode created for a number of different subjects
- ‘Gathu wuyun̄bi,’ ‘My son is lost’ or the ‘Melbourne song,’ based on the Gal̄pan̄ subject
- The AAO’s own *yuta manikay*, a fast version of Mälka

Yuta manikay fit into established progressions of song subjects and rhythmic modes: the integral tenets of pitch, rhythm, structure and text, discussed above, are altered only slightly if at all. Knopoff (1992) and Toner (2001) have discussed *yuta manikay* in detail, and so I here offer a brief summary. *Yuta manikay* are frequently designated because they incorporate a new rhythmic mode into an established song subject. These are often double modes consisting of two *gumurr* (chests), the first characterised by *bil̄ma* tapped on the ground, the second half with *bil̄ma* struck in the usual manner (refer to LE_5.4). Occasionally, a unison *chorus* section is added, in which any new text might feature. For example, the addition of the phrase ‘Yä wäwa, yä märi’mu’ (oh brother, oh father’s father) comes in the unison *chorus* of the Birrkpirrk ‘Goodbye song’ (LE_5.7).

LE_5.7	Birrkpirrk ‘Goodbye’: Unison <i>chorus</i> section bound by terminal cadence. Benjamin, Daniel and David Wilfred, Roy Natilma, Andy Peters. Ngukurr, 8.7.2011	00:43
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Gal̄pan̄ (Dillybag; Woven basket) is the Wäḡilak song that the *yuta manikay* ‘Gathu Wuyun̄bi’ (‘My son is lost’; ‘Melbourne song’) takes as its framework, and so it is perhaps more appropriate to consider such new songs as particular rhythmic and textual modes of established song subjects. The ‘Goodbye song’ is set to the framework of Birrkpirrk and, because it is fundamentally an extension of this song (with a double-*gumurr* ‘chest’ and added refrain), it is most often referred to as the ‘Father’s father’ *bil̄ma* mode of Birrkpirrk, or ‘double-one’ — signalled in performance with two fingers held up. In this sense, *yuta manikay* are as much new modes of old songs, as they are new compositions in a Western sense. *Yuta manikay* are involved in

the play of fleshing out productive ambiguities; the *manikay* tradition contains within it the scope to realise a series of songs with individually inspired additions and variations in the form of *yuta manikay*.

The ‘Football song’ is a good example of the addition of a new text to an existing song, here *Mäḍawk* (Silver-crowned friarbird). First heard by the orchestra on their tour to Ngukurr in July 2010, Daniel Wilfred embraced the opportunity to teach the visitors a new song appropriate for use in concerts. The AAO, ever keen to expand the scope and content of the collaboration, were sung the following (LE_5.8):

Nyagulnyagul wärrarra dunbirriyunayi

‘Ŋarra dhu bulyun, ŋarra dhu bulyun’

Mäḍawk flies through the red sunset

‘I want to play [football], I want to play’

Mäḍawk (Friarbird) ‘Football’ song text

LE_5.8	Mäḍawk ‘Football’: Benjamin, Daniel and David Wilfred. Ngukurr 26.5.2010	01:06
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Daniel Wilfred had dreamed (composed) this song in 2010, in anticipation of the impending Katherine District Football League grand-final. Whatever the poetic juxtaposition and choice of this particular *Mäḍawk* song subject might be, it is nevertheless clear that here *manikay* is being used as pertinent to contemporary event. Whether the following song in the series, *Waṭu* (Dog), has anything to do with the Ngukurr Bulldogs football team, I am not sure. My best reasoning suggests that the use of this song subject has more to do with the rhythmic energy and quick pace of the *bilma* modes for *Mäḍawk*, which skip along vigorously. It is certainly true that the song is quite an exciting one to listen to — one cannot help but tap along — perhaps like a football game.

By bringing contemporary events into the structures handed down through the generations, *manikay* speaks into the present. ‘Gathu wuyunḅi’ (LE_5.9) was a song composed and sung in response to events which happened on a *CRB* tour. ‘Ben

[Wilfred] has a Melbourne song. “*Yä wäwa, yä gutha marrama*” — that’s “big brother.” Roy [Natilma] sung this in Melbourne when Ben went walkabout and he was worried about him’ (Daniel Wilfred 2010). The song relays the story of Roy Natilma’s worry at losing his *wäwa* (brother), Benjamin Wilfred in Melbourne. Greg Dickson captured an audio record of Natilma telling this story at the Ngukurr Language Centre, in 2007:

Benjamin Wilfred: New one, Melbourne one. [Singing]

Roy Natilma: Im bin lukumbat mi [Kriol, ‘He, Benjamin, was looking for me’]. ‘Where’s my youngest brother?’ My dream, for my *wäwa* [brother], my *gutha* [young relative]. That dream come la Melbourne. That’s mine.

LE_5.9	Galpan ‘Gathu wuyun̄bi’: Roy Natilma and David Wilfred (yidaki). Ngukurr, April 2007	01:51
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The following tables show where ‘Gathu wuyun̄bi’ is sung within the Wägilak song series, during: the 2007 Greg Dickson recording (Fig. 5i); a recording of *manikay* made in 2009 at the Alan Eaton Studios, Melbourne, as part of the first *CRB* album (Fig. 5j). In both performances, ‘Gathu wuyun̄bi’ slots into the existing song and rhythmic mode structure, coming at the end of a sequence of modes within the Galpan song subject before the leader moves onto the next subject, Raki (String) (see also Fig. 5b).

<i>Galpan</i> song items	<i>Bilma</i> mode		Beats per minute
1	Weaving		88
2			
3			
4	Gathu wuyun̄bi		88
5			
On to Raki (String)			

Fig. 5i Sequence of *bilma* modes in Galpan sung during recording at Ngukurr Language Centre, 2007

<i>Galpan</i> song items	<i>Bilma</i> mode		Beats per minute
1	Weaving		88
2			
3	Dancing		110
4			
5			
6			
7	Gathu wuyunbi		88
8			
9			
On to Raki (String)			

Fig. 5j Sequence of *bilma* modes in Galpan sung during CRB album sessions, 2009

There is an underlying parallel between the disquiet within funeral *manikay* for the *birrimbirr* (soul) and a characteristic theme of worry expressed in many *yuṭa manikay*, especially ‘Gathu wuyunbi.’ Worry is a very pertinent emotion which lives in present and unique subjectivities, and the act of writing *yuṭa manikay* in response to such situations is one of bringing *manikay* directly to bear as a form relevant to contemporary lives. Corn suggests that *manikay* displays ‘concern for *birrimbirr* (souls) of the recently deceased, or sorrow for one’s own or another’s absence from kin or country’ (Corn 2002, 157). This has much resonance with Knopoff’s exploration of the ‘sorry’ feeling in many *yuṭa manikay*:

Many, but not all, newsong verses are inspired by an event involving *worrying*, such as concern for someone’s (including one’s own) safety or well-being, concern for the spirit of one recently deceased, or feeling *sorry* for a relation who has been away for a time. (Knopoff 1992, 144)

Finally, perhaps the most significant *yuṭa manikay* to be included into the Wāgilak series in CRB is the ‘Goodbye song.’ In both funerals in Ngukurr and on tour with the AAO, this song is always sung at the end of performances. The immediate impression of this song — with its dance actions characterised by large side-to-side swaying with two hands in the air (waving goodbye) — is that it has been concocted as an audience-

pleasing farewell at the end of performances, especially as it is performed with much overt showmanship.

More significantly, this song again demonstrates how traditional *manikay* forms are bound to contemporary events: it was sung by Benjamin Wilfred as he waved goodbye to his father's-father's body, as the plane carrying the coffin took off from the Ngukurr airstrip in 2005. 'All the faces bin look out the window, and they bin sad. And they start to move, like this [waves goodbye]' (Benjamin Wilfred pers. comm. 2012). The 'Goodbye song' again demonstrates the role of *yuta manikay* in elaborating the basic narrative sequence of *manikay* with relevant and poetically juxtaposed additions.

This is not only thematically but musically a very powerful song, as the large sections of unison *chorus* are a communal expression that is rich with individual vocal timbres (Chapter Eight) — many voices merge into one expression that moves from sadness to celebration. At funerals in Ngukurr, up to a dozen men can be standing, huddled in a circle, singing this song at the tops of their voices at the very end of a smoking ceremony. The *yidaki* is held up, bell in the air, and if there is any worry or sadness expressed through this song, it is blazed with great vigour and energy (Figs. 5k, l). Through smoking purification, all bad feelings are left aside. The 'Goodbye song' again demonstrates:

The Yolŋu practice of composing non-canonical *yuta* ('new') *manikay* items in which traditional subjects are related to contemporary events, such as funerals and family separations, which evoke *warwu* [sorrow, homesickness, worry] as an emotional response. (Corn 2010a, 89)

The dreaming or composition of *yuta manikay* is but one means of fleshing out the ancestrally given, legitimate skeleton of *manikay* — putting it together in the present and expanding the core narrative sequences. *Yuta manikay* perform an important role of mediation, speaking into the present with forms of the past, making *manikay* relevant to people today. 'Whenever I sing, Grandpa is always on my back; always there. And I do it for him, Grandpa. And for my kids. We are the Young Wägilak Group' (Benjamin Wilfred 2010).



Fig. 5k Jim Wilfred and Andy Peters performing the 'Goodbye song' following a smoking ceremony. 19.8.2010



Fig. 5l Lenny Wilfred, Daniel Wilfred, Benjamin Wilfred and Andy Peters performing the 'Goodbye song.' 19.8.2010

Living bones

[In keeping culture strong] he isn't just keeping Yolngu culture unchanged like a museum piece. He has learned to create something that is especially his own, but quite consistent with the past. (Marika 1995, 62)

To speak with authority into contemporary lives, tradition changes to stay the same; tradition is understood from new situations and must be made relevant to that situation if its orthodox tenets are to be meaningful. This paradox is embraced by the forms and traditions of interpreting *manikay* song. As integral structures are maintained through the generations they nevertheless entail a degree of *productive ambiguity*, allowing individuals to be pulled into the act of performance, brought into a tradition of active, creative realisation.

Orthodoxy does not necessarily preclude change. Rather, 'Yolngu artistic practice creates a balance between possibility and constraint [...] not that different from the Western perspective of seeing art having a place in a history of forms' (H. Morphy 2008, 73). By entering into a conversation with tradition through performance, an individual infers something of tradition's contemporary relevance from the musical forms handed down. This is an assertion that tradition is capable of speaking into present and unique contexts; the pertinence of tradition is felt as songs become experienced events. Ancestral connection and law are performed into being through *manikay*.

The structuring bones of *manikay* contain possibilities or inherent ambiguities that can be filled in, elaborated and realised through the creative design of individuals. Productive ambiguity is flexibility within the forms of what is passed down within a tradition, allowing the transmitted substance to breathe anew through creative realisation.

The basic Wägilak narrative is infused with personality through: the grain (timbre) of an individual's voice and stylistic vocal inflections; choice of words and textual image; improvisation around the melodic content; contextualised song selection and construction of a series of rhythmic modes; composition and juxtaposition of *yuṭa*

manikay. Narrative from the past is realised in the present: ‘*Manikay* is a skeleton — put it all together — *manikay* is from the spirits’ (Nunggarrgalug in Curkpatrick et al. 2010). *Manikay* is an ancestral body living and acting in the present through performance. As in painting:

The ancestral form, however, is an idea that only exists through its replication, and the criterion by which the success of a replication is judged is that it is a recognizable token of its type: for example that it has the correct clan designs, that it is an effective encoder of ancestral meanings and that it conveys the power of the ancestral past through the aesthetic affect of its infill. (H. Morphy 2008, 153)

Each song item in a *manikay* series perpetuates particular forms of rhythm and pitch. These are forms which encode social relationships and legal directives, narratives that address distinct clans and homelands. The stability and orthodox perpetuation of *manikay* structures allows it to create, in the face of generational change, a persistent identity — the Wägilak of Njilipidji who sing the songs of Djuwalpada. ‘Everything’s changing but we’ve gotta be honest and one. You gotta think about your country and the songs. What we teach, have that on your mind and think about it’ (Benjamin Wilfred in Corn et al. 2009). Here and now, law is brought into being through performance.

The preceding chapters have shown that *manikay* is an iteration of the ancestral text containing particular tenets and significations of a greater narrative complex, which has been passed down the *yarrata* (string line), sustained and connected through the generations. Performed iterations of a tradition in the present become the possibility for further iterations in an ambiguous future; the transfer of something to future generations who will form their own iterations of that tradition, incorporate, converse and respond in an ongoing, productive chain of effective history. The coming chapters extend from these observations, drawing in the dramatically envisioned iteration of tradition that is *CRB* to further illustrate this hermeneutic.

‘To be situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible’ (Gadamer 2006, 354), and through the performance of *manikay*, traditional knowledge exists in vitality beyond mere reproduction. Through a song’s

contemporary performance, new aspects of *manikay* emerge presently in relief, not as shadows of the past but as something animated and lively. Individual creativity feeds this dynamic process and is at the roots of cultural sustainability. Tradition is not mere custom or reified heritage; tradition speaks to us as individuals and pulls us into a greater reality.

SECOND PART:

CONVERSING TRADITION

Chapter six

Shifting horizons

Acts of interpretation are dialogical, a ceaseless conversation that is, with tradition. The interpreter projects provisional meanings but these are disturbed and re-defined when the interpreter's own prejudices are questioned by the horizon of the text or the partner in a dialogue. (*Gadamer in a nutshell*, Lawn 2007, 3)

This chapter outlines a number of concepts taken directly from contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, establishing an approach to Yolŋu notions of tradition that will carry through the musical analysis of coming chapters. Introducing another distinct layer into the conversation of this thesis, this chapter aligns the rich complexities of Yolŋu hermeneutics already introduced with critical hermeneutical method and discourse. Provisionally drawn together, my aim is not some synthesis or system that purports to objectively advance progressive thinking. Rather, with *Crossing Roper Bar* as a guiding metaphor, a productive interplay of ideas is pursued that holds the potential to question assumptions about, and enrich understanding of, *Wägilak manikay*.

I begin by introducing Gadamer who, in the mid-twentieth century, re-evaluated many pervasive notions about tradition, history and interpretation in the social sciences. Gadamer does not envisage tradition as something apart from us, over or back there. Rather, he builds from the idea that 'we stand in traditions whether we know these traditions or not' (Gadamer 2001, 45). Here, tradition is the very orientation of the ongoing *raki* (string) into which we are woven, which we continue to roll and extend into the future. Tradition is an intimate and present connection with something of the past — read *ancestral animation* or *text* — and shapes the very orientation of our cultural horizon.

This thesis concerns itself primarily with two planes of interpretation: that between individuals and traditional cultural expressions (that is, Yolŋu today and the *manikay* tradition); and that between persons and situations from different cultures (that is, intercultural engagement or collaboration). Interpretation occurs through dialogical

engagement on both these fronts, between subjects and elements of tradition, or between interlocutors. In such encounters, subjectivity necessarily precedes intersubjectivity and the gaze from a particular vantage point frames the very possibility of understanding. In a sense, 'subjects and objects are indivisible' (Lawn 2007, 40) within discourse or interpretation.

By drawing out the conversational characteristics of tradition, I elaborate on the transaction of the past brought into contemporary expression: through mediation, tradition is engaged intimately as something that both constitutes and speaks into our lives. A brief exploration of the limitations of historical reconstruction affirms the need for understanding to occur through mediation, as meanings exist beyond their origins in particular cultural milieu or historical horizons.¹

The entire second part of the thesis aims, which this chapter begins, demonstrates that *manikay* need not be investigated or interpreted as an object over-and-apart from the inquirer: the *manikay* tradition is known through engagement and from unique subjectivities. It follows that in bringing subjective ideas and assumptions into dialogue with *manikay*, an important assertion of the validity of Wägilak tradition is made. Engaging seriously and openly with cultural expressions of tradition asserts that those very expressions, passed down through the generations, might hold something valuable to say to us in our own situations.

Gadamer the philosopher

Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated. (Gadamer 2006, 291)

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) was a leading philosopher of the twentieth century. Born in Marburg, Germany, he lived through both world wars, the depression, German division and reunification. He was a pupil of Martin Heidegger, beginning his academic

¹ Just as Gadamer's writings are not sealed off from relevance to a thesis on *manikay*.

career focussing on Greek philosophy and Plato's ethics. Gadamer managed to distance himself from politics throughout the Second World War, and Heidegger's embrace of the Nazi party saw their friendship dissolve during these years (Lawn 2007, 22). After the war, Gadamer was invited to lead the reconstruction of the University of Leipzig as its rector, calling for a 'revival of humane culture in Germany' (Dostal 2002, 23). In 1947, Gadamer moved to West Germany, finally settling at the University of Heidelberg in 1949, where he was a philosophy professor for a number of decades.

Gadamer's magnum opus *Truth and Method* was completed in 1958–59. It is a leading contribution to modern hermeneutics representing a shift from the classical approach, which was concerned with developing appropriate and justified methods for interpreting texts — a discipline born of the Reformation's dispersal of responsibility for biblical interpretation from the Catholic episcopacy to the individual and, consequently, individuals within the world's diverse languages and cultures. It was not until the 1970s that *Truth and Method* gained momentum as a work of global significance, when a plethora of translations spread Gadamer's ideas across Europe, Asia and America (Dostal 2002, 26).²

Truth and method focuses on understanding as it occurs in history, art, literature and conversation, explicitly questioning the legacy of pervasive Enlightenment doctrine (Gadamer 2006, 272–91). The Enlightenment brought with it the directive that interpretation, say of a historical text, must seek objectivity through reasoned or empirical argument and method, overcoming 'the negative implications of a recourse to the authority of tradition' (Warnke 1987, 75). Such methodology assumed a need for the interpreter to transcend his or her situation in the present and, through the application of correct procedure, arrive at the truth behind the historically constituted meaning intended by the author (Ibid).³ Gadamer subverts these assumptions: the

² Chief critics of Gadamer include: critical theorists and philosophers of the 1960s, who claimed that Gadamer's account of hermeneutics could not produce sufficient criticism of ideology; French poststructuralists and deconstructionists, such as Derrida and Lyotard, whose debates with Gadamer took issue with his insistence that the process of understanding through language was universal (Warnke 1987; Dostal 2002).

³ Many assumptions of the Enlightenment have been heavily critiqued in recent decades, especially the idea of the autonomous, rational subject 'through the work of Horkheimer, Adorno and Heidegger, and

possibilities for interpretation, he argues, far exceed the intentions of an author or text of tradition from a particular historical situation. As Linge surmises:

The hermeneutical conversation begins when the interpreter genuinely opens himself to the text by listening to it and allowing it to assert its viewpoint. It is precisely in confronting the otherness of the text — in hearing its challenging viewpoint — and not in preliminary methodological self-purgations, that the reader's own prejudices (i.e., his present horizons) are thrown into relief and thus come to critical self-consciousness. (Linge in Gadamer 2008, xx–xxi)

For Gadamer, understanding is always interpretation: we can never remove ourselves from our constitution amid histories and traditions, a position which conditions our understanding. Lawn summarises Gadamer's thought: 'The important thing is not to assume a text [or tradition] to be a dumb or silent partner but an active voice in a constant conversation: good hermeneutic practice is to listen' (Lawn 2007, 25). Tradition speaks into our lives as something vocative and existential rather than ontologically objective.

Prejudice and postcolonial angst

We stand in traditions, whether we know these traditions or not; that is, whether we are conscious of these or are so arrogant as to think that we can begin without presuppositions — none of this changes the way traditions are working on us and in our understanding. (Gadamer 2001, 45)

At the final plenary session of the 2010 AIATSIS conference *Information Technology and Indigenous Communities*, Professor Marcia Langton praised the general tone of presentations for moving 'beyond postcolonial angst' (Langton 2010). Perhaps she was referring to an ability of presenters not to get too enmeshed in self-critical soul searching as they juggled with the ethics of method and language, at the expense of

more recently through that of Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard' (Warnke 1987, 167). Nevertheless, differentiation of the autonomous subject must precede any exploration of subjective limitations: 'The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings (Gadamer 2006, 272).

actually *conversing* with the Indigenous Australians they wrote about. That is, instead of forging new conversations through productive projects and engagements.

This statement came to mind when I read a section of writing by Brigg (2005, 118). Here, Brigg introduces the methodological thinking behind his work on 'intercultural conflict resolution' in legal mediation, presented at an earlier AIATSIS conference in 2001. While introducing the main concerns of his 'ethics of otherness,' the ideas espoused perhaps illustrate Langton's 'postcolonial angst' and betray the utter methodological confusion that ensues when one seeks a rationally sound, objective methodology to assuage subjectivity in cross-cultural interactions. Brigg begins by asserting that in operating through Western 'frames of reference,' Indigenous knowledge cannot be respected, and concludes:

If I were to interpret these [Indigenous Australian cultural] materials for the purposes of Western social and political science, I would be led to make certain claims about Aboriginal social and political life thereby bringing me back to the earlier ethical problem I identified of non-indigenous academics making claims about Indigenous life. In short, I cannot escape a treacherous political space; I potentially betray people with every move I make. (Brigg 2005, 118)

Brigg's ethics suggests that Aboriginal cultures are entirely oppositional to Western cultures and so fundamentally unknowable in any legitimate way; the endless cycle of personal angst is apparent as every attempt he makes at understanding *otherness* is 'compromised by the forms of knowledge that are traditionally used in the West for such efforts' (Ibid.).

Taking this line of argument forces one to conclude that it is fundamentally unethical to speak of one situation from another. By looking to method to necessarily ameliorate situation, 'a fantasy of perfect translation takes over [...] it reaches a peak in the fear that, being translation, the translation will only be a bad translation, by definition as it were' (Ricoeur 2006, 5). Yet even the representations of cultural traditions made by people indigenous to those traditions are provisional, subjective iterations, as this thesis will show and as Langton suggests:

There is a naïve belief that Aboriginal people will make ‘better’ representations of us simply because, it is argued, being Aboriginal gives us ‘greater’ understanding. This belief is based on an ancient and universal feature of racism: the assumption of the undifferentiated ‘Other.’ (Langton 2008, 115)

Method cannot legitimise interpretation and an *other* is not a discrete object to which such method can be applied. Rather, discursive engagement begins with a conversational partner and the validity of *another* is asserted if the interpreter allows difference to speak into their own, unique subjective understandings.⁴ Gadamer suggests that the frames of reference we bring to interpretation, our prejudices, are the very possibility of engagement and understanding — a possibility that Brigg, at least in the above passage, seemed desperate to avoid.

The following chapters discuss *CRB* as a conversation emerging out of the subjectivities that each player brings to interpretation and engagement with other people and cultures: a conversation that shifts horizons because it proceeds from those very situated horizons. I begin by unpacking Gadamer’s conception of *prejudice*, asserting that situation is not ‘socio-cultural baggage’ (Nattiez 1990, 104) but the very possibility of understanding — like the prejudice of a camera’s limited angle of view or a microphone’s directional field. Prejudices, or anticipations of understanding, are shown to be not simply negative, close-minded corruptions — which is an all too frequently and devastatingly realised potential of prejudices — but foundational in beginning to engage with culture or another person.⁵ The opening of ourselves to

⁴ The very possibility of dialogue or engagement with another individual destroys the concept of the absolute *other*: true otherness cannot even be thought, let alone engaged in dialogue.

⁵ Prejudices become unjustified when we do not allow them to be questioned and prejudice is not inherently unethical. Rather, the content of particular prejudices, when considered essential, can be unethical — especially where there are considerable discrepancies of power between individuals or groups of people. My use of the term *prejudice* rather than *situation* or *frame of reference* etc., is not simply provocative but stems from Gadamer’s own use of the term and dedication to etymology: *pre-judice* from the German *vorurteil*, ‘prejudgement.’

other voices, situations and traditions, carries with it the very possibility for the reformation and critique of our prejudices.⁶

The seminal work of celebrated Australian anthropologist William Stanner written in the same decades as Gadamer was challenging pervasive notions of subjectivity and interpretation: here a useful illustration comes forth. Stanner, who argued that we should '*think black*, not imposing Western categories of understanding' (Stanner 2009, 58), trumps his own relativism, using a non-Aboriginal expression bound up in millennia of associations, 'logos,' to interpret ancestral reality (the *dreamtime*): 'A kind of narrative to things that once happened; a kind of character of things that still happen; and a kind of *logos* or principle of order transcending everything significant for Aboriginal man' (Ibid.).

Stanner's 'logos' is an iteration of understanding and, if treated provisionally, becomes the basis for continuing engagement and further understanding.⁷ Following Gadamer's thought, Stanner's 'logos' is a prejudice foundational to ongoing engagement and understanding, a prejudice that nevertheless seemed to Stanner, relevant after years of learning and engagement with Aboriginal cultures. Understanding is always provisional and emerging, a reality Yolŋu hermeneutics also embraces.

Similarly, Nancy Williams' use of the term *corporate* to describe Yolŋu landholding groups, is a prejudice necessary to effectively destroy notions of *terra nullius* 'in terms that common law can comprehend' (Williams 1986, 104). Other examples of productive prejudices in interpretation and understanding can be found in the Yolŋu translations of the terms *Nyarra* as 'parliament' and *ringitj* as 'embassy,' discussed in Chapter Four.

Our prejudices and situations contain within them the potential to understand; they are the historical reality of our being. Prejudices form a platform from which we think, question and discuss. On the face of it, such statements seem quite controversial and

⁶ Gadamer's suggestion is that 'although we cannot escape the co-ordinates of *historical life*, we are not the puppets of history pulled down by inherited prejudice' (Lawn 2007, 65). It is the 'tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition' (Gadamer 2006, 272).

⁷ *Logos*, 'the Word' (John 1.1, Greek New Testament), is on one level an event of disclosure, an action of articulation.

provocative — even internally contradictory — if we assume that it is actually our prejudices which get in the way of understanding. But therein lies the rub: our words betray our subjectivities and play us into a corner. If we *assume*, we are forming judgement before understanding takes place. If we assume that prejudices are necessarily negative, that assumption is itself a prejudice.

The conclusion that prejudices are negative is, of course, not an uninformed position. That giant of contemporary Western constitution, the Enlightenment, held as fundamental principal the importance of overcoming prejudices in the name of reason: a position that, Gadamer quips, is ‘a prejudice against prejudice itself’ (Gadamer 2006, 273). We stand on the shoulders of this giant of tradition, an effective history which has rendered us in its own image, when we assume prejudices are essentially irrational and unethical. Yet Gadamer does not want us to jettison the reformation of prejudices, nor simply ‘facilitate the assimilation of [any] cultural difference with limited challenge to the dominant culture’ (Brigg 2001, 117):

The fact that we move in a linguistic world and grow up into the world through an experience pre-formed by language does not at all remove the possibilities of critique. On the contrary, the possibility of going beyond our conventions and beyond all those experiences [...] opens up before us once we find ourselves, in our conversation with others, faced with opposed thinkers, with new critical tests, with new experiences. (Gadamer 2006, 550–51)

Just like the world of language we inhabit and that inhabits us, prejudices are inescapably the framework of our thought, intimately shaping our anticipations and perceptions. Most difficult is the appreciation of others perceptions: another’s vantage point is always constructed, to varying degrees, in a different orientation than our own. Human experience is lived experience and the body is central to perception, and so the world of things and ideas is experienced by individuals whose perceptions are entirely original.⁸ Our worlds and relations are suspended in unmatched, real experiences. Yolŋu contend that the world should be seen through

⁸ Although experienced through the ‘same kinds of bodies’; hence, near-universal metaphors such as *anger as heat* (F. Morphy pers. comm. 2013).

the prejudice, the prior fact, of ancestral reality. This directedness allows them to understand and interpret natural phenomena and relations in their own, distinctly human way. As Gadamer suggests:

The historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something, whereby what we encounter what something says to us. (Gadamer 2008, 9)

The fluke of birth situates us in a unique position among the tangled multitude of human situation, experience and narrative — a crucible in which our particular hermeneutical situation and prejudices are formed. Section One showed how an individual's situation amid Wägilak culture shapes the experience of the world in a unique way. Ultimately, we cannot escape our constitution in amid particular horizons by appeal to objective method, as the apparently rational questions we ask are also shaped by anticipations and agendas. We come to interpret tradition from particular interests and through particular means.

When storm clouds are seen forming on the horizon, this is understood as it relates to our own situation: a godsend to the drought-stricken farmer; feared devastation to those facing floods; a reminder of *milpirri*, the importance of unity amid diversity in Warlpiri society (Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick pers. comm. 2013); a reified text of the *wata* (wind) *manikay* repertoire in the Yolŋu world.

History is also conveyed or mediated into our own horizons of understanding. Howard Morphy points out, in an anecdote about interpreting some paintings from the Sepik River province of Papua New Guinea, that our situations give us perspectives which shape our approach to questioning a *text* of tradition:

The very questions that [anthropologist] Anthony Forge posed about the relationship between representation and abstraction lay at the heart of modernist discourse. The questions Narritjin Maymuru and [his son] Banapana posed were closely related to the place of art in their own society. (H. Morphy 2008, 120)

Extending these basic observations about interpretation, our situations also shape the way we produce cultural expressions. The gaze of early European settlers in Australia, sketching the landscape and animals for the first time, may have perceived the kangaroo with the tail, nose and whiskers of a rat — a reality of perception that can actually be seen in art from the time (Fig. 6a). Some early illustrations even show the kangaroo with the face of a horse and the feet of a chicken (Fig. 6b). These early attempts to interpret or capture the new and strange world of the antipodes, somewhat disfigured as they may seem today, show us the very process of understanding as an event of mediation. The images also demonstrate to us the ongoing process of overcoming particular prejudices of expression — here, techniques and approaches to drawing animals developed in another environment and tradition.

Prejudice also shapes our understanding during performance or the course of perception. As a *manikay* song unfolds through time, the situation from which our interpretation begins also changes. We experience a course of events through time and our memory and anticipation work constantly to shape our perceptions of that music (Husserl 1964). Our perspective is in fluidity: it is always changing, playing back and forth, influenced by memory of what has gone before and anticipation of what is expected.

Anyone listening to music or reading a text understands particular components from a projected anticipation of the whole.⁹ From the title of a composition or the tonality established in the first few bars, impending elements of musical form, contour or texture are anticipated. From the experience of the opening songs of a *manikay* sequence, one anticipates the greater significances to which that series portends and

⁹ Musical semiologist Jean-Jaques Nattiez writes of a similar process but from a perspective of formalism: 'An object of any kind takes on meaning for an individual apprehending that object, as soon as that individual places the object in relation to areas of his lived experience — that is, in relation to a collection of other objects that belong to his or her experience of the world' (1990, 9). Understanding of any *object* itself is, in this sense, a movement of vitality: that which is being apprehended holds relation to everything else perceived from a situated horizon, and this situation is constantly shifting. Hanslick's seminal work of musicological formalism, *On the musically beautiful* (1986) [1891] might have been more eloquent and relevant had he incorporated this phenomenological aspect into his concept of 'tonally moving forms.' As Gadamer suggests, aesthetics is not an objective discipline but 'is absorbed into hermeneutics' when we realise that art is bound up in the experiencing and understanding subject (Gadamer 2001, 70).

the larger, regional narrative of which that *manikay* conveys only a part. Understanding is generated through anticipation or prejudiced projection, and those anticipations form the very orientation of further engagement — a back-and-forth play known widely as the *hermeneutic circle*.¹⁰

Revelation of knowledge in Yolŋu society is also a process of interpreting further layers of meaning that resonate with the complex of particulars already present to understanding. These particulars are first and foremost located in the orthodox narrative handed down through the generations and understanding of these particulars is mediated through one's position within the gamut of initiation and rights to knowledge. 'Further dimensions of the content of the Narrative are already contained within the more literal descriptions, awaiting the right circumstances or an appropriate level of ceremonial knowledge to be triggered' (Lendon and Caruana 1997, 34). Indeed, without the initial, orienting prejudices of a particular hermeneutic (Chapter Three), Yolŋu would not be able to hear the voice of the *birrkpirrk* crying on the wind when someone dies.

People, cultures and traditions are not objects over-and-apart from us but actively engage us in countless actions toward understanding. As time and situation shift, new horizons constantly produce and disclose further revelations of meaning. The play of interpretation unfolds like a conversation and as we are turned through new orientations, understanding continuing to morph through infinite variations. The complexity of infinite iteration (see Chapter Ten) and malleability ensures that 'understanding can no more be *reproductive* than a game can consist of exact duplications or repetitions of the *same* acts and events of play' (Thiselton 1992, 328).

As Langton suggests (1993, 33–4), you cannot objectively record or perceive information (reified understanding) from another culture, let alone from your own. It is our point of view which guides interpretation. Parts of history or tradition are given relative significance within the frame of the encounter, the angle of approach and the

¹⁰ The alteration between the perceived whole and the parts, or anticipation and memory, shapes the way we understand (see Grondin 2002; Bruns 1992). Gadamer describes the hermeneutic circle as the constant application and shifting of prejudices (Gadamer 2006).

questions that are asked. Any angst that leads to the disavowal of situation is not at all productive of understanding, let alone engagement with those understandings. Subjectivity precedes intersubjectivity and indeed forms the basis of tradition's continuance.

Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a 'methodological' circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding (Gadamer 2006, 293–4).

In accepting the role of prejudices in understanding, the interpreter supposes that further engagement is necessary to expand, elaborate, refute or question those very anticipations. To engage with any tradition is to perceive it from ever new, ever expanding horizons: 'It is in retranslation [the reiteration of an expression] that we most clearly observe the urge to translate, stimulated by the dissatisfaction with regard to existing translations' (Ricoeur 2006, 7).

In the next chapter I will examine the prejudice of *groove* that the Australian AAO brings to *CRB*, demonstrating how this approach to understanding *bilma* modes allows something productive to emerge from the musical conversation. What results in *CRB* is a provisional iteration of understanding, held in sound, but an understanding nonetheless. Similar analysis is continued into Chapter Eight; Chapter Ten extends aspects of this chapter, applied to the discourse of heritage and records.



Fig. 6a *The Kangooroo*, with the tail, nose and whiskers of a rat. P. Mazell (1789)
Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia

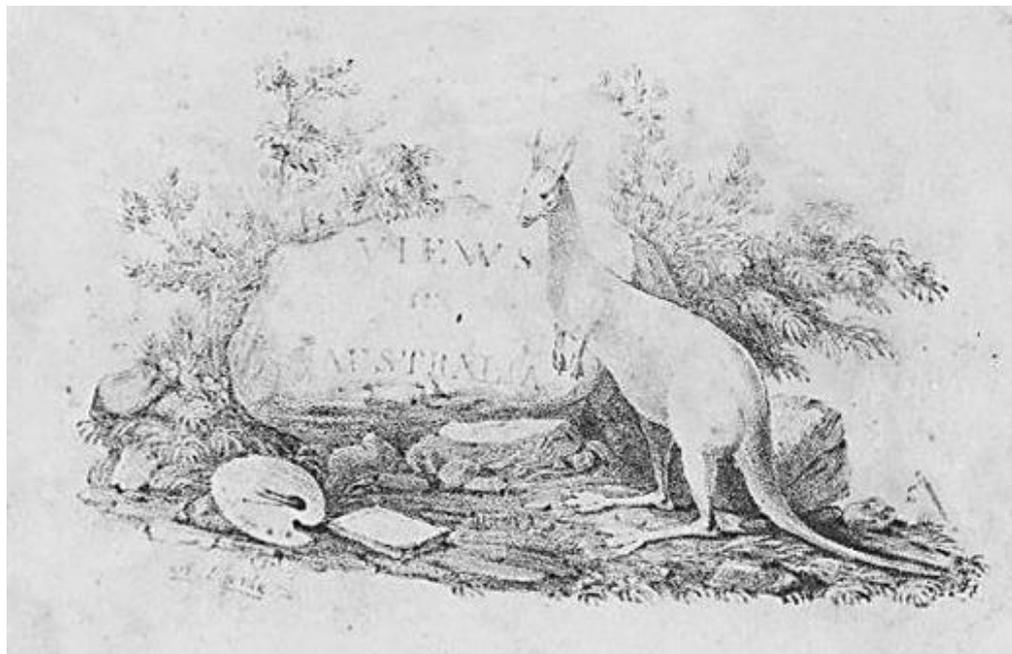


Fig. 6b *Views in Australia*, by A. Earle (1825). A kangaroo with the face of a horse and feet of a chicken. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.

An event of address

Tradition is an event of address, known as it engages. Because we begin from a situation, our very subjectivities are addressed by another person, text or history. In the present, we are addressed by some expression of tradition, something of the past that engages us through active reception or performance in the present. Tradition is known as it breaks into the present, as it holds some relevance for the present. In tradition, we are not presented with 'alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own' but are presented with something that we ourselves move within (Gadamer 2006, 303).

In understanding tradition we perform a novel mediation, as something is understood in relation to our expectations, experiences and situation — as the past is realised within the horizons of a unique present. Mediation occurs in any understanding from situation. Further, our understandings of tradition constitute the particular horizon of our present situation. Tradition is both intimately constitutive of our experience even as it is continued through our present iterations of understanding. 'Part of real understanding is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them' (Gadamer 2006, 367). A performance of *manikay* song is intimately shaped by the ongoing tradition of which it is a part, while sustaining that tradition through contemporary articulations of performance. We come to know tradition in its expression amid present circumstance, in the event of its address pertinent to unique individual lives and contexts.

It follows that the past is not an *object* to be reconstructed in a scientific way, little more than a century old museum piece or an ancient *manikay* song could be resurrected within the particular effecting and life-giving situation of its historical use. Tradition is not ossified heritage or merely reflective of a time past. It would be condescendingly unethical to consider the past a mere repository of information to be unearthed and plundered. Rather, tradition is vital transaction and translation through which action and understanding are effected. The performance of Wägilak *manikay*

brings a narrative of tradition, aspects of the ancestral text, into applied and active expression amid present subjectivities.

Tradition sustained is what has manifest in innumerable historical horizons and hermeneutical situations (understandings), of which the present offers just one possibility: Wägilak *manikay* can never be located in the past in an objective, *apart-from-us* sense. The Wägilak tradition is not solely located in a particular past but is sustained as tradition amid multiple, performed iterations.¹¹ Through the iterations (mediations) of tradition in performance or understanding, people today are connected with the histories that constitute their very horizons.

Further, present iterations also sustain elements of those traditions: through the performance of traditional *manikay*, Yolŋu are connected to specific social, linguistic and legal structures such as *bäpurru* (patrigroup), *gurrutu* (kinship) relations, *wäŋa* (homeland), *matha* (tongue), and ways of knowing and perceiving the world. While performances of ceremonial traditions are ever unique and provisional, they nevertheless sustain as ongoing and relevant a realisation of connection to ancestral origins; the creative presence of the living ancestral text is sustained as it is vocalised in innumerable historical horizons.¹²

In the modern music conservatory, a conceptual polarisation exists between musicological writing and ideas (*dicta*), and practical performance (*praxis*) (Abbate 2004, 507).¹³ This mirrors a more general distinction in Enlightenment thought between the *figurative* and *literal*, especially unhelpful in regard to Yolŋu culture and philosophy. Analysis and historical inquiry (*post-praxis*) play the role of informing (*pre-praxis*) performance and musical interpretation. Musical training focuses on the performed connection to a particular tradition, perhaps the French neo-classical tradition, through informed emulation of musical characteristics perceived to belong

¹¹ Even as Yolŋu today can, and do, engage with past iterations of the *manikay* tradition reified in records, such as Ian Dunlop's films (see Morphy with Deveson 2011) and other archived material of Yolŋu ceremony readily available at the Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala.

¹² A responsibility to practice ceremony introduced in Chapter Three as *ŋalabuluŋu rom* (correct practice).

¹³ This has also been identified as a divide between the drastic and gnostic (Abbate 2004).

to that tradition. Integrally, traditions are understood as distinct clusters of stylistic attributes, conceptually over-and-apart from us, requiring emulation and imitation. Consequently, successful performance requires the pursuit of authenticity from an unhelpfully novel situation in the present — a situation which is considered *other* to the tradition of focus.

Yet the present is more intimately connected with tradition than this polarisation allows. History is intimately woven around us, forming the very orientation of our present. Tradition is the *raki* (string) into which we weave a new strand (Chapter Four) and following ‘a precedent from the past is not to be seen simply as a return to the *authentic* way of doing things but as adding recursively to the ongoing trajectory’ (Morphy and Morphy 2012, 67).¹⁴ Wägilak performance of *manikay* might begin from historical emulation or learning through imitation — following the ancestral blueprint — but it immediately moves beyond any sense of tradition set apart in historical isolation. *Manikay* emanates from present life, from this land under my feet, from this country that my chest pulls toward. From present bodies and present histories, the continued performance of *manikay* within living tradition (living ancestral presence) shapes life and the meanings performance generates.

Present performance shapes reflexive ideas of tradition or history, and these ideas shape performance. We are both connected to traditions and can step back from them and look reflexively at the forms or styles of the past. Yet neat divisions between musical *praxis* and *dicta* risk stagnation. Ultimately, these things come together through performance, generating ongoing vitality of interaction and understanding. Tradition comes to us through events that actively speak meaning into our unique lives. Where such transaction and interaction occurs, a tradition is *authentic* in that it allows forms of the past to become involved in the present through performance.

The following three paragraphs offer an attempt at reformed musicological description, envisaging a description of *CRB* in light of these observations:

¹⁴ This mirrors Gadamer’s statement: ‘The hermeneutical reduction to the author’s meaning is just as inappropriate as the reduction of historical events to the intentions of their protagonists’ (Gadamer 2006, 366).

Tradition is a language which addresses us. It is not a static object but an intimate partner in an inextricably woven dialogue. It is a voice, a song, a rhythm that makes us move. The wind becomes a nexus between the ancestors and the self as it is felt blowing across one's back, beating in one's ears; an experience of tradition sung into presence, activated into being by the song *Wata* (Wind). The *manikay* singers' threads of song draw out those of the ancestor *Djuwalpaḍa*, as he sings to calm down that frightening wind — here and now, there and then. *Manikay* is performed in the present and lives through unique expression.

The drummer in a free jazz performance breaks into a standard rock beat underneath screeching multiphonics. The sizzling hi-hat and heavy off-beat snare draw the listener, whose body is relatively static in the auditorium seating, into an ecstatic sense of internal groove. The listener experiences a sense of going back from the conceptually distant *avant-garde* to the more grounded roots of rock, which are temporally removed but nevertheless closer to home, closer to the effective history within us.

Our experiences in art and music are directly related to the tradition in which we find ourselves, effective history constituting so greatly our horizons and relationship with the past. Constitution in Yolŋu traditions allows the voice of the plover to be heard on the wind; constitution within American popular traditions permits ecstatic joy at going back — in the present — to a youthful groove of decades past.

The subject understands uniquely because he or she experiences uniquely — contrary to Jankéléitch's assertion that the performed essence of music is 'not of the hermeneutic order of knowledge' (2003, 77). Our separation from, and constitution within, traditions is a productive relationship akin to dialogue or conversation. Tradition has formed us in its own image and we have relationship with it, and this relationship constantly shifts as in conversation (a hermeneutic circle).

We can experience tradition within ourselves and we can also dialogue with it as something outside ourselves — *dialogue* from the Greek roots *dia-legein*,¹⁵ with etymological connotations of 'welcoming [collecting] the difference' (Kearney in

¹⁵ δία, literally 'apart or through'; λέγειν, literally 'to say'

Ricoeur 2006, xvii). As a conversation with tradition draws us in, ‘a new horizon is disclosed that opens onto what was unknown to us. In every genuine conversation this happens’ (Gadamer 2001, 49). Tradition is something vocative and existential rather than ontologically objective, and it is known and sustained in an active play or conversation between the past and the present.

Conversing new horizons

In the section ‘Prejudice and postcolonial angst,’ I established that prejudices such as situation, history and language are necessary preconditions to any understanding: subjectivity precedes intersubjectivity. Yet in any encounter, with tradition or an interlocutor in conversation, there are always elements of our interpretation we are not justified in maintaining. By being open to the address of another voice in conversation, our very situation is opened to new possibilities. This voice — either a text of tradition, person or expression — is not a repository of objective knowledge but a dialogical partner and new meanings emerge from the back-and-forth play between interlocutors and situations.

History is dependent upon the situation that constructs it. Frances and Howard Morphy (1984) show how drastically history — not only suggestions of its legacy but factual interpretation of that history — can change over the course of a century. Their concern is with events of frontier violence in the Roper River region, beginning in the late nineteenth century.¹⁶ Perceptions of this violence shifted as they were filtered through the ‘Golden Age’ following World War One, which saw the employment of Aboriginal people on cattle stations and the eventual granting of equal wages. In the following passage, Morphy and Morphy suggest that different situations within history have strongly influenced the Njalakan constitution of history.¹⁷ This is an ideal illustration of Gadamer’s *effective history* (2006, 299).

¹⁶ This research came out of the Njalakan land claim on the Roper Bar Police Reserve that Morphy and Morphy were funded to prepare for the Northern Land Council.

¹⁷ See Fig. 2h for a map that shows the general area belonging to Njalakan people and language.

We believe that Ngalakan myths of the past [which, in 1980 did not relate any history of Aborigines being murdered by settler Australians] take the form they do because they have been filtered through the Golden Age: an era of peace and security following what must have been a period of chaos and apparent irrationality. (1984, 474)

Morphy and Morphy tease out the historical disjuncture of differing views — between white historians and Ngalakan memory — going on to show that, through source documents, there were in fact significant instances of violence and murder on both sides of the frontier, despite the more harmonious perceptions of those from the ‘Golden Age’ onwards. It is clear through this example that an open engagement with the past or tradition is vital: there are always elements of our understanding, of our prejudices which we are not justified in maintaining and which can only be addressed through a back-and-forth dialogue and preparedness to shift our horizons. Here, the contemporary Ngalakan view is potentially shifted through discursive engagement with key historical documents and sources.

As in historical inquiry, in opening up dialogue with tradition on respectful and critical terms, we are positioned to examine our own prejudices which are so entwined with our situation, rather than disavowing our situation in relativistic angst. In reality, our situation gives us the possibility of grounding understanding, beginning the process of reaching greater understandings through dialogue — a never-ending process:

Continuities [here, I read *conversations*] may be established with the past that have the ideological force to wipe out the Golden Age for good in the consciousness of people of the region and to redefine the role of Aborigines in the process of colonisation. For, as Barthes has argued, the only way to defeat one myth is to replace it with another. (Morphy and Morphy 1984, 477)

We understand tradition and history as they actively speak into our situation. This is the same in cross-cultural understanding. In attempting to understand another idea, point of view or musical expression, one is attempting to fuse horizons with another; to engage critically with another view and, in turn, to be engaged critically in one’s own views. ‘Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves’ (Gadamer 2006, 305). The conversational partner I refer to might be

recorded in a historical document or it might be aspects of Wägilak *manikay* that *address* musicians of the AAO.¹⁸

Ethical considerations face the musicians in *CRB* in the way that they come to form their understandings of things different. Langton (2008, 119–20) suggests that in cross-cultural exchanges, ‘the individuals involved will test imagined models of the other to find some satisfactory way of comprehending the other.’¹⁹ Cross-cultural understanding for musicians of the AAO is a relationship of subjective interpretation between individuals, who attempt to avoid objectifying difference through their openness to listening and conversing in new ways. Dialogue is not closed off in definitive, immutable representation and the collaboration’s agenda remains the development of greater understanding across cultural difference through shifting musical iterations. This approach accepts that one’s particular horizons of understanding are situated and as such, open to shift.

For the Wägilak musicians however, it might be more accurate to say that in entering into collaboration with cultural *outsiders* (musicians of the AAO), Wägilak-ness is asserted as integral identity. The performance of traditional songs is a disclosure of integral connection to those traditions and to sing Wägilak *manikay* is to be Wägilak. The willingness of the YWG to collaborate with the AAO is an affirmation of the vital, ongoing relevance of their traditions in ever new conversations.²⁰

Underpinning interaction in *CRB* is a prejudice that understands dialogue as antithetical to appropriation: dialogue that seeks a point of commerce, of exchange.

¹⁸ Ricoeur divides translation [understanding through iteration] into two varieties: the *ontological paradigm* between human selves or subjects, and the *linguistic paradigm* between languages or an interpreter and text (Ricoeur 2006).

¹⁹ Langton (1993; 2008) has written much about this through a discourse of *representation*. She argues that *Aboriginality* is an inter-subjective construct, ‘remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation’ (2008, 119), in much the same way that I have conceptualised *conversation* as a back-and-forth between interlocutors or a subject with a *text* of tradition. Here, I am not here discussing a sense of *Aboriginality* in *CRB*, but rather modes of understanding and dialogue.

²⁰ Conversations are ultimately begun from one side, from agenda, impetus and means (such as finances). In *CRB*, white urban musicians founded the original orientation and agenda — an agenda that contained an ethical imperative to allow new voices and directives to emerge, and allow the Wägilak musicians the chance to develop their own purposes for collaboration.

The collaboration is characterised by its varied and dramatic free improvisations; constantly shifting realisations of the underpinning Wägilak narrative; diverse performance contexts; rehearsals in which verbal discussion plays a large role in seeking new angles and ideas which can be presented and explored in music.

Through this dynamic *play* or back-and-forth between interlocutors and cultural traditions, dialogue avoids blatant appropriation through unanticipated or unsanctioned reification: the open conversational nature of the collaboration encourages individuals to respond to different traditions and each other in what they create. The provisional understandings and anticipations of players are shifted as the music progresses within a performance and as the collaboration develops — as personal and musical relationships between the YWG and AAO are strengthened. Every player remains open to the realities of change and ever-emerging understanding.

The AAO comes to collaborate with the YWG from this basis of testing prejudices, their situated fore-conceptions of music: constructions of tonality, intonation, form and narrative; strong beliefs in progressive individuality and voice in the face of orthodoxy; music as technical profession; music as largely abstract and devoid of ceremonial context (see Chapter Nine).²¹ The reality that the AAO musicians do hold these prejudices (languages/forms of expression) is the very possibility for dialogue to occur. The musicians begin to engage with *manikay* through their own conceptions of music, and these in turn are questioned by their understanding of *manikay*. Such understanding goes beyond musical forms of difference, as drummer Niko Schäuble and violinist Erkki Veltheim suggest:

The collaboration has again made it clear that the basis and indeed reason for songs and music can be — and maybe should be — sought in areas other than music [formal structures and sound] itself. The importance that *manikay* has for the Wägilak is inspiring and I hope to lend the same gravitas to my own performance. (Schäuble 2011)

²¹ By denying our presuppositions, we deny the possibility to question: we are unable to come to any meaningful mediation of understanding through our indigenous hermeneutic lens and, in turn, deny the possibility of coming to any understanding at all — let alone a new understanding enriched beyond our limited subjectivities.

My first trip to Ngukurr completely challenged my notion of how music could be conceived, and spurred me to undertake a Masters degree exploring the connection between music and ritual. (Veltheim 2011)

When faced with cross-cultural contexts of engagement, it is highly evident that musicians can never completely comprehend the experience of music from another vantage point. To claim authority of understanding would be to commit to an act of pure fantasy. This is why Gadamer concludes: 'I must allow tradition's claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me' (Gadamer 2006, 355). Such a realisation is the beginning of a more honest conversation.

CRB has from the very beginning been premised on a foundation of listening 'with wide open ears and minds' (Schäuble 2011); an acknowledgement that the otherness of Yolŋu tradition possesses depth of important meanings and validity. In desiring to understand more about music, indeed more about life through the musical forms of Wägilak *manikay*, the AAO afford this Yolŋu tradition the recognition of validity. In *CRB*, *manikay* is not considered a trove of *otherness* to be plundered but rather a complex and significant tradition, an actively-performed sparring partner that challenges as much as it inspires. From this basis, the Wägilak musicians too are given new contexts through which they can engage with the *manikay* tradition, in ways that lawful cultural orthodoxies can be respected.²² The collaboration is a dynamic, cooperative dialogue. Past artistic director of the AAO, Paul Grabowsky outlines *listening* as the basic premise of the collaboration:

The way that we improvising musicians learn is not that dissimilar from the way that these [Wägilak] gentlemen learn. We learn by listening. And the act of listening is a humble moment. You have to actually give yourself over to whoever it is that is telling you something. And your ego needs to be to one side. And that spirit that drives the *manikay*, I think we're in a very fortunate position to be able to take that on board. Maybe that's why this collaboration has worked so well. (Grabowsky in Corn 2009)

²² Davis (2007), Langton (1983) and Peters-Little (2003) argue that there is certainly a role for white musicians to play in the cultural representation of Aboriginal people or music, if these artists 'are prepared to engage in genuine intercultural exchange' (Davis 2007, 6).

In 2010, the *CRB* project was awarded the H.C Coombs Creative Arts Fellowship at the Australian National University. As a part of this engagement, the AAO were involved a week of musical activities including a number of dedicated improvisation workshops, a Wägilak dance workshop, forums on the collaboration and a performance of *CRB*. As project director and internationally respected performer, Paul Grabowsky gave a public lecture titled *The complete musician* (Grabowsky 2010). His account of the very first AAO trip made to Ngukurr in mid July, 2005, demonstrates how listening was integral to the projects beginnings and approach.

In the following extract from this talk, it is important to consider Grabowsky's position on Australian music education, which he sees as flawed in that it does not focus enough on the fundamental development of active listening skills. Grabowsky often asserts that listening skills are the primary means of fostering a student's development into adaptable, relevant and interesting musicians, musicologists included:²³

It is with this spirit of serious collaboration that we went to Ngukurr. Benjamin [Wilfred], Roy [Natilma] and the others sat down with our ensemble [...] They began to sing, and explained that this was a song called Black Crow [Wäkwak]. Our musicians asked to listen to it a number of times and then played back to them. This was a moment etched into my memory forever. The look of surprise and delight on the faces of our hosts, the fact that here were whitefellas sitting at their feet, wanting to learn their music and actually making a version of it, which they recognised as being close in spirit at least to what they actually do — not some Western version of it with all the microtonal inflections and gritty textures removed. Now, musicians who are only raised within traditional Western paradigms, could they have achieved this level of communication? I greatly doubt it. For a start, most of them never learnt to play in tune, let alone out of tune with a purpose in mind [...]

So great was the enthusiasm of the Wamut mob, that the senior songman was summoned, the great artist Sambo Barabara. And he too gave his approval. We were then told that we

²³ Grabowsky decries the lack of engagement with diversity in music education: 'In Balinese music, tuning is incredibly important, but in a way which would send the door-bitches of classical music education into paroxysms of wrath' (Grabowsky 2010) — that is, those *dogmatic gatekeepers* of the academy whose ideas prevent genuine conversations with musical traditions taking place outside of their restricted conceptions of musical heritage. 'Surely a course on the history of the turntable would be highly relevant, perhaps even more so, than the history of Romantic nationalism in Hungary' (Ibid.).

had all become members of the Wamut clan [skin section], and that our responsibilities to that status would begin immediately. We were taught some dance steps and then told to perform them at a *burgul* [dance]. Everyone did it; this was all part of the collaboration. (Grabowsky 2010)

Like children learning a language, the AAO approached this strange and foreign music through listening; listening so that they heard something and were able to imitate (explored further in Chapter Seven). Grabowsky observes that what was produced in this session was 'close in spirit' to the *manikay* tradition: direct, rote reconstruction was, from the outset, understood as an impossible fallacy. Each and every interpretation occurs through the horizon that takes up the conversation, and so every conversation with tradition is a renewal, a bringing into present situation. This occurs in the same way that linguistic translation allows understanding to be mediated into our own horizons, our own language; the very possibility for tradition to address us in our own personal situation. 'It is a participation in which questioning the other depends on being questioned, and affecting demands an openness to being affected' (Tamisari 2005, 56).

Gadamer's writing also shifted the locus of hermeneutics from its previous obsession with understanding as method toward a new orientation of understanding as event: 'To reach and understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were' (Gadamer 2006, 371). A genuine interpersonal or cross-cultural engagement demands openness toward reconfiguring understanding. This is reflected in *CRB's* approach to musical dialogue, a back-and-forth play of provisional assumptions and iterations that seeks new, enriched horizons. 'As with all good musical collaborations, I feel that I have become closer in a personal way to other humans' (Schäuble 2011).

Historical reconstruction

A short section of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* titled 'Reconstruction and integration as hermeneutic tasks' (2006, 157–61) discusses some important implications for the interpretation of traditional cultural forms such as music. Gadamer questions the notion that tradition is recreated in the present through *ideative representation* — the attempted reconstruction (rote reiteration) of something from the past, such as a musical form.²⁴ He suggests that Hegel's conception of hermeneutics is superior in its transcendence of this reconstructive approach, especially Hegel's suggestion that tradition is a living, thinking relation to the past which opens the possibility of 'thoughtful mediation with contemporary life' (Gadamer 2006, 161). In response to the ultimate shortcomings of historicism, this section will outline the necessity of active mediation in understanding and interpretation.

Historicism reads the past or tradition as something which is appreciated and understood by reconstructing the world at the origin of particular cultural expressions or idioms — the contextual and technical world of their temporal genesis and *intended* mode of being.²⁵ Through reconstructive historicism, we can only come to valid, essential interpretations if we transplant our understanding into the *other* historical situation. This demands that the interpreting subject approaching the alterity of tradition deny his or her own situation, a prerequisite method necessary to appreciating a historical meaning or truth. Historical reconstruction sees the past as *otherwise* and not *another* with which to converse.

In any determined text of tradition, any form of culture passed down the generations, there is indeterminacy. The dogmatic gatekeepers of historicism gain currency only by conjuring a false spectre of the past as something more authentic or real, as a location where the *true work* might exist — a notion in which the forms of the present world merely imitate an ideal reality elsewhere. Applied to cultural traditions, this view fails

²⁴ A concept from German Romantic hermeneutics, represented by the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher's notion of *vorstellung*, 'reconstruction.' Hegel breaks from this notion (Ibid.).

²⁵ Similarly, 'the idea that language is nothing other than the transmission and reception of nuggets of information reduces language to telegraphy and fails to take account of more fundamental issues' (Lawn 2007, 82).

to see that a particular past held, within its time, *only one* iteration of a tradition that persists in multiple situations and interpretations.

Hegel speaks of historical situation with poetic language, imagining cultural forms of the past as fruits ripened on a tree, living and constituted within the historical climate that shaped their growth: 'The spring and summer of the moral life in which they bloomed and ripened.' With this imagery established, his critique of historicism is penetrating:

[The historicist relationship to the past is an] 'external activity [... that] wipes spots of rain or dust from this fruit and instead of the internal elements of the surrounding, productive, and lifegiving reality of the moral world, it substitutes the elaborate structure of the dead elements of its external existence, of language, of its historical features and so forth. And this not in order to live within that reality but merely to represent it within oneself. (Hegel in Gadamer 2006, 160)

In direct disavowal of the present, the historicist quest dulls the possibility of culture living through mediation — or creative expression, integration and application — reducing that art form, idea or tradition to merely 'external activity' removed from the substantial world of the present. For Hegel, historicism only represents the past; it does not mediate an understanding of that past in present expression. Such *ideative representation* is not a dialogue between the past and contemporary life but a false objectification that can only form impoverished representations of tradition. Hegel continues:

But just as the girl who presents the plucked fruit [i.e. traditional forms in the present; *manikay*] is more than Nature that presented it in the first place [historical origin] with all its conditions and elements — trees, air, light, and so on — insofar as she combines all these in a higher way in the light of self-consciousness in her eyes and in her gestures, so also the spirit of destiny which gives us these works of art is greater than the ethical life and reality of a particular people, for it is the *interiorizing recollection* (Er-innerung) of the still *externalized* spirit manifest in them. (Hegel in Gadamer 2006, 160–61)

In this particularly dense passage, Hegel suggests that the reality of *effective history* — history constituting and acting on the present — contradicts the location of tradition in

any singular point of historical origin: tradition is not just plucked from the tree and presented to the present as a discrete object ('plucked fruit'). Rather, tradition is effective in the present, a living embodiment of the past in and around us.

Tradition transcends the fickle externals of historical objectification and is known through the self-conscious realisation of history's contemporary presence — practical and experienced through one's own 'eyes and gestures' that embody the past in living form. Texts of tradition are 'interiorised,' mediated into understanding, as they are brought into one's own situations and horizons ('interiorising recollection'). The use of the word 'recollection' here has important connotations of calling-forth memory from within and around oneself — memory that has pertinent meaning within a particular situation.

Ultimately, the subtle actuality of tradition in-and-around us trumps any objectification of tradition as something over-and-apart from us. Through historical reconstruction, tradition continues only 'in an estranged state,' acquiring 'a derivative, cultural existence [...] A hermeneutics that regarded understanding as reconstructing the original would be no more than handing on a dead meaning' (Gadamer 2006, 159–60). Liberation from historicism is possible when the interpreter, musician, or collector of cultural artifact, refuses to understand something exclusively from the limited standpoint of objective essentialism. Tradition breathes anew when creative engagement rips it from its historical past, allowing it to be actively meaningful in present lives.

An illustration

Tradition is something ubiquitous and infused within all, an ancestral presence in the land and in the people that constitute the present. In performing *manikay* and participating in cultural expressions from the past, we become actors within the greater play of tradition — our very horizons are given their initial direction by the situation we find ourselves in. We find ourselves existing as a strand in an ongoing *raki* (string), rolled by the generations that came before us; we come to know tradition as it

is engaged in the present. And through our very subjective understandings and performances we sustain the tradition of *manikay*, rolling ever new fibres into the ongoing *raki*. 'This is more than just copying what the ancestors have done. *Dhudakthun* [like *nalabulunju rom*; continuing ceremony] has the effect of bringing our spiritual past to life again through our modern behaviour' (Marika 1995, 61).

Beyond the limitations of historical objectivity, performance of cultural traditions allows the integration of meaning into the lives of individuals; meanings carried in tradition are lived through oneself. 'Participation is a doing that accomplishes itself in the single act of its production and reception. Beyond symbol and structure, referential meaning and exegesis, the force of the performance is in the first instance itself, in its very actualization' (Tamisari 2006, 47). The following anecdote illustrates this concept.

In 2010, I was invited to attend a public Aboriginal ceremony in New South Wales, at Wollombi in the Hunter Valley. This area is close to Sydney and the continuous connection between current generations and traditional ceremonial practice has been severely disrupted by colonisation. The ceremony itself had been started by local elders some two-decades prior and many of the songs and dances performed had been pieced together from fragmented historical documentation and living memories.

By virtue of the radical disjuncture between ceremonial practice past and present in this region, this ceremony could simply not have been reconstructed in the present as rote transferral from the past. Nevertheless, the performance itself was exhilarating and the gusto of the painted men and women betrayed a full commitment to the experience of the performance. The spirited yet serious nature of the event suggested the great significance of the ceremony in the lives of the people participating.

Alan Marett has written extensively on change within repertoires of *wangga* song over the past three decades at Wadeye (2005) and one particular comment he makes is here pertinent:

Nobody who saw the old men dancing with such virtuosity to the simplified Walakandha *wangga* repertory in 1988, or the mass dancing at the Barunga Festival, could have thought

impoverishment for a moment. The power and elegance of the dancing spoke for itself.
(Marett 2007, 72)

For myself as an audience member, there were many challenging aspects to this performance in New South Wales which made me confront my own ideas concerning Indigenous identity, tradition and contemporary expression. Many new songs had been composed and included in the ceremony; the language of proceedings was English; amplification was used for sound, as it is at many ceremonies around the country; there was a sausage sizzle. It was very easy to wonder if any of the content had substantial origins beyond the recent history of this particular event. And yet such questions seemed to present no barrier to the actual experience of events. The strength of the ceremony came instead from the sense that it was, despite many identifiable discontinuities with the past, fully traditional in the *conversation* with tradition that it brought into being.

Today's living generations were performing into being a very observance of connection with the past; of the present as something inextricably constituted by that past, whether this can be explicitly identified or not. In the act of this performance, Gadamer's *effective history* was realised. Tamisari follows a similar line of thought concerning Yolŋu performance:

In any manifestation, performance is prior to, and more effective than, any commentary, and it is thus in aesthetic experience as a form of participation [...] that its' *meaning* emerges. The force of performance is neither in the motivating intentions nor in the expected purpose or end, but in the performance itself [...] in the very single act of production and reception, it submits a specific truth to a happening. (Tamisari 2006, 50)

The experience of the performance itself by audience members and participants overwhelmed completely any measures of historical accuracy or absolutism which could be applied through objective analysis. Nietzsche (and later, postmodernism in general) argued that nothing was solid, no meaning or truth stable, because there are so many possible horizons of understanding and so many different situations which beheld understanding (Bruns 1992, 9) — a potential challenge to the endless (and therefore meaningless) possible manifestations of music performance. Yet Gadamer's

conception of hermeneutics, resonant with Yolŋu thought and the above anecdote, offers a way out of this dilemma 'of an endless conflict of interpretations, precisely because it shifts the question of understanding from the theoretical plane of seeing from a perspective to the practical plane of involvement and participation in the ongoing action of dialogue' (Bruns 1992, 9).

The complex brilliance of Yolŋu ceremonial expressions and the dense layers of signification of the Wägilak narrative, suggest a hermeneutic that embraces a plethora of iterations offered by performances through the generations and in a multitude of contexts. The *manikay* tradition seeks to hold relevance by being an active and engaging force in the lives of individuals today. Conversely, *manikay* is not meaningful today if its essence is sought in historical practice: 'The fantasy of the origin rendered historical, the desperate refusal of the real human condition, which is that of multiplicity at all the level of existence' (Ricoeur 2006, 33).

In resonance with this hermeneutic, Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred continue to assert that *CRB*, despite its dramatic creativity, is still 'the same' as *manikay* from the past. This is because, through *CRB*, individuals today are drawn into engagement with the *manikay* tradition as something present and active in the world around them (Chapter Three). Performing *manikay* enriches the world around those who are engaged with this tradition, deepening personal awareness of situation within history, kin, ecology and language.

Gularri (floodwaters)

Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted. (Gadamer 2006, 297)

In this chapter, I have established a focus on hermeneutics that appraises the necessity for interpretation from unique situation, showing tradition to be an event of address that speaks into subjective situations and contexts. This is a reality within individual horizons of understanding (prejudices, anticipations, histories) — the necessary

preconditions or frames of encounter from which conversation begins. Through an ongoing dialogue with expressions of tradition (back-and-forth questioning and realisation; performance), an individual comes to new iterations of understanding (mediations; applications; re-cognitions) that are provisional (not essential) but nevertheless the very means of sustaining a tradition into the future.

Just as in dialogue with an interlocutor (cross-cultural interaction), understanding continues to be enriched where individuals are open to new possibilities (shifting horizons). Undeniable situation demands that understanding of traditions is active (performed), not reconstructive (rote repetition) and shows tradition to be something intimately interwoven within our lives (effective history; historical self-consciousness). Traditions are known as they are engaged from present situations. Many of these ideas underpin analysis and discussion of *CRB* in the following chapters.

Finally, I return to the concept of *effective history* as it resonates with the Yolŋu concept of *gularri*. *Gularri* is the name given to particular bodies of Yirritja moiety floodwaters as they flow down particular Yirritja watercourses (F. Morphy, pers. comm. 2013). Like *raki*, the concept of *gularri* can be understood as an illustration of our connection with the past as it intimately configures our lives, giving us a particular orientation within our present praxis. David Wilfred explains that, through *gularri*, Yolŋu are connected to everything ‘from old times’ (David 2012).

Gularri concerns the lifegiving freshwater that fills rivers, tributaries and billabongs — an observable ecological fact, like the *wata* (wind), that connects different country and people together through its movement. Mandawuy Yunupingu explains this as a great ‘flowing’ that carries the ‘spirit’ of the present into the future: *gularri* is ‘one way of imagining how we can bring our pasts into our futures’ (Yunupingu 2003, n.p). Over time, this great, ever moving flow courses along with the seasons, from floodwater to stream, river to ocean, to begin again when the wet-season rains break.

This is a fitting illustration of tradition as effective history, for we are only ever at one point in the stream. This present moment in tradition and history only exists because the water has flown along from further upstream, supported by all the water that

surrounds it.²⁶ *'Manikay* was a long time ago and it's still here today: what those elders hand over still going to be there for the young people' (Daniel Wilfred 2011).

Gularri is about bringing our pasts into futures according to certain principles [...] There are many Aboriginal peoples with their own unique places. We as Yolŋu are separate from them, because we are connected to them. And we keep making new connections and new separations [...] *Gularri* shows us that connectedness in separation is not contradictory. (Yunupingu 2003, n.p)

For elder Andy Peters, a Wägilak expression with some equivalence to the concept of *gularri* is *ŋalabuluŋu rom*, 'following law' through the substantiating flow of ceremony passed down the generations. In the great stream of time, an individual is given their very orientation, their very point of view as an individual and therefore responsibility within complexes of ceremony, society and kinship. Individuals are beholden to the past, to *ŋalabuluŋu rom*, because they are constituted by everything that has come before: a particular point in a stream is constituted by the ever flowing water that moves from the past, carrying that water onwards into the future.²⁷ The position of the individual is unique in time but wholly dependent on their ancestral past — a past which is very much present. Simultaneously, *'Mulḱurr — the flowing water* [is a concept that can] truly express the uniqueness of our place and time' (Yunupingu 2003).

Mulḱurr (the flowing water) also carries of a complex of significant, equivalent meanings. *Mulḱurr* head 'is the top part of a person's in a general sense, including the temples' (Morphy and Morphy 2013a, 7). Compound words that use *mulḱurr* refer to states of mind, such as *mulḱurr-gulku* ('head-many' or 'indecisive') (Ibid.). For Yolŋu, mind is located in the fluid just below the frontal region of the skull and this water is

²⁶ I am here reminded of Heraclitus' famous dictum concerning the world in flux: 'You can never step into the same river twice,' and the reply of his student, Cratylus, 'You cannot even step into the same river once' (Robinson and Groves 1999, 10). Perhaps a Yolŋu retort illustrating the concept of *gularri* might be, 'You are only able to step into a flowing river here and now, because further upstream the river began to flow.'

²⁷ Deger writes about a documentary, *Gularri: that brings unity*, produced by herself and Bangana Wunungmurra, suggesting that this concept also expresses the 'revitalising potency' of creativity, as individuals embrace a flow and surge beyond their individuality and renew 'the vitality of the ancestral through their own creative effort' (2012, 79–80).

associated with the source of a clan's 'knowledge and the place to which the spirit returns,' the *gapu mangutji* (sacred waterholes) at the focal centre of Njorra ceremonies and a clan's *djalkiri* place (foundational site of ancestral knowledge) (Ibid. 16–17). In the wet season, these waterholes are flooded, 'spreading ancestral *mind* (knowledge) over the land to replenish it' (F. Morphy, pers. comm. 2013).

Through the performance of ceremony as *njalabuluŋu rom*, ancestral mind is spread through the generations, seeping into unique individual lives. While each clan's individual *manikay* repertoires are separate from one another, these are constituted and tied up in a greater flowing of the waters. With the mind, Yolŋu today sustain the ancestral text with new media of expression and in new contexts.²⁸ Creatively, the YWG engage with the *manikay* tradition in their collaboration with the AAO, imagining and performing a new iteration of the ancestral text in contemporary situation.

Mandawuy Yunupingu continues with his illustration of *gularri*:

Charles Darwin had come back to his English mansion after five uncomfortable years on a little boat. While on the voyage he had seen many natures, all different to the one he knew. And he had had lots of time to think. He realised that the forms of the plants and animals we have today are historical. The world had *not* been made already set in concrete.

Darwin saw something that Yolŋu already knew: that the natural world *is* history. It is many pasts brought into many futures [...] Nature is many pasts being reborn as many futures. Together but separate. Our concept of *Gularri* also talks of nature as history. (Yunupingu 2003)

The *manikay* tradition *is* living history; in its contemporary expression, it is history. Creative articulation of the Wägilak narrative in new forms and contexts is historical, constituted as a unique present by the orienting, supporting, life-giving waters of the past. The *manikay* tradition is inextricably entwined in the present; it is an active

²⁸ Galarrwuy Yunupingu tells a narrative with similar philosophical overtones (recounted in Corn 2002, 96). In this story, the dramatic actions of the ancestral figure Ganbulapula sanction the creation of new meanings and interpretations of traditional cultural symbols and ceremonial objects. Yunupingu states that the narrative's climactic action, in which a log coffin is flung into the sea near Djalumbu, suggests 'a new network of cultural meaning was created. The action generated the possibility of a future different from the past' (Ibid.).

partner in an ongoing conversation that, through its perpetuation, sustains itself into the future.

Chapter seven

Reflexive groove

The reflexive capacity of language, that possibility, always on hand, of speaking on the subject of language, of placing it at a distance, and in this way of treating our own language as one among others. (Ricoeur 2006, 13)

Groove is form in motion. It is performance breathing life into structures, giving them feeling as they are carried forward. Groove is felt in the body, physical sensation pulling an individual into sympathetic, corporate movements with others (Fig. 7a). Groove engages individuals on a fundamental level. Caught in a groove of rhythmic repetition or expected regularity, it is the experience that is central: where groove is not felt, it is not groove. Conversely, where there is no repetition to draw a listener or performer in, there is no groove. In this chapter, *groove* is understood in a way similar to Steven Feld: 'Style as process, a perception of a cycle in motion, a form or organizing pattern being revealed' (Kiel and Feld 1994, 109).

The term *groove* carries with it a world of associations and significations not necessarily relevant to *manikay*. Yet the term allows perspectives to be generated and provisional understandings to illuminate something of the concept of *bilma* (clapstick) modes; it is a useful prejudice of understanding for engaging with different cultural forms such as *manikay* (see Chapter Six). This chapter also attempts to bridge formalist and phenomenological descriptions of music — idea and performance — considering *groove* as simultaneous structure and experience.

To apprehend a form of tradition or the past is to conceptualise it at a distance from the experience of encounter. The title *reflexive groove* is, in this sense, a paradox: to look reflexively at the structures of *bilma* modes is to place them at a distance from the corporeal groove experienced in performing or hearing those *bilma* modes. Yet in performance, form and experience are inextricably linked. In performance, form is the action of structures becoming manifest through creative realisation and

understanding, and ‘we understand in a different way, if we understand at all’ (Gadamer 2006, 296). Form is known through experience and within situation.

Just as the *bilma* are the hardwood *naraka* (bones) of a tree, they also carry the orthodox forms of *manikay*. When the *bilma* strike, *manikay* is animated: Djuwalpada sets off on his journey. Led by the *bilma*, the movement of performance set in motion carries idea in action.¹

Form is that which can be reproduced in new contexts or reconceived through different media. The form of a circle is carried as a tangible text whether it is drawn in sand, sat in by a group or imagined as the *miny'tji* (design) for a fresh-water spring. Likewise, a *manikay* song can be performed by different individuals and voices, even as the bones of *manikay* persist (Chapters Four and Five). Form is contiguous through multiple iterations, yet actual phenomenological experience of form is unique to every individual. Likewise, creativity within a tradition is contingent on the repetition of elements of that tradition and begins with the forms of that tradition.

In *manikay*, form is necessarily in transit. The orthodox musical forms of the *manikay* tradition carry the bones of the Wägilak narrative — land, law, family — as they are encountered in situation. As people are in transit through temporal, social and ecological worlds, *manikay* forms are in transit through: *country*, as different *wāṅa* (homelands) and are connected through song narratives and ecological movements; *the generations*, as forms are handed down the *bäpurru* (father’s line) to be realised anew; *narrative*, as musical structures carry story and liturgical action; *understanding*, as progressive revelation shows ever greater narrative complexities, filling the figurative with brilliance; *existence*, as life is illuminated by the soundtrack of ancestral song, the world experienced as an ancestral text and life oriented toward the point of teleological transgression at Luṭunba. The forms of *manikay* are necessarily in transit.

Contrary to notions of historical reconstruction that understand the reproduction of form as an end goal, this chapter looks to form as the possibility for beginnings, for

¹ Musical transcriptions, of which there are numerous in this chapter, are inert until performed — externally or internally. Rhythm is not carried through the graphic representation of *bilma* modes but through realisation that is aural, physical and mental.

exploratory engagement through imitation and response. *CRB* is approached as a living tradition in which forms of the past are animated in the present. For the AAO, Wägilak *manikay* brings together musical structures, epistemologies and performance contexts that are outside of the usual horizons of these musicians. Through ever growing personal relationships and intimacy with the complexities of *manikay*, the music of *CRB* is consciously formed in the image of the *manikay* tradition. Through the orchestra's reaffirmation of key structural aspects of Wägilak song, orthodox meanings are carried into new contexts, sustaining the possibility for ongoing engagement with the Wägilak narrative.

As a dramatically envisioned iteration of tradition, *CRB* also illuminates *manikay* itself as a vital tradition engaged with the present, on its own terms and within ever expanding contexts. This chapter focuses predominantly on approaches to rhythm in the collaboration: *bilma* modes are considered a nexus between concept and experience, and *groove* is examined as a vital underpinning of musical discourse. Through the performance of rhythmic form, the Wägilak narrative transits from abstract idea to experienced encounter in the present. Action and understanding are effected through this conversation and willing engagement with the forms of tradition.



Fig. 7a Daniel Wilfred grooving to White Eagle *manikay*, at an Yirritja funeral in Ngukurr.
2.7.2012

Reclaiming groove

The main one is the clapping stick. The main one. You reckon he's a stick, but he's got a song. That's why we use that one. This thing can make song. Everything comes out of the clapping sticks. (Daniel Wilfred 2011c)

We drive down the Roper Highway towards Ngukurr, on the way back from a performance in Darwin at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, the launch of the exhibition *Colour Country: Art from Roper River* (Bowdler 2009). It is a sleepy, hot and muggy afternoon. The tarmac has ended and the dust from the vehicles in front envelops our view. Silence sits like the humidity, except for the occasional verbal punctuation as various creeks, hills, old cattle stations and roads that veer off north into Arnhem Land or south into Alawa country, are identified. But inside our minds — like the vehicle which is not fixed in any one landscape — we all sing our own song; amorphous fragments that twist around, emerging and disappearing like the glimpses of water seen through the trees that race by.

Everyone, even I cannot avoid this infection, taps a *bilma* mode in unity, perhaps lifting only one finger to expend as little energy as possible but nevertheless being drawn along in sympathetic corporeality, our individual songs somehow connected. Memories of the previous night's concert continue to emerge, like string being rolled out, latent with the potential to be woven into a whole; into a dillybag perhaps; into law. The ancestors groove along with us and time is punctuated by this rhythm, which extends back much further than our time. Way back then but also here and now, we all groove together.

Daniel Wilfred asserts that *bilma* are at the core of *manikay* as a relevant, ancestral narrative in the present. As two hardwood *naraka* (bones) from the core of a tree strike together, something happens where it once did not: a meeting of people, ceremony and *ringitj* (embassy) connection. These things are animated into being (see Chapter Four). Sound emanates, song begins. Existence too is animation and *bilma* bring the ancestral into present relief, animated into being through song, dance, movement and action.

Bilma modes are characterised by a redundancy of invention in the face of repetition and stability — they quite literally form the *naraka* (bones) of an orthodox text (Chapter Five). At the heart of *manikay* is the groove of the *bilma*, repetitive forms that conceal a rich depth of meaning from those predisposed to hear only primitive pulsation, or those prejudiced to seek qualification of meaning in the complexity of musical structures. This section reclaims the concept of *groove* from notions of primitivism and formalism, making more multifaceted a concept too readily simplified.²

Primitive people — those fantastical savages, constructed in the mythical romantic gaze of many Western minds — are precisely those who can do nothing but groove, ever-continuing to exist in a redundant, superseded past. The perceived lack of developed syntactical systems in music among *primitive* peoples — systems which academics obsessed over throughout the twentieth century — was understood as a disability to evolve beyond the immediate gratification of the basest of all affecting experiences, the pulsating throb of rhythm connected to body:

Because the primitives themselves do not make musical creation a self-conscious endeavour, they have neither a theory of music nor even a crude ‘aesthetic’ which might serve to connect their musical practices to their responses. (Meyer 1957, 289)

The character of Australian music depends a good deal on its rhythm, which is strongly marked and very irregular, full of sudden changes and often alternating between duple and triple time [...] This all exercises an unmistakable influence upon the feelings of the native; music excites his anger, with it he rushes into the fray, hurries off to the dance or the hunt, or willingly resigns himself to his master's orders. For these different circumstances the native seeks out the definite rhythm which best fits his

² The terminology *primitive* is not obscure but commonly used in contemporary musicological discourse: for example, in the pervasive description of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and its raw, *primitive* and violent energy — a key work studied in any course on Western music history. Stravinsky's composition uses complex rhythmic forms in a very corporeal, *groovy* way, carrying into bodily experience themes of ecological rhythm and violence that pervade the ballet's narrative. In one scene, Stravinsky brings to life imagery of a solemn pagan rite, as a young girl dances herself to death with music that flings her body around the stage to jarring, rhythmic repetitions. Extending into the very physical experience of the audience, the premiere of Stravinsky's radical work infamously caused riots. Perhaps a riot is the complete breakdown of groove.

case, quick for the dance, slow and solemn for love, wild and pathetic for mourning.
(Wallaschek 1893, 39)

Peter Sculthorpe is frequently held up by orchestral musicians as an important composer in the development of an original Australian music reflective of our landscape — that is, the popular images of huge expanses and small country towns. Leaving aside Sculthorpe's characteristic approaches to textural, rhythmic and melodic invention, perhaps the most important means of creating Australia in music was his use of external programmatic descriptions and explicit romantic sentiments. Unfortunately, Sculthorpe betrays his own affinity with concepts of primitivism, conceiving of Aboriginal people as primarily and prehistorically *in tune* with the earth:

A bogus national identity and its commercialisation have obscured the true breadth of our culture [...] Perhaps we now need to attune ourselves to this continent, to listen to the cry of the earth, as the Aborigines have done for many thousands of years. (Sculthorpe 1989, 2)

In music, Sculthorpe imagines the return to more natural state where people are unconsciously synchronised with the land and ecology — a position in which culture is derived from nature and strives for an affecting connection with these roots. In holding such views, Sculthorpe himself is culpable of fostering a 'bogus national identity,' evident in compositions such as *Mangrove* (1979), *Earth Cry* (1986) and *Kakadu* (1988). Such compositions have little to do with the particular Indigenous Australian cultures they claim to represent and a lot to do with Anglo-Australian myth making about those cultures. These works are largely characterised by incessant, repetitive rhythms. In *Kakadu*, dominated by a relentless drumming, it seems there is an attempt to connect the listener with a primeval beat: an experience of direct, natural gratification unadulterated by the formal complexities of developed musical syntax and cultural construction.

Popular culture embraces such easy, simplistic ideas of direct connection with a natural state, a connection apparently stronger and more urgent among Indigenous people and those culturally *other* to us. Charles Chauvel's popular 1955 film *Jedda*, depicts the internal conflict in the mind of a young Aboriginal girl named Jedda, raised

on a cattle station in domestic European culture (Chauvel 1955). In one scene, Jemma is practising the piano. Almost epileptically, she suffers a portrayed bout of primitivism, drawn back into a *tribal* state as her repressed but true character pushes to the surface. As she plays, the music slips out of the syntactical constructs of European classicism and tonality, and Jemma begins to bash frenetically on the keyboard. Conversely, the following analysis of *CRB* will show how the musicians involved in this collaboration avoid conceptualising *bilma* modes as primitive, instead playing into the *manikay* tradition of *making complex* the basic figurative forms that the *bilma* set out.

Contemporary ethnomusicologist Steven Feld writes of ‘the unabashed reproduction of primitivism’ that characterises much recent music identifying with the label *world music* on a more international level (2000, 154). Feld evidences recordings by music group Deep Forest and their appropriation of a Baegu lullaby from Northern Malaita in the Solomon Islands, rebranded by Deep Forest as a ‘globally harmonious object’ for all humanity, connected to the primitive in us all through sampled beats and ‘natural rainforest sounds’ (Ibid.). Globally, the pulsating throb of the didgeridu holds similar connotations within unexamined, fashionable assumptions (see Dunbar-Hall 1997).

Another view which does violence to the reality of musical complexity in *manikay* is the pervasive formalism that characterised Western conceptions of music throughout the twentieth century. In contrast to the corporeal throb of the primitive, music’s ultimate meaning for many structuralist musicologists, composers and performers, lies in its complex formal arrangements — the greatness of a musical work justified through intricate, mathematical analysis and realisation, rather than emotional experience. Through this gaze, *bilma* modes in *manikay* can only be seen as impoverished, simplistic forms lacking depth.

Alan Merriam, a central figure in the founding of the modern ethnomusicological discipline, posits ‘precise,’ ‘statistical’ approaches to the study of music as the ‘greatest possible contribution’ that the discipline can make to cultural history (1964, 301).³

³ Although Merriam was a central figure in the consolidation of ethnomusicology as an academic discipline, there were many individuals from the late nineteenth-century onwards who perused the study of varied European and American folk traditions, as well as music from more *exotic* locations such

Merriam sees the analysis of objective form as an end and not a means, a position rooted in the scientific rationalism of Descartes and the Enlightenment. This 'worldview still holds sway, and assumes itself to be the language of authority and legitimacy in the modern age' (Lawn 2007, 5). Merriam writes:

In sum, the study of music contributes in a number of ways to the reconstruction of cultural history [...] both music sound and music instruments can be handled through techniques of historic documentation and archaeological investigation [...] both music sound and music instruments are subject to analysis of an extremely precise nature through the use of statistics. (Merriam 1964, 301–2)

As a discipline of university music academies, ethnomusicology began to grow amid inherited orthodoxies of empiricism and formalism. Many leading musicologists in the late-nineteenth and twentieth century denied that music had any existence outside of 'autonomous beauty' and absolute 'tonally moving forms' (Hanslick 1986 [1891], 29–30), a conceptualisation of music which stems from Kant's aesthetics of 'disinterested contemplation' (Kivy 2002, 55). Heralded musicologist Hanslick goes on to assert that the body plays nothing more than an objective role in perception:

The auditory imagination, however, which is something entirely different from the sense of hearing regarded as a mere funnel open to the surface of appearances, enjoys in conscious sensuousness the sounding shapes, the self-constructing tones, and dwells in free and immediate contemplation of them. (Hanslick 1986 [1891], 30)

Such philosophies understand aesthetics as embellishment on system, a product of function. Hanslick, Gurney and Meyer, significant writers on music, suggested that social constitution, emotion, allusion, reference and symbolism are impure, somehow anathema to music's supposed essence as form: 'Extraneous comparisons are deeply detrimental to our understanding of [music]' (Bowman 1998, 134). Such a view assumes there is some standpoint outside of situation or prejudice from which one might take an objective view. Meyer argued for an 'information theory,' in which the

as Africa, within established disciplines of musicology. Other academics interested in music of difference grounded their studies in disciplines such as anthropology or psychology, such as Milton Metfessel in the 1920s (see Metfessel 1928).

more that is known about the characteristic forms within a musical style, the more that a composer could play with our expectations (Meyer 1957). This might be so, but Meyer understood this play of expectations as exclusively derivative of music's functional attributes.

Through these formalist positions, meanings of performance as they are experienced in individual understanding or bodily sensation are denied. Gadamer suggests a contrary approach: 'One needs to get away from objectivist naiveté and destroy the illusion of a truth that is separate from the standpoint of the one doing the understanding' (Gadamer 2001, 46). Formalism in Meyer's vein falls dramatically short of Yolŋu understandings of performance: the grooving realisation of form in experience is something overlooked by the aesthetics of formalism.

Far from being an endpoint of form, groove is a *beginning* underpinning complexities of both form and experience. More than drawing out the repressed primitive within, groove exists very much in the present, drawing unique individuals together across personal, cultural and temporal boundaries; temporal delineation between the present and past collapse in experienced performance. Groove performs connections of kinaesthetic sympathy.

As is evident in *manikay*, groove is the link, the nexus and the fulcrum between dance and song, form and experience, past and present, individuals and collectives — these seeming contradictions held within a synchronised constellation. AAO drummer Niko Schäuble asserts that groove 'is a strong component of *manikay* and also forms a musical basis, understood by all musicians, regardless of tradition and heritage' (Schäuble 2011).

In American popular culture there are reggae grooves, funk grooves and heavy-rock grooves, just as there are running, dancing and weaving grooves in *manikay*. More specifically, the *manikay* performed in *CRB* convey a distinctly Wägilak groove; a Njilipidji groove. Through song and dance, the *bilma* modes of *manikay* undergo transit or translation from conceptual, formal connection between people, history and country — rhythmic patterns shared by related clans — into sound and action, written

by bodies moving and carrying law through performance. Writing about contemporary dance music, Butler also considers the tangibility of groove: 'The beat can not only be heard, it can be *seen* in their movements and *felt* in their bodies' (Butler 2006, 3).

As I will show, *CRB* renders the various grooves of Wägilak *manikay* — Djuwalpada walking, running and dancing — in a complex way, denying appropriation through naive simplification. The musicians build new musical syntax and idioms onto this underlying, experienced connection between diverse people and musical traditions while retaining the foundational legitimacy of the Wägilak *bilma* modes. In this collaboration, rhythm is not approached as a construct of formalist mathematics removed from corporeal engagement; rhythm is understood as a beginning of conversation, rather than an endpoint of collaboration.

The YWG also understand form as transit, continued in new contexts and through new technologies as the underpinning ancestral text is realised in contemporary expression. The *bilma* carry the ancestral groove: that is, ancestral connection in lived experience, sustained through ongoing performance and action. The *bilma* lead a song, establishing the rhythmic mode, tapped out by the leader between song items and during the *ḡurru-waḡa* (nose-speech; hummed introduction). As they strike together, *bilma* inspire dance, a corporeal connection between kin with responsibility toward the same *manikay* repertoires, animating a narrative that is carried into all aspects of life. Likewise, the creation of new *bilma* modes is at the heart of composing *yuta manikay*, finding a new groove that will connect the present with the past.

That didj follow the clapping sticks, and the singer follow the clapping sticks. All the song today, the clapping sticks lead all of them. They find song, and they make how this clapping stick gonna go. New song [composed by first 'finding' the *bilma* mode]. If they find a new song, they make with clapping sticks. We don't make with the mind [...] When I sing, the clapping sticks leading me. And he got all the song, that clapping sticks. When we start, the clapping sticks make the sound for me to sing. I follow that clapping sticks.
(Daniel Wilfred 2011c)

The grooves of the *bilma* are central to *manikay*. As ceremony builds and songs emerge from the surrounding context of chatter and cigarette smoking, groove breaks

into being, emerging amid sounds that seek regularity and pattern. And these sounds are carried in the mind's ear long after a performance concludes. *Bilma* also underpin ceremonial action and the calling of names, connecting individuals and groups together with each other through *ringitj* associations and with country, carrying the essence of a deceased person back to the deep, profound waters of Luṭunba.

As the forms of the *bilma* are carried into future performances, the ancestral groove reverberates down the *yarrata* string line. Ancestral precedence animates the present — Djuwalpada dances — as *manikay* forms are disclosed through performance. Where the forms of *manikay* are in transit from concept to experience, *manikay* is living.

Beginnings – The early sessions

In such deeply poetic contexts, non-verbal performative aspects such as dance may be felt to articulate truths more directly than words. (Marett and Barwick 2003, 145)

In July 2005, a small group from the AAO travelled to Ngukurr for the first collaborative engagement of *CRB* (see Appendix Three for tour and performance history). After raising a small tent city in the middle of town, one of the first experiences of the orchestra in Ngukurr was to participate in a *bungul* (dance) led by Sambo Barabara, in which eighty-seven song items were danced by all musicians (Figs. 7c, d). Although the songs did not progress far enough through the Wägilak narrative to reach Wata (Wind), the subsequent rehearsals in Ngukurr all began with this subject, firmly establishing the collaboration as one concerned with purification ceremonies. Through dance, the essence of *manikay* as a performed narrative was impressed onto the musicians from the beginning. Over these first few days, players listened to and rehearsed with Wägilak singers in the Ngukurr Women's Centre and an outdoor concert was held on 27 July, with the following line-up:⁴

⁴ The number of musicians in subsequent performances of *CRB* was reduced, with the number of AAO musicians totalling around five on average. These early sessions coincided with another AAO collaboration featuring Ruby Hunter and Archie Roach, known as *Ruby's Story*, which was touring to Ngukurr at the time.

<i>Manikay</i> leaders:	Benjamin Wilfred	voice and didjeridu
	Sambo Barabara	voice
	Roy Natilma	didjeridu
AAO musicians:	Paul Grabowsky	keyboard
	Carl Dewhurst	guitar
	Erkki Veltheim	violin
	Julien Wilson	saxophone
	Tony Hicks	bass clarinet
	Philip Slater	trumpet
	Scott Tinkler	trumpet
	James Greening	trombone
	Philip Rex	double bass
	Niko Schäuble	drums
John O'Donnell	recording and mixing	

The intention of these rehearsals and the performance was to come together to forge the beginnings of a model for musical engagement. The AAO musicians needed to learn about the *manikay* tradition in order to respond with subtle and intelligent improvisation.

Chapter Three suggested *CRB* was an engagement occurring within Yolŋu movements of cultural adjustment and openness toward outsiders, and the importance of participation through *doing* in the Yolŋu hermeneutic; Chapter Five looked to the importance of the collaboration as an active *manikay* tradition, seen in the ongoing creation of *yuta manikay*; Chapter Six introduced the orchestra's willingness to shift their conceptions of music as they respectfully learnt to approach *manikay*, a historically significant approach in Australian cross-cultural musical engagement. In this section, the intentions and approaches of musicians are further detailed, exploring the basic rhythmic and melodic forms that shape *CRB* as an engagement with Wägilak *manikay*.

The following are reflections on the very first rehearsals of *CRB*:

I'd already agreed with young Benjamin that he was going to start teaching us some music. So he turned up with a few people and we sat down under a tree, and [...] they just started to play without any kind of preamble. Then they'd play, and sit back and look at us, and say: 'Well come on! Get cracking!' So off we went with this strange ensemble of, I think, violin, flute, trombone, drumkit, guitar and double bass. We listened — and this is the thing about being improvising musicians — we listened very, very carefully, asked them to play it a number of times, and played it back to them as best we could. And you should have seen the looks on their faces, when they heard this law being played on these funny instruments. They thought it was hilarious, but they were really pleased, nodded their heads, smiled, slapped us on the back, because they thought, 'Yep, you'll be alright' [...] Just to feel that the paradigm was being reversed for once, God! I can't tell you what a moment that was. It was profound. (Grabowsky 2011)

There are a couple of different angles that the project is going to take. Some music may come out of this that does not have traditional aspects to it so it will have freedom. It can go different places and develop. (Scott Tinkler in Australian Broadcasting Commission 2005)

It's hard to understand from a Western point of view, their differences in subtle variations and developments. It's not really overt. It's a language [...] to learn it takes years and years and years. (James Greening in Ibid.)

There are so many different things going on at once that I'm not accustomed to [...] trying to work out what to remember first when we're learning pieces. There's a lot of steps. (Julien Wilson in Ibid.)

Listening back to recordings of these early sessions (LE_7.1, LE_7.2), it is possible to hear the AAO musicians developing a basic feel for the music, first by imitating what they heard and then by playing these impressions together with the singers. When playing together, correlations and disjunctions between what was heard and what was

subsequently realised in performance, become apparent. Discussion and recalibration followed each attempt as greater resonance with the *manikay* style was found.⁵

LE_7.1	Birrkpirrk (Plover) 'Walking': The very first sounds of <i>CRB</i> to be recorded. Rehearsal in Ngukurr, 27.7.2005	01:09
LE_7.2	The same rehearsal as LE_7.1, at a later stage; the music coming together more cohesively. Ngukurr, 27.7.2005	01:18

The first rehearsal began with demonstrations of the *manikay* subject Wata (Wind, 'gentle' mode). The AAO, after listening half a dozen times, then imitated what they had heard: the drums followed the *bilma*; the trombone followed the *yidaki*; and the violin, soprano saxophone and guitar followed the voices. As the musicians began to find sounds and rhythms that matched those in the songs — coming to grips with the structures of an unknown language — a groove slowly started to emerge as something that carried the musicians along. This feeling of ongoing momentum allowed continued improvisation when the voices dropped out between songs to be grounded in the rhythmic metres of *manikay*. Slowly, over the years, the forms imitated became the imitators own, sustained through ever emerging musical creation.

It is impossible to understand what the work has to say to us if it does not speak into a familiar world that can find a point of contact with what the text says. Thus to learn a language is to increase the extent of what one can learn. (Gadamer 2006, 439)

Initially, drummer Niko Schäuble simply imitated the *bilma* mode on the snare drum, attempting to elaborate nothing rhythmically, discovering how this mode fitted in with the voices and *yidaki*. Much discussion was had about the basic form of *manikay* songs, especially the timing of individual entrances such as *yidaki* player's entrance after the *ḡurru-waḡa* (introduction), which proved elusively difficult. Schäuble then added flams — a rudimentary percussive device in which each main stroke is preceded

⁵ This model of learning through imitation was again employed later in October 2005, when Benjamin Wilfred travelled to Melbourne to continue teaching the AAO the fundamentals of *manikay* form, especially the *yidaki* patterns, *bilma* modes and vocal interjections used in the songs. These demonstrations were recorded individually for the song subjects Djuwalpaḡa, Gaḡpu, Birrkpirrk and Wata, at Okin Studio by Niko Schäuble.

with a grace note — perhaps in imitation of the *bilma*, which are never struck by different players within the ensemble at exactly the same time.

Beginning to experiment by filling in the space between *bilma* strikes, Schäuble continued to elaborate around the principal *bilma* beats with unmetred rhythms that built dynamically toward, or fell away from, these beats (see Fig. 7b). These elaborations filled in the space between strikes, rather than building complex rhythmic constructions over the basic metrical structure. Just as *bilma* modes are shared across *ringitj* (parliamentary) relationships, musical integration in the collaboration began from the observed and shared language of rhythmic form, a persistent foundation underpinning experimental improvisation.

The following diagram represents schematically the above described approach of Schäuble’s snare drum in-fills (LE_7.3; Fig. 7b). The horizontal axis denotes time; the height of the bars the relative dynamic of each strike. The bold strokes correspond to the *bilma* strikes.

LE_7.3	Birrkpirrk (Plover) ‘Slow’: Snare drum in-fills from rehearsal in Ngukurr (see Fig. 7b). 27.07.2005	00:46
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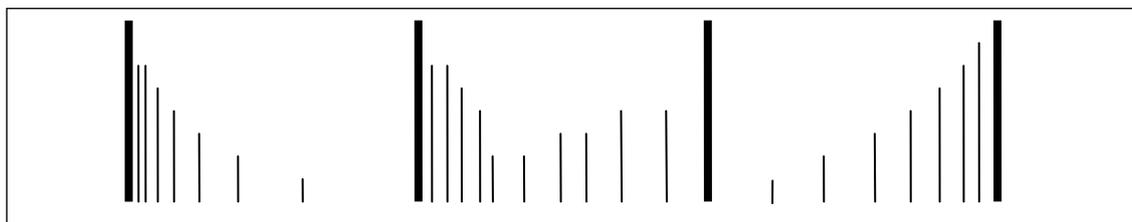


Fig. 7b Graphic representation of snare drum infill between *bilma* strike (LE_7.3)

Following these first attempts, Benjamin Wilfred introduced the musicians to a faster rhythmic mode of Wata, picking up to a ‘gentle breeze.’ Schäuble used the opportunity to take a different approach to the *bilma* modes, one that has characterised much of his playing throughout the collaboration in songs with a faster tempo. Contributing to the ongoing momentum of the *bilma* groove, Schäuble elaborated on the regular rhythm of the *bilma* with more complex rhythmic constructions (LE_7.4), filling the space between *bilma* strikes with proportioned subdivisions and the typical syntactic constructs of a jazz drummer. Basic rhythmic forms heard through analytical ears

became creative realisations in sound, approved with cries of ‘Yo! Manymak.’ In the following listening example (LE_7.4), it is interesting to note the way James Greening (trombone) imitates the *yidaki*, especially its overtone rhythms.

LE_7.4	Wata (Wind) ‘Strong’: Imitation of <i>yidaki</i> by drums and trombone. Rehearsal in Ngukurr, 27.7.2005	00:29
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The very first concert of *CRB* on July 28, 2005, was structured to allow the AAO’s *manikay* imitations to sit side-by-side with more elaborate solo improvisations based on Birrkpirrk (Plover) and Wata (Wind) (LE_7.5). Each song item was first sung by the YWG, followed immediately by the solo improvisation of one of the AAO musicians and then, finally, an iteration of the *manikay* song was improvised by the full complement of the AAO. Benjamin Wilfred introduced the first concert on the night; Grabowsky and Archie Roach reflected on it the following day:

This first one is Birrkpirrk. Everybody should know that. They [the orchestra] put that music together; they follow me. Copy us mob. It’s for my culture, from Wägilak *bungul* [...] We might play one more, all together now with them instruments, with the Wamut mob. (Benjamin Wilfred; see LE_7.5)

We did that with seriousness of purpose, albeit total ineptitude. I was talking to one of the elders this morning and he said it was enormously significant that we did that last night. It was a sign to them that we were willing to go wherever, do whatever, be whatever (Grabowsky in Australian Broadcasting Commission 2005).

I’m really, really excited. It nearly made me cry one time because professional musicians are actually playing the music from the people, rather than musicians arranging music for didj or clapsticks. (Archie Roach in *Ibid.*)

LE_7.5	Birrkpirrk (Plover) ‘Walking’: First concert of <i>CRB</i> . Ngukurr, 28.7.2005	02:25
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This basic structure — moving between *manikay* song, improvised solo and imitation — was not only the product of a group of musicians beginning to find their feet in a new musical language, but an attempt to forge new music that allowed the Wägilak singers independent space for direction and control. Despite evolving into more integrated modes of presentation over time (Chapter Eight and Nine), this initial

framework allowed the musicians the space to first of all hear *manikay* on its own terms before forming their own characteristic responses to it.

Within improvisations, the AAO's attempts to use the *bilma* modes as a foundation on which to build more complex structures also resonates with the role of the *yidaki* in *manikay*: the *yidaki* builds complex rhythms onto the underlying *bilma* pattern through a combination of vocables, timbral changes and overtones (explored below). Further, the importance of rhythm in improvisations acknowledged the fundamental narrative of *manikay*, performed in dance and carried through bodily engagement. From beginnings that recognised the importance of pervasive rhythmic narrative and momentum, *CRB* was forged as a collaboration not only living across a distinct cultural divide but also connecting *manikay* past, present and future through the interminable *bilma* groove.



Fig. 7c Sambo Barabara (checkered shirt) and Benjamin Wilfred (left) leading *bungul* in Ngukurr with AAO musicians, July 2005 (Image: Jeff Wassmann, Australian Art Orchestra)



Fig. 7d AAO musicians dancing in July 2005 (l-r): Tony Hicks, James Greening, Paul Grabowsky, Niko Schäuble (Image: Jeff Wassmann, Australian Art Orchestra)

Gara (spear)

As Djuwalpada was searching for a homeland, he was wary of the many dangerous creatures in the bush around him. He made ferocious sounds to warn those dangers off, shaking and rattling his spears and yelling, 'Waahh!' The opening of the 'throwing' *bilma* mode for Gara (Spear) begins with a non-metrical rhythmic *rattle* by the *bilma*, a rapid succession of strikes that precede a much louder, single strike coinciding with the end of each phrase-unit of text (Fig. 7e). The tension builds and Djuwalpada brandishes his spear with increasing ferocity, imitated by the dancers. Suddenly, the song breaks into the 'dancing' mode as the final *bilma* rattle (spear rattle) ends with the spear being sent through the air (LE_7.6). This shift into the 'dancing' mode is a cathartic release of tension that directly translates into the corporeal experience of groove.

LE_7.6	Gara (Spear) 'Throwing': Daniel, Benjamin (second coda), David (<i>yidaki</i>) Wilfred, Andy Peters, Roy Natilma (first coda). Ngukurr, 8.7.2011	01.47
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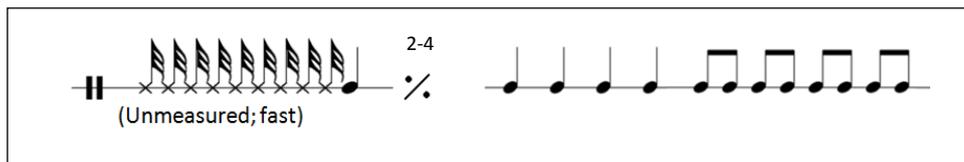


Fig. 7e Basic *bilma* mode structures for Gara 'throwing' and 'dancing' (LE_7.6)

The Gara 'dancing' mode grooves because of the inbuilt redundancy of repetition in the rhythmic form — heightened by the dramatic contrast with an unmeasured opening (the *bilma* rattle). This 'dancing' groove is not disjointed or fragmented but carries forward with expected regularity. As it carries the song along, individuals and collectives are drawn together in a relationship of participation. Sympathetically, rhythm and cadence patterns create detail, complexity and structure within and around the groove, most commonly through proportioned subdivision (especially by the *yidaki* 'didjeridu'). Groove connects musical syntax and abstract structures.

Musicologists Steven Feld and Charles Keil discuss *groove*:

SF: *Music Grooves* [title of book]. We've got a duality, maybe a double duality, in the title. What's it about to you?

CK: The clear duality is the word *grooves*. As a verb, music pulls and draws you, through participatory discrepancies, into itself, and gives you that participation consciousness. It's one of the few things that gives you that.

SF: OK, the present verb. It's the music that grooves. To groove, to cycle, to draw you in and work on you, to repeat with variation.

CK: And to me, that repetition and redundancy, which to most people is a bore, is music's glory. That's where a groove comes from.

SF: And when we say, 'It's the music that grooves,' we're drawing attention to the ephemerality of the music, to our participation in and experience of it [...]

CK: We groove on reality, and I think that's how our brains got built and shaped. We've got this developed cortex from watching the leaves flutter, tracking the animals, from grooving on reality and revelling in the repletion and redundancy of information with minor but frequent variations [...] You flow into repetition.

(Kiel and Feld 1994, 22–3)

The *bilma* mode 'dancing' is named this because it grooves, connecting the body and music in kinaesthetic sympathy, paced at a universally typical dance tempo of 112 beats per minute. It is felt both internally and externally as corporeal sensation, directly reflected in the *bungul* (dance) which comes alive with action. At the beginning of the song *Gara*, the dancers hold themselves with poise in an imposing stature, brandishing their spears and pointing their elbows to where the eyes are fixated. When the shift to the 'dancing' mode occurs, they immediately spring forward, advancing in a line and involving their whole body in the realisation of narrative action.

On the *CRB* album, the AAO musicians realise the powerful aesthetic affect of this rhythmic shift in *Gara* (LE_7.7). After imitating and playing into the established rhythmic mode, they continue to carry the groove beyond the end of the *manikay* song and into their own improvisations — an approach frequently taken in concert. In between their singing, Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred also groove with these improvisations, playing their *bilma* in time or dancing across the stage, elbows pointed.

The following musical analysis (Fig. 7f) points to some complexities the AAO build onto the underlying rhythmic *ḡaraka* (bones) of Gara (Spear).

The inherent tension and danger in the narrative of Djuwalpaḡa and the Gara subject is intensified by the AAO, who contribute to the building tension by progressively increasing the dynamic and textural density through the repetition of the ‘spear-rattling’ units (Fig. 7f). The below analysis, noting key musical elements, relates to the *CRB* album on which there are four repetitions (i, ii, iii, iv) of this unit prior to the cathartic release into the ‘dancing’ mode.⁶

LE_7.7	Gara: <i>CRB</i> album. See Fig. 7f (AAO 2010)	00.44
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‘Rattle’ unit	Time code for LE_7.7	Description
i	00:08	Erkki Veltheim (violin) plays a double-stopped tremolo on a tritone (Ab–D), with rapid crescendo and diminuendo — tonally and rhythmically unstable. Paul Grabowsky (piano) and Niko Schäuble (drums) reinforce the final <i>biḡma</i> strike with a short, accented diminished octave (G#–G), with cymbal and bass drum strike.
ii	00:15	Violin continues, now at greater intensity of tremolo and dynamic, with triple stopped dissonant chord. Piano and drums again reinforce the final <i>biḡma</i> strike but this time accompanied by one of the singers yelling a sharp, accented vocable.
iii	00:21	Bass drum, tom-toms and cymbals add unmeasured rhythms to the <i>biḡma</i> ‘rattle,’ increasing the textural and rhythmic complexity.
iv	00:28	Piano joins in this final build up with dissonant arpeggiations. Snare drum builds to the greatest dynamic so far, with a roll that leads to the final strike. Tony Hicks (tenor saxophone) joins at the last moment with a rapid trill.

Fig. 7f Musical analysis of Gara (LE_7.7)

⁶ A similar approach to Gara also characterised concerts and rehearsals in 2010 (Darwin, Ngukurr and Canberra) and 2011 (Melbourne).

The building of discrete units through increasing rhythmic, harmonic and textural complexities creates a sense of building anticipation: this intensification seems to be leading somewhere. The ‘dancing’ *bilma* mode breaks this tense uncertainty with regularity and the music shifts from engaging embodied attention through intensification, to engagement through the ongoing repetition of rhythmic movement. This is mirrored in the dance which reinforces these basic repetitions with regular, synchronised footwork, breaking out of the held poses described above. There is also a shift from relatively ambiguous larger-scale units (i, ii, iii and iv, as identified above), to smaller units which are more regular, shorter and repetitious (the singular beats of the ‘dancing’ *bilma*). This literally creates a release of energy through sound: sound emerges, takes over and is ongoing; it grooves. The narrative of *Djuwalpada* is felt in each individual body engaged with the performance.

The rhythmic setting of the text for *Gara* also exhibits a shift from freedom over the unmeasured ‘spear rattling’ units to regular, proportioned rhythmic subdivision locked into the underlying ‘dancing’ *bilma* mode (Figs. 7g, h).⁷ Proportioned and measured rhythmic layering is also the approach taken by other musicians. Stephen Magnusson (guitar) plays heavily distorted chords with sparse, articulate rhythms — never based on smaller-level subdivisions than a semiquaver (subdivision of four to each primary beat). Philip Rex reinforces, exactly, the rhythm of the *bilma* with straight quavers, and the bass and snare drums accent heavily the ‘crotchet’ division of the beat (Fig. 7h). Here, the *bilma* mode, fundamental to the narrative of *manikay*, remains integral to the music of *CRB*.

LE_7.7	Gara: see below analysis (Fig. 7g) and transcription (Fig. 7h) (AAO 2010)	00.44
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⁷ The unmeasured beginning of this song still employs the tonal pattern of the *Wägilak dāmbu* and the rhythms characteristic of the text, even if these are much more free and improvisatory in the first half of the song.

Time code (LE_7.7)	Text	<i>Bilma</i> mode
00:08	<p>Mrrayunmara gara guthanbiny ṅulaṅura, yarrarra Mrrayunmara gara guthanbiny ṅulaṅura, yarrarra Yarrarra, yarrarra, yarrarra, waahh!</p> <p>Dancing with the spear, the spear has almost left his hand</p> <p>Aiming the spear, aiming, aiming, waahh!</p>	
00:30	<p>Ah yarrarra, yarrarra, yarrarra Mrrayunmara guthanbiny Mrrayunmara guthanbiny, ṅulaṅu Waahh! Hey, hey-hey, hey!</p> <p>Aiming the spear, aiming, aiming Dancing with the spear, the spear has almost left his hand</p> <p>Waahh! Hey, hey-hey, hey!</p>	 

Fig. 7g Text for Gara (LE_7.7)

♩ = 112

Bilma

Voice

Ah yarrarra, yarrarra, yarrarra— Marrayun-ma-ra guthan-biny

Guitar rhythm

Bass rhythm

4

Bilma

Voice

Marrayunmara guthan-biny njalanu— Waahh— ! Hey, hey-hey hey!

Guitar

Bass

Fig. 7h Transcription of Gara vocal line, with rhythmic transcription of guitar and bass (LE_7.7 from 00:31)

When the voices and *yidaki* conclude this song item with their cadence, the AAO continues to improvise by following the established ‘dancing’ groove — as if they were remaining in the same groove of a record, extending the length of the song (LE_7.8; Fig. 7i). In the last part of the following example, the AAO effectively conclude Gara with the correct *manikay* cadence following their improvisations, signalled by the piano’s continual vamp on the syncopated cadence rhythm usually sung by the dancers (refer to Fig. 7h). An extended *liya-waŋa* (coda) in a *manikay* style follows, improvised by the tenor saxophone and violin.

LE_7.8	Gara ‘Dancing’: selections from <i>CRB</i> , see below analysis (Fig. 7i) (AAO 2010)	00:46
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Point of interest	Time code for LE_7.8	Description
i	00:08	The hi-hat continues to play the same rhythm as the <i>biḷma</i> but elaborates this pattern, initially by accenting (dynamically, combined with a slight opening of the hi-hat) the rhythms of the vocal interjections, ‘hey-hey.’
ii		The double bass improvisation suggests a 4/4 metre. The piano layers more complex rhythms on this groove.
Example fades out and in		
iii	00:24	The piano again vamps on the rhythm of the vocal interjection, elaborating and anticipating the final cadence.
iv	00:37	Correct <i>manikay</i> cadence, supported rhythmically by all musicians.
v	00:38	Harmonically, the tenor saxophone and violin improvisation is based on the <i>dämbu</i> (arrangement of pitch in <i>manikay</i>). This will be discussed in the coming sections (see Fig. 7u).

Fig. 7i Musical analysis of Gara (LE_7.8)

In *CRB*, the musicians of the AAO not only provide sympathetic rhythmic accompaniment for the Wägilak singers but participate in novel creation that resonates with the basic musical elements of *manikay* — notably narrative in rhythm and groove: *CRB* remains grounded in dance and corporally engaging action. This is central to the experience of otherwise inert formal structures, as Tamisari explains:

If dancing is one of the most effective ways of claiming, affirming and legitimizing one’s knowledge and authority in ceremonial contexts, the effectiveness of these *dancing statements* cannot be realized merely through acquiring the technical skills required for their flawless execution nor through an explanation of their complex symbolism. (Tamisari 2005, 49)

The final song in most *CRB* performances is the *yuṭa manikay* ‘Goodbye song,’ based on the Birrkpirrk (Plover) subject (see Chapter Five). This song is unlike others in the

Wägilak *manikay* series because of its homophonic, homorhythmic chorus. In a slower groove — which feels like it has shifted into a higher gear with slower revolutions — the AAO musicians usually leave their instruments and come to the front of the stage, participating in the dance actions, waving goodbye to the audience and also to those departing this life (Figs. 7j, k). ‘When we were singing today, I was saying goodbye to my friends, the orchestra. In my heart, just crying, you know. I’m leaving tomorrow morning [...] when we stop, we have to sit quiet’ (Daniel Wilfred 2011c).

At the end of a smoking ceremony, when the singers, dancers and family of the deceased move through the billowing white smoke, there is an expression of connection and community carried in the melodic and rhythmic unity of the ‘Goodbye song.’ Individual, experiencing subjects converge together through kinaesthetic rhythmic motion: audience and performers; Yolŋu and Balanda; generations present and past. This is a joyous moment in both ceremonies and the concert hall: ‘Send that spirit home now. Let it fly’ (Fig. 7l) (Daniel Wilfred 2011c).

The following listening examples (LE_7.9, LE_7.10) demonstrate two examples of the ‘Goodbye song.’ The second, *CRB* live in concert, typifies the types of rhythmic complexities the AAO build onto the shared rhythmic foundation. In both examples, the pervasive *bilma* mode connects everyone involved.

LE_7.9	Birrkpirrk ‘Goodbye’: Daniel (lead), David, Benjamin Wilfred (<i>yidaki</i>), Andy Peters, Roy Natilma. Ngukurr, 8.7.2011	02:10
LE_7.10	Birrkpirrk ‘Goodbye’: Daniel, Benjamin and David Wilfred (<i>yidaki</i>) with AAO. Paris, 10.11.2012	02:04

Form is given movement in expression, transiting from abstract conception to experienced phenomena and kinaesthetic sympathy. Form is a beginning, only completed through its iteration in performance, held in music, dance and design. The AAO’s sensitivity as they engage with the rhythmic forms of *manikay*, a very possibility of engagement, permits a coincidence of expression. While maintaining characteristics integral to the narrative of Wägilak *manikay*, they engage with these forms from their own situations of creativity, filling in basic grooves with improvised complexity.

Even as new iterations of *CRB* are creatively realised, ongoing shared experience of the rhythmic forms of *Wägilak manikay* persist. Through the pervasive *bilma*, each individual is addressed by the performed narrative, even if they understand and respond to this in their own unique way.



Fig. 7j The 'Goodbye song,' Australian National University, Canberra, 22.9.2010. The painting in the background is Sambo Barabara's *The Dead Ones* (2005), depicting the bones of a dead *mokuy* (see Bowdler 2009, 64)



Fig. 7k Daniel Wilfred (centre) leading the Goodbye Song with AAO musicians and students from Monash University. Melbourne, 13.9.2012



Fig. 71 Benjamin Wilfred, Philip Rex, David Wilfred and Tony Hicks, recording Birrkpirrk 'Goodbye song' for the second *CRB* album (yet to be released). 'Send that spirit home now. Let it fly.' Melbourne, 28.9.2011

Emerging

Paul Grabowsky: It's my own view that any work of art, really, its trajectory isn't complete until it is received by somebody.

Paul Kelly: Not until you play it to someone is it a song.

PG: That's its birth.

(Grabowsky and Kelly 2012)

This section, brief in text but rich in musical examples, looks to some approaches taken by AAO musicians toward key *manikay* structures that underpin musical creation in *CRB*, especially around the recording of the first album in 2009 (released 2010) and the years immediately following.⁸ Here, the collaboration comes into its own as something more synthetic than early performances, which were characterised by a musical back-and-forth between distinct groups. This album emerges out of accumulated years of listening and performing with ever increasing nuance and awareness.

There are a huge variety of approaches to improvisation on the *CRB* album (see Chapter Nine, 'Musical voices'), even more so within the numerous live performances throughout the collaboration's history (Appendix Three). The few improvisations discussed here are selected to illustrate the creativity and remarkable ability of the AAO musicians, who respond with sensitivity to the structural *bones* of *manikay*.⁹ Although unique musical utterances in their own right, these improvisations contribute to the *fleshing out* of productive ambiguities within the forms of *manikay* (Chapter Five). Improvisations bring these forms to life with a brilliance of colour, variety, ingenuity and possibility, creativity allowing the forms of *manikay* to be disclosed through active, situated expression. The first half of this section looks to cadences and *yidaki* (didjeridu) rhythmic structures, the second half to *dämbu* (harmonic/melodic structures).

⁸ A shared desire to move the project toward more synthetic performances, refocus on narrative over form and incorporate new multimedia elements, was expressed strongly during project development rehearsals in Melbourne, March 2011 (see Chapter Nine).

⁹ In a sense, the orthodox structure of *manikay* could be considered a *chart* (a basic jazz lead-sheet notating harmonic structure and melody), a set of information from which creation begins. This is not to say, however, that all improvisations in *CRB* necessarily begin from the *chart* of Wägilak *manikay*.

Manikay song subjects possess their own characteristic cadences, points of convergence for *bilma*, *yidaki*, singers and dancers, punctuating the end of the *yutungurr* (thigh; lyrics/song proper) and the beginning of the melismatic *liya-waṅa* (coda). In *CRB*, cadences are also points of convergence between improvisations and the forthcoming *manikay* song items, a sort of interchange that switches the musical action between the partners in conversation — the AAO and the YWG.

These improvisations either build toward the next song item, anticipating the appropriate rhythmic and tonal forms, or the song emerges out of the improvisations, begun by the lead singer finding a suitable point of entrance into the music. Improvisations in *CRB* tend to demonstrate more coincidence in form with *manikay* during the singing of song items than during the space between them. Needless to say, the progression of song subjects in the legitimate order — the liturgical program for a smoking ceremony from the ‘beginning to the end’ — persists through all performances.¹⁰ ‘We can’t change it [song order]. When you listen to those songs from Wild Blackfella [Djuwalpada]; all one. We can’t change it. Law. That’s Wägilak. That’s how Sambo told me, like that’ (Benjamin Wilfred 2011a).

The listening example below demonstrates the use of cadences as points of convergence for all musicians in *CRB* (LE_7.11; Fig. 7m). This particular cadence from Birrkpirrk (Plover) is commonly used to end performances (similar to the end of LE_7.10).

LE_7.11	Birrkpirrk ‘Brother and Sister’: characteristic cadence pattern as point of cohesion, see Fig. 7m below (AAO 2010)	00:48
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¹⁰ *Yuṭa manikay* in *CRB* are always performed at the end of a series of songs based on the one subject, as in local Yolŋu ceremonial contexts (Chapter Five).

Time code for LE_7.11	<i>Bilma</i> pattern	
00:06		Bilma tapped on ground, second time
00:40	Faster 	

Fig. 7m Birrkpirrk cadence pattern and bilma modes (LE_7.11)

Cadences do not just jump out of nowhere but are signalled with a variety of cues, visual and aural, predominantly from the lead singer who conducts the rhythm by striking the *bilma* with larger gestures: ‘Listen to the *bilma*; follow him’ (Benjamin Wilfred 2010c). The *yidaki* player anticipates the cadence with a series of syncopated overtones, matched by the dancer’s own vocal interjections. The complexity of the *yidaki*’s rhythms are also bound by the cadence, after which the instrument ceases to play during the *liya-wana* (LE_7.12; Fig. 7n).

The following examples demonstrate the complex construction of *yidaki* patterns. The transcriptions below (Figs. 7o; 7p) draw attention to the cadence point at the end of a *yutungurr* (thigh) of two different rhythmic modes of Djuwalpada, noting the dancer’s vocal interjections, which also build into the cadence. The second listening example (LE_7.13) is David Wilfred playing the Djuwalpada ‘Brothers and Sisters’ *yidaki* pattern in the context of a *CRB* rehearsal, particularly interesting because it was the first time this rhythmic mode was introduced to the AAO.

LE_7.12	Djuwalpada: <i>yidaki</i> patterns (4 examples with transcriptions below), demonstrated in Melbourne, 21.3.2011	01:59
LE_7.13	Djuwalpada ‘Brothers and Sisters’: the first experiments during Melbourne rehearsals. Voices at end are Daniel Wilfred and Paul Grabowsky, 19.3.2011	02:05

Time code for LE_7.12	Bilma mode	Performer	Transcription
00:00	Djuwalpaḍa 'Brothers and Sisters'	Benjamin Wilfred (vocables)	Transcription a
00:16	Djuwalpaḍa 'Dancing' (double)	Benjamin Wilfred (vocables)	Transcription b
00:35	Djuwalpaḍa 'Brothers and Sisters'	David Wilfred	Audio example only
01:06	Djuwalpaḍa 'Dancing' (double)	David Wilfred	
01:22	Galpu 'Brothers and Sisters'	David Wilfred	
01:37	Galpan 'Dancing' (double)	David Wilfred	

Fig. 7n Listening guide for LE_7.12

The image shows a musical score for the Bilma mode 'Brothers and Sisters'. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system is for the first system, and the bottom system is for the second system. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 88. The score is divided into three parts: Bilma, Dancer's voices, and Yidaki. The Bilma part is represented by a staff with vertical lines and 'x' marks. The Dancer's voices part is represented by a staff with horizontal lines and 'x' marks. The Yidaki part is represented by a staff with musical notation. The second system includes the vocal interjections 'Hey Hey Hey Hey'.

Fig. 7o Transcription a – Djuwalpaḍa 'Brothers and Sisters' *yidaki* patterns. Dancers vocal interjections have been added (LE_7.12)

The image shows a musical score for a Djuwalpada 'Dancing' performance. It consists of two systems of music. The top system is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 112. It features three staves: 'Bilma' (top) with rhythmic 'x' marks, 'Dancer's voices' (middle) with rests, and 'Yidaki' (bottom) with a complex melodic line. The bottom system shows a 4-measure phrase with vocal interjections 'Hey Hey Hey Hey' written below the Yidaki staff.

Fig. 7p Transcription b – Djuwalpada ‘Dancing’ *yidaki* patterns. Dancers vocal interjections have been added (LE_7.12)

It is important to note that the above transcriptions are representative rather than immutable. In each performance, the *yidaki* has room for virtuosic elaboration within these basic patterns and overtone signalling.¹¹ Further, the above simplification of these rhythms does not do justice to the complexities of rhythmic timbre changes within the *yidaki*'s ongoing *drone* — a complexity of accents and dynamic shading created by the subtle physical alterations inside the player's mouth (most apparent in LE_7.12).

In the early rehearsals of *CRB* in 2005, the *yidaki* was understood as a type of drone, imitated by the trombone and bass clarinet as some sort of tonal grounding (refer to LE_7.4). However, as the collaboration developed over time, it became apparent to the AAO musicians that the *yidaki* was, first and foremost, a rhythmic instrument ‘like the drums’ (David Wilfred 2011) — its complexity located in rhythmic elaboration,

¹¹ Aaron Corn suggests that variation in *manikay* is akin to the natural variation of persistent forms in nature, such as the infinite variety of each and every Stringybark tree (pers. comm. 2011).

invention and momentum.¹² Sympathetically, Paul Grabowsky often takes a rhythmic approach to the use of keyboard instruments in *CRB*, not limiting himself to the history of the piano as an invention with predominantly harmonic potential: ‘It’s not the box, but the brain that controls it that matters.’¹³ Here, technological forms, like the piano, are indeed *beginnings* not limited to historical uses or conceptual norms.

The below examples (LE_7.14, LE_7.15) demonstrate Grabowsky’s approach to rhythmic improvisation. Like the *yidaki*, Grabowsky builds rhythmic complexity over the basic *bilma* groove, carrying this groove towards its ultimate termination at the final cadence point of each song. The last example below (LE_7.16) demonstrates the ensemble carrying the Galpu (Spear thrower) *bilma* mode forward to its final cadence, after the voices have finished.

LE_7.14	Gara (Spear) ‘Dancing’: complex rhythmic ‘scatter’ piano within the basic groove (AAO 2010)	00:59
LE_7.15	Mälka (String bag) ‘Dancing’: Tonally ambiguous rhythmic descent through chromatic scale, bound by cadence point (AAO 2010)	00:25
LE_7.16	Galpu (Spear thrower) ‘Stalking prey’: improvisations contained by pervasive <i>bilma</i> mode and final cadence (AAO 2010)	01:13

Alongside cadences as points of convergence in *CRB*, the characteristic Wägilak *dämbu* (intervallic construction) also offers structural material which is frequently used to create musical orientations of departure or realignment. The AAO are brought into the Yolŋu world of *gurrutu* (kinship), their improvisations emerging in either synchronicity or contrast with the Wägilak *dämbu*. This tonal sequence carries identities of *bäpurru* (lineage) and *wäŋa* (country), continuing to generate engagement with such orthodox tenets as it is carried in performance. To perform in conversation with the Wägilak *dämbu* is to be brought into the world as an image of the underpinning ancestral text.

In *manikay*, *dämbu* demands elaboration through improvisation. Schematically, *dämbu* is a ‘fairly static intervallic structure’ (Corn 2008, 8), yet in performance it becomes a

¹² This is characteristic of East Arnhem Land. In West Arnhem Land song styles like *kun-borrk*, the pitch of the didjeridu does provide a tonal reference point for singers (listen to Djimarr 2007 for examples).

¹³ See Chapter Eight for an exploration of the keyboard’s potential for musical creation through changes in timbre.

rich tapestry of musical relationships. Individual lines weave around one other, merging into a dense cascade, the linear patterns of *dämbu* realised through harmonic juxtaposition between heterophonic melodic lines. The texture of *manikay* shimmers with brilliance and *märr* (essence; vitality), and ‘strong’ voices emerge over the top, reaching for pitches transposed into the octave above the starting pitch (LE_7.17, LE_7.18 below).

Märr (essence; vitality) is also created by extending the *liya-waṅa* (coda) and reiterating the *dämbu* at the end of a song item (see Chapter Eight): ‘Keeping the song strong, singing with strong voice’ (Benjamin Wilfred 2010c). Roy Natilma, in his flamboyant vocal improvisations that move beyond the basic tonal structures of Wägilak *manikay*, captures the spirit of *CRB* on recordings for the album (LE_7.17).¹⁴ Note that in the second example (LE_7.18; Figs. 7q, r), both the rhythm and pitch of the voices converge during the cadence.

LE_7.17	Djuwalpaḍa ‘Dancing’: Benjamin Wilfred and Roy Natilma, during sessions in Melbourne for commercial CD recording, 2010	00:44
LE_7.18	Birrkpirrk ‘Brothers and Sisters’: Benjamin Wilfred and Roy Natilma, see transcriptions below (Figs. 7q, r) (AAO 2010)	00:29

Yawilila yawilila	Plover, plover crying
Moyṅu moyṅu	Djuwalpaḍa dancing, Djuwalpaḍa dancing
Wipa nhaṅu Manunguḍudayi	Flying over the water [at Luṭunba] to land at Manunguḍudayi
Birrkpirrk-nha, moyṅu	Plover, Djuwalpaḍa dancing
Nhabilayi, nhabilayi	Plover, plover [alternate name]
Wipa nhaṅu Manunguḍudayi	Flying over the water [at Luṭunba] to land at Manunguḍudayi
Birrkpirrk-nha, moyṅu	Plover, Djuwalpaḍa dancing
Mmm, mmm, ga-Birrk!	Mmm, mmm, ga-Birrk! (Plover)
Birrkpirrk, Birrkpirrk, ga-Birrk!	Plover, plover, plover!

Fig. 7q Translation of Birrkpirrk text (LE_7.18)

¹⁴ Roy Natilma’s text is too indistinguishable for clear transcription

♩ = 106

Benjamin Wilferd

Yawi - li - la yawi - li - la - moy - ŋu moy - ŋu wipa nhaŋu Manungududayi

Roy Natilma

4

Birrkpirrk nha moy - ŋu Nhabilayi, nhabilayi wi - pa nha - ŋu Manungududayi

7

Bi - rrk - pi - rrk nha - moy(ŋu). Mmm - mmm

Faster

9

Bilma

ga - Birrk! A Birrk - pirrk Birrk - pirrk ga - Birrk!

Fig. 7r Transcription of Birrkpirrk (LE_7.18)

Reiteration is contingent on variation and the possibility for variation is contingent on reiteration. This is a fundamental principal of *manikay* and can be seen at work in the improvisations around the Wägilak *dämbu* in *CRB* (Fig. 7s). Comparing the early sessions of the project (2005) with the album recording (2010), highlights the freedom and nuance of inflection the improvising musicians take to weaving further *vocal* lines — on their respective instruments — into the overall musical texture.

In the first of the examples following (LE_7.19; Fig.7t), discrepancies around musician’s approach to the fourth pitch (descending) in the *dämbu* series become apparent (see Fig. 7s), as they try to position this non-diatonic interval with quarter tone shadings and pitch bends — imitating actual inflections of the voice. The second example (LE_7.20; Fig. 7u), shows an improvisation by Tony Hicks (tenor saxophone) and Erkki Veltheim (viola) to be similar in its divergence and elaboration of the basic *dämbu* structure when compared with the above examples of Roy Natilma’s singing.



Fig. 7s Intervallic structure characteristic of Wägilak *dämbu*

Hicks’ improvisation (LE_7.19; Fig. 7t) fits within two descents of the *dämbu* — effectively a double *bilma* mode with two *gumurr* (chests) — and melodic elaborations occur within this frame. Tonal modifications, such as growls and bends, give vocal-like inflection to the improvisation, and rhythmic momentum is given to sustained pitches of the *dämbu* through breath-accents. This excerpt also demonstrates how key climactic points in the song series, in Birrkpirrk especially, are often characterised by greater tonal convergence by all musicians on the basic *dämbu* set. Tonal orientation toward the Wägilak *dämbu* in *CRB* is selectively employed to effect a sense of cohesion.

LE_7.19	Gara (Spear) ‘Dancing’: Tony Hicks’ improvisation, see transcription below (Fig. 7t) (AAO 2010)	00:30
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♩ = 112

Tenor Saxophone
at concert pitch

5

9

(growl)

14

18

swung

Fig. 7t Transcription of Tony Hicks' solo in Birrkpirrk (LE_7.19)

In the *liya-waŋa* (coda), following the cadence rhythm, Veltheim's improvisation (LE_7.20; Fig 7u) comes out of the dense texture more prominently. It is characterised by an exploratory alteration of intervals shifting around the basic framework of the *dämbu*, much like the improvisation of a *manikay* singer. Rather than a complex rhythmic transcription, the notated example points to these intervals realised as an independent layer weaving in and out with the tenor saxophone (bar lines are included for visual clarity). This section is almost bi-tonal, as Veltheim explores the intervals of the *dämbu* around the pitch of G, Hicks around the pitch of F#. The resulting thickness of texture and ambiguity, greater than any simplified diatonic rendition of *dämbu*, is befitting the tonal complexity of *manikay*. This is a very beautiful moment.

LE_7.20	Gara (Spear) 'Dancing': Tony Hicks' and Erkki Veltheim's improvised <i>liya-waŋa</i> , see transcription below (Fig. 7u) (AAO 2010)	01:04
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Fig. 7u Pitch transcription of improvised *lya-waṅa* (coda) in Birrkpirrk (LE_7.20)

Finally, the following brief anecdote demonstrates how engagement with the forms of *manikay* in *CRB* is not always intentional — the collaboration does not only emerge through subtle and considered musical response. During rehearsals in Melbourne in March 2011, the YWG unexpectedly applauded the AAO musicians for creating their own *yuta manikay*. In one of the Mälka (String bag) song items, the AAO musicians had been pushing the tempo, faster than the usual *bilma* speed. Daniel, Benjamin and David Wilfred followed this unanticipated tempo change. Because the AAO had prefaced their understanding of *manikay* on a level of coincidence of rhythmic form, they were — even if unintentionally — able to engage with the tradition of creating *yuta manikay* through alterations of the established *bilma* modes (Fig. 7v) (Chapter Five). Here, the YWG understood the AAO’s faster Mälka groove as an entrance into Wägilak processes of creating *yuta manikay*. Daniel Wilfred responded during the rehearsal:

That song came from nowhere, that Mälka one. Him really fast! I don’t know what’s going on there, we bin follow you mob. That’s from you — came from nowhere! It’s for you, wäwa [my brothers]. New one. That’s the Mälka. New one. Manymak [good]! Followed you mob

beat. That sound comes from the bass. New song, for you mob. Manyak! That music come in from nowhere, even for the didj. (Daniel Wilfred 2011c)

Improvised responses to Wägilak rhythmic and intervallic forms in *CRB* demonstrate sensitivity in hearing and performing music that is both coincidental and creative. The AAO *play into* the forms of Wägilak *manikay*, going beyond initial imitation to extend and realise these forms with unique creativity and complexity. With ears oriented towards the subtleties of musical form and inflection, all musicians involved are drawn into the performance of the Wägilak narrative that emerges in ever new contexts of collaboration. In *CRB*, all performers are listeners, and each hears and responds to the Wägilak narrative in an individual way: ‘Understanding occurs in interpreting’ (Gadamer 2006, 390). Through performance and reception, this narrative comes to life. Grabowsky elaborates:

All art is latent until the moment it is received by the viewer, listener or reader, at which point it ignites, catching fire in the atmosphere of the mind [...] A work is never the same twice: no matter how many times we encounter it, our experience is dependent on circumstance. (Grabowsky 2012)

Like the literal, metonymic equivalences of Yolŋu hermeneutics (Chapter Three), the music of *CRB* is another unique but legitimate layer extending outwards from a basic blueprint, a realisation of foundational narrative tenets (*ŋaraka*) in ever-new contexts. These orthodox expressions are performed into individual experience: the musical forms improvised by the AAO groove Wägilak *gurrutu* (kinship) through rhythm, and they sing Wägilak *wäŋa* (country) through pitch.

The ancestral text transits, like the metonymic *change of a name*, from form to experience. The ancestral text is realised by performers vocalising the Wägilak narrative in the present, living life as a following of the ancestral text (*ŋalabuluŋu rom*). As song emerges into experience with brilliant complexity and unique iteration, human lives are led by song.



Fig. 7v Daniel Wilfred leading his own *yuṭa manikay*, 'Brothers and Sisters' with David Wilfred (left) and Philip Rex (right). Monash University, Melbourne 13.9.2012

Beyond form

A person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question. (Gadamer 2006, 370)

Behind the very existence of *manikay* are social, religious and existential questions to which the forms of *manikay* provide a response. This response is articulated in dance, music, improvisation and narrative, performed action that brings into being particular connections to land, social relationship, a sense of ancestral constitution and teleological orientation (Chapters Three, Four and Five). The tradition of *manikay* is sustained where the orthodox musical structures that carry these observations persist in engaging such creative articulation, conservative or novel.

Opening ourselves to the forms carried by tradition through respectful listening opens us to the possibility of being addressed by those forms, being transformed by an engagement with tradition continuing through and around us. *CRB* illuminates *manikay* as a vital tradition engaged with the present, bringing its social, religious and existential conversations into ever widening contexts of understanding. This conversation begins with the consideration of musical forms that have persisted through past iterations of the *manikay* tradition, the integral *naraka* (bones) of ceremonial practice.

This chapter has shed light on the growth of *CRB* as a dramatically envisioned iteration of Wägilak *manikay* beginning from a basis of imitation. As performance 'has its being in its revealing' (Gadamer 2006, 420), the integral narrative tenets of *manikay* are disclosed through experienced musical structure. The movement or mediation of form into experience is aptly illustrated by the concept of groove: a hinge that connects concept and realisation, past and present, dance and song, individuals and collectives. Here, the forms of groove become an orienting prejudice underwriting continued participation and learning.

Through the engaging experiences of groove, narrative is performed by bodies, extending out into the lived world of perception and interpretation, reinforcing tradition as a way of seeing, doing and knowing. As infectious, interminable groove, the rhythmic forms of the *bilma* catch performers, dancers and listeners up in the ongoing ancestral conversation.

During 2011 project development workshops in Melbourne, AAO musicians began to enunciate their views on the limitations of collaboration as imitation. They felt that imitation was not an objective end, rather the provisional beginnings of continuing creative engagement — a point of departure or transit. As Lawn suggests, beyond form, ‘cultural products (including art) and the natural world are not objects for rational investigation but voices within the fabric of an interminable conversation’ (in Baggini and Stangroom 2004, 102). For improvising musicians, musical forms are the beginnings of greater engagements between individuals and between individuals and traditions. AAO musicians express their desire to go beyond the forms of basic grooves:

I don't think a strong sense of groove is necessarily important to this collaboration [...] [our grooves] can often seem like mannered versions of the organic sense of groove that the YWG employs. (Veltheim 2011)

And you know the first bit, the character of the *mokuy*, it is not a simple sort of being, or a simple *idea* of a being [...] He's looking for the law — that's such serious stuff — and the sort of rock-and-roll'y stuff that I play, it's too un-subtle. (Schäuble 2011a)

We used to play in a very reactive way, applying very much what we know about playing grooves and these kinds of things, in order to give us internal structure that coincides with what these guys are doing. But actually, the meanings of the songs are so complex [...] that we have started to think that going into a very heavy groove thing immediately is probably not necessarily the way to go. And we've been trying to play much more of the story and allowing things to build very, very slowly over time, and also to have areas in the music where there is very little happening [...] a great deal of space. And, I think everybody felt it was a kind of huge leap that we'd made. (Grabowsky 2011a)

Through the validating event of listening — the recognition of alternate perspectives — musical forms such as *dämbu* or *bilma* modes allow individuals to engage with one another across time, situation and culture. *CRB* continues to interpret and dialogue with the musical forms that carry the *manikay* tradition, the *naraka* (bones) that are perpetuated as reflections of iterations past. But ultimately, discursive conversation emerges from these structures of engagement and tradition comes to be known as something ongoing and effective, shaping individuals lives and perspectives. Likewise, *CRB* is a conversation with tradition ever shifting through new iterations of being.

Chapter eight

Conversing tradition

Our lives in a sense are not limited to the dates that define them, but are joined to those who came before us and to those yet to come. This is the nub of the human experience, and Australia is home to some of the oldest expressions of this understanding in existence. (Grabowsky 2012)

Art emerges amid structural forms of expression and social forms of engagement. Integrally, reflexive understanding is the very basis and possibility for ongoing, discursive conversation with persistent forms from the past. As *Crossing Roper Bar* emerges as a distinct cultural expression in twenty-first century Australia, it simultaneously becomes one iteration within established, ongoing conversations: here, the conversations of the Yolŋu *manikay* tradition.

This chapter looks to the animation of *manikay* in performance, something at the heart of sustaining *manikay* as a tradition. This is evidenced in the ongoing *performance of movement* and oscillation within the music of *CRB*, as song is carried into diverse contexts of performance and reception beyond local ceremonial practices. The writing continues to draw on many diverse threads that, together, constitute the dynamic, heterophonic texture of *manikay*. As aural attention in *manikay* shifts between the different layers of voice, this section actively *plays* around with some of the multiple aspects of *manikay* performance, shifting around in a conversational way.

Tradition in and around us is engaged through the animation of creative iteration. *Manikay* is ever the ‘same but different,’ a common Yolŋu expression that avoids reifying tradition in the dead (historicist) forms of the past. Even as performers apply their unique creativity to the forms of *manikay*, discursively filling-in the productive ambiguities within orthodox frames (Chapter Five) — spaces of volition and independence — they are caught in the interminable conversation of tradition.

While individual iterations of *manikay* songs might differ from past iterations, these musical utterances continue to sustain an ancestral presence through the disclosure in

performance of ideas that constitute the very reason-for-being of *manikay*. An individual too is also inescapably constituted by the great tide of effective history — recall the concepts of *gularri* and *raki* (Chapters Four and Six) — asserting its influence through the very orientation of our situated horizons. As Yolŋu artist Durndiwuy Wanambi suggests, Yolŋu cultural expressions in the past are the ‘history for new generations’ (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 159). Wanambi’s assertion resonates with Gadamer’s *effective history*:

The language through which we articulate the present resonates with the meanings from the past as they continue to be operative in the present; this gives a sense of what Gadamer means by ‘effective historical consciousness.’ (Lawn 2007, 68)

Performing *manikay* today is the active entrance into ongoing conversations of tradition that arouse perennial existential questions. *Manikay* presents, into the context of a funeral, a substantial narrative and frame for articulating difficult conceptions of human existence and death. Beyond everyday modes of thought and speech, ceremony grounds an individual in tangible, existential awareness through corporeal experience and action. Yet somewhat paradoxically, participation in *manikay* also draws an individual into a greater constitution beyond particular situation or concern, joining together individuals past, recently deceased, present and future.

Manikay reflects life as something animated on multiple, dynamic planes of individual, social and ancestral constitution. Through *manikay* performance, the great animating action of ancestral progenitors is also brought to life: the narrative of Djuwalpaḍa paradoxically before human time but also sustaining present time. Grabowsky conveys his understanding of this:

We can learn much from our first nations, but perhaps the most important thing is that sense of unity of people and place, space and time, expressed through the creative act: that we are one, not rhetorically but in fact, and this oldest of knowledge should inform our better selves. (Grabowsky 2012)

In grasping after the ubiquity of the past in the present — our collective ancestral constitution amidst a constellation of unique situations — we discover that we are all caught up in the *play* of time and history beyond ourselves. The newness of the future

comes to us as a great fusion of horizons between the past and present. And we discover that we can participate in this *conversation*, this dynamic animation. Creative performance gives us a voice that both illuminates the past in the present and shapes the future as a newly articulated image of that past, the same but different.

The Young Wägilak Group

The Wägilak were chosen because they had taught the performances [*manikay* and *bungul*] and because of their openness and willingness to go and venture into setting up a new kind of real Australian music. This is not talking bull, if you know what I mean. This is the kind of music we've been looking for and by getting together, understanding each other, respecting each other, it's bringing music and people together — understanding each other. (Yugul Mangi Corporation Vice President Kevin Rogers, in Corn et al. 2009)

We are born into a world of tradition, history and culture, just as we are born into a situation of *gurrutu* (kinship) and relation to a *bäpa* (father) and *ṅändi* (mother). We are brought into hermeneutic systems of understanding and languages that create our worlds. Ceremonial *manikay* and *bungul* have come before us and the imperative to continue that ceremonial language, to 'keep culture strong,' is an imperative to keep a world alive. It is the imperative to sustain the present as a reflection of ancestral precedent; something that is intimately connected to us and constitutes our very own 'co-ordinates of *historical life*' (Lawn 2006, 65).

CRB was a collaboration actively pursued by the Young Wägilak Group and the community of Ngukurr with concerted effort, following the passing of Wägilak elder Sambo Barabara in 2005. In response to this untimely event, Benjamin Wilfred formed a cohort of younger-generation men who continue the *bäpurru* (father's group) agnatic descent line of Barabara. The YWG are effectively one iteration of family within the ongoing *yarraṭa* (stringline; agnatic descent), continuing the performed conversation with Wägilak tradition — an integral component of greater, regional ceremonies.¹ Like

¹ Magowan has written on this connection: 'Yolngu share a common concern of moral accountability to one another in the ancestral law. Accountability is represented in ritual feather strings that are fashioned for each clan and worn when dancing the journeys of the first ancestral creators. These

the contemporary expressions of Yothu Yindi, 'these musicians do not see their innovative practice so much as authentic but, rather, as legitimate. Their songs promote what for them are lawful expressions of hereditary identities, knowledge and values' (Corn 2002, 17). The YWG seeks opportunities to express their culture and develop skills in their artistic practice through new contexts and forums of presentation (Fig. 8a).

The naming of this group asserts the value of Wägilak cultural expressions, actively recognised by the group's drive to sustain narratives concerning kin, country, language and law. The ongoing performance of *manikay* maintains the hermeneutic that reads these narratives in ecology and society. Faced with the contemporary situation of declining engagement with ceremonial traditions and their impeded intergenerational transmission, the YWG's desire to 'keep culture strong' is a crucial motivation driving participation in *CRB*. 'No matter where you go' (Benjamin Wilfred 2010a) or what contexts of performance present themselves, responsibility to continue ceremonial traditions remains.

I lost my elder sister and elder brother, but I still got more brothers. That's why I keep telling them: 'Come to me, join me so we can do one job. Be strong together.' That's what I always tell my elder brothers. I'm the youngest, and I'm the only one to get the knowledge from Grandpa. I'm teaching some of my brothers, elder brothers, from my heart and spirit from Grandpa, and the painting and the land. Thankyou. That's Young Wägilak Group. (Benjamin Wilfred in Curkpatrick et al. 2010)

The YWG's imperative to 'keep culture strong' acknowledges that today's generation of Wägilak should learn from and respect the embedded knowledge and law carried through ceremonial traditions — even if profound truths are not necessarily or immediately apparent. In Yolŋu hermeneutics there are always deeper significances not yet revealed to present understanding. Further, responsibilities to maintain the Wägilak *manikay* narratives extend beyond the wellbeing of a particular clan, as all

journeys are realized through word, vision, and action manifested in story, song and dance. They twist and turn like the ritual feather strings used in armbands, head-dresses, and dillybags that metaphorically tie people and homelands together by their designs and spiritually constitute the moral fibre of Yolŋu being' (Magowan 2003, 303).

manikay repertoires are integral elements within a greater ceremonial constellation (Chapter Three and Four).

While *manikay* as a language encodes an excess of significations through form and structure, *manikay* is expressly concerned with performed, discursive engagement with tradition. *Bilma* modes may be musical forms of significance, packets of information carrying ideas of identity and narrative, but performed experience through groove dispels any temporal — and interpersonal — distance between this form of tradition and the present (Chapter Seven). What occurs in performance is a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Gadamer 2006, 305): musical forms allow disclosure, renewal and vitalisation as the present and past are brought together in unique experience. The Yolŋu hermeneutic seeks to bridge past and present situations, and the YWG embrace purposeful action toward sustaining culture through creative articulations of traditional ceremony. As I have suggested throughout this thesis, creativity is central to engaging understanding or interpretation:

A reconstructed understanding of tradition will not work in our situation. This is why you need hermeneutics; what is said in tradition needs to make sense from the now [...] Part of real understanding, however, is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them. Above I called this *the fusion of horizons*. (Gadamer 2006, 367)

The present reverberates with the action of ancestors past. The ancestors groove along with *manikay* today because the formal, syntactic disclosure of *manikay* resonates with their ever-present, ongoing song. *Manikay* is perpetuated as an essential foundation for each new generation to make sense of a world in which humans exist and relate in time, over time and through time. The song of ancestral precedence sustains this world and the possibility of the YWG is the possibility for iterations of tradition to continue engaging lives into the future, individuals caught up in the play of tradition disclosing itself in the present. The lives of the YWG are caught up in this ongoing song:

We’re the Young Wägilak Group now, with my story, with my grandpa’s story, and the spirit of grandpa following me. Giving me power, strong power. That’s why I’m talking strong. And I love my tour [CRB], what I do [...] I’m lucky I’m holding this Wägilak culture strong. I’m

lucky, that's what my grandpa told me: 'I'm going to give you the *bungul*, Wägilak. You have to keep it now.' 'Yeah,' I said, 'no worries.' I have followed my grandpa and I want to be like him. And I did it. I did. I'm standing here and talking for country and I'm walking with spirit, with Wild Blackfella called Djuwalpada. Even when I tour with the orchestra, that Wild Blackfella [follows], no matter where I go, this Wild Blackfella: country to country; the spirit, each day, in the ground, in the tree, in the land, hills, no matter what [...] I have to go for it. And I'm here; a strong man. (Benjamin Wilfred 2010a)



Fig. 8a The YWG (l-r) Wesley, Benjamin, Daniel, David Wilfred and Justin Nunggarragalug) leading the AAO in concert and *bungul* at Ngukurr, 26.5.2010

Conversive-discursive play

Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which the past and present are constantly mediated. (Gadamer 2006, 291)

Only a poet can translate a poet. (Ricoeur 2006, 38)

Manikay plays itself beyond the individual experience of the listener or performer, just as the ancestral narrative plays itself beyond the discrete and diverse *wāṅa* (homelands), *matha* (tongues), *manikay* (songs) and *gurrutu* (kin) that constitute individual components within *maḍayin* (the greater whole; the vital essence of creation).² These individual fibres intertwine and extend in sympathetic cooperation: each fibre is scant on its own but, connected to the tangled multitude of other fibres, merges into the greater blueprint of *raki* (string). All understanding, all human action and existence, are animated within this greater blueprint of *raki*. Lives are lived with unique colour, volition and creativity, filling out productive ambiguities within overarching structures and playing integral roles within frameworks or situations of *wāṅa*, *matha*, *manikay* and *gurrutu*. The individual is given a space and animated within the greater drama of the *gularri* (floodwaters). Yolŋu ceremony and song present this ontological paradigm.

The heterophonic brilliance of *manikay* grabs attention. Like the glint of light constantly shifting on rippling water, the aural vitality of *manikay* glimmers with simultaneous vocal realisations of the *dāmbu* (melodic/harmonic framework). Singers in *manikay* must decide between possibilities of melodic realisation, playing out these intentions against the contrary realisations of other singers (Chapter Five). The *gumurr* (chest) of a *manikay* song is a woven amalgam of independent lines that carry a conceptual, coherent whole (i.e. the pattern of the *dāmbu* 'head') (LE_8.1). Multiple voices maintain relative dynamic, rhythmic and textual independence, yet conform to the legitimate *ṅaraka* (bones) of a particular song. Such multiple, simultaneous

² Howard Morphy suggests that the animating action of the ancestral past is the 'supreme locus of connection,' (2005, 163) where the sheer plurality of outside referents or significations come together.

melodic realisation creates a whole that constantly shifts in the listener's apprehension, yet maintains an identifiable collective signature.

LE_8.1	Galpan: Daniel, Benjamin, David (<i>yidaki</i>) Wilfred, Andy Peters, Roy Natilma. Ngukurr, 8.7.2011	00.56
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The dense, constantly shifting and interwoven texture of voices in *manikay* is akin to the aesthetic of *bir'yun* (brilliance; shimmering) in *miny'tji* (design), explored by Howard Morphy (1989, 1991, 2008) (Fig. 8c). In Yolŋu design, *Bir'yunaramirri* ('having brilliance'; F. Morphy pers. comm. 2013) is effected as the formal technique of *rärrk* (cross-hatching), which carries dynamism and movement — and also *märr* 'spiritual power' — extending out of the medium of painting and into embodied perception.³ 'The underlying pattern is clearly defined yet the surface of the painting appears to move; it is difficult to fix the eye on a single segment without interference from others' (Morphy 2008, 92).

Morphy's conception of *bir'yun* also resonates with Gadamer's notion of *play* in art, which has informed my discussion of the *performance of movement* throughout this thesis.⁴ Gadamer suggests that perception is drawn in by the animation of play within structure, a 'to-and-fro movement which is not tied to any goal which would bring it to an end' (2006, 93) (see Fig. 8d, e). Play is ongoing as it renews itself — in one sense it grooves — and the player is lifted out of their situated articulations and into the

³ The shimmering brilliance in a painting of *māna* (shark), for example, conveys 'the flash of pain and fury in the eye of the shark as it tries to escape from the hunter [Murayana] and lashes out in anger. Its fury is also reflected in the energetic steps of the dancers in ritual as they re-enact the stages of its journey' (H. Morphy 1998, 190).

⁴ For Gadamer, art is hermeneutic engagement activated in play (performance); art is what 'says something to someone' (Gadamer 2001, 70). Gadamer moves away from conceptions of art bound to aesthetics, a relatively contemporary discipline in which subjective emotions are triggered in sensual apprehension (Lawn 2007). Aesthetics, the 'perception of beauty by the senses,' was a concept first used by German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762) (Goldman 2005, 255). Gadamer instead insists that 'art is a form of truth about the world and not a heightened state of individual feeling' (Lawn 2007, 87). This chapter illustrates something of that position, especially in the assertion that Yolŋu ceremony explicitly deemphasises subjective creativity, emphasising instead the participation in a discursive conversation above and beyond singular iterations of instances of performance.

ongoing vitality of the performance itself. The heterophonic vocal texture of *manikay* plays with aural reception.⁵

Just as our eyes shift over a landscape taking in infinitely differing perspectives, our ears shift through the layers of sound in *manikay*, delineated but necessarily complementary as they build from a common blueprint.⁶ ‘We are lost in these delicately intertwined voices: their melismatic lines gracefully permutating around the ideal of a unified melody’ (Corn and Gumbula 2007, 2). This movement of attention between different voices in aural reception — and between individual voices and the whole — is ever changing and unique to every performance. It vitalises the otherwise static, orthodox form of *dämbu*, an integral *ḡaraka* (bone) of legitimate performance.

The combination of text, rhythm and pitch in *manikay* is also a play of endless iteration and variety. Words oscillate on the sustained, repeated and relatively set pitches of *dämbu*, and pitches oscillate on the sets of appropriate, repeated words for each song subject. Singers choose from a known vocabulary of words that poetically explicate particular song subjects, combining these at will within the melodic/harmonic framework specific to each clan (*dämbu*). Daniel and Benjamin Wilfred explain:

DW: When Djuwalpaḡa walks, he gives those names for the songs. Those totems [central tenets of the Wägilak narrative]. We call those same words — reverse and forwards — when we sing. Change them around. Just use the one word [the same words].

BW: That’s the names, that’s the totems; song’s names — all one [always the same] when we are singing.

(Benjamin Wilfred 2011a)

The following listening example (LE_8.2) begins with a recording of Daniel Wilfred speaking the text of Mälka (String bag), a steady rhythm underpinning his repetition

⁵ Interestingly, Carty writes of similar approaches to painting that are emerging as distinctly contemporary practices in the desert regions: ‘Today the ancestral power of the Dreaming is encoded or indexed in Balgo art through a series of optical effects produced by outlining, concentricity, and the dotting that dazzles the viewer’s eye’ (2012, 117).

⁶ My own research through an AIATSIS grant (Curkpatrick 2010–2012) examined technological possibilities for recording *manikay* with multi-track field equipment, in order to create clearer records of individual voices that could be extracted from the dense, heterophonic sonic-whole.

and oscillation of key words and *yäku* (names). Not permitted by transcription, the *heard* voice engages attention as it addresses the listener in a more immediate, personal and inflection-rich way. The timbre of a voice animates linguistic forms, engaging perception.

LE_8.2	Mälka: Song text, Daniel Wilfred, Melbourne, 3.9.2011	01:15
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Timbre also plays an important role in contributing to the ferocity of dancer’s vocal interjections within ceremony, especially the harmonically rich vocalisation, ‘Waahh!’ yelled by Djuwalpaḍa to warn of dangerous animals. In *manikay*, name elicitation is also taken beyond the modality of everyday vocal speech. Words are imbued with a sense of immediacy by the voice that rises in intonation higher than everyday use, in intensity beyond everyday speech. Like the great orator Martin Luther King Jr., whose voice in performance moved beyond form and semantics to corporeal expression — full of a *lived* moral power greater than physical might — name elicitation in *manikay* rises above song. The sacred names of Luṭunba, that ultimate teleological orientation, are intoned above the rapidly striking *bilma*.

Manikay songs are basic, figurative iterations of the *garma* (public) Wägilak narrative (Chapter Four). Name elicitation gives *manikay* an additional brilliance, adding *märr* (power; vitality) to performance as secret/sacred names are called. Invoking the deep names of a clan’s essential constitution, name elicitation is performed by a voice that connects, through performance, with the voices of every other generation.⁷ The sacred *yäku* (names) merge with those of the ancestors, whose substance forms the land and sea, and also the very bodies of Yolḷu (people).

Similar to the elicitation of names in restricted song repertoires (not used in this thesis) is the calling up of the wind in Wata, heard below in the context of *CRB* (LE_8.3). Similar to the timbres of sound discussed in musical description, wind is itself a particular timbre, an ecological timbre. The movement of air gives a particular *feel* to

⁷ Wägilak name elicitation and song at the climax of ceremonies (without *yidaki*) is known as *ḍalkara* (Benjamin Wilfred 2012) — a term that implies full knowledge of the law and sacred business (Zorc 1996). *Ḍalkarra* singing uses ‘big,’ significant song subjects that are not in the *garma* (public) *manikay* repertoires, such as Bäru (Saltwater Crocodile) and Buḷmanydji (Shark) for the Wägilak.

being alive; the sensation of wind is experienced through its movement (animation), whether gentle or ferocious.

LE_8.3	Wata (Wind): Benjamin Wilfred calls up the wind with the AAO; Daniel Wilfred is singing. Quai Branly Museum, Paris, 10.11.2012	00:56
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The *märr* (essence; vitality) and aesthetic brilliance created in a textually rich performance of *manikay* is sustained by a singer's ability to perform with a strong, independent voice and to extend individual song items with conviction. The *liya-waŋa* (head-speech; coda) maintains the dynamic and expressive intensity of the *gumurr* (chest), finishing with the reiteration of key song words on the sustained final pitch. Here, the dynamic never tapers off and the vocal intensity is maintained until the final inflection — a rounding-off or fall-off of pitch (LE_8.4). The longer and stronger the *liya-waŋa*, the more receptive the audience is with cries of 'Yo!' (Yes!), and *Manymak* (Good).

LE_8.4	Raki: <i>liya-waŋa</i> sung by Daniel Wilfred with YWG. Ngukurr, 8.7.2011	00:39
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The *liya-waŋa* extends the performance of movement after the dancers have stopped, holding the vitality of performed form in existence before it is broken with informal chatter and sips of tea between *manikay* items. The length and complexity of the *liya-waŋa* intensifies over the course of a ceremony and the informal rests between songs become shorter. It is not uncommon for there to be around half-a-dozen cries of, 'One more, one more,' as a ceremony is extended by continual repetitions of songs at the climax of ceremonial action and communal involvement. As Daniel Wilfred says, this is when you need to 'go for it! Die or life' (Daniel Wilfred 2010). *Märr* (essence; vitality) in *manikay* depends upon sustained embodiment and engagement, the continuation of song in movement and ongoing, vital action. 'One more!' keeps the power of *manikay* alive.

SC: How do you make *manikay* powerful?

Benjamin W: You have to keep going. Strong voice. A lot of heart. A lot of going up high [...] keep going. Keep remembering. The didj keep going too. Until you die, then you give up [laughs].

SC: When there are more voices, is that more powerful?

BW: Yeah. You just gotta keep doing it. Keep going, until you die.

David W: I might die while playing *yidaki* [laughs]. (Benjamin Wilfred 2011a)

Dance also sustains the performance of movement, contributing another layer of play to the overall performance. When the *yutungurr* (thigh) section of a *manikay* item begins, there is a *movement into action* as the dancers leap forward, advancing toward the singers after holding relatively static poses at the beginning of each song. Tamisari writes of the *märr* (power; essence) embedded in ‘a spectacular dance performance by which a dancer affected, or as Yolngu say *saw* and thus *entered* the inner feelings of the spectator’ (Tamisari 2005, 53). The rhythm of feet moving up and down; pointed elbows quivering with energy; the flick of dust from the ground; the movement of a wrist swishing a bunch of leaves; the back-and-forth advance and retreat of the dance formation in a line; the glint of eyes brandishing a spear — all these elements combine to sustain vitality and ongoing performance. Bodies are caught up in response to song; the individual is lost in the dance, caught up in the play of participation and the persistent groove of the *bilma*.

As successive generations renew the ancestral discourse through ceremony, they also *animate into action* the ancestral text through *ḡalabuluḡu rom* (following law). Performers are led by the play of movement which they enter into, interlocutors led by the movements of a conversation as much as they invest their own selves into it. These dynamics sustain the ancestral text in the present.

In the songs of Djuwalpaḡa, dancers seek *guku* (honey) with eyes that follow where the elbow points. The dancer’s chests, like the *gumurr* (chest) of a song, pull the individual toward the country that Djuwalpaḡa seeks. In singing and dancing, the body is led by a greater narrative, caught up in the ever-renewing vitality of performance. Djuwalpaḡa sings through the *manikay* leader’s voice and dances through the ongoing movements of ceremony in action.



Fig. 8b Benjamin Wilfred presenting his grandfather Sambo Barabara's work *Cypress Pines* (1995), at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 25.5.2010. The play of infill, colour and shapes brings this painting to life (Image: Tobias Titz)



Fig. 8c Benjamin Wilfred presenting his grandfather Sambo Barabara's *The Dead Ones* (2005), at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 25.5.2010 (Image: Tobias Titz)



Fig. 8d Detail of Sambo Barabara's *The Dead Ones* (2005) (Images: Tobias Titz)

Performing movement

The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him. (Gadamer 2006, 98)

Performances of *CRB* do not impede the sustained performance of movement inherent within *manikay*: the oscillations of pitch and text; textural and timbral brilliance; the vitality of movement in dance. As I will show, the AAO contribute to sustaining the performance of movement and momentum in a variety of ways, especially in: the play of choice in improvisation; the aural brilliance of complex textures and timbres; the rich elaboration of the underlying *bilma* groove.

CRB participates in discursive events of musical conversation, ever changing as ‘understanding proves to be an event’ (Gadamer 2006, 308) articulated through various iterations. All of the musicians involved come to know *manikay* by participating directly in the vital play of *manikay*, each individual musician lifted into an ongoing tradition greater than themselves.

In ceremonial contexts, the event of each *manikay* song is separated by its non-event. From the beginnings of the collaboration, improvisations in *CRB* affirmed this structure through separate, imitative improvisations that followed the demonstration of a *manikay* item by the Wägilak singers. The movement between the discrete songs of Wägilak *manikay* and subsequent improvisations allowed the orthodox narrative to be encountered and disclosed ‘from the beginning to the end’ (Benjamin Wilfred 2011a) and in its legitimate sequence. As this narrative came to be filled out in a new way — substantiated in part by the novel inclusion of AAO improvisations — the event of particular songs in the present was lifted above mundane time, joining in communion with all the different but legitimate iterations of this narrative past and future. Performance is animated by this productive tension between the unique and universal.

In hearing and seeing performances of *CRB*, attention shifts between textural layers. These layers might be simultaneously improvised lines, sequential segments of improvisation overlapping with *manikay* singing or a combination of both. In the back-and-forth approach of the early collaboration, shifts of attention between layers were explicit — sections between the AAO and *manikay* singers clearly separate. Yet this is

also the case within more synthetic sections of *CRB: manikay* is animated in a listener's or performer's reception as their attention shifts between simultaneously presented layers within the music. Performance is also animated by these movements of perception between the particular and whole.

In improvisation, choice of what sounds to emit — or not to emit — creates vivacity in realisation. Again, this is another form of movement that animates performance. The largely unplanned, free-improvisational approach of the AAO is latent with anticipations as the music unfolds. This approach to musical creation highlights the vocative address of particular musical events: *happening* is brought to the fore; sounds are seemingly brought out of nothing; a work is conceived in the moment, animated into being. As players address their attention to something particular within the ongoing discourse of the music, they speak into the musical conversation, committing ideas into sound. Each sonic utterance — where it did not before exist — is subsequently subsumed by the greater work, the collective creation which exists beyond the individual.

Trust is everything in improvising, because your contribution during the improvisation will always be heard in relation to the input of the other players, therefore you must trust that input as being in every way as important as your own. Know when to lead and when to withdraw, and always engage with an open mind. The object of the improvisation is the sublimation of the individual into the process of the group. (Grabowsky 2011)

Players courageously bring into sound the future direction of the music, relinquishing control of particular intentions to the collective. Flexibility and highly skilled, receptive listening are imperative to sustaining a performance which would otherwise fall into an incoherent heap. Subjective iterations constitute the collective, just as present iterations of *Wägilak manikay* are lifted into the ongoing performance of the ancestral text, individual fibres woven into the greater blueprint of *raki* (string). In performance, the newness of creativity demonstrates, 'with equal force that things are as they have always been: the authority of their forbears is confirmed by the painting [event] as a record of the performance of that authority (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 26).

Free improvisation draws attention to the dynamic play of musical elements within the work, to their synthesis, contradiction, abrupt or fluid variation (see Chapter Nine). There is alteration in a listener’s aural attention between performing individuals and the collective, intrigue between the parts and the whole. These disparate elements shape each other, resulting in the lack of any authoritative author-persona. A hermeneutic circle, a conversation, evolves:

So there is in listening [as one improvises] an active component and a passive one simultaneously, in the sense that you are receiving information, and immediately feeding it back into the conversation in order to move it forward. (Grabowsky 2011)

A musician conceives of an idea and brings something of it into play — a texture, a rhythm or a combination of sounds — and the collective takes up the game of play. The performance of movement is held in a liminal space that never settles into essentialist representation, sustained by tensions of anticipation and musical responses of imitation, change, development and deconstruction. The players enter into this dialogue in which they are led by the greater conversation as much as their own subjective roles within it. Ultimately, sustaining the conversation becomes a goal in itself, the importance of participation elevated beyond the intermittent results of performance.

The following listening example (LE_8.5) demonstrates the role of improvisation continuing into the silence after a *manikay* cadence point in *CRB*, sustaining the performance of *manikay* through ongoing participation. This example is selected because you can sense the musicians looking for ways in which to continue the music as a collective, to keep it going. *Manikay* is also sustained where individual voices continue to commit sounds and ideas to the animation of a greater whole.

LE_8.5	Djuwalpaḍa: Improvisation beginning with the piano (Paul Grabowsky) and clarinet (Tony Hicks). The double bass (Philip Rex), drums (Niko Schäuble), voice (Benjamin Wilfred) and <i>yidaki</i> (David Wilfred) commit themselves into the music as it emerges. Paris, 10.11.2012	00:42
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Members of the AAO decide between many possibilities within performance. Convergence or divergence with the persistent heterophonic texture of *manikay*, the rhythmic forms or the colour/timbre of other musicians, is a productive means of musical engagement. The dense textural layering of improvised voices that is a central aesthetic force in *manikay* permits improvisations that seems to diverge far from the basic rhythmic and tonal structures of *manikay*.

The following examples demonstrate a number of different approaches to textural layering in *CRB*. The layering of new sonic components into the established heterophony of *manikay* engage the listener as the *manikay* songs are given new colourings — new sonic canvases or backgrounds of *rärnk* (cross-hatching). The following examples (LE_8.6, LE_8.7, LE_8.8) are all taken from the performance of *CRB* in Paris, 2012.

LE_8.6	Gara: A textually dense section of <i>CRB</i> with multiple, independent and equivalent voices. Benjamin Wilfred improvises on Gara text. Paris, 10.11.2012	00:28
LE_8.7	Mälka: 'Next song called long string bag, bush dillybag' (Daniel Wilfred). Four distinct voices in interwoven texture: piano right hand (reiterating <i>dämbu</i>), piano left hand, double bass and drums. Paris, 10.11.2012	00:53
LE_8.8	Raki: Synthesiser (keyboard) used to create a layer of colours and timbres around the continuing groove. David Wilfred improvises on <i>yidaki</i> ; Tony Hicks plays flute. Paris, 10.11.2012	01:03

The above examples demonstrate that playing around with texture and tone-colour through improvisation provides, for the AAO, a key means for *moving* or *animating* sound. The timbral construction of sounds and their combinations are, in *CRB*, as important as structures of melody, harmony and rhythm. Perhaps since Schoenberg coined the term *klangfarbenmelodie* (tone-colour melody)⁸ in 1911 (Kennedy 1994, 471) and European impressionist composers began treating musical colour as a central compositional element in the early twentieth century, timbral change in sound has

⁸ This term described Schoenberg's own use of *tone-colour-melodies* in his composition *5 Orchestral Pieces* of 1909.

been regarded as an important musical possibility. Changing the colour of sound allows it to unfold, shift, move through time or develop: dynamism and vitality are permitted in the face of potential redundancy.⁹

Roland Barthes has identified the aesthetic significance of vocal timbre in contemporary music, naming this difficult-to-define attribute as ‘the grain of the voice’ (Barthes 1977, 157).¹⁰ Improvisations in *CRB* create interest through the different timbral grains produced by particular instrumental voices within the collective — grains that converge and diverge, in fine parallel motion or complex, knotty malformation.

In *manikay*, the grain of the voice is also an integral element in creating living vitality within a performance. As Daniel Wilfred suggests, aesthetic affects are created through the use of different vocal grains: ‘I have the voices for Sambo [Barabara], Roy [Ashley] and mine. Choose which one to use; changing all the time’ (Daniel Wilfred 2010). When performing *CRB* at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Daniel Wilfred used vocal colours and characteristic inflections reminiscent of Sambo Barabara’s singing style.¹¹ Reflecting on the use of this voice as something both invigorating and sad, Daniel chose to imitate Barabara as much as possible because Barabara’s *galay* (wife) was present in the audience (Daniel Wilfred 2010). Here, the grain of the voice connected the performance with elders past; the individual singer giving themselves up into a greater body of *gurrutu* (kin).

Broadly, jazz and improvisation styles have historically embraced timbral alteration as an integral element of musical creation: it would suffice to note John Coltrane’s frequent alteration of fingerings on the same pitch and Miles Davis’ characteristic use

⁹ Ornette Coleman’s theory of *harmolodics*, influential in American improvised music of the late twentieth century, suggests that musical creation should not be limited by the predominance of one, or a combination of, elements such as harmony, melody, rhythm or pulse (Coleman 2013) (see Chapter Nine).

¹⁰ In musicological literature, timbre and colour is understood as a possibility for sound manipulation opposed to the *extensional* experience of form (Chester 1990), for example the experience of diatonic harmony shifting through structures and patterns. In contrast, timbre and tone colour are *intensionally* felt and experienced.

¹¹ Opening the exhibition *Colour country: art from Roper River* (see Bowdler 2009), which featured paintings by Sambo Barabara and Amy Jiwulurr Johnson.

of various mutes within one improvisation (see Evans 2000). Today, guitarists and keyboard players are endowed with a multitude of pedals and effects, which can be used to create new timbres by distorting or altering overtone constructions, note envelopes and relative amplitudes within the tone. To highly skilled musicians, these are not superficial effects but integral possibilities for sound manipulation and musical creation. Likewise, many wind instrumentalists play around with half-a-dozen instruments — flute, piccolo, clarinet, bass clarinet, alto, tenor and soprano saxophones — to the same effect (LE_8.9; Fig. 8f). Colour or timbre alterations are achieved in collective ensembles through the juxtapositions of various sonic layers, an approach evident in *CRB* (LE_8.10).

Paul Grabowsky: So when Benjamin starts singing, Tony, I think we need a timbral change too. We need to mark that somehow.

Tony Hicks: With a different instrument? Righto.

PG: It's a big drama.

(*CRB* rehearsal, Darwin, 22.5.2010)

LE_8.9	Three examples of Tony Hicks' use of instrument selection to provide unique colour within the one concert: piccolo; flute; soprano saxophone. ¹² Monash University, Melbourne, 14.9.2012	01:25
LE_8.10	Djuwalpaḍa: Sustained pedal in the guitar (Steve Magnusson) slowly changes timbre under flute solo (Tony Hicks). A more drastic timbral change occurs when the viola (Erkki Veltheim) enters on the same pitch. The drums (Niko Schäuble) play the Djuwalpaḍa 'Running' <i>bilma</i> mode. (AAO 2010)	00:57

On 22 May, 2010, the AAO and YWG were rehearsing for a performance at the Darwin Entertainment Centre. One concern at this time was the perceived necessity to create a basic, overarching structure to improvisations — in sympathy with the progression of the song series — that fostered a greater sense of unfolding narrative. The intention

¹² Monash University students, forming a small brass ensemble, can be heard in the middle of this example. This group read short musical fragments from prepared charts, conducted in by Paul Grabowsky at particular moments during the performance. The group were, in effect, another instrument within the collective, offering a unique, pre-configured timbre to be *sampled* at the discretion of Grabowsky.

was to create the feeling of beginnings: Djuwalpaḍa’s travels, the start of a journey and the setting into motion a narrative. Grabowsky suggested that this coming into being of sound should be like light emerging in darkness, a movement from nothingness to energy, stillness to action: ‘This is night. Now, the first rays of sun’ (Grabowsky, pers. comm. 2010). Here, the idea of *manikay* as a great animation through narrative was central. Texture and timbre provided a means of structural orientation, creating directional growth and providing the very means of animating sound in performance.

That night in Darwin, the sound of the guitar began the concert at a barely audible dynamic, repeating the same pitch — constantly pulsating — giving movement to a narrative beginning from silence (LE_8.1; Fig. 8e, g). Steve Magnusson (guitar) allowed the pitches that make up the harmonic spectrum (built on the ‘tonic’ of the Wāgilak *dāmbu*) to alternate up and down, allowing the sounds to sparkle and permitting the natural variations of amplitude in each note to shimmer.

The rate of change in the music was slow but not inert, as it seemed to breathe or pulsate — just as the morning star does not sit inert in the sky but twinkles. Other musicians began to enter the texture, events that shifted the colour of the music. This progressive building was mirrored by a gradually increasing dynamic, leading to the beginning of the story, the cadence strike where the *bilma* enter and Djuwalpaḍa begins to walk on his journey, searching for a homeland. As in ceremony, the Wāgilak narrative was born through an animation of sound.

In the recording of this concert opening (LE_8.11), each instrumental voice also reveals additional pitches associated with the *dāmbu* of Wāgilak *manikay*, forming the collective sound of this *dāmbu* as a combination of individual pitches (Fig. 8e). After several minutes, Daniel Wilfred begins singing on just one pitch, animating the *manikay* text with rhythm oscillating on a fixed pitch.

LE_8.11	Opening of <i>CRB</i> . Refer to listening notes below (Fig. 8a). This excerpt is one great textural, timbral and dynamic animation from nothing. Darwin, 22.5.2010	05:35
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Time code for LE_8.11	Identification of events of instrumental entrance and timbral change
00:00	Guitar, shimmering through a harmonic spectrum, shimmering
00:31	Keyboard/synthesiser, low; guitar dynamic slowly building
01:08	Keyboard/synthesiser, subtle pulsations under guitar
01:31	Snare drum (snare off), soft
01:52	Guitar, adds a new pitch from <i>dämbu</i> ; synthesiser increases in intensity
02:16	Piano enters with repeated rhythms, a more brittle sound than the sustained electronic instruments
02:32	Daniel Wilfred enters, soft singing on <i>dämbu</i>
02:54	Flute enters with brief phrases; more drum involvement (tom-toms)
03:18	Benjamin Wilfred enters at a greater dynamic
03:22	Cymbal rolls gradually add more frequent dynamic swells
03:50	Tone colours and dynamics become more strident; rhythmic intensity increases
04:30	Tenor saxophone enters on the 'tonic' of <i>dämbu</i>
04:48	Cadence point
05:02	Djuwalpada 'Walking': <i>yidaki</i> and <i>bilma</i> enter

Fig. 8e Listening guide indicating the progressive entrance of instruments (LE_8.11)

Through this beginning, everyone grows into the performance of movement. Sound is disclosed and the songs are brought into play, emerging as events within experience. The image of a shimmering, rising sun illuminating everything that existed but was not seen, describes a performance of *manikay* that discloses the Wägilak narrative of old into the awareness of the present. The *bilma* finally strike and bring the songs of Njlipidji into full relief.

The musicians discuss this approach to the opening of *CRB* (below), an approach that has come to characterise recent concerts, including those in: Canberra 2010; Goolwa, South Australia 2012; Paris 2012 (LE_8.12 below); London 2012.

Paul Grabowsky: Now that; that is fantastic. It's like the sun coming up. It's like the sun coming up in the morning. And this thing just slowly happens. And all of a sudden the light is in your eyes, and we go 'bang-bang' [claps cadence rhythm]. And we can really let that happen over ten minutes.

Benjamin W: We'll do that.

PG: You know, slowly let it happen. And if that is the only new thing that we do tonight, I'll be very, very happy.

BW: Can we do it again? Let him sing first [Daniel Wilfred], then after, I come in.

PG: It's got this real sense of going somewhere.

BW: OK. One more.

PG: Ok, so we come on stage and I think the first thing we hear tonight is Steve [Magnusson, guitar]. Steve starts this thing.

Philip Rex: Steve Magnusson, sound of the land!

[Laughter. Music starts]

DW: That's the Yolŋu [man, Djuwalpada].

(*CRB* rehearsal, Darwin, 22.5.2010)

LE_8.12	Opening of <i>CRB</i> . Daniel Wilfred: 'First song called Wild Blackfella. He went with his spears. This is the song.' Paris, 10.11.2012	03:24
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Fig. 8f Tony Hicks playing a fife with an array of wind instruments in the foreground. Monash University, Melbourne, 13.9.2012



Fig. 8g CRB with Desmond Wilfred (dancing), Benjamin, Daniel and David Wilfred (l-r), Paul Grabowsky, Philip Rex, Niko Schäuble, Steve Magnusson, Tony Hicks (l-r). The projected image is Sambo Barabara's *Medicine Man* (c. 1997). Darwin, 22.5.2010 (Image: Tobias Titz)

Textures of situation

The Yolngu concept of tradition admits the actuality of individual variation and innovation as a proof of its continuing vitality and authenticity, passed from leader to leader through the successive generations. (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 26)

Manikay is not only a medium of layered musical components, the texture of multiple voices combining to create a performance. It is also layered through various social, cultural, legal and religious contexts, each situation illuminating one aspect of *manikay* as it portends to the greater ancestral text beyond situated iteration. Further, *manikay* is layered through time, each generation building on the ancestral footprint and all that has gone before.

While the blueprint of *manikay* exists, like the *raki* (string) above the individual fibres of each performance, *manikay* is nevertheless disclosed through performances within the particular perspectives offered by context. As a text, Wägilak *manikay* ‘is potential before it is actualized. It is capable of being formed though it is not yet formed’ (Gadamer 2006, 423). And in the actualisation of its iteration, in the experience of its corporeal expression, it is renewed.

The Wägilak narrative is necessarily mediated through individual expression and understanding, otherwise it remains abstract and intangible (Chapter Ten). Ceremony collapses the past and the present, communal and individual, together in a great fusion of horizons, held in the event of the performance — in unique bodies and minds. Like the progressive emergence of revelation in Yolngu textual significations and interpretations, performance of *manikay* discloses the text to ever new horizons: ‘The presentation of the essence, far from being a mere imitation, is necessarily revelatory’ (Gadamer 2006, 114).¹³

¹³ Pervasive Western assumptions hold that experience ‘is valid only if it is confirmed; hence its dignity depends on its being in principle repeatable. But this means that by its very nature, experience abolishes its history and thus itself’ (Gadamer 2006, 342). Such assumptions deny the unique, understanding subject, and these assumptions are contradicted by the Yolngu concept of *gularri* (lifegiving flowing of freshwater). In the great flow of *gularri* (Chapter Six), the individual iteration is separate from, yet inescapably formed by, effective tradition. ‘Gularri shows us that connectedness in separation is not contradictory’ (Yunupingu 2003).

CRB is itself a medium of iteration, a particular voice in the greater realisation of *manikay* through vast time and situation. This observation is reflected in the forms of *manikay*, discussed above, that contain multiple layers of media and voice within a greater constellation. *CRB* is layered on many levels, temporally and structurally. Just like the heterophonic vocal texture of *manikay*, ceremonial performance is a woven tapestry of sound, dance movements, designs, images, language and time, past and present.

The display of Barabara's paintings during performances of *CRB* (see Fig. 8g above) indicates toward the complex relations between design, song and narrative underpinning the Wägilak text. The paintings imply to the intuitive audience member that Yolŋu ceremonial contexts, from which the songs originate, are themselves made up of interconnected and interdependent repertoires of *miny'tji*, *manikay*, *bungul*, *yäku* and *wänja* (design, music, dance names and country). Projected on screen, images contribute another voice to the texture of performance.

Paintings by Barabara, such as the award winning *The Dead Ones* (2005) (shown at the beginning of this chapter), extend the aesthetic of *bir'yun* (brilliance) beyond its intricate *rärrk* (cross-hatching) into the striking use of colour. In his paintings, Barabara embraced the possibilities of new materials, such as fluorescent paint, to extend the traditional aesthetic: 'His work is firmly embedded in terms of subject matter and style, within the relatively fluid traditions of Arnhem Land, whilst exemplifying great personal innovation' (Bowdler 2009, 69).¹⁴ When performing alongside projections of Barabara's paintings, *CRB* seems to extend out of their bright, colourful brilliance; the paintings are, in a sense, a precedent to the rendering of *manikay* with colourful yet complementary improvisation. The legacy of Barabara's painting and the cultural relevance of connecting *manikay* to *miny'tji* is realised by the AAO musicians: 'Grandfather's [Barabara's] stuff is the bedrock. That's what we're building the thing on. That's the foundation. That's the root' (Grabowsky 2011a).

¹⁴ Barabara's work most commonly depicts ceremonial subjects, including the cypress pine, sandridge goanna, saltwater crocodile and Djuwalpaḍa (sometimes referred to as *Devil Devil*).

Importantly, the *CRB* collaborators continually search for new media and technologies of expression — lighting design, projection of images of country or film, surtitles, program notes — recognising the importance of the greater Wägilak narrative expressed in forms beyond just *manikay*, beyond formalism's 'tonally moving forms' (Hanslick 1986).¹⁵ An early step in this direction was the inclusion of footage of women dancing in the concert held at the Australian National University, Canberra, on 22 September, 2010. This footage had been shot during the AAO trip to Ngukurr in July that year and depicted women in brightly coloured clothes dancing to a performance by the YWG (Fig. 8h). A few minutes of this footage was looped throughout the entire performance of *CRB* that evening.

Interestingly, the rhythm of the dancing on the video — slowed down from real-time and not synchronised with the music on stage — created another layer of play within the overall performance. There is a propensity for visual rhythms to pulse in synchronicity or against the aurally received rhythms of music. The speed of the footage on stage created an additional layer of movement in bi-rhythmic contrast to the rhythms heard in the performance — multiple grooves experienced simultaneously.

This video was warmly welcomed by all as important addition to the collaboration, especially as it overcame numerous logistical and financial barriers to having women perform on tour. Further, the video offered an important point of engagement for an urban Australian audience entrenched in cultures of film. This layering of new mediums of expression within *CRB* contributes to the intensification of experience for the audience, pointing toward the complex layered significations in the Wägilak narrative. As in visual art, new media of presentation help to 'articulate the artist's authority in the expanded frame of reference of the new social arenas now addressed by the work' (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 32).

During the 2010 tour to Ngukurr and Darwin, filmmaker Zbigniew (Peter) Friedrich accompanied the AAO, capturing a large amount of footage of people from Ngukurr,

¹⁵ Chapter Two briefly outlined the historic acceptance of new technology amongst Yolŋu and other people in Ngukurr, readily worked into cultural expressions from the mid-twentieth century.

the surrounding countryside, the collaboration in rehearsal, performance and social settings. Prior to performances at the 2012 London Jazz Festival and the Quai Branly Museum in Paris, guitarist Ren Walters produced a film to accompany performances of *CRB* that drew heavily on Friedrich's footage. Given its first showing in the performance at Monash University on September 14, 2012, Walters' film is a fragmented collation of images and video clips related to Wägilak *manikay* and *CRB*, depicting: some basic figurative designs related to the Wägilak narrative; a few song texts and place names; images of family and children in Ngukurr; images of the country around Ngukurr; images of Barabara's paintings (Figs. 8i, j). All of these elements contribute to the constitution of the Wägilak narrative present on stage. Occasional use of sound in the film also added a further aural layer to the music, and incorporated fragments of people's voices, children's laughter and games.

Importantly, this footage draws attention to the historical progression of the collaboration, constituted in wider relationships and events that have come together over time, leading to the very presence of the musicians performing on stage.¹⁶ Through performance alongside this film and Barabara's paintings, the collaboration past and present is brought into the ongoing play of expression. 'Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted' (Gadamer 2006, 297). In *CRB*, tradition is known as in the metaphor *gularri* (flow of freshwater), tradition or ancestral precedent forming the very constitution of the present.

For the Yolngu, the Western convention of seeing — that is, to see a painting [or film] from the past as if it effects some historical closure — has little meaning insofar as all art exists simultaneously in the present and in the past. Time and space collapse towards each other within the frame of reference of the painted image [or performed song]. (Caruana and Lendon 1997, 22)

¹⁶ In discussions with musicians, especially Tony Hicks, it is clear that as the collaboration shifts into new directions, there is wariness of letting *CRB* become a 'postmodern multimedia spectacular that distracts from the heart of the music' (Hicks, pers. comm. 2012). This is not so much a concern about layers of relevant supporting material, such as Walters' video production, but the inclusion of material from outside the history and narrative of the collaboration.

Finally, varied contexts of performance, presentations and educational workshops are also layered together to form the *CRB* collaboration as a rich series of events and not just a performance.¹⁷ Each context allows for the presentation of the Wägilak narrative in a new forum. ‘The coming into play, the playing out, of the content of tradition in its constantly widening possibilities of significance and resonance, extended by the different people receiving it’ (Gadamer 2006, 458). Through novel context, the possibility for continuing the *performance of movement*, the sustaining play of *manikay*, opens up. In every performance of *manikay*, a fibre is rolled into the ongoing *raki* (string), a texture of individual iteration merging into a song beyond the individual voice.¹⁸

Despite opening themselves to conversations outside of local ceremonial contexts, the YWG continue to assert the legitimate, orthodox *ɲaraka* (bones) of *manikay* within the *CRB* collaboration, an existential imperative in the face of often apathetic or ignorant — innocent or otherwise — awareness and history. Like film, through which the Yolŋu have discovered ‘an instrument of education and, through this, political and legal persuasion’ (Deveson 2011, 155), the YWG ‘keep culture strong’ by embracing context as a medium of expression to sustain the ancestral play of *manikay*.

The media of music, dance, design, image, film and language in *CRB* are layered like the vocal textures in *manikay* — a dense play of movement and interaction. Similarly, the varieties of situation that *CRB* presents within are contexts to be embraced as a means of extending the ancestral conversation, sustaining the play of *manikay* through new forms. Textures of multiple media and situation contribute to the performance of a new ceremony, in which past generations, distant homelands, designs, dances and

¹⁷ For example, *CRB* is not only a discreet performance but a collaboration extending into educational residencies at institutions such as the Australian National University’s School of Music (2010) and the Australian National Academy of Music (2011).

¹⁸ Howard Morphy and Philippa Deveson have written, in a similar way, on the place of film in Yolŋu ceremonial expression. They conclude: ‘Films of ceremonies themselves are both whole objects and components to be added to the other manifestations of ancestral action [...] Yolŋu do not see them [films] as an authoritative version that has to be replicated any more that they see sacred objects from the past as more authentic than objects made in the present. They are part of a composite that can be taken apart and put together again (2011, 22)

narratives collapse together in a unique present — a unique present forged as a living articulation of the past.



Fig. 8h The colourful sight of women and children dancing to a performance of *CRB*, Ngukurr, 26.5.2010. Footage of these dancers was projected behind the performance in Canberra on 22 September, 2010



Fig. 8i Ren Walters rendering of the *miny'tji* (design) for Luṭunba, projected behind David Wilfred, Niko Schäuble, Daniel Wilfred and Philip Rex (l-r). Monash University, 13.9.2012



Fig. 8j David Wilfred, with *likandhu-nupan* (elbows pointing) in front of an image of Maxine Wilfred (Benjamin's youngest daughter). Monash University, 13.9.2012

Concluding remarks

Yolngu theory about art represents an archetypal Aboriginal view of the world in which the forms of the present are viewed as a reproduction of the forms of the past [...] Over the years I have recorded many statements in which people denied their creativity and emphasized the unchanging nature of their art. (H. Morphy 2008, 148)

The best we can hope for is that one poet should come across another and put a new poetic work, as it were, in place of the original by creating an equivalent with the materials of a different language. (Gadamer 1986, 11)

Descriptions of *manikay* in Chapters Seven and Eight have drawn on many threads that are, in performance, woven together into a heterophonic, animated whole. These chapters have also shown that the above two statements are not contradictory: discursive articulation is not anathema to, but begins from, reflexive imitation. Our pasts are connected to our futures, constituting our very orientation as we creatively realise tradition anew; recalling Mandawuy Yunupinju's conception of *gularri*, 'connectedness in separation is not contradictory' (Yunupingu 2003).¹⁹

It would be Platonic to assert that dramatically envisioned iterations of *manikay* in contemporary media are not *true* reproductions of the ancestral blueprint or text but *only* representations of tradition rendered through the senses. Rather, in the actualisation of its iteration, in the experience of its corporeal expression, *manikay* is renewed as both the same and different. New media of performance permit the mediation of characteristic forms into unique realisations, and individuals are caught up in the play of tradition disclosing itself with richness and brilliance in the present.

Underpinning *manikay* and *CRB* is a productive relationship between the individual subject and that subject's position within the greater play of tradition; between individual utterance or inflection and the governing forms of a work of art; between the present as unique and the present as constituted by the great, effective past. In performing *manikay*, individuals are caught up in an endless oscillation of perspective

¹⁹ Likewise, *manikay* reveals that 'vertiginous proximity prevents us both from apprehending ourselves as a pure intellect separate from things and from defining things as pure objects lacking in all human attributes' (Merleau-Ponty 2008 [1948], 52).

between these possibilities. Like a conversation, the *manikay* tradition continues to be shaped through this back-and-forth play of interaction. Where the musicians are lost in the performance of movement, in the moment of creation, tradition is sustained. The AAO participate in this discursive animation that has a life of its own: 'This dynamic play of give and take is an ongoing process, a living thing' (Grabowsky 2011).

Through the performed movements of *manikay*, the Wägilak narrative is disclosed into being. Aspects of a greater ancestral text are revealed in heterophonic textures of presentation, by new media of vocalisation and in creative iterations of narrative tenets that are ever the 'same but different.' Music is capable of bringing movement into play through shifting perceptions and attentions, changing texts, textures and timbres. This is exemplified by the heterophonic, interweaving texture of improvised voices; the combinations, alterations and oscillations of text, rhythm and pitch; the *märr* (power) created through the sustained vitality of extended codas and performances; movement in dance; the very happening or event of songs, a movement of disclosure contrary to their non-event.

A parallel aesthetic to *bir'yun* (shimmering) exists in sound, in the performance of movement and the shifting attention of reception. Sound shimmers like *rärrk* (cross-hatching) through movements of colour and texture: timbral changes animate otherwise static forms, a temporal unfolding that brings narrative into being; the vocal grain of the singer connects contemporary performance to elders past.

These movements animate the Wägilak narrative like light shimmering on water, a tangible and dynamic reality rather than a removed, fixed object of attention. As perennial human questions underpin Yolŋu ceremony and the YWG's responsibility to sustain ceremonial narratives, the continued performance of *manikay* animates those questions in the present — not just for Wägilak people but, potentially, for everyone involved. Prefacing the coming chapter, as African-American improvising legend Ornette Coleman puts it, 'Sometimes I play happy. Sometimes I play sad. But the condition of being alive is what I play all the time' (Coleman 2013). Tradition addresses us in our very existence and is not an abstract language of particular forms.

Performance emerges within ever new contexts and situations, and Yolŋu understanding of the ancestral text emerges from progressive revelation amid these contexts. Through performance, something emerges which is beyond the individual or the ensemble, and yet the individual is central to this emergence. Mediated through various technologies of presentation, *CRB* is a coming together as in ceremony, engaging individuals across cultures, situations, generations and history. Even as something new comes out of this collaboration, the *manikay* tradition continues to shape individuals' understandings of one another and our place in society, culture and history.

David W: Sound good?

Paul Grabowsky: I thought that did a lot of things

Daniel W: When I was singing, I feel that power...

David W: And the power went to you mob

PG: It felt very cohesive, felt like we were playing together

Daniel W: Like I feel something in me.

PG: I think we really came together, all together.

(*CRB* rehearsal, Melbourne, 19 March 2011)

In the songs of Njilipidji, the voice of Djuwalpada is not represented; these songs *are* the voice of Djuwalpada singing into the present. The song Gara does not describe the foundation of Njilipidji; the spear *is* Njilipidji, an ancestral law released into flight and grounded in the land today, whenever it is sung. Ancestral law is not an abstract or speculative concept but is the living embodiment of these very things, *ŋalabulunju rom* — life as an ongoing, animated conversation. As Wägilak people continue their ceremonial practices, life reverberates with the original ancestral song.

Chapter nine

'It's our tradition too'

Daniel Wilfred: This is our Wägilak culture. We are sharing in this collaboration, using our culture.

Tony Hicks: Yeah, it's your culture. But it's our culture too. What we are doing, that's our culture.

(Conversation on the road to Ngukurr, 2010)

A child of many parents, born out of wedlock; one would have to say that *jazz* is redolent with irony. (Grabowsky 2010)

Crossing Roper Bar is a collaboration born of many parents. It is an expression grounded in multiple cultures and histories, vocalised by unique individuals. Ironically, this apparent melange perpetuates deeply embedded cultural orthodoxies in its brilliantly diverse realisations, weaving difference together in a great, heterophonic unity. *CRB* is an expression of being in time and place, in present-day Australia, where people coming together across cultural difference — blown together by the *wata* (wind) — suggests better possibilities for the future. In a world brimming with an excess of variability, productive collaboration between different individuals and traditions attests to the rich possibilities of intermingling existence.

As delineated tradition or style, *jazz* may also be said to contain many contradictions intermingling in productive creation. While *jazz* is a nebulous concept and musicians performing under this rubric explore widely diverse idiomatic frameworks and musical languages, they nevertheless perform *jazz*. Through the canon of blues, swing, bebop, cool, soul, funk and free; from America to Asia; the 1920s to the 2010s; through African-American slavery, World War Two, modernism and postmodernism; from the LP to the CD and internet; *jazz* persists as an undercurrent of attitude, a constant of *giving voice* to the individual, the performance of vocative musical utterance and expression. This chapter places *CRB* within *jazz* as a tradition of approach, rather than a history of particular idiomatic forms or structures. So too, the Young Wägilak Group

are considered as individuals seeking to express their voice in new contexts and through the technologies presented them by the AAO.

Writing about music seems second-hand, somehow removed from the reality of performance or participation in listening or dancing, 'a souvenir [...] taken away from the experience' (Abbate 2006, 506). Contrasted with lived performance, talking about music makes little sense to its *reason for being*: even the most banal chart-topping pop song hinges on its bodily dance beat; an *academic* work by composer John Cage, which speaks straight into abstract discourses, does so through the realisation of these ideas in performance.¹ Similarly, the identification of transcribable elements of a performance removes them from the experienced address of performer to receiver: reification seeks repetition and 'the exact repeatability of sounds tends to clash [...] with the idea of the essential uniqueness of the moment that forms part of the jazz attitude' (Pressing 2002, 3).

Following these observations, this chapter does not attempt to classify definitively the AAO's musical approach to *CRB* in terms of stylistic categories, even though expectation of style does alter the perceptions of listeners. Rather, jazz is understood as an approach that *gives space* to the individual, allowing them to articulate ideas, narratives and feelings in performed sound. On this fundamental level, jazz affords Wägilak expressions a basic legitimacy and right to voice, even as this occurs amid novel, dramatically envisioned musical creation.

At a concert of *CRB* in Darwin on 22 May 2010, Paul Grabowsky displayed a slideshow of photographs of African-American jazz greats such as Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman on his laptop, which sat atop the grand piano facing out into the audience (Fig. 9a). Sitting alongside a projected image of Sambo Barabara's painting of Djuwalpada, *Medicine Man* (see Figs. 4c, 8g), these photographs situated the

¹ My father Stephen Curkpatrick has expressed a similar observation, differentiating between *torque* and *talk*. Torque is 'leverage on an axis as power applied through turning, like using a spanner to turn a nut; it is power to effect change; something is loosened or tightened. Talk without torque invariably yields frustration and malaise. Genuine power as skill and energy exhibited through character and purpose is joyous in engaging challenges within creative rhythms of vocation' (pers. comm. 2013).

performance within an effective history of jazz — the present performance articulating into a conversation already oriented by these great musicians.

As in the Yolŋu world, these leading *songmen* (Davis, Coleman, etc.) from a generation-or-two past sustained jazz as an ongoing conversation engaged through new approaches, applying their musical creativity to new contexts and forms of expression in an ever shifting world of technology and connections between people. In a sense, Davis and Coleman perform in *CRB* today through the effective, historical constitution of the AAO musicians. As in local *manikay* contexts, ceremonial performance perpetuates an awareness of life within coordinates of substantiating, effective history. Similarly, American trombonist, composer and scholar George Lewis also moves to reinstate the place of memory and history as integral components orienting improvised music, especially within African-American experiences (2002, 232–33).

CRB today persists within an ongoing stream of jazz, flowing floodwaters of ancestral connection and constitution (see Chapter Six). These streams of liberal, vocative expression shape desires to: establish frameworks permitting increased freedom of expression through improvisation and spontaneity; explore conversational dynamics with responsive, collective creation and collaboration; develop performance techniques and attitudes that allow more subtle, engaged responses towards different musical forms and situations; tell stories through sound with the contemporary technologies, media and contexts on hand.

In *CRB*, traditions play with and against each other, any clear demarcation between the past and present, YWG and the AAO, amorphously dissolved in the realisation of performance. Collaboration between different individuals and cultures is embraced as a positive and productive tension, allowing unique voices to emerge as the collaboration constantly shifts through new manifestations. Romantic appropriations of cultural difference are replaced with a more contemporary, pluralist approach to music, where ‘voices once suppressed or ignored are now being heard, and what they are saying is often strikingly different from conventional accounts’ (Bowman 1998, 356). Violinist Erkki Veltheim conveys this attitude, which is fundamental to *CRB*:

I don't think the AAO could lay claim to the term *manikay* [in what they play], that would seem to me culturally colonialist. I do think something unique must occur as a result of any such dialogue across a great cultural divide, even if it ends up being but a misunderstanding [...] Perhaps the important thing is not the end product, but the very process of open engagement. (Veltheim 2011)

Giving space to individual voices and open engagement are prejudices of the jazz attitude that have allowed *CRB* to continue to shift and change over time as it develops greater nuance of interaction. *CRB* has also allowed the YWG to engage with new ways of performing, developing their ideas of music as interpersonal dialogue and spontaneous creation. Most importantly, *CRB* has allowed everyone involved to realise the amazing possibility for music and performance to bring people together in contexts never before imagined, with futures directed toward new horizons only beginning to open out.



Fig. 9a Ornette Coleman on stage during *CRB*, peering out of Paul Grabowsky's laptop. Darwin, 22.5.2010

The language of the Australian Art Orchestra

There is a particular stream of thought that I think is really relevant to what we do here in Australia [as jazz musicians], articulated well by George Lewis [...] In his view, one of the distinguishing aspects of jazz [...] is that it is all about cultural context and story: the story of the improviser. It's different from the European art tradition where the work and the author are separated. For Lewis, it's about individual agency [...] I'm much closer to the jazz tradition now, doing all the weird stuff that I'm doing with my laptop and my amplifiers, and making sounds nothing like idiomatic American jazz. (Peter Knight, recently appointed director of the AAO; Knight 2013)

Rather than conforming to particular stylistic agendas, the great liberalism at the heart of jazz improvisation — an energetic expression of freedom — allows the music of *CRB* to emerge with substantial variety in each and every performance. The overall, woven whole of performances is constituted by the improvisations of individuals contributing their voice to the play of sounds (Chapter Eight). These shifting threads of improvisation provide a focal point for listener attention and amazement at the ability of performers to spontaneously weave musical lines, shaping the overall sound of the collective. *CRB* is a dynamic, conversational play in the way AAO musician Tony Hicks describes his own project with David Tolley, *The Expose Project*: 'A playground for engaging in joyous investigation of our relationship[s] through sounding' (2011, 65).

Each performer brings a particular set of sounds and approaches (prejudices) to their improvisations. Indeed, playing a specific instrument gives one a particular perspective on music, a technology of approach not only a result of technical possibility — the scope of an instrument's integral timbre, note envelope, range and dexterity — but also the histories, traditions and pedagogies of which that instrument is a part. Despite conscious efforts to break away from convention or to pursue the new, 'technique is content and content is technique' (Schuller 1997) — even deconstruction begins with constructions. Innovation is perused through constant, performed application toward new ways of thinking and realising music.

While all creation begins from a set of technical and conceptual approaches to music, an explicit concern of jazz musicians is finding space for individual voice within or

outside dominant paradigms and idiomatic forms. As a result, improvisation in the jazz tradition is an ideal basis for discursive, non-essentialist engagement with difference:

This notion is at the heart of my concept of music as language, and it is in the spirit of collaboration and communication that the AAO has worked in recent years with musicians from different musical language groups, from Bali, from South India, with classical musicians, with musicians from pop and rock and increasingly with musicians from our Indigenous communities. (Grabowsky 2010)

Because improvisers have learned the value of a courageous approach to their instruments, in that they always search for new ways to do things and new avenues for self expression, they have been in my experience especially good at using music to bridge cultural divides. (Grabowsky 2011)

Central to *CRB* is an approach to collective improvisation resonant with influential directions established by jazz musicians in the latter half of the twentieth century.² The development of *free jazz* was an approach of largely unstructured, collective improvisation. In particular, it gave attention to the notion that improvisation was first and foremost a realisation of individual expression through sounds unhindered by the unnecessary constraints of structural expectation: free jazz sought to improvise form and not only content-in-form.³ Ornette Coleman describes this radical approach: 'I play pure emotion [...] Blow what you feel — anything. Play the thought, the idea in your mind — break away from the convention and stagnation — escape!' (Coleman 2013). Pressing outlines the origins of the *free jazz* movement:

The first unmistakably relevant evidence of free musical improvisation appears to be the home recordings made in the early 1940s in New York by jazz violinist Stuff Smith [Hezekiah Leroy Gordon Smith] and concert pianist Robert Crum. Later, in 1949, pianist Lennie Tristano's jazz group recorded the first spontaneous studio tracks: *Intuition* and *Digression*. (Pressing 2002, 5)

² Recent accolades confirm the importance of *CRB* as a part of jazz histories. These include: *Best Jazz Ensemble* 2010, Bell Jazz Award; *Best Jazz Group* 2011, New York City Jazz Record.

³ Free jazz also liberated timbre, colour and the raw sounds of multiphonics from the predominance of musical elements such as melody and harmony. Expanding conceptions of sound in improvised music reflected movements in the world of visual art and European/American classical music of the period (see Shipton 2007, 539–626).

A decade-or-so after these beginnings, saxophonist Ornette Coleman came to be widely recognised as the great advocate of free jazz, giving name to the concept on his 1960 album, *Free Jazz* (Kingman 1990, 391).⁴ Coleman went on to coalesce his ideas of improvisation into a concept known as *harmolodics*, which has surprising coincidences with the vocal textures in *manikay* (Chapters Five and Eight). In *harmolodics*, a group of musicians improvise collectively, basing their improvisations on a distinct musical fragment or theme, simultaneously responding in their own unique way by drawing out particular aspects of that theme. No one line is more important than any other and 'the fine points of each player's phrasing and inflection are deliberately invoked to render each voice distinct' (Palmer 1993). Coleman's biographer describes his approach to improvisation, in this instance going beyond the orthodox structures of *manikay*:

The nature of improvisation, in Coleman's view, is incompatible with predetermined patterns, be they harmonic, rhythmic or structural; the pre-existent form should not determine the improvised line, the improvisation should instead *create* the form. (Wilson 1999, 37)

Improvisation foregrounds decision. The largely unplanned, free-improvisation approach of the AAO highlights the vocative address of particular musical events: the event of their happening is brought to the fore, as an approach to sound is seemingly brought out of nothing, conceived *in the moment*. Here, as in *manikay*, 'art is only about happening' (Threadgill and Fischlin 2011, 7). Players address their attention to something particular within the ongoing musical conversation and commit a thought to sound, generating ongoing discourse among the collective. Paul Grabowsky expands on this tactical 'thinking on your feet,' that has been described as a game of what-to-do and when-to-do-it, 'creative problem solving in real time' (Ross 2011, 1):

Effective improvisation requires a flexibility of response, based on knowledge of what belongs where, and how best and most creatively to make decisions in the moment [...] The

⁴ Pianist Cecil Taylor was, independently of Coleman, another key architect of the *free jazz* direction of the 1960s. Other players (especially in the United States) with intersecting interests were Sun Ra, John Coltrane, Evan Parker, Richard Abrams and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Pharaoh Saunders, Miles Davies and Archie Shepp (Pressing 2002).

spur of the moment, a wonderful word-picture, is exactly where improvisation takes place. A true improvisation lives for, and in, the moment of its creation. So you can imagine that an extended improvisation is the sum of countless millions of improvised decisions, each one existing only in the passing flash of its execution and yet somehow managing to be part of something utterly coherent. Even improvisations that are made up of seemingly random and disconnected events can have an inherent logic not immediately evident; it remains the quality of the concept, and the ability of its creator(s) to realise it, that makes the difference between good and bad improvising. (Grabowsky 2011)

Playing the game of improvisation demands a certain reliance on technical ability and musical aptitude. Nevertheless, 'the attraction of the game, which it exercises on the player, lies in this risk. One enjoys a freedom of decision, which at the same time is endangered and irrevocably limited (Gadamer 2006, 95). Limitations (or possibilities) are created by the sounds and ideas of other musicians. In *CRB*, the freedom of the YWG to sing *manikay* with autonomous discretion becomes an irrevocable framework of performance. Productively, the voice of *manikay* within the collective is used to shape improvisations through apparent musical divergence and convergence.

In this sense, *manikay* becomes a basic *chart* for performance, a musical theme responded to or an expected musical utterance that is increasingly understood and accurately anticipated as the collaboration matures. *CRB* is a conversation that takes pride in its respectful response to Wägilak *manikay* and does not reach the revolutionary extremes of Coleman's (theoretical) *free jazz*, doing away with any preconception of structure.⁵ Rather, AAO musicians are sympathetic to the *naraka* (bones) of Wägilak *manikay* necessarily underpinning culturally legitimate performance (Chapter Five). While improvisations remains relatively free, the approach of *CRB* displays some key parallels with Bill Evans' description of the seminal Miles Davis album, *Kind of Blue* from 1959 — even as the music manifests with dramatically different results:

⁵ Theoretically contrary to Gadamer's conception of prejudice as a foundation for developing understanding, 'Coleman saw *Free Jazz* as epitomizing liberation from preconception, and its absence of formal structure and harmony as allowing musicians who were normally restricted by their training to discover more about themselves' (Shipton 2007, 572).

This conviction that direct deed is the most meaningful reflection, I believe, has prompted the evolution of the extremely severe and unique disciplines of the jazz or improvising musician. Group improvisation is a further challenge. Aside from the weighty technical problem of the collective, coherent thinking, there is the very human, even social need for sympathy from all members to bend for the common result [...] As the painter needs his framework of parchment, the improvising musical group needs its framework in time. (Evans 2000 [1959], 2)

As the YWG seek to foster engagement with *manikay* traditions by bringing Yolŋu and Balanda (whitefellas) into the participation of ceremonial performance (Chapter Three), so too is the AAO at heart a collaborative ensemble. Many of their projects involve the sympathetic yet creative engagement with different musical styles from around the world; the discursive, performed exploration of musical forms and concepts unfamiliar. These various projects demand flexibility in response and sensitivity in listening amid radically different contexts of collaboration. The musical and technological materials available to the AAO as improvising musicians — their instrument, abilities and ideas — present them with opportunities for conversing with music from Chennai, Bali, Japan and beyond.

Based on an ethos of expanding assumptions and knowledge of music through collaboration, each of the AAO's projects manifests in dramatically different ways, seeking fresh approaches to music that resonate with the cultural traditions they converse with. Since its foundation in 1993, the AAO has fostered these types of engagements, trailblazing a new direction for Australian music that is more engaged with the rich cultures in our global region and multicultural society, developing strong, ongoing partnerships. 'One of the primary aims of the Australian Art Orchestra has been to create situations allowing for a free and open exchange of musical and dramatic ideas between different cultures and traditions' (AAO 2013). The predominance of improvisation at the core of the AAO's musical conversations is central to these engagements. As George Lewis explains:

In performances of improvised music, the possibility of internalising alternative value systems is implicit from the start. The focus of musical discourse suddenly shifts from the individual, autonomous creator to the collective. (2002, 234)

In 2000, the AAO began working with Balinese musicians and composers in a project named *Theft of Sita*, directed by Nigel Jamieson (LE_9.1). This project incorporated music, song, story-telling, puppetry and video in a telling of the Ramayana narrative that relayed the ancient Sanskrit epic in Bahasa Indonesian (a modern language) and with particular focus on pertinent themes of revolution, democracy, corruption and money. Paul Grabowsky worked closely with new-music composer I Wayan Gde Yudane and Balinese poet Ketut Yuliarsa, to compose this very different, intriguing work.

LE_9.1	Excerpt from the <i>Song of Sita</i> , from the collaboration <i>Theft of Sita</i> . The singer is Shelly Scown (AAO 2000)	00:47
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An insistence on equal partnership with Indonesian artists, the respect of culturally different expertise, the use of musical imitation as an important means of engagement and a commitment to better understanding the forms of Balinese music shaped this collaboration in a way similar to *CRB*. Paul Grabowsky reflects on *Theft of Sita*:

Cross cultural collaborations are delicate situations. In an age where the term ‘world music’ has come to disguise a multitude of musical crimes and in which sampling technology has resulted in wide spread looting of cultural artefacts, reducing everything to the status of the ‘found object,’ the onus on our creative team has been to approach the composition process as a partnership.⁶ (Grabowsky 2013)

Other collaborations undertaken by the AAO follow similar models and languages of *crossing over*, but with hugely diverse results. *The Chennai Sessions (Into the Fire)* brings Indian Carnatic musicians, composers and virtuoso Mridangam player Guru Karaikudi Mani into the AAO, forming performances that explore, predominantly, the great rhythmic possibilities of music (LE_9.2): ‘The rhythmic intricacies and improvising

⁶ Feld writes about the emergence of the genre *world music*, a label which Grabowsky despises, identifying that the 1980s were a period when world music really started to take off and attract a lot of popular attention due to the high profile, highly financed commercial marketing of record companies, notably: the Beatles’ adventures with Ravi Shankar in the 1960s and 1970s; ‘Paul Simon’s *Graceland* (1986) with South African musicians; David Byrne’s *Rei Momo* (1989) with Latin musicians’ (Feld 2000, 149).

practices that reside at the core of both the South Indian Carnatic tradition and the Western jazz tradition are revealed in this program in virtuosic splendour' (AAO 2013).

LE_9.2	Opening of <i>Sacred Cow's Tail</i> , from <i>The Chennai Sessions</i> (AAO 2008)	01:42
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Another collaboration, *The Hollow Air* directed by trumpeter Philip Slater, explores possibilities of timbral and tonal variation through improvisation with Japanese shakuhachi player Riley Lee. *Kura Tungar: River Songs and Stories* (also *Ruby's Story*) was a project with Aboriginal singer-songwriters Ruby Hunter and Archie Roach that has a more fixed compositional/arrangement base but nevertheless attempts to render these charts with vibrant colour and depth through the process. Other eclectic projects such as *Soak*, 'influenced by artists such as Arvo Pärt, Henryk Górecki, Brian Eno, Radiohead, Dust Brothers and Miles Davis' and *Ringing the Bell Backwards*, are collaborative in their juxtaposition of multiple strands of European and American traditions and performers. Here, as in all AAO engagements, unique music emerges through the productive interplay of diverse voices.

I see *CRB* as being part of the inter/cross cultural stylistic block — referring to *Into the Fire*, but also to the Hunter/Roach collaboration [*Kura Tungar*], as well as the early *Theft of Sita* project. I think *CRB* is well on the way to matching the degree of interaction within these projects, which have the *advantage* of their artistic traditions being related more closely. [These projects are] steeped in a mix of traditions, mainly Western classical and jazz, with a typical 'Aussie' approach, i.e. having enjoyment of the process and recognising performance as an integral part. (Schäuble 2011)

The AAO conceive of music as a possibility for engaging with other people and cultural expressions, bringing new aspects and colours into pervasive musical discourses and paradigms. By providing space for personal expression and conversation, these projects open the horizons of individuals through interpersonal engagement in sound. Such principles, contiguous with attitudes of vocative expression born in jazz histories, have become the basic language of this originally Australian ensemble. Improvisation is at the heart this language, articulated in performance. But beyond their approach to musical language, the AAO create beautiful music, as sound engineer John O'Donnel confirms:

It's extraordinary [...] this band, it's just an extraordinary group of people that, musically, don't seem to have any kind of fear or notions that they can't do something. They sit down there and they go, 'That's a challenging piece of music to improvise to,' yet somehow they create beautiful music. (O'Donnel in McLaughlin 2005)

Musical voices

In speaking, one word brings forth another, and hence our thinking gets promulgated. A word becomes real when it proffers itself in our speaking on its own out of however thoroughly pre-schematized a thesaurus and customary usage. We speak that word and it leads to consequences and ends we had not perhaps conceived of. (Gadamer 2006, 552)

Every musician involved in *CRB* brings their own voice to the project. These unique voices are the very possibility for creativity; each musician has something different to say. Every improvisation is also a unique response within time and place. Players speak into the conversations going on around them, the ongoing conversations of tradition that constitute their very orientation to performance. Within the great liberal tradition of jazz improvisation, individual players perform dynamic and colourful responses to Wägilak *manikay*, illuminating this vocative attitude towards music as a history from which they emerge.

The following table (Fig. 9b) describes characteristics which, in many instances, represent the improvisational approach of each player from the AAO, based on the 2010 album (recorded in 2009). On this recording, Wägilak approaches to improvisation are conservative, showing little divergence from the idiomatic forms of Wägilak *manikay* (see Chapter Five): YWG realisations of *manikay* do not extend to 'the generation of musical structure in real time' (Lewis 2002, 215), a characteristic of improvised music in Europe and America after 1950. Developments in the approach to improvisation of the YWG are discussed shortly.

Within the collective ensemble of *CRB*, individual approaches toward improvisation emerge; from these individual approaches, a collective emerges. The below descriptions should only be considered representative to a degree and are ultimately

generalisations, useful here as an illustration of the collaboration as a collection of distinct voices. Direct quotes from these musicians follow.

Musician	General approach to improvisation on <i>CRB</i> album	Example	Length
Tony Hicks, winds	Use of rapid passages to create colours around the <i>yidaki</i> or <i>manikay</i> voices. Frequent changes between different instruments.	LE_9.3 (Djuwalpada)	00:21
	Solo improvisations based on the intervallic material of <i>manikay</i> , elaborating key pitches with ornaments, tonal inflections and 'jazz' phrases. ⁷	LE_9.4 (Birrkpirrk)	00:45
Erkki Veltheim, violin/viola	Melodic and harmonic oriented fragments; extended sections of improvisation often follow the intervallic structure of <i>manikay</i> . Harmonic sequences and pitch series suggest a strong connection with European traditions, especially in their intervallic construction. ⁸	LE_9.5 (Birrkpirrk)	00:35
Paul Grabowsky, keyboards	Rhythmically repetitive ideas, based on the <i>bilma</i> cadence rhythms, move through complex harmonic patterns or pitch series. Alternatively, simple repetitive ideas are moved through temporal shifts, or rhythmic contraction/expansion. ⁹	LE_9.6 (Raki)	00:51
	Creation of complex timbres through the use of synthesised sounds or extended piano techniques, such as plucking the strings. ¹⁰	LE_9.7 (Djuwalpada)	00:29
Niko Schäuble, drums	Alternations between fluid rhythmic gestures and more regular, repetitive (although complex) grooves. Imitation of <i>bilma</i> modes and cadences. ¹¹	LE_9.8 (Djuwalpada)	00:29
Philip Rex, double bass	High degree of rhythmic interaction with the <i>bilma</i> groove, providing an underlying pulse and energetic drive.	LE_9.9 (Galpan)	00:36

⁷ Also LE_7.19

⁸ Also LE_7.20

⁹ Also LE_7.14 and LE_7.16

¹⁰ Also LE_8.8

¹¹ See Chapter Seven

Stephen Magnusson, guitar	Use of timbral <i>pedals</i> (sustained colours) that provide a sonic background over which action occurs. Subtle shifts in timbre and heavy use of effects create interest. Occasional melodic solo. ¹²	LE_9.10 (Galpan)	00:51
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Fig. 9b Characteristic approaches to improvisation in *CRB*, based on the 2010 album (AAO 2010)

Being a melodic player, everything I do is like a lead statement. To form those statements I had to develop new techniques and approaches for exploring micro-tonality, and as my own practice developed and my ears became more attuned to the music, it stopped sounding out of tune. It was as if a whole new world opened up. (Tony Hicks in Power 2010)

I have tried different approaches, including attempting to create incidental sounds that follow the story of the *manikay*, as well as attempting to deliberately play *against* the *manikay* and create a strong musical argument based on my own interests: for example, trying to exaggerate the differences between our two musical cultures. (Veltheim 2011)

I am trying to grasp the rhythmic flow, which is different from the music I usually play. Having learned about the deeper meaning of the songs, I am approaching playing with the narration/story in mind, as the music of the songs — mostly in regard to pitch — are all very similar. I do try to interpret the meaning of the song and *translate* it into my own musical language, rather than just imitate the Wägilak style. (Schäuble 2011)

When [the Wägilak musicians] play, they don't adhere to strict tempos like other types of music do. That led me to thinking that their concept of time was fundamentally different. We tend to chop time up and subdivide it into minutes, hours, weeks and months; we do the same with music. (Philip Rex in Power 2010)

The above statements point to the collaboration as a discursive conversation between ideas and approaches. Not attempting to hold *manikay* within a singular, definitive musical framework, the AAO take a risk: an engaging performance that does not fall into an incoherent heap — or float away in ungrounded pluralism — must rely on the skill of musicians to respond tactfully and lucidly on stage. In real time, individuals respond to the musical situation ever-emerging around them. For the AAO musicians, the collaboration is understood as a possibility for musical exploration and the

¹² Also LE_8.10

excitement of discovering new approaches inspires creativity. Allowing Wägilak approaches toward music to work into their own assumptions and language, both *manikay* and AAO improvisation are allowed to grow into new colours, shades, textures and directions.

Key to the viability of improvised performance being sustained through the course of an hour long *manikay* series is a willingness to forgo fixed, singular ideas of how the music should take shape. The improvised collective is a paradox: every player must lead and every player must follow. Further, in every moment each musician is responding to both the immediate situation and a sense of greater musical development or course of events. Questions that run through a musician's head might be: Where is the music going? What could happen next? How can I show my intentions to others in what I perform? What are the intentions of others? How long can I lead in this direction? These dynamics engage perceptive listeners in the audience and within the ensemble. The collaboration unfolds playfully as movement is created and narrative animated.

Since the 2010 album musicians of the AAO have, to various degrees, moved beyond the approaches to improvisation set out in the above table (Fig. 9b). Continual development of the project and personal musical exploration has always been an aim of *CRB* rehearsals — the *CRB* album reifies only an instance of this process (see Fig. 9e). Tony Hicks' Master's thesis (2011) explored his own process of development in great detail. Although he traces his approach to improvisation over a number of years and through different projects, a pervasive goal remains the liberation of performance from old 'codes of production,' seeking to allow 'for more contextually sensitive contributions within a range of unconventional music making contexts' (Hicks 2011, 65):

By 2012, my individual approach had evolved and matured significantly due to my intensive investigation into textural and microtonal techniques to liberate me from the prejudices and effective histories of my jazz-based melodic language and traditional instrumental techniques. This evolution of approach can be heard by comparing my contributions to the 2009 and 2011 [*CRB*] studio recordings and the Paris concert [...] The process of change that

took place was partly inspired by working in *CRB*. This process involved the gradual dismantling of idiomatic melodic approaches to my instruments in free improvised contexts. (Tony Hicks, pers. comm. 2013)

The below table (Fig. 9c) gives a few select examples that highlight Hicks' change in approach to *CRB*. All listening excerpts have been introduced in previous chapters.

<i>Manikay</i> song	Approach to improvisation	Context
Birrkpirrk 'Goodbye'	Harmonic/melodic approach imitates singers pitch structure; attention given to melodic ornamentation and vocal-like inflection around this content	<i>CRB album</i> (AAO 2010), recorded 2009 LE_9.4
	Greater melodic and harmonic flexibility; attention to timbral modification and textural layering within the ensemble contributes to the overall intensification of sound	<i>CRB concert</i> 2012, Paris LE_7.10
Gara	Improvisation gravitating around <i>Wägilak dāmbu</i> as a <i>tonal</i> centre; diatonic approach; evenly proportioned rhythmic constructions (see Fig. 7t)	<i>CRB album</i> (AAO 2010), recorded 2009 LE_7.19
	Focus on timbral modification and use of microtonal intervals; rhythmic sequences do not fit neatly into the underlying groove	<i>CRB concert</i> 2012, Paris LE_8.6
See also the discussion of textural layering and timbral animation (Chapter Eight), LE_8.6 through LE_8.10		

Fig. 9c Comparison of Hicks' earlier and later approaches to improvisation in *CRB*

So too, the forum of *CRB* has allowed the YWG to engage with new ways of performing and to explore ideas of music as interpersonal dialogue and spontaneous creation.¹³ Engaging with the AAO musicians, who never play the same thing twice, presents the YWG with a challenging context. As the *manikay* leader in more usual, local contexts of performance shapes a performance by selecting and then leading in songs at an appropriate time, Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred have become adept at finding opportune moments during AAO improvisations at which to begin the next song item. If the music is soft and gentle, the *manikay* leader will respond by bringing the song in slowly, extending the *ɲurru-waŋa* (nose-speech) so that the full singing voices emerge gradually and not abruptly, out of the humming. If the improvisations are intense, then the *manikay* is brought in with great energy and vigour, the *bilma* cutting through any volume the AAO can muster.

When Daniel Wilfred joined the *CRB* ensemble in 2010, there was a clear shift towards more improvised interaction from the YWG during performance. This has manifest in a number of ways. Particularly, where the YWG are engulfed by the sound of the AAO or caught up in the groove of the bass and drums, they feel no urgency to begin the next *manikay* item. Instead, they improvise along with the other musicians in the characteristic ways described below (LE_9.11 through LE_9.13). YWG improvisations occurring between the *manikay* items are a genuine part of the innovative mix.

LE_9.11	Improvisations by Daniel, Benjamin and David Wilfred in Raki and Birrkpirrk: Syncopated vocal interjections, <i>yidaki</i> overtone ‘hoots,’ and repetitive <i>bilma</i> patterns within improvised sections reinforce the underlying <i>groove</i> , and are often accompanied with dancing. Also, the rhythmic interjection of animal sounds such as the cry of the Birrkpirrk. The guitar solo is by Ren Walters. Monash University, 14.9.2012	01:25
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¹³ While Daniel and Benjamin Wilfred are distinct and unique singers within the ensemble, they are here considered together as their general approach to improvisation is similar. More space would be needed to draw out the intricate subtleties between their respective approaches.

The following examples demonstrate Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred’s innovative opening to a performance of *CRB* (LE_9.12) and David Wilfred’s *yidaki* improvisations in the same concert (LE_9.13). Daniel and Benjamin create a new beginning to the concert not at all based on the conscious perpetuation of the *manikay* tradition or material from any previous concert. This opening (LE_9.12) is improvised for its drama, an expression conceived and then realised in sound, in real time: ‘I sing, “Ahhh, ohhh.” That sound come from nowhere’ (Daniel Wilfred, pers. comm. 2012). From the outset, Benjamin and Daniel set up this performance as a conversation that emerges on stage as it is performed. Other musicians respond to this, leaping into action after the sudden *bilma* strike.

LE_9.12	Opening of <i>CRB</i> improvised by Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred. This excerpt fades back in as the singers return to improvise on the same motif at a later stage. Monash University, 14.9.2012	03:08
LE_9.13	David Wilfred improvising on the <i>yidaki</i> . Daniel Wilfred, singing without the <i>bilma</i> , bends his song to the AAO groove. Monash University, 14.9.2012	00:28

Individual improvisation and decision making, connected yet separate within the overall collective, engages the attention of the listener. The tension between the shape of an individual’s discreet musical approach and the way this shapes the course of the music (and vice versa) provides a key dynamic animating aural reception of the music (Chapter Eight). Instead of a singular, structuring point of view, an individual must be actively engaged in relationship with other players visually, aurally, conceptually and proximately.¹⁴

You hear Paul [Grabowsky]? You hear that wind sound he makes? We just listen that orchestra, hear that song. You listen to Tony [Hicks], playing that saxophone [imitates saxophone]. David [Wilfred] play the bass, that didj — like the drums. We listen; just play

¹⁴ There has been a conscious effort to bring about more interaction between the visibly different instruments and forms of music, and within interpersonal communication on stage. During the 2011 recording sessions, more musical interaction between players and singers was generated by an intimate seating arrangement in which the YWG was interspersed amongst the AAO musicians — not all that dissimilar to the *bunched-up* sitting arrangements in *manikay* performance in public ceremony.

along [...] I make that new song tonight. I was sad. I sing that new song for all my friends [in the AAO]. I will miss you mob. Then make that sound for the Birrkpirrk [...] You see Ben? Just dance — like a mad man! (Daniel Wilfred, pers. comm. 2012)

Because of the nature of free improvisation, it is difficult to generate large sections of homo-rhythmic or homo-tonal synchronicity. When they do occur, such sections provide contrast, even relief, from dense group improvisation. The AAO often discuss approaches that would allow for more sparse and subtle sections of music, and more independent spaces for individual voices to emerge. There is an explicit desire in the ensemble to develop an overarching framework of progression through sections of distinct sound combinations: 'The whole thing for me is a story that seems to build and on the CD it's full on right at the start' (Schäuble, pers. comm. 2011). Paul Grabowsky, Tony Hicks and Philip Rex discuss:

PG: I think there is great drama in that, in that music. And I think we are not always really getting that drama.

TH: Cause that's what I'd really like to see is...

PG: Less playing.

TH: Less of everyone playing.

PG: Yeah, that's right. Duo's, trio's, solos.

PR: Breaking it down, less of the frenetic sort of stuff where we're all in.

(Rehearsal in Melbourne, 21.3.2011)

One obvious means of creating space or developing a sense of overall narrative progression is the inclusion of short, composed fragments within the music — points of convergence. During rehearsals in Melbourne in March 2011, Schäuble brought along some charts he thought might suit the purposes discussed. These were subject to some experimentation but no definitive decision on whether it was a good idea or not. Some players still felt that the music should be completely free from premeditated structures, allowing it to continue to evolve into something unobstructively resonant with *manikay*. During the recording session in May 2011, Grabowsky also brought some composed charts into the studio. These were played

once and then abandoned as they did seem to conflict, pastiche like, with the central focus on Wägilak song (LE_9.14).

LE_9.14	Djuwalpaḍa 'Brothers and Sisters': rehearsal using composed fragments. Melbourne, 19.3.2011	02:08
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Such issues are ongoing, interesting points of discussion within the ensemble. The following conversation occurred between Paul Grabowsky, Erkki Veltheim and Tony Hicks:

PG: As we now know the songs quite well — or we are getting to know them — I think that we could actually have, from time to time, a little more structured music which goes with the song [...] And maybe music that launches out of the song into a composed piece of music, which is then a kind of a platform for improvisation. So I want to try and take it to the next level, and I think that all this talk about the look [lighting, visuals etc.] is really important too.

(to EV) I'd really like you to write some things, little fragmentary compositions that, in turn, set up various sorts of possibilities for exploitation.

EV: You think that everyone could write something?

PG: If anybody wants to write something they should. I think the more we can collectivise that process, the more interesting the results will be.

TH: Are you talking about? Little audio cues? Musical cues?

PG: Well I know what I would do. I would write a little kind of head. Like a head arrangement for something, which would either be designed to sync with a particular part of one of the songs, or it comes out of the *manikay* cadence, and that leads in turn to something; it sets up another kind of environment. So they're the kinds of things I'm thinking about. Like the line in Wata [Wind], that's a good example.

(Rehearsal in Melbourne, 21.3.2011)

The 'line in Wata' that Grabowsky refers to is a composed sequence of pitches played by the AAO at the beginning of this track on the 2010 album (Fig. 9d; LE_9.15). This is an effective addition to the song and not an incongruous fragment, as Grabowsky conceives the motion and timbre of the instrumental sounds sympathetically with the *manikay* narrative: the picking up of a breeze that carries away the spirit of the

deceased. This section is structured like a series of breaths, the gentle contours animating an eerie pitch sequence which bends around like a fluid, gentle breeze. This example (LE_9.15) also demonstrates the skill with which the YWG enter into the established texture with their *manikay* song.

LE_9.15	Wata 'Gentle breeze': composed section with bass clarinet and violin. See transcription below (Fig. 9d) (AAO 2010)	02:08
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rhythmically free

Bass clarinet and violin

2

3

4

5

6

7

Voice enters

Fig. 9d Rhythmically approximate transcription of the composed pitch-series opening Wata (LE_9.15)

As each of the musicians participating in *CRB* bring their own musical voices and ideas to the collaboration, the resulting music constantly shifts in manifestation, bending and twisting like the wind. Musicians are moved to explore new ideas, sympathetically listening and engaging with one another while simultaneously expressing themselves through musical utterance. 'Connectedness in separation is not contradictory' (Yunupingu 2003) and the back-and-forth interactions between individuals and ensemble productively create a work of living, moving vitality. In this dynamic conversation with and amid various traditions and subjectivities, individuals find a voice of their own; each unique voice plays a vital role in sustaining and revitalising the traditions they ultimately move within.



Fig. 9e Rehearsals for *CRB* involve much discussion and experimentation. Ngukurr, 25.5.10

Something emerges

The insight gained by all participants through intense workshops has been profound. I hope we will be continuing along this path. I also hope that the *flow* of material can also work in the other way: the Wägilaks interpreting songs of from *our manikay* tradition. (Schäuble 2011)

Through the perspectives that each individual brings to improvisation and performance, *CRB* is shaped from productive prejudices. As this occurs, there is a conscious effort to continue to break down barriers of *us-and-them*, AAO and YWG, to forge new, shared horizons that stem from the experiences and insights of collaboration.

Metaphorical language often betrays the prejudices through which understanding or interpretation takes place. Conversely, in understanding the metaphors used by an interlocutor from another cultural background, situated horizons of understanding are expanded (Chapter Six). All understanding is interpretation and situation remains the very possibility of having perspective. Our voice as an individual is our ability to respond creatively within the productive framework of situation. During a public lecture at the Australian National Academy of Music, Grabowsky's use of language in response to a question from the audience demonstrated just this: the particular prejudices of apprehension from which he begins to interpret and create (perform) shape his understandings of *manikay*.

In this exchange, Grabowsky was asked, 'What entry points did you find, when you first heard this music, were most present for you? Were you looking predominantly at rhythmic construction, or is there a role for harmonic progression [in *manikay*]?' Interestingly, 'What seems to be the thesis-like beginning of the interpretation is in reality already an answer, and like every answer the sense of an interpretation has been determined through the question that is posed' (Gadamer 2001, 49). The audience member framed their question with terms such as *particular musical element*, *rhythmic construction*, and *harmonic progression*. To this question, a coy Yolŋu response might have been, 'There are no musical *particulars* in *manikay* that you can take away from anything else — it is all the same; all one. We do not *construct*

clapstick modes as they have always been like that; we cannot make them. The intervallic patterns do not take us forward in *progression*. They are our ancestors; they connect us back.'

Grabowsky's response to the questioner used the following expressions, even though he was well aware of the theoretical limitations of such terms in regard to *manikay*: melody line; micro-detail; uniformity of shape; variations; heterophony; relationship between lines; synchronisation points; line-against-line; 5/8 metre; cadence. Despite the conceptual and historical disjunctures between Western musical terminology and Yolŋu words about music, the prejudices of language nevertheless underwrite the possibility of engagement. The concepts we hold and through which we articulate allow us to begin conversation and, through that conversation, to come to richer understandings.

Similar terms have been used throughout this thesis — although interrogation of these concepts has generally occurred implicitly.¹⁵ Linguistic constructs allow us to begin to approach difference across cultural and temporal divides. 'In all understanding an application occurs, such that the person who is understanding is himself or herself *right there* in the understood meaning' (Gadamer 2001, 47). The constant performance of questioning and experimentation with ideas, in relation to other ideas, is necessary to expand horizons of understanding. Grasping after the structural forms of another's musical ideas is a beginning (Chapter Seven), which can be extended into discursive interaction and realisation (Chapter Eight). Through conversation with another individual or culture, our perspectives are transformed because we do not exist on our own:

To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were. (Gadamer 2006, 371)

¹⁵ For example, Chapter Five interrogated dominant conceptions of melody and harmony as separate *horizontal* and *vertical* planes; the Wägilak notion of *dämbu* offers an alternate perspective.

AAO musician Tony Hicks explores a similar concept through the terminology of *transculturation* (2012). Transculturation as a theory concerns the productive interface between converging cultures where new cultural expressions are produced, a concept largely developed by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (Ibid; Berry and Epstein 1999). Hicks' research demonstrates the willingness of AAO musicians to go beyond performance: time and energy is spent on interrogating theories of intercultural engagement and, in the process, questioning personal assumptions about such issues.

Musically, this project [CRB] forced a further redefinition of my improvisation conceptions and musical philosophies by revealing the habitual nature of Western musical constructs such as tonality and temperament. A new language was required that could express the raw power and transcultural potential of this collaboration [...] improvisation can exist to drive evolving creative processes, leading to profound creative transformations and the development of new languages.' (Hicks 2011, 2–3)

Similarly, Erkki Veltheim completed a Master's degree on the connection between music and ritual, with direct implications for his approach to CRB: 'Perhaps the important thing is not the end product, but the very process of open engagement' (Veltheim 2011). Niko Schäuble and Paul Grabowsky comment in a similar way:

Apart from the artistic aspects, this collaboration has revealed many things to me, philosophically and socially. As different as our cultures may be, so similar are we as human beings: we all love our family and friends, we all crave respect, we all laugh at silly jokes. (Schäuble 2011)

The trust earned, ability to listen and understanding of the process by each participant are the rewards of collaboration, and when this occurs across cultures, the benefits are great indeed. (Grabowsky 2011)

Because of their openness and serious approach to listening, the AAO have been able to question their musical prejudices (their musical languages) and come to a richer understanding through musical dialogue. This dialogue is performed, improvised, as they put themselves on-the-line in trying to articulate a new music sympathetic to the forms and concepts driving *manikay*. 'In intercultural contexts, we should seek the

significance of the performative in the immediacy and intimacy of this knowledge that only art can produce (Tamisari 2005, 56).

For both the AAO and the YWG, what *CRB* is emerges out of this fluid collaboration, a conversation that generates engagement with the *manikay* tradition, jazz histories, contemporary contexts and audiences, and a possibility for vocative expression in the present. The collaboration is itself an active tradition that allows individuals the opportunity of using their perspectives to respond to tradition — the past in and around us — and to give personal insight into tradition a voice (Chapter Seven and Eight). ‘It is still the case that an interpreter’s task is not simply to repeat what one of the partners says in the discussion he is translating, but to express what is said in the way that seems most appropriate to him’ (Gadamer 2006, 307).

The Young Wägilak Group are also adept musicians and individuals who seek to express their voice in new contexts and technologies. Just as the musicians from Melbourne use their instruments and ideas of music as unique perspectives to respond to Wägilak *manikay*, so too do the YWG make use of the AAO as a technology for enriching creative insights into the *manikay* tradition. Through this process, learning shapes understanding:

I always learn about that *munanga* [whitefella] music. I just listen to that sound, how this fits, how the beat goes. I just follow the beat, how they play, how they make the sound: how this [*manikay*] song can go with that beat. I’m learning. What I do, what I learn, I can do it on tour with *CRB* and I can do it in the funeral, back home. (Daniel Wilfred, pers. comm. 2013)

CRB is simply one more iteration of *manikay* performance along a great, ancestral *raki* (string), occurring within historically significant movements of Yolŋu cultural assertion and an embrace of new contexts and media (Chapters Two and Three). Within the project itself, each and every iteration of performance also weaves into a history of *CRB* that continues to effect and shape all subsequent realisations. Just like the *manikay* tradition, the collaboration continually emerges as an ongoing song that reaches beyond the horizon of each performance and individual performing.

Crossing over

Without the test of the foreign, would we be sensitive to the strangeness of our own language? (Ricoeur 2006, 29)

Tradition is inseparably entwined with the present. 'We stand in traditions, whether we know these traditions or not' (Gadamer 2001, 45), and these traditions carry with them particular frames of perception that we bring to all understanding. In conversing with others — grasping at the forms and concepts of another individual or culture — with sincerity and openness, our horizons can shift beyond limited perspective. New richness and possibilities for creativity and interaction open to us and we are transformed, no longer remaining who we were. 'Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition' (Gadamer 2006, 293) but the beginnings of a conversation between form and experience, past and present, individuals and cultures.

In *CRB* a unique collective emerges from the musicians performing. The music emerges from situated but productive perspectives, as individuals sympathetically give one another space to create within a flexible musical conversation, shaping the music in response to situation. Carried by unique voices that weave into dense, collective textures, performance is sustained through the ever-shifting play of musical forms. Performers are engaged in the experience of musical creation and conversation.

The AAO are constituted by an effective history of attitude towards music as the possibility for liberal, vocative utterance. Established frameworks for interaction based on listening and an openness to new ideas — also seen in their collaborations with musicians from Indonesia, Japan and India — permit new forms of expression to resonate across cultural distances. The freedoms of improvisation underpin the AAO musician's ability to converse with other individuals and traditions.

CRB moves beyond ideas of tradition located in abstract forms of the past, understanding tradition as it exists through present performance. Crossing over boundaries of time, culture and situation, the collaboration exists in and for the present. As the conversation of *CRB* continues to morph into future iterations, it in turn constitutes that very future.

Chapter ten

Involved heritage

Old and new ways are always combining into something of living value. (Gadamer 2006, 305)

Chapters Seven through Nine have brought my observations of *Crossing Roper Bar* back to the narratives, hermeneutics and *manikay* with which this thesis began. This chapter is somewhat a coda, a tail extending out of the body that points the reader toward some wider significances of my work. Many statements are purposefully provocative, especially the critique of the prevalent parlance *intangible cultural heritage* — a starting gun to conversations that move beyond the immediate challenges posed here.

Yolŋu ceremonial practices confront simplistic designations of heritage and neat distinctions between tangible and intangible aspects of culture. As this thesis has shown, the core out of which Yolŋu ceremony, thought, law and relationship extend is the ancestral text, inscribed in existence (Chapter Three and Four). Public components of the ancestral text in the narratives particular to each and every clan — central tenets that point to a greater complex — are performed through *manikay*, *bungul* (dance), *miny'tji* (design) and *yäku* (names). These complementary repertoires emanate from reified traces in the natural and social Yolŋu world; active ceremonial involvement perpetuates the knowledge necessary to read, hear, feel, touch and smell these manuscripts for performance, defying the broad brushstroke of *intangible culture*.

Particular *manikay* repertoires are ever parts of a greater whole (Chapter Four), a whole that is sustained by the creative articulation of its diverse component parts. The approach of heritage seeks to sustain particular components of *manikay* as discrete objects needing intervention in order to be carried forward or celebrated as meaningful. This is, in a sense, like sketching the shadow cast by an elder sitting for portrait in order to sustain the life of that elder — perhaps as part of a project that seeks to capture the wonderful diversity of humanity through the exhaustive collation

of silhouettes from around the world. Sketching a shadow reifies a mere aspect of experience; such a project achieves its goal of celebrating human diversity only through representation. So too, the project of heritage deals only in a currency of *mere aspects* of lived reality. Components of *manikay* are ever parts of a greater whole.

Essentially, heritage is the recognition of apparently valuable particularities of tradition. Conversely, this thesis has shown that value of tradition is recognised through ongoing engagement and performance, an active drawing-out of traditions relevancies in the present. Conceptions of heritage risk stagnation if they do not recognise, first and foremost, the living value of the past in the present. Heritage must become *involved* in ongoing events of creativity that respond to tradition in and around us. Conceptions of heritage are impoverished where they are limited to antiquarian preservation or objective classification (Chapter Six) and even the most materially fixed, *tangible* heritage must be engaged through subjectivity and context.¹

Removed from the event and participation of its production, the record is merely latent with potential, awaiting interpretation, mediation, activation or performance. A pair of *bilma* (clapsticks) held in the cradle of a museum display — separated from living, dancing bodies by a pane of glass — are a record of heritage that hold unrealised potential. Through the action of performance, by striking the *bilma*, heritage comes to life. It becomes valuable because it has the potential to engage us in the ongoing play of tradition (Chapter Seven and Eight), to raise questions and to speak another perspective into our lives (Chapter Nine). Heritage is more than a catalogue of essential objects: it is the experience of vocative events of disclosure, a song or a rhythm that makes us move.² When the *bilma* strike, Djuwalpada's song is

¹ Recall the exploration in Chapter Six of Gadamer's notion of *effective history*, allowing us to transcend essentialist, historicist conceptions of the past, often expressed in taxonomies of *continuity* and *change*.

² This assertion presents an alternative to the *objectivity* at the heart of early ethnomusicological discourse, as Merriam describes: 'Ethnomusicology aims to approximate the methods of science [...] the formulation of hypotheses, the control of variables, the objective assessment of data gathered, and the grouping of results in order to reach ultimate generalisations about music and behaviour [...] ethnomusicology is both a field and a laboratory discipline; that is, it is data gathered by the investigator from among the people he is engaged in studying, and at least part of it is later subjected to analysis in the laboratory' (Merriam 1964, 37).

here and now. Heritage can be known as valuable only as tradition living through experience.

Before interrogating the pervasive terminology of *intangible cultural heritage* (ICH), this chapter examines the record as one possible iteration — a mere aspect — within an ongoing and effective history of tradition. Records are also considered as fragments that come to us from the past, latent with potential to enliven conversation, action or performance: records can agitate dialogue between present subjectivities and tradition in, around and before us. They can form the basis of positive action aimed toward sustaining narratives of tradition as ongoing and efficacious in the present.

Comments in this chapter are critical of prevalent conceptualisations of *intangible heritage*, not the creation of records of cultural expressions or their positive use. As Allan Marett and Linda Barwick attest, recordings and reified records have proven vital in recovering previously 'lost' repertoires of song in the Australian context (2003, 144). The same assertion applies to Indigenous Australian languages: efforts by individuals such as Rob Amery and Jack Buckskin show that old records, however partial, have been integral to the revival of the Kurna language of the Adelaide Plains (2011). Through the efforts of individuals, records from the past can bring tradition into the present as something of living value.

Human appraisal of heritage stems from inherently good motivations and attentions. In Australia, heritage presents an opportunity for addressing present concerns over past injustices and a legacy of indifference toward Indigenous peoples and cultures. Driven by the desires of individuals to see a future substantiated by the rich and valuable past, human engagement and relationship are fundamental to this project of heritage. Through the investment of time and energy, and an openness to shifting horizons, understanding cultural traditions is always achieved through a conversant doing.

Phenomenological excess

The Yolŋu hermeneutic suggests that the richness of all creation points to the reality of the ancestral text (Chapter Three). Country and ecology are existential vocalisations of the ancestral text, tangible traces of ancestral reality (Appendix Two). Yolŋu (people) exist on the land and within the movement of seasons, sustained by country and ecology. Yolŋu also exist among other people and kin (*gurrutu*), and are connected back through the generations to the creative foundations of ancestral precedence: relationships are branches, connections supported by deeper ancestral roots. The ancestral text is animated through the ceremonial performance of narratives pointing toward this great reality.

The Wägilak narrative — a specific component of a greater whole — is manifest in multiple media of expression, including song, dance, design, language and story. It is performed in ceremony, figurative images and themes carrying nuanced significations. This brilliant, ceremonial constellation mirrors the phenomenological excess of the natural world. Admiring its brilliant heterophonic, layered complexity, we understand the impossibility of ever creating a comprehensive record of Yolŋu cultural expressions.

There is infinite variation in nature and, just like language, ‘it is always possible to say the same thing in another way’ (Ricoeur 2006, 25) or approach it from another standpoint. In nature, the tangible extends beyond particular aspects assimilated by perspective: from quantum mechanics beyond our reach to macro movements greater than our limited time and space; the infinitely complex flight pattern of a bee; the rolling of huge storm clouds and the progression of lumbering seasons; the immensity of the heavens and gradual rotation of the stars. *Manikay* celebrates the brilliant exuberance of the natural world and the interwoven interactions of people, history and matter.

As a cultural expression performed amid this richness, *manikay* is not removed from existence given us *in excess* (Marion 2002).³ Human interpretation is as diverse as natural exuberance: ‘Because the work of art possesses a physical reality (sonorous material, cloth, paint, etc.), this material may be perceived in an autonomous way [...] we are thus led straightaway to recognize an irreducible plurality’ (Lacoste 2009, 16). The creation of any authoritative, definitive or discrete record of any cultural tradition is, therefore, a phenomenological impossibility; reification reduces natural excess. Performed iteration is also provisional, capable of offering only one perspective, illuminating particular nuance within context.

The Yolŋu hermeneutic builds from existence as an exuberant excess (Chapter Three). Even in the great ancestral text beyond individual situations, ‘the metaphysical core is never merely said because it is itself complex and intertwined with social practice. It cannot be condensed in a single sentence; rather it is performed, pained and danced’ as aspects of it are illuminated from human situation (H. Morphy 2008a, 137). The essential *inside* of the ancestral text is always beyond the grasp of all outside referents, held within differing contexts of history, geography, personality or relationship: ‘All phenomena appear, but only to the extent that they show themselves’ (Marion 2002, 30). Consequently, heritage can never be known objectively.

From the utterly unique experiences of an individual, the world is ever apprehended in a new way. To celebrate, communicate or consider the world, present or past, is to come to ever new iterations of understanding (interpretation) or presentation (performance). Basically, the creative re-cognition of tradition is at the heart of engaging the present with the past. Creativity engages individuals as tradition *speaks* to them, holds their attention and has something to say.

In communicating heritage to future generations as something of value (*ŋalabuluru rom*, ‘following the ancestral blueprint’), a record or performed iteration of tradition must engage reception — it must engage the mind and action of the creative individual (see Curkpatrick 2013; Morphy and Morphy 2013a). The orthodox narrative of

³ Marion’s thought offers an interesting parallel to the great richness of existence celebrated in Yolŋu cultural expressions such as *manikay*.

manikay, for example, is only sustained as individuals are caught up in the experience of performance that begins conversation with these integral forms (Chapter Seven). In performance, creative individuals release forms from the past into living interpretation.

Records are conscious manifestations of tradition, iterated in persistent yet ephemeral material traces; records are persistent in their orientation toward the future, an inherent intention of their creation. Recording mediums give us the possibility of capturing aspects of life's phenomenological excess. Because they present us with component particularities rather than objective entireties, an interpreter must engage with life beyond the actual materials and references contained in the tangible record. Records portend to wider significances beyond the article of their essential manifestation.

On the *CRB* tour through Darwin and Ngukurr in May 2010, photographer Tobias Titz lugged along a large format camera and tripod. He used these to take portraits of the musicians and people from Ngukurr.⁴ Using Polaroid 665 Film, he took two images: one portrait and the second an exposure of the white background. The person photographed was asked to scratch a message into the emulsion of this second film. The message could be anything: a reflection on the project, a feeling, a story (Figs. 10a, b).

Titz's photographs captured aspects of the *manikay* tradition and also aspects of *CRB* as a collaboration and event. Actually, these photographs continue to be, in their own right, expressions within the *manikay* tradition and *CRB* — they are not simply derivative but contribute another voice to the unfolding narrative. Beyond the actual materials and literal content of these photographs, records like these tell stories pointing to life that extends beyond the present frame of their composition.

A camera only offers one perspective, a visual one removed from many living dynamics. Similarly, other recording technologies fall short of duplicating experience. A microphone, for example, must be placed so that its magnetic field is oriented toward

⁴ Further examples of Titz's photography can be viewed at <http://www.tobiastitz.com>

a particular voice, capturing only an impression of sound emanating in an infinitely complex way from the singer's vocal chords. Likewise, a painting might capture an image of the country a song conjures in the mind's eye, but the mind's eye conjures far more than just images.⁵

Different media specialise in different types of records: the technology of words capture an imperative to action or response; the technology of painting carries brilliance in its combination of colour; the technology of voice gives us emotion in timbre. Human expression runs on these mechanics, which always point to greater, hidden realities of saturated, uncontainable phenomenological excess — just as *manikay* performance is a technology that carries interrelated narratives forming a greater story beyond the individual. Despite their limitations or orienting prejudices, recording media form the very possibility of sustaining iterations of tradition and bringing the past into the contemporary world through performance (see Chapter Six). In perceiving records, we are called to respond and interpret to the unique perspectives offered us.

New contexts and technologies of performance cut fresh facets into the excess of life, reflecting brilliant colours, shapes and patterns. The audio record is relatively new to Arnhem Land and the *manikay* tradition. Like the written word's relationship with spoken language, recorded sound does something powerful in allowing the past to become contemporaneous with every present — to speak into ever new and ever widening contexts. Daniel Wilfred today listens to a recording of Sambo Barabara singing in 1975 and that song provides a wealth of meaning and inspiration unanticipated by Barabara at the time of recording. In their performances today, the YWG bring this audio record to life: performances are enriched by a past that continues to inspire creativity into the future. Records live through their activation, ever articulated anew through performance.

⁵ Corn and Gumbula (2007) discuss further impediments to conceptualising and recording a complete *manikay* series.

For Yolŋu, new media and technologies are used positively within a traditional hermeneutic (see Chapter Three), as Morphy and Deveson describe:⁶

Thus as well as viewing films such as *In Memory of Mawalan* and *Djunguwan at Gurkawuy* as archival resources, the Yolŋu also view them as expressions of ancestral performance: as wholes in which the parts are connected together by the agency of the participants at a particular moment of time [...] Viewing collections of material objects, whether virtual or actual, in the same way requires that they are experienced not as separate objects but as objects in action and in relationship — as objects that elicit ritual performances in the mind [...] [The Yolŋu] epistemological perspective challenges the distinction between the material and immaterial manifestations of things and is if anything pre-adapted to the digital age into which we are moving. (Morphy with Deveson 2011, 25–7)

The potential for performing tradition with new technologies is actively embraced by many Indigenous Australians, despite the inherent dangers of culturally illegitimate use and access.⁷ Films such as *Mamu*, by the young, emerging filmmaker Curtis Taylor, employ new technologies to tell old stories of law-breaking (see Taylor 2011). In *Mamu*, the fate of a young boy who oversteps the line by publishing sacred designs on Facebook, is explored.⁸ Here, the detrimental possibilities of new media are mitigated by an active use of that technology to embrace self-representation (see Langton 1993, 2003; Peters Little 2003).⁹ Taylor explains:

This film, *Mamu*, it's about right; it's about wrong. It's about the past; the future. And the new; and the old. It's about the internet [...] and this thing in our culture, how can we use

⁶ This thesis does not enter into important issues of power and representation in any depth; nor the challenge to traditional systems of cultural authority by increasing accessibility through new media.

⁷ A recent AIATSIS conference *Young and Old: Connecting Generations* (2011), focussed on the responses and approaches of Indigenous communities toward new technologies.

⁸ Similarly, the work of PAW media (Pintubi, Anmatjera, Warlpiri), especially their *Animating Jukurrpa* series, shows how storytelling through new media (especially animation) can use traditional symbols and designs while conforming to the correct, lawful use of public knowledge (Woods et al. 2011). Despite an orthodox orientation, such productions are still creatively vibrant and engaging, reaching new audiences and contexts away from the campfire. As in Arnhem Land, 'Warlpiri absorb new media to fit with and reinforce existing social practices' (Cardamone and Rentschler 2008, 105).

⁹ Similar works in entirely different mediums, such as contemporary wood sculpture, are discussed by Caruana (2010, 47). He describes the artwork *Bones* (1982) by Rembarrŋa man Brian Nyinawanga, depicting the bones of 'a father and his two daughters who were killed for failing to uphold customary marriage promises' (Ibid.).

this technology to work for us, and for us to use it the way we want to use it. Not technology using us. And that is the message *Mamu* is sending out [...] I'm bringing those pieces of music back, the traditional singing in the front, at the start of the movie. Well I didn't hear those songs since I was a kid. And those songs recorded 20 years ago on the river [...] I put those songs in the film so people watching it [...] can say, that's my grandfather singing, that's my song, and that's my Jukurrpa [*dreaming*]. (Taylor 2011)

Recording technologies and new media allow the past to speak into the present in a way that reveals unique aspects of that past. 'Skills and crafts, passed on as part of a tradition, are not merely repeated as on a production line, that which is passed down is constantly in a process of being reworked and reinterpreted' (Lawn 2007, 35). Through the very presence of something of the past, we realise that our unique perspectives today are ultimately singular understandings bounded by our own situations in place and time; an excess of meaning lies beyond the reach of our apprehension.

As new media of recording and performance continue to evolve, these technologies of articulation hold the potential — like the *CRB* collaboration — to enrich traditions with new perspectives. Tangible culture is and can only ever be the recorded iteration of something much greater and heritage lives as it effects engagement with the past from contemporary situation. Beyond our limited gaze, remnant fragments of a time past can enrich our lives as we recognise the brilliant diversity, depth and colour of existence, and our unique place within it.



Fig. 10a Portrait of Benjamin Wilfred (Image: Tobias Titz). Copyright Tobias Titz, 2010 Benjamin's text is from the *manikay* song Birrkpirrk (Plover) and translates: 'Crying crying, flying above, singing, landing by the water. Singing, dancing, singing. Father's father, these bone songs, Djuwalpada.'

Gorag gor ag Gorag
 Yawulul mirrbijunha
 Gapu - dhamaanydhai
 djirrunha
 Dhamparny - bathun
 Djirrunha
 BAPABAPAPAGA
 Dhadi dhadi Dhadiya
 Njorrkadhuwalgapa
 dhumi Njorrkadhuwal
 Yalawiya



Fig. 10b Portrait of Daniel Wilfred (Image: Tobias Titz). Copyright Tobias Titz, 2010

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Intangible culture?

What we are talking about is not songs that need safeguarding but *singing* that needs safeguarding. (Sally Treloyn, Coordinator of the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia; 2012)

Although much could be written on cultural heritage beyond the scope of this thesis, I have chosen to provoke discussion around the parlance of *intangible cultural heritage* (ICH), a designation that is a present preoccupation of many individuals, academics,¹⁰ organisations and governments around the world — especially the United Nations, who regard it as ‘one of the priorities of UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation] in the cultural domain’ (UNESCO 2013). I wish to show how the concept of ICH has emerged reflexively and in response to the perceived inadequacies of tangible or monumental conceptions of heritage, suggesting that the current privileging of intangible heritage in discourse and policy only inverts the original limitations of tangible heritage.

This section will elaborate on the following assertions: tangible culture is known through subjectivities, performance and intangible aspects of culture; intangible aspects of culture are not knowable except where they manifest as tangible elements in performance or record; as we engage with cultural expressions, their intangibility dissipates; *manikay* and Yolŋu ceremonial expressions are tangible in ways that current UNESCO definitions of ICH do not recognise. My aim is to point towards some theoretical limitations of the concept of ICH in the light of Yolŋu ceremonial practice, rather than the practicalities or politics of implementing policy concerning ICH. Theory and terminology is, of course, always compromised; a luxury of academia remains the constant interrogation of concepts.

The above exploration of life’s excess showed that the tangible exists and saturates the world far beyond our perception from limited situation. This is a reality embraced by

¹⁰ Sufficient to note here is the plethora of recent publications (Aikawa-Faure 2009; Arzipe 2004; Kalay et al. 2008; Kearney 2009; Kreps 2009; Logan 2007; Seeger 2009; Smith 2006 and 2009; Zanten 2004) following the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage* (UNESCO 2003).

the Yolŋu hermeneutic in which tangible phenomenon is layered with direct, metonymic equivalences and significances in a complex beyond singular understanding (Chapter Three). Further, in the Yolŋu hermeneutic, a painting of the Wägilak *birrkpirrk* (plover), for example, not only represents the plover of the natural world but the natural world is shaped and known through the Wägilak narratives of the plover — the painted *birrkpirrk* is not a single, objective entity fixed in the particular materials of its iteration.

Beyond the materials of its immediate expression as a physical thing, the painting of the Wägilak *birrkpirrk* also expresses direct metonymic equivalence with a constellation of articulations within culture and nature, and the painting itself is constituted by these multiple articulations (Chapters Three and Four). For the Yolŋu, these are tangibly inscribed in: the land, geographical features and sacred objects; people and bodies; kin and relationships; seasons and ecology; even tracks on the ground made by the bird and by the dance.

Following these observations, *manikay* is understood simplistically if it is understood with the broad brush-stroke of *intangibility* in contrast with the apparently *tangible* painting. Where *manikay* is performed, interpreted or engaged in the world, intangibility dissipates: *manikay* becomes meaningful in real, tangible lives and ecology, and the song *Birrkpirrk* carries the same constellation of equivalences as does the painting of that bird. *Manikay*, so-called ICH, is known through real and experienced phenomenon; ICH that is knowable cannot be *intangible*.

Categorical designations of heritage as *tangible* and *intangible* draw their currency from related but different terminological binaries such as *material/ephemeral* or *static/temporal*. Introducing ICH, UNESCO offers us an example of the common approach toward delineating *tangible* and *intangible* culture along these lines: tangible cultural heritage is defined as ‘physical artefacts [...], buildings and historic places;’ ‘objects’ that can be studied; ‘the actuality of the object, as opposed to a reproduction or surrogate, draws people in and gives them a literal way of touching the past’ (UNESCO 2013). Conversely, ICH includes ‘festivals, oral traditions, oral epics, customs’

that are a ‘particular fragile form of heritage, often under threat of extinction’ (UNESCO 2013a).

While these definitions might be useful in policy making, the laudable goal of celebrating and supporting great cultural diversity among peoples of the world does not preclude examination of the terminology used to carry such efforts. The banal equation of material records with the concept of *tangible culture* is a distortion that delineates fixed, objective culture in opposition to temporal perception, hermeneutic or phenomenological excess.

UNESCO’s delineation of cultural heritage is easily extended into descriptions of *manikay* and *miny’tji* (design): *manikay* is perceived through the course of time and so is intangible, whereas a design is perceived as a whole tangible entity once completed — unlike a song, its materials of presentation can be picked up, moved, conserved or destroyed. Immediate limitations of delineating *tangible* and *intangible* culture along these lines can be seen through some basic arguments of phenomenology.

Contrary to the above categorisation, the objective, material painting is not where the *miny’tji* (design) is located. Like a song, one also perceives *miny’tji* through the course of time. As your eyes and attention shift focus and the *bir’yun* (shimmering brilliance) of the painting *plays* (Chapter Eight); as your focus shifts between particulars and the whole; as you move through a gallery and aspects of the artwork on display move between conscious perception and the fringes of apprehension.¹¹

Stepping back from the play of apprehension to the process of creation, Merleau-Ponty offers us a description of an artist painting a landscape that confounds any categorical location of an objective landscape:

When our gaze travels over what lies before us, at every moment we are forced to adopt a certain point of view and these successive snapshots of any given area of the landscape cannot be superimposed one upon the other. It is only by interrupting the normal process of seeing that the painter succeeds in mastering this series of visual impressions and extracting

¹¹ After Eduard Husserl’s *The phenomenology of internal time consciousness* (Husserl 1964), a seminal series of lectures that established phenomenology in the first decade of the twentieth century. Parts of these lectures examined our perception of music through memory and anticipation.

a single, unchanging landscape from them: often he will close one eye and measure the apparent size of a particular detail with his pencil, thereby altering it. (Merleau-Ponty 2009 [1948], 40)

Just like the painter in Merleau-Ponty's description, so too does each and every interpreter of a work of art 'alter' and 'interrupt' the material record to recreate that painting within subjective experience. Despite connotations of rigidity that designations of *tangible* suggest, a painting is no more contained than a song. Known through human perspectives, even *tangible artefacts* are fleeting presentations amid a world of great excess and exuberant variety.

The dynamic life of heritage and tradition is much greater than that held in singular iteration, material or otherwise. Human perspective is naturally prejudiced, full of subjectivities, desires, particular understandings and anticipations. Ultimately, the material record of a painting carries a potential for engagement not with its exclusive self but with meanings to which it portends, engaged tangibly from and amid human life. Definitions that delineate *tangible* and *intangible* cultural heritage along the lines of *material/ephemeral* or *static/temporal* are misleading.

While there are intangible aspects of culture — even monumental architecture — these could never be contained by description. That would be a contradiction, for the intangible wealth of culture is as diverse and amorphous as the subjectivities and contexts that a culture or tradition addresses. At a recent International Council for Traditional Music conference, Graeff argued a similar position in a plenary session paper: one cannot differentiate between the tangible and intangible, because 'heritage exists exclusively at the moment of its performance, at the moment of being experienced' (2013).¹²

In configuring the 2003 UNESCO *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (from here on, the *Convention*), views which were themselves

¹² Founded in 1947, the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) is a leading, academic organisation focussed on music and dance research. ICTM is a significant non-government organisation in formal consultative relations with UNESCO.

phenomenological in scope were maintained.¹³ Yet there seems to have been no examination of the inconsistency between these views and the phenomenological impossibility of intangibility in perceptible culture. Zanten, from the Dutch team of experts, explains a view of culture that resonates with phenomenology: ‘Culture is now looked at as a site of contestation [...] it is continuously re-created by people’ (Zanten 2004, 37). If this thinking were followed through, neat distinctions between intangible and tangible heritage would dissolve. In reference to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Kearney writes the following about the parlance of ICH:

The immediate and long term position offered by a phenomenological approach is that ‘being’ in the most immediate tangible form of the human body and consciousness creates all possible perception and thus creates all potentials for tangible and intangible cultural expressions. Such a position renders distinctions of tangible and intangible almost redundant [...] A phenomenological approach views heritage as an embedded concept that cannot be disengaged from the world and people around it [...]. (Kearney 2009, 210–11)

The formation of the *Convention* was shaped by altruistic sentiments. The thrust to create this convention came about, largely, as a response to the inadequacies of the dominant yet restrictive Eurocentric views of tangible heritage pervading earlier conventions, such as the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (WHC) of 1972 — a document concerned with monumental architectural and archaeological heritage.¹⁴ Despite being full of ‘corrective measures to right this imbalance’ (Aikawa-Faure 2009, 19), the 2003 *Convention* concerning ICH falls short of recognising complexities in Yorlju hermeneutical thought. A romantic notion of *living* rather than material cultures pervaded UNESCO discussions: ‘Their rich cultures [‘southern countries’ outside of Europe and America], it was argued, are

¹³ On its web site, UNESCO indicates that there are currently 153 signatory nation states, excluding Australia, as of May 2013.

¹⁴ Further, the *Convention* aims to reaffirm ‘the ethical position that the right to protect cultural diversity and cultural heritage is a cultural right, part of the panoply of human rights’ (Logan 1997, 43). It is designed to support the activities of states in safeguarding local minority and indigenous people’s heritage, and also brought the treatment of this heritage into the international gaze. Another important role of the *Convention* is global awareness building of important and often endangered heritage worldwide. These were reified in two lists created by UNESCO, the *List of the intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding* (2008) and the *Representative list of the ICH of humanity* (2009).

expressed more in their living form than in their monuments and sites' (Aikawa-Faure 2009, 19).

Disrupting UNESCO's delineations of types of heritage, Indigenous Australian cultures stem from the tangible world which *is* a record or inscription of ancestral action: monumental sites of sacred significance are foundational manuscripts for song, dance, knowledge and law. As Warlpiri elder and director of the Milpirri festival in Lajamanu Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick suggests: 'Don't let anyone tell you that Aboriginal people can't read or write. You teach us to use the paper and pencil, but we will teach you to read the country' (Patrick 2013). Further, if the rich monumental heritage right across the continent of Australia is to be recognised, we must do so in a way that incorporates song and dance.

In its 'attempt to acknowledge and privilege non-Western manifestations of and practices of heritage' (Smith and Akagawa 2009, 2), the *Convention* posits cultures outside of European traditions in an opposition of living otherness. Through this push for global relevance, the definitions of ICH seem to have been formed as a mechanism for dealing with *everything else*. An alternative might simply have been the expansion or reworking of the concept of tangible heritage beyond monuments, architecture and artefacts. Yet there remains much currency in a polarised divide between the West and others; a contemporary dualism between 'Western — global, developed and colonial knowledge systems and indigenous — local, marginalised, developing and colonised knowledge systems' (Kearney 2009, 212).¹⁵

As an idealistic response to a perceived deficiency, every possible manifestation of culture otherwise than monumental architectural and archaeological heritage, had to be contained under the rubric of ICH. Skounti, who was involved with the preparation of the *Convention*, defines a concept that, as a result, seems quite elusive:

¹⁵ A bias Derrida calls *logocentrism* (see Chapter Four): the 'transcendental signified' of the West is the inscription of word (Derrida 2002). We extend our bias onto *other* cultures in our desire to understand them to be characterised by: oral traditions; intangible heritage; *direct* connection to nature; societies more personal than institutional.

There is no *one* intangible cultural heritage, there is wide spectrum, ranging from the non-material dimension of a material heritage element (site, monument, object) to the most intangible aspect (tale, poem, song, musical note, prayer, scent, perfume, etc.). (Skounti 2009, 77)

In idealistic concepts, fractured and complex realities must be subsumed if apparent legitimacy is to be maintained. Idealism cannot contain contradictions and, just as the rubric of ICH is so vague, we are led to believe that this universal cannot harbour damaging prejudices like the previous vernaculars it replaced — and on which previous conventions had been based — such as *authentic, native or timeless*.¹⁶

The idealisation of universal definitions is no more evident than in a presentation given by Arzipe, former Assistant Director-General for Culture at UNESCO and one of the sixteen delegates selected to draw up the convention. This all-inclusive, harmonious definition was given in her presentation at the *Convention* working group in Turin, Italy, 2001:

[ICH consists of] birth, rites of age [...] death [...] kinship, community, settlements [...] botany, zoology, pharmacopoeia [...] nature beliefs, names, landscape [...] signs, representation, rituals, flags [...] cosmo vision animistic beliefs [sic], sacred books [...] high arts, local arts [...] season's calendar, games, religious festivals [...]. (Smith and Akagawa 2009, 24–5)

The confusing breadth of this statement washes over actualities and intricacies of any Indigenous Australian cultural practices. Subsequently, ICH is a conceptually poor response to cultural difference and a fundamentally incorrect paradigm. The conflation and homogenisation of any specific or local indigenous interests with those of the rest of the world *otherwise* is not a realistic response to the rich diversity of humankind.

¹⁶ I will not cover these and other issues concerning the *Convention*, except to note that a glaring issue for an Australian context might be the nomination process: nominations, along with support and funding, must come from the state administration: 'The final result does not, on a formal level, differ greatly from the World Heritage Convention of 1972' (Skounti 2009, 82). Liberal thinking suggests that it is really individuals and minority groups who should have the power to define and control their own heritage (Kearney 2009, 22). For more on the nomination process, see Seeger (2009); for more on the abuse of human rights in Myanmar and Laos justified under the *Convention*, see Logan (2007).

A provocative parallel can here be drawn with the colonisation of the Australian continent. Australia's colonial legacy was not only one of dispossession but a fundamental inability to recognise — even a propensity to ignore — the specific records of culture articulated in the land and, conversely, the direct expression of title to land in ceremonial practice. Positioning cultures of difference as *other*, in their 'intangible' and 'living' forms, betrays a strange resonance with the infamous *terra nullius* mindset, even though this concept stems from completely different motivations and sentiments. If land is *terra nullius*, it is empty and holds no records: 'It is the legacy of abstraction, which positions ICH as elusive, incapable of being seen and immaterial, that impacts on the capacity to understand ICH as owned, culturally guarded and exclusive' (Kearney 2009, 216).

If land is a record of a song and a tangible articulation of the greater ancestral text, then the cessation of contact with land means the cessation of the details, substance and meanings which encapsulate and empower songs; those songs become irrelevant. Decreasing degrees of intimacy with the environment has had serious ramifications for the reproduction of song knowledge as all songs entail a critical understanding of the intricate sounds, movements, smells and feel of ecological forms (Magowan 2007, 37). In Australia, the land is an articulation of living, tangible culture and a physical manuscript of song.

The parlance of ICH obscures the reality of cultural expression that is more than the mere materials of immediate presentation. The simplistic equation of *tangible* and *intangible* heritage with *material* and *ephemeral* articulations creates a focus on the permanence of media over the tangibility of culture understood in phenomenological experience. The particular material record of a painting or song carries a potential for engagement not with its exclusive self but with meanings to which it portends, which can only be engaged from living subjectivities.

Further, the delineation of ICH categorically distinct from tangible culture perpetuates a mindset of difference, where indigenous cultures are characterised as fundamentally *other* in their oral, ephemeral and therefore endangered intangibility. Against this grain, Yolju culture possesses a wealth of monuments and sacred sites; it is abundant

with recorded perspectives and curatorial processes linked directly to song and dance. Such complexities in Indigenous Australian epistemologies must be recognised in any efforts toward sustaining particular traditions, the promotion of engagement with these traditions and the celebration of diverse human culture.

Looking to the *manikay* tradition and *CRB*, we are presented with an alternative approach to sustaining engagement with ancestral narratives that is conversational and discursive, relying on the creativity and investment of individual subjectivities. Here, heritage is allowed to become involved as relevant amid ever changing, ever widening situations of understanding. New forms and expressions — acrylic paint or a jazz quintet — can legitimately engage the present with heritage and tradition. Tradition is vocative, not essentialist, and the intangible wealth of culture is as diverse and amorphous as the subjectivities that creatively sustain traditions into the future.

As it is perpetuated through performance, *manikay* becomes something that exists beyond its sonic patterns: it is known as relationship, place and ecology; it engages lives; it is read and known amid the phenomenological excess of the world. Those involved in active conversations with the tradition come to see the metonymic equivalences between different medium, such as *manikay*, *bungul* (dance), *miny'tji* (design), *yäku* (names), *wäŋa* (country) and can value these components of tradition — the basic goal of heritage.

As we engage with cultural expressions, even if they are materially ephemeral, intangibility dissipates. Through continued enunciation and expression, vital culture is renewed as an ever emerging record of the present grounded in the past. The sustenance of heritage is bound up in creative performance.

Living heritage

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets, Burnt Norton, V* (1944, 19)

Human appraisal of heritage stems from inherently good motivations and attentions. Heritage, something of value from the past, lives in the present by becoming involved in ongoing events of creativity. Conceptions of heritage must not become stuck in fixed objectivity. Rather, records should agitate dialogue between the present and tradition in, around and before us — a basis for positive action looking to draw out tradition's value for the future. The constant rearticulations of discursive conversation and performance offer an approach to sustaining tradition that is malleable and pertinent; continued engagement with *manikay* in new conversations is central to its living vitality and perpetuation.

Tangible culture extends in an excess beyond what we can categorically assimilate or apprehend. So too, the tangibility of song escapes the definitions of ICH formulated by UNESCO, definitions shaped to accommodate cultural expressions *other* than physical cultural artefacts or monumental heritage. For Daniel Wilfred, Wägilak song comes out of the *bilma* just as narratives come out of the material stuff of paint on canvas — a complex hermeneutic that defies simplification and expands pervasive notions of tangible heritage and records. The hermeneutical approaches of different cultures can provide a productive basis for conversations about tradition, potentially shifting our own, situated understandings of heritage or cultural forms such as music.

The ancestral text also exists beyond all possible manifestations in ceremonial narrative or performance. Within the Yolŋu ceremonial constellation, particular iterations like painting carry potential for engagement not with their exclusive objectivity but with a richness of meaning toward which they indicate. *CRB* presents an

approach to engaging with *manikay* traditions that embraces this reality, particularly in the discursive flow of musical forms, ever emerging into new perspectives and entwining into a greater whole beyond individual situations (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine). As a model of collaboration, *CRB* offers an approach to engaging with heritage that avoids illegitimate or stagnating reification through definitive representation. Through collaboration, individuals today are drawn into engagement with the *manikay* tradition as something tangibly present and active in the world around them.

Recording or performing an iteration of cultural tradition is like sketching the shadow cast by an elder sitting for portrait, thrown into relief by the sun's position in the sky during a certain time and season. In performing Wägilak *manikay*, if we were to bring further aspects of the Wägilak narrative into that performance — such as dance, design and language — a more detailed portrait would start to emerge on our page. While this portrait could only ever point towards the rich life of that elder, the more aspects we incorporated, the more that the sketched forms on the page would come to reflect the greater reality sitting before us. There might be many ways of approaching this sketch: through a Picasso-like juxtaposition of multiple aspects; through a Michelangelo-like assertion of the very presence of physical substance, proportioned as we apprehend it with our own eyes.

Yet as we better came to know that elder sitting before us — the greater our relationship and the deeper the resonance between our thoughts and emotions — our notions of portraiture would shift with this relationship. If we were to grasp something of the profound, existential actuality of that person, we might not depict them with Cubist or Italian Renaissance styles but instead paint them as a waterhole. We might paint their *djalkiri* place of conception, 'where knowledge originates' and is carried in the mind of Yolŋu (people), expressed in new places and contexts through the performance of *manikay*, *bungul* (dance), *miny'tji* (design) and *yäku* (names) (Morphy and Morphy 2013a, 12–17).

As the YWG sustain *manikay* through new contexts and media of expression, they are using their minds to creatively bring into relief aspects of a great, profound ancestral reality. They sketch shadows of this text, working with new materials and contexts to

come to a better, lived relationship with it (*ḡalabuluḡu rom*). This requires skill, aesthetic engagement, determination, real-time tactical decision making and all the mundane requirements of living and communicating within place and context. As Yolḡu perform ceremony, maintaining responsibilities toward country, kin and story, they actively sustain the world and existence as a conversation with ancestral reality. In life as a lived expression of the ancestral text, intangibility dissipates in the rich, substantiating presence of ancestral precedence. This hermeneutic demands that heritage becomes involved in ongoing events of creativity, responding to ancestral presence in and around us.

In performing *manikay*, Yolḡu hear an ancestral echo that reverberates in the present; performance provokes the continuation of this echo. Where ceremonial practice lapses, the ancestral echo is lost. Sustaining heritage or creating records in the Wägilak world is nothing — however it manifests in form, material or context — if it is not the active realisation and continuation of life animated by ancestral precedence and oriented toward its essential *telos*, the deep, profound waters of Luṡunba. For at this place, the ancestral echo reaches its voice.

CONCLUSION

Chapter eleven

Conclusion

But I will stop here. The ongoing dialogue permits no final conclusion. It would be a poor hermeneuticist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word. (Gadamer 2006, 581)

Conversation is active possibility: it shifts and evolves, unfolding through provisional iterations, reaching toward something future. Drawing in unique individuals, conversation is sustained by the voices of those involved and yet it exists beyond the singular subject, carried by the ongoing play of perspective and movement. Possibility is the very openness of the future to creativity and new relationships. Ultimately, tradition actively pursued is a conversation of possibility reaching toward new articulations of the past.

Tradition lives through the animation of conversive, discursive performance. Spaces within inherited forms are productively filled by creative realisation and interpretation. Such conversation is participatory, revelatory and fluently expressive. By playing into individual situations, tradition is engaging and present, shifting our horizons of understanding.

Creativity is central to the realisation of new possibilities, permitting individuals to engage with tradition and one another in genuinely authentic ways. Creativity is characterised or directed by inherent histories, yet it seeks an ever-novel response to context. Anticipating a different future, creativity transforms horizons because it proceeds from those very situated horizons.

In the face of stagnation, the animation of tradition begins from creative vocalisation. We can hear tradition in a song, move with tradition in a dance. This requires a focus and responsibility toward ongoing performance, contrary to the location of tradition in essentialised record or representation. The Yolŋu hermeneutic affirms living engagement with tradition: *manikay* is carried in minds and bodies, performed outwards from the tangible, experienced world of society, relation and ecology.

Further, the *manikay* tradition is living history; its contemporary expression is ancestral presence. The orienting, supporting, life-giving waters of the past continue to flow into new articulations, forms and contexts.

Contemporary performances of *manikay* resonate with the ongoing echo of ancestral precedence; an ongoing flow of ancestral mind; the present oriented by effective history. The performance of *manikay* sustains human engagement with ancestral precedence, a text manifest within a complex constellation of narrative, significance and equivalence. By following the ancestral footprints carried in ceremonial repertoires, Yolŋu lives are given orientation (*ŋalabuluŋu rom*): progression through stages of revelation shape a person's existential journey toward the profound waters of Luṭunba. Here, at the point of teleological transgression, the echo of ancestral precedence finds its voice.

Because it is discursive and engaging, ceremonial performance is fundamental to sustaining engagement with the ancestral text. As structure in motion, narrative in performance, *manikay* carries orthodoxies of social, individual and existential constitution beyond dry, objective principle and into lived experience. The fluid, exploratory musical conversation of *CRB* resonates with this hermeneutic, joining into the ongoing conversation of *manikay*. Importantly, musicians seek to engage with essential musical forms — the *ŋaraka* (bones) of *manikay* — through dramatically envisioned articulation, demonstrating paradoxical stability amid creativity.

Taken as a whole, this thesis has presented an interpretation of Wägilak *manikay* carried in text, image and recorded sound — an engagement with the *ŋaraka* (bones) of *manikay*. It is also one thread within a song rich beyond excess; it is wholly limited but nevertheless draws the reader toward greater engagement and awareness. Here, text is a prejudiced technology of iteration, like the camera, capable of offering particular perspectives on the *manikay* tradition.

Treated provisionally and engaged creatively in reception, subjective records like this thesis — beginning from particular languages, histories, methods and conceptions — can inspire ongoing interaction with tradition, sustaining the voice of tradition into the

future. Likewise, *manikay* need not be interpreted as an object over-and-apart from the inquirer, as tradition is inextricably woven into the present and known as it is engaged from diverse subjectivities. Tradition is an event of address, a song or rhythm that makes us move.

Affording Yolŋu cultural expressions a seriousness of attention given to any established academic discipline, this thesis has demonstrated some of the extensive intricacies of Yolŋu thought. It began from the premise that engagement with Indigenous Australian cultures and people should be complicated rather than simplified: as in the Yolŋu hermeneutic, ever increasing layers of complexity work into vibrant understanding. Introducing the Wägilak narrative, deeper significations of narrative tenets were alluded to, even as a comprehensive account of these intricacies remains elusive.

This methodological orientation guided the exploration of: layered fragments of Wägilak narrative; conceptions of metonymic equivalence; the living web of social connections between families, clans, *riŋgitj* (embassies) and interrelated ceremonial repertoires; idiosyncrasies of tradition expressed through *raki* (string) and *gularri* (floodwaters); productive ambiguities in stable musical forms; *bir'yun* (shimmering), an important aesthetic principle; the play of understanding and attention in reception; vitality of performance that sustains movement and motion; tensions between individual voices and the ensemble; dense, heterophonic textures of sound and situation.

Applying Gadamer's dictum that 'every understanding is already an interpretation,' this thesis considered human experience of music as an integral source of meaning, establishing a focus on tradition carried amid a dense, woven tapestry of perspectives and interpretations. Extending from these ideas, *CRB* was introduced as a project of multiple improvised threads interwoven into an ever-shifting whole, diverse voices coming together in a great conversation of tradition.

Avoiding appropriation through illegitimate reification, *CRB* presents us with a laudable approach to musical engagement amid diversity in Australia. The ongoing efforts of the AAO to listen to the inherent complexities of Wägilak *manikay* move beyond histories

of superficial musical interaction between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. For the AAO, *manikay* is not a trove of otherness to be plundered but a means of developing personal relationship; musical languages of engagement emerge through sensitive, reflexive imitation.

Exploring the motivations, means and results of the *CRB* collaboration, this thesis documented some of the inherently good possibilities of intercultural engagement. The horizons of individuals involved have tangibly shifted by means of discursive engagement that looks toward new possibilities. Further, through the textures of liberal improvisation and layered multimedia, the performance of *CRB* collapses together diverse situations and histories into a rich expression of the here-and-now.

Blown by the ancestral wind, *CRB* realises the amazing potential for music to enliven new conversations between people and traditions never before imagined. In this collaboration, futures are directed toward new horizons opening out onto truly new articulations of the past.

Possibility

Considerations of the idiosyncrasies of tradition have, up until this point, been primarily concerned with the movement and animation of the past in the present — performed into experience and sensation. Yet as *manikay* moves from the past to the present, it is ultimately concerned with the future. *Manikay* sustains thought and action toward this future, inherently replete with an excess of possibility.

Manikay animates life within culture as it sustains an endless play of forms, sounds and sensations. Music and performance are integral to animating life: forms that can be filled with voice and improvisation address unique contexts and connect individuals across temporal and cultural divides. Yet the hermeneutic of *manikay* ever orients awareness beyond the animation of life amid situation, culture and tradition.

An individual's creativity grasps toward possibilities beyond singular articulations held in history, subjectivity, idiomatic form or medium. Creativity unique to every individual

suggests the possibility of life beyond the beginnings of culture and tradition, which constitute our initial awareness and orientation in the world.

Our actions and voices hold possibilities for renewal. Where they honestly and lovingly seek what is good, they can be renewing. The very nature of possibility calls us to respond, to open our horizons to new possibilities by expressing creativity in everything we do.

Finding a personal voice amid the effective histories that undeniably constitute our being, affirms the goodness of possibility as it enriches life freed from any tyrannies, stagnations or mystifying hazes of the past. Integral humanity can be defined beyond culture and tradition: the goodness of possibility is something we can freely choose to live toward.

Tradition is known through performed conversation. Where that conversation is discursive, exploratory, fluent and honest, tradition is worth celebrating as it leads toward new possibility. Manyak.

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Appendix one

Song texts transcribed in thesis

Unless otherwise noted, all translations and transcriptions were made with Daniel and Benjamin Wilfred, 2010–2012. These are not literal, word-for-word translations but reflect an appropriate explanation for the context.

Chapter three		
Wukun – Clouds (Andy Peters 2012)	Nyalk, galkanen nyalk Gumurr nhawurlanapu Gel-gel-gel likanangayi nyalk Balangayi nyalk mala	Rain, falling down I see the clouds forming The rain is coming, cooling rain Falling on the country
Chapter four		
Birrkpirrk – Plover (Wägilak elder Diltjima in McKenzie 1983, 9) ¹	Dirri pala (Birrk Birrk) luyun bawuda Ngulalang Lutunbuy lapa budapurru Dunubawuy Gapu da jindi gunmawili Mayrikbirrk budapurru Mayrikbirrk budapurru Ngulalangba djinbananawuy	From the island to the shore the Plover [Birrkpirrk] waded Reaching the mainland at the rivermouth Where the bay is wide Plover crossed over Where saltwater met fresh, The water swirled.
Dhanarra – White flower	Wurrpu dilyunayi, dhanarra bädun Buluwulu gupurranayi, milimili bädun dilyunayi	Flowers are starting to come out, white Eucalyptus flowers Seeds falling down, flowers withering and dying
Djuwalpada – Mokuy ‘Ghost’	Djuwalpada Njirriyinjirriyi Dhawal- wal duy’yun Likandhu-njupan Djuwalpada	Djuwalpada, Njirriyinjirriyi, walking across the country Djuwalpada, with elbows pointing

¹ Orthography as in the original

Gara – Spear	Marrayunmara gara guthanbiny Yarrarra, yarrarra, yarrarra Gulyunmirr galpu, maḍayin-marrayi	Aiming, shakes his spear, runs towards the country Aiming the spear, ready to throw, aiming Thrown from the spear-thrower making the sacred law
Galpan – Dillybag	Galpan galpan wandina Birrinyinbirrinyin maninyala	The woven basket Carried by the ghost Birrinyinbirrinyin
Wata – Wind	Djiṅala gurru yalagarayi Mawululayi Gumurr-wuma wākura dādutj-manayi Gumurr yabalayi gumurr-wuma gumurr-gumirri balayi	He’s going up to Njilipidji Pulled to the country by his chest Walking back to his place
Wata – Wind	Wata butthun marayi Läplap mirriṅani Djulgarra buma Mokuy mali nhaṅgu Gangul gangul butthun marayi	The wind is blowing The <i>mokuy</i> is walking with the wind He is dancing on the ground He is looking at the shadows The <i>mokuy</i> flies now
Guku – Honey	Lirrawaya baṅburr mayipa Guyu-guyu, guyu-guyu, ahhhh, ohhhh Rawarrararay, bulunyerri dalḡumirri	The toothed bee [with stinger] is flying, starting to make a hive Buzzing, buzzing, ahhhh, ohhhh [sound of the wind] Like the sound of the wind, it flies a long way to make another home
Mälka – String bag	Mälka dil’yun marrayi bulunyerri Rrr, rrr, rakirri; Rrr, rrr, gawudju	That string bag – now we are painting up Rolling that string; rolling and making it longer

Birrkpirrk – Plover	Yawilila yawilila Moyŋu moyŋu Birrkpirrk ŋäthi Luṭunba nhaṇa Gawirrinjdji ²	Plover, plover crying Djuwalpaḍa dancing, Djuwalpaḍa dancing Plover crying for Luṭunba, looking toward Luṭunba
Chapter five		
Djuwalpaḍa – Mokuy ‘Ghost’ (Daniel Wilfred)	<i>Word for word transcription</i> Djuwalpaḍa Ŋirriyiŋirriyi Dhawal-wal ḍuy’yun ŋopurr-ŋopurr Burrwanyila Ḷikan-dhu garrarr’yun Mokuy-u ŋupana Dhawal-wal ḍuy’yun Gandjalala Mokoy-u ŋupana Ŋirriyiŋirriyi Dhawal-wal ḍuy’yun	Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i> Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i> Arriving at his home place wrist or forearm Name called by <i>mokuy</i> Elbow-with Dance <i>Mokuy</i> (ghost) [ergative] follow, pointing Arriving at his home place Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i> <i>Mokuy</i> (ghost) [ergative] follow, pointing Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i> Arriving at his home place
Djuwalpaḍa – Mokuy ‘Ghost’ (Daniel Wilfred)	<i>Word for word transcription</i> Ḷikan-dhu, Ḷikan-dhu Djuwalpaḍa Dhawal-wal ḍuy’yun Ḷikan-dhu, Ḷikan-dhu, Ḷikan-dhu Djuwalpaḍa Garrayaṇa, garrayaṇa Wakura Gurrumirri	Elbow-with [repeated] Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i> Arriving at his home place Elbow-with [repeated] Name of Wägilak <i>mokuy</i> Place where Djuwalpaḍa walked Place where Djuwalpaḍa walked Place where Djuwalpaḍa walked

² This translation was begun by Aaron Corn on May 26, 2010.

	<p>Duḷumirri</p> <p>Gumurrmirri</p> <p>Wakura</p> <p>Gurruḡmirri</p> <p>Ḳikan-dhu</p> <p>Gara'yun</p>	<p>Place where Djuwalpaḡa walked</p> <p>Chest-having</p> <p>Place where Djuwalpaḡa walked</p> <p>Place where Djuwalpaḡa walked</p> <p>Elbow-with</p> <p>Spear</p>
<p>Djuwalpaḡa –</p> <p>Mokuy 'Ghost'</p> <p>(Benjamin Wilfred)</p>	<p><i>Word for word transcription</i></p> <p>Ḳikan-dhu</p> <p>Djuwalpaḡa, Djuwalpaḡa</p> <p>Ḳirriyinjirriyi, Ḳirriyinjirriyi</p> <p>Djuwalpaḡa, Djuwalpaḡa</p> <p>Nyagulyagul</p> <p>Butjulubayi</p> <p>Ḳikandhu-ḡupan</p> <p>Djuwalpaḡa</p> <p>Ḳäkirri, ḡäkirri,</p> <p>Dhawal-wal ḡuy'yun</p> <p>Ḳikan-dhu</p> <p>Djuwalpaḡa</p> <p>Ḳirriyinjirriyi</p>	<p>Elbow-with</p> <p>Name of Wägilak mokuy</p> <p>Name of Wägilak mokuy</p> <p>Name of Wägilak mokuy</p> <p>Name for Mäḡawk (Silver-crowned friarbird)</p> <p>Place where Djuwalpaḡa began walking</p> <p>With elbow-pointing</p> <p>Name of Wägilak mokuy</p> <p>Cover [fresh meat in ground oven]</p> <p>Arriving at his home place</p> <p>Elbow-with</p> <p>Name of Wägilak mokuy</p> <p>Name of Wägilak mokuy</p>
<p>Mäḡawk -</p> <p>Friarbird</p> <p>'Football'</p>	<p>Nyagulyagul wärrarra</p> <p>dunbirriyunayi</p> <p>'Ḳarra dhu bulyun, ḡarra dhu bulyun'</p>	<p><i>Mäḡawk</i> flies through the red sunset</p> <p>'I want to play [football], I want to play'</p>

Chapter seven		
Gara – Spear	<p>Marrayunmara gara guthanbiny ɲulaŋura, yarrarra</p> <p>Marrayunmara gara guthanbiny ɲulaŋura, yarrarra</p> <p>Yarrarra, yarrarra, yarrarra, waahh!</p> <p>Ah yarrarra, yarrarra, yarrarra</p> <p>Marrayunmara guthanbiny</p> <p>Marrayunmara guthanbiny, ɲulaŋu</p> <p>Waahh! Hey, hey-hey, hey!</p>	<p>Dancing with the spear, the spear has almost left his hand</p> <p>Dancing with the spear, the spear has almost left his hand</p> <p>Aiming the spear, aiming, aiming, waahh!</p> <p>Aiming the spear, aiming, aiming</p> <p>Dancing with the spear</p> <p>The spear has almost left his hand</p> <p>Waahh! Hey, hey-hey, hey!</p>
Birrkpirrk – Plover	<p>Yawilila yawilila</p> <p>Moyŋu moyŋu</p> <p>Wipa nhaŋu Manungududayi</p> <p>Birrkpirrk-nha, moyŋu</p> <p>Nhabilayi, nhabilayi</p> <p>Wipa nhaŋu Manungududayi</p> <p>Birrkpirrk-nha, moyŋu</p> <p>Mmm, mmm, ga-Birrk!</p> <p>Birrkpirkk, Birrkpirrk, ga-Birrk!</p>	<p>Plover, plover crying</p> <p>Djuwalpada dancing, Djuwalpada dancing</p> <p>Flying over the water [at Luṭunba] to land at Manungududayi</p> <p>Plover, Djuwalpada dancing</p> <p>Plover, plover [alternate name]</p> <p>Flying over the water [at Luṭunba] to land at Manungududayi</p> <p>Plover, Djuwalpada dancing</p> <p>Mmm, mmm, ga-Birrk! (Plover)</p> <p>Plover, plover, plover!</p>

Appendix two

Defining 'ancestral text'

To clarify my usage of terminology, the following table summarises the layered terms that refer to different aspects of the *ancestral text*.

Ancestral text	<i>Metaphysical</i>	A blueprint above and beyond; an ultimate essence; ancestral reality. The ancestral text contains all possible iterations and aspects of life and history.
	<i>Phenomenological</i>	The richness of all creation portends to the reality of the ancestral text.
	<i>Ecological</i>	Country and ecology are existential inscriptions of the ancestral text, tangible traces of ancestral reality, precedence and presence. Yolŋu (people) always exist within the movement of seasons, sustained and reliant upon the land. This is a tangible, stable reality.
	<i>Social</i>	Yolŋu (people) always exist among other people and kin (<i>gurrutu</i>). People today are connected back through the generations to the creative foundations of the world. Relationships are branches or connections, supported by deeper ancestral roots.
Wägilak narrative	<i>Ceremonial</i>	Performed expression of fundamental tenets of the ancestral text. The ancestral text is animated and engaged through ceremonial performance and event. Figurative images and themes carry nuanced significations. The Wägilak narrative is manifest in various media of expression including song, dance, design, language and story.
	<i>Contextual</i>	The Wägilak narrative is only one element within a greater narrative web extending across Arnhem Land, each clan holding a different but complementary component. Greater narrative

		wholes are multi-faceted expressions of the rich, heterophonic ancestral text. Society and <i>gurrutu</i> (kin) relations are reflected in joined, complimentary narratives.
Yolju hermeneutic	<i>Initiation, education</i>	Individuals engage with and interpret the ancestral text in a particularly Yolju way. Yolju modes of understanding open up the possibility of reading the ancestral text as it is inscribed on existence and society.
	<i>Nyalabuluṅu rom</i> (correct practice)	Continuing to live life as an engagement with the ancestral text; sustaining life in reflection of ancestral presence and precedence through ceremonial performance. Performing song <i>translates</i> the ancestral text from concept or law into experience and practice.

Appendix Three

*Crossing Roper Bar and Tract tour and performance history*³

2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workshops and performance, Ngukurr community, NT ▪ Workshops and recording, Okin Studio, Melbourne
2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workshops and performance, Garma Music Festival, Gulkula, NT
2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance, World Federation of International Song Writing Competitions, Melbourne ▪ FINA World Championships, Birrarung Marr, Federation Square, Melbourne ▪ Broadcast, Radio National's <i>The Music Show</i>, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Melbourne ▪ Performance, Queensland State Library, Queensland Music Festival ▪ Performance, Brisbane Powerhouse, Queensland Music Festival ▪ Workshops, Cherbourg State School, Queensland
2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workshops and performances, Top End tour with Tura New Music: Darwin, Katherine, Timber Creek, Kununurra, Warmun, Fitzroy Crossing, Broome, Lombadina, One Arm Point, Beagle Bay ▪ Performance, Perth Concert Hall
2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance, Apollo Bay Music Festival, Apollo Bay, Victoria ▪ Performance, Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne ▪ Performance, Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre ▪ Recording, Alan Eaton Studios, St Kilda, Melbourne ▪ Forum and performance, Federation Hall, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne ▪ Forum and performance, Melba Hall, Melbourne University ▪ Workshops, Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE, Melbourne

³ *Tract*, composed by Erkki Veltheim (see Chapter One).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance, signing of the <i>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i> by the Hon. Jenny Macklin, Parliament House, Canberra ▪ Performance, Australian Music Centre Awards, The Playhouse, Sydney Opera House
2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance, Australian Performing Arts Market, Adelaide ▪ Performance, WOMADelaide, Adelaide (Young Wägilak Group only) ▪ Performance, Adelaide Town Hall with the London Sinfonietta (Erkki Veltheim's <i>Tract</i> only) ▪ Performance, opening of <i>Colour country: Art from the Roper River</i> exhibition, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin ▪ Performance, Darwin Entertainment Centre ▪ Performance and workshops, Ngukurr community, NT ▪ Forum and performance, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies annual conference, Australian National University, Canberra (Young Wägilak Group only) ▪ HC Coombs Creative Arts Fellowship residency, workshops and performance, Llewellyn Hall and Australian National University, Canberra
2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workshops, Brunswick, Melbourne ▪ Recording, Alan Eaton Studios, St Kilda, Melbourne ▪ Workshop, Australian National Academy of Music, Melbourne ▪ Performance with the Australian National Academy of Music (Erkki Veltheim's <i>Tract</i> only), Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne ▪ Broadcast, Radio National's <i>The music show</i>, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Melbourne
2012
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance, Signal Point Art Gallery, Goolwa, South Australia ▪ Performances and workshops, Monash University School of Music, Victoria ▪ Performance, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris ▪ Broadcast, BBC Radio, London ▪ Performance, London Jazz Festival, Southbank Centre, London ▪ Workshop and performance, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University, Cambridge ▪ Workshop and performance, Homerton College, Cambridge University, Cambridge

2013

- Performances and workshops during tour from Darwin to Perth:
Darwin, Kununurra, Cape Leveque, Djarindjin, One Arm Point, Broome, Beagle Bay,
Moonlight Bay, Karratha, Roebourne, Perth

2014

- Performance, workshop and CD launch at the National Museum of Australia,
Canberra
- Performance at Bennetts Lane Jazz Club, Melbourne
- Schools workshops, Melbourne

