Cultural Gold ◊ Colonial Desire

First Nations stories
and the
non-Aboriginal theatre maker

By

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ABSTRACT

My desire as a settler-colonist playwright to include First Nations experience in my work was the genesis of this research. But questions about my own playwriting soon gave way to broader issues of australian theatre affecting First Nations cultural rights and artistic expression. As such this work uses testimony and case study to illustrate what happens when non-Aboriginal theatre makers engage with First Nations stories and portray First Nations people.

Most new knowledge comes from conversations with eleven theatre makers discussing their experiences of creating stage stories about and for First Nations people. I also examine receptions of Sydney Theatre Company's *The Secret River*: that work exemplifies how colonial history is depicted on stage when made for White audiences.

I have developed a four-pronged theory framework to interpret this data: (1) critical Whiteness and colonising habits of those operating as White, (2) artistic freedom, (3) First Nations nonmaterial/cultural capital (FNCC) incorporating Bourdieu's Capital, Habitus and Field, and (4) meanings of culture/Culture: to distinguish between artistic pursuit (culture) and Culture as an integral code for being human.

Through these lenses it emerges that First Nations theatre, made under First Nations control and authority, is Culture and Culture-making in the profound sense of that word. This contrasts with the meaning of culture to describe the arts role that non-Aboriginal theatre fulfils for settler-colonists. This understanding distinguishes between First Nations theatre, which constitutes First Nations Culture, and theatre depicting First Nations people, which is not First Nations theatre or Culture.

Meanwhile, the artistic freedom and cultural safety of First Nations theatre artists and audiences remains less certain than that of their settler-colonist counterparts. This is so even as non-Aboriginal artists and audiences increasingly recognise and desire the cultural value, and thus one or more forms of capital, inherent in First Nations stories. This White recognition, as desire, extends to capital

embodied by Indigenous people who have authority and knowledges to stage those stories.

As First Nations Culture becomes visible as capital, new and continuing problems of settler-colonist behaviours are activated. These include White theatre maker strategies to access artistic capital embodied in First Nations people and Culture. Thus, Bourdieu's Capital reveals movements of First Nations theatre capital out of First Nations control into that of non-Aboriginal artists—for use in settler-colonist narratives. In these instances, First Nations theatre capital (FNCC) is transformed into colonial capital.

Conversely, Bourdieu's ideas also reveal movements of theatre capital in positive collaborations between First Nations and non-Aboriginal theatre makers: White creative capital, such as funding, dramaturgy, euro-theatre traditions, spaces and, sometimes, playwriting labour, is deployed under First Nations control to make First Nations stories and Culture. In these collaborations White capital transforms into First Nations capital because of how, for whom, to what purpose and under whose control it is deployed.

However, notwithstanding such positive capital exchanges, this inquiry finds that First Nations theatre artists and communities in australia will not have genuine artistic freedom until their collaborations are a free, Sovereign choice rather than a colonially structured capital necessity.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis:

1. Does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university;

and that:

2. The research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University;

and:

3. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this research does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: *Kay B Nankervis*

Date: 29 July 2023

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This work has been undertaken across several Nations on the land mass now referred to in colonial terms as 'Australia'. I acknowledge that this continent and those places are, always have been and always will be Aboriginal land: they have never been ceded by - nor has any treaty been framed with - their rightful occupants and custodians.

Throughout this research I have lived on Wiradyuri country in the shadow of Wahluu (also known as Mount Panorama in Bathurst, NSW). I pay respect to Wiradyuri elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people who might read this thesis or whom I have met with for its creation. I also acknowledge those other Nations and clans whose places I have travelled to for thesis work: the Whadjuk Noongar people, the Kulin Nation in Naarm (including those of the Yalukit-willam clan of the Bunurong people and the Wurundjeri clan), and those of the Eora nation.

I am grateful to those First Nations theatre makers and arts workers who have participated in this research or assisted with it. I also acknowledge both First Nations performance traditions dating back over tens of millennia and the pioneering work of First Nations people since 1788 to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories to colonial australian stages.

It has taken several villages and three universities to raise this PhD; so, I owe thanks to staff and others across all of those sites for supporting this doctoral work. Unsurprisingly, all three higher education institutions bear the names of british settler-colonists, two of them colonial explorers. At Charles Sturt, where I was employed as an academic throughout most of my PhD study, I thank two former heads of the School of Communication and Creative Industries, Associate Professors Margaret Woodward and Dr Susan Wood, for energetically supporting and guiding my applications for Faculty study leave. I thank also the then Dean of Arts, Professor Anthony Cahallan, and former Associate Dean (Research), Associate Professor Philip Hider, for approving those rounds of generous doctoral support to work on my thesis. Thank you also to Professor Cahallan, plus Associate Professor Joy Wallace, Dr Barbara Hill, Associate Professor Wendy Nolan, Dr Donna Bridges, Dr Jillene Harris and Aunty Gloria Rodgers for encouraging my preceding work as a Charles Sturt Indigenous Education Fellow (non-Indigenous): this fellowship was instrumental in my decision to then undertake a PhD in australian colonialism and First Nations performance.

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Kay Nankervis,
In the shadow of Wahluu, Wiradyuri-land
29 July, 2023

INTRODUCTION: CREATIVE INTENTIONS, CRITICAL CONCLUSIONS

This research began as a creative writing inquiry focussed on making a theatre stage-play. I wanted to explore how I as a non-Aboriginal australian might acknowledge colonial history—and the experience of the colonised—in my playwriting. This meant investigating what problems my engagement with First Nations stories created. I knew acknowledgement of colonisation required portraying or making space for the realities of First Nations people whose experiences of australian colonial nationhood were different to mine. What were the problems of undertaking this work? The other questions I asked at the beginning were: what could I *do*, what methods must I *use* or what approach did I *need to take* in my theatre-making to resolve these problems?

But there were other questions I needed to ask also. Irreconcilable old and new problems emerged in my research and changed its direction. This thesis journey has become a story instead of the complex value of First Nations theatre storytelling when it is made by First Nations people under First Nations' people's genuine control: how that value creates desire, triggering colonising impulses in those who are not First Nations people. Mistakes other non-Aboriginal theatre makers and performance producers have made in telling stories affecting First Nations people are important to this narrative. Digging into these problems eventually made visible those respectful collaborative relationships between First Nations and non-Aboriginal theatre makers that do enable First Nations theatre, and thus First Nations Culture, to be made and reproduced.

At the heart of this work are eleven conversations I had with theatre makers about their experiences of telling First Nations stories on stage. While I initially sought advice on my own writing intentions this agenda soon faded away: every interaction, even in the beginning, went elsewhere. Theatre makers shared rich, personal stories of what happened when theatre involving First Nations peoples' stories was being made. There were broader ideas to be understood than what I could do appropriately as a non-Aboriginal playwright. To fully see the knowledge in

this data and other inquiry threads, I had to de-link my research from a plan to make a play. This was a necessary response to what I learned and so that I could learn.

My use of the word "theatre maker" includes me and refers to all those artists and other theatre professionals engaged in the development, production and performance of stage works generally understood as "theatre". This includes directors; dramaturgs; writers; performers; cultural consultants; company artistic directors; lighting, sound and set designers; set builders; technical operators; stage and production managers; venue managers and programmers. I am a member of that group, mostly as a playwright and actor who is also sometimes engaged in dramaturgical processes to develop other artists' new works. The practitioners cited most throughout this thesis as theatre makers were directors, dramaturgs, artistic directors and playwrights.

In Chapter One, the first in Part I: Landscape of Theatre Inquiry, I begin to set out the problem I represent as a non-Aboriginal theatre maker. I outline how I am distinguished from First Nations australians and what theoretical frameworks inform issues linked to these distinctions. My research questions acknowledge the effects of colonial reality on my position as a non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist theatre maker; therefore, I reference critical race and Whiteness literatures to understand impacts of colonisation on those colonised: in particular, on First Nations people of australia. As this research has evolved, these frameworks illuminate White/settler-colonist habits and, through that White colonial habits lens, the problems that can occur when non-Aboriginal theatre makers engage with First Nations stories.

In Chapter Two I identify White assumptions about how artistic freedom operates. Those ideas are measured against theories and global policies of what artistic freedom should be. This analysis includes who among groups of people are more likely to enjoy artistic freedom and associated cultural rights as a lived reality. This has provided another lens through which to understand the later conversations I had with theatre makers.

I use lower case throughout this thesis to refer to the nation state known as "Australia" and other colonising nations not connected to australian lands pre-1788.

This counter-colonial defiance of english title case norms acknowledges that australian lands have never been ceded and, as of 2023, no treaty regarding them had been established between euro-settler-colonists and First Peoples. This lower case use thus recognises Aboriginal and Torres Islander Sovereignty and aims to irritate residues of *terra nullius* in White imaginations.

Conversely, I have capitalised White and Whiteness to distinguish those terms from the colour white and from notions of skin colour: to recognise the complex meanings of Whiteness used in this scholarship. I am applying these rules around my own words. However, where I directly quote other authors or research participants, I follow the text's style or default to common case usage, so as not to put my specific meanings onto the words of others, even though our intended definitions might align. I use first person pronouns such as "I" and "me" throughout all chapters to keep myself and my subjectivities as researcher and theatre maker visible.

Chapter Three traces current literature and recent histories exploring issues affecting First Nations theatre and theatre makers. I reference Maryrose Casey's work on White receptions of First Nations theatre emerging on urban stages from the early 1970s (2004). This has enabled me to mark a shift from then to now in the ways that First Nations theatre work has come to be valued, or seen to be valued, by the broader arts sector and non-Aboriginal theatre producers. This is significant for noting changing non-Aboriginal theatre makers' behaviours in relation to First Nations theatre, artists and communities. Chapter Three also incorporates critiques of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience has been represented on australian stages and elsewhere. The chapter ends with an overview of the Australia Council's role in First Nations theatre, the evolution of its First Nations arts protocols and recent Australia Council research into how australian audiences, programmers and venues respond to First Nations theatre. As I was submitting this thesis the Australia Council was merging with other smaller arts bodies into a new entity called Creative Australia, under the Federal Government's five year cultural policy unveiled some months before (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023). In this thesis, however, I am using that body's longstanding name, Australia Council for the Arts, and abbreviated moniker, Australia Council, to reflect the era of its work I am discussing.

Chapter Four explores the resourcing and reception of *The Secret River*, Sydney Theatre Company's adaptation of Kate Grenville's novel. This production toured local and international stages from 2013-2019 throughout the period when interviews for this research were conducted. Both the *Secret River* novel and play exemplify colonial history framed for White audiences. The stage production demonstrates also what White philanthropy can enable, and what White critics will praise as Reconciliatory, even as a key First Nations theatre leader was questioning, repeatedly, the genocide-justifying story that the novel and the play were telling.

Two chapters follow in Part II: Methods of Theatre Inquiry. Chapter Five sets out entwined qualitative methods I have used in dialogue with fellow theatre makers around First Nations theatre stories: active conversations underpinning a blended oral history-case studies approach. I explain how I have positioned myself within the conversation reporting while extensively quoting participants' words so that they can retain their voices, albeit while I have ultimate power as curator.

Chapter Six introduces two more frameworks for analysing conversation data alongside critical Whiteness and artistic freedom lenses. Bourdieu's nonmaterial capital and his Habitus-Capital-Field framework are discussed alongside how other scholars have applied his concepts to First Nations arts and enterprise in australia. Additionally, two broad understandings of culture/Culture operating today are presented, provoked by what co-conversationalists have told me about the role of theatre in their communities. This culture/Culture framework further defines what constitutes First Nations theatre and, alongside Bourdieu's ideas, will help categorise White/settler-colonist behaviours revealed in theatre artist conversations.

Part III: Voices of Theatre Inquiry (Chapters 7 to 11) covers what happened in these meetings with eleven key theatre makers. My co-conversationalists included members of First Nations theatre organisations Moogahlin, Ilbijerri and Yirra Yaakin, other First Nations theatre artists and leaders, plus non-Aboriginal theatre makers experienced in collaborating to make First Nations stage stories.

Summarising these exchanges at the start of this thesis is reductive without the anecdotal contexts my co-conversationalists provide. With that caveat, I list

some themes which have arisen. A key distinction has emerged around the significance of theatre as Culture for First Nations people vs its role as mere arts culture for settler-colonist australians. First Nations theatre made under First Nations control constitutes Culture according to the profound meaning of Culture: a roadmap for life, identity, humanness and belonging. As already explained, I apply these two meanings of arts/culture and Culture as a methodological framework to help distinguish First Nations theatre from other theatre. This includes identifying theatre which portrays First Nations people but is not First Nations theatre or Culture.

Integral to First Nations theatre as Culture was another theme in the Voices conversations: that First Nations theatre makers must account to communities and get their stories right. Discussions around these requirements have made visible White/settler-colonist assumptions that these accountabilities are a load *obstructing,* rather than cultural capital *enabling,* First Nations theatre/Culture. Out of this disconnect comes cultural safety issues in rehearsal rooms, on stages and for audiences. This includes pressures on First Nations artists to compromise Cultural protocols and thus their own cultural safety. These revelations are understood more clearly through all four of this thesis's analytical lenses: artistic freedom, White colonial habits, First Nations creative capitals (FNCC) and distinctions of culture/Culture meanings.

Practitioner stories also reveal that non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist theatre makers increasingly value First Nations theatre and stories about First Nations people. This rising visibility of First Nations capital perceived in the White imagination includes that seen in Indigenous stories, community relationships, cultural knowledges and Culture-making methods. There are anecdotes about new, problematic settler-colonist behaviours aimed at accessing some categories of these valuables. Those behavioural instances include over-claiming of relationship to First Nations people by non-Aboriginal creatives to gain funding and community access. Non-Aboriginal theatre makers can also join with First Nations communities to tell their stories but might retain control and authorship of the work produced. I view these behaviours through all four theory frameworks: White colonial habits, culture/Culture, artistic freedom and Bourdieu's Capital/FNCC. They show how

White theatre makers access First Nations forms of theatre capital, such as stories and the Indigenous authorisation to tell them, to create colonial narratives. What begins as First Nations capital, FNCC, becomes colonial capital instead.

These chapters in Part III: Voices of Theatre Inquiry also identify the existence of collaborative practices, structures and resources which *do* enable First Nations theatre/Culture to be made. This occurs, for instance, where non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist dramaturgs, directors and playwrights contribute their theatre capital to productions under genuine First Nations control. In these cases, White creative capital embodied in non-Aboriginal agents and institutions transforms into First Nations theatre capital (FNCC). Why and how this is achieved becomes clear through practice examples throughout Part III. Nevertheless, while settler-Indigenous collaborations can bring White capital in positive ways to First Nations theatre- and culture- making, such arrangements involve compromise. It emerges in Part III that important to maintenance, reproduction and making of Indigenous Culture through theatre are clear spaces where First Nations artists and communities can work away from the settler-colonist gaze. In the absence of these opportunities First Nations theatre makers and communities are not exercising artistic freedom. First Nations-specific creative spaces include tangible structures which are currently scarce, such as First Nations-led performing arts education and theatre venues available exclusively for First Nations productions.

In Chapter Twelve I summarise this research's contributions to the field of australian theatre. These findings include the four-pronged theoretical framework developed for and arising from the Voices data. More importantly, this thesis makes clearer what genuine First Nations artistic and cultural control in australian theatre-making entails, requires and signifies. These findings have direct application for changes underway across all australia's arts fields, as federal and state governments roll out their latest multi-year arts policies and plans. This is especially apposite for the Federal Government's *Revive* arts policy unveiled at the start of 2023. Its five key principles begin with the tenet: "First Nations First". The new federal arts entity established by *Revive,* Creative Australia, is required to form a First Nations-led arts board by mid-2024, and for that board's focus to start with performing arts. Guaranteeing First Nations control of how Indigenous stories are told on australian

stages will be crucial for *Revive* and Creative Australia's declared "First Nations First" agenda.

That said, ensuring First Nations control of Indigenous stage stories might sound a simple, moderate ask. But my research says otherwise. I demonstrate how colonial structures, and the White psyche which maintains them, deny First Nations people the artistic freedom that settler-colonists exercise without thinking. Many stories in this thesis show how White colonial desire conspires to sidestep First Nations autonomy within, and Sovereignty over, theatre-making that uses First Nations stories, people, bodies and Culture. To see how this White colonial desire operates, the first chapter in Part I: Landscape of Theatre Inquiry explains critical theory I began with to inform this research and my position within it.

PART I. LANDSCAPE OF THEATRE INQUIRY

1. CRITICAL LOCATIONS: WHITENESS, RACE AND SPACE

i. Introduction: colonial contexts

My identity as a non-Aboriginal descendant of pre-1900 european settlers has been integral to this playwriting journey. I wanted to address in my storytelling how contemporary colonial realities affect australian First Peoples' and settler-colonists' lived experiences differently. I intended to end my complicity in the dominance of euro-settler-colonist realities on australian stages by developing culturally appropriate, inclusive playwriting. It will become clear that such assumptions about what I might *do* and whether I could contribute to decolonising theatre practices had many problems. There were more important understandings I needed first. Realising that my settler-colonist position affected how I could proceed, however, was at least a start. It was also the first step to unpacking problems of myself and all non-Aboriginal theatre makers under investigation in this research.

This chapter covers ideas which illuminate settler-colonists' positions contrasted with those of the colonised. These divergent realities became entrenched over centuries of european imperialist expansion into lands lived in by non-european societies. The basis and effects of these practices have been unpacked for decades across theory labelled race, critical Whiteness, postcolonial, decolonial and more. These ideas will be outlined and then applied to my position as a settler-colonist. This will include explanations of terminology used to refer to Indigenous peoples in australia and elsewhere. These theories and definitions will contextualise problems I present as a non-Aboriginal playwright wanting to acknowledge the realities of First Nations australians—who are displaced and colonised in the land where I live and work. The theory discussions which follow outline well-trodden paths of academic thinking, but it is necessary to acknowledge these ideas because they explain and predict White/settler-colonist behaviours revealed in this study. These theories about colonial habits therefore provide one of four frameworks used to interpret what I learned from theatre makers in Part III: Voices of Theatre Inquiry.

ii. Research locations: colonial theory frameworks

a. Critiquing eurocentrism

Theorists at least as far back as Dewey (1928) have acknowledged that race- and culture-based inequities have continued beyond the abolition of slavery in the united states and elsewhere. Europe AKA "The West" vs the rest does not exactly delineate colonisers from those who are Indigenous/colonised, but this distinction is implicit in assumptions critiqued by cultural scholars about where "civilisation" resides and is defined.

Postcolonial theory emerged from the 1970s as a major wave of this criticism. Today the "post" prefix is under critique for implying that colonial structures are behind us (for instance: Cunningham, 2018, p. 38; Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p. 37). However, "much of postcolonial theory is concerned with the lingering forms of colonial authority after the formal end of Empire" (Elam, 2019) rather than a world where colonialist structures have ceased. So, postcolonial writing recognises the ongoing injuries of colonialism. Edward Said's conceptualisation of the Other (1978) is still referenced regularly to describe how hegemonic cultural groups, of which coloniser descendants are a significant subset, view colonised peoples. Many significant postcolonial authors have emerged since the 1980s, including Said's 'postcolonial trinity' fellow travellers. Homi K. Bhabha's discussion of agency among the colonised, cultural hybridity and intersections of race, culture and nationality (1994) reveal how culturally value-laden all research is. Gayatri Spivak (1988) uses the term subaltern to specify everything and everyone with limited access to cultural imperialism within a colonised world. She thus argues that different experiences and spaces accrue and operate for members of social groups according to how activities and peoples in those social groups are positioned as colonising or colonised. In addition to the Spivak-Bhabha-Said trinity, Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin's work (1989) links postcolonial texts with postcolonial arts culture to question the dominance of eurocentric Cultures, ways of knowing and being. Postcolonial writing is vast beyond these key texts, but its recognition of how colonial histories, imaginations and resilience create distinct life experiences for coloniser and

colonised is fundamental to the realities of australian First Nations communities and artists. This fundamental euro-critique therefore very broadly frames this research.

Scholars such as Mignolo (2009), advocate *decolonisation* as a global necessity to counter euro-dominance (p. 161). He critiques lingering colonial assumptions that there is a central, objective point of knowledge. That supposed central point, he argues, is based upon epistemologies derived from ancient greek and latin societies and the euro-languages which emerged from them into renaissance, imperial europe (p. 164). He uses another latin-american scholar's term for this myth: *the hubris of the zero point* (Castro-Gómez, 2007)—a coining Castro-Gomez also used for the short title of his later book, "Zero-Point Hubris" (2021). Decolonial options, Mignolo advocates, include "epistemic disobedience" (2009, pp. 160, 161) to delink from the illusion of zero-point epistemology. That is, to move away from an illusory zero point which creates a euro-enculturated "knowing subject" who delineates human and knowledge value:

> ...the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them... (and) there are still many believers. At stake is the question of racism and epistemology... (T)hat if you come from Latin America you have to 'talk about' Latin America; that in such a case you have to be a token of your culture. Such expectation will not arise if the author 'comes' from Germany, France, England or the US. As we know: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science. (Mignolo, 2009, p. 160)

The belief that euro-peoples embody zero-point knowledges and thus are all-knowing subjects implies other assumptions which, in their power, become self-fulfilling truths. One is that euro-peoples have greater agility to move between spaces of endeavour and thus to observe Other Cultures: that they have epistemological agility to understand and to comment upon Cultures and peoples not privileged by myths of zero-point epistemology. Mignolo's (2009) and Castro-Gómez's (2007) coining of the zero-point epistemology myth thus theorises a phenomenon which emerges in this research. This is where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are assumed to have narrower practices and subject-matter where they can operate expertly than do their euro-descendant settler-colonist

colleagues. Examples of illusory zero-point epistemology having these effects in australian theatre practices arise in later chapters. The myth of zero-point epistemology has strong links to solipsistic habits of Whiteness affecting First Nations australians discussed in these next sections.

b. Critical Whiteness and *terra nullius*

Critical Whiteness literatures identify Whiteness as an invisible norm by which other cultural or raced groups are judged. Whiteness denotes membership of the cultural group in a place or society deemed to be the expected norm. Critical Whiteness thus extends Said's concept of the *Other* and incorporates Mignolo's and Castro-Gomez's zero-point epistemology concept. Goenpul race and Whiteness professor, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2006), notes that multiple non-australian scholars, including Garner in his seminal text "Whiteness: an Introduction" (2007), attest to the power of Whiteness. These critiques demonstrate that norms of Whiteness construct identity, frame subjectivity, drive decision-making and maintain power structures in government and elsewhere (2006, p. 388). Whiteness as a norm thus also frames knowledge and those values which determine which knowledge is produced. Moreton-Robinson notes Montag's contention (1997, p. 285), central to Whiteness critiques, that Whiteness has become a universal of "humanness", erasing its racial character (p. 388). Moreton-Robinson also acknowledges australian scholars such as Nicholl (2004) and Ravenscroft (2004), who highlight the effects of White ontological subjectivities on Indigenous Sovereignty (2006, p. 388). Such ontological subjectivities include what activities, enterprise, actions and cultural phenomena are valued in a colonial society ruled by Whiteness norms.

There are other White colonial positions which operate, almost conversely, amid White subjectivity's undervaluing of Other Cultures. This can be seen when settler-colonists' enact desire to take as their own what they *do* value in another Culture. I term this *White colonising desire* and assume I am not the first scholar to coin the phrase, although I might apply it differently to others. I recorded my thinking around *White colonising desire* some years ago, as I was having research conversations with theatre makers. It is useful to see the concept I was taking to those data gathering encounters. Therefore I include, verbatim, this note I made in

my endnote library responding to Ravenscroft's (2012) different meanings of "White Australian Desire":

> When *I* apply the concept of White desire or White colonising desire, I am referring to the desire of those who operate as White to want elements of life or goods or culture/Culture belonging to the Other who does not operate as White. That White desire assumes a right to those non-White valuables by dint of the desirer being White. This is the practice of the coloniser: to view their own culture as superior and by dint of that to assume rights to aspects of Others' cultures or economies as if more deserving or more capable of making the best use of those commodities, or cultural valuables created by and enjoyed by the Other. White desire when I use those two words together is the psychological and social behaviour of this process of thinking and action: I (as settler-colonist) see something that is in the Other's life or society or creative practice or culture, I am intrigued (and see value, entertainment, healing of guilt or the exotic), I want, I deserve to have, I acquire; those Others I acquire from benefit from me engaging in that process of acquisition. (Nankervis, 2015)

Thus, colonising *desire,* as a driver of White possession, begins in history with physical territory-taking; but it extends to any commodity the colonised create or use. My use of *colonial desire* throughout this thesis thus encompasses the ideas in this quote along with all critical literature referred to already. More scholarship into the source of White desire's power and maintenance is still needed, however, to further explicate how I conceptualise this phenomenon. This includes Sullivan's (2006) arguments that colonial desire, driving "habits of White privilege", is so deeply seated in the White psyche that the coloniser will always sabotage intentions, even their own, to decolonise. Sullivan's ideas will be expanded upon shortly. Meanwhile, Moreton-Robinson, citing Foord (2004), attests that the "White fantasy of *terra nullius* and disavowal of Indigenous Sovereignty" (2006, p. 388) are fundamental to australian nation-building. This is key to another aspect of White colonial desire: the desire to maintain things as they are. This includes unconscious strategies to control narratives of national history to justify past and continuing acts of colonial possession. As will be seen, these critical Whiteness readings applied to the australian context predict and make visible problems of the non-Aboriginal theatre maker. This includes the power of the *terra nullius* myth in White/settler-

colonist imaginations: how it has served White colonising desire for centuries and how it persists unconsciously in White theatre narratives today.

Australian coloniality was founded on, and I argue still resonates with, the eighteenth century european legal doctrine of *terra nullius*. That is, any unsettled land could be acquired by a sovereign state and the laws of that state would apply to the new territory (G. Foley, 1997, p. 2). NSW was declared an unsettled territory, or *terra nullius*, and occupied by the british even though Aboriginal people lived on the land and had for millennia. In 1992 the High Court's Mabo judgement (1992) declared the *terra nullius* doctrine a myth with no historical validity for australia. Whether this decision alleviates the impact of colonisation on australian First People's Sovereignty is contested. Mansell (1992) declared of the Mabo ruling soon after it: the "court gives an inch but takes a mile" (p. 1). Simpson (1993) argues that "in discarding *terra nullius* the High Court may have resolved one crisis" but it has "created another". That new crisis, Simpson contends, is of interpretation and will persist until australia is acknowledged as "conquered territory at international law" (p. 195). Foley (1997) attests that the Mabo decision and subsequent Native Title Act, 1993, function "to further dispossess and disadvantage the majority of Aboriginal people on mainland Australia today" (p. 6). With or without these Mabo contestations, *terra nullius'* endurance in australian law is legal testament to the epistemological dominance of eurocentric world views for valuing cultures, driving social structure and formulating legal codes. *Terra nullius* not only declared that the First People on australian lands had no culture or social structure, it designated them as either non-existent or less than human. The doctrine of *terra nullius* thus demonstrates how colonial desire can foment delusions that justify methods, such as theft and conquest, to satisfy those White yearnings. As demonstrated in later chapters these assumptions about precolonial Indigenous societies, driven as they are by colonial desire and its many distorted lenses, have implications today for First Nations artists' agency.

c. Race and other illusions: contexts of Whiteness

For decades the notion of *race* has been rejected as having no biological or other basis—except as a construction of difference exercised by those in the privileged group that considers themselves non-raced. Spelman (1988), and Cowlishaw (1987) refer to Montagu (1975) and Livingston (1964) for their critiques of the concept of race. Spelman said that the "existence of racism does not require that there are races; it requires the belief that there are races" (Spelman, 1988, p. 208). Cowlishaw noted the importance to her field of anthropology of Montagu's statement that biologically defined racial categories were of no significance in explaining other aspects of social life. She criticised nineteenth and twentieth century anthropology for treating Aboriginal people as a race when "in the mid-twentieth century... biologists resoundingly rejected racial categories by showing that variation within such groups is greater than variation between them" (Cowlishaw, 1987, p. 222). In its explanation of "critical" in critical race studies the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association said that:

> ...racialised categories are not taken as reflecting 'real' differences in the world, but rather... such categories are made to matter in social contexts where racialised hierarchies are rendered salient... Hence, we speak about 'racialisation' to indicate that race is an ongoing process of definition rather than a pre-existing 'fact'. The concept of 'racialisation' helps us to explain why certain groups of people, ideas and spaces become associated with 'race' at different historical and political moments. (ACRAWSA, 2014b).

My use of the word race therefore denotes the erroneous belief in race operating powerfully in a colonised world. My references to race do not constitute acceptance of the existence of races but an acknowledgement that *racialisation* constructs race and operates to maintain White/unraced privilege as understood within critical Whiteness scholarship.

These mechanisms of racialisation give further context to Whiteness and its power. Whiteness, as already indicated, is used in Whiteness literature to denote those cultural groups of people who occupy dominant positions within, almost always, eurocentric nations. Hence, the "White privilege" to which I refer is a

phenomenon arising from and enacting this dominance. These realities distinguish those categorised as White, not by physical features or skin colour, but by whether they are members of the group whose members are the dominant norm. Those who have been colonised and subjected to the power of colonisers are in many instances Indigenous populations of those colonised places. Whiteness also describes the position of descendants of colonisers in relation to race — a positioning that establishes White dominance and privilege. As already said those who are White assume that only non-White people have a race, ethnicity or Culture (Montag, 1997, p. 285). Meanwhile, who embodies Whiteness and non-Whiteness can shift: "...the boundaries of who is classified as 'white' are flexible, with different groups of people qualifying as 'white' at different times..." (ACRAWSA, 2014a).

d. White imagination: limited, incommensurable and... innocent

Critical literature already referenced indicates that prejudice contained in non-Aboriginal worldviews is so entrenched in White ways of seeing and being it is difficult to alter even over generations. There is plentiful discourse on how this affects the White imagination (for instance: T. Morrison, 1992; Ravenscroft, 2012), operates deep within the White psyche (Riggs & Augoustinos, 2005; Sullivan, 2006) and drives behaviour. Moreton-Robinson (2000, p. 188) names one manifestation of White unknowing as "incommensurability", quoting Ang's definition:

> "... the limits of and the partiality involved in all forms of communication and affiliation across lines of cultural division... Incommensurability then pertains to *the residue of the irreducibly particular that cannot, ultimately be shared*" (my italics) (Ang, 1997, pp. 58-59).

In her critique of White feminism, *Talkin' Up To the White Woman* (2000), Moreton-Robinson attests that incommensurability exists between settler-colonist and First Nations australian women because First Nations women's experience "is grounded in a different history from that which is celebrated and known in white domains" (p. 3). Tuck and Yang (2012) use the word incommensurability similarly: to recognise divergence between worldviews and interests of settler-colonists versus those of First Nations people. They argue that decolonisation, unravelling colonial

structures and injustice, cannot depend on the futures of each group globally being made commensurable. Ang's (1997), Moreton-Robinson's (2000) and Tuck and Yang's (2000) incommensurability concepts are yet another useful frame for predicting problems of australian theatre practice, colonial habits and White desires borne out across the chapters which follow.

Meanwhile another colonial habit Moreton-Robinson (2004a, 2004b) and her australian co-authors Casey and Nicoll (2008; 2000) attest to is White virtue. In one form of White virtue individuals and collectives believe the ongoing colonial project is making a positive world future separate from a destructive colonial past. Assumptions of Reconciliation can, problematically, be infused with that thinking. An allied virtue belief is that White people and structures always improve a non-White space when they enter it. This is especially so, the belief holds, because White settler-colonists bring material advantages and superior worldviews and knowledges. This assumption is exemplified in its largest sense by colonisation itself but also operates every day in multiple macro and micro arenas. In another version White/settler-colonists see themselves as absolved from or countering colonial harmfulness. Part of White virtue thinking lies in identification with what scholars label benevolent White acts (Macoun, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Ahmed (2004) includes among such actions White agents acknowledging their unraced privilege (p. 2). She describes these "declarations of Whiteness" intended as anti-racist acts to be "non-performative" (pp. 1,3) because they do not commit any person, institution or nation to act against racism or surrender privilege. Nevertheless, via such benevolence-signalling australian colonist-settlers believe themselves progressive, critical thinkers and good people doing good things; yet they remain actors in problematic power structures (Macoun, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). By adopting progressive, benevolent identities they assume innocence and defer material changes that would stop colonial progression:

> Settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware.

> Yet settler moves to innocence are hollow, they only serve the settler. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10)

Macoun similarly terms "claims to innocence in relation to racial and colonial oppression" as *colonising white innocence* "to describe a construction of whites as non-problematic and not implicated in either historical or contemporary violence" (2016, p. 89). This construction by settlers, she argues, enables and erases ongoing colonial violence. It circulates in media, policies, academic work and cultural production (2016); it serves the "possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a, pp. 220, 230); and, it is one of many ways that White virtue is regenerated and preserved (Macoun, 2016).

Allied to colonising White innocence, White virtue, incommensurability and colonial zero point epistemologies (Castro-Gómez, 2007; Mignolo, 2009) are forms of unconscious White privilege that involve "ownership of the earth" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 122) and White solipsism. This is an assumption by those who live unraced that their experience is a norm available to all. This, as explained in the next section, drives White expectations (and habits) of free movement into spaces and fields of endeavour created by those operating as non-White (Sullivan, 2006).

e. White psyches, bodies and occupation of space

Sullivan's definitions of White privilege include that it is exercised somatically (bodily) and psychologically through occupation of space and habits "formed through transaction with a racist world" (2006, p. 63). White habits are retained via a possessiveness as if Whiteness means ownership of the world and justifies "taking land, people, and the fruits of other's labor and *creativity* as one's own" (my italics) (2006, p. 122). Sullivan argues that Whiteness as possession describes not just the act of owning, but also:

> … the obsessive psychosomatic state of white owners. Commodifying non-white peoples and cultures, unconscious habits of white privilege tend to transform them into objects for white appropriation and use. The benefits accrued to white people

through this process include not merely economic gain, but also increased ontological security and satisfaction of unconscious desires. (Sullivan, 2006, p. 122).

Sullivan's detailing of unconscious White drives to appropriate creative spaces and commodities made by other Cultures (Sullivan, 2006) is another underlay for "colonial desire" in this thesis' title. In naming my critical Whiteness framework *White colonial habits* I allude to Sullivan's book title *"Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege"* and its thesis that White desire and privilege manifest as unconscious, unstoppable "habits". Theatre makers I have spoken with and arts literature cited in later chapters give multiple accounts of White/settler-colonist creatives enacting and exemplifying these habits across the australian theatre landscape.

Sullivan (2006) in her analysis of race, space and place in britain, canada and the united states argues that space both constitutes and is constituted by White privilege "such that space is raced and... bodies become raced through their lived spatiality" (p. 143). Sullivan notes the ability of people regarded as White to move into spaces without being challenged, whereas people of colour, in the united states for instance, often require documented reasons for being in locations where White people can move without explanation (p. 148). Sullivan applies this mobility between physical spaces to what also occurs with non-physical spaces such as fields of endeavour. White people, Sullivan argues, are "ontologically expansive" in unconscious exercise of their White privilege (p. 144). They assume their desire to engage with non-White people's Cultures or spaces can always be fulfilled as if by right. Through this White ontological expansiveness they thus move into enterprises, entertainment, industries and culture/Culture created by non-White people. Additionally, Sullivan contends, White people can act as if space is racially neutral because of the domination of White habits of space (p. 153). This domination has power because it presents itself as a colour-free standard: a White solipsism which feeds into White expectations of rights to places, spaces and activities occupied and created by non-White people (p. 154). This analysis invokes Foucault's claim that space is fundamental in any exercise of power (1984). It also brings into play Bourdieusian concepts, discussed in Chapter 6, around Habitus and Capital as they

relate to capacity to move between culturally and class-designated spaces (Bourdieu, 1986a, 1993; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013).

An overarching theme in what Sullivan (2006) and Foucault (Foucault, 1984) argue about mobility is that persons occupying White identity move into physical and ontological spaces and territories new to them as a right or as ownership. This observation is supported in all this thesis' chapters describing what can happen when non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist theatre makers engage with stories of First Nations experience.

iii. Locating myself, those near me and those located elsewhere

Defining myself within this research establishes how I distinguish my identity and realities from those of First Nations australian people. This is important for identifying those other theatre makers who are also not Aboriginal and whose theatre-making affects First Nations communities and communities of arts practice.

a. Non-Aboriginal, euro-settler-colonist, White (woman)

I describe myself broadly as *non-Aboriginal*. I have no known family connection to any people descended from First Nations occupants of the australian continent and territories. I do not identify as being an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or First Nations australian and there would be no First Nations australian people or community who would acknowledge me as belonging to their group or having First Nations identity.

In a further drilling down into my non-Aboriginality, I am descended from european settlers who began occupying the australian continent in the 18th and 19th centuries. Apart from a german great grandmother, my lineage is anglo-celtic: previous generations were english, scottish and cornish and settled in australia before the 20th century. If Whiteness is measured in terms of how one's identity and cultural practice are assumed as the norm, in 1960s australia when I was growing up there weren't many categories of australians—apart from anglo-celtic descendant *men* and *boys*—who were Whiter than me.

b. Other, non-White, First People locations

When I say I am non-Aboriginal and settler-colonist I am distinguishing myself from the multiple language groups, communities and Nations of peoples who are descendants of the First occupants of the lands and territories we now call "Australia". An implication of my non-Aboriginality is as a descendant of the colonising cultural group which invaded australia and began centuries of dispossession of those peoples already living here.

Original occupants of places which have been invaded, colonised and/or taken over by an external cultural group are referred to by international organisations such as the United Nations as "Indigenous" people, although different terms for referring to First Peoples are used in different parts of the world. I use terms First Nations, Indigenous, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, to refer to descendants of the First People living on lands now known as "Australia". Less often I might use First People and First australians to refer to First Nations people. The general descriptor for australian Indigenous people, First Nations, has moved from little use ten years ago into accepted usage by australian arts organisations. "First Nations" recognises multiple cultures, nations and language groups of Indigenous peoples of the australian mainland and the Torres Strait. The word Nation also implies Sovereignty of First Peoples in australia and resists the historic application of *terra nullius*. So, that is the term I use most to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, where other terms are used by people or literature I am quoting, I have followed that lead. More importantly, I have tried to refer to each First Nations person via the specific language or cultural group or groups with whom they identify.

c. Implications of non-Aboriginal and First Nations identities

I have established that my settler-colonist identity places me among australia's Whitest. While the social group to which I belong to is seen almost everywhere in the places my category and I live, our identity is invisible to ourselves. We do not perceive it because we see ourselves as the social norm with little consciousness of having a Culture. (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b; A. Moreton-Robinson, 2006; 2008; A. M. Moreton-Robinson, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). This

affects what privileges of mobility, choice and freedoms I and my non-racialised ilk enjoy (and assume). It also means that I have to make a conscious effort to see this different level of power and privilege I enjoy (and which other groups of people do not).

CONTENT WARNING: The next paragraph (commencing on the next page) describes 1960s settler-colonist attitudes reflected in NSW primary education and may be upsetting to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers.

In the 1960s growing up, my White imagination under formation was enveloped in the Great Australian Silence (Stanner, 1969) about the nation's colonial beginnings and their repercussions. I was schooled in the virtues of post-1788 australia's pioneer beginnings. This narrative included subtle and unsubtle racist framings of First Nations australians, past and the present. White euro-occupation of australian lands was valorised in comparison to what existed before pre-1788. Aboriginal people's colonial realities, hidden by the Silence, were rarely alluded to. First Nations people were somewhere else, or almost disappeared, fading out in the face of a superior euro-british society which was replacing them. There were other lessons at school and Sunday school about the wrongs of racism against people of colour living in other global locations. But there were none about racism as it operated in australia. Aboriginal people's questioning of the colonial status quo did finally become visible to me on 1970s news screens. But for a long time growing up, these colonial truths cut only fleetingly into my awareness, while I enjoyed the comforts, expectations, cultural safety and social mobility of euro-Whiteness. I sensed then that racism existed in australia against First Nations people, but I never had to reckon with that racism, or with how I benefited from colonial history and nation-making which was founded on it.

These descriptions of mid-20th century White experience have become common as non-Aboriginal people acknowledge privileges of being non-raced; but recognising such realities does not alleviate them. I will not take up space tracing how I shifted from self-categorising benign non-racist (potentially non-performative) to researcher wanting to drill into these Whiteness issues within my arts practice (also, potentially non-performative) (Ahmed, 2004). I nevertheless acknowledge that in numerous writings on methodologies and research labelled "Indigenous", "(n)on-Indigenous researchers who study Indigenous people and issues are situated in a highly contested epistemological space" (Puch-Bouwman, 2014, p. 408). I recognise these contestations but do not claim to have frameworks to make a peace with them. At this point I merely acknowledge problems my non-Aboriginal identity, existence, social position and worldview pose for both this research and future creative work.

iv. Conclusion: implications of colonial locations

The colonial theory covered in this chapter distinguishes my non-Aboriginal self, and other non-Aboriginal theatre makers, from those First Nations people with whose australian stage stories I/we might seek to engage. Post-colonial writers acknowledging effects of european imperialism illuminate my identity as a descendant of pre-1900 european immigrants who settled in australia as part of those colonial practices. Describing myself as a settler-colonist therefore distinguishes me from, and describes my relationship to, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose lives and continuing Cultures were and are disrupted by the influx of my ancestors to their lands.

Colonial theory identifies eurocentric assumptions about where knowledges and civilisation are centred. This includes critical Whiteness recognising that members of the mainstream Culture in a society (the *White* norm) have privileges and power not exercised by othered Cultures or raced groups. Settler-colonists in australia such as myself occupy that most privileged grouping and therefore operate as White while First Nations people are ascribed as non-White. I acknowledge that such a declaration of my own Whiteness is not without its own racialising problems; but it is necessary for this inquiry to make that distinction about myself. An effect of Whiteness is that those operating as White perceive virtue in their Culture and in their interactions with other Cultures. This plays out in some collaboration examples discussed in later sections of this thesis, including assumptions by White/settler-colonist artists that they are operating counter-colonially and/or that theatre-making value flows in one direction: from themselves to First Nations communities.

Another White phenomenon is the ontological expansiveness of White privilege, where those operating as White assume rights to non-White people's activities and Cultures for "increased ontological security and satisfaction of unconscious desires" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 122). This tendency, along with White virtue, helps predict and explain White/settler-colonist efforts to deploy and engage with First Nations stories, communities and First Nations theatre artists for seemingly unconscious colonial agendas. Recognising White ontological expansiveness is important for understanding some White theatre maker behaviours

revealed later in this thesis and for seeing when collaborations are privileging White narratives.

These theories outlined in in this chapter distinguish White/settler-colonist positions from those of First Nations people, identify colonial habits and thus help define problems investigated in this thesis. The thinking here constitutes one of four analytical lenses applied to data in later chapters and will be mostly referred to throughout this thesis as the *White colonial habits* framework. Meanwhile, the next chapter unpacks the concept of artistic freedom, its relationship to White colonial habits and whether it confers rights on non-Aboriginal theatre makers to portray First Nations experience.

2. ARTISTIC FREEDOM

i. Introduction: what does it mean, and for whom?

When I first described my theatre research to non-Aboriginal people unfamiliar with these issues, the response was nearly always the same. I would explain I was investigating problems of portraying First Nations characters or experience in my playwriting, and they would say: but what about artistic freedom? Why can't you write whatever you like? They invoked my rights, and thus those of all White/non-Aboriginal australians, to an unlimited ontology of subject matter and narrative territories including First Nations people's experience and representation.

Such invocations imply and claim that artistic freedom operates equally across class, gender, abilities and White and non-White identities in an assumed "colour-free" standard (Sullivan, 2006, p. 154). Such assumed universality is challenged by stories ahead in this research and in australian First Nations critiques of the White imagination. Before we visit theatre maker narratives in later sections, the academic and global insights discussed in this chapter will suggest who has artistic freedom and how it operates. Those ideas contribute to the second theory framework, artistic freedom, which will be applied to conversations in the Voices of Theatre Inquiry data section. The building blocks for this artistic freedom lens begin with definitions used in the common settler-colonist vernacular.

ii. Lay, White meanings of artistic freedom

As commonly understood, *freedom* in artistic freedom appears to mean rights, means and permissions for the artist to do as they please, encased in an implicit assumption that this freedom is available for anyone who chooses to exercise it. The concept thus implies equal opportunity in a fair and just society. Initial definitions of freedom support this: a basic "define: freedom" Google search brought up first, from one of the british empire's oldest english dictionaries, "the *power* or right to act, speak or think as one wants" (my italics) (Oxford, 2016). If a social agent has freedom they are able to do what they want, to exercise their will. Freedom thus can

operate as an alternative noun for power, which in turn is understood as the capacity of an agent to use for their own purposes such things as circumstance, economics, political systems, the environment or other people. This ability is enabled, presumably, by access to physical and weapons strength, resources, means and/or political rights to act and be heard without threat to oneself/myself or my community.

Other freedom definitions were: "the absence of subjection to foreign domination or despotic government", "the power of self-determination attributed to the will; being independent of fate or necessity", "not being imprisoned or enslaved", "unrestricted use of something" and "not being subject to or affected by (something undesirable)" (Oxford, 2016). Another site defined freedom as "exemption from external control, interference, regulation, etc.", "the power to act without restraint", "ease or facility of movement or action", and "the absence of, or release from, ties, obligations, etc" (Dictionary, 2016). Ease of facility of *action* and *movement*, unrestricted *use* of something and *exemption from regulation* are all dictionary elements I infer my neighbourhood extollers of artistic freedom were championing. These are all powers and privileges that Sullivan (2006) argues enable ontological expansiveness enjoyed by those who operate as White (p. 144). In keeping with this White privilege association, those dictionary definitions imply that freedom might not always be available to everybody; freedom is defined by distinction between the limits those who are *not* free labour under and those who *are* free escape or avoid. But *artistic* freedom is often declared as if it's available to all.

The first Google-generated definition for *artistic* freedom said it was "the extent of freedom of an artist to produce art to his or her own insight" (Wikipedia, 2016). "Own insight" suggests that an individual has artistic freedom if their epistemological and ontological worldviews—as expressed in their art—are accepted, supported or, at the very least, safe to share. As I argued in Chapter 1, citing multiple scholars, a group can enjoy privilege and exercise power over others through the acceptance or rejection, or mainstreaming and/or marginalising, of different group's ways of seeing and knowing. Therefore, where a group's epistemological and ontological perspective is not accepted, that group can expect their artistic freedom to be curtailed; it will be less than that of people whose worldview *has* mainstream

acceptance and matches that of those with institutional, political, cultural and/or economic hegemonic power. Whiteness critiques applied to dictionary definitions thus indicate that artistic freedom does not operate equally and those who do enjoy artistic freedom are unlikely to see or acknowledge that others don't.

iii. Academic views of artistic freedom

Philosophy academic Haig Khatchadourian (1978) positions artistic freedom as an extension of freedom's general foundations: "all persons have a right to self-actualisation; and… this includes the artist's right freely to create, as a condition as well as a form of his self-actualisation as a human being" (1978, p. 25). One's humanity and sense of self, especially for artists, might therefore need self-expression through creative activity. Khatchadourian (1978) focuses on authoritarian states' powers to oppress dissidents, such as in Nazi Germany, and for other states, including liberal democratic ones, to impose other forms of censorship. He does not investigate whether artistic freedom operates equally or unequally across cultural groups within nation states.

Importantly though, Khatchadourian (1978) argues art has humanistic functions: it helps to know ourselves by holding up a mirror to society and by exposing *society self-delusion* (p. 28). Art serves us when we can see ourselves or something about ourselves in it, including that which is not pretty. Representation's role in art would therefore include to represent *inclusively* and *truthfully* (This would be notwithstanding that a supposed 'truth' across a community will vary and always be under contestation and revision). When Khatchadourian was writing about artistic freedom, class and Marx were more evident in academic discourse than emerging Foucauldian, postcolonial and, later, Whiteness criticism. Correspondingly, he did not point to White virtue, solipsism or other habits of White imagination as social self-delusions that artistic freedom could expose. Khatchadourian does argue, however, that artists have a responsibility to mentor each other and avoid manipulating their popularity or status as artists against artistic rivals: to enable artistic freedom to operate for all so that society would benefit from

a greater range of artists' visions (p. 25). This might suggest that one dominant social group of theatre makers, in Khatchadourian's thinking, should monitor how their artistic freedom impacts on other artists and communities and exercise restraint accordingly.

American law academic Russell Robinson (2007) examines conflicts between the First Amendment-protected artistic freedom of film writers to designate the gender and what he called the *race* of characters versus employment discrimination laws which ban prescriptions based on race and gender (p. 2). He notes that it was regular practice—at least when he was writing in 2007—for castings in blockbuster movies to prescribe lead roles in such ways as "male, white Caucasian, 40s"; whereas minor roles would be less prescriptive and would be the roles most available to African americans and other actors of colour (pp. 10-11). Despite legislation which banned job advertisements listing preference for a particular "race" or "sex", Robinson notes the film industry regularly used discriminatory casting call-outs to actors; yet he could not find a single published case of an actor taking a race or sex discrimination claim to court (p. 15). He contends that discriminatory hiring in american screen entertainment "projects particular images and meanings worldwide, uniquely shaping norms and beliefs throughout society" (p. 16). Robinson proposes that the american film industry adopt what is known in australia as 'colour-blind' casting [1] to cast lead roles in blockbuster films. He also advocates that legislators consider making rules which specifically address casting where the film or theatre story is not dependent on a specific cultural, or raced or non-raced, identity of the central characters.

Whether colour-blind casting [1] can affect artistic freedom and representation equity on stage and screen needs deeper discussion in separate research; there is not scope to address it here. What Robinson's work does show is that the artistic freedom rights of the film industry in the united states appeared to trump, in practice if not in law, rules banning race discrimination in employment. This overriding of discrimination rules appears to maintain the rights of american writers and producers to cast most of the industry's stars from among White/euro-settler americans. The invocation of artistic freedom here preserves—or even expands—creative territories already acquired by White storytellers and performers.

The american industry's exercise of artistic freedom, at least in 2007, also maintained that White-settler audiences would see themselves being the hero protagonists most often on american screens.

Lankford (1990) argues those claiming artistic freedom rights have obligations. He cites Dewey's (1928) observation that removal of obstruction so that an individual has unlimited choices is not the only prerequisite to freedom, although many people mistakenly think it is (1990, p. 23). This erroneous belief affects some human action as if it is true. Lankford concurs also with Dewey's contention that freedom is not a natural condition but rather one achieved through society's collective awareness of choices and "the consequences of choosing"; freedom becomes possible when society's members act "to ensure the greatest range and benefit of choices" (p. 23). Here, again, there is an implicit call in Lankford and Dewey's thinking for those exercising artistic freedom to do so with restraint and with regard for all society's members. Yet, those invoking artistic freedom often do so to claim that those with social power to express themselves creatively are excused from any need to answer to others.

Lankford (1990) discusses artistic freedom in the context of two Robert Mapplethorpe visual arts exhibitions in the US involving photos of nude and semi-nude children. In response to those events, a congressman sought legislative restriction on federal funds for artwork deemed "obscene or indecent", including that exploiting children (p. 16). One complainant said a little girl in one photo was "too young to know what's going on" and would be mortified as an adult when she realised how widely her image had been displayed (p. 18). This raises the agency human arts subjects can expect or should have within the context of the artist's—or theatre maker's—"freedom". This agency means the agent has capacity, through what they know and where they are positioned socially, to give informed consent about how their image, body, personal details or realities are used and shown to audiences. This consent operates at individual level and at group identity level, such as that for First Nations communities. Consent agency includes that the agent or agents asked to consent have power, rights, space, age maturity and information to actively decide whether to allow or refuse such use of their image, personal details and story.

The U.S. funding amendment passed almost unchanged. Funding restrictions were applied to material which "denigrates, debases or reviles a person, group, or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin" (Helms, 1989; Lankford, 1990, p. 16). Lankford contends the art world's reaction was "vociferous" against the entire amendment section for curtailing freedom of expression (p. 16). Lankford did not conclude in favour of restricting artists but did advocate for a rigorous "aesthetic inquiry" to find a balance between freedom of expression and responsibility to society, and to art itself (p. 24). That the amendment also wanted to stop funding of art which denigrated others on race or national origin grounds was not considered specifically in his discussion nor, it seemed, by those in the U.S. art world arguing against the amendment's limits on artistic expression.

Nevertheless Lankford (1990), Robinson (2007) and Khatchadourian (1978) all indicate that rights to artistic freedom bring with them responsibilities in the exercise of that freedom (or power) to express. They argue, in different ways, that artistic freedom is a doctrine intended for social good, not for individual indulgence or maintaining power advantages. However, it would seem that most of the White world at large (Dewey, 1928) and the arts world when it sees artistic freedom reined in (Lankford, 1990) assume and operate as if there is not—or should not be—any social responsibility or social contract attached to that artistic privilege. This means that the arts world in defence of artistic freedom might overlook, by not seeing, issues affecting the agency of those portrayed by artists. The Helms amendment/ Mapplethorpe controversy suggests this (1990). That construction of artistic freedom—being without responsibilities to others/Others—has implications while it has traction with White artists and performers. They can champion artistic freedom to portray and represent as they see fit, to the detriment or erasure of the rights of those they portray (Lankford, 1990; Robinson, 2007).

The next section explores what one international scholar has argued is needed for artistic freedom to be available for all groups in a society. Among the prerequisites is that all communities and identities enjoy *representation* in the arts they have access to.

iv. United Nations thinking on artistic freedom

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights in 2013, Pakistani sociologist Farida Shaheed, focused on the right to "freedom of artistic expression and creation" (OHCHR, 2013) in her fifth report to the UN General Assembly (Shaheed, 2013). This freedom included "the right of all persons to freely experience and contribute to artistic expressions and creations, through individual or joint practice, to have *access to and enjoy the arts*, and to disseminate their expressions and creations" (OHCHR, 2013). In this way Shaheed's report preamble lists three aspects to artistic freedom: the freedom (or right or power) to create (or be part of the process of creating), the freedom (or right or power) to disseminate what is created (to reach audiences) and the freedom (or right or power) to have access to and enjoy the arts (to experience the creations of other people) (OHCHR, 2013). These three items—creation, dissemination and enjoyment of the arts—can therefore indicate how much an individual person or a sociologically defined group of people operates with artistic freedom. They also help measure when limits on artistic freedom are marginalising an entire group of people.

Shaheed (2013) notes that "the right to the freedom indispensable for artistic expression and creativity" (p. 3) is protected under UN political, civil, cultural and economic rights covenants (ICCPR, 1976, Article 19; ICESCR, 1976, Article 15). Freedom of creativity therefore has broad acceptance as a right even if not everyone is able to exercise this right equally. Shaheed (2013) argues that art enables individuals and communities to "develop and express their humanity, worldview and meanings assigned to their existence and development" (p. 3). Artists entertain, she contends, but they also contribute to the functioning of democratic societies by countering "existing power centres", "contesting meanings" and "revisiting culturally inherited ideas and concepts" (p. 3). There are of course many places where visual, performing and literary art is championed as a way to explore humanity and question norms and power structures. What is potent here in Shaheed's summary are her links between freedom of this artistic expression, cultural identity and broader human rights:

> The crucial task of implementing universal human rights norms is to prevent the arbitrary privileging of certain perspectives on account of their traditional authority, institutional or economic power, or *demographic supremacy* in society. This principle lies at the heart of every issue raised in the debate over the right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity and possible limitations on that right. (my italics) (2013, p. 3).

Shaheed thus argues that, where one group's perspectives are left out or misrepresented by the dominant group, then the human rights of that non-dominant group who has been falsely portrayed—or under-represented in portrayals—are being violated.

Shaheed has also researched artistic freedom and resistance affecting women marginalised by religious and gender politics in her global region (1999, 2006). However, in her OHCHR report Shaheed examines limits created institutionally by nation states on artistic freedom of all genders and cultural communities. These include both censorship, imposed uniformly on all artists within a nation, and economic deprivation that most artists experience as a group. Shaheed does not interrogate how different groups within one nation state or different communities within the broad global group of artists might have lesser access to artistic freedom. Therefore, Shaheed does not evaluate here the artistic freedom of Indigenous people whose perspectives, although non-homogenous, might counter perspectives of other non-Indigenous artists. Thus, when Shaheed raises the right of people to access the arts as part of artistic freedom, she is exploring effects of institutional limitations such as censorship and structural impacts such as the economics of arts industries. Nevertheless, Shaheed's definitions implicitly include access to enjoy the arts: "... freedom of artistic expression and creativity cannot be dissociated from the right of all persons to enjoy the arts ..." (Shaheed, 2013, p. 3).

Shaheed's test of artistic freedom measures what people can gain from the arts in terms of how creations address their questions and enrich their cultural life. That is, how works represent and speak to a social group and enable those audiences to see themselves. Shaheed's report indicates who has artistic freedom depends on (1) who can access the arts (geographically and economically for instance), (2) whether a group feels comfortable being part of arts audiences and (3) whether they'll feel

welcomed as an audience by what stories, perspectives and artistic forms are delivered to them. Another aspect of Shaheed's artistic freedom is the expectation audiences can have about seeing themselves portrayed by people who are them or, less equitably and at the very least, by people who genuinely know their perspective in a respectful, informed way. This is a more detailed, specific and inclusive way of understanding Khatchadourian's (1978, 1980) and others' (Dewey, 1928; Lankford, 1990; Robinson, 2007) characterisation of the arts' role as a mirror on society and its members. This understanding suggests that the arts' reflections should be accurate and meaningful for all. It also requires that the aggregate of arts activity across a nation includes and represents all its members across the diversity of its peoples.

v. White imagination and rejection of restraint

White/settler-colonist assumptions that artistic freedom is universally available are challenged by a range of australian First Nations literature scholars investigating the White imagination, including those who are authors and poets themselves. This section will briefly engage with thinking from two such scholars, starting with Wiradjuri poet and academic, Professor Jeanine Leane. Leane (2021) begins her critique of White notions of academic freedom's universality by noting settler-colonists' insistence on their rights to unfettered expression:

> Within the white imagination there is an invisible charter of rights that I hear frequently quoted, touted, lauded: *it is my right to imagine whatever I want! My imagination is free!* So encoded is this invisible charter of rights that insists that the white imagination has no limits, that all peoples and places deemed as 'other' become carte blanche – a blank white page for their imaginations to write. (Leane, 2021, p. 12)

Leane's argument here is part of her analysis of settler-colonist resistance to *Overland*'s Neilma Sidney Short Story Competition introducing, in recent years, a question in its submission guidelines for authors to answer: '*If your entry takes up the voice or experience of a marginalised or vulnerable identity, do you identify yourself as being a part of that community or experience?'* (2021, p. 13) Leane quotes from one "settler" writer's essay responding to this development: "As a writer this question reads both as a directive and a warning: that is, it incites fear in me

about what I am allowed to write (and thus allowed to attempt to understand though my work)." (Gildfind, 2020, quoted in Leane, 2021, p. 13). Leane contends that this author's position reflects:

> ...the white panic caused when minorities threaten their culture of literary appropriation. Like most white writers Gildfind does not see the need to identify as white, they just launch into their spiel, speaking as if whiteness was/is the universal default position. The normativity of their whiteness and unquestioned right to speak needs no further explanation. Ironically they go on to argue that identity doesn't matter, but the vested interests and unstated privileges of whiteness drive the argument. (Leane, 2021, P. 13)

These White behaviours Leane (2021) critiques, indicate that those who know themselves as *not* marginalised feel threatened merely by the requirement to identify and acknowledge themselves as such; this occurs even before they see that requirement as a query about whether they can justly move into an Others' space or portray those Others as their own White/non-marginalised selves see fit. Marginalised groups, among them First Nations peoples, often must identify *their* 'marginalised' selves to have access to a space that is reserved for them; this physical or creative locale is often safer and more welcoming than that occupied by dominant/settler-colonist/White social agents, but accessing it requires an act of self-disclosure with potential for additional, unforeseeable consequences on the First Nations person disclosing or on their community. The *Overland* question instead asks those *non*-marginalised/dominant social group members writing about the Other to identify *them*selves; such a reversal in who must name their identity position, as Gildfind declares, "incites fear" (p.13); this is fear of artistic containment (he claims) and also (I argue) of White identity exposure to self and Others.

This example meanwhile provides further evidence of the ontological expansiveness of White privilege (Sullivan, 2006) or what Leane merely calls 'theft' (2021, P. 13) embedded in the White psyche (2006, 2021). These unconscious defaults underpin White imaginings of rights to express in those fewer, confined, marked places where Other/marginalised voices are pushed to by White ontological dominance. The *Overland* objections also expose White fragility in the face of

merely *implied* exclusion or containment, such as the requirement for non-marginalised writers to answer for their White privilege and their movement into non-White/non-mainstream spaces. I use the word 'fragility' here to encompass settler-colonist discomfort at their revealed positions in colonial history, and White strategies to close such narratives down or prevent them gaining doctrinal traction or authority. 'Fragility' as a label belies how effectively these supposed White sensitivities can be weaponised. Such strategies can include White declarations that they as settler-colonists are suffering: thrust into victimhood, 'unjust' guilt, shame and marginalisation when they glimpse, or are asked to account for, their unearned privilege and complicity in what Moreton-Robinson (2004a) and others term the australian 'colonial project'. Leane (2021) also argues that settler-colonist fragility or "white panic" (p. 13) creates, and emerges from, a need to control and suppress how the observant knowing but marginalised Other, experienced in White ways, might portray those who are not marginalised. This White containment of non-White narratives emerges powerfully and unconsciously from deep in that part of the White psyche which maintains colonial privilege and suppresses revelations about the injustice of that privilege. Part of this containment, that both Sullivan (2006) and Leane (2021) argue derives unconsciously from the White psyche, includes controlling who has most freedom to reproduce, define or create those australian narratives which have potential to wield doctrinal power. Whiteness, as Leane (2021) and others show us, does not take kindly to any suggestion that constraints on, or restraint by, settler-colonist voices is warranted. White/settler-colonist fragility, when activated, rejects demands for self-restraint in creative expression and cannot tolerate being restricted to seeing the White self through non-White lenses of the Other. As Leane (2021) attests: "white identity politics has had a long, militaristic, government sanctioned, uninterrupted history of absolving itself of responsibility to any colour, culture or loaded cultural standpoint"; this is but one of the reasons that "(q)uestioning the limits and neutrality of the white imagination is dangerous but necessary... Settlers... are oblivious to the costs of uninformed representation." (p. 13)

Meanwhile, Aboriginal writer and illustrator, Ambelin Kwaymullina of the Palyku people (2014), notes other dangers for Indigenous australians in relation to First Nations rights to express and raise questions through the arts. These dangers

or “vulnerabilities” (p. 27) attach to the need, cultural right and academic freedom of First Nations people to protect and withhold cultural knowledges from exploitation by White/settler-colonist agents and institutions desiring to acquire them: “We possess valuable ecological and cultural knowledge. But our vulnerability means our resources have all too often been exploited by others, and this includes our stories.” (p. 25) Along with misuse of significant First Nations cultural property in traditional stories, Kwaymullina argues that White/settler-colonist dominance also infringes on portrayals and representation of Indigenous peoples: “We have been written about as though non-Indigenous people are entitled to define our identities, our histories, and our ultimate destinies. I find all such works to be works of fantasy.” (p 28) She contends that the White gaze cannot fully see or know First Nations people in australia, because of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s lingering need to hide from shifting, but unrelenting, White surveillance:

> It saddens me when I see the myth of Indigenous people as passive, unresisting victims being unthinkingly incorporated in contemporary works of literature. It surprises me, too, that anyone would find it reasonable that people living under oppressive regimes would put all of who they were on display for their oppressors to see. (Kwaymullina, 2014, p. 30)

Kwaymullina’s observations (2014) suggest that another way that a social group such as First Nations people should expect to exercise artistic freedom is by having the power to choose who portrays them and how. This includes rights and powers to refuse to share or surrender cultural valuables, such as contemporary tales, lived experiences, traditional ceremonies and cultural stories.

The academic freedom discussions across this chapter have moved between several broad ways in which academic freedom, rights to imagine and rights to express are experienced differently between First Nations/non-White communities and those who occupy settler-colonist/non-Aboriginal/White positions. In this section, First Nations literary critiques are applied to White assumptions of universality: the notion that artistic freedom in all its meanings is available to all social and cultural groups. This belief sits alongside White/settler-colonist expectations to have unfettered freedom to imagine and portray First Nations people and other groups of marginalised Others. Another vulnerability in First Nations

communities' artistic freedom noted here, and explored further in discussions with theatre makers in later chapters, is pressure on First Nations cultural and story Sovereignty posed by greater power and resources available to White/settler-colonist creatives to produce work portraying themselves and Others. Also raised here: the rights of First Nations people to refuse to share stories or information about their Cultures with members of dominant settler-colonist groups, without fear of retribution or White efforts to subvert such refusals. This requirement feeds into both understandings of White desire and possession and cultural safety discussions emerging later in the thesis. Meanwhile, this section's arguments by two australian First Nations literary scholars contribute further knowledge to both the *White colonial habits* framework established in the previous chapter and the *academic freedom* framework developing in this one. These Indigenous scholar insights will resonate through the next two chapters in those sections exploring (1) First Nations theatre resilience over four decades, (2) evidence of lingering White attachment to settler-colonist portrayals of Aboriginal people, and (3) receptions of *The Secret River* stage-play.

vi. Conclusion: implications of artistic freedom

Exploring artistic freedom meanings has exposed erroneous White assumptions that such freedom operates as a colour free standard across all arts fields. Recognising these inequities in artistic freedom across society, alongside what scholars argue is required for artistic freedom to operate, constructs a second framework for building knowledge in this research.

This framework acknowledges that a group or person has artistic freedom when they have: (1) freedom (or right or power) to create (or be part of the process of creating), (2) the freedom (or right or power) to disseminate what is created (to reach audiences or to have a voice which is heard) and (3) the freedom (or right or power) to have access to and enjoy the arts (to experience the creations of other people). Additionally, enjoyment of the arts, crucial to artistic freedom, includes (4) being welcomed into spaces to access the arts, (5) that people see themselves and their social group in arts portrayals, and those portrayals are truthful, and (6) that people have access to arts which speak to their own or their group's questions. These

elements include that those with artistic freedom (7) can see themselves portrayed by people who are them or, at the very least, in combination with those who genuinely know and respect their perspectives and that (8) they themselves control, or have most power over, how their community is portrayed. The framework also acknowledges (9) that erroneous belief in the universal availability of artistic freedom can mask artistic inequities and silence efforts to redress them. These expectations around artistic freedom constitute a second lens, *artistic freedom*, applied in this thesis to understanding conversations with theatre makers and public discourse on performance issues examined in the chapters to follow.

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vii. Footnote: *Artistic Freedom*

[1] I am not suggesting here that the australian film industry is 'colour blind': I am noting that this is a term used here which might illustrate the american context (or opposite context) I am describing. What 'colour blind casting' constitutes, whether it operates or could operate in australia and what value the practice might have, are questions which require a much bigger investigation beyond this research project.

3. SHIFTING STRUGGLE, ENDURING PROBLEMS

i. Introduction: the changing theatre landscape, and more of the same

This chapter traces fifty years of struggle by First Nations performing arts voices to reach audiences. This overview makes visible how White/settler-colonist theatre makers', audiences' and programmers' rising interest in First Nations stories has brought new problems. This trajectory begins with reception of First Nations theatre in the early 1970s, followed by issues emerging in artistic portrayals of First Nations people over the decades which followed. While First Nations theatre is the focus here, storytelling affecting First Nations people across literature and film will be referenced briefly also. The artistic struggle which unfolded from the late 1960s into the 2020s resonates with both the artistic freedom and the White colonial habits theory frameworks of previous chapters. The story of rising White/settler-colonist interest will reflect in Bourdieusian "Blak gold/cultural treasure" insights I will explain some chapters ahead. Additionally, briefly tracing recent and contemporary First Nations theatre history here will give context to what theatre makers reveal later in this research.

ii. First Nations spaces, new value and… the White empire takes back

a. White receptions of First Nations theatre: early days

Maryrose Casey's history (2004) of australian Indigenous theatre from 1967 into the 1990s argues how First Nations theatre artists' work was framed racially, politically and colonially alongside changing political and government arts policy. First Nations australian theatre in the later twentieth century, Casey contends, was interpreted by dominant non-Aboriginal audiences, critics, makers and underwriters bound by "imperial/colonial narratives of Australia… to serve national imaginations of history and identity" (p. xx). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within First Nations theatre were thus not valued.

For instance, Casey's "Critics' Response" chapter (2004) illuminates 1970s australian White critics' presumptions regarding for whom and to what purpose Indigenous theatre was being made (p. 70). One critic declared of Black Theatre-Nimrod collaboration, *Basically Black*, "if you're black you'll love the show" as if this was a negative (p. 80). Australian First Nations people appeared to critics as secondary, less informed recipients of theatre art and social criticism than their White audiences; this included critics' apparent assumptions that their readers, and therefore theatregoers, would be non-Aboriginal (p. 70). In this way, critics did not recognise First Nations audiences as the best judges of how truthfully and appropriately their realities were portrayed on stage. Critics did, however, refer to First Nations audience members as if they were another aspect of the First Nations performance to be observed by White patrons sitting beside them (p. 70). First Nations audience bodies and personas were thus commodified and deemed available for White entertainment and learning: that is, for colonisation.

Casey (2004) argues that 1970s critics reflected culture- and race-based narratives of Aboriginal australians in ways that framed them as lost and needing guidance. One critic said *Basically Black*'s creators needed to learn how to write (p. 85); others said the work was "basically bad" (p. 66),"embarrassing" (p. 66), blamed audiences "for everything" (p. 80) and lingered on the "only-too-familiar preoccupations of black activists" such as Aboriginal child mortality and land rights (p. 71). 1970s critics thus wanted Aboriginal theatre makers and actors to focus on areas settler-colonist audiences would prefer to learn about. White audiences, reviewers implied, did not want to be confronted by pressing issues affecting Aboriginal people (p. 71). Casey hypothesises that most critics attending *Basically Black* probably expected to have their positions affirmed as knowledgeable, sympathetic anti-racists rather than as active agents of colonial inequity (p. 82). Meanwhile, colonially, critics prioritised how White/settler-colonist audiences would respond to *Basically Black* (p. 70). This compelled them to overwhelmingly reject those First Nations perspectives critical of colonial Australia. Their disparagement of First Nations creatives' abilities as part of that rejection, reduced the likelihood that similar Indigenous critiques of settler-colonists would be staged again.

This White response to First Nations Culture, disparaging the theatre work and playing deaf to its messages, has shifted over decades with a changing theatre landscape. First Nations theatre, Culture and stories today have more settler-colonist attention, even if they are still at the margins of australian entertainments. A number of play works from the 1960s, 70s and 80s authored by First Nations writers are recognised today as key components of the Australian theatre canon, most evidently through their inclusion on secondary school syllabuses. Those studied plays made before 1990 include Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers* (first performed in 1968), Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man* (1975) and Jack Davis's *No Sugar* (1985), *Honey Spot* (1985) and *The Dreamers* (1982) (Casey, 2004, pp. 268-274). Other works premiering in those decades up to the mid-1980s include *The Gods Look Down* (Kevin Gilbert, 1970), *Here Comes the Nigger* (Gerry Bostock, 1976), *Put Your Boots* (Jim Everett, 1983), *Short Changed* (Robert Merritt, 1982) Eva Johnson's two 1984 premieres, *Tjandarella* and *Onward to Glory*. Bob Maza's *Mereki* was staged in 1986, Johnson produced again with *Murras* (1988), then came *Up the Ladder* (Roger Bennett, 1989), and *The Keepers* (1988). *Jack Charles is Up and Fighting* (with material from Bob Maza, Jack Charles, Oodgeroo Noonuccle, Frank Hardy, Jim Crawford and others), more plays by Jack Davis and an assortment of works either authored by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) or based on her poetry (Casey, 2004, pp. 268-274) were also staged in that period. Several capital city Indigenous-led theatre companies have arisen in the decades since the National Black Theatre of the 1970s. Three of them, Ilbijerri, Moogahlin and Yirra Yaakin, are still operating today. A key driver establishing them has been First Nations artists' moves to control how they and their communities are portrayed.

b. Resisting White imagination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait theatre artists wanting to make theatre by First Nations Australians for First Nations audiences established Indigenous theatre companies in the 1990s (Casey, 2004, p. 214). Driving this development was how First Nations creatives and audiences were affected when theatre and film portrayals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience, often claiming to be "Indigenous", were made without First Nations artists having project control (p. 213).

This disquiet included that felt by actors performing Aboriginal character roles written by non-Aboriginal writers. Ilbijerri Theatre Company's Yorta Yorta, Wiradjuri and South Sea Islander co-founder, Kylie Belling's dislike of the Aboriginal woman character she played in 1986 film *The Fringe Dwellers* moved her to set up Ilbijerri with other Victorian community members. They wanted to make theatre created and performed by First Nations artists for First Nations audiences (Casey, 2004, p. 214; Glow & Johanssen, 2009, pp. 18, 29). It was felt White/non-Aboriginal writers could create inaccurate approximations of First Nations people and their experience in ways that disempowered all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander australians. Non-Aboriginal writers creating First Nations parts also displaced Indigenous writers and often made scripts needing cultural corrections that First Nations cast members were called upon to fix (Glow & Johanssen, 2009).

Casey's list of works by First Nations playwrights 1968-1997 (2004, pp. 268-281) includes scores of productions throughout the 1990s, in far greater number than recorded for the previous decades. This expanding canon over that decade reflected the establishment of three Indigenous-controlled theatre companies: Melbourne-based Ilbijerri, Brisbane-based Kooemba Djarra and Perth-based Yirra Yaakin. In addition, Sydney's Belvoir Street, Perth's new Black Swan theatre company, Queensland Theatre Company and Melbourne Workers Theatre were among companies which hosted some of these works or collaborated with First Nations artists to develop other original productions telling First Nations stories.

1990s plays by First Nations writers in Casey's list (pp. 274-281) include *The 7 Stages of Grieving* co-created by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman (produced by Kooemba Djarra and, for at least one production, with Performing Lines), *Up the Road* by John Harding (directed by Neil Armfield at Belvoir St), *Bran Nue Dae* by Jimmy Chi and Kuckles (directed by Andrew Ross), *Corrugation Road* by Jimmy Chi (Black Swan), *Sistergirl* by Sally Morgan (Black Swan and Melbourne Theatre Companies), *Runamuk* by David Gilroy (Yirra Yaakin) and *Food for Thought* by Glenn Shea (Ilbijerri). Other key works were *King Hit* by Geoffrey Narkle with David Milroy (Yirra Yaakin), *Changing Time* by Jim Everett/puralia meenamatta directed by Wesley Enoch (Salamanca Theatre Company, Hobart) and *The Lost Children* by Jane Harrison (readings directed by Wesley Enoch at Melbourne Fringe Festival of a

play draft commissioned by Ilbijerri). *The Lost Children* reading evolved into Harrison's 1998 play premiere *Stolen,* just after the period where Casey's list of plays by First Nations playwrights ends. *Stolen* had seven consecutive seasons in Melbourne following its premiere; by 2007 it had been performed across australia and the globe, won several awards and been placed on australian state matriculation syllabuses (Harrison, 2006, p. xiii). The Sydney Theatre Company has slated a new *Stolen* production for a mid-2024 season at its Wharf Theatre; in 2021 the STC staged Mailman and Enoch's *The 7 Stages of Grieving* for the fourth time, on this occasion with Shari Sebbens directing. Two revered 1990s theatre-makers named in this section, Geoffrey Narkle and Jimmy Chi, have since passed on; meanwhile, at the time of completing this thesis in early 2024, every other First Nations artist named in this paragraph was still making new First Nations stories as writer, performer, researcher, dramaturg or director and continuing to win and be nominated for literary, theatre and film prizes up to and into the last decade.

1990s works by First Nations playwrights on Casey's list include, also, some co-created with non-Aboriginal artists; examples are *Ningali* by Ningali Lawford with non-Aboriginal co-writers Angela Chaplin and Robin Archer, *Box the Pony* written by Leah Purcell with non-Aboriginal theatre-maker Scott Rankin, *Oh, My God I'm Black*, devised by Maryanne Sam at Melbourne Workers Theatre with non-Aboriginal collaborators Patricia Cornelius and Irine Vela and *Bidenjarreb Pinjarra* co-devised by actors Kelton Pell, Trevor Parfitt and non-Aboriginal performers Geoff Kelso and Phil Thompson (2004, pp. 274-281).

Meanwhile, the 1993 Belvoir St premiere of *Radiance,* touted as an exemplar of collaboration between a non-Aboriginal writer—Louis Nowra—and the original all-woman First Nations cast, is not on Casey's list because the work does not fit the key criterion for her chronology: First Nations authorship (2004, p. 268). *Radiance* nevertheless warrants brief investigation here because my thesis began as an inquiry into how I, as a non-Aboriginal playwright, could appropriately portray First Nations people in my work. Nowra's play is one way this was attempted by a non-Aboriginal writer, albeit well before the 21st century period of practice and discourse I am focusing on for this thesis' questions. Additionally, commentary about the play when Belvoir St revived it in 2015 offers an example of reception—during that later period I *am* examining in this research—of Aboriginal portrayals by non-Aboriginal writers.

Radiance received mixed reviews (Blake, 2015; James, 2014) including praise for Nowra's and the actors' joint ambitions to make strong women characters, and to tell a rich, character-driven story that "should not be seen 'as an Aboriginal play'" where "Aboriginal characters became abstractions in order to make polemical points" (Nowra, 2000, p. ix). The play depicts three women—Nona, Cressy and Mae—reunited, after a long period apart, at the home where their mother has died just days before. They had each had different fathers and had little—or in Nona's case, nil—knowledge of or relationship with their respective male parents. The theatre cast of Rhoda Roberts (Nona), Lyda Miller (Cressy) and then recent WAAPA acting school graduate Rachael Maza (Mae) famously insisted that Nowra cut out any reference to the women characters' Aboriginality:

> When we sat down at the first day of rehearsal they made sure that the word, Aboriginal, was never mentioned in the script. (Nowra, 2017)

> We wanted to perform in a psychological drama that was universal and not just about being black... We had this dream that three Lebanese girls could play these roles. Or three Chinese girls... They could bring their own cultures to the roles. (Roberts, 2015a)

> The process started out with us saying 'we'd like to look at three sisters, three women... No mention of them being Aboriginal because we don't want you to write something that is about the Aboriginal experience'... Anybody could do this play... three white girls could do it, three Jamaican girls could do it, three Lebanese girls could do it, any three women could do it. (Miller, 2014, p. 7)

This approach—ignoring, not being specific to and not naming First Nations identity—was mentioned, warmly and approvingly, throughout many pieces of commentary on the work. One reviewer, for example, declared "this is one of the really novel and successful aspects of *Radiance"* (Makeham, 1994, p. 189); another, enamoured with the film adaptation several years later, described it as "an act of reconciliation without politics" enabling audiences, via this 'lack" of race politics, to take *Radiance* "to heart" (Hessey, 1998, in: Spark, 2001, p 46).

Radiance's visibility as a possible collaboration model was thus consolidated when Arrente and Kalkadoon film-maker Rachel Perkins commissioned Nowra to

write the screen adaptation of his stage play. During early rehearsals the 1998 film cast—Deborah Mailman, Trisha Morton-Thomas and Rachael Maza (this time playing Cressy)—criticised the draft script Nowra had re-developed with Perkins, prompting further changes (Perkins, 2003, p. 40). The stage-play script had won the 1994 Australian Literary Society Gold Medal; the film won the audience award for most popular film at the 1998 Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne film festivals. For her *Radiance* performance Deborah Mailman won best actress categories at both the 1999 Film Critics Circle of Australia and 1998 Australian Film Institute awards, becoming the first Aboriginal woman to win an AFI award. The film itself was nominated in five more AFI categories including for best film, best achievement in direction and best adapted screenplay. Both the play and the film thus received accolades and awards at a time when many stage works portraying First Nations people were being created already by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers. This phenomenon of praise for a White writer's work when it involves Aboriginal people will be explored further in Chapter Four discussion of Andrew Bovell's and Sydney Theatre company's *Secret River* production, twenty years after Nowra's effort.

There are a range of similar, though not identical, explanations of how Nowra came to be working with the original First Nations cast on the *Radiance* stage-play: he was actively petitioned either by his then partner, veteran First Nations actor Justine Saunders, by Miller and Roberts (Blake, 2015; Maza in James, 2014, p. 10; Portus, 2017) or by all three (James, 2014, p. 11), to make this work for Roberts, Miller and a third First Nations actor to perform in. Nowra himself says in his 1993 author's note that he had already started work on the piece "when Lydia Miller visited me one day asking if I would write a play for the very actresses I had in mind" and that the work "further evolved through working on it with Lydia, Rhoda, Rachael and Rose Clemente, the director" (Nowra, 1993, p. v). Later he said that Maza was cast as Nona when Kylie Belling became unavailable (Nowra, 2000), suggesting that Belling not Maza was the third actor he originally 'had in mind' but Maza, not Belling, was on board when the play was further developed with the cast in rehearsal. Andrea James, in her commentary on a Belvoir St revival of *Radiance* twenty-two years later, said Nowra was blessed to be told what he had to do by "these four strong women" (James, 2014, p. 8). Rhoda Roberts and Lydia Miller have both said they

were inspired to work with Nowra by Saunders' longstanding campaign to see better parts created for Aboriginal actors, especially women:

> Justine said about her acting work, 'I've been raped, prostituted and killed but I'd love a role where people can see I have emotion'. That was a driving force for us. Rhoda Roberts (in: Blake, 2015)

> ...Justine... [had] constantly advocated and championed roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander actresses beyond just being a stereotypical character within a play... "victim, raped and murdered" as Justine used to say. Lydia Miller (in: James, 2014, p. 8)

However, while both the play and film were received warmly in many quarters, the work had portrayal, reception and representation problems. For example, a turning point of the action is the revelation that Nona was conceived by the rape of her actual mother (whose identity is also revealed at the end of the play). These rape circumstances are an underlying tension for Cressy throughout the stage and film narrative; this thread is central even though, as Roberts and Miller contend, they and Saunders wanted Nowra's work to provide them characters to play where they would not be victims of rape or violence. James (2014) acknowledges this anomaly but indicates the fact the male perpetrators were not represented on stage ameliorates the problem:

> Ironically, the women play out the roles of the victimised—raped and bashed once again—but refreshingly we never see any men on stage. (James, 2014, p. 11)

Spark (2001) argues that this absence of men, in a work written by a White male dramatist in consultation with three or more First Nations and one Italian woman, means that the social group who does not have a voice in *Radiance* is Aboriginal men (p. 39). Spark also attests that audiences, in the absence of detailed identity, will read the rapist in the story and the negative men in the recently deceased mother's life as 'black'. This case is not clear in other people's interpretation of the play or film; Rachel Perkins, for instance, has declared she saw the Harry Wells character as 'white' and this was indicated in her film by his house (C. Simpson, 1999, p. 34). It could be more accurate to say Aboriginal men are *erased* and *silenced* by this film. Also more convincingly, Spark draws on Moreton-Robinson's (2004) and Huggins' (1996) critiques of "the concomitant privileging of

gender over race in (white feminist) analyses of structural oppression" (2001, p. 39) to argue that *Radiance* the film—as with White feminism—presents First Nations women as enduring their worst injustices at the hands of men, not colonisation and racialisation; thus, the impact of Whiteness on Aboriginal women's positions is not examined. Spark contends that the play's refusal to address Whiteness and racialisation is behind White australian audiences' approval of *Radiance* as a model for representing First Nations people on stage and in film (p. 46-47).

For this argument, Spark (2001) outlines problems of where the White imaginations of non-Aboriginal audiences will take them when they see Aboriginal people on stage but the writer and co-devisers have not addressed identity issues. She quotes Morrison's contention that the "habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous liberal gesture" but results in the "black body" having a "shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body" (T. Morrison, 1992, pp. 29-30; Spark, 2001, p. 41): efforts to downplay Aboriginality serve to mask Whiteness and continue its veneer as unraced. *Radiance* film reviews quoted by Spark declare that *Radiance*'s characters, because their Aboriginality is not foregrounded, thus represent a 'universal' version of humanity: "Each woman represents a life experience, not just of aboriginal women, but people everywhere" (*Sun Herald,* 10 November 1998, in Spark, p. 41), and, "It matters not that... they are Aboriginal... What matters is that they are *real* (my italics) Australians confronting life, death and each other with passion, humour and love" (*Sunday Telegraph*, 11 October 1998, in Spark, p. 41). Spark is concerned such reviews, and *Radiance* itself, reinforce what Moreton-Robinson describes as belief in a "deracialised but gendered universal subject" (2000, p. xviii; 2001, p. 39). I posit that this desire to see Aboriginal actors enact and embody a White 'universal' is assimilatory and erasing in its intent. The reviewers' comments also suggest that those critics believe the less 'Aboriginality' evident in the characters portrayed, the more 'real' humanity and humanness those characters will have.

Spark (2001) goes even further to argue that White audiences have taken *Radiance* "to heart" because they feel at ease somatically—comfortable within their bodies—because their Whiteness and colonial position are not challenged: the White body is relaxed when Whiteness and Aboriginality are portrayed a certain way (p. 46). Spark draws on Threadgold's ideas (1997) about the role of the body in

maintaining existing social structures: following Threadgold, she argues that the supposed lack of race politics in *Radiance* is not what comforts audiences; what relaxes them is that "the particularity of these politics folds within the grammar which is already 'in the body' (1997, p. 99)" (2001, p. 46). While acknowledging there are multiple ways to read *Radiance*, and that the work might have made positive efforts to 'rewrite' representations of Aboriginal womanhood, Spark argues that:

> The particular textual trace of white denial and indifference—which is already 'in the nervous system… the musculature, the habitus of the [Australian social] body' (Threadgold, 1997, p. 99)—seems to me to be reinscribed by the film. (Spark, 2001, p. 47)

Spark's (and Threadgold's) analysis fits with Sullivan's arguments that White colonial habits are exercised by White bodies through occupation of space and maintained unconsciously because these habits and expectations reside deep in the psyche. However, rather than just exercised via White bodies' free movement, Spark argues that these unconscious desires underlying colonial habits are also held in and resonate through White bodies. Challenges to White privilege and occupations disturb the "grammar" and "musculature" of Whiteness's norm-based power and this is felt as a tension both psychologically and physically, even if the White body does not understand the source of this disturbance.

One final problem of *Radiance*, the play and film, is the question as to why Nowra was asked to write the piece when, by the early 1990s, First Nations playwrights were already creating award-winning plays. This is not fully explained but it appears Roberts and Miller chose Nowra because he was "flavour of the month" (Roberts, 2014, p. 8). In residues of 1960s and 70s White attitudes to the abilities of First Nations theatre creators, plus White zero-point hubris, a former BBC journalist and reviewer of hundreds of australian First Nations artworks and performances (Aboriginal Art Directory, 2024) declared in 2015 that an "experienced" playwright such as Nowra had been needed to create such a good play; First Nations playwrights such as Davis, Gilbert and Merritt, Eccles (2015) claimed, did not have "broad" enough skills:

> …the greatest point of interest for an elder of the tribe of critics like myself is the history of the play in which that original cast used their performances in roles written by an experienced playwright – Nowra had broader writing skills than pioneering Aboriginal story-tellers such as Jack Davis, Bobby Merritt and Kevin Gilbert – to reveal "a deep array of emotions that we could sink our teeth into", as Rhoda Roberts put it in a recent interview. (Eccles, 2015)

Maza's view was very different:

> 'I guess the biggest issue for me with *Radiance* was the need to bring in a white writer, and I believe we are past this stage—we have the writers! We have the talent!'
> Rachael Maza (in James, 2014, p. 13)

Maza's position is reflected in what First Nations theatre scholars were arguing even before *Radiance*'s 2015 reprisal. Muruwari descendant playwright Jane Harrison (2012) queries why non-Aboriginal dramatists want to write Aboriginal characters and stories. She poses several questions: How can they feel confident writing First Nations characters sensitively with authentic voices? How do they research their material? Do they care if the Aboriginal community is happy with their work and how they would check this? Meanwhile, Harrison (2012) quotes several leading First Nations theatre artists saying Indigenous stories should only be told by First Nations people or not told at all (pp. 9, 12).

c. Text and film quagmires: more White imagination trouble

Wiradyuri writer Anita Heiss's survey of First Nations publishing (2002) is referenced in later protocols guiding engagement with First Nations arts (Arts NSW, 2011; Hurley, 2003). Heiss (2002) has canvassed First Nations australian writers plus non-Aboriginal and First Nations publishers of First Nations authors and First Nations themed work. One view is that non-Aboriginal writers *could* provide a voice for First Nations people or advocate constructively on First Nations themes. However, the overwhelming sentiment is deep disquiet over non-Aboriginal writers portraying First Nations australian themes and creating First Nations characters. This is largely because they misconstrue and misunderstand Aboriginal people (p. 198). Bundjalung historian Ruby Langford Ginibi declares: "'For years we have been

misrepresented by misinformed people and never had a voice!'" (in Heiss, 2002, p. 199). Waanyi anthologist and author Alexis Wright complains that First Nations people have been invisible, or been "'at the mercy'" of being misrepresented in academic and other books which do feature them, while "'most of our people would not have a clue about what was written about them'" (in Heiss, 2002, p. 199).

These observations reiterate a history of negative representation of Aboriginal people in White literature and academic writing—representation which Aboriginal people have been powerless to stop (Heiss, 2002, p. 199). Goorie and european fiction writer Melissa Lucashenko and others contend that non-Aboriginal writers should not write about First Nations people unless First Nations people have asked them to: "'Who asked you to write about Aboriginal people? If it wasn't Aboriginal people themselves, I suggest you go away and look at your own lives instead of ours'" (Lucashenko in Heiss, 2002, p. 199). Lucashenko and literacy researcher Mary Rhyden assert that non-Aboriginal researchers and writers should be prepared to be asked: whose permission do you have? (Heiss, 2002, p. 203)

Heiss (2002) quotes one view that non-Aboriginal writers can write about historical or colonial themes but *not* create fictional characters (p. 200). Another perspective is that non-Aboriginal authors *should* write about settler-colonist/First Nations relations: to highlight oppression of Aboriginal people and acknowledge responsibility for colonial history (p. 200). Another view argues that if non-Aboriginal writers leave out Aboriginal people and themes their writing perpetuates a monoculture or White epistemological dominance (pp. 200-201). This point critiques the extent to which non-Aboriginal people can and do operate without thinking about First Nations australians, as if they don't exist (Heiss, 2007, pp. 256, 263). Even further, Yiman and Bidjara academic Marcia Langton (1994) contends that postulations by non-Aboriginal people that only First Nations artists, writers and film-makers can portray other First Nations people is essentially racist (p. 95). Such a belief, Langton argues, suggests that settler-colonists expect each and every First Nations creative to understand and know the motives, beliefs, cultures and characterisations of all First Nations people. That kind of expectation, Langton attests, would assume that First Nations people across australia are a homogenous,

less diverse group of Others distinct from and unknowable by non-Aboriginal australians (p. 95).

Forty years of commentary on film representations of First Nations people reflect problems akin to those in theatre. A central concern maintains that non-Aboriginal film-makers and writers have difficulty portraying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: they tend to create two-dimensional, inauthentic characters that are manifestations of the White screenwriter's and filmmaker's imaginations and misframings (Mills, 2012; Pike, 1977; Rodriguez, 2012; Turner, 1988). They emphasise only themes and stories of which they are aware, not realising their knowledge gaps (Rekhari, 2006). They see the stories of their First Nations characters through a White lens even when they are trying to critique colonisation (Brown, 1988; Hickling-Hudson, 1990; Langton, 2006; Turner, 1988). Non-Aboriginal portrayals of First Nations australians have often been negative and/or limited in scope because they do not know or comprehend the breadth of First Nations Culture and experience (McKee, 1999; Rekhari, 2008). Or they deliver a First Nations story through the lens of non-Aboriginal people who were often only at the edges of what happened.

A 20th century example evincing some of these problems is *Aeroplane Dance* (1994), by acclaimed non-Aboriginal filmmaker, Trevor Graham. This was a collaboration with the Yanyuwa people on the impact of a U.S. fighter aeroplane crash near their communities during World War Two. Casey and Bradley (2011) argue *Aeroplane Dance* was dominated by the american airmen's story while the Yanyuwa people served only as a backdrop—even though the film was promoted as being the community's story too. The Yanyuwa's "Aeroplane Dance", developed in response to the plane crash, was used in an altered, inauthentic form for filmic purposes without accurately positioning its significance within the story *Aeroplane Dance* told. The film represented australian history through an american lens, further marginalising the community's experience in a one-sided story.

These centerings of non-Aboriginal people in narratives claiming to be about Aboriginal experience are yet another way First Nations people are obscured by White storytelling. In further erasure, Hickling-Hudson (1990), Pike (1977), Langton

(1994) and Rekhari (2008) concur: adverse representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have happened alongside general exclusion of First Nations characters from the australian film canon. This screen absence was most stark up to 1950 (Pike, 1977) but has persisted into this century (2008). Such exclusion curtails the artistic freedom of First Nations people unable to control portrayals of themselves even when they are drawn into the process. Indigenous participants remain unable to see themselves and their Culture authentically in film narratives purporting to include them. White imaginations are implicated in these old and recent portrayal errors; that is, in concert with allied production agendas that favour the hegemonised tastes and cultural imperviousness of settler-colonist audiences.

That said, the presence of First Nations people on and behind australian screens has risen in recent years since these critiques of absences and distortions were first aired. *Redfern Now*, *Cleverman*, *Total Control*, *Mystery Road* and *The Gods of Wheat Street* have been suggested to me as productions where First Nations actors are centered in a range of storylines that push the boundaries of what First Nations screen narratives can be. There is not scope within this thesis—I must push on to my theatre-specific questions—to evaluate these examples as explorations of Aboriginal Culture, vehicles for First Nations talent, or even whether all of them are telling Aboriginal stories; 'Whose stories are these? Who are they for?' must always be asked of works said to represent First Nations people. It is necessary, nevertheless, to acknowledge within my arguments that screen portrayals of First Nations actors look different and far more varied than they did when I commenced this research more than a decade ago.

d. 'Not Aboriginal enough' and other false binaries

Davis and Moreton (2011) argue that the remote/urban binary, already noted in other scholarship, has operated for decades in australian film: "demarcating the powerful and persistent colonialist conception of Indigenous Australians as remote, native and by implication 'authentic' on one side ... or urban, colonised and by implication 'inauthentic' on the other side...." (2011). This binary framing of "authentic" and "inauthentic" First Nations australians by non-Aboriginal people has, as Davis and others attest, stymied First Nations creative practice. Remote situations and projects have for decades attracted most film funding, narrowing what

types of characters are created to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on screen (2011).

Similarly, Harrison (2012) attests that non-Aboriginal writers are attracted to the mythical, spiritual Aboriginal character, especially in film, and this romanticising overshadows other kinds of stories which might reflect the true diversity of First Nations australians. So, as with Davis and Moreton (2011), Harrison contends that real stories "of an urbanized group (tend) to be viewed as 'inauthentic' by the dominant white society" (2012, p. 22). First Nations playwrights have had work rejected for production as "not being Aboriginal enough". Often these are personal journeys of urban Aboriginal people passed over for stories with political ideas or larger issues facing Aboriginal australians (p. 23). Such disinterest in urban experiences erases the complexity and variety of First Nations people's lives. It also suggests that personal narratives are only worthy of representation on screen if they are those of White/settler-colonists. That is, First Nations stories are expected to serve their community or educate White people, not explore the range of genres non-Aboriginal film-makers can pursue unfettered. Meanwhile, educative portrayals must fit within White imagined parameters of what should be known about First Nations people (2011). Amid these strictures on what constitutes an "Aboriginal story" in film, theatre makers have complained that theatre addressing First Nations stories and issues develops a "sameness" when "white creatives" are at the helm (Harkins-Cross, 2014).

Given these concerns it is appropriate to note: this thesis at no stage intends limits on the range of genres or stories which can be defined as First Nations theatre—whether they be contemporary urban, remote, fantasy, realism, magical, sci-fi, pre-colonial/traditional, adaptations of euro-canon stories and so on—provided the works meet tests, already outlined and to be further distinguished, of being by and for First Nations people such that First Nations Culture/culture is being made.

e. First Nations actors: shifting landscape, shifting roles

Still to this day, the creative life of actors is at the mercy of scriptwriter imaginations, which scripts funding bodies and producers will back and which

stories programmers and distributors will book in their venues. In theatre, stage-play content affects dynamics in the rehearsal room alongside the impact of who has artistic control as director or among collaborators. Casey and Syron (2005) illuminate problems facing First Nations actors in projects where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal theatre artists are working together. When the playwright and director are non-Aboriginal yet material in the play concerns First Nations issues, ignorance by non-Aboriginal colleagues can be hurtful. Another problem, long complained of, arises when a script involves First Nations themes or characters and actors are asked in the rehearsal room to step up as cultural advisers (Glow & Johanssen, 2009). Actor-writer Meyne Wyatt indicates through his stage protagonist's words in *City of Gold* (2019/2022) that the cultural consultant issue in rehearsal is still happening. Casey and Syron (2005) note that, at the time they were writing, not only were Aboriginal actors usually not offered payment when asked to give cultural advice, they were often asked to provide knowledge about communities not their own. This arises from presumptions that a First Nations actor will know about all aspects of Indigenous experience and culture across multiple language and cultural groups, that there is little difference between First Nations Cultures or that there is one, homogenous australian First Nations Culture. For the actor separated from their cultural group by colonial history, the request to provide knowledge about their own group's First Nations Culture—knowledge they don't have—can trigger renewed loss and shame over those lost connections (Casey and Syron, 2005).

Meanwhile, the Indigenous realities First Nations actors have most often been cast to portray require them to embody characters who suffer or have no agency (Casey and Syron, 2005). Such storylines determine actors' working environment and creative world. The scarcity of roles available to First Nations actors has raised questions about casting practice (Lewis, 2007) while actors union, MEAA/Equity, has campaigned for so called "colour-blind' casting (N. Garner, 2014) over more than a decade. The past decade has seen shifts as more australian small-screen drama depicts First Nations people in a greater variety of power dynamics, socio-economic positions and storylines. Australian stages are less clear. Some theatre scholars will argue that First Nations theatre has blossomed in the last five or six years (2017-2023) with a diverse range of works by Aboriginal theatre makers commanding mainstages, including by veterans Jane Harrison, Andrea James, and Wesley Enoch,

with generations of talented, original Indigenous playwrights just behind them: Nathan Maynard, Meyne Wyatt, Thomas Weatherall, Dylan Van Den Berg, and Hannah Belanzsky, among many others. Gamilaroi/Torres Strait Islander playwright, TV comedy writer and performer, Nakkiuh Lui, was the most produced dramatist in Australian theatre in 2019 (Hay & Carleton, 2022). This must augur well. But these anecdotal examples of Indigenous stories' variety and mainstage popularity expanding First Nations theatre programming, belie what arts body data says theatre's (mostly White) paying audiences are lining up to see.

Glow and Johanssen (2009), meanwhile, find that First Nations theatre artists can be torn between responsibilities to serve their communities versus their personal opportunities and breadth of practice. As artistic director Wesley Enoch explains, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists wrestle with wanting to be both connected to their communities and unfettered creative artists; meanwhile, non-Aboriginal artists on the outside "looking in" are free to move between creative spaces (Glow and Johanssen, 2009, p 31). This returns to that contrast already noted between non-Aboriginal creative artists' liberty, i.e. artistic freedom, and the more complicated journey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists traverse within a creative life. Both load from colonial structures plus accountabilities led by Culture add complexities to First Nations artists' theatre work. These are extra considerations and tasks that White/non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist creatives do not encounter. These divergent experiences also reinforce the ease settler-colonists have in moving between theatre that depicts First Nations people and theatre which erases or ignores them.

f. First Nations stories, White destinations

Harrison (2012) notes that audiences viewing First Nations theatre are still most often non-Aboriginal. This is even though Indigenous theatre makers have declared for decades that their principal aim is to create works for their own communities: that entertaining non-Aboriginal audiences is secondary (p. 9). Harrison coins the term "Indig-curious" (p. 6) to describe rising interest among non-Aboriginal australians not just to tell, but also to hear, stories of First Nations people. This, she argues, arises from "desires of the hegemonic culture to hear 'authentic'

tales of the 'other'" (Kurtzer, 2003, p. 181). Indig-curiosity can include White desire to be *seen* to know, be interested in and care about Indigenous australians. Harrison contends settler-colonist theatre-goers provide the necessary large, paying audiences for First Nations plays and presume that the purpose of the works they are seeing is to educate them (pp. 32-33). Critics still praise narratives when, according to one reviewer, they are "directed towards the white audience" who are "gently mocked, but this is never alienating" (pp. 12-13). Thus, the comfort of non-Aboriginal patrons as they are being educated remains important decades after it was a preoccupation of theatre critics in the 1970s (Casey, 2004).

At the 2015 Theatre Arts Forum in Sydney, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic leaders Rachael Maza (2015), Richard Frankland (2015a) and Rhoda Roberts (2015b) gave keynote addresses on First Nations theatre's future. A unifying theme was impediments on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre practice arising from non-Aboriginal people's powerful presence in the bureaucratic and creative spaces within which First Nations work must be produced. Rachael Maza acknowledged that committed, non-Aboriginal people of integrity have been crucial in bringing australian Indigenous theatre to audiences since the '60s and '70s. This, she told the audience, was necessitated by expertise, experience and resources they could bring *because* of their privilege. While power and privilege continue to divide Indigenous and non-Aboriginal australians, and to influence what theatre is made, non-Aboriginal/Indigenous collaborations remain necessary (Maza, 2015).

Maza distinguished between cultural appropriation and cultural exchange and their relationship to authorship and ownership of work. Cultural appropriation, she argued, is based on imperialism, capitalism, assimilation and oppression—especially those aspects of imperialism that take territories, subjugate groups and extract everything of value from the colonised. Maza used the scenario of the non-Aboriginal playwright creating a play for a non-Aboriginal theatre company where they have asked a First Nations person to share their story. She contended that the use of that story and the retention of copyright over the play created from it by the non-Aboriginal writer is cultural appropriation. The key, she explained, to where appropriate cultural *exchange* takes place lies in who retains ownership of the story: both the financial benefits arising from copyright but also control of the form

that story takes and how it is conveyed to audiences (Maza, 2015).

Harrison (2012) and Maza (2015) thus demonstrate how White audiences and White theatre-making resources impact on the artistic freedom and cultural rights of First Nations people. This includes First Nations audiences, those communities wanting their stories told and artists wanting opportunity to tell stories in culturally safe, financially fair and well-resourced environments. Harrison (2012) argues First Nations stage stories are still being framed, and therefore selected for production, according to the needs of non-Aboriginal audiences. Maza's concern (2015) is that the advantages of privilege that White/non-Aboriginal creatives have in making theatre lead to unequal exchanges of Culture. This includes White appropriation of First Nations stories. This can happen when cultural ownership or authorship is not recognised adequately or if consultation on use of cultural stories has been insufficient. Maza's address also argues that settler-colonist control of portrayals of Aboriginal people distort their narratives to the detriment of all First Nations communities.

These worries, expressed at the 2015 Australian Theatre Forum, aired more than four decades after the first federal Aboriginal Arts Board was established to further First Nations arts. The next section in this chapter describes very broadly how the Australia Council, from where that Aboriginal arts entity operated, has responded to the changing positions of First Nations arts and performance.

iii. Evolving arts body interventions

The Australia Council of the Arts has been, for fifty years, the federal body which dispenses arts grants, undertakes arts research and develops policy to support artists, cultural producers and creative agencies. It was merged into new federal arts body, Creative Australia, in July 2023; but this discussion will address Australia Council activities pre-dating the restructure and name change. There are state government arts bodies which also contribute funding and policy development around Indigenous theatre; but the Australia Council, as the federal organisation, has been significant for the performing arts across all the states, territories and First Nations communities. The Aboriginal Arts Board was established within the

Australia Council in 1973; in its last iteration with the Australia Council it was known as the First Nations Arts and Culture Strategy Panel (Australia Council, 2022). Through the establishment of this Indigenous-focused arts board, First Nations artists and arts leaders have evaluated work for Indigenous funding and overseen the Australia Council's programs for First Nations creative work (Australia Council, 2022). Arts policy moved faster from 1970-1990 and with more focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture than previously, due to the Aboriginal arts board's work (Australia Council, 2022; Gattenhof, 2019, p. 413). For the last thirty years or more, the Australia Council for the Arts has engaged in dedicated cultural policy and program delivery to enhance understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts including theatre and performance (Gattenhof, 2019, p. 413). This Australia Council work has happened, of course, alongside unfunded, unsupported work to preserve, maintain, continue and rebuild First Nations performance and storytelling dating back through millennia (Gattenhof, 2019, p. 414).

a. Australia Council protocols 2002, 2007, 2019

Impetus grew throughout the 1990s (Australia Council, 1997) for government arts agencies, especially the Australia Council, to develop Indigenous arts protocols: to guide First Nations and non-Aboriginal artists and producers in how to work appropriately with First Nations communities, stories and cultural materials. Wuthathi/Meriam intellectual property lawyer Teri Janke was involved in consultative development for the 2002 protocols. She drew on her sustained research around First Nations cultural rights and copyright (including: Janke, 1998; Janke, 2001, 2005, 2015, 2016a, 2018, 2019, 2021; Janke & Guivarra, 2006; Janke & Iacovino, 2012) to co-author that first 2002 version and then take over as sole cited author on the updated versions which followed (Australia Council, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e; Australia Council & Janke, 2019). Janke has been the main author for the last twenty years on many First Nations cultural protocols produced for public and private organisations in NSW and across much of Australia for arts, film, performance, museum, library, literary and ecological practice.

It is difficult to summarise the Australia Council's First Nations protocols without losing key information which must be read at source; but *some* of the issues within them can be canvassed here with that caveat understood. All three versions (2002, 2007 and 2019) noted that for copyright to apply australian law requires existing or recently deceased authors or creators to be identified and for works to be in tangible, published form. These protections therefore do not exist for work created over millennia, belonging to communities rather than designated authors and maintained and reproduced in oral form and communal memory. The absence of a law that protects "traditional symbols, songs, dances, performances or rituals that may be part of the heritage of particular Indigenous language groups" is "where the Australia Council for the Arts' protocol guides come in" say the three editions. In 2022 these sentiments were also, in very similar words, on the Australia Council webpage where the protocols were then located (Australia Council, 2007c, p. 3; Australia Council & Janke, 2019). All versions (2002, 2007 and 2019) noted that the Australian Government had yet to make a determination on Janke's recommendations in *Our Culture: Our Future* (Janke, 1998) for changes to law, policy and procedures to protect Indigenous knowledge and expression:

> While works by individual artists are protected by copyright, Australia does not yet have a law that prevents alteration, distortion or misuse of traditional symbols, songs, dances, performances and story that may be part of the heritage of particular Indigenous language groups. (Australia Council & Janke, 2019)

The 2007 edition was the one in operation throughout the period of data collection for this research. It was split into five brochures covering performing arts, writing, media arts, visual arts and music. The performing arts brochure covered traditional performance, dances, rituals and songs but stated it did not address the *published version of a play* (my italics) because that was covered in one of the other documents. The 2007 performing arts protocols asked that creators planning to depict an identifiable community or individual seek permission from that community, person or person's relatives and go through a process of checking that the story they wanted to tell was correct (Australia Council, 2007c, p. 21). The 2007 performance protocols also warned non-Aboriginal people that just because they liked a dance or story or other aspect of First Nations performance did not mean

they/we have the right to use it. I inferred from this wording, and still do, that the author(s) felt settler-colonist creatives needed reminding that their White desire for something of value in another Culture does not entail ownership (Ritchie, 2019). Despite these clear directives for seeking to use real life and cultural stories, there was no explicit reference in the performing arts specific protocols to how non-Aboriginal theatre makers should operate around creating *fictional* stage stories depicting imagined First Nations characters or circumstances.

Nevertheless, the case studies provided by First Nations theatre companies Yirra Yaakin, Kooemba Jdarra and Ilbijerri in the 2007 document were instructive about possible collaboration problems when non-Aboriginal artists and organisations are involved. One case described pushback against the use of protocols by mainstage companies. This meant some First Nations work was unable to travel to capital cities outside its home state because the mainstage theatre company refused to observe protocols requests (Australia Council, 2007c). Another gave an example of a non-Aboriginal creative consulting communities in the beginning, then proceeding to make work in contravention of advice provided, while still claiming endorsement of the First Nations theatre company through which she'd sought the community connection (Australia Council, 2007c).

The 2007 *Writing* protocols appeared to be the guide for advising playwrights producing a written play script. The *Writing* document had, as examples of practice, two non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist novelists' descriptions of how they consulted First Nations people for portraying fictitious Indigenous people in their work. One author was Kate Grenville and her novel *Secret River*. As I discuss in the next chapter, this text and the play made from it, were critiqued between 2006 and 2019 by academics and others for how Darug people were represented. Despite these criticisms, including by First Nations theatre makers, Grenville's *Secret River* example remained in place until the new protocols edition came out in 2019. The 2007 versions were, however, augmented in 2016 with the release of a detailed practical guide (Janke, 2016b) for artists to implement the existing protocols. The provision of a checklist in this supplement and fresh examples of good practice, by mostly First Nations artists, were useful interim updates reflecting revisions that were to be in the 2019 edition. That next protocols iteration (Australia Council &

Janke, 2019), in operation in 2023 as this research was concluding, had dropped both of the non-Aboriginal novel authors' consultation examples. Models of collaborative practice and appropriate consultation were provided by *First Nations* companies, leaders and creatives instead.

b. Australia Council protocols 2002, 2007, 2019: core principles

The core principles of the Australia Council First Nations arts protocols have remained much the same since the first version came out in 2002; they draw on international covenants on the cultural rights of First Nations people (ICESCR, 1976; United Nations, 2007) and consultation with australian First Nations communities and are informed by Janke's research on how to address legal gaps in cultural heritage protections (including: Janke, 1998, 2016b). First Nations *ownership* of cultural property is central to the principles: respect for that principle means First Nations communities must be consulted on use of their cultural heritage, be empowered to give or refuse consent, be acknowledged for their contribution of cultural heritage to any work created and have right to benefit from sharing of their cultural heritage, particularly if it has been used commercially (Australia Council & Janke, 2019). The protocols also say that consultation and consent is a dynamic, evolving and ongoing process. This means consultation and consent must be (1) revisited periodically on existing uses of heritage and (2) begun afresh with each new engagement with First Nations people and cultural material (Australia Council & Janke, 2019). Commentary for implementing the principles is included on the Australia Council protocol documents to clarifies the principles' meanings. They are further illustrated by practical application in specific examples of creative work and collaboration (Australia Council & Janke, 2019). That said, the emphasis in the ten core principles is on cultural heritage and does not address explicitly newly imagined creative work that portrays First Nations experience. The requirement to consult on contemporary urban stories and for creating fictional representations of Aboriginal people must be gleaned from the commentary around the protocol's principles. This requires understanding that First Nations Culture is being continually remade in response to the colonial present. It follows, therefore, that contemporary First Nations stories can constitute contemporary *cultural heritage* for which

consultation, permissions and negotiation should also be necessary. Those kinds of theatre-making projects creating new stories of the present were not covered explicitly in the 2007 protocols; this vagueness means they appear still unaccounted for in the 2019 advice.

c. First Nations performance: changing definitions and provisos

Supporting commentary to the protocols, including that on the Australia Council website where they are found, has definitions around what work is deemed First Nations performance. This is important for several reasons, including determining funding eligibility. For more than a decade the Australia Council has stipulated that projects seeking First Nations funding must be under First Nations control. How this is defined and implemented in funding criteria and protocols has evolved, partly to ensure the genuineness of that First Nations control. Early in this research, for instance, the Australia Council's then performing arts Indigenous protocols document said an Indigenous project must have at least fifty percent Indigenous content or content developed by Indigenous artists (Australia Council, 2007c). That was important for defining which projects should follow the protocols and to identify projects eligible for Australia Council Indigenous project funding. Later I recorded that the Australia Council's 2015 grants model, in a stricter definition than that in the 2007 Indigenous protocols then still in operation, required that non-Aboriginal organisations seeking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Fund (ATSIAF) money had to demonstrate the project was *under control and management of* Indigenous artists (Australia Council, 2015). This definition of which projects could apply for First Nations grant funding—that they were under First Nations control—made clearer who the personnel were that this involvement meant. In 2021 the Australia Council website's First Nations funding page stipulated that financial support under its First Nations arts programs was "dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, groups and organisations" and "assessed wholly by Indigenous peers" (Australia Council, 2021). This was stronger still than the wording in 2015, stipulating that a project seeking Australia Council First Nations project funding would support projects by First Nations artists and/or

communities "for First Nations people's benefit". These words suggest that the flow of such benefit to First Nations people must be demonstrated in some way.

The other key national body for supporting Australian stories in performance, Screen Australia, had also for a decade or more similar criteria requiring First Nations control of a project before it could be eligible for Indigenous program funding (Screen Australia, 2013). In 2013 Screen Australia defined Indigenous *content* to include any film or program based on an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander story or cultural heritage (Screen Australia, 2013). By 2021, Screen Australia was stipulating on its website that collaborative drama feature and TV projects needed to demonstrate the concept had been *originated* by a First Nations team member to be eligible for First Nations funding. "In the case of co-writing teams, made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers, the original concept must come from the First Nations Australian writer. This must be shown in the application" (Screen Australia, 2021b, 2021c). That First Nations projects must come from First Nations ideas and thinking has thus emerged as a specific criterion for marking the First Nations veracity of work claiming to be an Indigenous TV or feature project. For all feature film, TV and documentary projects Screen Australia's First Nations department insisted it would only fund projects "*authored* by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners" (my italics). Where projects involved non-Aboriginal collaborators "projects must have Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander practitioners in key creative roles: at least as writer and director, and in the case of writing teams the lead writer must be First Nations Australian" (Screen Australia, 2021d). Conversely, the Australia Council has not explicitly stated that First Nations theatre eligible for its funding must be First Nations *initiated* or *ideated* projects or of First Nations authorship; nor has that arts body spelt out the structure of appropriate collaborative teams. Recent wording, however, insists that its First Nations arts programs be "dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, groups and organisations" (Australia Council, 2021). There is also a reminder that all works seeking Australia Council support are evaluated by First Nations arts peers. These two requirements suggests that projects from non-Aboriginal people's ideas would require significant additional evidence of First Nations control compared to that required for those projects which are clearly initiated by a creative team's First Nations members.

d. Australia Council research: First Nations theatre landscape 2015-2021

Australia Council commissioned research has been examining, since 2015, First Nations theatre's engagement across urban mainstages. *Building Audiences* (Bridson et al., 2015) explores attitudes to First Nations performance via forums and interviews with industry members and through focus groups with audience members (both existing and potential). *Building Audiences'* six authors note the need to develop the First Nations arts ecology through capacity building that could include mentoring, training and stable employment for Indigenous artists (p. 17). Meanwhile, many non-Aboriginal people, their interview data shows, hold beliefs about First Nations theatre deterring them from attending performances. Non-Aboriginal people see Aboriginal theatre as "serious" and "educational" while they, as potential audience members, "just want to relax and just not worry about what's wrong with Australia" (p. 14).

Showcasing Creativity (Australia Council for the Arts, Bailey, Yang, Whitford, & Vodjanoska, 2016) examines First Nations performing arts programming in australia's mainstream venues and festivals. Only two percent of almost six thousand works programmed in 2015 mainstage seasons were First Nations productions (p. 9). Almost half of the mainstage presenters in that year did not program works made with either First Nations control, involvement or content (p. 9). The report and Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts head, Lydia Miller, conclude that attitudes revealed in the study indicate a need for "cross-cultural dialogue" between mainstage presenters and First Nations artists and communities. This includes a call for mainstage artistic leaders to examine their "assumptions on which programming and presenting decisions are made across the country" (Miller & Australia Council, 2016, p. 4).

The last of the twelve *Showcasing Creativity* key findings notes that mainstage presenters and producers disclosed their programming decisions were affected by underlying "race relations" which were an obstacle to presenting First Nations works (pp. 9, 40, 41). Programmers revealed that they believed non-

Aboriginal audiences were racist and they, the programmers, didn't want productions to confront audiences about their racism in case it affected box office takings (p. 41). The report states also that venue staff and programmers themselves exerted overt and systemic racism, and/or held unconscious alignment with their own dominant cultural paradigm; these attitudes and worldviews disinclined them to program First Nations work or understand its value (p. 40).

Creating Art Part 1 (Australia Council, O'Sullivan, & Huntley, 2020) reports on in-depth interviews undertaken with First Nations performance makers on their experiences in realising work. The report makes multiple findings about mentoring, capacity building, promoting First Nations performance and First Nations agency and control over work. Comments and conclusions through the document include that: it is essential First Nations theatre work is developed from a cultural base to ensure diversity, authenticity and to avoid stereotypes (p. 13); First Nations creative control and agency over work is essential but work is being marketed as "Black" or "First Nations" when it hasn't been made under Indigenous control (p. 23); and, narrow perceptions of what constitutes First Nations theatre need to be challenged (pp. 13, 20). First Nations theatre artists also reported that First Nations actors were still being called upon in rehearsal and development of plays to provide free cultural advice including around First Nations Cultures that were not their own (Australia Council et al., 2020). This is despite the fact that the Australia Council performing arts protocols, at least since their 2007 edition, have expressly stated that this should not happen, that qualified cultural consultants should be engaged to answer such questions and they should be paid for this cultural work (Australia Council, 2007c). On skills development and mentoring, the report calls for a strategic sector response to the skills gap in off-stage roles and for proper resourcing of mentoring and cultural consultant roles in First Nations performing arts (p. 12).

e. What the arts bodies tell us

This recent Australia Council research on audiences' and programmers' attitudes to First Nations stage stories is a disturbing place to end this chapter on the landscape Indigenous theatre operates within. Programmers, the Australia Council research reveals, believe non-Aboriginal audiences have a racist disinterest in—or

aversion to—First Nations stories. To cater to this racism, those theatre decision-makers are disinclined to program such work. Additionally, the Australia Council's researchers perceived anti-Aboriginal racism among venue staff surveyed. At the end of the second decade of this millennium this research demonstrates that Aboriginal voices and audiences are still not welcome universally across our mainstages. This is despite the indications in other sections of this chapter that, for better or for worse, there is a rising interest among non-Aboriginal theatre *makers* in First Nations stories.

Meanwhile the Australia Council and Screen Australia have been developing since the late 1990s protocols and funding criteria to manage problems which might arise in collaboration between First Nations people and non-Aboriginal artists. Such protocols are also intended to guide First Nations artists working with First Nations communities they are not part of. Funding criteria have evolved to respond to changing issues in collaboration and to identify which projects qualify as 'Indigenous'. Wording has been strengthened around First Nations control of projects, how that can be ensured and that First Nations people must benefit from First Nations projects. What is not clear in the research or in the First Nations protocols reviewed here is how many theatre companies and artists are applying the protocols to their practice. Australia Council and Screen Australia First Nations funding requires that projects they support adhere to their protocols; but it is unclear what mainstage companies are doing when they have means to make theatre about First Nations people without arts bodies' financial help.

iii. Conclusion: implications of enduring (White theatre maker) problems

Looking backwards, a mish-mash of seemingly contradictory settler-colonist behaviours litter the australian theatre landscape so far examined. Critics in the 1970s *and* forty years later disparage First Nations artists for revealing colonial truth and disturbing White fragility. Similarly, multiple scholars attest that false binaries and limited ideas of Aboriginality have persisted in film and theatre through much of the twentieth century, continuing into this one. Harrison's (2012) unhappy coining of

Indig-curiosity calls out White colonising desire and benevolent strategies to occupy creative realms of the Other. Inconsistent though it is, this rising settler-colonist curiosity complicates First Nations moves to creative autonomy. Indigenous communities, theatre makers and arts leaders continue to struggle for control of their narratives, as policies and protocols constantly evolve, ostensibly to ensure they may have it. Meanwhile, moving into the third decade of this millennium, First Nations stories have been avoided by mainstage theatre programmers second guessing the anti-Aboriginal racism they expect of their core, White, audience.

Through this discussion I have developed lenses around *artistic freedom* and *White colonial habits*. *Artistic freedom* proposes a test of cultural Sovereignty, including creative rights assumed to be universal but which clearly aren't. The *White colonial habits* framework acknowledges such assumptions as a typical effect of White solipsism.

Meanwhile First Nations arts leader Rachael Maza (2015), early in the period of this research, set a bar—her word—for what constitutes First Nations theatre: theatre by First Nations people for First Nations people. In that address she stipulated that genuine collaboration, not consultation, was the only way that non-Aboriginal and First Nations creatives could make theatre together of use to First Nations audiences. Her demands were for First Nations communities, people and creatives to be accorded the cultural agency necessary to exercise artistic freedom.

In the same speech, Maza framed White play-makers' appropriation of First Nations theatre stories as habits of colonial possession: they saw something valuable in another Culture and exercised their White prerogative to have it. However, Maza's colonisation analysis was not reported. The slim coverage of the Ilbijerri leader's keynote address (2015) focused on how she critiqued her colonial narrative case study: Sydney Theatre Company's production of *The Secret River*.

4. PRAISE, DESIRE AND LOATHING: THE CASE OF *THE SECRET RIVER*

i. Introduction: White theatre makers lead the way

Audience and theatre critic responses to Sydney Theatre Company's adaptation of Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River* illustrate the landscape within which First Nations storytelling was operating during this research. This chapter therefore reviews what the play's makers recorded about their intentions and what arts journalists wrote about *The Secret River* once it opened. I know of two people who declared publicly that the *Secret River* stage story was offensive to First Nations people. I examine what they said, along with the views of academics who had earlier critiqued Grenville's novel on similar grounds. The flood of White arts critics, however, congratulating *The Secret River*'s theatre makers drowned out these lonely naysayers. Reviewers were delighted that this tale made clear the desperation of british people arriving on australian shores, as a way to understand what they did to the people already living there.

ii. Rolling seasons and never-ending acclaim

The Sydney Theatre Company (STC) stage adaptation of *The Secret River* (Grenville & Bovell, 2013) opened at the 2013 Sydney Festival of the Arts and went on to the major Canberra and Perth arts festivals that year. It won six Helpmann Awards including Best New Work, Best Play and Best Direction and continued to reap other national play, theatre and literary awards. The STC staged more *Secret River* productions over subsequent years with altered casts, in partnership with other state and international theatre companies. There were some redevelopments including experiments with outdoor settings. The later productions included an "encore season" starting in 2016 and taking in the Melbourne Arts Centre, Adelaide Festival, Queensland Performing Arts Centre and Roslyn Packer Theatre in Sydney. A similar production played overseas several years later at the British National Theatre, London, and at the 2019 Edinburgh International Festival. *The Secret River* was thus the most high-profile depiction of First Nations reality the australian

theatre industry took around the country and overseas before the Covid-19 pandemic shut down live performance touring.

iii. Problems in the *Secret River* novel

Grenville's novel *The Secret River* (2005) centred on the journey of european settler frontier characters forging new lives in NSW australia's Hawkesbury River region in the early 19th century. It recounted colonist settlers', including ex-convicts', arrival on that Darug land just north of what is now called Sydney and their interactions with First Nations people already living there. While the characters were fictional with fictional anglo-celtic names the story drew on colonial fact: Grenville said she was inspired by a desire to understand the history of her ancestor Solomon Wiseman who settled on the Hawkesbury at what is now known as Wiseman's Ferry (Grenville, 2006a; 2006b, p. 149). It was said Grenville used details of a well-known massacre at Waterloo Creek in 1838 for creating the one in her novel (McKenna, 2005). The *Secret River* (2005) narrative begins and climaxes with the murderous poisoning and shooting of local First Nations people by settlers known to the settler-protagonist; another crisis point is when an unnamed local First Nations man spears and kills the settler who led the murders.

The novel was itself criticised for recounting events based in fact through non-Aboriginal characters' (and readers') eyes (Kelada, 2010), for making the First Nations people in the story invisible, voiceless, unnamed and distant victims in subtly dehumanising ways (Clendinnen, 2006), for imposing a White author's Reconciliation on the past (Kossew, 2007) and for normalising the process of Aboriginal dispossession and for blurring colonial history with fiction (Clendinnen, 2006). Wiradjuri poet, academic and author Jeanine Leane (2014, 2016) argues:

> I read this narrative as a continuing stream of consciousness for white settlers... it is an ongoing investment in nationhood and the reshaping of settler identity in the twenty-first century.... In this case, 'diverting the debate into something more comfortable' means rewriting dispossession and massacre in a way that is more empathetic and less judgmental of settler perpetrators and their descendants. (Leane, 2014, pp. 12-14)

> The fact that Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005), a rewriting of colonial history by a settler author, has been the most taught text in Australian secondary schools since 2009 speaks loudly to the persistent use of settler literature as a tool of cognitive imperialism. It allows for the cultural transmission of settler narratives and values, and in doing so overwrites Aboriginal history and experience. I am not suggesting that this work and others like it be scrapped – they are important texts that reveal synchronic slices of settler consciousness of and about Aboriginal people at any given time. But I am challenging the notion that these are Aboriginal stories. They are not. (Leane, 2016)

iv. Desire to stage *The Secret River*

The creative leadership who chose, and determined how, to adapt *The Secret River* for stage were non-Aboriginal director, Neil Armfield, non-Aboriginal playwright, Andrew Bovell, the STC's non-Aboriginal artistic directors, Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton and Nunukul-Munaldjali descendant choreographer, Stephen Page (Bovell, 2013, 2015; Page, 2017; Schofield, 2017). According to the program, stage-play text notes and publicity commentary, Bovell and the other senior theatre makers wanted to fix the lack of Darug people's representation and viewpoints in Grenville's text (2013, pp. xviii-xix; 2015). Bovell described in the first text edition (2013) and on the Sydney Theatre Company website (2015) how he considered adding another story thread: where one non-Aboriginal Thornhill son grew up to marry a Darug woman and joined her community. This branch of the Thornhill family became one which identified and operated as Darug not settler: "one family was white, the other black" (p. xvi). However, Bovell ultimately agreed with his collaborators that he should stay with the book's central narrative and avoid new threads (p. xvii; 2015). Bovell had wanted to invent a Thornhill brother who could befriend Darug people, countering on stage the genocidal White actions in Grenville's novel; plus, he suggested he might have been seeking to avoid the story's dark violence (xvii).

The thrust of Bovell's, Page's and other STC theatre makers' commentary on their *Secret River* creative processes presents intentions to truthfully and with balance portray shared history. This is notwithstanding that this inner, mostly non-

Aboriginal, creative circle's explanations, laden with "I" and "we", assumed their power and capacity to determine how best to depict these semi-fictional events about a much larger historical and enduring colonial reality. Nevertheless, these *Secret River* theatre makers did take steps to address gaps in their knowledge and gaps in Darug agency within Grenville's narrative…

v. Righting (and re-writing) the novel's wrongs

The Sydney Theatre Company team identified that the people who had lived in that Hawkesbury area were members of the Darug nation. The language and cultural group had not been named in Grenville's novel. Darug elder Richard Green, whom Page already knew, joined the development team (p. xviii; 2015; Page, 2017) as a cultural and language consultant and co-collaborator (2013, p. xviii; 2015). Green spoke a revived, recovered version of Darug, the First local Hawkesbury language, correcting assumptions by other creative team members that it had been lost (2013, p. xviii; 2015). Green translated the words Bovell wrote for *The Secret River's* Darug characters into Darug for them to speak on stage (2013, p. xviii; 2015) "and made (the language) fit the needs of the production" (2013, p. xviii). Early in development, he, Bovell, Armfield and Page travelled to the Hawkesbury River location where *Secret River* was set: to immerse themselves in the location as part of their creative process (2017). This was where they drew on the Darug name for the Hawkesbury's huge body of water to create Dhirrumbin (2017), a narrator who could illuminate the Darug characters' interior worlds, witness history before, during and after the play's events and "… allowed us to retain some of Grenville's poetic language" (2013, p. xvii; 2015). Thus, many words Dhirrumbin spoke in english on stage, to express Darug perspectives and provide objective context, came from Grenville's omniscient author voice.

The Secret River's stage producers aimed to increase First Nations-Darug representation and agency by focussing on two fictional families—one settler and one Darug—occupying the shared stage space "equally" and using the same, fixed campfire, albeit at different times (Curtis, 2017). This was to make the Darug people as present in audience minds as the settlers. The massacre is told twice in the stage-play: first through settler characters' eyes and actions and then recounted by

Dhirrumbin. She describes each Aboriginal family member being killed while each actor releases a handful of flour as their character dies (Curtis, 2017). Nunukul-Munaldjali choreographer Stephen Page said in online publicity material that the First Nations and non-Aboriginal cast members of *The Secret River* came "together as one" to tell an unresolved narrative in responsible "care-taking" of that story (2017). He described the "awakening" of the *Secret River* narrative as a "medicine, because it finds us a new way to cleanse through and heal that generation of guilt" (Page, 2017, 2019).

Playwright Andrew Bovell said he was compelled to address the violence depicted and "understand how this conflict is being played out today" (2013, p. xvii; 2015). He said Grenville had kept the First Nations people in her novel distant because she did not feel culturally equipped to interpret them as full characters in her story as "it was not possible to empathise with the traditional Aboriginal characters" (2013, p. vxiii; 2015). Bovell said he didn't have that "choice" with a stage rendering (2013, p. xviii; 2015). Along with inserting a Darug spirit narrator, Dhirrumbin, Bovell and his collaborators worked to give the Darug characters on stage "a voice… an attitude… a point of view… (and) language" (Bovell, 2013, p. xviii; 2015). This included changing Darug characters' names from anglo-celtic ones in Grenville's novel to Darug ones: Yalamundi, Ngalamalum, Buryia, Gilyaga, and Duyll Dyin (2013, p. xix; 2015).

Bovell's stage narrative excised the novel's long depiction of Thornhill senior's life in London and how he was transported to Australia. The play began, and stayed, on the Hawkesbury in Darug country. In Bovell's rendering both the non-Aboriginal and Darug groups had differences within them between characters on how to deal with the problem created by the other occupiers/occupants (Bovell, 2013, p. xix; 2015). Bovell described the central dilemma of the novel as encapsulating "our historical dilemma – two peoples with a different understanding of the land and its ownership… The question was whose definition of ownership of land would prevail… History has answered that question, but the novel and therefore the play suggest that a different outcome was possible" (Bovell, 2013, 2015). This is not the only place where the story of *The Secret River* is seen as conveying an equal conflict between two groups with competing, morally equal claims to occupy the Hawkesbury/Darug

area. Bovell's words say that one side of colonial history has prevailed, imposing that side's approach to land permanently on all people on the australian continent. This interpretation of our present and future as fixed and decided presents another White presumption unconsciously at work, denying Sovereignty of First Nations people by lauding a one-sided Reconciliation, despite Bovell's declared counter-colonial intentions.

Nevertheless, White imagination's insidious biases notwithstanding, the development team wrote pages of commentary explaining how they tried to give voice to Darug people and to balance whose realities were conveyed sympathetically. Indeed, theatre critics, arts journalists and award judges declared this achieved. They praised *The Secret River* as a Reconciliation breakthrough healing australia's colonial "past".

vi. Critics and judges: applause, acclaim and (White self) congratulation

Blanchett and Upton commissioned *The Secret River* soon after Grenville's novel came out in 2005. Commentators and judges welcomed the play when it reached the stage eight years later, agreeing, it seemed, with the STC creative team that they had represented colonial history appropriately. The Sydney Theatre Awards named *The Secret River* best new Australian work; it won six Helpmann Awards and the next year, in 2014, a Victorian Premier's Literary Award. Victorian literary judges lauded the playmakers for "tackling" australia's dark colonial massacre history with "tenderness" and "compassion" (Convery, 2014); their report writer praised the greater agency Darug characters had compared to Grenville's text with "voices and personalities in their own right" and "their own language – *entirely untranslated in the STC production, much to the credit of the creative team…*" (my italics) (Convery, 2014). Thus, the makers were praised for having the First Nations characters speak in a language almost no audience member would understand. The same writer said Bovell's text exceeded Grenville's because of meaningful consultation with First Nations people surpassing usual australian practice: "The presence of Indigenous dialogue on a page necessitates an Indigenous speaker, their presence in a rehearsal room, in dialogue with a writer and a director, and finally, on a stage: all of which happens all too rarely in Australian theatre" (2014).

Longstanding theatre critic John McCallum in his review "Deeply moving evocation of a tragic conflict in *The Secret River*" (2013) framed the killings in *The Secret River* as less than murder and more a "tragic" outcome of two conflicting sets of desires and claims. This is despite the fact those fictionalised killings were symbolising genocidal practices which have occurred across australian colonial history. McCallum began with: "This great tragedy… told with such heartbreaking eloquence and humanity… will become a classic of the Australian theatre"; and then "…it shows us… how all the protagonists were trapped in a situation from which there was no obvious happy escape" (2013). McCallum congratulated Armfield and Page's production for bringing "the Aborigines [sic]… into the drama in a very powerful way…" and for delivering the "great moments of the novel… with a lightness and force that is very affecting" (2013). He acknowledged "many fine performances" across the First Nations and non-Aboriginal cast including the Thornhill actors who portrayed "complex characters, emerging out of the hideousness of Georgian England to find a place for themselves under the new sun of a blood-drenched landscape" (McCallum, 2013). He noted also with implied approval—and incorrectly, given the Dhirrimbin character's english narration—that the play ends with "the first words of English that any of the indigenous [sic] performers have spoken: 'This, my place'" (2013).

The ABC's *Books and Arts* radio program page said in 2013 "audiences and critics are loving [*The Secret River*] …the landmark theatre event of the year… a very Australian story… of Australian race relations… [and] the choices made by our forebears, for better or for worse" (LoPresti, 2013). A local ABC reviewer of *The Secret River*'s Perth Festival season wrote that this "superbly adapted" version of Grenville's novel, "a classic in the making", with "clear unambiguous narrative" and "superb stagecraft", puts the First Nations and settler stories "side by side" whilst also showing through "thuggish", "Dickensian" characters "the fatal flaws that led otherwise civilised men to dispossess a people so brutally" (Laurie, 2013). These reviews continued critics' broad theme that a major plus of the play was that it made the fictionalised murder and dispossession of First Nations people "by otherwise civilised men" understandable. Applause for this aspect of the work continued unabated.

Crikey's reviewer concluded after the first Sydney performance (and having read Grenville's novel) that "*The Secret River* is as close as it gets to textual healing" (Syke, 2013). He thus ascribed Reconciliatory impetus to both the stage-play and novel. Syke was one of the few reviewers who acknowledged that non-Aboriginal australians use euphemisms to talk about european invasion of australian lands. He noted: "Colonisation was a systematic process of brutalisation which, first and foremost, required seeing Aboriginal people as less than people" (Syke, 2013). At the same time, he congratulated Bovell, Armfield and Page for broadening the book's viewpoint to show Darug people's perspectives in ways that were "something much more thoughtful, sophisticated and sympathetic than *mere political correctness* would yield" (my italics) (Syke, 2013). Syke said this meant, for instance, that Thornhill was not demonised for his moral cowardice—which included turning a blind eye to "the brutal enslavement and repeated rape of a young Aboriginal woman (played courageously, and chillingly, by a naked Miranda Tapsell, corralled by a rope 'round her neck)" (Syke, 2013). Syke wrote that Grenville's and Bovell's take on early history was speculative but "informed" and that "Upton, dramaturg Matthew Whittet, Bovell and Armfield have banged heads and banged out a winner". They achieved this he said, not only by eliciting a first night standing ovation but in *Secret River*'s "unsentimental, all-round sensitivity. No one, black or white, is portrayed as an outright saint or demon… Thornhill's stance… is understandable… having come from abject poverty" (Syke, 2013). Non-Aboriginal commentators in 2013 were thus certain the *Secret River* stage production was a necessary, courageous truth-telling about colonial history, detailing settler occupation's effects on First Nations people, and also constituting an appropriate Reconciliation step for moving forward.

Meanwhile in 2016 director Neil Armfield said the artistic team and cast had workshopped different endings for the upcoming revival tour and that surtitles of the Darug dialogue had been prepared so that audiences could understand what the Darug characters were saying (Neutze, 2016). But the cast disagreed with the use of surtitles, Armfield said; they would be road tested on the tour to see if they should stay and could be dropped early on (Neutze, 2016), which they were. The version of *Secret River* which toured in 2016 and 2017 was therefore largely unchanged from that performed in 2013 (Neutze, 2016). It was also much the same version taken overseas to Edinburgh and London in 2019.

Plaudits continued to greet *The Secret River* throughout all its tour seasons into 2016 and 2019. A Guardian Australia review said the stage production exuded "a painful political resonance that never feels didactic", that its "fraught story of early colonisation" was back for a "much-deserved" and "much-needed" encore (Sebag-Montefiore, 2016). The decision by Armfield to continue Darug language without surtitles left "the non-Darug speakers, like Thornhill, alienated. Largely looking through his eyes, we understand many of his choices, even if we can't condone them…" (Sebag-Montefiore, 2016). This critic, therefore, lauded the absence of understandable words in the mouths of Darug characters, as it helped audiences see the settler/non-Darug perspective even more clearly. One *Stage Whispers reviewer* gushed: "what can be said that hasn't been said before?" and praised *The Secret River* for portraying the "darker side of our history" and "the objective perspective it presented. Thornhill's actions… are presented as inexorable from his distorted viewpoint; thus, compounding the overall sense of tragedy at a basic human level… this production somehow provides an eerie sense of redemption" (Cooper, 2016). Another *Stage Whispers* critic felt Thornhill's pain, describing him as "an idealist who's conflicted and makes a terrible decision he has to live with for the rest of his life" (Pinne, 2016). The Daily Telegraph said that the 2016 production of *The Secret River* was an "Australian classic, perhaps even more important now than it was then" (when it premiered in 2013) and that the issue of surtitles was irrelevant on second viewing because being *un*able to understand the Darug people "is precisely the point anyway" (Simons, 2016). The Guardian's british reviewer said the Edinburgh Festival performance of *Secret River* was "masterly storytelling with metaphorical resonance" which "leads to a shattering conclusion in which force prevails and Thornhill turns from an immigrant farmer into a reluctant oppressor" (Billington, 2019).

Program notes and publicity for the 2013, 2016 and 2019 productions included these review quotes: 'a stunning, shattering piece of theatre that goes to the heart of our history' *The Sunday Telegraph;* 'Astonishingly beautiful to look at, languid in its storytelling and deeply affecting… Essential viewing,' *Sun Herald;* 'No theatre lover should miss this thought-provoking staging of a play,' *Limelight;* 'This production of *The Secret River* is destined to stay in the minds of all who see it'

GlamAdelaide; 'The Secret River is one of the most important pieces of theatre you are likely to see in this country' *The Upside News."*

The Secret River's producers were congratulated for demonstrating Thornhill's quandary: Darug resistance to his presence obstructed his dream to escape poverty. That resistance was therefore the problem which triggered the story's "tragedy". Through this frame, the audience empathised with Thornhill, the other settlers and their desperation. These theatre appraisals approving that framing of colonial violence persisted in glowing, unabashed fashion up to 2019, even after First Nations theatre leader Rachael Maza criticised *The Secret River* for how it depicted and positioned those events.

vii. Lonely voices: not everyone liked what they saw

Ilbijerri Theatre's artistic director Rachael Maza told the 2015 Australian Theatre Forum that *The Secret River* demonstrated how First Nations stories and experience of colonisation are often appropriated to portray First Nations people through a White, non-Aboriginal lens (2015). Maza's speech urged that "a bar" be set to identify Indigenous theatre and distinguish it from other theatre about or involving First Nations people. However, as said earlier, Maza's comments about *The Secret River* specifically—not her larger points about what defines First Nations theatre—were what captured media attention.

Maza told the forum she had "nothing but incredible respect for the integrity of the artists (Armfield, Bovell and Grenville) who made this work" (Maza, 2015). She explained that this showed when non-Aboriginal people portray Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or Culture in a way that offends Indigenous australians, it is not because "you're a good person or a bad person; it's not a question of your integrity or a question of your intentions—despite your best intentions in fact" (Maza, 2015). In other words, even non-Aboriginal people who have track records advocating for Aboriginal voices, perspectives and rights, make mistakes if left in control of bringing those voices and stories to australian stages.

Maza said something "did not feel right" for her as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person when she saw *The Secret River*. Seven white actors and seven black actors were on stage, she said. The white actors spoke english, the black actors spoke in "language", so she did not have access to the voices of the black actors' characters. They had to resort to gesticulatory acting:

> All I understood was 'go away', 'come here'. Very, very basic… because of the gestures. And on the other side—half—of the stage I came to know and really care about this young white couple and their two kids. I was able to go into great depth and empathy with the very complex, moral, ethical dilemma that they were in… So, the decision to bring the… (Aboriginal people) on stage but not give them a voice I had access to… all that did for me was to perpetuate the mythology that Aboriginal people (are in the) 'savage' basket"… That (they) exist in the 'other" basket that I will never have access to nor empathy for (Maza, 2015).

Maza said Aboriginal people suffering in the play at the hands of non-Aboriginal characters were relegated to being a backdrop or problem in the White/settler-colonists' story (2015). As with criticisms made by others about Grenville's novel, Maza said the Aboriginal people in the *Secret River* play did not have a voice and were "off the page… we travel only in the world of (and) through the white characters". The roles were unrewarding for Aboriginal actors to perform while perpetuating settler-colonist perceptions that First Nations people lacked agency and capacity when europeans arrived, and still have those deficits today (Maza, 2015). Maza recounted that in an ABC interview, producer/actor Jeremy Sims and playwright Andrew Bovell said they had *intended,* that is, their *aim* was*,* to give Aboriginal people a voice and representation on stage in contrast to the way they were made mute in Grenville's book. This intention was expressed also in writings on *Secret River* development decisions (Bovell, 2013, 2015; Curtis, 2017). Maza's point was that *The Secret Rivers*' producer had had the best of intentions to do this but had failed.

Maza said she was disturbed by how the story's central White/settler-colonist "everyman" was presented with a dilemma—a choice—between participating in the murder of Aboriginal people or abandoning his dream to settle in Australia. Maza said this problem—and the character's consideration of it—was structured to make

the audience sympathise with a decision to kill Aboriginal people to make way for permanent settlement by non-Aboriginal arrivals. As Maza put it, a mythology was perpetuated: "…we had to do what we had to do and really there was no alternative for the first White people" (Maza, 2015). As already seen, most critics' reviews had also praised the stage story for how it presented an apparent quandary of necessary, justified, unavoidable genocide confronting the settler characters. Maza repeated her criticisms of *The Secret River* when the production was reprised in 2016, telling a Belvoir Street Theatre forum that this version of Australian history perpetuated a "tired old trope" that Aboriginal people "had died out", declaring: "that's not the story I want to be telling my kids" (Tan, 2016).

The only negative written review I found for *The Secret River* was by a blogger describing themselves as "independent" and "Reviewing theatre that looks like you" (KimProv, 2019). This person was troubled by the performance they saw at London's National Theatre in 2019; firstly, for the stage story's White positioning:

> Such is the prism of whiteness through which the play is presented that the audience is asked to see the hardship of the Thornhills and the eventual regret they feel at their part in the atrocity as the real tragedy here. The crassness, for want of a stronger word, is astonishing. (KimProv, 2019)

And, secondly, for the behaviour of the mostly White audience:

> I have written about Inappropriate White Laughter before. It happens a lot. I have rarely experienced it to quite the extent that I do here. Racial slurs, racial shaming, even racial violence all provoke waves of hearty laughs. What is this? (KimProv, 2019)

This reviewer declared that the play's publicity lied when it said this was the story of two families—that only the Thornhill family's story was told—and they concluded that the message of this "flawed, insensitive way of framing any story about the early years of Europe's desecration of Australia" was "abhorrent" (KimProv, 2019). I've been unable to establish the identity of this blogger, but I will hazard from the title of their blog that they might be the only *Secret River* theatre

reviewer I have been able to find, apart from Rachael Maza, who identifies as non-White.

vi. Conclusion: ramifications of *The Secret River* 's staging and reception

Publicity, commentary and reviews surrounding the STC's *Secret River* production—from its 2013 Sydney premiere to the 2019 performances overseas—were split across two starkly conflicting narratives. One, the predominant coverage reaching the most people, was of a brave creative team and cast of non-Aboriginal and First Nations theatre practitioners daring to face up to shameful australian colonial history as a form of truth-telling and healing. This storytelling was especially commendable because it was done in a way which was not confronting to settler-descendants; White fragility was accommodated. The other story about *The Secret River* was of a production retaining the novel's problems: presenting a non-Aboriginal perspective of what happened and obscuring the Darug characters' humanity in ways which offended First Nations theatregoers.

There was a split also between First Nations cast and crew members championing the production and one First Nations theatre creative outside the *Secret River* team (Maza) speaking against what had been made. After Maza's criticism (2015) *Secret River* director and playwright, Armfield and Bovell, cited in various forums (for example Arts Centre Melbourne, 2016a; Neutze, 2016) their involvement of Darug elder Richard Green in development and explained how they believe the cast was made culturally safe. These forums were led by director Armfield and playwright Bovell with First Nations and non-Aboriginal cast members seated on stage alongside the creative leadership.

Meanwhile, every reviewer in mainstream media publications I located congratulated *The Secret River's* producers for telling the story in the way that they did. Not one arts commentator after 2015 acknowledged, or seemed to know about, Maza's criticisms made that year. At no point did any critics appear to canvass any First Nations response to the play outside of the main creative team. This indicates

shortfalls in the capacity and competence of otherwise seasoned reviewers, when they are non-Aboriginal and not aware of First Nations arts issues, to critique theatre portraying First Nations experience. Leane (2021) argues similarly, about literature, that colonist-settlers have little capacity to evaluate White portrayals of First Nations people:

> …what settlers call 'literary merit' is writing that conforms to their comfort zone, does not name or challenge whiteness, and reinforces racial and cultural stereotypes. Also, when only a white readership/literati judge the literary merit of other white writer's representations, how can they themselves be informed enough to know if it is a respectful or accurate representation? (Leane, 2021, p. 14)

The *Secret River* stage production was commissioned in 2006, the year after Grenville's novel came out. This was six years after 500,000 australians walked across the Harbour Bridge for "Reconciliation" and the year before the new prime minister, Kevin Rudd, issued an apology to First Nations people for government removal of Aboriginal children from their families into the 1970s. Despite these Reconciliation milestones, it is questionable to what extent any First Nations members of the *Secret River* audience were accorded a key aspect of artistic freedom prescribed by UN cultural rights expert Farida Shaheed (2013): seeing themselves and their perspectives on stage. According to Maza they did not (2015; Tan, 2016); they only saw a mostly erased version of themselves created by White colonial imagination and desire.

It is unusual for australian theatre companies to stage a play with *The Secret River*'s cast and devising team size. It is instructive to consider what works First Nations theatre makers could have made with the resources that were channelled into this project. However, STC leaders' use of artistic power/creative capital to select and make that story for its Reconciliation agenda was exactly what would be expected to come from a White imagination, steeped in White capacity and mostly unconnected to First Nations theatre people or communities. It exemplifies the problem of creative projects portraying First Nations people when they originate as a White/settler-colonist person's, or group of people's, *idea*.

The Secret River also illustrates theory frameworks developed for this inquiry. The first lens, *White colonial habits*, sees *The Secret River* makers', critics' and audiences' acts of White ownership. That is, they take possession of what is a shared colonial narrative and frame it in ways that erase the Other's version of it. As Leane (2021) argues:

> White Australian settler culture is nothing without theft, and this intergenerational mentality extends into the spheres of cultural production and literary culture… Theft is embedded in the settler psyche and the dominance of settler identity politics depends on its continuity, and the control of how others are represented. (Leane, 2021, p. 12-13)

When Maza first critiqued *The Secret River* (2015), she told her audience that many non-Aboriginal theatre makers, including *Secret River*'s creators, colonise First Nations experience to tell stories for White/settler-colonist purposes, even with the best of counter-colonial intentions. Thus, *The Secret River* exemplifies the propensity for settler-colonists—who are intending to represent interests of the colonised Other—to instead, seemingly unwittingly, enact and perpetuate colonial structures. *The Secret River* also illustrates how *artistic freedom* across the australian arts landscape is not exercised evenly. That is, First Nations people are less afforded those artistic freedoms—or power, capacity and opportunity—to express according to their artistic insight. *The Secret River*, even with a large contingent of First Nations performers in its cast, did not afford those actors or any First Nations person the opportunity to see their points of view, narratives or real identities on stage.

The next chapter outlines methods, methodologies and data applied in this research. These approaches include use of the discourse around *The Secret River* staging discussed here and conversations with theatre makers reported in Chapters 7-11.

PART II: METHODS OF THEATRE INQUIRY

5. CONVERSATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The key data in this research comes from conversations with eleven theatre makers conducted and curated using elements of case study, active interviewing and oral history methods. In addition, I have reported on discourse surrounding a play production, *The Secret River*, to further illustrate the landscape of australian theatre within which First Nations stories have been told. This chapter will describe and reflect on how each of these methods has been used to gather and organise data for this research.

i. Introduction: methods of data gathering and curating

I am interpreting two data sources in this research for making new knowledge: (1) I have recorded and discussed conversations with people who have relevant theatre experience and expertise; and (2) I have observed and discussed discourse around examples of theatre made during the research. As part of the research design, I have positioned myself and my playwriting problem within the inquiry. This includes that I am acknowledging problems of the research itself and how my non-raced/White identity contributes to those problems. This chapter focuses on the merged methods—case study, active interviewing and oral history—used to gather, curate and begin to interpret the stories and information collected via conversations with theatre makers. I will also explain why I am not describing my conversation methods as *Yarning*, notwithstanding my intentions to conduct the research, involving First Nations people, in culturally appropriate and respectful ways.

The main source of original data and new knowledge comes from conversations: eleven extended qualitative interviews conducted between 2015 and 2018 with theatre makers and performance arts leaders. The majority of conversations went for approximately 90 minutes; but they ranged in duration from 45 minutes to more than two hours. Six of those conversations were with First Nations artists and five with non-Aboriginal creatives. All of my co-conversationalists

had been or still were theatre makers; they shared between them experience as directors, playwrights, dramaturgs, public arts body theatre leaders and artistic directors. All five of the non-Aboriginal theatre makers had experience making theatre with First Nations people to tell stories of First Nations realities.

The eleven interview participants were among the first fifteen theatre makers I contacted for this research. They all replied within days agreeing to take part. While I emailed more than thirty additional theatre makers over the following three years with the same request I either received no reply or a clear "no". These requests made later were mostly to emerging and mid-career theatre makers to balance the level of experience of those I would be speaking with. The data I have collected therefore comes from ten senior theatre makers and another regarded then as mid-career and who now has standing as a theatre leader and mentor. Therefore, my research documents the experiences and perspectives of theatre makers who have been part of a shifting theatre landscape for at least the last twenty years and have influenced many of those changes. My data reporting in Chapters 7-11 respond to what they shared in discussion with me; therefore style, written analysis and discussion modes vary within and across the conversations examined.

A case study data source, examined in the previous chapter, comprises public commentary showing how Sydney Theatre Company's play, *The Secret River*, was received.

This chapter also acknowledges challenges which emerged across the project. As a White/settler-colonist researcher drawing on First Nations knowledges, experience and stories, I outline tensions arising from my position in the research and how I have sought to manage them.

ii. Conversations: first stage approvals and consent

Monash University Human Ethics Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) approved interview data gathering from 10 December 2014 – 10 December 2019. I contacted most potential participants via email with a MUHREC approved covering letter (see Appendix II/A), explanatory statement (see Appendix II/B), consent form

(see Appendix II/C) and a list of the questions I would bring to each interview indicating ground which might be covered (see Appendix II/D). The interview/conversations and reporting to MUHREC were completed on time and as required (MUHREC Approval Certificate Project Number CF14/2754 – 2014001523).

iii. Conversations: methods of interactive knowledge making

The methods I used to conduct and report on conversations with research participants drew on merged methods of data generation with explicit use of: (1) active interviewing, (2) case study method and (3) oral history. Before I outline characteristics of these methods, I note some general observations about how these meetings with theatre makers over the three-year collection period unfolded. We made meaning together *during* each interview and were aware of the ground we had covered. I came to each new interview changed by the previous conversations I had had with other participants. The life experience of each co-conversationalist and our respective positions within the research subject matter were also key to what knowledge was made. I felt some struggle between the natural pull of our conversations and the need to accumulate hard data. But, as so many contemporary qualitative researchers argue, attempting a strictly objective approach to gathering such data would have limited the dialogic knowledge produced. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) contend that all these characteristics of interview data collection I observed and list here occur in the method they call “active interviewing” (p. 37).

a. Active (and reflexive) interviews

Holstein and Gubrium’s text, *The Active Interview* (1995), offers a framework for understanding how we, as co-conversationalists, are positioned within what is broadly termed the extended qualitative interview. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) advocate *active* interviewing as “a form of interpretive practice involving respondent and interviewer as they articulate ongoing, interpretive structures, resources and orientations…” (p. 16). In this approach, they contend, all interview participants are “inevitably implicated in making meaning” (p. 18). Moreover, researcher and participant are aware throughout their conversation of meanings they are arriving at;

meaning making "is a continually unfolding process within the course of an interview" (p 52) and "(r)eality is constantly under construction … assembled using the interpretive resources at hand" (p. 16). Holstein and Gubrium's "active" adjective therefore encompasses researcher and participant's respective positions as meaning makers within their exchange. Additionally, in active interviewing the researcher makes clear what they are intending to find out; interviewer and respondent discussion is framed by a problem or issue they are jointly attempting to explore. The active interviewer "actively stimulates and cultivates the subject's interpretive capabilities" (p. 17). "Active" also refers to the continual, separate decisions respondent and interviewer make as they converse with care and purpose.

The respondent's decisions include choosing what to reveal and what narratives of experience to share. In this way, there is an "assumption of epistemological agency" on the part of the respondent (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 77); the respondent "as subject and society member" mediates the knowledge they convey to the interviewer so is "always an active maker of meaning" (p 77). The interviewer, in turn, is active in responding and changing their questions according to what is happening in the conversation and what the respondent reveals about themselves. This exchange is not "just another conversation" (p. 56); rather, it has shared purpose and the researcher actively codes respondents' narratives and opinions during their exchange. This behoves the interviewer to constantly adjust what they ask of and reveal to the participant in response to what the participant is sharing. Therefore, an active interviewer has prepared questions but changes them according to what happens in the conversation. Interview schedules "should be guides not scripts" and the interviewer "can even ask the respondent what questions" they should pose and why (p 56).

I adapted my prepared lines of inquiry during each of the research conversations. Appendix II/D contains the questions I prepared and took with me to every interview. They include questions about my co-conversationalists' careers, biographies and experiences as well as their opinions on collaboration issues. In not one conversation did we address all my listed questions. Anecdotes that conversationalists shared and questions they had of me about my research required us to spend time on those complex stories and issues. Some questions I had prepared

were less important or relevant given what I was learning instead. In the earlier conversations, as well as asking participants about their experiences, I presented myself as a playwright seeking advice from them on how I could appropriately make a work acknowledging First Nations experience. Co-conversationalists challenged me about this intention. On these occasions, unpacking my theatre-making plans took our dialogue into new questions posed by both me and my participant. Across the conversations our interviewing agendas—and therefore what questions I asked and answered—shifted as I learned from each successive co-conversationalist how my playwriting research focus needed to change.

In advocating active interviewing, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) argue an objective process is not possible or useful. They reject methods that position participants as mere knowledge receptacles from whom researchers extract objective data (p. 8-9). Instead, they attest that because interviewers and respondents together are meaning makers interview data is inevitably collaborative and interactional: "Socially constructed meaning is unavoidably collaborative…. [Y]ou cannot free any interaction from 'contaminants'" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 18). These realities therefore should not be removed but, instead, embraced for arriving at meaning and knowledge (pp. 18-19). As I explain in several sections, I have included in my data reporting the names, identities and brief professional biographies of each of my eleven research conversation participants. Those individual details are key elements of the data. At the same time, as established from the outset, this thesis is framed by my researcher identity as a non-Aboriginal settler-colonist woman playwright, theatre academic and former journalist. This description of me has been conveyed to participants at several points, including when they were first sent requests to take part in our conversations.

Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) use of the word "active" also alludes to the related practice of active *listening*. There are overlaps between what qualitative scholars intend by this and what might be found in lay, health and business applications. This can create some confusion of intention. For instance, Cunic (2022) explains on her open website, that active listening is communication skill which "goes beyond simply hearing the words that another person speaks" and includes "reflecting back" what has been said, listening "to understand rather than

respond" and "withholding judgement or advice" so that the other person can "feel heard and valued." In scholarly listening research, Glenn (2022) labels this practice of reflecting back "paraphrasing" (p. 1). He argues it is core to active listening for gaining "positive regard"(p. 1) and incorporates what Manusov (2020) ascribes as *Active Empathetic* listening (p. 105). However, I do not embrace the performance of empathy implied here as a tool for manipulating an interaction. The form of active listening I applied to conversations was for exchanging genuine views rather than to develop a rapport I could exploit. Given the agency and insight of the leaders I spoke with I doubt I could have succeeded in such a pointless subterfuge if I wanted to. I reflected back to co-conversationalists what I had heard only to check I had heard sufficiently. Active listening in my interviewing therefore only refers to that used in genuine research *dialogue*.

Denzin (2012) cites Holstein and Gubrium (1995) and their advocacy of "the active, dialogic interview" (2012, p. 340) to advance a similar interviewing approach he labels *reflexive*. As with the active interview, the researcher establishes themselves "as a co-constructor of meaning in this dialogic relationship" (p. 347) with the person interviewed. Denzin contends that a reflexive interviewer must be "an active listener" (p. 347) in the sense advocated by Bourdieu (1996b). The French sociologist argues for a "reflex reflexivity" where the researcher monitors their own position in the course of the interview to perceive "the effects of the social structure within which it is taking place"; this, Bourdieu argues, includes "our own presuppositions" (1996b, p. 18). To counter the effects of the researcher's controlling position as initiator and questioner, through reflexive self-monitoring, Bourdieu recommends that the interviewer instigate "a relationship of *active and methodological listening*" (p 19). This, he argues, involves attentive and supportive active listening whilst also actively extracting generalisations:

> In effect, it combines the display of total attention to the person questioned (and) submission to the singularity of her own life history... with methodological construction, founded on the knowledge of objective conditions common to an entire social category. (Bourdieu, 1996b, p. 19)

It is clear that researcher reflexivity, and the active listening required for it, are important elements of the active interviewing methods and methodology Holstein and Gubrium (1995) advocate. At the same time, with different emphases and precision, Bourdieu (1996b), Holstein and Gubrium (1995) and Denzin (2012) all argue that active, reflexive interviewing involves: (1) transparency of intention, (2) empowerment of the interviewer as co-researcher, (3) researcher awareness of their power within the interview relationship and (4) commitment to inquiry that serves the interests of research participants. Denzin, for instance, contends that the reflexive interview involving active listening is a "tool of intervention" and a method "for uncovering structures of oppressions in the life worlds of the persons I am interviewing" (2012, p. 347).

In keeping with these five principles, I applied these practices in my conversations with participants: (1) acknowledging what I believed co-conversationalists were telling me, (2) seeking further clarification, (3) including my thoughts about what I was hearing as part of our conversational exchange, (4) basing each question I posed on what I had just been told and (5) being transparent about what I was hearing and taking away. In these ways my co-conversationalists and I travelled together on the journey of our discussion. I was also clear, at the point we met to begin talking, about how my perspectives of the theatre issues we were to discuss were already forming. We therefore negotiated, both at the start of our conversations and throughout them, what we could find out together. This constituted a semi-mutual, informal agenda setting for our interaction.

I use the adjective *semi*-mutual to acknowledge that I, as the researcher, have set up the interaction and already prepared a questions framework. I have greater power than participants over our agenda because I am meeting initiator and planner. "It is the investigator who starts the game and who sets up its rules" (Bourdieu, 1996b, p. 19). Plus, as Bourdieu (1996b) contends, reflexive interviewers such as myself "submitting to the singularity" of a participant's story are nevertheless engaged in "methodological construction" based on knowledge about "an entire social category" (my italics) (p. 19). I have decided who I am speaking with and why; that is, what category of people they must fall within, or be defined as, so that they belong in my research. I resist at this reporting point, however, any imperative to

reduce my co-conversationalists to a "social category". This is notwithstanding that, yes, my co-conversationalists represent a group of people engaged in specific practices of australian theatre and this commonality is why we have interacted in this research. They are an *arts practice* category, I contend, existing across plural social ones. Regardless of what kind of category they are, to fully understand the complex experience each co-conversationalist brings, I have minimised coded, thematic generalisation in my data reporting of our conversations. Instead, the focus is on each person's career trajectory and individual story; this has been via a questions framework I *intended* should operate as open and reflexive, but over which I nevertheless always had control.

Where Bourdieu's "methodological construction" based on a "social category" (1996b, p. 19) might apply lies in the fact I am not researching solely my participants' practice; I am drawing knowledge substantially from what co-conversationalists have told me about the practices they have experienced of *others*. Therefore the "methodological construction" Bourdieu (1996b) contends reflexive researchers, such as I, engage in involves me recognising those secondary others as "an entire social category" instead. I am more comfortable to do this social labelling with that secondary group. In fact, as part of my research inquiry, method and methodology, I have from the outset identified and categorised those secondary others as White/non-Aboriginal (theatre makers, policy-makers, arts managers and audiences) and even more specifically, where true, as settler-colonists. I have acknowledged also, starting in Chapter 1, that I fit those descriptions and can be categorised the same way. They/I are/am an identified "social category" I am observing through the words, and therefore lenses, of my co-conversationists. They, my participants, meanwhile have greater diversity in their social identities across their group membership—because that membership is not exclusively First Nations or White/settler-colonist.

I use several terms interchangeably to refer to the people with whom I have conducted these interview conversations. Mostly I refer to *participants* or, better still, *co-conversationalists*. This is to emphasise the agency and standing I intend these theatre experts to have alongside me, the researcher, as they assist in this thesis

work. I avoid *interviewees*, however, because this noun constructs research participants as passive objects of another's action.

To focus in depth on the individual experiences of theatre makers and so gain greater understanding, my active interviewing practices are combined, and overlap with, oral history and case study methods and methodologies.

b. Case studies

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) cite what they term Flyvbjerg's (2011) "common sense definition" to describe case study method "as the intensive analysis of an individual unit" (2018, p 315). Schwandt and Gates provide useful examples of what a research *case* can be:

> What constitutes a case is disputed. In the simplest sense, a case is an instance, incident, or unit of something and can be anything – a person, an organisation, an event, a decision, an action, a location like a neighbourhood, or a nation state. (Schwandt & Gates, 2018, p. 341)

They then cite fourteen scholarly definitions to demonstrate the conflicting ideas around what constitutes a case *study* (2018, p 342). The first two in their list exemplify these apparent contradictions:

> In depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar's aim is to elucidate *features of a larger class of a similar phenomenon.* (my italics) (Gerring, 2004, p. 341)

> The study of the particularity and complexity of a single case... Case study research is not sampling research. *We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases.* (my italics) Our first obligation is to understand this one case. (Stake, 1995, pp. xi, 4)

Schwandt and Gates (2018) argue these discrepancies occur because of different uses of case method. They note that Gerring (2007) and others gather case study data to generate hypotheses and build theory (2018, p. 348). Conversely, other scholars use the *descriptive* case study for "detailed portrayal" (2018, p. 345) of a

phenomenon, person or thing; they engage little with "existing scholarship, either theoretical or empirical" (p. 345) as they focus on the depth of description and detail of the thing studied. The descriptive case study:

> … usually requires drawing on methods of document review, participant observation and in-depth interviews to understand the experiences, perspectives, and worldviews of people in a particular set of circumstances. (Schwandt & Gates, 2018, p. 346)

Similarly, Hamel, Dufor and Fortin (1993) describe the University of Chicago sociology cases study "tradition" as an "inductive approach" where "empirical details are considered in the light of the remarks made in context" (p. 16). They argue that the Chicago scholars, though diverse in their case methods and what phenomena they were studying, agreed that every sociology case study "must consider the perspective of the social actors" and thus "provide an understanding of the personal experiences of these actors" (p. 17). Thus, the Chicago approach attests that case studies involving phenomena, events, objects or institutions where people are present must include, at least as part of the data, perspectives of those people. Hamel et al. (1993, p. 17) quote Chicago school adherent Becker (1970) on his further view that no external effects on human behaviour can be understood "unless we consider them from the actor's point of view" (Becker, 1970, p. 64).

Even though these case approaches and applications cited thus far are diverse, the conversation data in this thesis draws on elements of all of them. Each person I spoke with constitutes a "single unit" (Gerring, 2004, p 341) or "individual unit" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p 315) of study. That the thing or person of study is examined and reported in depth is common to all the case study descriptors cited. Similarly in my thesis, I report each person's identity, circumstances, biography and career experiences mostly as they relayed them to me. Case study by its many definitions, including Schwandt's and Gates' on the descriptive case method (2018, p. 346), also allows for multiple materials, documents and other information sources to build information about the object, phenomenon, incident or person of study. I include additional information from beyond our interview transcripts, such as news articles and organisation websites, to augment details of co-conversationalists' biographies

and the theatre examples they've raised. However, I rely mostly on personal account in the eleven practitioner case studies and use alternative sources of data and evidence only as needed to complete or clarify what has been shared. My methods differ from those projects which study fewer cases in exhaustive depth, often only one, using multiple information threads mostly sourced independently of the study object or objects (Schwandt & Gates, 2018, p. 346). That approach contrasts with my case emphasis on the testimony and subjective perspectives of eleven theatre creatives and leaders.

In my conversation data reporting I extract some broad themes and identify phenomena, as advocated by Gerring (2004), and apply them to theory advanced in this research. But my analysis, resulting argument and theory development happen mostly in sections before and after the specific case reporting in the *Voices of Theatre Inquiry* data chapters. This separation is important for the second definition in Schwandt and Gates' list of definitions (2018, p 342) where Stake insists (1995, p xi, 4) that each case be understood individually. To this end, as already stated, I have *not* reported this interview data as coded themes drawn from anonymous sources. Instead, I have framed these interactions as each named person's story inside a story of our conversation. Each researcher-respondent conversation has been retained and reported explicitly as an event in time.

The *Voices* reporting chapters (Part III of this thesis) therefore focus on the specifics of each conversation more than the thematic conclusions that can be drawn from them. Each one of the "Voices" of theatre inquiry constitutes a *case*. The plural noun "voices" is used in the title of Part III *Voices of Theatre Inquiry* when "cases" would also be correct. This word choice emphasises (1) the process of individual *people* as cases telling their story, (2) that those speaking might have multi-vocal authority arising from fulfilling multiple australian theatre roles, (3) that participants consciously supply the data by speaking about themselves and their theatre environments, (4) that participants speak as separate individuals with unique experiences and (5) that much of what we hear is in participants' own words. This is not to say that there is *no* analysis in these chapters. I do make connections between the theoretical frameworks developed for this research and the experiences my co-conversationalists share. Unifying themes also do emerge. But the emphasis in the

Voices reporting is on the detail of the theatre professionals' experiences and *their* perspectives on them.

Approaching most co-conversations as individual case studies has enabled me, through recording detailed descriptions of experience, to embrace the complexities of the contexts in which my co-conversationalists were operating. As Ridder argues, "the contextual conditions are… part of the investigation" enabling "a better understanding of "how" and 'why" things happen" (2017, p 282). Hamel *et al.* (1993) contend that interview-based case study uncovers what "meanings and symbols enter into the actor's interactions and defines their points of view on these interactions" (p.17); this includes what sense of agency participants have within their professional arenas. Co-conversationalist perspectives on their personal agency and that of their fellow theatre makers are important in this research in addition to the structural issues their stories reveal. For instance, one co-conversationalist disclosed career struggles and personal doubts they, rightly or wrongly, felt responsible for. They perceived career roadblocks as being about themselves not the australian theatre landscape. Others outlined frustrations in how non-Aboriginal co-creatives' behaviours had, at least on occasion, distorted or blocked their own more expert contributions to portrayals of First Nations people. In those anecdotes, co-conversationalists did recognise these recurrent problems as structural: affecting not just themselves but all First Nations theatre makers and artists. The divergence in how agent-participants' explained issues in their creative agency exemplify the complexity found by studying multiple cases via multiple voices.

As I note in several places, I include sizeable sections of the participants' own words. This is, on one hand, so that readers of this thesis can draw conclusions themselves from the individual's disclosed experience. Ridder (2017, p 289) labels this case study strategy and effect "naturalistic generalisation". He argues this requires the researcher to provide thick description directly from participant testimony so that:

> …the reader can learn from the case as well as draw (their) own conclusions. Readers can thus make some generalizations based on personal and vicarious experiences ("naturalistic generalization"). (Ridder, 2017, p. 289)

By extensively quoting their testimony, my co-conversationalists retain some power of their own voices despite the power I exercise as researcher, interpreter and curator. Participants' own words reveal nuances of their perspectives and truths which might otherwise be erased. I intend the individual agency of co-conversationalists to be mobilised via these long, direct quotes in ways that acknowledge their positions as the expert knowers of their experiences.

Discourse around *The Secret River* play staging detailed in Chapter 4 constitutes a twelfth case study, although its parameters, content matter and evidentiary purpose are different to the eleven practitioner conversations. The rationale for this case is that *The Secret River* constitutes theatre about colonial history involving portrayals of First Nations people but made under non-Aboriginal theatre makers' control. In fact, First Nations theatre leader Rachael Maza identified *The Secret River* as such, and her critique is what first drew my researcher gaze to this play and its production. Additionally, *The Secret River* premiered and toured over a seven-year period which overlapped substantially with when I was conducting theatre maker conversations for the practitioner case studies.

The *Secret River* study takes in aspects of the play making itself but centres on public *responses* to the play's performances. I examine published reviews alongside discourse critiquing the original Grenville text and what *Secret Rivers'* theatre makers wrote about their efforts to adapt her novel to stage. Unlike the eleven interview case studies, this one does not focus on theatre makers' experiences. I did not interview the play's devisers but have merely included in my *Secret River* data what they wrote in publicity and education materials about their plans and choices. These written reflections provide basic information about the style of the play and the theatre makers' *intentions* more than their experiences in devising the work. Instead of examining the playmakers and their perspectives, as occurs in the other eleven cases, this *Secret River* case study investigates the play's *reception* and thus the behaviour of audiences and critics. The explanations *The Secret River*'s director, designer and writer shared online and in text of their creative decisions provide important context for the reception inquiry. That is, I have not explored the *Secret River* creatives' processes with them directly; but their public disclosures about how they conceived the play and chose performance elements were key to the rationale

for this separate case inquiry. Their written and broadcast reflections demonstrated the epistemological and ontological power they exercised as *The Secret River*'s theatre devisors, confirming that non-Aboriginal creatives controlled that stage story. This has become important context for understanding the case data on audience and critic reactions to the work as reported in Chapter 4.

Data sources for the *Secret River* reception case study therefore comprise: (1) scholarly criticism of the original source novel; (2) the play makers' own text and Sydney Theatre Company website notes; (3) theatre critics' and arts journalists' reviews; (4) recorded theatre forums where *Secret River* was discussed; and (5) media coverage of all these discourses. I have accessed a range of academic, artist and audience responses to the play and novel across all four data sets to inform my study of *Secret River's* reception. The most overwhelming and disturbingly consistent evidence has emerged from data set (3), theatre reviews of *Secret River*. It reveals critics' almost unanimous desire for colonial history to be portrayed on theatre stages in ways which non-Aboriginal audiences can feel comfortable watching; it was a feat they argued, almost as one voice, that *Secret River* had achieved. At no stage did those *Secret River* critics investigate or consider the needs or desires of First Nations theatre audiences. Revelations across all four data sets combine to demonstrate that *Secret River* is a work which exemplifies non-Aboriginal theatre maker, critic and audience problems that affect First Nations stories and people. The *Secret River* study thus provides a contemporary theatre case context for understanding the eleven practitioner conversations leading this inquiry.

In this way, it is the theatre maker conversations which are the engines of my research; I intend those subjective, personal testimonies to have epistemological power to drive what I uncover as testimony curator-disseminator. Acknowledging this responsibility to hear, act on and thus be guided by these voices means I draw not only on active interviewing and case study approaches but on oral history methods and methodology as well.

c. Oral history

> Ontologically, oral history is based on a conception of research as a *process*, not an event. The practice of oral history assumes that meaning isn't "waiting out there" to be discovered, but rather that meaning is generated during the research process. In other words, we build meaning through the generation of an interview narrative, and the analysis and interpretation of that narrative. (Leavy, 2011, p. 8)

Thomas and Perks (2020) attest, and it is generally accepted, that the practice of oral history emerged among historians during the 1940s (p. 2). In the 1930s Depression era, however, research projects recording American working class and ex-slave experiences in people's own words suggests that the method was being used earlier in non-academic circles (Mun-hye Baik, 2011, p. 1). Thomas and Perks (2020) quote Grele's definition, "the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction" (1996, p. 63), to argue oral history has transformed "historical enterprise"; this includes that other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and psychology have adopted oral history methods (2020, p. 3). Leavey (2011) contends that, because many types of researchers across disciplines use oral history to collect data, "the purpose or intent of an oral history project" can vary widely (p. 5). Historians fill in the historical record, anthropologists seek to understand cultures and any researcher might combine agendas according to the project (2011, p. 5). Sociologists, Leavy further posits, can use oral history to link "individual (micro level) experiences with cultural, historical or structural (macro level) phenomena", while feminist and other critical researchers often apply oral history to access "subjugated voices" (2011, p. 5). Both the sociologists' agenda to link personal experience to structural realities and critical scholars' efforts to free stymied voices resonate with my research intentions. How I use oral history methods therefore aligns most easily with those extrapolations by non-history disciplines. This includes that I considered my line of inquiry, at the time we were having our conversations, to be about the present and future rather than about *history*.

However, while I did not set out with an historian's agenda, my conversations method shares many practices with oral history; this includes efforts to respect

participants' agency and foreground their perspectives. These intentions are needed because oral history studies often have "an explicit social change agenda"; and those working with oral history "rarely remain neutral regarding their relationships with the people they study and the possible uses of their work" (Shuman, 2003, p. 132). For instance, I am engaged in similar creative endeavours as my co-conversationalists. That they have higher recognition than I do in our shared practice areas was a dynamic which affected how I engaged as a researcher with them, even if they were not aware of it.

Oral history, as with my entire conversations method, is a qualitative interview method emphasising participants' perspectives (Leavy, 2011, p. 3); it thus requires the researcher "to be fully present with the person narrating his or her story" (Leavy, 2011, p. 5). Key aspects, therefore, of my active interviewing and case study practice align with that of oral history: I (1) undertook extended interviews; (2) sought, received and recorded the personal stories, accounts and perspectives of the theatre makers with whom I conversed; and (3) engaged in a dialogic process (conversations) with my co-conversationalists to make knowledge and arrive at meaning. Additionally, the knowledge we have made together emerges, broadly, as a critique of the creative circumstances my First Nations co-conversationalists work within and want exposed. This accords with active interviewing's and oral history's separate, attested agendas to represent the interests of those under study.

Other ways that oral history accords with Holstein and Gubrium's active interviewing and my approach (1995), is that oral history acknowledges the "joint authorship of interviewer and interviewee" in creating narrative and meaning (Mun-hye Baik, 2011, p. 4) via shared authority (Frisch, 1990; 2003, pp. 111-112). Active listening is crucial to the "dialogical" (Mun-hye Baik, 2011, p. 6) and "pliable" (p. 4) dynamic of an oral history. The "listener" incurs a "duty" of commitment to make knowledge, to listen, to be present (Spiegel & Charon, 2005, p. viii) and, as with active interviewing, respond to what they hear:

> Although oral historians... conduct rigorous research in preparation for interviews, they do not follow a scripted process, nor do they strictly adhere to a static body of

questions. Rather, oral historians follow narrative cues, and discern points of interest provided by interviewers/narrators. (Mun-hye Baik, 2011, p. 4)

In these ways our conversations travelled mostly where my co-conversationalists wanted to take them, rather than following an unwavering agenda set by me, the researcher. As part of their agenda setting, most of my First Nations co-conversationalists asked questions of me, especially at the beginning of our conversations, to find out who I was and why I was doing this research. We *exchanged* biographical details about ourselves in this process: rather than one-sided information collection by the researcher. Additionally, at least two of my co-conversationalists challenged assumptions they perceived in some of my questions. The discussions which came from those participant queries were among the most instructive, for me, in the conversations data.

Another process claimed of oral history interviews is that the co-conversationalist can reflect upon both what they are asked and what they themselves say; so, while narrating they tell the story both to the researcher-listener and to themselves (Spiegel & Charon, 2005, p. xi). This is especially relevant if this research encounter is the first time the participant has considered those questions or shared those personal experiences for recording by another. I felt this palpably in the case of one theatre maker who commented during our talk that she relished the opportunity my questions gave her to reflect on her past practice and on current First Nations theatre issues. In some cases therefore, as Mun-hye Baik (2011, p. 6) argues quoting Portelli (1998), the researcher-participant dialogue enables co-conversationalists to reveal not only what they did, but "what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did" (1998, p. 36). These reflections happened in our conversations according to (1) who the participant was; (2) where they were in their theatre-making journey; (3) at what point in my data gathering journey we spoke (so, where *I* was); and (4) how accustomed each person was to sharing their perspective and insights. While oral history *is* demonstrated to be part of my data gathering approach, there are several more ways in which my conversations method diverges from many oral historians' practices. One is that, according to Leavy (2011), oral history generally involves "*multiple* open-ended interview sessions with *each* participant" (my italics) (p. 3). I met multiple

times with only one of my study participants, Perth-based director and artistic director, Andrew Ross; we had three separate extended conversations (2017a, 2017b, 2017c) over one week to cover both his long history of working on First Nations stories and his views on my inquiry. With every other theatre maker who participated in this research I had just one lengthy conversation. Therefore, the common oral history practice of *multiple* interviews with each participant was mostly absent from my data gathering.

As much interview research across academia has been conducted with "social and political elites", Thomson and Perks (2020) contend that oral history's key contribution is "to record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been hidden from history" (p. 2). This is similar to Leavy's contention that oral history is important to critical scholars for accessing "subjugated voices" (2011, p. 5). Most of the theatre makers I conversed with were and are high profile theatre artists whose voices would be expected to emanate strongly already from their work and their additional roles as arts leaders and academics. As stated already, I did not *plan* to restrict my sample of co-conversationalists to senior theatre practitioners; I also sought to speak with new and emerging First Nations theatre artists so that I could have a cross section of generations represented in my data. I *did* want to include First Nations practitioners not previously heard from. However, most of the younger, mid- and early-career actors, dramaturgs and directors I approached were reluctant to take part; some advised me to speak instead to the artistic directors they reported to or often worked with. Only one early to mid-career First Nations playwright/dramaturg, mentioned earlier, spoke with me for this inquiry. In these ways the artists I approached who were not senior theatre makers or leaders during the period of my data collection exercised their agency and chose not to participate.

That my sample included mostly experienced, recognised theatre makers raises questions over whether the voices of those I spoke to are or were "subjugated". That said, there is certainly evidence that First Nations theatre makers, including those seasoned ones among my co-conversationalists, struggle to be fully heard. Australia Council (2020) research examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis demonstrates that theatre programmers exclude First Nations theatre, and thus First Nations

theatre maker voices, from their mainstages because they perceive non-Aboriginal audiences to be hostile or uninterested (pp. 44, 49). First Nations theatre maker testimony reported in Chapters 7-11, including that of senior artists accustomed to advocating publicly on Indigenous theatre issues, reveals how—nevertheless—colonial agendas have blunted or distorted their voices. These include examples of First Nations theatre leaders being "consulted" on scripts so that their Indigenous identity could be cited, even though their input was not used to modify the work they reviewed. There are other cases where First Nations artists saw both their artistic work and their theatre expertise relegated to what one artist called "cultural corner", thus limiting the audience, accessibility and application of their theatre-making across australia's arts narratives. Similarly, stories of First Nations voices and expertise being excluded and ignored emerged from my conversations with non-Aboriginal theatre makers. In these ways my conversations method and research agenda have aired First Nations perspectives which are often dismissed and go unheard in White/non-Aboriginal spaces. However, the level of topic expertise defining who I spoke with in this oral history project, I suspect, does not fully align with the research and social positions of people whose "subjugated voices" critical scholars aim to liberate. Most of my interview participants, as part of their work, have spoken in other settings about their practice. This does not disqualify my conversations with them from being oral history; but those interviews do differ from oral history projects which capture events by speaking to witnesses who would otherwise never have had their viewpoints recorded.

It is therefore evident that, due to the specifics of both my inquiry and my co-conversationalists, my oral history practice differs from some norms expected of the method. These differences include that I embedded myself as a fellow theatre artist in the conversations, at least in the earlier encounters. I did not present myself to interviewees as someone recording their oral history; rather I presented to them as someone with an inquiry—a problem or gap in my knowledge—that I wanted their personal experience to inform. But it was oral history which my co-conversationalists delivered to me. Even as I tried to guide the first few conversations to my own theatre maker agenda (how to make *my* play), participants moved me into their realities as practitioners via rich personal anecdotes beyond the specific play-making details I was also seeking. In these rich narratives my co-

conversationalists verbalised not just current experiences but their *memories* as well, albeit of *recent* history. Our recordings thus archive senior theatre makers' recollections of a recent australian theatre era that is becoming the past. In all these ways I did not *embark* on our conversations as an historian; however, because this research preserves theatre maker memories ahead of major arts institution and policy changes now underway, I might very possibly have been made into one.

iv. Were we Yarning?

My hesitation from the start of this research to attempt *yarning/Yarning* methods as part of my conversations practice was motivated by a desire to be transparent about who I was. That is, I wanted to be clear about my Whiteness/non-Aboriginality. I did not want to imply greater cultural knowledge or relationship to participants when approaching them for involvement or during our conversations. This was to enable co-conversationalists to give informed consent and, in deciding whether to speak with me, transparency about the level of cultural safety they could expect in engaging with me, an emerging non-Aboriginal researcher. This in turn would provide further consent information to co-conversationalists for shaping how they would respond to my questions.

Further study indicates this hesitancy about attempting Yarning was appropriate. All the australian First Nations scholars cited in this section capitalise Yarning to distinguish its deep cultural basis. In evaluating Yarning as a method, Kennedy *et al.* (2022) note that First Nations academics have long advocated Indigenous methods and methodologies be used in research involving First Nations communities (p. 1) and that "*Yarning* is the most reported Indigenous method" (p 1) across health research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is assumed, Kennedy *et al.* (2022) contend, to be a culturally safe way to engage with First Nations participants (p 5) and "frequently cited as a way of decolonising research practice" (p 16). But they warn:

> Numerous research has validated Yarning as a recommended method to privilege Indigenous ontologies. However, it is not simply enough to report employing an

> Indigenous method such as Yarning and assume that it is adequate. (Kennedy et al., 2022, pp. 16-17)

Kennedy *et al.* (2022) note that, of 46 research publications claiming to use Yarning they studied, only half reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers collected the data and undertook interviews (p. 7). Six of the others explicitly reported that there were no Aboriginal or Torres Islander people doing this work, despite claiming the study's research practices were Yarning (p. 7). Only eleven reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had led the research; details of their research roles and Aboriginal status, in most cases, were "scarce and difficult to immediately identify" (p. 7). The remaining projects were even more vague about the positionality or identities of researchers. For instance, eighteen projects did not report whether First Nations australians were involved in data collection and most of those papers did not identify who conducted the Yarning circles (p. 13). Kennedy et al (2022) conclude that researcher reflexivity and positioning, especially of non-Indigenous researchers, are often inadequate in First Nations health research. This is one way Yarning is often claimed as a method without adequate explanation or reporting, they argue, and needs to change:

> [T]his method must not be used lightly to justify safety and security in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people… Researchers, particularly non-Indigenous led research teams, must only report using an Indigenous method if they are willing to report adequate detail on its application and how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were involved at all levels of the research. (Kennedy et al., 2022, pp. 19-20)

They recommend that journals alter their practices to accommodate appropriate reporting of Indigenous research method; this includes (1) adjusting word limits to enable adequate researcher standpoint and methods description and (2) engaging First Nations editors and peer reviewers (p. 20).

Other scholars go further, declaring non-Aboriginal researchers are simply not able to undertake Yarning authentically and appropriately. Atkinson, Baird and Adams (2021) and Murrup-Stewart, Atkinson and Adams (2022), for instance, assert Yarning is an "Aboriginal culturally specified" process (2021, p. 191) and Yarning

method is based on “Yarning as a cultural practice” (2022, p. 779). In this, they insist, both participants and the researcher(s) are australian First Nations people engaging in a purposeful, culturally guided sharing of stories where both voices—researcher and participant—are equally important (2021, p. 192). Yarning thus requires a relationality between researcher and participant(s) based on “shared explicit and tacit knowledge and memories gained from everyday localised Aboriginal normativity” (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2022, p. 779). While Yarning’s use in research is still evolving, Atkinson *et al.* (2021) argue it has these three key characteristics: (1) Yarning operates under an Indigenous Research Paradigm; (2) it recognises and engages Indigenous Research Standpoint theory; and (3) those involved in Yarning research, including the researchers themselves, are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (pp. 191-192).

An Indigenous Research Paradigm recognises that settler-colonialism is ongoing and, for this reason, “privileges Indigenous voices” to reveal “assumptions about reality” (Atkinson et al., 2021, p. 192). Canadian researcher Margaret Kovach (2010) equates her “conversational method” to Yarning and Indigenous “re-storying” (p. 40). She contends that, in methods incorporating an Indigenous paradigm, researcher and researched are merged so that reflexivity rather than objectivity is the norm (p. 41). An Indigenous Research Paradigm also holds researchers responsible for the potential impact on First Nations peoples involved (Datta, 2018, p. 36); this paradigm therefore respects the relationship between research participants, the topic and the researcher by maintaining “relational accountability” (2021, p. 192).

In Yarning method *who* the researcher is has importance, so Indigenous Standpoint Theory becomes necessary (P. Atkinson et al., 2021, p. 192). Standpoint in research, as discussed in Chapter 1, broadly means an individual’s perspective brought to the research and how that is made clear (p. 192). More deeply, it acknowledges that both a person seeking knowledge and knowledge itself are socially situated (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 332). Nakata (2007) contends that applying Indigenous Standpoint Theory to method can make clearer “the corpus of objectified knowledge about us” as that corpus emerges and enables “understanding of our lived realities” . While Indigenous Standpoint Theory thus produces “truth” about “the

Indigenous position" it also reveals the workings—across the entire academy for instance—of so-called "knowledge" (p. 350).

Being Indigenous is the third requirement Atkinson *et al.* (2021) and Murrup-Stewart (2022) insist must be met for a researcher to Yarn. That is, the Yarning research method is undertaken by a researcher who is a First Nations person. Through lived experience of being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander the researcher thus has the necessary embedded, enculturated habits and knowledges about how to Yarn appropriately with another First Nations person (2021, p. 195; 2022, pp. 786-787). Atkinson *et al.* (2021), Murrup-Stewart (2022) and Kovach (2010) are among a range of scholars who recognise various categories of Yarning, first proposed by Bessarab & Ng'andu (2010, p 40-41). These variations reflect contexts, purpose and what information is exchanged: they include *social* Yarning, whereby researcher and participant exchange information about their families and communities to establish their relationality to each other; and *cross-cultural* Yarning, where the First Nations researcher explains to Indigenous participants the requirements of academic research governed by euro-western paradigms. A combination of Yarning forms are usually applied in Yarning method (2021, p. 192). The experience, knowledge, voices and relationships involved in First Nations people Yarning—a process familiar to Aboriginal people—promotes cultural safety which in turn improves data authenticity (2021, p. 195). But for a *non-Aboriginal* researcher to say they are Yarning is incorrect, if not fraudulent:

> In these circumstances researchers are enticing Aboriginal study participation under the guise of cultural appropriateness and familiarity that does not exist… Non-Indigenous researchers asserting use of Yarning method are especially at risk of unintentionally "playing Aboriginal." This occurs through creating an Aboriginal Other that enacts elements of Yarning method with a blindness to the relational intricacies and complex processes involved in handing down oral culture via embedded shared memories between generations over millennia… (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2022, p. 787)

In these ways, Murrup-Stewart *et al.* (2022) categorise non-Aboriginal researchers' claims to Yarning as both a subterfuge and an Othering which further fuels their ignorance about Yarning as a complex cultural practice. Furthermore, Murrup-

Stewart *et al.* (2022) argue, researcher claims to Yarning are both White virtue posturings and acts of colonising possession: non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist researchers use Yarning method "via an assumed entitlement", as "a smokescreen to magically mitigate power dynamics", while using "Aboriginal peoples as research resource, all under the guise of virtuous activity" (pp. 786-787). These problems of the non-Aboriginal researcher assuming capacity to Yarn exemplify White colonial habits identified in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

I accept these arguments and evidence that being Indigenous is a prerequisite for using Yarning methods and methodologies. For any non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist to claim to be research Yarning with First Nations participants is inappropriate and misleading. Therefore, as I, too am a non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist researcher it is not possible for me to Yarn. This is notwithstanding my efforts to apply elements of an Indigenous paradigm to my research practice via the *White colonial habits* lens developed for this research. This includes identifying those of my research positions which reflect my non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist standpoint in relation to the varied First Nations and non-Aboriginal S/standpoints of my co-conversationalists. Atkinson et al (2021) argue Yarning is *not* a "conversational method" which they describe as "active construction of an interview agenda via a collaborative conversation between researcher and participant" (p. 193). This description resembles what I am doing as well as sounding like Yarning and the Indigenous conversational method Kovach (2010) describes; but it is distinct from those two cultural practices. Conversational method and my method differ from what occurs in Yarning because, despite my efforts to shift my research paradigm in decolonising ways, "researcher positionality shapes the interpretation of the data" (2021, p. 193). Relationality with family, country, community and cosmos central to Yarning method is absent from what I am doing in my conversations with participants.

However, while I do not have necessary cultural capacity and identity to Yarn, learning about the requisites and practices of Yarning has helped me consider changes I needed to make in my conversations with participants for this research. When I emailed potential co-conversationalists asking for their participation, I explained (1) who I was, (2) my theatre and other professional background, (3) my

non-Aboriginality and its relevance for this research and (4) what overall areas of knowledge I wanted their help with. I assumed this was sufficient indication of who I was and why I was undertaking this research. With each in-person meeting I began by asking participants about themselves and their theatre career trajectories. Over time it became clear I needed to explain verbally something about myself and my motivations: so that my co-participants who I was and thus with whom they were speaking. Some of my co-conversationalists even demanded at the outset I explain these things. I therefore adjusted my conversation practice going forward: I would begin by putting in words, in person, why I was there, where I had come from in theatre and elsewhere, what I currently believed or was learning about my questions, what I hoped to do with the knowledge we were making and why I felt compelled to ask these broad questions about collaboration practice. I also asked what else they wanted to know about me and my research. This became a necessary, respectful step to let co-conversationalists know with whom they were speaking before they shared something about themselves. Putting such information in an email before our meeting was not sufficient for explaining myself.

I acknowledge also that my reporting on and interpretation of what was happening in all the conversations is bound up in my subjectivities then, my shifting practitioner/researcher agendas which followed and where I had moved to when completing analysis in the final months of work on this thesis. It is also necessary to again acknowledge my interpretive power as a White/settler-colonist researcher within a White/euro-centric academy.

v. Problems of the non-Aboriginal researcher

Puch-Bouwman (2014) argues that, even as non-Aboriginal researchers try to address their contested role in researching First Nations people's realities, the presence and access we have in this endeavour still constitutes "higher level symptoms of the colonial aftermath" (p. 408). The coloniser's mind in these research spaces is "an occupied territory as well, requiring liberation" (p. 417). Puch-Bouwman (2014) advocates that non-Aboriginal researchers of First Nations people frame their practices "against the grain of their own privileged colonizer position" and aim to heal the colonial aftermath of which we are a part (p. 416). But even with

these efforts, broader, world-wide coloniser power positions are unlikely to be surrendered (Puch-Bouwman, p. 417); colonial power/knowledge is infamous for recreating itself such that efforts to make research paradigms counter-colonial might merely disguise the colonial residues within them (p. 410). I am not able to posit a solution to these problems of my White/settler-colonist position within this research but offer some ameliorations. I have noted that White/settler-colonist is the standpoint from which I operate. I am attempting throughout this work to expose this problem and using it as a problematic underlying the inquiry. At the same time, I do not claim these measures as sufficient to solve the problem of White/settler-colonist domination of the western academy within which Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, including me, work. Nor do I claim resolution of my position as what Puch-Bouwman (2014) calls a NIROPI: a non-Indigenous researcher of Indigenous people and issues (p. 409).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) contends that research has served european imperialism, arming colonisation in ways which still terrify First Nations communities (2012). Theory and data framed as knowledge about First Nations people has been collected for centuries, classified, presented to coloniser nations and then back to those who have been colonised (2012). These are, Smith says, stark examples of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988) which have helped enable Othering discourses in euro-based vocabularies, institutions, doctrines, imagery and policies (Said, 1978). Smith (2012) champions grounding research in First Nations people's epistemologies: including via researcher humility, reciprocity, relational responsibility, respecting oral traditions and serving the agendas of those First Nations people with whom research is being done. This is to counter White values of professional ambition inveigled in research and claimed as social service in the academy's discourses about itself (2012).

The vast majority of research and literature I have referenced in this thesis and used to guide my processes has been authored by First Nations academics and scholars operating as non-White. Additionally, as already stated, I have attempted to balance my power as researcher by foregrounding the words of my conversation participants in the data reporting chapters ahead. I acknowledge that a key theoretical framework I have applied to understand our data, outlined in the next

chapter, comes from White, french sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. However, I have used australian Indigenous academics' reconstructions of his ideas to create a Habitus-Field-Capital framework for this research. I accept that the overall value of my research about First Nations issues can only be definitively judged by First Nations people, including First Nations academics, and that such valuing must also answer to how or whether my research maintains data Sovereignty.

Scholars within the data Sovereignty movement such as Walter (2005, 2016; Walter et al., 2020; Walter & Suina, 2019), Snipp (2016), Kukutai & Taylor (2016), Davis (2016) and Diane E. Smith (2016) argue, as Smith (2012) does, that academy research has extracted data from First Nations people and then framed that material in deficit narratives which serve colonising agendas. Data Sovereignty's overarching principle is that First Nations people own data and information about themselves including to control how their data is used, reported and framed. This aligns with cultural rights and rights to self-determination proclaimed in international covenants (M. Davis, 2016) including Article 3 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016; United Nations, 2007). Means for establishing and protecting First Nations data Sovereignty within academia are in continuing development (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). Scholars have argued euro-based tropes of First Nations disadvantage and deficit are so embedded in data gathering that only massive disruption of research practices can end the academy's habitual deficit searching, extraction and interpretation (Walter & Andersen, 2013; Walter & Suina, 2019). Adoption of data Sovereignty principles by the academy is thus far from complete (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016).

Data Sovereignty aligns with communal moral rights (Janke, 1998, 2019) and other principles reflected in Australian arts protocols discussed in Chapter Three (Australia Council & Janke, 2019; Screen Australia & Janke, 2009). It also reflects (and informs) the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies code of ethics for responsible research with First Nations communities (AIATSIS, 2020). The latest AIATSIS research code substantially restructures, but continues, principles in the previous AIATSIS research guidelines (AIATSIS, 2012). They maintain that research involving First nations people and issues involves (1) benefits to the community; (2) community involvement in the research process; (3)

recognition of diversity and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems; (4) mutual understanding; (3) free and informed consent; (7) negotiation of outcomes reflecting specific community needs; (8) establishing formal written agreement; and (9) ongoing consultation and negotiation (AIATSIS, 2012). A major addition is that Section 2.9 in the 2020 code calls on institutions managing data to adopt Indigenous data Sovereignty principles (AIATSIS, 2020, p. 19). They require the researcher to report back to co-participants on findings and consult with them before publication on how the data and knowledge they have shared is interpreted and disseminated. The next section discusses the extent to which I have used these approaches and where my research practices need to change to meet such expectations going forward.

vi. Respect for participants and communities: ongoing, unfinished business

At the very beginning of this research I was unaware of AIATSIS research protocols; I relied on Monash University's ethics process (MUHREC) on the understanding that the MUHREC committee included First Nations academics with expertise in Indigenous research issues. My consideration of ethics in this project was also informed by the reading I had undertaken to develop the *White colonial habits* framework which informed my data collection design. Additionally, I wrote the ethics application guided by my primary PhD supervisor at Monash: an experienced, respected non-Aboriginal researcher in First Nations theatre. I noted in my application that the First Nations practitioners I would approach for my research would be accomplished creatives with a strong sense of agency. As all my participants are and have been theatre leaders, my prediction then about the level of agency my co-conversationalists would have has been borne out. AIATSIS research guidelines have been developed to cover a wide scope of research. That includes both projects like mine, where participants are experienced advocates, and other research where First Nations people and communities are considered vulnerable participants because they are unused to dealing with investigators. AIATSIS research protocols therefore need to be addressed in different ways according to the project and the people participating. In many ways my methods have met those requirements.

AIATSIS code expectations that this research (1) benefits the communities it is about is met in several ways. The most obvious is that I am studying a broad problem—the non-Aboriginal theatre maker—which First Nations creatives (including theatre makers I spoke with) had raised publicly before I commenced the project. That my participants were mostly First Nations theatre makers and it was issues affecting Indigenous theatre creatives, audiences and communities of which they were members meant that there was (2) community involvement in the research process. I intend, by acknowledging my non-Aboriginal standpoint and the limits that places on how I can research First Nations theatre issues, that I sufficiently (3) recognise diversity and demonstrate respect for Indigenous knowledge systems. As I have already discussed in the thesis introduction and Chapter 1, I have shifted the focus of my research in response to what I learned from each participant: away from making a play to instead digging deeper into the problems this represents and into related aspects of First Nations artistic freedoms. This adjustment of my project purpose and the discussions about it during our conversations come near to (4) mutual understanding and (5) negotiating outcomes reflecting specific community needs. Having (6) a formal written agreement is substantially covered by the consent process: I confirmed that my participants were giving (7) free and informed consent via the wording of my emailed request (Appendix II/A), the information sheet attached (Appendix II/B) and the consent form they signed in person when we met (Appendix II/C); this consent form combined with the information sheet provided (8) a written agreement. This consent, however, included the right of participants to withdraw from this research at any point. Consent by each participant therefore remains in flux and is an ongoing process. This is related to another AIATSIS requirement, (9) ongoing consultation and negotiation, and the new 2020 AIATSIS code requirement: that researchers adopt, acknowledge and enact data Sovereignty.

These nine AIATSIS principles encompassing First Nations data Sovereignty, self-determination, respect for culture and research reciprocity require me to report back to participants on my use of our conversations. This is a continuing process which needs to be documented and problems acknowledged. I firstly emailed back to each of the eleven participants a verbatim transcript of the conversation recorded with them, for each participant to keep and use in their own writing if desired. Each participant could indicate parts they did not want included in my research, make

amendments and indicate if they wanted any parts to be attributed anonymously. One of my participants made changes to their transcript: to remove small sections not significant to our knowledge making and amend some sentences for greater clarity. That then became the record of our conversation for this thesis. No-one else sought to change their transcript except that I needed to assure one participant that I would edit out “ums” and “ahs” from her verbatim words in the writing up of our conversation. Others did not respond or acknowledge receipt when I sent them their transcripts. I was advised by my supervisor that this was not uncommon; that while I continued to provide my participants opportunities to comment on my work or remove themselves from my research I was meeting ethics requirements. Another pair of participants I interviewed together indicated at a later point that they did not want to continue as part of this research and so, except for these sentences in this paragraph, there is no reference in this thesis to those two participants or the data we generated. My reference to eleven interview participants throughout this research excludes those two interviewees who withdrew.

There have been some difficulties and delays reporting back to participants exactly how I have interpreted and used what they told me. Everyone in this research was sent their verbatim transcripts within three months of our conversation. However, I have waited to complete my writing up of our meetings before contacting participants with either broad results of the thesis work or opportunities to view how I have curated and interpreted their words. It was only in these late stages of this research that my analysis of our conversations was completed to a meaningful stage for co-conversationalists to review. By 25 July 2023 a summary of the thesis findings had been sent to all participants alerting them that my reporting of our conversation was available for them to see and comment upon. At the time of submission only four theatre makers had replied that they were ready to view how I had reported our conversations. More experienced researchers, including one of my original supervisors, have told me I should not expect many responses given the pressures theatre makers of their calibre have on their time. However, all eleven participants but one responded during the period my thesis was being marked, providing feedback, so that I could make changes to the final version of the thesis according to their wishes. Of the ten who responded, most were positive about how our conversation was reported. Two wanted a number of their quotes

adjusted and for my discussion and their commentary to be updated in line with changes in the australian theatre landscape since we had spoken. Most merely requested some updates and corrections to their biographical data. All in all, though late in the thesis process, these follow up conversations have been valuable for refreshing data, ensuring its accuracy and jointly reporting our conversations. Five participants I can say expressed approval and congratulations for the insights we had found together and how they were portrayed. One of my eleven participants, however, emailed me briefly to say that having viewed my reporting, she did not want our conversation included in my thesis and that she was withdrawing participation. She cited the time that has passed and changes that have occurred in the industry since we spoke, but also how I had interpreted some of our exchanges. I have removed this theatre maker's name and interview from the thesis document so that her participation is not disclosed. However, I do acknowledge in the section where her interview would have been that she has withdrawn, and I contend there that her contribution is still a presence in the thesis because of the impact our conversation had on my thinking and decisions at an early point in the project. That leaves just one participant who has not replied to the regular emails I have been sending her asking her to review the attached reporting of our conversation. I have also used other communication methods such as Facebook Messenger and the enquiries email at this person's work organisation to ensure they know this material exists. I have kept this theatre artist's testimony as part of the thesis because of her encouragement originally around seeing research of this nature being undertaken; also, based on my experience of her public courageousness, forthrightness and agency, I expect this experienced artist and leader would tell me if important changes needed to be made. I hypothesise that this lack of contact reflects the huge pressure on the artist's time as a major theatre leader and arts advocate. I have added an editorial note in that section explaining that this testimony report has not had the artist's final approval and that anyone choosing to quote from it or arrive at understandings based on it must acknowledge these views and disclosures were expressed in 2017, not 2024.

Meanwhile, for the process of getting permissions, I have purposely kept the names of my participants out of other sections of the thesis so that their participation is quarantined within the section reporting their case study. This was to enable me

to provide each theatre maker blanket anonymity should they decide to remove their testimony from the thesis record: it would merely be a process of redacting that section. The only exception to this is that I mention the late Andrew Ross' participation in several other parts of the thesis. He repeatedly told me, at each of our meetings including when he signed his consent form, that I did not need to check my work back with him or send a transcript. I interpret his insistence on this to be because he suspected, due to his ill health at the time, that he might not be able to give later consent and did not want this eventuality to obstruct my work. Meanwhile, I continue to seek explicit participant approval from the one person who has not yet conveyed their wishes on the matter.

As this project draws to a close, it is apparent to me that my process for reporting case study/oral history results to my participants has had problems, mostly due to not establishing a systematic timeline for doing this. In future research I conduct I will design a reporting plan that includes stages of notifying progress to participants. This will include sharing to participants, as they become available, (1) their transcript (within three months of our meeting); (2) edited versions of those parts of our interview transcripts I intend to quote in my research; (3) broad results and findings across the project research overall; (4) a near final draft of the interpretation of our conversation with opportunity to collaborate on changes; (5) notification that the research paper is about to be submitted for peer review or to the research sponsor; (6) results of that peer review process; and (7) the pending publication date and in what journal or other location. Should the research take more than a year, these steps would be augmented by a quarterly general newsletter-style email to participants informing them of how the research is progressing. I would expect to guarantee in my process that all participants will have access to the complete published version of the research.

I was reticent to publish before thesis completion the new knowledge I was finding with participants. Apart from taking some early ideas pre-data collection to non-refereed streams of conferences, I chose not to publish any articles based on our conversations during my candidature. This was to ensure the rigour of my thinking had first been tested in the PhD evaluation process and to respect the importance of the issues I was inquiring into. If I prepare any journal articles from this thesis

research post examination, I will undertake another round of consultation and checks with any participants whose co-conversations will appear in that later writing. It is likely that I will reorganise data in those shorter publications to remove names of and identifying information about participants.

vii. Conclusion: merged methods and White researcher issues

The key data in this research comes from conversations with eleven theatre makers conducted and curated using elements of case study, active interviewing and oral history methods. At the same time discourse on play production, *The Secret River*, has been reported to further illustrate the landscape of australian theatre within which First Nations stories have been told. I have taken steps to acknowledge and counter the problems of myself, a settler-colonist researcher within the White australian/euro-based academy, as I inquire into First Nations experience and issues affecting First Nations people. These efforts to acknowledge the rights of all participants in this research is ongoing and will need to continue even after this thesis is evaluated by the academy and, hopefully, placed in the Flinders University library. These problems and responsibilities, including tenets of data Sovereignty and IATSIS codes around appropriate First Nations research, overlap significantly with the creative arts issues investigated in this research and grappled with by arts bodies' First Nations protocols discussed in an earlier part of this thesis.

The next chapter, meanwhile, will explain two more theory frameworks underpinning the methodology of this research and which I am applying to theatre maker conversations: (1) *First Nations nonmaterial/Cultural Capital (FNCC)* (drawing on Bourdieu's system of Habitus, Capital and Field and (2) *meanings of culture/Culture*.

6. TWO (MORE) CULTURE FRAMEWORKS

i. Introduction: theory the data demanded

I began this research knowing that the issues in it would be informed by critical race and Whiteness theory. What artistic freedoms mean for those ascribed as non-White follow from both Whiteness literature and informal discussions about non-Aboriginal theatre maker problems. Those early activities, therefore, produced the first two key frameworks for understanding and conducting this research: *White colonial habits* and *artistic freedom*. They were lenses which influenced the design of my data gathering and which I took into conversations with theatre makers.

The theory frameworks I am introducing at this point, however, became visible and relevant as I was *finalising* the last of those research conversations. That is because every conversation made clear the complexity of First Nations theatre Culture, its value to non-Aboriginal theatre makers wanting to tell First Nations stories, and how that value or capital is embodied in First Nations creatives' and communities' stories. It also became apparent that I needed to theorise the cultural significance of First Nations theatre compared to non-Aboriginal theatre. That lens, *meanings of culture/Culture*, will be unpacked a few pages hence in section 6.iii. Additionally, I am applying sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus-Capital-Field framework to understand settler-colonist behaviours linked to First Nations theatre stories. This framework, which I label *First Nations nonmaterial/cultural capital (FNCC)*, makes visible shifts in how First Nations theatre artists, knowledges and Culture are valued across the australian theatre landscape. As will be seen, these value changes can arise as First Nations theatre stories and storytellers move between creative arenas, or fields. These shifts, however, have also happened across time, including over the fifty years since both the National Black Theatre and the federally constituted Aboriginal Arts Board first came into being.

ii. Cultural gold: through Bourdieu's glass glinting

Bourdieu's concept of Capital, especially cultural, social and symbolic capital, illuminates the value of knowledges and relationships First Nations people bring to

First Nations theatre-making. Those knowledges and relationships, as sites of capital constituting all three nonmaterial forms of capital, are also revealed in what non-Aboriginal theatre makers do to try to access them. That is, understanding that Indigenous stories, relationships, people and practices are forms of creative capital, with shifting values between fields, explains a range of White behaviours triggered when those forms of non-White capital become salient. These responses vary according to whether First Nations creative capital, becoming visible in the White gaze, can serve colonial agendas or endanger them. To effectively apply Bourdieu's thinking to White behaviours and First Nations theatre-making, his key concepts of Habitus, Capital and Field need explication. This overview includes examples of how australian researchers are applying Bourdieu's framework to fields of practice involving First Nations people. For this discussion I am capitalising Bourdieu's three concepts when referring to their broad abstractions, Capital, Habitus, Field. I am using lower case for the narrower social-cultural-symbolic forms of capital and when I am applying any of the three concepts to real world objects or practice.

a. Bourdieu basics: Habitus, Capital and Field

In his most widely known concept—that loosely known as "cultural capital"—acclaimed sociologist Pierre Bourdieu extrapolated social, symbolic and cultural Capital from the Marxist notion of economic capital. Marxist theory holds that those who have economic capital are those who own and control the means of production within their society. Capitalists, owners and controllers of capital, control production to benefit themselves economically and politically. In this way, possessing economic capital means you have economic and political power plus the capital class to which you belong holds and maintains collective structural power. The more economic capital you have acquired within a capitalist economic system, the more power and mobility you have. Bourdieu, in his exploration of economic and education success, arts access and arts tastes and dispositions across classes (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986a), identifies that social attributes and knowledges can enable people to move across classes or to operate within *fields* of endeavour within a society. His system for understanding how this occurs involves three concepts he called his "thinking tools" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1989, p. 50): Habitus, Capital and Field.

Bourdieu's Habitus refers to the embodied lived experience of a person or how they have been enculturated through their lived circumstances. This includes where and into what family and class the social agent is born plus what they encounter in life. All these things of course are heavily influenced by their family, social, political and geographical circumstances (Maton, 2014). Habitus is a structure that "comprises a system of *dispositions* which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Habitus captures how we as individuals embody our history, how we apply this history to our current situations and circumstances and then how we make choices to act or behave in certain ways and not others (Maton, 2014). As Bourdieu puts it, it's a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination (Bourdieu, 1977/1972; Maton, 2014). As his famous sports metaphor attests, "The habitus as *the feel for the game* is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature…" (Bourdieu, 1990/1987).

The game itself—the unspoken rules operating in a given field—Bourdieu calls the field's *doxa*. The shaping of our habitus by our past and present conditions gives us a feel for some games—or doxa—over others and particular ways of playing those games (Maton, 2014). Our expectations and beliefs as to what is appropriate for us, which games to engage in, what are the obvious actions to take and the most natural way of doing them, are conditioned by our habitus and affected by our experience of past outcomes (Maton, 2014). Thus, Bourdieu says, a society's or other social group's habituses constitute a mediated form of arbitrated social structure(s) (Bourdieu, 2000/1997; Maton, 2014). Important to Bourdieu's system is the interrelationship between Habitus and Field—especially as a particular field and its *doxa* (unspoken rules) are the "game" to which participants bring their habituses.

Bourdieu's concept of Field refers to an area of activity or interest and all the people/actors, institutions, rules (including legislation), unspoken rules, means to produce and even impediments to production encountered in that field of endeavour (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995; Bourdieu, 1986a, 1993, 1996b, 2002). Most commonly (and in Bourdieu's original concept) "fields encompass the relations among the totality of relevant individual and organizational actors in functionally

differentiated parts of society, such as education, health, and politics" (Anheier et al., 1995, p. 860) or the arts. Bourdieu's framework has been tested by various scholars on a field as large as the entire globe, or sections of the world which interact such as G7 nations, so-called OECD countries or regional global descriptors such as asia or europe. A field can also mean a particular country or society marked by particular Cultures (such as 20th century france). However, Bourdieu's Field is more commonly applied by scholars to areas of endeavour *within* a country or state or town or globally, including, in addition to those already listed: sport (or a sporting code); education; a Culture (or culture) within a Culture; professions and smaller, specific pursuits within the arts such as literature, theatre, film or visual arts. Categories of fields are infinite and they overlap infinitely.

Habitus and Field are relational structures: each shapes and defines the other and according to Bourdieu's analysis, with Capital, they explain *practice*: that is what participants generally and individuals individually do within a field of endeavour. Each field of practice (including an entire society) can be viewed as a competitive game or "field of struggles" (Maton, 2014, p. 54). According to Bourdieu's framework, while both a person's habitus and the field within which those dispositions have context are resilient and enduring, they are not immutably fixed (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). Each can be altered by changing personal, in-field or external circumstances; this includes individuals' habituses and their field encountering and influencing development of each element (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). The Field structures the Habitus while the Habitus contributes to constituting the Field as a meaningful world (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992a, p 127). Hysteresis occurs when one's habitus (or a group of like people's habituses) lags behind changes that occur in the field (Bourdieu 1977a: 78-9). The Habitus can get out of synch in this way because dispositions are embodied, so "the habitus develops a momentum that can generate practices for some time after the original conditions which shaped it have vanished" (Maton, 2014, p 59). Thus, while Field provides the context within which Habitus operates and each of these phenomena affects the shaping and shifts of the other, the effect of each on the other is gradual (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991).

The significance of a field and its doxa for determining what elements of an individual's habitus and their related attributes constitute *capital*, meanwhile, is not gradual but dramatic and immediate. This is because, what constitutes nonmaterial and economic capital within a field, Bourdieu contends, is determined by what is valued by the actors in that field. One of Bourdieu's simple definitions of Capital is what a person's *position* is within a given field (Maton, 2014, p. 51). At the same time, what is valued within any particular field is under constant readjustment as actors and institutions within it fall away, are replaced by others or change capital positions in relation to each other (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). It is this valuing—and the dynamics of actors and institutions within a field affecting that valuing—which realises capital within a field. That field position, and that valuing, is subject to unrelenting, although not always dramatic, change. Bourdieu (1986) summarises the interrelationship between Habitus, Capital and Field with the equation:

[(Habitus)(Capital)] + Field = Practice (Bourdieu, 1986b, p. 101)

That is, practice comes from the relationship between a person's dispositions (Habitus) and their position in a field (Capital) within the current state of play in a particular social, economic or cultural arena (Field) (Maton, 2014, p. 51). Conversations with theatre makers in this research confirmed for me an even simpler equation:

(Our) Culture = (Our) Capital

This sum reflects the words of Lee-Ann Buckskin, Narungga, Wirangi and Wotjobaluk deputy chair of the Australia Council Board; she declared some years ago to a First Nations arts forum that "Our Culture is Our Capital". Unfortunately, I have not kept in my notes of Buckskin's address details of the date or webinar where she said this; therefore, I am unable to provide an authoritative citation. However, it would be even less appropriate not to acknowledge that Buckskin was the person from whom I first learned of this coining of the interchangeable relationship between First Nations Culture and First Nations capital.

b. Bourdieu's Capital

Bourdieu's possibly most quoted (and therefore most misapplied) concept, cultural capital, comes from the forms of nonmaterial capital he identifies as operating within society and other defined fields of endeavour. Initially, Bourdieu distinguishes Marx's concept of economic capital from two other forms of capital he argues are operating at the same time: social and cultural (1986a); he refers to a fourth form of capital only in passing—symbolic capital—as arising out of one or more of the other three being present in a person, community or cultural product (Bourdieu, 1986a). However, after *Distinction* (1984) and *Forms of Capital* (1986a), he focuses in more detail on symbolic capital (for instance, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). In many discussions by later scholars, "Bourdieu's four forms of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic" (Maclean, Harvey, & Press, 2006, p. 29) are rendered in diagrams as having equal status in his theoretical framework or in their operation (for instance Figure 1 in Harvey & Maclean, 2008, adapted from Maclean, Harvey and Press, 2006, p 29). Those representations look like this:

Figure 6.1: Forms of Capital diagram including 'Economic' as a category

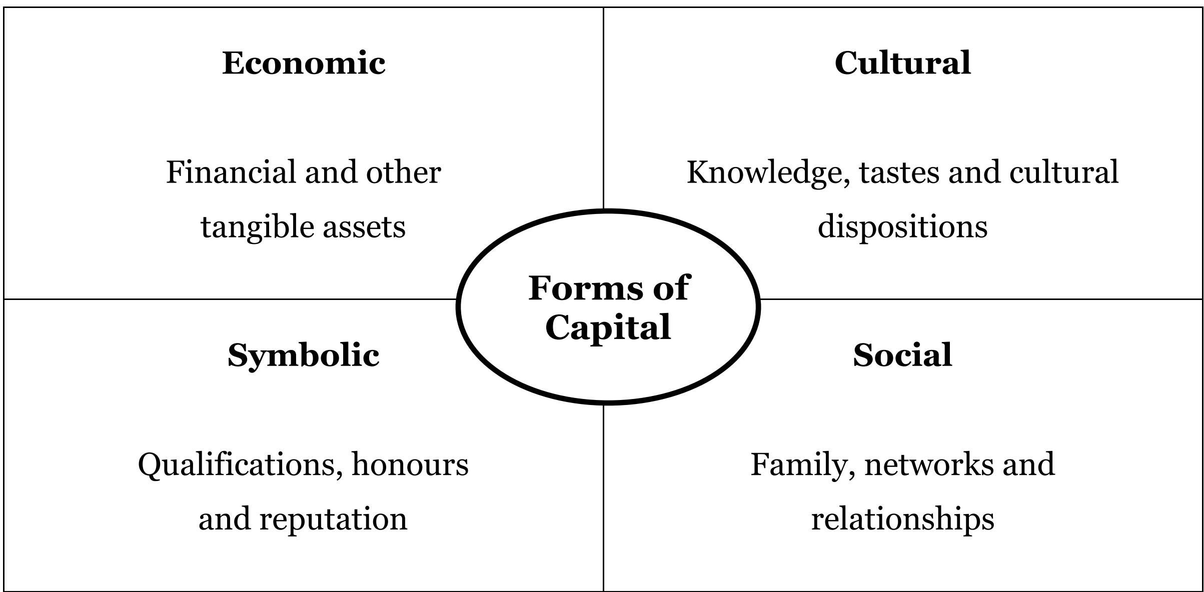
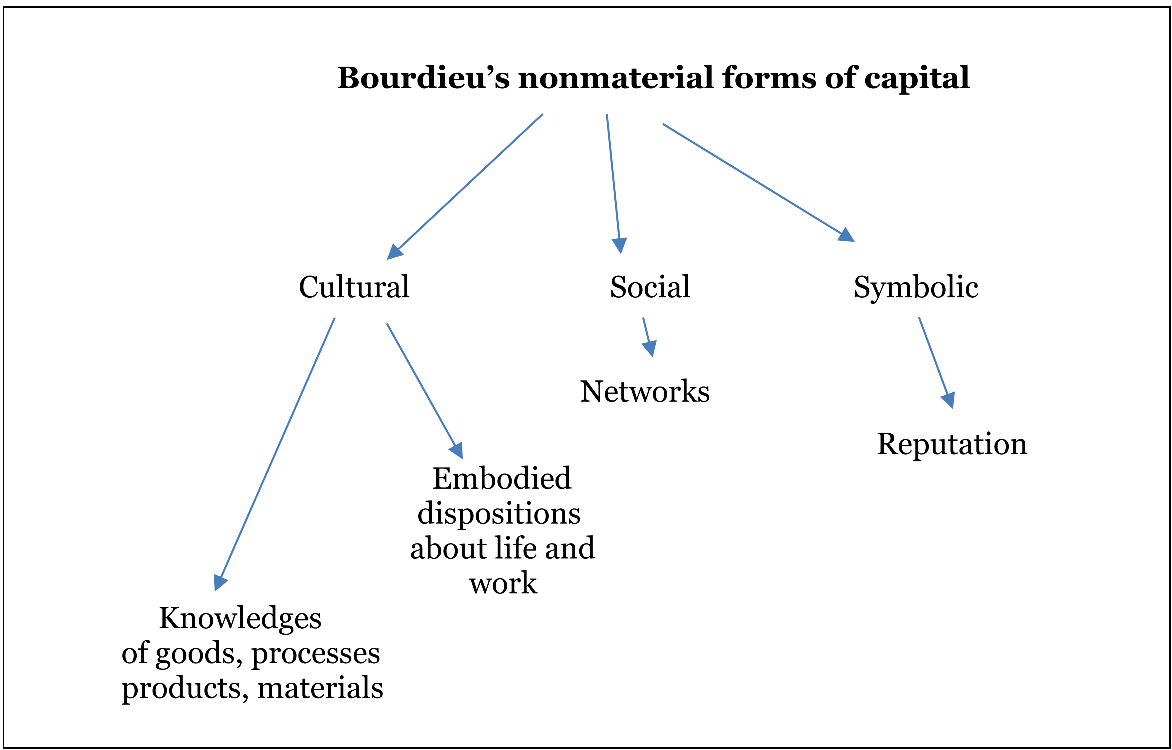


Figure 6.1 does not illustrate the interdependence of forms of capital on each other or that they might vary in importance case by case, field by field; nor does this diagram

indicate that the three nonmaterial forms of capital can and often do convert into economic capital and economic success.

Other illustrations found across the literature make clear separation between Marx's economic capital and Bourdieu's *nonmaterial*—social, cultural and symbolic—forms of capital. The diagram below is adapted and simplified from Lee & Shaw's illustration (2016, p. 1742) of how Bourdieusian nonmaterial capital might operate in entrepreneurship:

Figure 6.2: Bourdieu's three categories of nonmaterial capital embodied in small business start-up entrepreneurs



Like many scholars, Lee and Shaw (2016) do not include economic capital in their image of Bourdieu's capital. This is even though they note that Bourdieu (1986) "argued that *economic capital* is the most important" (2016, p. 1737). Lee & Shaw (2016) contend that to understand entrepreneurial practice these "intangible resources" (p. 1735) of social, cultural and symbolic capital need further study alongside material, tangible ones: "In a Bourdieusian sense, successful entrepreneurship depends on an access to a mix of economic, social, cultural and

symbolic capital" (2016, p. 1737). Lee & Shaw (2016) make explicit in their focus on nonmaterial capital what Bourdieu also argues: that cultural, symbolic and social capital often convert into economic success and thus economic capital. How Bourdieu positions the relationship between economic and nonmaterial capital this way requires further explanation.

Bourdieu's Capital draws on the Marxist definition of economic capital as ownership of the means of production (power to produce and make profit from that production); in that sense Bourdieu equates nonmaterial (or the non-economic) forms of capital as nevertheless constituting capital for economic success within a field of endeavour or society and as capacity to make material and/or intangible products of economic value (Bourdieu, 1986a). In a break from Marx's view of nonmaterial capital, he argues that the impact of cultural, social and symbolic capital was often economically quantifiable and intimated that evidence of them operating could be seen in terms of economic as well as cultural outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986a). He said all those non-material forms of capital nevertheless manifest in a set of practices which are "objectively economic" but "are not and cannot be socially recognised as economic" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 243). That is, those nonmaterial forms of capital can all lead to economic benefits for those who have use of them depending on the field of activity where those forms can operate. He equated Capital—in all its forms—as amounting to "the same thing" as power (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 243), much as Marx did when describing economic, material and political forms of power coming from ownership of economic capital viz. the means of production (Marx, Engels, Moore, Aveling, & Torr, 1947).

As portrayed in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 I initially assigned each of the three nonmaterial forms similar weight. This provided a starting point for seeing settler-colonist theatre maker actions in response to First Nations practitioners' capital. This assumption simplified my first steps in theorising how Bourdieusian Capital applies to australian theatre-making and First Nations stories. However, as has emerged in specific practice examples in the data chapters, the reality is more complex: the importance and relationship of each Bourdieusian capital to the others varies from real world theatre case to theatre case and across theatre fields. That said, for establishing analytical principles such complexity does not need to be

addressed at this point in the thesis. In fact, I will only acknowledge broadly those variations in my analysis of theatre anecdotes and examples emerging in later chapters: such detailed examination is beyond the scope of this broad multi-lensed thesis but provides scope for more specific future research. For this thesis what is important is how Bourdieu's three forms of nonmaterial capital can be used to make visible First Nations creative capital, and how non-Aboriginal theatre makers respond to that First Nations creative capital.

c. Three forms of Bourdieu's Capital

Of Bourdieu's three so-called nonmaterial forms of capital, "cultural capital" has entered the academic and bureaucratic lexicon most noticeably. It is often used to represent, somewhat narrowly, the value of artistic outcomes in communities, what is provided for the arts and the value of people who contribute this way. "Cultural capital" is also often used as shorthand to represent all three forms of nonmaterial capital Bourdieu identified. The meanings of cultural capital have been stretched (or confined) in numerous directions, many of which are helpful (although not all) for scholars and arts advocates. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, refers to several phenomena and outcomes, tangible and intangible. It means the capabilities and knowledges embodied in people or communities empowering the creation of cultural products and success within a field of endeavour; it also refers to tangible and intangible products of culture created by people or communities and which have cultural value that is often transmutable into economic value.

Bourdieu therefore distinguished between what he called *embodied* cultural capital—those cultural knowledges or attributes one has within oneself or group of people or community of people—and *objective* cultural capital: that found in cultural objects or what can be provided in terms of cultural objects, commodities or experiences. Cultural capital embodied in an individual can include how they speak, their vocabulary, their manners, their understanding of expectations society or their community has of them (enculturation/socialisation), their education level and how they dress or look: any elements about a person or group of people enabling success within a field of endeavour (or community). A third form of cultural capital which

Bourdieu describes as *institutional* includes such things as academic qualifications. Such capabilities acquired intentionally through education exist as documents physically separate from the person. However, I contend that because an agent can claim those qualifications as part of their person, those qualifications constitute *embodied* cultural capital as well as institutional. While embodied cultural capital may be seen to exist across a group of people having acquired the same cultural competencies, Bourdieu stressed that such capital is held individually and disappears once an individual dies (or moves away) (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 4).

Cultural capital can be understood broadly to be capital which enables an agent to succeed in the social milieu where that individual agent is or wants to go. This includes capacity to move across classes. Cultural capital reflects power, socialisation and enculturation an individual has within a society. Thus some "cultural capital can be acquired… quite unconsciously" and some intentionally through an investment of time and education (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 243). In other words, some is inherited, some is absorbed through lived experience or relationship and some is acquired intentionally by effort. Cultural capital encompasses intangible and material commodities of Culture/culture which society—or the social space where an agent wishes to operate—values. Those attributes and commodities are needed within a field to communicate effectively, to fit in and to engage seamlessly in exchanges, be they cultural, social, familial, creative or economic. They include accumulated cultural knowledge that confers social status and power. The fact that cultural capital is activated or existent only according to the field of endeavour where it applies is a further element of Bourdieu's field theory. Enculturation is a major determinant of both an individual's cultural capital and their habitus; therefore, the two phenomena of Habitus and Capital, as embodied attributes of an individual, substantially overlap.

Bourdieu's *social* capital refers to whom an individual or group knows: what networks they have with other people and how those relationships provide them with access to resources and power for their own success and benefit (or that of the group with whom they identify). Being "well connected"—having entrée to people who hold power, influence, authority or asset-resources—provides agents with social capital (Bourdieu, 1986a). Similarly, being known to members of a particular community or

being part of that community provides one with greater social capital within that community than that held by someone not from that community. One agent's membership of a community may therefore also be viewed as valuable social capital to another agent who is seeking a relationship with that community for their own cultural, economic and artistic purposes.

The third nonmaterial form, symbolic capital, Bourdieu argues, is commonly seen as prestige and authority—even lifestyle—and depends on the perception of others to recognise (or think they recognise) that symbolic capital in a person or group of people (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). In his earlier writing, *The Forms of Capital* (1986a), Bourdieu distinguishes between economic, cultural and social capital but does not separate out symbolic capital as a distinct fourth category. He argues that all these other forms of capital might also operate as symbolic capital or be major aspects of the symbolic capital an agent has. Symbolic and social capital are entwined because social capital is "governed by the logic of knowledge and acknowledgement" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 257). That is, when a person is recognised as having social capital through their relationships: that *perception by others* constitutes symbolic capital alongside the social capital inherent in the relationships themselves. Bourdieu argues that every form of capital can become symbolic when it is "grasped through categories of perception that *recognize* its specific logic" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Thus, while symbolic capital can be objective—through prizes, qualifications and awards—it is largely subjective. It is also powerful because of its operation through other forms of capital:

> Any capital, whatever the form it assumes, exerts a symbolic violence as soon as it is recognized, that is, misrecognized in its truth as capital and imposes itself as an authority calling for recognition. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013, pp. 298-299)

Bourdieu's concept of field, being a site of struggle for what is valued, is thus crucial to realising symbolic capital. Symbolic capital can be recognised around a person or group in one field or community and not necessarily be perceived elsewhere. This is so because, as Bourdieu argues, all three forms of non-material capital plus economic capital interact with, overlap, support, create and empower each other depending how broad or specific the field is in which they are operating (2013, p. 298).

d. The implications of Habitus on Capital within a Field

As already suggested, there is a huge overlap between an agent's Habitus and their Capital. That is, their lived, embodied history determining their dispositions and propensity to make particular choices or to act in certain ways is a major component of that agent's cultural, social and symbolic forms of Capital. This is especially so of their embodied cultural capital. As already stated, Habitus is contextualised by Field and Habitus and Field can influence each other's development over time. However, an agent's embodied, nonmaterial *capital* is much more dramatically and automatically determined by the field where that agent is operating than is their habitus. Yet, Bourdieu's system allows that an agent's habitus will be changed over time by what they experience through participation in a field:

> The structures of the habitus are thus neither fixed nor in constant flux. Rather, our dispositions evolve – they are durable and transposable but not immutable. At the same time, the social landscapes through which we pass (our contextual fields) are themselves evolving according to their own logics (to which we contribute). (Maton, 2014, p. 53)

An agent's habitus therefore evolves through their experiences within a field only slowly. This is very different to an agent's capital, their position in the field: it is *immediately* constructed by the field where they are operating. That is, an agent's capital is defined by what attributes that agent has that are useful in a given field at a given point in time, usually the immediate present. An agent's capital reflects what is happening in the field while the agent's habitus reflects what is happening in the agent. The durability of Habitus is important for understanding the distinction between Habitus and Capital notwithstanding the enormous role of an agent's habitus as the source of their capital in a given field.

e. Capital and First Nations australians

Walter (2010) argues that Bourdieu's social, cultural and economic capital framework for explaining individual life chances neglects to include a fourth category she calls race capital: "Bourdieu's focus was social class ... Yet race also delineates

structural and structuring position, theoretically independent of cultural, economic and social dimensions." (p. 47) Race can operate as a "medium of social inclusion" for those agents designated White and of social exclusion for those operating as non-White; thus it is "a powerful *social* category" (p. 47):

> Societally produced and reproduced race is still a potent explanatory of why one group, distinguished by skin colour, culture or place of origin, differ in life chances to others. Race as a social relation of power is underpinned by a society's system, usually entrenched, of racial stratification. Population differentiation into… (hierarchically ordered racial groups) establishes the capital power of a particular race position. (Walter, 2010, p. 47)

Walter's conceptualisation contends that in colonised nations like australia, race capital is highest among those least "raced" or, in other words, those operating as most White:

> Australia's racial hierarchy and pattern of race capital conference emerge from distinct race infused histories and interaction practices. These reflected, and reflect, colonisation and its processes of possession/dispossession, privilege/disadvantage and entitlement/marginalisation. Those currently and historically at the top, Anglo-Australians, vary widely in their allotted social, cultural and economic capital, but share race capital position. Positionings across lower gradations, mostly migrants from non-English speaking countries, change over time. … The Indigenous place at the bottom remains, as does the shared level of low and embodied race capital. (Walter, 2010, p. 47)

Walter brings Bourdieusian concepts and race and Whiteness theory together by examining their operation in specific, entire nations. The fields within which she examines "race capital" are colonised societies as a whole, such as "Australia", rather than smaller fields of endeavour where what is valued in people is weighted differently. With the term *race* capital Walter thus labels how an individual or group of people in the australian colonised nation might be graded according to their level of Whiteness. This is not a binary White/non-White value. Rather, she contends, Whiteness and the race capital attached to it are ordered from the most White, the dominant, normed group of euro-celtic australians, through to those who are less

White, according to shifting race values, and ending at the bottom of the hierarchy with Indigenous people who rank as least White in australia (Walter, 2010). Thus, in those fields of endeavour where euro-settler ethnicity and non-Indigeneity are assumed norms distinguishing Whiteness from non-Whiteness, race capital resides in those operating as White/non-Indigenous and, within colonising nations, is most absent in that group deemed Indigenous. In this way Walter's race capital concept encompasses colonial realities and deficit discourses affecting those raced as non-White and Indigenous; she seeks to make visible the embodied capital in those "unraced" whose advantages attach directly to being seen as White and to assuming privileges of Whiteness.

Walter's race capital and its correlation to Whiteness provides one conceptual link between Bourdieu's system and the *White colonial habits* lens also applied to this research: Walters refers to *deficits* in capital experienced by First Nations people as a population group in australia. This analysis correlates with the structural effects of White colonial habits on First Nations experience outlined in previous chapters. However, this thesis will use Bourdieu's system for a different purpose: to reveal a different presentation of capital embodied by First Nations people and other australians. That is, it will make visible capital operating within specific fields of creative endeavour where First Nations Culture and identity are recognised and valued.

To that end, this thesis will identify and apply three connected (but distinct) fields of australian theatre categorised by the extent to which they involve and represent First Nations theatre, stories, people and Culture. This research will therefore reveal First Nations symbolic, social and cultural capital (FNCC) embodied in those agents able to claim First Nations identity, knowledge and/or belonging; FNCC exists and is recognised to different extents and categories according to the australian theatre field where those agents are operating. This recognition of First Nations-specific nonmaterial capital in First Nations people and communities (FNCC) upends how Bourdieu's ideas have been used to assume that cultural capital resides mostly with (or even characterises) White/middle-class groups of people. Instead, Bourdieusian nonmaterial capital embodied by First Nations people and valued in First Nations creations is recognised in this framework and activated

because of the First Nations (or First Nations connected) fields of endeavour where these creative activities are taking place. The australian theatre fields identified as appropriate for contextualising FNCC this way will be discussed shortly alongside other literature about australian Indigenous creative capital. But first it is necessary to discuss how Habitus is viewed by some scholars in relation to First Nations colonial experience.

f. Habitus and First Nations Standpoint

First Nations standpoint theories have emerged from Indigenist and feminist scholarship further adapted by Indigenous theorists in australia such as Dennis Foley (2003), Walter (2010) and Moreton-Robinson (2013; 2009). Foley has developed an Indigenous Standpoint Theory combining Aboriginal philosophy "that treasures mother earth" (2003, p. 47) with an emancipatory remit privileging First Nations voices, needs, relationality and knowledge systems/epistemologies. Similarly, Moreton-Robinson details how Indigenous Women's Standpoint incorporates interlaced Indigenous ontology, epistemology and axiology amid shared colonial experience. Connectedness and belonging to country underpin knowledge systems and ways of knowing that involve reciprocity, cooperation and humility about knowledge held (2013). These epistemological elements in turn inform the axiology of Indigenous Women's Standpoint to require acting with relationality, accountability and communal responsibility:

> An Indigenous woman's standpoint is ascribed through inheritance and achieved through struggle. It is constituted by our sovereignty and constitutive of the interconnectedness of our ontology (our way of being); our epistemology (our way of knowing) and our axiology (our way of doing). It generates its problematics through Indigenous women's knowledges and experiences acknowledging that intersecting oppressions will situate us in different power relations and affect our different individual experiences under social, political, historical and material conditions that we share either consciously or unconsciously. (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 340)

Key to Indigenous Women's Standpoint, Moreton-Robinson argues, is shared social positioning within colonised societies:

> All Indigenous women share the common experience of living in a society that deprecates us. We share the experience of having different cultural knowledges. We share in the experience of the continual denial of our sovereignties. We share in the experience of the policies of dispossession. We share our respective countries' histories of colonisation. We share the experience of multiple oppressions... These ways of knowing and experiencing generate the problematics of Indigenous women's standpoint. Such a standpoint does not deny the diversity of Indigenous women's individual concrete experiences. Rather it is where our shared knowledges and experiences within hierarchical relations of ruling and power converge and are operationalised. (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, pp. 342-343)

Moreton-Robinson's explanation here suggests that Indigenous Women's Standpoint is only that which is found in common across Indigenous women's experience of being, doing and knowing; therefore, unlike Bourdieu's Habitus, Indigenous Women's Standpoint as described by Moreton-Robinson transcends lived experience unique to an individual. This focus on universally shared experience thus indicates *a singular* Indigenous Women's Standpoint for developing research methods and paradigms that serve First Nations people and resist colonial agendas of the academy. This is even though Moreton-Robinson acknowledges here that Indigenous women's "individual concrete experiences" are diverse (2013, p. 343).

Walter (2010), who has published with Moreton-Robinson on Indigenous methodologies which reference Standpoint (2009), addresses Standpoint slightly differently from Moreton-Robinson when linking it to her race capital arguments. Walter alludes to the specific, individual nature of each First Nations person's standpoint. This is seen for instance in the words "how we see our*selves*" and "personal identity location" in her description of Standpoint as a broad concept: each agent's standpoint develops via lived experience that is individual and particular, notwithstanding common experiences, oppressions and modes of enculturation shared by First Nations australians:

> Standpoint encapsulates our position, who we are and how we see ourselves in relation to others and to society. Within this, our perceptions and world views are not neutral, objective understandings but moulded by the filters of our experiences

> and circumstances and our social, cultural, economic and personal identity location. (Walter, 2010, p. 53)

Walter posits here that because Standpoint and Worldview are created through individual experience and social circumstances they have significant overlap with Bourdieu's concept of Habitus: "Standpoint, therefore, to a certain degree, is analogous to Bourdieu's concept of the habitus." (Walter, 2010, p. 53) Standpoint "is the epistemological, axiological and ontological frameworks" which differentiate how a First Nations researcher or economic actor perceives and operates in a given field compared to the behaviour, actions, interpretations and responses of someone who is non-Aboriginal. (Walter, 2010, p. 53). In this way Walter argues for a universal First Nations People's Habitus in the same way that Moreton-Robinson argues for a distinct Indigenous Women's Standpoint—both based on commonalities of experience, belief systems and collectivism. Their positions are more nuanced than that, however. Focusing on academic researchers, Walter maintains there is difference across and between First Nations' people's standpoints even while their like positions in "social space" create commonality:

> From an Indigenous position in four-dimensional social space these (epistemological, axiological and ontological) frameworks will, almost inevitably, vary from those of non-Indigenous researchers. This is not an essentialist statement. Indigenous researchers will have diverse and divergent standpoints, but their underpinning epistemological, axiological and ontological frameworks will also reflect their similar position in space. (Walter, 2010, p. 53)

This suggests that First Nations Habitus, as a like term for First Nations or Indigenous Standpoint, can be collectively distinguished from one or more habituses that are not held by First Nations people.

This explanation does not conflict with Bourdieu's insistence that Habitus is formed in and embodied by the *individual* according to specific personal experience so that no two habituses are identical. Bourdieu's application of Habitus to his field theory acknowledges that some agent's habituses are more suited to the doxa of particular fields than others. Like experience, such as those of people within particular classes, having particular tastes and dispositions, and thus commonalities

across their respective habituses, equip them *en masse* for particular fields. Thus, while habituses are specific and individual, it is commonalities of people's habituses—those dispositions which are similar and the same—which group people together in terms of their expectations and levels of success in certain fields. Thus, Bourdieu's system brings the individual into the social: the effects of these phenomena he describes, despite being embodied in the individual, are structural. In this way, if "race capital" is added to Bourdieu's analysis, as advocated by Walker (2010), commonalities of experience, culture and enculturation across the habituses of First Nations australians (and Indigenous peoples in other colonised lands) could equate to, or be like, a First Nations or Indigenist Standpoint.

Maton (2014), a White south african scholar who does not identify as Indigenous, argues that Bourdieu's Habitus should not be confused with Worldview or Standpoint. Before I discuss his reasons, I note that according to Moreton-Robinson Standpoint and Worldview have evolved from feminist, postcolonial and non-White scholarship to make visible the White patriarchal assumptions of the traditional academy and the assumed power and values of coloniser classes within colonising societies (2013). Maton's thinking on Worldview and Standpoint might therefore reflect his academic standpoint (and habitus) as a non-Indigenous man and the different or lesser visibility of those two phenomena—Worldview and Standpoint—in his life experience. More simply, he might not see, experience, need or use Worldview or Standpoint in the same way that a First Nations scholar would. As a south african social sciences academic, Maton is absolutely attuned to race but not as invested or implicated in the same way.

That said, Maton (2014) warns against equating Worldview or Standpoint to Habitus for two broad reasons. One, he argues that Habitus is more nuanced than Worldview or Standpoint because of its role within Bourdieu's system. This seems like a reasonable position for maintaining the specifics of Bourdieu's detailed and relentlessly refined, interactive framework. More problematic is Maton's second contention that Habituses evolve and Worldviews and Standpoints do not. That is, individual habituses evolve according to effects of changes within a field and the interactions of actors' habituses within that field on each other, whereas, he maintains, individuals' standpoints and worldviews are by definition assumed to be

fixed and permanent (p. 62). I argue that Standpoint and Worldview are themselves evolving concepts; so, to ascribe unchangeability of any group's or individual's standpoint as a defining, operational characteristic of Standpoint is not supported by literature. It is more likely that Worldviews/worldviews and Standpoints/ standpoints evolve too: the worlds and environments where people's positions and lived experience happen, forging their worldviews or standpoints, change. Therefore, the experiences and knowledges of individuals and groups of people having those positions will expand, shift and alter. These interactive evolutions in circumstances and environments, where such lived experience affects choices and practice, could equate to the interactive changes occurring between Field and Habitus in Bourdieu's framework. In these ways these lived experience(s) of agents, or groups of agents, and their standpoint(s) or worldview(s) deriving from those experiences, do have strong overlaps with Bourdieu's Habitus. Therefore, I argue that Walter's contention they are similar, even substantially the same thing, has value.

In fact, Walter's correlation of Standpoint, Worldview and Habitus offers useful insight for examining australian theatre practice in relation to First Nations people. This includes providing another link, alongside race capital, between Bourdieu's frameworks and the Whiteness, Race and colonial realities scholarship drawn on for the *White colonial habits lens* in this research. Walter's aligning of the three terms Habitus, Standpoint and Worldview helps to fold her conception of race capital into Habitus-Capital-Field analysis. Walter's joining of standpoint and race capital concepts to Habitus and Capital therefore also helps me apply Bourdieusian theory to First Nations artists' and audiences' experiences within creative fields.

g. Capital and First Nations creative production

A number of australian scholars have identified Bourdieusian Capital found in First Nations fields of non-academic practice. These include fields of creative and economic production. Walter, as already explained, has applied Capital and Habitus to Indigenous and non-Indigenous research methods within the academy to illuminate problematics of data collected and the value of Indigenist cultural knowledges held by First Nations scholars to research about Indigenous peoples (Walter, 2010). Central to her discussion, however, is the capital *deficit* attaching to

race (and especially Indigeneity) in the broad field(s) of colonised societies. Conversely, this section will examine the ways that other australian, mostly First Nations, scholars have identified the *positive* capital attached to Indigeneity, especially in such smaller fields as those of Indigenous economic, cultural and creative production.

Dennis Foley (2017), already cited for his work on Indigenous Standpoint (2003), argues social capital inherent in First Nations relationships, kinship systems and networking constitutes a key element of Aboriginal capital within First Nations enterprise: "Aboriginal capital begins in this connection between people and generations not found to the same extent within colonial society." (2017, p. 76) His framing of Indigenous social capital in this way denotes that First Nations entrepreneurship is a distinct field of business practice where Aboriginal capital is activated and visible.

Foley defines social capital in business fields generally as "the stock of resources for entrepreneurship perceived available to an individual through the strength of normative and structural ties within a group" (2017, p. 64). Elsewhere, he and O'Connor (2013) cite Nahapiet & Ghoshal's (1998) general social capital definition derived from Bourdieu as the one they apply to First Nations entrepreneurship:

> (W)e… define social capital as the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilized through that network . (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243)

Foley & O'Conner (2013) add into their definition of social capital, to make it specific to First Nations entrepreneurship, that First Nations entrepreneurs' social capital exists largely because of shared understanding of—and expertise in surviving—colonial oppression:

> Social capital for Indigenous entrepreneurs is the actual and potential resources embedded both within and available through their own socio-cultural networks that

> to a large degree are determined by their experience of colonisation and the contemporary socio-cultural environment within the dominant society, as well as their ability to function outside of or within structures of cultural oppression often born of negative stereotypes. (Foley & O'Connor, 2013, p. 270)

Social networking, Foley maintains, "is the social interaction aspect of social capital's structural dimension" used by Aboriginal entrepreneurs and integral to their success as business operators (2017, p. 64). Social capital "is a development based on the Indigenous entrepreneurs obtaining resources from their social networks that allow them to survive" (2017, p. 67). Foley implies thus that knowledges, Standpoint and networking, which comprise Aboriginal capital within Indigenous fields of enterprise, are additionally necessary and activated because those fields operate within colonial societies steeped in colonial practices. Because of these oppressions he attests that "Aboriginal capital is an intrinsic asset tangible to the Indigenous and will always remain intangible to the coloniser" (2017, p. 81).

Such invisibility of Aboriginal capital to settler-colonisers in australia aligns with both Walter's race capital, where non-Whiteness constitutes a lack of capital in colonial domains, and White solipsism and virtue literature informing the *White colonial habits* framework for this thesis. However, the case of *The Secret River* in Chapter 4 and anecdotal conversation data in later chapters, suggests non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist creatives do see Capital embodied in First Nations people's habituses. The problems this awareness creates—because it arrives through non-Aboriginal/White/settler-colonist lenses and desires—emerges further through the later conversation data chapters. This includes cultural, social and symbolic capital non-Aboriginal creatives perceive in First Nations people for their own agendas. These forms of FNCC destined to be colonised are related but different to Foley's more narrowly defined Aboriginal Capital attached to Indigenist Standpoint and which he declares is invisible to colonisers (2017).

Unlike Foley, other scholars identify First Nations *cultural capital* in Indigenous creative practice and include that which is valued by non-Aboriginal as well as First Nations audiences and consumers. For instance, Bamblett, Myers & Rowse's edited book, "*The Difference Identity Makes: Indigenous Cultural capital in*

Australian Cultural Fields" (2019b), applies Bourdieu's framework to First Nations creativity in six australian cultural fields: music, sport, documentary film & TV, literature, heritage/museums and visual arts. Each field, in line with Bourdieu's definition of a field, is comprised of its institutions and actors plus assumed ideas about legitimate conduct and activity and what commodities, abilities and objects are considered *valuable* (Laurie Bamblett, Myers, & Rowse, 2019a). Bamblett *et al.*'s interpretation of what can constitute a Bourdieusian field (2019a) includes all of australian society and its economy as a field within a global social and economic field. This overlaps with Walter's application of Bourdieusian Capital, whereby she argues that First Nations identity and experience can undermine operation of those forms of capital for First Nations people living and working in the broad field of australian contemporary settler-colonised society. Bamblett *et al.* and their contributing authors, while acknowledging that fields can mean entire societies, are however more concerned with smaller, specific fields of activity; they examine specific, creative fields where First Nations Culture is recognised as valuable, thus activating a distinct variant of cultural capital that is identified as First Nations/Indigenous.

> [W]ithin any field of Australian culture, it is possible for a person or institution to mark certain objects, words, images, persons or practices as being either Indigenous or nonIndigenous and then to assert the distinct value of that which is marked 'Indigenous'... To the extent that the 'Indigenous' object, words, images or practices are recognised – by agents within the field – as having value by virtue of their 'Indigenous' character, then 'Indigenous cultural capital' emerges" (Laurie Bamblett et al., 2019a, pp. 21-22).

Each field, they argue (following Bourdieu), is a site of struggle over what is to be valued—especially as new actors assert and embody new distinctions.

Much of the writing in this collection highlights Indigenous cultural capital (ICC) contained in creative cultural production of artistic *items* and cultural entertainments plus ICC in the Indigenous cultural *capability* to make and reproduce these valuables. However, Xu (2018) interprets Indigenous cultural capital (ICC) in First Nation's children's literature as "cognitive acquisition and

competence in deciphering cultural codes" (2018, p. 13) such that ICC "transforms the distinctive value of embodied or possessed cultural knowledge into an agency for personal empowerment in the process of cultural and social production" (2018, p. 14). In this way Xu foregrounds the power that nonmaterial forms of Indigenous capital afford individual agents in an Indigenous/First Nations creative field because of both their unconscious and recognised Indigenous cultural competence (operating as cultural capital). Ginsberg and Myers (2006) argue that First Nations painters in traditional communities do more than reflect "kin and country": they might also "take on a far larger cultural and political *load* as part of Indigenous cultural capital" (Ginsburg and Myers, 2006, pp 105-106). Xu (2018) and Ginsberg & Myers (2006) thus recognise that First Nations people often bear cultural responsibility attached to their Indigenous cultural capital.

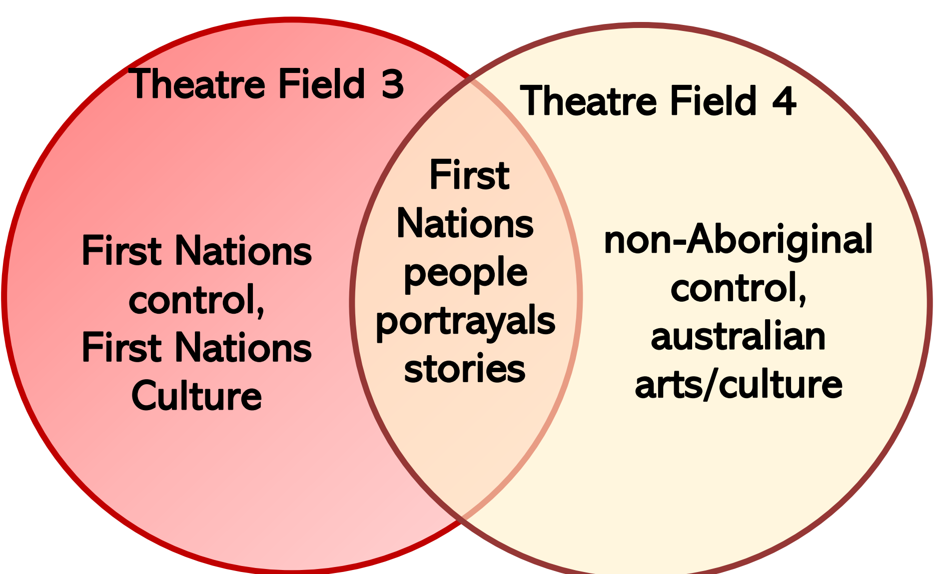
Meanwhile, Bamblett *et al.* (2019b) attest that ICC arises in Australian cultural fields through the emergence of professionals empowered by their possession of Indigenous knowledge, via life experience or acquired through study. Bamblett *et al.* (2019a) argue that those best able to embody and enact First Nations knowledges constituting ICC are First Nations people themselves. They (2019a) also note a distinction between Indigenous people when seen or framed as a *population* (that is, described via statistics and deficit narratives within a colonial australia) and as a *people* or *peoples* (described in terms of Culture and cultural attributes and arts-making valued within a colonial australia). As such they highlight an apparent cultural capital paradox occurring in how australia claims First Nations peoples' Cultures as part of the "Australian" culture/Culture and yet fears, stymies and erases them. This paradox is fuelled further by the power of the disadvantage narrative which Bamblett (2019) argues is how Aboriginal people, throughout childhood and beyond, hear themselves distinguished from settler-colonists.

h. Bourdieusian fields and First Nations theatre

For this thesis I am designating four intersecting and overlapping fields of australian theatre practice in relation to First Nations theatre stories. The broadest field, within which the other three sit, is *(1) australian theatre* or Theatre Field 1. A smaller field within Field 1 is labelled simply (2) *theatre engaging First Nations*

stories or Theatre Field 2. All the theatre-making in Field 2 requires access to First Nations nonmaterial/cultural capital (FNCC), whereas all theatre in australia outside Field 2, at this point in time, does not. Field 2 comprises two smaller fields whose distinctions are key to this thesis: (3) *First Nations theatre* (Theatre Field 3) and (4) *theatre engaging First Nations stories which is not First Nations theatre* (Theatre Field 4). There are crucial differences between these two smaller fields in practice and doxa and therefore what Capital is most valued between them. They mark how some of the practices and theatre made in the broader Field 2 constitute First Nations theatre (Field 3) and some do not, instead characterising Field 4. The relationship and distinctions between the four fields can be illustrated using Venn diagrams, beginning with this one illustrating Theatre Field 2 and the two smaller fields which comprise it:

Figure 6.3: Field 2 – Theatre engaging First Nations stories (Field 3 + Field 4)

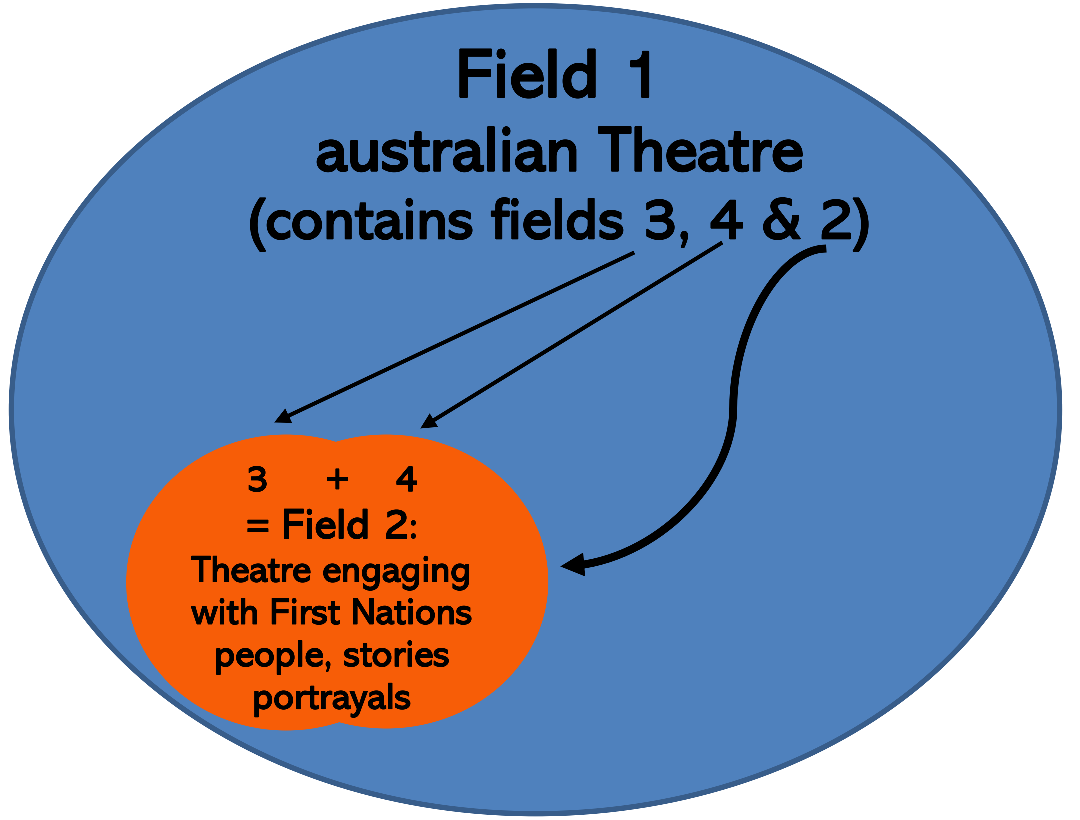


As indicated in Figure 6.3, Field 2 encompasses all theatre works and practices which draw on First Nations theatre capital (constituting FNCC) because they involve First Nations people, stories and portrayals. Where Field 3 and 4 circles overlap indicates the elements, including capital, that theatre across both fields 3 and 4 use. The overlap is not meant to suggest that some theatre works straddle both fields 3 and 4. Rather the overlap describes what those different creative productions have in common: that they use First Nations stories. This distinguishes those two fields from

the rest of australian theatre. The two fields using First Nations stories, or capital, when collapsed into one field comprise Field 2. In Field 2 all theatre works being made invoke the need to apply appropriate protocols and/or cultural consultation because First Nations people and realities are being represented. The smaller Field 3 encompasses those works made under First Nations control; as such they constitute Indigenous theatre and therefore are First Nations Culture. Conversely, those works and practices in Field 4 portray and/or explicitly cast First Nations people and/or draw on First Nations experience and/or stories. However, Field 4 works are not made under First Nations control and therefore they do not constitute Indigenous theatre under the definition developed in this thesis. Nor do they constitute First Nations Culture. They are simply part of australian arts culture. The distinction between "capital C" Culture and the non-capitalised culture used in this Field 2 diagram is explained further in the next section of this chapter (6.iii) exploring meanings of culture. Those culture/Culture differences are another important element distinguishing First Nations or Indigenous theatre (Field 3) from non-Aboriginal theatre which portrays First Nations people (Field 4).

As already outlined, theatre fields 2, 3 and 4 are part of the larger, broader field of *australian theatre* (Theatre Field 1). The relationship between them is illustrated on the next page in another Venn diagram, Figure 6.4:

Figure 6.4: Theatre Field 1, australian theatre, containing Theatre Field 2

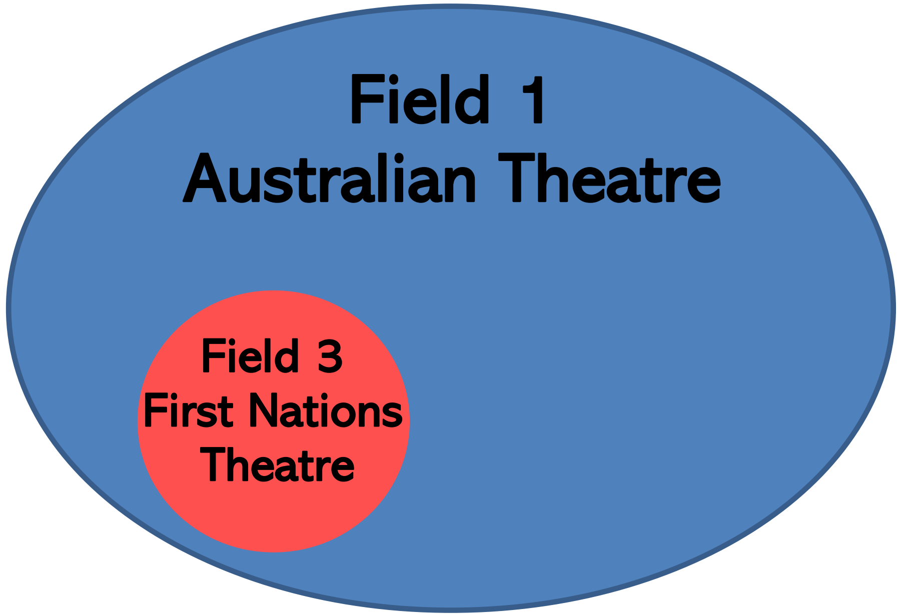


The entire Venn oval in Figure 6.4, including both the blue and orange areas, constitutes Theatre Field 1 *australian theatre*. The blue area indicates that australian theatre activity which does not engage First Nations stories or invoke application of First Nations arts protocols. The orange area indicates the australian theatre activity which does. Theatre indicated by the orange area is part of Field 1: *australian theatre* but represents the smaller field within of Theatre Field 2: *theatre engaging First Nations stories*. As already said Field 2 is made up of Field 3 *First Nations theatre* and Field 4 *Theatre engaging First Nations stories but which is not First Nations theatre*. The size of the orange area is not proportional; I'm not attempting to represent the comparative volume of Field 2 to Field 1 (*australian theatre*). However, I have placed the orange area, Field 2, in the bottom left quadrant of the overall australian theatre field to suggest the marginalisation of First Nations stories and perspectives under ongoing colonial history. That said, with growing appreciation of First Nations creative practice and new federal government 'First Nations First' arts policy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023), we might expect Field 2 to shift closer to the australian theatre field's centre. The shape of Field 2 might change also as Field 4 (non-Aboriginal theatre about First Nations people) becomes a smaller component of it. The accuracy of these predictions, however, can only be established over time as shifting policies, resources and updated protocols take effect.

Meanwhile, I acknowledge that it is arguably simpler and equally valid to collapse Field 4—theatre engaging with First Nations stories which does not meet this thesis's tests of being First Nations theatre—into the broader field of Field 1 *australian theatre*; that is, to not distinguish it as a separate field from all australian theatre. However, as I go on to illustrate, acknowledging this particular arena of practice as a specific field helps to identify different workings of First Nations Capital (FNCC) across both those fields, 3 and 4, where First Nations people and stories are represented. Field 4 is an important phenomenon and concept for discussing problems of the non-Aboriginal theatre maker. That said, it is also useful to set Field 4 aside momentarily to map distinctions between First Nations theatre and the rest of australian theatre. Those two fields can be represented by Figure 6.5, on the next page. This Venn diagram separates out that australian theatre which is First Nations theatre and thus Culture (Field 3) from Field 1. Field 4 is not marked here but

instead, for a brief time in this thesis, is collapsed into the rest of Field 1, australian theatre. That collapsing of Field 4's theatre-making in that occurring in Field 1 is valid because (1) that is how the Field concept, and this set of fields, operates – fields can overlap infinitely and some fit within others, and (2) Field 4 has practices, creative leadership and other forms of nonmaterial capital found in Field 1 but may often be working without key FNCC/creative-Culture which is crucial, and more salient as, Capital in Field 3.

Figure 6.5: First Nations theatre field within australian theatre



It is useful to identify what could influence the rankings of capital operating across the two fields in this diagram, remembering of course that Field 3, First Nations theatre, is a component of Field 1. To illustrate the range of capital, habituses and institutions influencing practice in each of Field 1, Australian Theatre, and Field 3, First Nations Theatre, I have listed key operating elements for each field in two tables (6.1 and 6.2). The first, 6.1, is on the next page. These lists are not exhaustive but broadly indicate people, resources, processes, laws and organisations at play. The tables include theatre makers and other agents with varying habituses and embodied economic and nonmaterial capital. Also present are non-agent elements affecting the doxa and economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital operating in each field. They include institutions, funding bodies, legislation, theatre companies and theatre story traditions. They in and of themselves can constitute

capital too, or their operation and influence can make other elements capital, depending on the field. These tables are somewhat dense, untidy, domain ontologies populated with everyday, rather than Bourdieusian, descriptors of what agents encounter in those fields. Their purpose here is to suggest the range of elements (including agents) that occur in each field and which are valued differently according to each field's distinct objectives, practice and doxa. It is important to note, again, that all elements in the First Nations theatre field occur also in the australian theatre field because First Nations theatre sits within the larger field. However, what ranks as Capital and how that Capital is ranked varies according to whether it is operating in the smaller field of *First Nations theatre* or the broader *australian theatre* field. (See Table 6.1, next page)

Table 6.1: Elements of theatre-making in Field 1 Australian Theatre

Theatre makers	Stories/audiences	Spaces/leaders	Public structures
Directors / artistic directors Performers Designers Playwrights / dramaturgs Cultural consultants Stage & prod managers **Sub-categories of maker-agents applied in the field**: Non-specified/general/all; Men, women or people of non-binary genders; LGBTQAI+; Young, emerging, mid-career or established; White/anglo-celtic/non-CALD; 1st or 2nd gen immigrant, English as 2nd language, of Asian, non-euro, african, middle eastern descent, practising non-Christian religions and associated cultural dress (such as Muslim women), CALD; First Nations, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; People of South Sea and Pacific Islander descent; Non-Aboriginal theatre makers with First Nations cultural competence and/or collaboration experience; Regional/remote artists; People of diverse abilities incl. hearing, mobility and vision impaired, cognitively divergent.	**Genre and creator options according to project:** Australian: by australians for australians; First Nations theatre; Non-australian creation but australian staging/prod; Imported production; Comedy, drama, musicals, physical theatre, dance, Shakespeare, 18th, 19th, 20th century euro plays, non-euro traditions, First Nations stories. **Genres and stories by and for the following audience categories:** Non-specified. Men, women or of non-binary gender; LGBTQAI+; Children, young adults. White/settler/non-CALD; 1st or 2nd gen immigrant, English as 2nd language, of asian descent, of non-euro descent, of african descent, of middle eastern descent, practising non-Christian religions and cultural dress, CALD; First Nations, Aboriginal, and/or Torres Strait Islander; People of South Sea and Pacific Islander descent; Regional / remote; Audiences of diverse abilities.	**Companies, stages and artistic directors:** Mainstage capital city; Mid-ranked; Fringe and alternative practice; Youth (e.g.: ATYP); CALD-focused; First Nations-led (e.g., Yirra Yaakin, Mooghalin, Ilbijerri) and those companies' leaders; Regional; Public funded long-term; Self-supporting (via ticket sales and corporate philanthropy). **Training:** Major and 2nd tier institutions: performance, dramaturgy, playwriting, arts management, design etc. E.g., NIDA/ UNSW, WAAPA/ECU, VCA / MelbU, WollongongU; Open entry non-pro classes city & country; Group specific programs (e.g.: diverse abilities, low SES, regional, CALD); First Nations specific & led programs.	Government arts policy and funding (federal, state, local govt) incl. annual budgets; Regional Arts Fund; Australia Council; State arts bodies (e.g., Create NSW, Arts Queensland); Regional Arts Development Organisations (RADOs); Access and diversity policies; Youth arts policies; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts (Panel of Australia Council, formerly Aboriginal Arts Board); Australia Council First Nations Arts Protocols 2019; State-level First Nations arts policies, protocols and initiatives; Arts advisory boards at various levels, with varying agendas and purpose-specific expertise; Unions and professional representative bodies; Culture, heritage, IP & industrial relations laws.

The broad field of *australian theatre* represented in Table 6.1 includes arts bodies, all forms of theatre-making organisations, audiences, citizens voting in and out arts-friendly governments and people who do the work of making and presenting theatre on australian stages. Skills to make theatre for australian audiences and people who have those skills are valued and recognised as being, having and embodying australian theatre capital. This includes creatives with appropriate knowledges, especially First Nations people, to make First Nations theatre and theatre with First Nations themes. How First Nations stage story skills are valued or operate as Capital continues to shift in the broad field of australian theatre as First Nations narratives' and theatre makers' positions in this larger field change.

As I have already explained, within the field of australian theatre sits a narrower field, *australian First Nations theatre* (Field 3). This field of theatre-making engages only in making and delivering theatre which meets the tests already outlined, and which continue to be refined throughout this research, of what constitutes First Nations theatre. First Nations theatre is made by and for the benefit of First Nations people, for or inclusive of First Nations audiences and under First Nations control, methodologies and initiative. Table 6.2, mapping elements of this First Nations theatre field, Field 3, is on the next page.

Table 6.2: Elements of theatre-making in Field 3 First Nations Theatre

Theatre makers	Stories/audiences	Spaces/leaders	Public structures
Required for practice in field of First Nations theatre: Australian First Nations, Aboriginal, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander: Directors / performers / artistic directors / designers / devisers / playwrights / dramaturgs / stage & prod managers / cultural consultants. **These sub-categories of non-Aboriginal TMs/maker-agents are not required for FN theatre practice but may be active and activated in the FN field:** Non-specified/general australian theatre makers (TMs); White/anglo-celtic, non-CALD; Non-Aboriginal theatre makers with First Nations cultural competence and/or collaboration experience; Non-Aboriginal TMs without FN cultural competence or collaboration experience; People of Pacific and South Sea Islander descent; Those who are CALD, of asian descent, of non-euro descent, of south & central american descent; of african descent, of middle eastern descent, practising non-Christian religions and cultural dress (such as Muslim women), 1st or 2 nd gen immigrant and / or those whose 1st language is not English; Men, women or people of non-binary genders; LGBTQAI+; Young / emerging, mid-career or established; Regional/remote artists; Those of diverse abilities such as hearing impaired, mobility impaired, vision impaired, cognitively divergent etc.	**Required for practice in field of First Nations theatre:** Works by one or more australian First Nations, Aboriginal, Indigenous and/or Torres Strait Islander practitioners including: Directors / performers / designers / dramaturgs / devisers / playwrights / stage & prod managers / cultural consultants / artistic directors. Made under control of First Nations people and in collaboration with australian First Nations, Aboriginal, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander communities whose stories are being told. Made for (key audiences): australian First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. **Not required for FN definition but often present:** Additional categories of First Nations audiences and communities portrayed: Men, women or people of non-binary gender; LGBTQAI+; children, young adults, adults, 26-40, 40+, 55+; urban / regional / remote; audiences of diverse abilities; English as 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th language. Non-Aboriginal audiences and people portrayed: White / anglo-celtic / non-CALD; 1st or 2nd gen immigrant, People whose 1st language is not english, of asian descent, of non-euro descent, of african descent, of middle eastern descent, Muslim, CALD; People of Pacific and South Sea Islander descent. **White/non-Aboriginal genres used in FN Theatre** Comedy, drama, musicals, physical theatre, dance, euro-traditions, Shakespeare, 18th, 19th, 20th century euro plays, non-euro/asian traditions.	**First Nations theatre companies:** For example, Yirra Yaakin, Mooghalin, Ilbijerri and their leaders. **Non-FN theatre companies (often needed for programming and collaborations):** Mainstage capital city; Mid-ranked; Fringe and alt practice; Youth (e.g., ATYP); CALD focused, Regional; Public funded long-term; Self-supporting (ticket sales and corporate philanthropy). **Training:** First Nations specific & led programs Major and 2nd tier institutions (performance, dramaturgy, design, playwriting etc). E.g., NIDA/UNSW, WAAPA/ECU, VCA/ MelbU, WollongUni; Actors Centres; Non-pro drama training city and regions.	**First Nations-specific:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts (Panel of Australia Council, formerly Aboriginal Arts Board); First Nations specific government arts policy and funding (federal, state, local govt.) incl. annual budgets; Australia Council First Nations arts protocols; State-level First Nations arts policies, protocols and initiatives. **Other bodies operating in the FN theatre field but not FN focused:** State, federal, local access and diversity policies and programs; Youth arts policies; Regional Arts Fund; Australia Council; State arts bodies (e.g., Create NSW, Arts Queensland); Regional Arts Development Organisations (RADOs); Arts advisory boards at various levels, with varying agendas and purpose-specific expertise. Unions and professional representative bodies; Culture, heritage, IP & industrial relations laws.

This Field 3: *First Nations theatre* table, 6.2, contains the same categories of skills, people, habituses, institutions and capital sources as listed for the general australian theatre field. However, the ways particular institutions and non-Aboriginal and First Nations agents, their habituses and capital are valued is different. In Table 6.2 I have placed First Nations creatives and other agents plus First Nations organisations, knowledges, programs and protocols at the tops of each column. This is to suggest the greater importance and value (or capital AKA field position) First Nations people, organisations and capital have in the field of *First Nations theatre*. First Nations creative capital (communities, practitioners, spaces, stories, methods, identities, relationships, networks and recognition) is of particular value in this narrower theatre field within *australian theatre* and so constitutes rich nonmaterial First Nations capital or FNCC. Those capital commodities which can be marked and operate as First Nations or Indigenous are crucial to all the field's endeavours and outcomes, including defining that those practices occurring, and products made, in the field are First Nations Culture.

Nevertheless, White/non-Aboriginal capital—including institutions, spaces, theatre craft traditions and practitioners—also operates in the First Nations theatre field. This is because White capital attached to non-Aboriginal creatives or embedded in european theatre traditions is often deployed by First Nations artists to make Indigenous theatre constituting First Nations Culture. Additionally, White/non-Aboriginal arts workers and creatives still control a large portion of theatre-making funds. These interactions between White/non-Aboriginal and First Nations capital in making First Nations theatre, Culture and artistic cultural artefacts become clearer in conversation data in later chapters. Which White/non-Aboriginal resources (people, institutions, venues, funding) are valued and so operate as capital within the First Nations theatre field are subject—as is all capital—to the positioning struggle of Capital and agents within the field. Bourdieu (1977/1972, 1986a, 1996b) argues, and First Nations scholars such as Walter (2010), Bamblett *et al*. (2019a, 2019b) and Foley & O'Connor (2017; 2013) agree, this struggle is constantly underway.

Similar domain ontologies with nuanced variations in capital rankings also apply for Field 4 *Theatre engaging with First Nations stories but which is not First*

Nations theatre and the broader aggregate of fields 3 and 4, Field 2 *theatre engaging First Nations stories*. Acknowledging these three fields makes visible the different forms of capital recognised and active when theatre portrayals and representation of First Nations stories, people and realities are under First Nations control and when they are not. The three fields also acknowledge that many settler-colonist theatre makers, audiences and programmers do not perceive distinctions between Field 3 and Field 4's creative and cultural/Cultural outputs: that, is they do not see differences between First Nations theatre (Field 3) and theatre that is made *about* or involving First Nations people but which is not First Nations theatre (Field 4). Evidence of these flawed theatre maker, programmer and audience perceptions emerge in Australia Council research (Australia Council et al., 2020; 2016) and other literature discussed in Chapter 3, in the reception of *The Secret River* outlined in Chapter 4, and in conversational anecdotes throughout Chapters 7-11.

i. Bourdieusian capital and First Nations theatre

I accept Bamblett, Myers and Rowse's assertion that Indigenous cultural capital (which I call First Nations nonmaterial/cultural capital, FNCC) can arise from recognition of distinctly "Indigenous" practices, images, words or objects (2019a). I emphasise, however, that the power of nonmaterial forms of First Nations capital embodied in First Nations people is further understood with Walter's correlation of Habitus with Standpoint (Walter, 2010). Even more importantly, that power comes from the specific cultural positions, relationships and competencies (social, symbolic and cultural capital) which Xu (2018) and Ginsberg & Myers (2006) argue are required to bear First Nations cultural/colonial load and meet First Nations cultural accountabilities.

From the conversations I have had with theatre makers, all three forms of nonmaterial capital—social, symbolic and cultural—operate in First Nations theatre-making because of the recognised cultural value of First Nations people's knowledges and authority to share those knowledges. These First Nations forms of nonmaterial capital held by First Nations people relate to First Nations knowledges generally, to knowledge of First Nations stories and experience, and to knowledge of community

accountabilities. They also relate to relationships a First Nations person has and the authority they have to give permissions around cultural matters because of the position they hold within a First Nations community. These symbolic, social and cultural attributes include an agent's understandings of their own family lineages, of relational expectations within their mob, between language groups and families and cultural and other accountabilities First Nations agents have to their communities.

Attributes which Bourdieu calls "embodied cultural capital" (a category of his broader "cultural capital" concept) are key to First Nations storytelling. First Nations theatre makers can bring embodied cultural, symbolic and social capital to practice because of their habituses. These comprise knowledges, ways of being and ways of acting acquired consciously and unconsciously from living as Aboriginal people and within First Nations communities. Non-Aboriginal theatre makers seek capital embodied in a First Nations person, because they perceive that Aboriginal person, even if not steeped in a First Nation community's traditions, would at least be versed in its expectations. That Aboriginal person's cultural competence and authority to provide advice is important capital to a non-Aboriginal theatre maker wanting to work with First Nations stories. This capital is mostly cultural but also imbued with social and symbolic capital because of others' perceptions and the importance of community relationships. Those "others" whose perceptions determine social or symbolic capital can be First Nations community members, for instance, or non-Aboriginal creatives or audiences, depending on who the agents are in a given theatre field where theatre about or for First Nations people is being made or sought after. My application of Bourdieu's concepts in this way will be clearer when viewed through their multiple appearance in Chapters 7 to 11: especially as made visible through non-Aboriginal theatre maker behaviours.

Bourdieu's framework also acknowledges that personal attributes and networks might operate as cultural and social capital in some fields but might not be constituted as such in other arenas of practice or among other sections of society. Thus, where or when cultural attributes and social networks rank as capital varies. This is significant for First Nations theatre makers. Their competence and authority to meet First Nations cultural and community accountabilities constitute crucial cultural capital for making Indigenous theatre. However, First Nations creatives'

habituses, and their ensuing creative capital, are not always recognised as theatre capital across the broader field of australian theatre. This reality will further emerge in the conversational data in Chapters 7-11.

j. Bourdieu lessons

In the chapters that follow I apply Bourdieu's system of Habitus-Capital-Field=Practice to understanding conversations undertaken for this thesis research. His nonmaterial capital concepts—cultural, social and symbolic—make visible the cultural, and potentially economic, value in First Nations theatre Culture and practice. Bourdieu's recognition of *embodied* nonmaterial capital—cultural, symbolic and social capital attached to a person or community and enacted by them—is important for understanding First Nations cultural/nonmaterial capital (FNCC) exercised by First Nations creatives and community members. These forms of capital integral to making First Nations theatre/Culture arise largely from what a first Nations person knows (about First Nations Culture alongside general theatre traditions), who they know (and who knows them), and who they are (or what position they occupy within one or more First Nations communities).

Bourdieu's concept of Field, describing distinct areas of endeavour, location or society, denotes that specific nonmaterial capital (such as FNCC) operates in some places and for some tasks and creative production categories, but not in or for others. FNCC embodied by First Nations theatre makers is thus currently most salient in the smaller field of First Nations theatre-making (Field 3). That said, non-Aboriginal creatives wanting to make theatre portraying First Nations people in productions which are not First Nations theatre (Field 4) will also value FNCC embodied in First Nations people. They might, however, not be the same forms or manifestations of FNCC that are valued and deployed in First Nations theatre practice. These different applications of FNCC according to the field in which the capital is deployed emerge also in the anecdotal conversations in data chapters 7-11. Meanwhile, First Nations identity in and of itself is capital in some creative fields and not in others. This marking of "Aboriginality" as capital (or not capital) can be experienced as a racialisation in either scenario. Other First Nations theatre capital, including social,

cultural and symbolic, are equally prone to disappearing and reappearing as the agents who embody them move across arts fields.

Alongside Bourdieu's Fields, Habitus is equated by some scholars to their concept of Standpoint and Worldview. All three conceptualisations involve an agent's dispositions, preferences and values emerging from their sum of life experience, identity and life circumstances. There are nuances between what phenomena each of the three concepts comprise and how they affect social systems and collective and individual choices and actions. All three can support the key Bourdieusian idea that a person's habitus, or to others, their standpoint or worldview, make operating in some Bourdieusian fields easier than in others. In one differentiation from the other concepts, Habitus is made salient, Bourdieu says, by Field. A person's habitus is therefore linked to what nonmaterial capital they embody and in what situations this capital exists, can operate or is required. Bourdieu's Habitus recognises the capital embodied in whom a person has become and what they will think and do as a product of their experiences and Culture.

Bourdieu's research originally identified the cultural, social and symbolic capital French middle class people (thus those usually operating as White) embody to succeed in a range of social education and artistic fields. His ideas are diverted in this research to acknowledge First Nations nonmaterial capital (FNCC) operating in First Nations knowledges, Cultures, stories, relationships, leadership, lore and artistic practices. This includes FNCC embodied in First Nations people when those people and their individual FNCC are engaged in First Nations fields of artistic, social and economic endeavour. Such fields where FNCC is needed (or desired) can include First Nations theatre (First Nations Culture) and theatre about First Nations people which is non-Aboriginal arts culture. Under new Federal cultural policy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023) and other recent shifts across the australian theatre landscape, FNCC could be expected to increase in value, salience and volume across the entire australian theatre field. This will be revisited after the data chapters to follow. However, before those conversations with theatre makes, one more framework needs unpacking: distinctions between various meanings of culture.

ii. Meanings of Culture/culture

Theatre maker conversations in this research indicated that First Nations theatre constitutes a particular meaning of Culture/culture distinct from that operating for non-Aboriginal theatre. This section clarifies that difference by examining *culture* meanings across key academic disciplines, as defined by some First Nations scholars and by noting how definitions have changed with such key international organisations as the United Nations and UNESCO. Understanding First Nations theatre-making as Culture (rather than culture) is an important lens through which to see issues of collaboration involving non-Aboriginal creatives.

a. In conversation: Culture loomed large

Before I began researching sociology and anthropology definitions, I recorded these words to reflect what I had already inferred from First Nations theatre maker/co-researchers about how Culture operates in First Nations theatre practice:

> Culture is intrinsically tied to self-hood and identity: to existing and being and to knowing who one is oneself and who everyone else is with whom one interacts. Culture is yes, as dictionary definitions will tell you, artistic materials and phenomena produced by the social, language, nation or identity group of which you are part. But it is much more. It is the materials, understandings, stories, relationships, customs, habits, values, spiritual modus operandi, legends, ancestral knowings, persistent knowledges and inherited wisdoms which are valued, protected, reproduced and adapted for the purposes of identity survival, perpetuation of a robust society and the self-hood of the individuals, social and family groups within it. It can collectively comprise the ways by which a group or person understands their identity or knows that they exist. It's how a group knows who they are and what meanings they derive from being alive: from existing. (Nankervis, 2020)

This understanding came from speaking with First Nations theatre makers even though we rarely discussed Culture/culture per se by name as a topic. But it was always in the room. I recorded that paragraph before I had engaged with euro-descendant and First Nations theorists' writings on culture/Culture. Literature

across disciplines supports this understanding of Culture acquired in my conversations about theatre. It is one of two culture/Culture definitions important for making distinctions between theatre practices in this research.

b. Two key meanings

Many discourses on ideas around the word ‘culture’ begin by saying that there are numerous meanings attached to the word (Jenks, 2005; Schafer, 1993, 1998). Renowned sociologist/anthropologist, Raymond Williams (1985), attests that is it “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (p. 62). That said, there are two key distinctions in how the word culture can be understood that help identify when theatre portraying Indigenous Australians is First Nations theatre. Williams (1958, 1981, 1998) was an early scholar to separate these two important ideas of culture/Culture: one being about how people live their lives or what has come to be known as the “way of life” definition of Culture; the other important meaning he describes is those arts and high culture activities such as paintings, theatre production, opera, song, performance and literature which are often performed by arts specialists. That is, culture can also mean and is often understood as the *product*s and *artefacts* produced by members of an all-encompassing ‘way of life” Culture (1958, p. 93). Williams maintains that the two conceptions need to be understood and acknowledged together.

The distinction between these two meanings of Culture/culture has become important to the United Nations in its work around cultural rights: in 1980, UNESCO’s Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies said that henceforth understanding of culture would move from arts and cultural products making to the more profound idea of Culture as determining ways of life, systems of meaning and worldviews:

> ...[I]n its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs. (UNESCO, 1982)

Aligned with this profound/life-ordering concept of Culture, Geertz (1973) argues that having Culture is an essential condition for human existence and this need for Culture is what makes us human (pp. 49, 52). He also notes that while Culture is universal and operates within and across a people, its effects are held individually, enable individuality and have deeply personal meaning not universally articulated (p. 37).

Through-out this thesis I capitalise the noun Culture to denote UNESCO's 1980 definition and these scholars' "way of life/essential to exist" meaning. I use a lower case "culture" to represent that other idea of culture as the artistic products of a Culture. I use lower case for all meanings of the adjective "cultural" and adverb "culturally" relating across culture and Culture definitions so that meaning for those words is indicated by context.

c. First Nations Culture vs settler-colonist arts/culture

In the conversations I had with First Nations theatre makers I was struck by the significance First Nations theatre has as Culture compared to the role that theatre plays for non-Aboriginal Australian artists and audiences. The different position of theatre seemed to represent those two broad ideas of culture: First Nations theatre as Culture is part of profound sense-making/way of life functions for First Nations people, while non-Aboriginal theatre for non-Aboriginal people functions as culture in the more peripheral, less profound way that art does. As Noongar theatre maker, Kyle Morrison, put it:

> Aboriginal theatre is a microcosm of contemporary Aboriginality.... [O]ur Culture, our theosophy is expressed within our guts... I don't think theatre is just art for Aboriginal people; because... it still speaks to our blood. (K. Morrison, 2017)

The work of two First Nations researchers confirms that Culture, including arts/Culture-making, is in First Nations communities both a profound driver of way of life, knowing and identity, and a palpable presence demanding respect, attention and nurturing from those who embody it. Dharawai, Dhunguttie and Gomilaroi educationalist Shayne Williams (S. T. Williams, 2007) cites western scholars who

describe that meaning of culture/Culture to be an all-encompassing code of life and existence. He argues further that for First Nations people he knows, Culture is a worldview based on values of First Nations people; it ascribes communal responsibilities and a collective, rather than individualist, sense of purpose. AIATSIS's Djangadi CEO Craig Ritchie (2019), describes First Nations Cultures as "adaptive sense-making" systems that underpin "our engagement with the world around us" and provide meaning, a system of ideas and worldview that enables orientation to a range of environmental and social contexts. He contends that First Nations Culture will always be present when two or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people are together: because they will find a unique way to embody First Nations identity, values and ways of looking at the world. Aboriginal Culture, Ritchie attests, is produced and sustained by the social action of Aboriginal people and the work Aboriginal people do together. "It exists and it is there first" (2019).

d. Defining lessons

These definitions provide context to the complex, culturally driven process by which First Nations people create First Nations theatre with respect for community accountabilities, cultural sensitivities and cultural safety. Both those *processes* and the *outcomes* of them can be ascribed as First Nations Culture. That is, such work is (1) profound Culture-making, (2) experience of Culture existing as a phenomenon by itself and (3) the power of an undeniable, palpable Culture at work in the most profound sense of Culture. This test of Culture being at work and also being made helps to distinguish between First Nations theatre and that theatre which portrays or casts First Nations people but is not First Nations theatre.

These different ways of understanding culture/Culture in First Nations theatre vs the broad field of australian theatre *not* addressing First Nation realities provides a lens through which to understand the conversations had for this research. These distinctions are probably not new ideas to those working appropriately within First Nations theatre and Indigenous communities generally. However, theatre maker anecdotes in later chapters will show there are non-Aboriginal/White artists attempting theatre about First Nations colonial experience who do not appear to

understand the Cultural significance of First Nations stage stories or the cultural safety considerations therefore arising. This is even though major arts bodies such as the Australia Council, through their Aboriginal arts units staffed by First Nations practitioners and bureaucrats, prepare and share advice for non-Aboriginal practitioners on those issues.

iii. Conclusion: frameworks for hearing conversations

Four broad frameworks for seeing Culture/culture have been introduced across this thesis to inform the conversations which will follow in Part III: Voices of Theatre Inquiry. This chapter added the last two of these frameworks for analysis going forward. Bourdieu's concepts of nonmaterial Capital—cultural, social and symbolic—in relation to his other key concepts of Field and Habitus will identify the economic and cultural value of First Nations Culture and of the First Nations people who embody, make and deploy these phenomena in the fields of First Nations theatre, theatre using First Nations stories and the more generalised field of australian theatre. Those nonmaterial categories thus arising from First Nations people and First Nations cultural and creative activities, knowledges and relations will be called First Nations cultural capital or First Nations nonmaterial capital or First Nations cultural, social and symbolic capital or First Nations cultural/nonmaterial capital (all being used to mean the same thing here and represented by the initialis FNCC). The label I use for this framework is *First Nations nonmaterial capital/FNCC*. Secondly, two broad distinctions within the word culture/Culture have been outlined. Alongside FNCC concepts, they will help identify value in cultural work undertaken and will distinguish between the various forms of australian theatre which portray and/or employ First Nations people. That framework is labelled *meanings of culture/Culture*.

Two other, related cultural frameworks were addressed earlier, in Part I: Landscape of Theatre Inquiry. Beliefs in race and the related power of Whiteness discussed in Chapter 1 explain and predict colonising behaviours across the australian theatre landscape. These theories identified White colonising desire, the "ontological expansion of white privilege" and assumptions of ownership (Sullivan, 2006), the ongoing colonial project (Foord, 2004; A. Moreton-Robinson, 2006), the

persistence of a "zero-point epistemology" myth driving colonial imaginations (Castro-Gómez, 2007; Mignolo, 2009; Puch-Bouwman, 2014) and how belief in White virtue/benevolent White acts deludes settler-colonists from seeing themselves as actors in persistent White, colonial power structures (Ahmed, 2004; Macoun, 2016; Macoun & Strakosch, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This theory framework is labelled in this thesis *White colonial habits*.

The *artistic freedom* framework explored in Chapter 2 examines myths and truths about how artistic freedom is understood and what needs to be in place for a community to have it. Belief that artistic freedom operates equally across White/settler colonists and First Nations communities is exposed as a solipsistic delusion. However, theories of what constitutes artistic freedom (including United Nations thinking on cultural rights) are useful for identifying when First Nations theatre as Culture is being made, what elements are present to ensure the cultural safety of those engaged in this work and the implications for First Nations communities when theatre about them is produced and they are not the intended audience.

These four lenses: *White colonial habits*, *artistic freedom*, *First Nations nonmaterial capital/FNCC* and *meanings of culture/Culture* illuminate the knowledge shared by First Nations and non-Aboriginal theatre makers in the conversations which follow across the next five chapters.

PART III. VOICES OF THEATRE INQUIRY

The conversations I had with theatre makers for this research began in the east coast states of Victoria and NSW and then moved to Western Australia. As will become apparent, there is divergence in the post-1970 east and west coast histories of First Nations theatre storytelling. These differences appear linked to the level of engagement of First Nations theatre audiences and the kinds of collaborations which occurred on each coast through the eighties, nineties and into this millennium.

As each conversation is a separate event occurring in the recent past, I use mostly past tense to report our discussions. This acknowledges that the views theatre makers have expressed and the realities they have described to me could already be changing with shifts underway in the australian theatre landscape. Additionally, I will be using the words 'said' and 'told me' when reporting what theatre makers conveyed to me, rather than using more complex academic verbs; this is to keep my framing of their words as neutral as possible. They have *told* me what they have seen and know; I, as an academic, might argue, contend or posit what their words mean for my thesis.

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7. MESSAGES FROM REDFERN

i. Introduction: theatre makers speak… and question

Two theatre makers I met separately in Redfern, Sydney, early in my inquiries each expressed concerns about plans I had as part of my thesis to write a play on australian First Nations themes. Those early Redfern-based message bearers were a non-Aboriginal verbatim playwright, who has worked with First Nations theatre makers and communities to tell their stories, and a key Aboriginal performing arts organisation leader, theatre maker and academic.

ii. Liza-Mare Syron

Dr Liza-Mare Syron is a First Nations theatre director, actor, drama teacher, dramaturg and academic with family ties to the Birrbay (or Biripi) people of NSW's Mid North Coast (Syron, 2020). Dr Syron was Co-Artistic Director of Moogahlin Performing Arts when we met and was still in that role when this thesis was submitted in 2023. At the time we spoke in 2015 she was an academic at Macquarie University and had been a guest lecturer and dramaturg at NIDA for about ten years. In 2020 Syron became Senior Scientia Lecturer at University of NSW and at the time of thesis submission also held the position of Co-Associate Dean Indigenous in UNSW's Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture (Syron, 2023). Before University roles Syron was head of theatre performance at the Eora College for Aboriginal Studies and then senior Aboriginal cultural development officer at Arts NSW. Dr Syron co-founded Moogahlin Performing Arts, located at Carriageworks, hosts the bi-annual Yellamundie national Indigenous playwriting festival. Sydney-based Moogahlin is one of three First Nations controlled capital city theatre-making organisations in australia alongside Perth's Yirra Yaakin and Ilbijerri in Melbourne. Syron has directed, mentored and been dramaturg on a range of mostly First Nations theatre work. She has published on actor training, Indigenous theatre practice, inter-cultural performance and theatre and community development (Syron, 2020). Syron is therefore theatre practitioner, theatre leader and theatre academic. Her recently published book, "*Rehearsal practices of Indigenous women theatre makers: Australia, Aotearoa, and Turtle Island*" (2021) follows a three-year project she undertook across three continents

“investigating the every-day practices of contemporary Indigenous theatre makers from inside the rehearsal room… (and) employing Indigenous standpoint theory, specially an Indigenous woman’s standpoint” (2021, p. 2).

At the start of our conversation Syron said she was reticent to “hand over” all the depth of insight she had around my questions, even though she believed in making knowledge free and accessible. My questions, however, were about work Syron had undertaken for more than a decade drawing on long-held, intuitive knowledge.

> We’re sitting down and you ask me a question and I’m able to give you an answer; but I may not be ready to because I need to own that. Sometimes you can do ten years of work and then you just give that over: ‘Well, this is what I’ve discovered’. I used to do that. I used to just give it away… But at the moment I’m at a point where I’m discovering things I’ve always intuitively known but I’m only now at a point of being able to articulate it deeply. So maybe what we can talk about is some surface stuff? (Syron, 2015).

Syron’s stand made visible the value of knowledges held by her as a First Nations theatre maker and academic: her knowledge was First Nations Cultural Capital sought by non-Aboriginal people, such as me, wanting to work in the First Nations storytelling and research field. Notwithstanding the limits set, Syron imparted understandings that were new and of greater complexity than I had knowledge of before our meeting.

Syron wanted to know what work I was planning and why I wanted to address First Nations issues. What was my interest and what were my credentials? Why did I want to write a play about First Nations experience when I was not a First Nations person myself? These questions shaped our conversation and shifted the direction of my thesis research.

We established that I did not want, as Syron put it, “to be complicit in the Silence” (2015). This was the Great Australian Silence and forgetting named by Stanner (1969, 2009) to label White/non-Aboriginal ignorance and denial about colonial truths affecting the broad australian narrative at least up to the 1970s. But

my *desire* to counter colonial silencing was not adequate for what I wanted to do or for understanding why such unilateral non-Aboriginal theatre-making intentions were problematic. "It's a start," Syron told me; but it was not enough. In fact, Syron warned me, this research to problematise non-Aboriginal theatre makers could have the reverse effect of further problematising First Nations people in the eyes of non-Aboriginal australians (2015). This effect arises out of another Great Australian Silence made visible in our discussion: that imposed on First Nations artists and communities as part of White colonial habits.

a. White portrayals and Great Silenc*ings*

Syron noted that non-Aboriginal creatives have often depicted First Nations people as part of the landscape of a White story. In these portrayals Aboriginal characters are two dimensional: they have little to say or do or are being rescued by White benevolent heroes. This, Syron explained, exemplifies another Great Australian Silence: the silencing of First Nations voices:

> That's been going on since Katharine Pritchard - the black that doesn't speak. That's the Great Silence. When non-Aboriginal people are interpreting those perspectives, you don't even have a voice. My uncle (actor/director Brian Syron) used to fight for it; Gary Foley used to fight for it. It's been going on since dot. (Syron, 2015)

This was not a Silence exercised by the dominant White society in what they *did not say* (to each other) but a Silence imposed *on* the colonised around what they might safely say without repercussion. As evidenced in Whiteness and artistic freedom discourses referenced in previous chapters, even if there are *benevolent* intentions by those with a White voice, the cultural, material and political rights of those with less access to being heard will always be threatened. A key problem attached to the non-Aboriginal playwright wanting to portray First Nations realities is the voice and means they have to do so when many First Nations artists do not.

Syron noted that if she raised problems that First Nations theatre makers and audiences experience in the australian theatre landscape she and the rest of the First

Nations theatre-making community would be labelled as "whingers". Syron said Aboriginal theatre makers and performers are called "troublemakers" if they speak up in rehearsal rooms about cultural consultation, cultural appropriation and First Nations community expectations. She was therefore concerned that my framing of this research, even though well-intentioned, could be used detrimentally against those First Nations theatre makers most courageous about identifying issues. Syron cautioned that being viewed as honest and not automatically compliant to non-Aboriginal theatre makers' creative desires can affect a First Nations artist's standing in the australian theatre industry. This would be another form of silencing, representing control and epistemological violence (Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Spivak, 1988, 2006) experienced by First Nations artists constantly required to make economic- and culturally- loaded judgements and choices around the work they do in an opportunity-starved industry (Casey & Syron, 2005). It also suggests an ongoing lack of cultural safety endured by First Nations theatre makers when they work with non-Aboriginal people.

Syron acknowledged these and other problems occurring in projects under White control but urged me to find examples of good collaboration to talk about: appropriate work made through cooperation and partnership between First Nations and non-Aboriginal theatre makers, programmers and sponsors. All five of the non-Indigenous theatre makers I conversed with for this research had track records of making ground-breaking theatre collaborations created under First Nations control or where the Aboriginal voice of the playwright or person being portrayed was paramount.

b. Collaboration is necessary

Syron said First Nations theatre-making leaders have shifted from identifying what is not working in the general theatre landscape to what First Nations and not-Aboriginal creatives are getting *right* when they cooperate in First Nations stage storytelling:

> It's really easy to position it as this great divide or "they're always doing it wrong" when in fact there are some great relationships and collaborations that probably also need to be spoken about; so we don't come off as looking like we're not happy with the way White people represent us on stage or in film, because I think it's more complex than that. (Syron, 2015)

Syron said framing First Nations and non-Aboriginal theatre practice as essentially divided further problematises First Nations theatre storytelling and storytellers: it was important to recognise cooperation and mutual interest between First Nations and non-Aboriginal theatre makers, rather than division, because of the tenuous nature of leading creative lives whatever an artist's cultural identity. Making First Nations theatre representing First Nations viewpoints for First Nations audiences, Syron noted, still requires collaboration and co-productions with non-Aboriginal people: because of the structure of the Australian theatre landscape; this is especially so for the allocation of resources and theatre-making and presenting spaces.

> For a start-up company like Moogahlin, for example, we need to co-produce. That's our model, because we recognise that there are a lot of other people out there who have the resources that want to assist in the development of Aboriginal work and that's our mandate, to develop Aboriginal work. We can't do it alone right now, so we need to work with people who want to work with us that have got a good history of working with Aboriginal work and people. (Syron, 2015)

Syron named Carriageworks, one of australia's largest multi-arts venues, as an important non-Aboriginal partner committed through its Reconciliation action plan to provide opportunities for Aboriginal artists and theatre makers. This includes co-hosting the Yellamundie First Nations playwriting festivals with Moogahlin. But not all production partnerships in recent australian theatre-making have been ideal…

c. Our own terms vs Big Money take-overs

One of the resourcing issues compelling First Nations theatre makers to work with non-Aboriginal theatre companies and venues is, simply, space.

> There's not one Indigenous company in this country or in New Zealand or Canada that has their own theatre space and land is a contested issue. We do not have our own space to tell our own stories. (Syron, 2015)

Since I spoke with Syron, the Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre Company has moved into refurbished premises in Subiaco, Perth, with the company's own stage. Ilbijerri and Moogahlin still rely on work they produce being hosted, co-produced or programmed by other, non-Aboriginal theatre companies and venues and even Yirra Yaakin seeks other venues because their Subiaco premises are not ideal for all the work they do.

At the same time, while First Nations theatre makers and companies accept the need to collaborate, Syron said they also need opportunities to work separately from non-Aboriginal people to develop appropriate cultural processes, including meeting accountabilities to communities and ensuring cultural safety:

> We're still working out our own stuff. We sometimes need space to do that and we need to do it for ourselves. That's when people start getting a bit funny about it, "Oh, why do you need your own space?" and "Why do you need to do that for?" It's because we need to work this out ourselves. (Syron, 2015)

Syron thus indicated she has experienced White resistance when she or other First Nations creatives have sought dedicated cultural space, metaphorically and physically, away from the White gaze and White control of resources. This suggests that some non-Aboriginal people contest what First Nations people say they need to undertake creative work involving First Nations Culture. Syron's words here, and earlier comments about "troublemaker" and "whinger" labels, demonstrate it can be culturally unsafe to make such a cultural request or demand. Cultural safety for First Nations creatives is therefore less certain when non-Aboriginal people are in the equation; this includes because non-Aboriginal/White people assume their norms and timelines must be answered to.

Syron said money was also an issue for providing First Nations creative space: funding a dedicated First Nations theatre venue would cost millions, "That's arts

dollars" said Syron, indicating those funds were scarcer and more precious than dollars allocated to other economic activity. Another money problem can occur when a well-resourced producer takes over a project initiated by Yirra Yaakin, Moogahlin or Ilbijerri but does not co-produce with them. In this way outside organisations overlook the risks taken and resources expended first by smaller, First Nations companies:

> We're doing all the development. Like Yellamundie: spending money on residencies, getting ideas out, supporting individuals, and then when a play gets to a certain point, along comes the big producer, you know, "We can put all this money into that!" Recognition needs to be made to the companies that have already invested from the beginning, in individuals and in their work; (the big producers) need to come to Ilbijerri or Yirra Yaakin, and co-produce with them, and allow the Aboriginal company to make artistic decisions about how that show's going to be produced. (Syron, 2015)

Alternatively, when big money does allow First Nations theatre makers and leaders to control creative and cultural decisions, the burden can be huge because the stakes become so high.

d. Pressures of leadership

Syron said the contribution of big White benefactors to First Nations theatre-making does not make an equal relationship. Aboriginal people appointed to leadership roles in big arts organisations are often underprepared and overwhelmed:

> You're often thrust into those positions because they're there and somebody has to do it. A lot of Aboriginal arts workers suffer from anxiety because there's just so much pressure on them to succeed. Those positions need to be filled by the right people; but the right people haven't always got the right experience or qualifications or skills. And there's very little time once you're in those jobs to develop those skills. It's on the run. (Syron, 2015)

Moves to expand First Nations theatre-making capacity and leadership came out of the 2010 National Indigenous Theatre Forum (Syron, 2015). The biennial

Yellamundie First Nations Playwriting Festival was a priority within that plan and the company that Syron co-led, Moogahlin Performing Arts, took over the role of delivering it, despite herself and the other three directors only undertaking their Moogahlin roles on a part-time basis. Another element in the plan was developing First Nations arts leadership through creating positions where First Nations people with arts experience could be mentored as leaders. Rising numbers of emerging Aboriginal dramaturgs were also increasing the power of First Nations theatre voices (Syron, 2015).

At the same time, Syron said, non-Aboriginal dramaturgs able to work with First Nations stories and provide mentorship can help build First Nations theatre capacity. An example was the roles playwright Alana Valentine and dramaturg Peter Matheson had played at the Yellamundie Indigenous Playwriting Festival held shortly before our conversation. But the case had to be made for their involvement: Matheson was mentoring a young Aboriginal woman in dramaturgy as part of the festival workshop program and Valentine had recognised ability to work with First Nations people and stories:

> Alana works with Aboriginal people so it's a no-brainer; she has that experience and she has the proper process of working and there's not a bad word said about her in the sector so, it would be silly to ignore those skills and her experience. (Syron, 2015)

Thus, appropriate collaboration involving a non-Aboriginal person is more likely to happen when: (1) they have capacity and understanding to work respectfully with First Nations people gained through collaboration experience; (2) they have highly developed and recognised skills in theatre-making they can share with First Nations people in the theatre-making process; and (3), as a result of these two factors, their involvement will build capacity for First Nations creatives. That is, those First Nations colleagues of non-Aboriginal collaborators will become independent theatre makers, mentors and arts leaders themselves, if they aren't already.

This approach contrasts with examples raised by theatre makers in later chapters where no capacity building of First Nations people and communities occurs.

Instead, First Nations participants remain indebted to the non-Aboriginal person leading the theatre-making project made with and about them. This can include the outside non-Aboriginal creative claiming authorship. Almost always in these problematic structures First Nations communities and people do not develop capacity to make their own work separately from that theatre maker or other non-Aboriginal producers. Appropriate collaboration thus requires that non-Aboriginal theatre creatives are contributing White capital to make themselves less needed over time in First Nations storytelling spaces.

I argue also that non-Aboriginal artists' (1) ability to work appropriately with First Nations people, emerging from experience doing so, is a form of learned cultural understanding which in many cases amounts to acquired First Nations nonmaterial/cultural capital (FNCC). At the same time, White/non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist theatre makers with (2) highly recognised theatre skills and access to resources and infrastructure, can bring these forms of White capital to First Nations story making. Settler-colonists' capital can thus arrive into Indigenous creative spaces mostly as non-Aboriginal/White cultural, symbolic and economic capital. However, depending on those non-Aboriginal theatre makers' cultural experience, the capitals they bring might also involve them having acquired FNCC. Additionally, whatever the genesis of the capital attached to White/non-Aboriginal collaborators it can be transformed by how it is deployed. White creative capital can become First Nations cultural/creative capital (FNCC) when it is controlled and directed by First Nations artists, people and communities operating according to their individual and collective First Nations habituses. This capacity for creative capital to transform is one of the key arguments and points of analysis arising from the Bourdieusian FNCC framework I present in Chapter 6 for understanding what theatre makers have shared with me.

e. First Nations actors: identity persists beyond casting and content

As has been noted by others, including Fredericks (2013), being Aboriginal is not identity which can be picked up or put down according to location or task. When a First Nations person is cast in a non-Aboriginal role, Syron said, they do not cease

to be Aboriginal; that is because they will always bring cultural knowledge, experience, context and responsibility to the work, whatever it is about:

> You can never escape your Aboriginality; it is who you are at the core of your being. You will always bring yourself to a role. (Syron, 2015)

Syron said Aboriginal actors performing across the canon of euro-american and euro-australian theatre and film are sometimes quoted saying: "I'm not an Aboriginal actor, I'm an actor". They are not arguing, she said, to dispense with their Aboriginal identity and selfhood; they're saying just because I'm an Aboriginal actor doesn't mean I can only play Aboriginal roles (2015). They are resisting, I infer, a White hubris they sense in the industry: the notion that First Nations creatives cannot access an imagined eurocentric zero-point epistemology (Castro-Gómez, 2007; Mignolo, 2009) in performance as easily as can non-Aboriginal actors.

Syron has written about rehearsal room dynamics in Indigenous theatre-making (2021)and theatre creation not under First Nations control (Casey & Syron, 2005). Issues in rehearsals, almost always in those controlled by non-Aboriginal creatives, can include the problem of cast members being called upon to act as *ad hoc* cultural consultants on matters raised by a script or other theatre work. Syron told me that First Nations artists had become better at articulating the cultural consultant issue as a problem than they used to be and as a result companies are better at understanding it:

> Before it was just a feeling, there's something wrong here. It takes a while to work out what it is that's wrong and then talk about it amongst your peers and then get to a point where you have a consensus about what's wrong. Then you're able to articulate it as a sector; and then everybody's on the same page so we're not just fighting these battles individually. (Syron, 2015)

Meanwhile, First Nations communities expect First Nations theatre companies to get their processes culturally "right"; this is a major part of the work First Nations companies do and does not always come easily (2015).

f. Accountability, protocols and cultural consulting

First Nations theatre companies, Moogahlin, Ilbijerri and Yirra Yaakin, have "ongoing continuous cultural maintenance" and consultation work expected of them in addition to the theatre-making tasks undertaken by all stage companies (2015). They are more obligated, Syron said, to do this work correctly and face repercussions from First Nations communities if they don't:

> We struggle to get it right because we have a stronger obligation to get it right and so when we don't, we get a lot of... kickback, I guess. It's the hardest part of the work. And it's the most important part of the work. And you have to do that work on top of the artistic and administrative work that you do. All this cultural consulting: making sure everybody knows what's going on, making sure they're doing the right thing; the stories that are being told or the type of work that's done, the community needs to know about it because our stories belong to all Aboriginal people in a way. (Syron, 2015)

This complex and significant work is often invisible to non-Aboriginal people looking into First Nations theatre from the outside. There is also a collectivism driving this cultural process. The stories First Nations theatre companies tell on stage about First Nations people's experience—contemporary, historical or traditional/dreaming–belong to Aboriginal communities, not the theatre companies that choreograph, script and stage them (Syron, 2015). Ownership of cultural and creative products is recognised differently to how copyright, production rights and authorship operate in non-Aboriginal theatre-making. Knowing these distinctions is important cultural knowledge. Knowing how to work between these two sets of creative ownership, responsibility and sharing/delivery principles is key First Nations creative capital (FNCC). This dual work might be invisible to most non-Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, it seems First Nations people working in the arts, as also articulated by others in this and later chapters, universally accept responsibility to First Nations communities as a given which is inseparable from the creative process.

This cultural responsibility involves additional labour by First Nations' artists. In this work they deploy their embodied FNCC including knowledge for communicating appropriately with communities. This cultural work involves more tasks and time; however, when Syron and I spoke, there had been no push for First Nations theatre arts workers to have a cultural pay loading acknowledging this. Community accountability means the work must be done regardless:

> You still get paid the same as everybody else; but your work has got that part of it because, at the end of the day, you go home to your community. So, you can't escape. You'll run into someone in the street and they'll go: "Hey, I heard about this thing, what's that about?" And you've got to go well you know, "Ra ra rrrrrr ra". But if you let people know along the way, then you're not going to get corralled in the street or you're not going to hear bad talk about you. It's not to say that's always the outcome; but if you let the right people know, who have the right position within the community, then they'll do that work for you. (Syron, 2015)

g. Where the Australia Council protocols come in

When Syron and I met, the 2007 edition of the Australia Council's Arts protocols for working with First Nations people and culture had been operating for about eight years. Syron said the advice in the Australia Council protocols was based on how First Nations people work so they, First Nation theatre companies, were the most obligated to follow them:

> They were written, yes, to show non-Indigenous producers how to work with Indigenous material. They were ground-breaking at the time, but now they're just a starting point. They actually articulate the way in which we work. So, the people who have the most obligation to practise protocols in their work are the Aboriginal companies. Because we are held to account by our communities whereas non-Indigenous companies aren't. (Syron, 2015)

Syron doubted that the Australia Council Indigenous protocols were used generally by non-Aboriginal companies, except where First Nations staff were

employed there or they had taken on an Aboriginal work. She wished that non-Aboriginal people would take on this responsibility more often:

> The only time we ever see them being in practice is when there are Aboriginal people working in those companies. And then again, what tends to happen is the Aboriginal people are given those responsibilities to implement; when in fact, now I'm talking about Reconciliation stuff, that work (Reconciliation) is about non-Indigenous people taking responsibility for implementing those things. I understand that sometimes people go: "Well, I don't know any Aboriginal people and I can't pick up the phone and call Uncle Max like you can," and "I don't know the right thing to do," so they're just handed over to the Aboriginal workers. (Syron, 2015)

In this way, non-Aboriginal creatives were missing—or avoiding—opportunities to learn how to work with First Nations people and stories appropriately and so build learned First Nations cultural and creative capital (as FNCC). Without seeing into rehearsal rooms, Syron said, it was hard to know if non-Aboriginal companies were applying the protocols:

> Once the work's up, yeah, you can put on a smoking, you can do a welcome to country, that's easy. But the work that happens in the rehearsal room when you are dealing with those issues, and you are talking about those issues, that's really where it's important that those protocols are followed. It's really hard to see evidence of that because it's behind closed doors. (Syron, 2015)

Meanwhile, Syron said, there was growing understanding among new generations of non-Aboriginal people moving into the arts. Since 2010, she said, there has been greater integration of Aboriginal Studies into school and University curricula. Syron predicted that the next wave of new non-Aboriginal theatre makers will have greater cultural competence and they'll be ready to tackle different, newly complex and more nuanced issues which will arise.

h. White desire to portray colony and race

Syron warned against playwriting and general race relations discourse in australia presenting the middle class as villains. In words reminiscent of what Rachael Maza had said at the 2015 Australian Theatre Forum, Syron told me that just because non-Aboriginal people have taken on false ideas they've been fed and "moulded" to believe about Aboriginal people "doesn't necessarily mean you're a bad person or that you should be beaten up for it." She said the issues are "more complex" than mere outcomes of White middle class arrogance and ignorance (2015).

Anyone making theatre, Syron said, should be clear about for whom they are making that work. She wanted to know for whom I would be writing a play. Who was my audience? I said my playwriting would be aimed at non-Aboriginal audience members such as me but that I would want what I was presenting to have approval of First Nations people: audiences and theatre makers. I wanted my play to present ideas that First Nations people would want conveyed to non-Aboriginal australians. Syron urged me to stick to telling non-Aboriginal stories, perhaps critiquing White privilege, if I didn't want to make the errors I was critiquing in this research:

> This is your story; this is not an Aboriginal story. I don't think you should even try and tell an Aboriginal story. Because that's what you've been saying to me. What do you think about these non-Aboriginal people who tell Aboriginal stories? I mean you're placing yourself right in there with them. (Syron, 2015)

Syron told me not to be concerned that a play of the type I could appropriately make, if produced, might occupy scarce theatre and programming space in the australian arts landscape and would not provide work for First Nations actors:

> That's fine. We're making our own work. You don't have to make work for us. (Syron, 2015)

This fact seems obvious. But this exchange exposed an enduring misconception complained of by theatre makers in Chapter Two: the presumption that non-

Aboriginal artists' intentions to tell stories about colonial experience were always of great value to First Nations theatre artists and people.

i. Lessons of this conversation

Syron showed that a lack of material and nonmaterial White theatre capital—such as White production funds, skills/craft knowledges, spaces and leadership experience—requires most First Nations theatre makers and companies to collaborate with non-Aboriginal organisations and people to stage First Nations stories. These partnerings are an uneasy compromise that First Nations theatre leaders such as Syron accept and want to nurture. But First Nations theatre makers, she said, also need designated First Nations space to work out cultural issues associated with First Nations portrayals. This cultural requirement can trigger non-Aboriginal resistance to being excluded from some First Nations processes and creative areas. Syron's statement here indicates there are cultural safety issues affecting First Nations artistic freedom even around requests to work in culturally safe non-White/First Nations designated environments. First Nations theatre makers must thus manage a range of complex pressures because of the need to work collaboratively with non-Aboriginal artists and companies. These pressures can be exacerbated by non-Aboriginal theatre makers expecting freedom of movement into all First Nations creative spaces.

Syron stressed how important stage-stories made by First Nations people were to the First Nations communities they portrayed or worked with. Accountabilities to communities, and how producers address them, is integral to making First Nations theatre. These ways of working constitute key (embodied) First Nations nonmaterial/creative/cultural capital (FNCC); they are an automatic and accepted given for First Nations artists, notwithstanding the requirements are complex and require much energy and meticulousness to get right. Those practices, knowledges and responsibilities encompass all three Bourdieusian capital categories—social, cultural and symbolic—embodied in First Nations artists and communities. They are key elements both *of* First Nations Culture and *for making* Culture. These

components of FNCC are constantly developing in complexity and specificity as the performance work and the field of First Nations theatre expand and change.

Syron said, during our conversation, that non-Indigenous companies, including mainstream ones, are not compelled to account to First Nations communities for work they stage about them. A clear case of this was the STC's *Secret River* production, funded largely by corporate philanthropy. Where the practices of non-Aboriginal theatre companies have moved to in 2023 requires renewed investigation. However, recent research by the Australia Council cited in other thesis sections (Australia Council et al., 2020, p. 4; Miller & Australia Council, 2016, p. 4) indicates not much has changed in the cultural capacity and creative intent of most australian theatre companies to resource appropriate First Nations theatre-making that engages First Nations communities.

Nevertheless, Syron was adamant that collaborating with non-First Nations theatre makers was necessary and could be positive. She cited the next Redfern messenger in this thesis as an exemplar of the culturally competent non-Aboriginal collaborator with whom First Nations stories could be told appropriately.

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iii. Alana Valentine

Alana Valentine is a non-Aboriginal australian playwright who has created works telling real-life stories, many involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. We met one afternoon in Redfern, Sydney, moving from café to café until we found one quiet enough for us to record our talk. Alana's repeated message to me, before I turned on the recorder, was: "You might not like what I am about to tell you, but the fact is, if you want to write about Aboriginal people's experience you should wait to be asked. You really should wait to be asked." (Valentine, 2015). This advice echoed the words of Melissa Lucashenko quoted in Chapter 3 of this thesis: "Who asked you to write about Aboriginal people? If it wasn't Aboriginal people

themselves, I suggest you go away and look at your own lives instead of ours" (in Heiss, 2002, p. 199). I felt then that Valentine's reasons for seeing me included not only generosity to another artist, but also to ensure I understood the sensitivities around what I wanted to do: that she also wanted to protect Aboriginal people from a non-Aboriginal newcomer who might not be culturally safe to work with.

a. Emerging ally

Valentine was a radio producer before she became a full-time playwright and had conducted hundreds of interviews for making programs. This influenced her verbatim process for making theatre from real experience and oral history interviews (Valentine, 2015). Her first play *Multiple Choice* in 1985 was about a teenage alcoholic. Over the next two decades Valentine supported First Nations actors being cast in her plays in roles not designated as Indigenous (2015). Batjala, Munumjali and Wakkawakka actor Wayne Blair played the Greek lead of Nicolas Pappas in *Run Rabbit Run* and Bidjara, Ngati Porou and Te Arawa actor Deborah Mailman played a non-Aboriginal lead in *The Conjurors,* an early Valentine play staged in Queensland (2015). By the time *Run Rabbit Run*—about the Sydney Rabbitohs trying to re-enter the National Rugby League—played Belvoir's upstairs mainstage in 2004 Valentine was known as a non-Aboriginal australian theatre ally of First Nations people (2015).

b. Aboriginal stories within australian stories

As Valentine developed *Run Rabbit Run* many South Sydney Rabbitohs supporters she spoke with were First Nations people, including one man who told her he identified more strongly as a South Sydney supporter than as an "Australian" (2015). Valentine thus gave voice to First Nations people in this play that was not designated as a First Nations story. Another Valentine play about shared First Nations and non-Aboriginal experience was her portrayal of women and girls who'd been incarcerated in Sydney's Parramatta Girls Home. But this time Valentine began work on *Parramatta Girls* at the request of Aboriginal people: when a former First Nations inmate of the home invited her to a lunch with other First Nations women who had been held there:

> She said to me 'why don't you come along and meet these women and they can meet you and see if they want to work with you.' So, I went to this meeting. There were probably fifteen or twenty Aboriginal elders, women elders, who had been in Parramatta Girls Home; I went 'round and talked to every single one, told them what I was thinking of doing, which was a play about the experience of being in the home and they, one of them particularly I remember her vividly, Marlene, saying to me, 'I'll tell you this story Alana, but I won't tell you unless you promise to put in the tough bits'. And I laughed and said, 'oh Marlene, the tough bits is absolutely what I want to hear'. (Valentine, 2015)

In *Parramatta Girls* more of the characters were First Nations people than in *Run Rabbit Run*; the experience of First Nations women and girls was the focus, notwithstanding non-Aboriginal inmates were also given voice:

> That was a play where being Indigenous or non-Indigenous, the women were saying to me, was of less importance to them in some ways, than the fact that they were incarcerated in the home. There was a shared experience of incarceration that crossed racial lines. Absolutely there was a specific experience that was about the Aboriginal women and they were very clear about that. But at the same time, they knew that I had to get the confidence of all the Parramatta girls – to understand what was common to the Parramatta girls and what was specific to the (Aboriginal) women. (Valentine, 2015)

Run Rabbit Run, Valentine said, was a verbatim play "based on pure transcript". *Parramatta Girls* was based also on transcripts—interviews Valentine conducted with scores of former inmates—but much was changed. Valentine eventually collapsed all the recollections into eight characters' storylines. However, the first version of *Parramatta Girls* in development, and presented to an audience that included her interviewees, was "pure transcript" delivering scores of different stories from the women Valentine had met and heard:

> I interviewed thirty or forty women; I went to a small Aboriginal weekend meeting of ex-inmates. I went to a big reunion out at the Parramatta Girls Home where I met fifty or sixty women, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, observing their interactions and getting permission off the bigger group. Because these women had

> gone thirty years without their story being told or being believed, it was important that the first public flush of that story was absolutely their voices simply being heard. (Valentine, 2015)

Valentine's development process enabled all participants to be heard and to hear themselves. As the play was being created, they could engage in conversations and reflections enabled by early iterations of her work. Valentine's final eight characters, however, had to represent the experience of hundreds (2015). She gave them each two voices: as incarcerated teenagers decades previously plus their perspectives as middle-aged women survivors in the present day. The process involved continuous consultation with the former girls' home inmates, including gaining their acceptance for the collapsed stories (2015).

c. Respect for play subjects: let them see themselves, warts and all

Valentine said her work is never objective; it comes from the subjectivities of working closely with the people and themes her plays are about (2015). This indicates that a reciprocal relationship between Valentine the playwright and the people she portrays develops before or during the consultative theatre-making process. Valentine said her subjective approach "does not yield hagiography" but builds respect to tell the truth to communities about themselves—a respect she said is often only accorded to middle class audiences in Australian theatres:

> My job as an artist and the job of those artists on stage, is to give those people, I really believe it deeply, deeply Kay, I believe they have the human right to look at themselves on stage in all their strength, but in their weakness as well. We do that for middle class audiences who go to the theatre and go, 'oh look, I'm like that you know, or these are my good things and these are my not so good things'. I believe that many people have a right to do that. So, you don't ever, resile from that, those tough choices or tough truths, but you choose your marks. (Valentine, 2015)

Valentine thus said that middle class euro-descendant audiences (the Whitest

of non-Aboriginal australians in class terms) have the greatest access to seeing themselves truthfully on stage than do other classes or groups within australia. They, according to Valentine, have more opportunities via contemporary australian theatre programming to reflect on themselves through the honest, three dimensional, multi-representational ways in which their varied characters and personages are portrayed on australian stages (2015). Valentine's insistence that all peoples "have a right to that" connects with UN cultural rights' rapporteur Shaheed's contention that artistic freedoms, rights and responsibilities of an individual or social group includes being able to see themselves in art (2013, p. 3). That includes that a person or people with artistic freedom have access to conversations through the arts about issues of importance to them. Valentine thus was championing the artistic and cultural rights of non-White, non-middle-class audiences. This consciousness of non-White/First Nations audiences appears missing in the actions and words of many non-Aboriginal australian theatre makers discussed in literature I have examined and conversations I have had. That is, critiques of White/settler-colonist theatre-making and other arts argue that those depictions of non-White characters by White creatives are not made for non-White audiences to see themselves portrayed. Rather, such work is to meet the needs and interests of White/non-Aboriginal audiences wanting to learn about the Other. Unlike Valentine's expressed intention, many other White/settler-colonist playwrights and directors cannot provide First Nations audiences with opportunities to see and reflect upon themselves—nor do they aim to.

d. Two rules

During our conversation, held continuously over the same afternoon but split across three cafes, Valentine reiterated her central, first point several times: that to appropriately portray experiences of one or more First Nations people you need to have been asked to do so by those being portrayed:

> It frames what I said to you way back, it seems like ages ago now, when we were at coffee shop 1, which is: in every case where I have included Indigenous characters or have worked with Indigenous artists, I have always been invited, not simply invited but in many cases, petitioned very, very

> sincerely, ‘please write this story, please do this, please include this because our story hasn't been told’. (Valentine, 2015)

This was repeated when Valentine made her second key point about First Nations collaboration, consultation and control of First Nations stories entrusted to her:

> I always believe, (a), that you should be asked is the first thing; second, that you've got to have Indigenous people in major creative roles. So in *Parramatta Girls*, I was the non-Indigenous writer, and Wesley Enoch was an Indigenous director; so that worked well. (Valentine, 2015)

Valentine stressed this several times: that, when she worked with First Nations stories and people, at least one of the other key creatives—such as director or dramaturg or both—needed to be First Nations:

> I don't get involved in projects unless there's Aboriginal artists. If there's Aboriginal subject matter. If the principals of that, meaning the director or the writer or the producer or someone in that sort of position, isn't an Indigenous person (I won’t get involved). (Valentine, 2015)

e. Telling the White folks: a crisis revealed… and help acknowledged

Valentine’s play *Head Full of Love* came out of her partner’s work in Alice Springs with the Jimmy Little Foundation addressing kidney disease in First Nations communities (2015). When Valentine visited the Alice Springs region she was shocked by how many central desert First Nations people, young and old, were afflicted by kidney disease: many were forced to come off country to undergo dialysis in Alice Springs, Adelaide and Darwin and had shortened lives due to poor kidney health from birth (2015). Valentine approached the NPY (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) Women’s Council and Purple House, an Indigenous-run dialysis clinic in Alice Springs, to ask if she could write a play about the local beanie festival (a Top End kidney disease fund-raising event):

> And they (said) we really want this story of kidney disease to be told. So, I suppose I had the imprimatur of the Purple House, I had the imprimatur of the Beanie Festival, I had the NPY Women's Council saying 'yes'. There are two things I would say to any Aboriginal artist who might question that. And they wouldn't because they can read the acknowledgements (in the *Head Full of Love* play text). But the first is, again, there was an Aboriginal artist who was in the play, Roxanne McDonald, and there was an Aboriginal artist who was the director, Wesley Enoch. And the play again was about the relationship between a pretty clueless non-Indigenous woman and an Indigenous woman.

Valentine offered me a copy of *Head Full of Love* (2014) as a record of how she acknowledged all the members of the local Alice Springs community who helped her create this story. That section is a full page of dense text naming every organisation and individual, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who helped Valentine make contacts and develop understanding to tell this story of the impact of kidney disease on Pitjantjatjara communities. This concluded with special thanks to women elders, and to one elder in particular who had died before the play script was published (2014). Acknowledgement, Valentine indicated through showing this to me, was a key action in appropriate collaborative work with communities: written acknowledgement clearly and permanently attached to the published work. This play, unlike other Valentine work, however, was directed primarily at non-Aboriginal audiences—by having a White/settler-colonist middle class protagonist—with a purpose to raise awareness of First Nations' people's kidney health crisis in the Northern Territory of australia. However, while it was made in ways that spoke to White/settler colonists, it was creative, educational work requested by First Nations people to enable First Nations communities' physical and cultural survival. It appears to have been what those affected communities wanted to say to White australia and White health bureaucracies, albeit, through a White/non-Aboriginal playwright's pen.

f. Verbatim practice: exchanges for making First Nations Culture

Valentine told me that her verbatim practice has developed over decades to ensure that her works reflect respect for (and reciprocal exchange with) the people whose stories she tells. Valentine said the need to account to First Nations communities created positive elements in her work, not impediments:

> My verbatim technique and how that changes your practice, is very familiar to what Aboriginal artists [work with]. When an Aboriginal person makes a work, they can't just do whatever they want. They have obligations to their community and to their culture and I, when I make a play about Souths, I can't just say whatever I like. I keep one foot in the community and one foot in my artistry. So, I suppose why I love working with Aboriginal artists is because they understand that's not a creative impediment but rather a brilliant puzzle to solve – a fantastic thing. Because then when you get it right and the community like it, even if there's grumbling or whatever, it's such a great thing if you bring the community along with you. (Valentine, 2015)

Valentine, without using the Bourdieu-based term, recognised the First Nations cultural-creative capital (FNCC) attached to both the way that First Nations artists work and to the expectations, knowledges and accountabilities of working with First Nations communities. Cultural accountabilities are accepted aspects of a First Nations artist's work; they are not burdens but significant cultural methods and tasks tied up in the cultural significance of First Nations theatre. As Valentine described it: they are not deficits, but creative puzzles which enrich the project. To work with these 'creative puzzles' the playwright stays connected to the community throughout the preparation and telling of the community members' story. According to conversations I have had with other theatre makers, Valentine's collaborative, respectful and adaptive methods are highly valued by communities *and* fellow practitioners with whom she works:

> I have an elaborate verbatim technique which means that extensive consultation is a part of my practice as an artist; that kind of notion of having one foot in community responsibility and one foot in artistic responsibility is endemic to all my work. When it comes to Indigenous work it is simply

> heightened by my cultural awareness; I've been trained up by a lot of blackfellas, trained up in a good way and I guess I have listened. (Valentine, 2015)

Valentine' brings to First Nations storytelling the White creative capital she embodies and which derives from her individual habitus. That is, White capital attached to her ABC work history, her education, her advantages of living as a non-Aboriginal/White person in a colonised australia and many, though not all, of her acquired playwriting skills. Valentine brings, too, acquired First Nations Cultural/nonmaterial Capital (FNCC), also deriving from her unique habitus, and which has been accumulated through working with First Nations stories and people. In this process she contributes both White/settler-colonist and First Nations Capital to the making of First Nations Culture. Her embodied White/settler-colonist economic and non-material capital deployed for making First Nations Culture is thus transformed from being White, potentially colonial, capital into First Nations Cultural Capital. It is so redefined and remade (from being repurposed) because of the counter-colonial work that it does in those collaborative theatre-making situations.

g. Further capital exchange: sharing and building capacity

Valentine's commitment to First Nations theatre artists includes her work to support First Nations *playwrights* and other theatre makers. She has been involved in at least one of the Yellamundie First Nations Play Festivals in recent years as dramaturg. She has also been dramaturg in other projects separate from Yellamundie including Bangarra's *Patyegarang,* about a Darug woman's relationship with non-Aboriginal man, William Dawes.

> What I do is listen. There's a word in William Dawes' diary, a Darug word, Cama, which means to dig. Though we've used the German word "dramaturg" to describe the way in which I've been working with Stephen Page on *Patyegarang*, I think it would be much more appropriate to say I'd been the cama-turge; I've been Stephen's digging tool and reflecting pool and sometimes his Shakespearian fool in this creative journey to honour and imagine into breath these respected ancestors Patyegarang and William

> Dawes ...(in tandem with the work of) an Aboriginal choreographer.
> (Valentine, 2015)

Since our conversation Valentine has also collaborated with First Nations actor Ursula Yovitch to create a rock musical starring Yovitch, *Barbara and the Camp Dogs*, about an Aboriginal pub singer, with her sister and her cousin, making a pilgrimage back to home country in the Northern Territory.

h. Lessons from what Valentine told me: through a Bourdieusian lens

As a non-Aboriginal theatre maker Valentine would not embody the same level of First Nations symbolic, social and cultural forms of capital as someone who is a First Nations creative recognised as Indigenous by their communities and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of australia. However, Valentine has worked on repeated occasions with First Nations people whose story she is telling. Additionally, as dramaturg, playwright or co-writer, she has made plays with recognised First Nations theatre makers such as Wesley Enoch, Liza-Mare Syron, Ursula Yovitch, Rhonda Dixon-Grosvenor, Stephen Page and Yellamundie workshop participants and facilitators. This suggests that Valentine is recognised by these First Nations theatre makers and their theatre communities as someone who works appropriately with First Nations people and has valuable playwriting craft to share. Lisa-Mare Syron said as much about Valentine earlier in this chapter (Syron, 2015). This positive reputation among First Nations theatre makers and communities accords Valentine First Nations symbolic capital recognised and valued within the field of First Nations theatre.

Valentine has also acquired First Nations social capital through her work. This exists in the relationships she has built over time with First Nations people and communities portrayed in her plays—the people whose stories she has shared—and through the social networks she has with fellow theatre makers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in the fields of theatre-making generally and that of First Nations theatre and performance more specifically.

Valentine, though non-Aboriginal, has acquired embodied First Nations cultural/nonmaterial capital (FNCC). This is cultural capacity, in the form of various knowledges and skills Valentine has acquired in relationship with First Nations people. This acquired FNCC enables her to work appropriately with First Nations communities, fellow artists and non-creatives to make work of value to First Nations and non-Aboriginal audiences. This embodied FNCC includes recognition by First Nations theatre leaders that her collaboration practices are appropriate. Valentine's works themselves are cultural products reflecting and creating that form of First Nations cultural-creative capital that attaches to artistic outcomes and products which rely on and present First Nations Culture making. I would posit that the volume or value of First Nations cultural/nonmaterial capital (FNCC) that any arts outcomes or products contain varies according to how much First Nations Culture making was involved in their creation, how much First Nations approval is accorded the work and to what extent First Nations audiences are catered for in the work.

I did not ask anyone I have spoken to for this research directly to critique or approve Valentine's practice. That's not where our conversations went. Therefore, I have heard only anecdotal and hearsay evidence of how widely Valentine's work is approved of across First Nations communities and theatre fields. Some First Nations theatre makers' brief references to Valentine, alongside her ongoing invitations to collaborate with First Nations artists, indicate she is a non-Aboriginal playwright welcomed and highly regarded by the First Nations theatre community as a collaborator. This tacit approval extends to her playwriting authorship as creator of stories about First Nations experience in collaboration with First Nations communities and artists. There are one or two other non-Aboriginal theatre makers I infer have also gained approval approaching Valentine's standing. However, during my research conversations with First Nations theatre makers, they mostly referred to other non-Aboriginal directors, playwrights and producers whose approaches to portraying First Nations experience troubled them. These problems of other playmakers emerge in the chapters which follow.

i. Problems of and for the non-Aboriginal collaborator

While indications are that Valentine makes theatre with First Nations people in culturally appropriate ways, this does not mean an emerging non-Aboriginal playwright today can simply copy Valentine's declared ways of working to move appropriately into the First Nations storytelling space. Valentine's culturally appropriate and respectful collaboration practice comes from artistic relationships and requests for her project involvement she could not have planned and which have grown organically with her years of practice. This includes that she has acquired some FNCC and her individual habitus has evolved via the life experiences she has had making theatre with First Nations communities and artists. At the same time, collaborations between non-Aboriginal playwrights and First Nations communities can have problems of power and authorship no matter how culturally competent and respectful the non-Aboriginal playwright/ally is. This includes how work by non-Aboriginal playwrights about First Nations people might occupy limited theatre spaces at the expense of work by First Nations playwrights.

iv. Conclusion: key Redfern messages

Theatre makers Alana Valentine and Liza-Mare Syron were the two artists with whom our conversations specifically included my creative intensions to make a play. Valentine was concerned that I was proposing to write a work about or involving First Nations experience when I had not been approached by First Nations people to do so. It was an issue of invitation and permission. Syron was also concerned about my credentials and cultural experience to attempt a work that encompassed First Nations realities and portrayed First Nations people. She observed that, by seeking to make theatre about First Nations issues, I was placing myself among the White/non-Aboriginal theatre makers I was both critiquing in my research and hearing critiqued. Syron encouraged me to focus on issues and realities of which I had direct, longstanding knowledge: such as that of the behaviour of non-Aboriginal middleclass/White australians with whom I had grown up and who comprised the non-racialized category of australians of which I was a member. After these two early conversations the focus of this research moved away from a creative project about colonial realities to a thesis which could encompass all that theatre

makers subsequently shared with me about First Nations storytelling in the australian theatre landscape. That research shift began with what I learned in Redfern when, under Dr Syron's questioning, I could not distinguish myself from those White/settler colonist theatre makers whose colonial habits I wanted to avoid in my own practice.

Valentine named several aspects of her verbatim practice which highlighted appropriate exchanges of Bourdieusian non-material/creative/cultural capital between herself, people portrayed in her work and First Nations people with whom she collaborated. This included her first rule of engagement: that she had not only a First Nations community's permission to portray them/their experience but also that she was either *approached by them* to do this or that she was heavily *"petitioned"* by that First Nations community to proceed with a project if she had proposed it. Alana's other key rule was that her work on First Nations stories had to involve experienced, senior First Nations artists, such as a director/dramaturg, working alongside her in development and production.

Valentine also said she commits to First Nations people whose stories she tells that her work will create truthful portrayals: "the good and the bad". That is, she would accord First Nations subjects of her stories the same artistic right she said White/non-Aboriginal audiences are accorded by australian theatre: the opportunity to see themselves fully and so to be able to reflect honestly on themselves. This approach accords with the rights advocated by Shaheed (2013) in her UN discussion of what constitutes artistic freedom. Valentine said full acknowledgement of and respect for the contribution of First Nations communities to her work is crucial to appropriate practice. She also said that the necessity to meet cultural responsibilities to communities was a creative opportunity, not an impediment. In this way Valentine recognised the First Nations cultural-creative capital attached to First Nations Culture's responsibilities and accountabilities.

Syron vouched for Valentine's practice for contributing dramaturgy, story construction and other theatre-craft to the telling of First Nations stories. She spoke positively of both Alana's own playwriting and that of First Nations emerging and established writers whose work Valentine contributed theatre knowledge to. The

conversation with Syron also made explicit the multiple forms of theatre and cultural knowledge that First Nations theatre makers and theatre leaders bring into the rehearsal room to make work in culturally appropriate ways.

A major theme emerging from the conversation with Syron, however, was the added pressures on First Nations theatre makers and leaders because they are making work within a colonised australia. This complicates First Nations stage stories in several ways, including that: (1) resourcing compels First Nations theatre companies to partner with non-Aboriginal entitles; (2) sometimes work nurtured by First Nations creatives is taken out of First Nations control when major companies want to put the project onto their stages; and (3) First Nations theatre makers and leaders feel pressure to stay silent about issues in rehearsal and other creative arrangements or risk being problematised. These are serious impositions on First Nations cultural safety and artistic freedom. White colonial habits have, and do, establish those limits and dangers. They include: (1) economic inequity created by historic colonial practice; (2) White assumptions of ownership and rights to that made by the Other; (3) White solipsism, which does not recognise the cultural needs and raced experiences of those who are non-White/Other; and, (4) White virtue which assumes all interactions between White and non-White people transmit value in one direction, from their White selves to those non-White Others.

The next chapter hears from one First Nations and one non-Aboriginal playwright. They have had varied creative careers as writers, performers and makers. At one point they worked together, in what was a ground-breaking play-making project at the time, exploring Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives of australian life.

8. MAGPIE PLAYMAKERS

i. Introduction: cultural exchange within the colony

Two theatre artists were brought together as writers almost two decades ago to create a theatre piece, *Magpie*, on relations between First Nations and settler-colonist australians. One of the theatre makers was Gunditjmara poet, playwright, songwriter, filmmaker and, at the time of our conversation, head of the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development at the University of Melbourne, Associate Professor Richard Frankland. The other was playwright Melissa Reeves, whose theatre practice had developed with the Melbourne Workers Theatre. I met with Frankland and Reeves separately years later after their *Magpie* collaboration to ask them about that experience of making a play together. I also sought their observations on what was needed for positive collaboration and if the landscape of those questions had changed since *Magpie* (Frankland, 2015b; 2015). That was my plan. But in my conversation with Frankland, we didn't get to *Magpie*…

ii. Richard Frankland

Decades before I spoke with Richard Frankland he had worked as a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody field officer. He used those experiences to write and present award-winning documentary *Who Killed Malcolm Smith?* and to write and direct television drama *No Way to Forget* and the play *Conversations with the Dead* (Aboriginal Victoria, 2019). He has produced many non-fiction, fictional drama and comedy films (2019), published a novel and children's book plus released music albums with his bands and soundtracks for many of his films (2019). Frankland has run workshops across business and government organisations to encourage freedom of cultural expression and cultural safety for First Nations Australians (2019). Frankland was an Associate Professor at Melbourne University's Wilin Centre when we spoke but has since been appointed Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts at Deakin University (Frankland, 2023). Among his many creative works, I was most aware of the Malthouse Theatre production, *Walking into Bigness,* and *Magpie,* a theatre piece he co-wrote with non-Aboriginal

playwright Melissa Reeves under the guidance of Yorta Yorta/Gunaikurnai dramaturg-director and playwright Andrea James.

a. The loads First Nations artists bear

The strongest lesson I gained from Frankland during our conversation was the cultural/colonial load and lack of cultural safety within which First Nations artists work, live and create. I will use Frankland's term "cultural load" at this point but will replace that phrase with "colonial load" later when I explain my reasons for the alternative label. Frankland said he supported collaborative arrangements between non-Aboriginal and First Nations people to make work which gave voice to First Nations communities. He said there had been many "helpful" depictions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience made by non-Aboriginal film and theatre makers (Frankland, 2015b). However, he said the vast majority of work made during australia's colonial history was directed through a non-Aboriginal White colonial lens; First People were still struggling, he said, to tell "our stories through our eyes" (2015b):

> In the words of W. H. Stanner, we were homeless in our own land. And anything about our history was silenced. And then history was written through the eyes of the dominant culture so the access point to wealth and power is in the shape of the dominant culture. We're still struggling to tell our stories through our eyes and when we get to do that, quite often, (our stories are told) within the dominant culture or there's a negative attitude within that dominancy. (Frankland, 2015b)

Frankland thus declared that Aboriginal people have been portrayed within a colonised, disenfranchised and, not uncommonly, malignant context. He said that until the early '90s there were only four known Aboriginal film makers: Bruce McGuinness, who made two films in the 1970s; Brian Syron, actor, drama teacher and lead in the first production of Merritt's *The Cake Man,* as mentioned in a previous conversation; acclaimed artist image-maker Tracey Moffatt; and Bill Onus (Frankland, 2015b). At that same point in the 1990s, Frankland said, ten thousand hours of film footage existed about Aboriginal people; more than ninety percent had been written, directed or produced by non-Aboriginal film-makers so that much of it,

therefore, "was through the lens of a non-Aboriginal, western, Euro-centric culture" (2015b).

b. Consultant problems

Frankland was critical of the role of "consultant" allocated to First Nations people paid to advise those non-Aboriginal film and theatre makers attempting to portray First Nations people and their experience.

> Aboriginal people were perpetually placed in a victim mentality and hired on films as consultants. And like any consultant, you have the authority to say lots of things, but no power to actually make sure it's enacted. (Frankland, 2015b)

Frankland said the consultant's role was yet another form of victimhood imposed on First Nations people, because that role contained no power to change White depictions of Aboriginal people. This would often mean that those portrayals would continue perceptions of First Nations people as victims with no agency.

> Where we stand now, I don't think people want to be consultants on plays. I don't think people want to be seen as a victim or merely a survivor; although I'm sure some people have been socially engineered into being comfortable in that role. (Frankland, 2015b)

Frankland repeated that First Nations people need to have the ability to "tell our stories through our eyes" to contribute to national identity (2015b). He framed this as an active mission for First Nations people to achieve; not one where Indigenous people must wait for non-Aboriginal people to become aware enough that this shift can happen. But changes were also needed in how the dominant non-Aboriginal culture interacted with First Nations people:

> We need to enable and empower the dominant within the dominant culture to practice deep listening or Kanang Wang or Dadirri – which means being able to listen but actually *hear* what Aboriginal people and Islander people are saying. We need (also) to recognise that we live within a colonised *structure*,

> not a colonised *event*, (which) continues to shape our voice and shape the way we're heard and shape the way our stories are interpreted. The Aboriginal voice needs to be deeply heard, deeply listened to with empathy. [my italics - reflecting A/Prof Frankland's vocal emphases] (Frankland, 2015b)

With these words Frankland was acknowledging that colonial institutions, structures and White/settler-colonist privilege, encompassing phenomena I have labelled *White colonial habits,* are ongoing. These colonial controls affect the artistic freedoms of First Nations people in terms of rights and capacity to express. Colonial realities and White/settler-colonist institutions and audiences, he said, "shape our voice and... the way we're heard and... the way our stories are interpreted" (2015b). Frankland's analysis reflects a range of critical literatures cited in this thesis, and which note that where political and social power resides determines whose narratives of a society have voice and audience.

c. Collaboration needs empathy

Frankland advocated collaboration based on empathy for creating australian narratives, for making work that acknowledges First Nations experience and for addressing race relations. He said non-Aboriginal collaborators need to "walk through the doors of Aboriginal Australia":

> Ask me why can I go to fifteen funerals a year? Every one of those Aboriginal people you see out there is in the same situation. Why are Aboriginal children in Victoria eleven times more likely to be removed, not just from their families but from their culture? From their stories? From their Aboriginal shape? Why is the highest arrest rate for any demographic in Australia Aboriginal women at the moment? Why all the chronic illnesses, and who's stopping that from being commonplace in the media? And why is it viewed as the victim's fault? People don't go out and seek out a heart disease. They don't go out and seek to commit suicide. Why are there eleven kids killing themselves in eleven months in a small community in Victoria? And why isn't that front page news? Why is a reality TV show far more important? Why do people cry about that and not those eleven kids? And why don't you know

> about this? This isn't a guilt trip; this is simply a legacy that we've been left with. (Frankland, 2015b)

Frankland thus called on non-Aboriginal creatives to understand why these problems are disproportionately faced by First Nations people including First Nations theatre makers and performers. His words echoed a key finding of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Royal Commission for which he had worked: that most non-Aboriginal people did not (and still do not) understand why so many Aboriginal people's circumstances were more troubled than those of non-Aboriginal australians and this ignorance led them to blame Indigenous people for that difference (Royal Commission, 1991). The Commissioners recommended that education and media institutions engage in raising understanding among non-Aboriginal people about the reasons for First Nations people's ongoing struggle (Royal Commission, 1991) linked to dispossession and colonial impacts. Frankland said colonial narratives blame First Nations people and First Nations cultural practice for the circumstances which drive these negative statistics (Frankland, 2015b). As noted in earlier sections, other academics such as Maggie Walter say these statistics are collected and curated in ways which problematise First Nations people and First Nations culture rather than critique Australian colonial history and ongoing colonial practice and policy (Walter, 2010, 2016; Walter et al., 2020; Walter & Suina, 2019). Frankland said these colonial realities and what he called "cultural load", mean non-Aboriginal creatives have starkly different circumstances to those of First Nations performers and creators:

> Frankland: I was the first Aboriginal employed in commercial television to direct non-Aboriginal staff. And it was a very different feeling because they didn't have to put up with the fifteen funerals a year or chronic illnesses or people being incarcerated or all of these things.
>
> Kay: Their lives were easy
>
> Frankland: No, just different. Very different. Didn't have the cultural loads that I have to carry. (Frankland, 2015b)

d. Listen, learn, hear – Koorreen principles for collaborators

Frankland said non-Aboriginal people wanting to depict First Nations people must do their homework. He did not suggest that they need to already have relationship with Aboriginal people or to have been approached by Aboriginal people to work with them. But he said they needed to be ready to learn, including about themselves:

> You've got to walk through the doors of Aboriginal Australia, a world that you don't know and go and learn... Do every cross-cultural course you can... Find the inner-racist in yourself, find one in your family, find one in your community, in your workplace and when you can't find any more then we've won... the first rule is be informed about what you're writing about... You need to humanise what's been dehumanised... Question yourself, question the way you perceive the world, the way you've been socially engineered and why. (Frankland, 2015)

Frankland said that non-Aboriginal people wanting to collaborate need to listen and hear which First Nations stories can and should be told. This way First Nations people would *have control of what stories are made about them or for them* (my italics): when they are not listened to or not heard then that control cannot operate. Frankland's advice resonated with evolving Screen Australia and Australia Council protocols and arts funding rules which increasingly insist money earmarked for First Nations projects will only go to projects which come from First Nations people's imaginations and ideas (Australia Council & Janke, 2019; Screen Australia, 2021a). But Frankland's emphasis was on White/non-Aboriginal people *listening* to enable that First Nations control.

Frankland gave me a card with seven principles which guide the Koorreen Enterprises organisation he had established to "strengthen community, to entertain and to educate" (Frankland, 2016a). This work included running cultural competency and anti-lateral-violence workshops. Frankland recommended to me his Koorreen Principles as a framework for appropriate collaborative practice in making theatre. They are**:**

> **Listen** (to the earth, waters and others so you may learn); **Learn** (from all you hear, see and feel. This will inform you on who you are and who you can be); **Respect** (all living things and beings to enable them to respect you); **Integrity** (conduct yourself and act honestly at all times so that others may learn from you); **Honour** (honour the great spirit, the property of others and your own life path); **Compassion** (have compassion for others so that you learn to be graceful with your spirit); **Courage** (have courage to act in all of the above and to know when you have made mistakes so that you know when to have humility). (Frankland, 2016b).

The listen, learn, respect, integrity and humility components of these principles align thematically with First Nations collaboration protocols developed by First Nations artists, lawyers and producers for arts organisations, including those for Screen Australia (2019) and the Australia Council (2021) already discussed. For non-Aboriginal people to embody and enact those principles they would need cultural competence and self-awareness to understand how those principles would affect or change their White behaviour.

e. *Walking into the Bigness*: good collaboration

Frankland had recently worked with Batjala, Munjali and Wakkawakka actor-director Wayne Blair and non-Aboriginal dramaturg Chris Mead to create *Walking into the Bigness*. He said collaborating with Mead worked, even though he was not a First Nations person, because Mead was willing to listen but also to bravely contribute his extensive knowledge about stage storytelling:

> He's willing to step right back and say I don't know. But he also has enough life experience, with storytelling to say: “Oh hold on, this is an actual part of the story.” So, there's great courage there and there was great respect there. It was hard fought for and hard won by him and by the story itself. And we also had non-Aboriginal actors, both male and female, playing me, an Aboriginal man. So that was a big step too. People didn't notice that; no one commented because the story became seamless.
> Kay: Was it controversial? Did some people say: “Well listen, this is an opportunity for Aboriginal actors that's been missed”?

> Frankland: No. It wasn't missed at that time; if you'd done it ten years ago it would've created great problems. So, it was pretty, pretty good stuff.
> Kay: So, what's changed? So that it's not a problem now?
> Frankland: Well, it is a problem now, but it's how it's delivered. The fact is *there was Aboriginal control all the way through* and people relinquishing at different parts. [my italics] (Frankland, 2015b)

The mixed cast of five First Nations and non-Aboriginal actors who played Frankland were Tammy Anderson, Paul Ashcroft, Luisa Hastings Edge, Rarriwuy Hick and Tiriki Onus. Frankland said Chris Mead applied respect to the creation of his story alongside an exchange of artistic and cultural capital he, Blair and Mead brought to the play development process. Frankland thus cited Mead's story craft, without using the Bourdieusian terms I am applying, as (mostly) White/settler-colonist cultural capital which, while not originating as First Nations cultural-creative capital (FBCC), was useful in that First Nations theatre storytelling process. His description of Mead's story support—"it was hard fought for and hard won by him"—suggests that Mead was able to advocate for Frankland's perspective on his own story: to be an anti-colonial ally because of this non-Aboriginal/White cultural capital he possessed alongside a respect for First Nations story autonomy. This respect and understanding constituted a form of First Nations nonmaterial/cultural capital (FNCC) that non-Aboriginal people can acquire through experience, respectful practice and listening. Frankland also emphasised how important it was for the creative work and allocation of roles to be under Aboriginal control. The implication was that this ensured a safe place where First Nations people and non-Aboriginal collaborators could make brave, creative decisions. This included casting and portrayal decisions which might have caused disquiet if not for the appropriate collaboration and exchange occurring: that is, appropriate practice which enabled the appropriate, culturally safe engagement of all expertise in the room.

f. The cultural corner is another Othering

Frankland and I returned again and again in our conversation to ways in which First Nations' people's cultural expression had been repressed by non-Aboriginal control, appropriation and curation. These limitations included the

relegation of First Nations arts, performance and music in ways which categorised First Nations people as Other:

> For many years Aboriginal art and voices were placed in the cultural corner and the cultural corner was controlled by a whole heap of non-Aboriginal gatekeepers. For instance, I had a band which was a rock band which at festivals they would hire us because they needed to fit the Aboriginal quota and put you on with the Scandinavian accordion players. That's fine but we were a rock band. Then when I became well known you were on the mainstage, but you were on the Indigenous night or whatever. Cultural corner is a necessity but it's a problem. (Frankland, 2015b)

g. Cultural safety and responsibility

The conversation also returned repeatedly to the load and responsibility First Nations artists carry when portraying First Nations experience:

> Quite often Aboriginal actors do these incredibly hard roles that knock the crap out of them and they do it in a way which is phenomenal. One day there'll just be Aboriginal, or there already is, action films and comedies and, and it will be part of our cultural makeup. What we have now is people still dying in custody, people dying of chronic illnesses, dying at incredibly young ages. And people, artists (are also affected): when you have art you have voice and when you have voice you have freedom and with freedom comes responsibility and this is where Aboriginal people are being incredibly responsible with their freedom, what freedom they may have, facilitating the voice of those who die in custody, or families who grieve, or their community and people who suffer at a great rate. And doing it against tumultuous odds, doing it against the mass media, the popular press, doing it against the wishes of government, and sometimes with the support of government and doing it against the attitude and indoctrinated attitude of twenty-three million people. I mean this is raw courage, this is art in its truest form and it's about changing the world. It's about saying I won't live a full and complete life but my art is going to make sure that my kids live one year longer than me, that my grandchildren live five years longer than me and have a better quality of life. (Frankland, 2015b)

Frankland, significantly, equated having an artistic voice with having both freedom to express and responsibility attached to that freedom. This aligns with how *artistic* freedom was framed by scholars cited in Chapter 3 of this thesis. At the same time, Frankland said that freedom was more difficult for First Nations artists to exercise: it required “raw courage” to represent First Nations people amid a society dominated by “twenty-three million” non-Aboriginal citizens (2015b). He did not name cultural safety during our conversation, but his examples of loads that First Nations people carry, and the impact on them of roles they play to portray colonial experience, suggest that there is social risk plus emotional and physical injury associated with telling those stories within a colonised australia. When later asked elsewhere to explain cultural safety “in a nutshell”, Frankland described it as the freedom and security of knowing one can exercise and engage in one’s culture without danger: that you will not be ridiculed, arrested, attacked, condemned or stopped (Frankland, 2018). This brief definition implies also that when cultural safety exists what is revealed about your culture will be respected; this includes respect for boundaries around who can partake in that work with you or who can access the work that is produced.

In a summary of a report on how to instil cultural safety for First Nations people in Victorian government agency operations, Frankland and his co-authors described cultural safety as “traditional culturally-based forms of identity, belonging, stability and protection which create meaning and connection for Aboriginal peoples” (Frankland, Bamblett, & Lewis, 2011, p. 27). In this definition Frankland and his colleagues have not focused on ‘danger’ or external threats of ridicule or attack. Instead, their definition of cultural *safety* includes the *presence* of active First Nations Culture and people who are making “meaning and connection” for Aboriginal people (p. 27). They pronounce, therefore, that the *presence* of First Nations Culture and its *free expression*, among and by those to whom it belongs, are key to cultural safety [1].

Frankland also spoke to me about responsibility to tell stories and to do so in a way that accounts appropriately to both (1) the communities those stories represent or come from and to (2) the varied First Nations audiences who will see them. Those stories today are often subject matter determined by colonial history and current

colonial reality. This is so, notwithstanding that Frankland and other theatre makers have talked about a creative future where First Nations theatre would more often deal with other cultural and community matters than colonial impacts; this would also mean that all forms of stage entertainment genres would be richly represented in First Nations theatre stories.

h. Frank(land) lessons… and the loaded meanings of load

Frankland helped me see the extra work that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertake because of the colonial realities within which they live. He also reiterated that there is suffering, injury and a range of financial, health and psychological problems with which First Nations creatives disproportionately deal because of being members of an identity group of peoples who have been dispossessed and colonised. He gave me many examples of additional loads that First Nations people are likely to have weighing upon them while making theatre.

For a time after speaking with Frankland, I was confused about the meaning of cultural load versus responsibility and accountability to community. I understood cultural load to encompass all the cultural work associated with being a First Nations person, so I regarded cultural responsibility and accountability to community as a "load" alongside other life outcomes associated with being a First Nations australian living within a colonised land. This misconception was set right by a later conversation I had for this research with a First Nations artistic director [2], reported in Chapter 10, section (iii) (c). It is there in our verbatim words where my confusion is best understood and cleared up. However, I will draw on the realisations I had then to distinguish now between cultural load and other phenomena such as maintenance of cultural safety, cultural responsibility and accountabilities to community. This will also show how such a misconception by a non-Aboriginal person in the rehearsal room can add to load experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creatives and feed into deficit narratives about First Nations people and Culture. Understanding that my conflation of *load* with cultural *practice and responsibilities* was wrong, in addition, enabled me then to draw a distinction between what is load and what are those complex practices and responsibilities of First Nations Culture which are, in effect, cultural capital.

Cultural load indeed can involve cultural expectations on a First Nation person. But it is not the cultural knowledge of those expectations which creates load—or even those expectations and accountabilities themselves which are the "load". The load is created by the colonial circumstances within which First Nations people are operating. Expectations around protecting and respecting First Nations Culture and one's community's Culture and kinship needs are in fact elements of cultural capital (FNCC). The load occurs when it becomes difficult to meet those expectations because of the pressures and lack of cultural safety to do so when operating within australia's colonial frameworks, inequities and values. In the context of this academic writing, I am building on Frankland and other's use of the term cultural load to build my own conception of colonial load. Rather than appropriating a term generously shared with me by these First Nations artist, I am here coining another term for the purposes of my academic argument. This related label emphasises that the problems associated with load arise from australia's colonial frameworks, and *White colonial habits*, not from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture. "Colonial load" identifies the culprit and the cause rather than naming and blaming that which (and whom) is affected. Labelling these phenomena *colonial* load helps to distinguish (1) colonialising impacts on First Nations cultural safety and freedom that create load from that cultural work and (2) respect for accountabilities to community and kin which are First Nations cultural/nonmaterial/creative capital (FNCC). That work, capability and understanding which protects, maintains and makes First Nations Culture in the theatre-making process—mostly embodied in First Nations people with that knowledge—is embodied cultural capital in the Bourdieusian sense. This capital (FNCC) includes the knowledges and capability to make work and tell stories in culturally safe and appropriate ways. What is produced under First Nations control using those appropriate processes is First Nations Culture. So too, are the processes themselves FNCC, even as they are being developed and refined. The resulting creative works are also First Nations cultural capital in another of Bourdieu's senses: products which have cultural, nonmaterial value that often transmutes into material economic value.

Frankland also referred in his conversation with me to other colonial loads with which First Nations creatives must often deal while non-Aboriginal theatre

makers are not burdened in the same way. These are issues such as the shorter average life expectancy of First Nations people, poorer health outcomes and higher rates of incarceration of First Nations people. These again are what I would call *colonial* load because they are aspects of First Nations experience which have been created by australian colonisation and that which Moreton-Robinson terms “the colonial project” (for example, in Moreton-Robinson, 2007). These statistics are colonial outcomes but are often used in ways which problematise First Nations people (R. Atkinson, Taylor, & Walter, 2010; Walter, 2010, 2016; Walter et al., 2020).

There are also colonial loads associated with day-to-day interactions with non-Aboriginal australians. For example, a First Nations woman recently tweeted that one of the most constant loads she is tired of bearing is having to repeatedly explain basic cultural concepts to non-Aboriginal people such as the difference between Acknowledgement of Country and a Welcome. The deficit here is not that there are important differences between these two acts acknowledging custodianship and Sovereignty; the deficit comes from broad ignorance by non-Aboriginal people who, within the colonial framings of australian society, do not need to know these basic term distinctions within First Nations Culture to prosper. In this way it is important to remember that the ignorance and curiosity of non-Aboriginal people can constitute an extra colonial load on First Nations people in many contexts, including the rehearsal room.

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iii. Melissa Reeves

Melissa Reeves is a non-Aboriginal Melbourne-based playwright who has had more than a dozen works produced including *Happy Ending, Furious Mattress, In Cahoots, Storming Heaven, Great Day, Road Movie and Salt Creek Murders,* along with award-winning works *The Spook* and *Sweetown* (APT, 2022). Reeves co-wrote *Who's Afraid of the Working Class*, *Fever* and *Anthem* with Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Christos Tsiolkas and composer Irine Vela (APT, 2022). In 1999 *Working Class* won best play in the Queensland Literary Awards, two AWGIES for best new

play, and the Jill Blewitt Playwrights Award. Reeves co-wrote *Magpie* with Richard Frankland and that collaboration prompted me to request her participation in this research.

Before playwriting, Reeves graduated from Flinders University in Adelaide with an arts/acting degree and performed for eight years with the Troupe Theatre Company, created by Flinders graduates, and then the Red Shed Theatre, also formed with close friends (Reeves, 2015). Red Shed staged Melissa's first play *Cahoots* about a group of aging brownies (junior girl guides).

a. First foray into colony and race

For her second play, *Sweetown,* Reeves wanted to address race relations in australia through her experiences of living in a country town (2015). When a dramaturg advised her to find another story than her own for this she began researching the 1838 events at Myall Creek Station (2015) located between Moree and Inverell in northern NSW.

CONTENT WARNING: Readers please be warned that details, of a violent crime perpetrated against Wirrayaraay people, a clan of the Gamilaraay nation, follows this warning. Those details commence at the top of the next page.

Myall Creek is where on 10 June 1838 a commandant of the NSW mounted police, with a group of convicts, soldiers and one free settler, massacred up to fifty Wirrayaraay people, including children, camped at Waterloo Creek near present-day Bingara (National Museum Australia, 2021). Seven of the twelve perpetrators were later convicted at trial of murder and sentenced to public hanging. They were the first british subjects executed in australia for murdering Aboriginal people (National Museum Australia, 2021). Reeves travelled to Bingara with her mother to research those events and found that, while some people were open about Myall Creek's terrible history, the local museum was not:

> The very first night we went into the local pub and, totally un-asked, the publican started talking about the Myall Creek massacre and how Bingara was famous for being the first place where white people were hung for murdering black people. And then I went to the local museum where it was totally hidden. There wasn't a mention, there wasn't the slightest mention of it. (Reeves, 2015)

Reeves did unearth some records in Bingara of the Myall Creek events alongside decades-long efforts by Bingaran residents to establish a memorial. These elements of the Myall Creek story inspired her play set in 1965 about a fictional town with a similar history. A memorial marking the Myall Creek murders was opened in June 2000 (about ten years after Reeves's research visit to Bingara) and "stands as both a site-specific and a national monument, in that it preserves memory of one particular massacre but is also representative of many more that took place across the country" (National Museum Australia, 2021). Meanwhile, as a young, emerging playwright, Reeves was unsure how to portray First Nations people, so she left them out:

> I didn't know how to tackle Indigenous characters or whether to. I had the name of members of the local Indigenous community (living not too far from) Bingara, and I was sort of too nervous to do it; I ended up going "I won't write Indigenous characters" because I just didn't quite know how to or whether I should or shouldn't. Also, this town was entirely white and all the Aboriginal people had gone because, presumably, they didn't want to live there. So, I decided to write a story that told the story of this massacre through the white

> characters that lived in this town and that was why there weren't Indigenous characters in it. And it felt weird because the politics is that we, exactly what you said, *terra nullius*; we rub the people out and here was I writing a play that was leaving them out. It was a weird thing to do but at the time that was what I did. (Reeves, 2015)

Reeves thus felt responsibility to consult Wirrayaraay-Gamilaraay people before representing their ancestors' experiences in a fictional story, but she was reticent about contacting them and telling them of her playwriting plans. Reeves' solution for bringing further light to the Myall Creek massacre was to tell those events through the eyes of non-Aboriginal people in a similar but fictional town guilty about a similar but fictional mass killing. As Reeves herself said, the people murdered, their loved ones and descendants were left out of her play because of both her sense that consultation was required to portray them and she believed they had been dispersed/no longer lived in the district. Reeves' fictional rendering of Myall Creek-inspired history was made into a White story which examined the impact on settler-colonists of facing up to Australia's murderous colonial beginnings. This was achieved through twenty-eight characters played by eight actors (Bramwell, 1991).

Reviews suggest that Reeves' work had comic elements which gently mocked the non-Aboriginal inhabitants of *Sweetown* (Bramwell, 1991, p. 38; Clarke, 1995) and it was mostly well received (Bramwell, 1991, p. 38; Reeves, 2015). However, it is possible *Sweetown*, if produced in the last decade, would have been criticised in the ways that *The Secret River* has been for the absence of First Nations voices in the story. Reeves said the play was appreciated by at least one, revered First Nations playwright:

> It was a good play, it worked and we toured it to Darwin. We toured it to some Aboriginal communities, and Roger Bennett, the fabulous, late (Arrernte) playwright who wrote *Up the Ladder*, actually saw it. I met him later in Melbourne Workers Theatre and he really liked the play; so, I felt vindicated. That was my first experience of, trying to address our (shared history). (Reeves, 2015)

b. *Magpie* collaboration

Reeves was strongly connected with the Melbourne Workers Theatre when the Company initiated *Magpie* and asked Richard Frankland to cowrite with her ”a collaboration between an Indigenous and non-Indigenous playwright talking about living together in this country” (Reeves, 2015). Yorta Yorta/Gunaikurnai theatre maker and creative producer Andrea James ran the *Magpie* development workshop with First Nations and non-Aboriginal actors and Reeves and Frankland as writers:

> We had this great week that Andrea ran brilliantly, and we just explored how we'd thought about being white or being black or [how we saw] the other as we grew up, just the whole imaginary of those issues in Australia. Little personal things. Frankland was a delight to work with and he was also extremely, loose. He went: 'You write anything you want to write. I will write anything I want to write.' And then we tried to make a show which was a mixed success. A bit sprawling: a bit of this, a grab of that, all singing, all dancing, stand-up comedy. But there were pearls in it, real pearls in it [and] it was hugely important to me. (Reeves, 2015)

Reeves engaged more deeply into her own and others' realities:

> What that workshop did was plunge me into other people's subjectivities: poverty and privilege. I got a very clear picture of disparity. Disparity of money, disparity of opportunity, and how to live with that. I'd [learned previously] about massacres and the history of Australia and I went through a similar thing that week [learning about First Nations realities as they were during my life-time]. (Reeves, 2015)

Reeves said one *Magpie* piece she wrote, “Civil War”, came from a story one of the First Nations workshop actors told about feeling unsafe: that the world is dangerous when you are an Indigenous person in australia, requiring constant hyper-alertness. She wrote a First Nations person's inner monologue while they were visiting a bar, reflecting these fears. Reeves felt empowered to write in a First Nations voice because she had the permission of First Nations people in that workshop:

> Frankland was crucial for the permission. If Frankland or Andrea had said: 'Listen, you're going to write the white characters and Frankland's going to do the black characters.' I would've gone: 'Fine. Absolutely. Let's do that.' It was absolutely being given permission. I don't know what would've happened if I turned up with something and they'd gone, 'oh, this is awful.' I don't know! Interesting to think, but they didn't. (Reeves, 2015)

c. Lessons: writing the colony 1990-2015

Reeves said non-Aboriginal playwrights should not avoid addressing race relations and colonial realities in australia. She had had positive experiences of working through issues of First Nations story ownership: thinking through the implications of each project as they arose. Reeves had experienced no personal recriminations or criticism from First Nations people for either *Sweetown*, First Nations portrayals in *Who's Afraid of the Working Class* by a co-writer, or for her work on *Magpie*. She agreed, however, that while there was limited australian theatre programming of work addressing race relations, plays on those topics from non-Aboriginal playwrights should not crowd out those by First Nations creators (2015).

Reeves' works exploring race relations and First Nations experience were made from 1990-2002, and we were discussing those projects some years later. Reeves therefore had worked on *Sweetown* and *Magpie* before and up to when the first version of the Australia Council Indigenous Arts protocols were released. Correspondingly, Reeves was not able to consult those published guidelines because they didn't yet exist. Also important to note, is that Reeves' two plays involving First Nations realities were made during another transition period in First Nations stage stories. As Casey (2004) argues, the end point of her book at 1997, while arbitrary, nevertheless marked a turning point in how Indigenous theatre was positioned. This came from the emergence through the 1990s of First Nations controlled theatre companies plus the movement of key Indigenous directors into mainstage non-Aboriginal spaces such as the Sydney Theatre Company and Melbourne Workers Theatre (p. 267). The period of the late 1990s into the early 2000s, Casey (2004) contends, heralded an opening up of potential ways in which First Nations theatre

artists might work, including in collaboration with non-Aboriginal theatre creatives (p. 267). But those years preceded more formal policy and protocols by arts bodies to recognise the cultural property and portrayals issues attached to First Nations theatre stories. These re-positionings have been influenced by a range of factors and new history noted across Chapters 3 and 4 and emerging in these conversations chapters. This is notwithstanding that much of that new history, as I have already argued and as will emerge further, has involved White/settler-colonist resistance or bypassing of First Nations advice on appropriate collaboration. That said, my point here is that Reeves was making *Sweetown* and *Magpie* at a time when specific protocol advice for creatives such as herself was still under development.

Reeves' present-day perspectives on her early work demonstrate both problems and possibilities of non-Aboriginal theatre makers desiring to illuminate historic and current race trouble in australia. Those issues include the 'best of intentions' problem: where non-Aboriginal theatre makers want to educate non-Aboriginal australia about colonial history and current issues affecting First Nations people. However, non-Aboriginal creatives are often not fully cognisant of how their presence in that storytelling space might reduce opportunities for First Nations-initiated theatre-making. Nor is there an understanding of the problems associated with centering non-Aboriginal perspectives and actions, as the only agents, in history or current realities where First Nations people have endured the most suffering and loss. Reeves' management of consultation issues for *Sweetown* would not be adequate today for portraying First Nations realities. That is because First Nations characters were excluded from the stage and the story in ways that mirrored White/settler-colonist beliefs in disappearing Aboriginal cultures. However, Reeves' play (1) illuminated settler-colonist behaviours past and present; (2) reflected cultural awareness, considerations and appropriate practice for the turn of the millennium; and (3) confronted White audience imaginations in ways which for the time would have been, at least faintly, decolonial.

iv. Conclusion: cultural safety, colonial load and appropriate cultural exchange

The conversation with Richard Frankland addressed in parts the impact of colonisation on First Nations people and the additional loads First Nations artists and communities bear as a result. These loads include threats to cultural safety in creative situations involving non-Aboriginal people. This discussion with Frankland made visible distinctions between loads and *cultural responses* to those loads. That is, a clear distinction arises between *load* caused by colonisation and *cultural responses* to load enabled by First Nations Culture. That is, First Nations Culture, and resilience strategies enabled by that culture, constitute cultural, symbolic and social Capital or FNCC embodied by First Nations people and their First Nations habituses.

The collaboration Frankland described with non-Aboriginal dramaturg Chris Mead for making *Walking into Bigness* demonstrates where nonmaterial theatre capital embodied in White/settler-colonist australians (mostly *White* cultural, social and symbolic capital) transforms into First Nations cultural-creative theatre capital (FNCC). This occurs because it can, when under First Nations management, be used to help make First Nations Culture. Frankland said this was possible because of the respectful way Mead relinquished creative control to First Nations people so that Frankland's story could be made and told in culturally appropriate and First Nations empowered ways.

Melissa Reeves' theatre-making addressing race relations and her position as a White/settler-colonist in contemporary australia demonstrates shifts over time in what is appropriate collaborative practice. *Magpie,* made under control of an experienced First Nations dramaturg/director, revealed innovative ways that First Nations and White/non-Aboriginal artists can work appropriately together to make First Nations Culture and cultural products. Outcomes in these scenarios include creation of new FNCC as new cultural objects as well as new theatre methods. Made visible—and explicitly referred to by Reeves—was the *permission* she was granted to express her own subjectivities and imaginings of First Nations' people's experiences while her work was guided in a culturally safe setting by First Nations fellow

creatives. Clear in her words was that Reeves would follow First Nations directions and that First Nations creatives and communities were the project experts in the room. The respective contributions of the *Magpie* artists constituted both White/settler-colonist and First Nations capital. Under First Nations control, those two sources of creative theatre capital (embodied by two agent-artists with different habituses) were thus deployed in appropriate cultural exchange. This meant that what might have begun as White capital embodied by Reeves transformed into FNCC such that new First Nations Culture—and FNCC in various forms—was produced.

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v. Footnotes: *Magpie* playmakers

[1] Issues of cultural safety for audiences and actors are discussed by a Noongar theatre maker [2] in a later chapter. [Chapter 11, Section ii. (f)]. Another theatre maker [2] alludes to audience cultural safety when she talks about White-made theatre which can make her feel ill - when colonial events are portrayed in insensitive ways [Chapter 10, Section iv. (f)]

[2] I am not identifying theatre maker-participants in this chapter: to maintain their anonymity outside of the thesis section where I report our conversation. This is a convention I have adopted for all participants (except the late Andrew Ross): I am quarantining their identities and the fact they have taken part in this research within their specific thesis section. This is because at time of thesis submission I had not yet finalised with them their consent to their testimony being publicly available. That said, feedback was obtained—after submission—from all but one participant and incorporated into this version of the thesis lodged in Flinders Library. These steps are explained in section 5 (vi) in the Chapter 5 methods discussion.

9. TWO ARTS SECTOR LEADERS

i. Introduction: leadership adaptations

I have grouped these two co-conversationalists together because of the arts organisation and leadership roles they were occupying when I approached them for this research. The first leader in this chapter, a non-Aboriginal director-dramaturg, was head of theatre at the Australia Council when we spoke and one of the first people I met for this inquiry. The second theatre maker was, at the time of our discussion, an Aboriginal researcher in First Nations arts leadership and former head of an Indigenous arts development organisation. My conversation with her was the last one I had for this research. The projects both these arts leaders have worked on are very different and their careers have taken different trajectories; but both their stories include how they and others have used and adapted their creative leadership positions to enable First Nations theatre, FNCC and Culture to be made.

ii. Marion Potts

At the time of submitting this thesis in 2023 Marion Potts was leading Performing Lines as Executive Producer. That organisation aimed to "champion the unconventional, the marginal, the rebellious and the new" and "ensure that the breadth and plurality of Australia's creative potential is represented and celebrated" (Performing Lines, 2022). When I spoke to Potts for this research, she had just taken on her first bureaucratic role: as 'Director-Theatre' at the Australia Council of the Arts. Before then she'd "only ever been a practitioner" and said that her new role with the Australia Council was as "the artform practitioner within the organisation" (Potts, 2015).

Potts began in theatre through the Sydney University dramatic society. She'd started a law degree but soon shifted to completing honours in theatre; she then studied directing at NIDA before completing a university Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Performance Studies (2015). Her time soon after at Sydney Theatre Company culminated in five years as resident director up to 1999, followed by a period freelancing for mostly major companies while raising two young children. After that Potts was artistic director at Bell Shakespeare before joining Malthouse

Theatre as an associate artistic director. Potts eventually became Malthouse artistic director before taking the Australia Council role (2015). While at Malthouse, Potts oversaw several stage projects engaging with First Nations stories “as a director, or as a dramaturg or as an artistic director programming work” (2015).

a. First Nations stories are integral and complex

At the start of our conversation, Potts summarised how she saw the quandary faced by non-Aboriginal theatre makers, such as herself, wishing to support inclusive truth-telling across stories told on australian stages:

> Non-Indigenous artists often feel that if they're really going to be true to the pressing issues that we face as a society, and that's what we are about—holding the gaze of the more confronting things that are happening in the world, then you have to engage with Indigenous issues and at least attempt to realise that big social conversation in some way. But, at the same time, you have to also acknowledge that those stories aren't necessarily ours to tell. So, that's the navigation that you have to attempt. (Potts, 2015)

Potts said that non-Aboriginal practitioners “have better guidelines now” largely because of Australia Council Indigenous arts protocols (Australia Council, 2007c) which had been in place by then, when we spoke, for almost thirteen years. However, Potts said the question of who can tell First Nations stories “needs to be fairly and squarely answered by Indigenous artists or the Indigenous people relevant to the particular topic area or theme or subject matter that you're dealing with” (2015).

b. Non-Aboriginal champions of First Nations stories

Potts said that within her generation of practice, non-Aboriginal theatre makers Neil Armfield, during his time as artistic director at Belvoir Theatre, Sydney, and her predecessor at Malthouse, Michael Kantor, were leaders in opening theatre space to First Nations stories: ; their way, she noted, had been paved by the earlier

work of non-Aboriginal theatre makers such as Andrew Ross and Wendy Blacklock, who had also championed the staging of First Nations stories:

> [From the point I was working in the profession] the person that really shifted things within the mainstream context of Australian theatre was Neil Armfield of Belvoir: by actively starting to program Indigenous works and working closely with Indigenous playwrights and artists and having Aboriginal actors in non-Indigenous plays. All of that was ground-breaking. Which isn't to say that there weren't other people who were also very active; but I think in terms of a kind of major cultural intervention, you have to really thank Neil for his championing of Indigenous artists and Indigenous works. So, then a number of other artists were influenced by that leadership role that Neil played and began making it a priority within their own programs as well. (Potts, 2015)

Potts acknowledged, while discussing Armfield's work, that Ilbijerri Artistic Director Rachael Maza had raised, just weeks before my interview with Potts, that 'White privilege' (Potts, 2015) enabled non-Aboriginal theatre makers access to resources to tell First Nations stories through a White lens. This speech by Maza had specifically criticised Neil Armfield's *Secret River* production for the Sydney Theatre Company (Maza, 2015). However, Potts's praise of Armfield was based on First Nations-related projects he had *initiated* and which were relatively unprecedented in main-stage "white-led" theatre. Potts said her Malthouse predecessor was another example of a non-Aboriginal theatre leader furthering First Nations stage projects:

> At Malthouse Theatre, Michael Kantor put in place an initiative, found some philanthropy, to support large scale Indigenous works; because it was felt at the time that even though people were starting to program the odd play or the odd two-hander or support Indigenous work on a smaller scale, there was nowhere near the same level of commitment to large scale works. They're more financially risky, they're more logistically complex. So, he began a whole stream of programming and, for a couple of years running, he had some really large-scale Indigenous works in the program. (Potts, 2015)

Potts acknowledged also the work of First Nations pioneers whose theatre-making pre-dated that of Armfield, Kantor, Ross and Blacklock:

> I wouldn't want to overstate Neil's contribution relative to that of Indigenous artists like Bob Maza and National Black Theatre prior to Neil coming into the scene. Gary Foley—all of those great activists—saw the arts as a vehicle of expression for their particular communities as well. And I'm sure (Neil would) agree that his awareness was raised largely due to those people who were really at the forefront of Indigenous theatre. (Potts, 2015)

Potts thus linked non-Aboriginal director Neil Armfield's support of First Nations stage stories and artists to the work of Indigenous activists and play-makers Gary Foley and Bob Maza, who had put Indigenous stories onto Sydney stages two decades before he did.

c. Good intentions... and no template

Potts was clear that First Nations stories today should always be under First Nations control and involve genuine consultation with communities. She said, however, that there have been plentiful instances of theatre using First Nations stories without appropriate consultation. "It happens all the time," she said; that's why First Nations artists have "felt the need to advocate for their own rights in their own stories" (2015) and why it was the topic of all three keynote addresses (Frankland, 2015a; Maza, 2015; Roberts, 2015b) at the Australian theatre forum where Maza had critiqued *Secret River*. Potts said non-Aboriginal people make these errors because issues are complex and vary with every project:

> I don't think any artist that I know of sets out with an agenda to be nefarious to Indigenous artists at all. But there are awarenesses and there are complexities around storytelling that mean that it's hard to find any one rule that is a template for how you work with Indigenous artists. There's huge diversity within Indigenous culture and we're really only just starting to come to terms with that; you know we keep talking about Aboriginal artists and Indigenous work and without necessarily unpacking the differences that exist even within that area. (Potts, 2015)

Potts thus notes that there is no absolute, transferable template which can

cover all collaborative structures and projects to ensure appropriate making of theatre stories about First Nations people. Potts raised the need, later in our conversation, for clear definitions of what constitutes First Nations theatre:

> This should start with defining First Nations Theatre as theatre that is creatively led and controlled by First Nations People; this fundamental definition needs to be made and understood by non-Indigenous practitioners. (Potts, 2015)

Such a definition, I inferred from Potts, could make visible the range of content covered in stage stories about First Nations people; plus it would identify the varying control structures and combinations of collaborations occurring between First Nations and non-Aboriginal theatre makers (2015). theatre-making

d. Stepping back, not down, from *Shadow King*

Potts' involvement in Malthouse collaboration project, *The Shadow King,* an adaptation of Shakespeare's King Lear, began with a conversation between then artistic director Michael Kantor and the now late Murrungun actor and songwriter Balang (Tom E.) Lewis (Potts, 2015). The work involved a long development period driven by Kantor and Lewis and which continued after Potts took over from Kantor at Malthouse's creative helm:

> Tommy was an equal, if not greater, driving force in many ways than Michael was. There were so many different incarnations as to how those key relationships could work. At one point I was going to step right out of the project to allow for another Indigenous person to come in as dramaturg. All through the conversation we were very aware that the key creative team needed to be Indigenous. Because otherwise it ends up being a story told from a white person's perspective and that's not what we wanted. One of the big game changers, in recent times, has been that we've started to see Indigenous stories that are being told from an Indigenous perspective rather than a white person's perspective. (Potts, 2015)

Potts questioned whether, as a non-Aboriginal theatre maker, she was the most appropriate person to fulfil the key development role of dramaturg for *Shadow*

King. This was resolved, not by Potts stepping down, but by adjusting her dramaturgy process to ensure the key creative team members were First Nations artists (2015). This indicates that Potts positioned herself, not as one of the key creative decision-makers, but as a theatre-making and storytelling craft resource the First Nations creative team could access for informing their decisions. If this happened as Potts intended, she brought her embodied White/settler-colonist cultural capital into a First Nations theatre-making process for use by First Nations creatives for a First Nations story.

e. Problems of White Capital readings

The following clarification is not specific to this section reporting my conversation with Marion Potts, but it has become necessary through the progress of the Voices chapters to provide it at this point. I am concerned by a possible, unintended reading of my arguments about White capital as it is deployed by First Nations theatre makers to make First Nations Culture. That is, some might infer the case I make about uses of White theatre capital indicates a belief in the greater virtue of White/settler colonist creatives' skills and ideas or that they must always be present. That is not what I intend. Rather, I am incorporating a reality of how the australian theatre landscape is colonially structured such that White Capital is still an unchosen necessity for many First Nations theatre endeavours. These constraints on First Nations creativity are noted by First Nations theatre makers in the previous data chapter and those ahead. It is a current reality that I and fellow conversationalists do not relish and are working to change.

I saw potential for a deficit reading of FNCC alongside my discussions here of White Capital when I was revisiting literature that notes how First Nations theatre makers have been disparaged by White, colonial framings. Casey and Syron (2005), for instance, show how White gatekeepers of australian theatre have continued into this century to undervalue First Nations artists. This includes through casting decisions, in 'benevolent' commentary on First Nations actors' skills, in rehearsal room power dynamics and in which works they choose to program. Casey and Syron (2005) argue that settler-colonist benevolence tropes based on the "idea of the virtue of white nation" (p. 111) underpin these White theatre gatekeeper behaviours. Their

evidence and that in Casey's earlier history (2004) provide many examples of White/settler-colonist theatre makers, programmers, financiers and critics demonstrating beliefs in the superior craft and storytelling of White/settler-colonist creatives. Thus, re-reading Casey and Syron's (2005) work at this point has compelled me to see and guard against a deficit reading of First Nations creative capital (FNCC) and Culture in how I discuss White theatre capital.

By way of one non-Aboriginal theatre maker example, the White capital Potts embodied in the case of *The Shadow King*, and which I argue First Nations theatre makers deployed, involved not just theatre expertise, but included all non-material and economic capital attached to Potts' White/euro-descendant/settler-colonist habitus. While every individual's habitus is specific to them, it is possible to make generalisations about those of a particular social group, whose habituses orient them as individuals to conform successfully within that group where they belong (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 88-89). Therefore Potts, as a member of a middle-class White/settler-colonist australian social group, can be said to have a habitus which enables her to orient successfully within that group. Agents possessing habituses of this kind dominate leadership across the australian theatre landscape, notwithstanding slowly increasing cultural diversity across the nation's arts institutions. Potts's White/settler-colonist habitus then and now has both determined, and been determined by, the social fact(s) that she: (1) would have access and orientation to develop her theatre expertise, (2) be recognised to have that expertise and (3) hold a position to exercise it. That First Nations theatre-making nearly always still needs the White capital attached to settler-colonists such as Potts is not due to the relative creative talent and value of First Nations theatre makers and communities. In 2023 it is a social fact determined by the Capital structuring of the theatre landscape in a colonised australia. That reality is a persistent problem underpinning the narratives in this thesis.

As I have already proposed in Chapter 6, a key intention of my arguments is to make visible the varying power of First Nations theatre capital (FNCC) operating across differently defined fields. I am referring to one or more theatre fields where First Nations stories have priority, so that FNCC is more visible, compared to the larger, general australian theatre field where Indigenous stories are not the primary

focus and FNCC is less salient. This aims to counter Bourdieu's seminal focus on the superior advantage White/middle-class french citizens have due to the capital they embody within the fields he was examining. My recalibrated fields analysis is assisted by Dennis Foley's (2017) arguments—including his assertion that "Aboriginal Capital" within the business-entrepreneurship field is "intangible" to White/settler-colonists (p. 81). My thesis argues that FNCC has become increasingly visible and tangible to non-Aboriginal theatre makers, especially those wanting to operate in First Nations theatre fields, and that this rising visibility has triggered new acts of colonial possession. These problems also might be due to the distorted ways in which the White imagination will see and understand FNCC. I suggest in my conclusion that FNCC which First Nations artists embody will achieve greater visibility and power across the entire australian theatre landscape if the "First Nations First" intent of Federal Arts policy unveiled in 2023 becomes reality.

Before finalising this thesis draft, I asked Marion Potts if she minded that I had speculated about her individual habitus—in the way I have above—to make a broader, general point about non-Aboriginal theatre maker habituses at play in the australian performing arts. I infer from Potts' response that she agreed to this illustrative use of her position as a White/non-Aboriginal arts leader for the purposes of my argument:

> I think this is all fair enough. It's the double-bind that non-Indigenous arts leaders are in—and we can't actually think outside the constructs that we are defined by. We are limited by our own enculturation… (Those constructs) are all we know and all we have to offer… (That again is why First Nations theatre by definition must be) creatively led and controlled by First Nations people. (Potts, 2023)

f. Varying collaborative structures and operating guides

In Potts's first year as associate artistic director, Malthouse programmed a return season of the Big hArt /Belvoir theatre co-production, *Namatjira*. Belvoir production publicity describes *Namatjira* as "by Scott Rankin" (Big hArt's non-Aboriginal founder/artistic director) and co-directed by Rankin and Batjala Mununjali Wakkawakka writer-actor-director, Wayne Blair. This stage story was made with members of Albert Namatjira's family and is one of several Rankin/Big

hArt works which have had mixed responses—praise and criticism—from First Nations and settler-colonist theatre makers. Rankin's work is discussed further with other co-conversationalists in Chapters/Sections 10. iv. (g) and 11. ii. (b) (c) (d). Additional appraisals of *Namatjira* can be found in the writings of non-Aboriginal academic, Susanne Thurow (2020) who worked on the stage project as both production team member and embedded researcher; in that of Noongar scholar Carissa Godwin (2021) who canvasses concerns from fellow theatre makers about *Namatjira* and provides additional analysis; and in Jane Harrison's *Indig-curious* (2012) Platform Paper.

Meanwhile, as mentioned in a previous chapter, Malthouse commissioned Gunditjmara playwright Richard Frankland to develop a stage story about his own life, *Walking into the Bigness*, also directed by Wayne Blair. Development of *The Shadow King* was commenced at a similar time, even though it was some years before it reached the stage. During that period Malthouse also programmed *Briwyant* created by Wiradyuri dancer-choreographer Vicki Van Hout. It was "the first ever show by an independent Indigenous choreographer to tour nationally" (Australia Council, 2019b). During her tenure, Potts said, First Nations stage storytelling was programmed every year at Malthouse. Potts's creative involvement as artistic director varied from project to project according to whether she was programming a finished work or having producer or dramaturg input (2015).

Potts said that there was "plenty of information", when we spoke in 2015, available in various guidelines, including the Australia Council protocols on working in Indigenous arts (2007c), on how non-Aboriginal theatre makers could collaborate appropriately with First Nations artists, non-artists and communities. However, the guidelines had scope for interpretation; how they were applied would vary because creative relationships "vary immensely" (2015). Potts said an ideal collaborative scenario between First Nations and non-Aboriginal theatre makers is when a First Nations director loves a story and approaches non-Aboriginal people to be part of the development or production team; thus, Potts was advocating for works that emerge from First Nations instigation and ideation. But whatever the genesis of a project, she said, the key to appropriate collaboration is First Nations control:

> As an artistic director, I would always feel more comfortable if Aboriginal artists were in the key decision-making roles when it comes to the stories that are about their culture. But that doesn't mean that non-Indigenous people can't be involved. It's just about the creative control, and the storytelling control, over representation. (Potts, 2015)

Potts thus described an approach aligning with First Nations creative control advocated in, and made more explicit with, each iteration of Australia Council and Screen Australia protocols for working with First Nations communities and stories (Australia Council, 2007c; Australia Council & Janke, 2019; Screen Australia, 2021a; Screen Australia & Janke, 2009). To Potts, better collaborations mean First Nations communities or artists have initiated the project: the impetus for the story comes from First Nations people. Potts said if a *non-Aboriginal* theatre maker sought her advice on how to make a play that represented issues and circumstances of First Nations people she would need more information about their intentions:

> Well, what issues, what communities? Go and consult with the communities. Come back when you've done your homework about how they're going to be represented. And more importantly, who else is going to be in your team? Who's going to be the Indigenous person that is protecting the way Indigenous people are represented through that work? (Potts, 2015)

Potts indicates here that a non-Aboriginal playwright wanting to move for the first time into making plays addressing First Nations themes or experience has lots of work to do. Her hypothetical set of questions is underlaid with larger ones: Why do you want to do this? Why should *you* be doing this? What relationship do you have to the people whose story you want to tell? Do they want you to be the one to tell it? Interestingly, Potts appears to suggest here that the hypothetical creative team needs at the very least one First Nations person with appropriate cultural expertise to protect how Indigenous community members are represented in the process and portrayed on stage. Since we spoke, a sole First Nations cultural consultant/intermediary has been superseded by stronger requirements around story control and collaboration. At every other point in our discussion Potts' position, too, was more rigorous: that appropriate First Nations story telling involving non-

Aboriginal collaborators must begin with First Nations people and remain under First Nations control.

g. Seeking more First Nations decision-makers

Potts said the australian theatre-making and programming landscape needs more theatre companies, especially mainstream ones, employing First Nations producers and First Nations artists in decision-making roles. Malthouse had employed a First Nations producer, Potts said, and brought him into every conversation about First Nations work they were contemplating:

> We were able to feel much more confident about venturing into that territory, and about programming, because we could at least have a conversation. I'm not saying that (this First Nations producer role) is the end point. It often meant that that person could then go out and have wider conversations about the work. But it meant that we weren't trying to pussy-foot around and feeling frustrated that we couldn't artistically address some of the most pressing issues of our time. (Potts, 2015)

In this way, Potts was seeing the cultural and social capital embodied in the First Nations staff member Malthouse had employed: the company's agenda in creating this position was to draw on and be guided by that artist's cultural knowledges and community relationships around First Nations storytelling. This included their skill and sensitivity in how to broach conversations about permissions with First Nations communities. Potts acknowledged that the person in that role would not be expected to have all the knowledge required to answer questions—but would be more likely than a non-Aboriginal person to have appropriate ways of seeking First Nations community and artists' help to make the work under consideration. This would include networks and relationships—First Nations social capital, a form of FNCC—that the First Nations staff member is more likely to embody and have access to by dint of being a First Nations person recognised as such by Indigenous communities. This is also because they are more likely to be culturally versed in the issues and accountabilities associated with making stories about First Nations experience. That is, they would have embodied First Nations cultural capital (FNCC) which includes various First Nations knowledges. At the same time, I do not

mean to suggest all First Nations people in Australia always have these cultural knowledges and literacies or to the same degree. The First Nations cultural knowledge of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person varies with each individual's habitus created by their unique circumstance of growing up with First Nations Culture and other influences in a colonial australia. This variance is therefore linked not only to differences between australian First Nations Cultures but, more strikingly, to colonisation and ensuing community separations and dispossession arising from colonial practices since 1788 (Casey & Syron, 2005, p. 11).

In keeping with these issues, Potts told me in 2023 that her views on the role of an inhouse or project-based First Nations cultural consultant have evolved since we spoke early in my research:

> My views about this are slightly more nuanced today - I am more mindful that this can often burden that one person and position with the cultural load and labour on behalf of a whole community, and with responsibility towards an entire organisation. It's unfair and another form of imbalance. (Potts, 2023)

Potts said, in our first conversation (2015), mainstream theatre companies need to work harder to make First Nations *audiences* feel welcome because, as data continues to show, only a small percentage of mainstream theatre audiences are First Nations people. Potts indicated in 2023 this discrepancy, also evident in data cited in Chapter 3 of this research, continues today (Potts, 2023). Potts (2015) said her call for east coast theatre companies to employ more First Nations inhouse staff across all their operations could ensure First Nations patrons see more First Nations people in theatre foyers when they come to see plays:

> There's (still) work to be done in making the Indigenous general public feel welcome in the theatre and that's not only about having people in producing roles; it's about having people working as ushers, behind the bar, in the box office. It's about having people in roles within the fabric of the organisation that just change the look and the feel of the place. (Potts, 2015)

But theatre programming is most important for attracting First Nations

audiences—by ensuring that works presented connect with First Nations people's many and varied concerns:

> People go to the theatre because they see their world represented on stage somehow and that allows them to interact imaginatively with a whole series of possibilities: social possibilities, cultural possibilities. If those people go to the theatre and there's not one Indigenous person on stage, there's not one Indigenous person in the foyer, why would you? You're not going to feel that that work connects with you at any level. That's why it's important that we program Indigenous works so that we can invite (non-Aboriginal) audiences to share in that experience but also so that we can allow Indigenous people to feel included in something that's a pretty fantastic medium. (Potts, 2015)

Potts's reasoning here for making First Nations audiences feel welcome and represented in mainstage theatres—by the spaces themselves as well as stage content—seems to be about inclusion: *including* First Nations people in what occurs in mainstage theatres. Potts' insistence that First Nations theatre audiences should be able to see themselves on stage—and that this is important for welcoming First Nations theatre-goers—comes close to articulating that element of artistic freedom discussed in this thesis' second chapter. That is, for an entire group of Peoples to have artistic freedom they must be able to see creative work which reflects themselves, their worldviews and their concerns.

h. Potted lessons: welcoming First Nations stories onto mainstages

In our conversation Potts cited efforts by non-Aboriginal artistic directors to get more First Nations stories under First Nations creative control onto australian mainstages. She said cultural/collaborative errors by non-Aboriginal creatives involved with First Nations stories often related to the complexity of issues in collaborative Indigenous playmaking. She advocated for mainstage theatre companies to employ more First Nations people in creative, administrative, front of house and leadership roles to make those venues more welcoming places for First Nations audiences. And Potts was adamant that Aboriginal artists should be in the key decision-making roles for creating stories that are about First Nations experience (2015).

Meanwhile, I reiterate my concern about potential readings of my discussions in this section and elsewhere of White/settler-colonist capital deployed in First Nations theatre. I must rebut any deficit framing of First Nations theatre makers' creative skills, capital and Culture which might be inferred from how White Capital is described in this thesis. I am concerned readers might infer that First Nations theatre makers need to be shown the way by White/non-Aboriginal creatives, as has happened in how critics have framed First Nations work historically (Casey, 2004, p. 70; Casey & Syron, 2005, pp. 99-103). Such deficit framings are part of what I intend my research to critique. However, as discussed in previous chapters, deficit framings generally are a recurrent problematic in research about First Nations people and issues, especially when undertaken by non-Aboriginal researchers. That is, disadvantage experienced by First Nations people attaches to them in the White imagination as cultural outcome. This tendency thus denies the structural reality that persistent First Nations disadvantage is a colonial product which should attach to White/settler-colonists in a deficit framing of the colonisers. I note, therefore, that settler-colonist/White capital's often destabilising presence in First Nations theatre Culture-making is a problematic of the current australian theatre landscape; it is an enduring residue of the colony, not a problem of First Nations creative practice and Culture. In a colonised theatre landscape, it is difficult to assess whether *any* collaborations occur with the fully Sovereign, decolonised and artistically free desire of First Nations theatre makers and communities.

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iii. Michelle Evans

When I spoke to Michelle Evans for this research, she was an Associate Professor of Leadership at Charles Sturt University's business school. Unlike other theatre makers who contributed to this doctoral work, I knew Evans well: we had both worked at Charles Sturt's Bathurst campus and had mutual friends. When this thesis was submitted in 2023 she was an Associate Professor in Leadership at the

Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Melbourne (Evans, 2023). Evans was also co-founder and program director of the MURRA Indigenous Business Masterclass Program at the Melbourne Business School (2023) where she had completed her PhD (2012) in arts leadership about seven years before. In this discussion to follow I position Evans's story as theatre maker and arts mentor, revealed in our conversation, alongside her academic research into First Nations arts leadership.

a. Theatre beginnings: cultural action and liberation

Evans' first degree, a Bachelor of Arts in Communication/Theatre-Media from Charles Sturt University, trained students in cultural action and performance-devising based on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1977, 1992, 1995) philosophies. In the years following, Evans moved between theatre directing, arts management and arts program leadership roles focused on building First Nations and marginalised communities' capacities. In an early role with The Workers Cultural Action Committee (WCAC) at Newcastle Trades Hall, Evans used Freire-ian and Boal-ian methods "to create a space where people (and communities)… found in themselves (ways to recognise and articulate oppression) and were able to transform" across various artistic forms (2018). Managing across creative forms, Evans curated art exhibitions, ran writing workshops and managed various activities at WCAC during the period that playwright Paul Brown and others developed *Aftershocks* (1991), a play about the 1989 Newcastle earthquake (2018).

Evans joined the Melbourne Workers Theatre (MWT) in 2003 as assistant, then acting, company manager. She was part of the MWT development and rehearsal team to create race relations play *Magpie* (2001), discussed earlier in Chapter 8. Evans worked with Christos Tsiolkas, Pauline Whyman, Julian Meyrick, Tony Briggs, Patricia Cornelius, Andrew Bovell and others to create *The Waiting Room* (2002), about the refugee crisis, and *Fever* (2002), the earliest sequel to *Who's Afraid of the Working Class* (1998).

b. Wilin Centre: "the work I wanted to do in the world"

Before MWT Evans held an Indigenous liaison role at Victorian College of the Arts and helped establish VCA/Melbourne University's Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development in the Melbourne Arts Precinct. The Melbourne Workers Theatre's dependence on playwrights for making theatre departed from the Boal-ian improvisational methods Evans was used to and she found the Australian Council for the Arts play funding model—through distinct phases of pitch, creative development, rehearsal, production and performance—to be limiting (Evans, 2018). Evans therefore relished moving from MWT back to VCA and Wilin as the Centre's first director—with seven years guaranteed funding.

> That was where I wanted to do the work that I wanted to do in the world at that time. So, I was very happy to return. But, that time in the theatre (at MWT) was really, really instructive for me to think about the limitations of that particular artform, the work that I wanted to do in the world, but also how I wanted to support artists who were using those tools. (Evans, 2018)

Evans established an artists-in-residence program and made Wilin "a space for the creation of new Australian works that couldn't be made without the support of a training institution" (2018). One of the performance projects Evans oversaw at Wilin was Deborah Cheetham's opera *Pecan Summer*. Cheetham wrote the libretto and composed the work's music; but an even greater part of the opera-maker's vision was developing new artists:

> It was this bigger political piece around training. We had to go and identify people around Australia who might be interested in pursuing opera (laughs)—to train them. Deborah obviously wrote the piece and wrote the music for the piece; and then we had to rehearse it. It (was a multi-year project) and has become a platform, not just for Deborah and her company, but for all of these amazing performers who have gone on to train at places like the VCA, but also internationally. This project was Deborah's idea of not wanting to be the only one. She's a fantastic teacher, a leader, an artist and she's a composer. She's all of these things. And that's the sort of work you want to do. (Evans, 2018)

As Evans said, Deborah built the opera arts capacity of other First Nations performers and artists so that she would not be 'the only one': that is, the only First Nations person performing at her level in that creative field. Cheetham's and Evans' work included making the field of opera less White/settler-colonial by providing

culturally appropriate training and projects for First Nations emerging artists. During her seven-year stewardship of Wilin Evans strove to transform traditionally White/settler-colonial academic and creative spaces to make them suitable places for First Nations people to operate within. Part of this work included leading *non-Aboriginal* people to better understand First Nations Cultures through engaging with Aboriginal communities:

> I curated a cultural program where we took thirty postgraduate artists (all but one non-Aboriginal) up into Cape York on a journey over at Weipa, for the 400th year anniversary of the landing of the *Duyfken* [1], working with those Aboriginal communities, creating interface spaces and creating opportunities for people to have those immersion spaces. For Indigenous people my job has always been—whether it's at VCA or Melbourne Business school, these elite, White places—that I am a person who can get a foot in the door and do something to create space for people to come in. It changes that place as much as it changes the opportunities for the Indigenous people coming into those places. I'd like to think that the Wilin Centre has changed the VCA for the better over time. We were seeing the formation of new companies and new artistic collectives out of Wilin, not just Indigenous, but Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. We were having our artists perform at national and international arts festivals and working internationally on major arts projects. (Evans, 2018)

Evans thus referred to a process of creating spaces where First Nations artists can operate in culturally safe ways. This includes creating ways to alter the habituses of non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist collaborators, bureaucrats and managers active in those same or overlapping spaces. Evans' later academic work has focused on the role of First Nations arts leaders in making creative endeavours safe and available for Indigenous artists. I am including her research here in our conversation because she said it provides insight into her role at Wilin and is useful for understanding her own and other First Nations artists' leadership practices.

c. First Nations arts leadership: territories and practices

During and after her Wilin tenure, Evans completed PhD and postdoctoral research into how First Nations arts leaders enact their leadership (Evans, 2012; Evans & Sinclair, 2016a, 2016b). Evans' thesis (2012) and co-authored publications

based on its findings (2016a, 2016b) identify "leadership identity practices" (2016a, p. 278) and the notion of *territories* (2016b) to convey "the overlapping contexts in which Indigenous artistic leaders work" and to highlight "the embodied ways individuals enact leadership across country and community" (2016b, p. 270). Leading, Evans and Sinclair argue, requires Indigenous arts leaders to both express and resist "cultural identities of Aboriginality" (2016a, p. 270); therefore First Nations leaders must apply "sometimes contradictory" leadership practices, according to circumstance, in processes that include ongoing identity work (2016a, p. 271) and which are often "ingenious, persistent and courageous" (2016b, p. 477).

Evans and Sinclair (2016b) identify four overlapping, dynamic territories in which First Nations arts leaders operate and which, they contend, are therefore unfixed and evolving constantly. Territory 1, *Authorisation in a bi-cultural world (cultural authorisation and self-authorising)*, names the ways in which First Nations artists and artistic leaders seek authority and permission from communities to do culturally appropriate work (p. 478). Territory 2, *Identity and belonging (both fearless and connected)*, comprises the pressures on First Nations artists to perform their cultural identity. This includes, in often painful experiences, the need to defend and address questions about their identity from both First Nations and non-Aboriginal quarters (pp. 480-481).

Evans and Sinclair (2016b) provide examples of emerging and established First Nations arts leaders recognising themselves as individuals and their bodies and personas as sites from which to enact Indigenous leadership. This embodiment is made more difficult and sometimes traumatic amid public debate about "authentic" Aboriginality (p. 481). This includes being the "first" Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander artist to succeed in a particular field. One such example they present, also noted by Evans in conversation with me (2018), is Deborah Cheetham's experience as the "only" Aboriginal opera diva and her yearning for more First Nations people to enter that field of opera so that she would not be alone (2016b, p. 481).

Evans' and Sinclair's (2016b) *Territory 3, Artistic practice (being innovative plus a custodian of cultural values)*, means that First Nations leaders must balance three sometimes inconsistent tasks: (1) respecting and observing cultural protocols; (2) enabling experimental creativity; and (3) meeting commercial

and managerial requirements (p. 481). First Nations arts leaders addressing this third territory of practice must set boundaries around these demanding, crucial and conflicting arts-making imperatives. This balancing includes “constructing non-judgemental secure physical spaces for the creation of new work” (p. 482).

Evans and Sinclair (2016b) categorise Territory 4 as: History, colonisation and trauma (expressing and containing trauma, empowering and generating hope). This refers to the agency and power that First Nations arts leaders exercise amid the continuing colonial trauma experienced by First Nations people in australia—including leaders themselves, their families and the fellow artists they lead (p. 470). Evans and Sinclair refer to methods of “containment” (2016a, p. 281; 2016b, p. 483) that First Nations arts leaders develop to (1) provide safe spaces for communities to express and contain trauma, (2) educate White agencies and people about colonial realities affecting First Nations communities (and artists), and (3) address the lateral violence and bullying which can emerge within communities because of residual trauma (2016a, pp. 280-282; 2016b, p. 483).

Evans and Sinclair (2016b) contend that their analysis of how First Nations arts leaders exercise their leadership draws on Foucauldian concepts of predetermined relations of knowledge, power and language (1980) which have rendered Indigenous people as objects and troublemakers (2016b, p. 477). Yet, Sinclair and Evans (2016b) argue, while still applying Foucauldian perspectives (1972, 1980), the ingenious, courageous adaptations applied by First Nations arts leaders to work within these inescapable power relations suggest their own positions within them are not absolutely fixed (p. 477): “Acts of subversion and resistance can be expressions of power, and sometimes, we would argue, practices of leadership” (p. 477). Using a Bourdieusian toolset, I posit that this propensity to alter power relations suggests First Nations leaders deploy strategies which shift their positions in arts fields. That is, their capital, which is their field position determining their power within a field, can change because of the impact of their strategies, or *practices*, on their own and other’s habituses within that arts field. Evans and Sinclair (2016b) themselves liken their concept of *territories* to Bourdieu’s Field (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996a), “as a series of overlapping physical and temporal spaces marked out by discursive, symbolic, embodied, cultural and economic positions” (p. 477). Their *territories* framework, they contend, derives from how arts leaders

described their complex, embodied connections, occurring all at once in the present moment, to multiple communities, lands and past/present/future time periods (p. 477).

d. Leadership *territories*: Field… or Practice?

For the purposes of work here, I do not equate Evans and Sinclair's four territories—describing First Nations arts leaders' problems, duties, expertise, actions and responsibilities—to Bourdieu's concept of Field, as they suggest (2016b, p. 477). Rather Evans' and Sinclair's territories synthesise *contexts* (or fields) with the work (or practices) First Nations arts leaders *do* within the fields where they operate as leaders. Therefore, I argue Evans' and Sinclair's *territories* are closer to Bourdieu's concept of Practice. First Nations leadership territories, defined by leaders' contexts and duties, reflect structures and realities found within those arts fields. But *territories*' actual substance, while defined by field contexts, characteristics and components, are the *practices* of First Nations leaders in those arts fields. Evans' and Sinclair's territories are thus a complex conflation of (1) those structural *realities* within arts fields with (2) First Nations' leaders Culture-led and other habitus-based *strategies* for responding to those realities. Territories, in Evans' and Sinclair's analyses, merge Cultural and colonial contexts of arts fields where First Nations leaders operate (the Field) with the Culture- and colony- driven *actions* (Practice) of a particular social group (First Nations arts leaders) operating in that field according to their habitus(es).

The four Evans and Sinclair *territories* therefore, in my current reading, are rich ontologies of the work First Nations arts leaders need to do across the current australian arts landscape. The Evans-Sinclair *four territories* framework maps First Nations arts leadership *practice* which is influenced by and includes the fields they operate in. Those territories do not signify or define four fields or even one combined field. They could, according to Bourdieu's framework, instead be descriptions of practices—or an ontology of the practice—occurring across one large or several possible arts fields. How Evans' and Sinclair's four nominated territories relate to Bourdieu's framework presents a potential lens through which to drill down

further into their analysis. Such further study is beyond the scope and agenda of this thesis but a possible avenue for future investigation.

e. Leadership Capital and Culture

Applying Bourdieu's concepts more broadly, I contend that Evans and Sinclair (2016a, 2016b) have uncovered rich examples of the complex creative capital First Nations arts leaders embody and deploy in practice. Indigenous arts leaders' culturally required and culturally informed attributes—identity, relationships, knowledges and skills—are embodied and enacted First Nations symbolic, social, and cultural capital (FNCC) deriving from their respective habituses. The courageous strategies Evans and Sinclair (2016a, 2016b) reveal are learned, enculturated, devised, created and enacted First Nations practice reflecting their embodied capital (FNCC). This is FNCC used to make new Culture in the form of new cultural and artistic practices and artefacts. The specific habitus of each First Nations arts leader is the site and source of the First Nations cultural-creative capital (FNCC) they embody and deploy to address their multilayered role within their First Nations arts fields and beyond. First Nations leaders' complex responsibilities and strategies are generated within their arts field both by resources for, and colonial impediments to, making Culture. The Evans and Sinclair research (2016a, 2016b) illustrates the complexity of the cultural, artistic and community accountability issues which all First Nations artists must navigate to operate appropriately in preserving and making First Nations Culture. Their inquiry (2016a, 2016b) makes explicit the complexity and profound value of First Nations Culture (and thus nonmaterial capital or FNCC) embodied in First Nations arts makers and the First Nations communities and Cultures they serve.

f. Evans lessons: leadership terrains

Associate Professor Evans, in detailing her earlier work as an arts practitioner and facilitator (2018), described actions, intentions and projects of her own which fit within the territories of leadership practice emerging from her research (2016a, 2016b). As Evans explained, she sought a way through for fellow First Nations artists to make appropriate cultural artefacts—such as performance, festivals, film and

exhibitions—amid realities of colonisation that include trauma, obstruction and limited resources (2018). Her processes also required respecting accountabilities to First Nations communities and their stories. This remains complex work, as Evans' research shows, to ensure First Nations cultural capital (FNCC) is used to make First Nations Culture and not products supporting colonial constructions of Aboriginality. Instances where First Nations cultural capital is misappropriated for colonial construction, as seen in Sydney Theatre Company's *Secret River*, exemplify how White colonial habits distort and silence Indigenous people's voices and obliterate their artistic freedom. In those colonial constructions, First Nations cultural capital (FNCC)—including stories and art—have been diverted from serving First Nations audiences to create narratives for White/settler-colonist theatre-goers. Such constructions of colonial pasts and present, other scholars argue, preserve and continue the australian colonial project (A. M. Moreton-Robinson, 2006) which includes efforts to impose and conclude Reconciliation (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The cultural ingeniousness of First Nations arts leaders identified by Evans and Sinclair (2016a, 2016b) counters and resists the dominance of colonial narratives and White/settler-colonist constructions of colonial timelines. Indigenous leaders' practices therefore apply tools, methods and knowledges—all adaptive, nonmaterial, First Nations capital (FNCC)—mobilised by the impacts of colonisation on First Nations people's artistic and cultural freedom.

iv. Conclusion: leadership strategies for enabling Culture

Both Evans and Potts have described creative leadership strategies which operate *relationally* to empower voices of, and control by, First Nations artists making theatre stories. Evans showed that leadership by strong, knowledgeable and agile First Nations arts makers is necessary to promote culturally safe First Nations stage stories and to expand First Nations theatre-making capacity. Evans' and Sinclair's *territories*—for describing leaders' actions, methods and responsibilities—make visible the First Nations social, symbolic and cultural capital (FNCC) Indigenous leaders embody and deploy. Evans' and Sinclair's work also helps to reveal how these adaptive, ingenious strategies (key FNCC) are *needed* to enable empowered First Nations theatre Culture to be made.

Potts stressed the complexities involved in appropriate First Nations playmaking because of the combination of *relationships* between First Nations and non-Aboriginal creatives is different for every project. Additionally, each *story* and whose community the First Nations story belongs to has different responsibilities, consultation requirements and sensitivities attached to it. Errors are made, Potts said, not because of lack of care but because so much detailed care is needed (2015). Potts said First Nations stories on any australian stage must be under First Nations control: non-Aboriginal theatre leaders contributing their skills to First Nations projects must adjust their roles and input to ensure First Nations people are in control and that they, the non-Aboriginal creative, is serving the voices and vision of the First Nations artists and community whose story it is (2015). Such power adjustment, I argue, is how White nonmaterial capital can be deployed for First Nations stories and thus transform into FNCC through being diverted to make First Nations Culture. However, such revised power dynamics and capital movements currently still depend on White choices determined by the individual habituses of non-Aboriginal collaborators. Therefore, how First Nations control of First Nations stage stories can be made universal across the australian theatre landscape remains an urgent inquiry emerging from this thesis.

Potts said arts protocols can indicate ways of working but are open to interpretation. She called for clear definitions of what constitutes First Nations or Indigenous theatre with First Nations control central to any definition. Potts also said that mainstage theatres need to hire more First Nations people in all its operations so that they would be welcoming spaces and venues for First Nations people, artists, audiences and stories. Potts' view, that First Nations people are most qualified and competent to manage consultation with communities and other First Nations story development, recognises the First Nations cultural capital (FNCC) embodied and enacted, to varying degrees, by individual First Nations people. *Recognition* of that creative-cultural FNCC is also *symbolic* capital activated by First Nations and non-Aboriginal assumptions about a person's First Nations identity and community belonging.

Meanwhile, Potts' observation that east coast theatre venues need to be more welcoming to First Nations audiences expands an already noted discrepancy in

the cultural rights and artistic freedom of First Nations communities compared to non-Aboriginal audiences: First Nations people are less able to access mainstage and other theatre because those arts spaces, according to Potts, are not encultured or structured to welcome them. This is so, not just in what work is programmed and who is making that work, but also who First Nations audiences will encounter front of house in most theatre venues. Potts' comments suggest that predominantly settler-colonist staffing and programming can mark theatre venues as White to those non-White social groups whose non-White habituses mean that they see and feel the norm of Whiteness. Added to these barriers, Potts says, are broader ones such as theatre tickets costs, access to theatre season programming information and where theatres are located (2023).

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v. Footnotes: Two arts sector leaders

[1] The *Duyfken* was a Dutch East India Company ship believed to be the first European vessel to make a recorded landing on australia's coastline

10. ILBIJERRI WOMEN

i. Introduction: colonial masquerades vs genuine cultural exchange

Ilbijerri is, in 2023, australia's longest Indigenous-run theatre company still in operation. It is therefore unsurprising that three people I spoke with for this research were or had been employed by Ilbijerri and had worked together. I met with each 'Ilbijerri woman' at different times and, for anonymity reasons, did not reveal I had spoken, or would be speaking, to their colleagues. These conversations were united by instances where non-Aboriginal/settler-colonist people involved in arts work seemed to value the First Nations identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creatives over their skills and cultural knowledges for making theatre. That is, in some projects, First Nations artists' *symbolic* and *social* FNCC embodied in their Indigenous identity was more highly sought by non-Aboriginal collaborators than the *cultural* FNCC of their theatre-making practice and capacity. This emerged from examples the Ilbijerri women gave of non-Aboriginal screen and theatre makers creating work portraying First Nations people without appropriate consultation. In those projects, settler-colonist producers and directors sought symbolic and social capital attached to First Nations people: to give authority to their work as White creatives and to gain entry to communities. These Ilbijerri conversations also revealed further instances of non-Aboriginal controlled and imagined work either masquerading as First Nations theatre or being mistaken as such by programmers and non-Aboriginal audiences. However, all three women's stories also contained strong examples of appropriate collaborations contributing to First Nations theatre and Culture making.

I begin with the most recently conducted conversation of the three reported in this chapter: This key First Nations arts leader was part of a three-person panel advising on Indigenous theatre for the Federal Government's 2023 *Revive* arts policy. At the time of our meeting, she was reluctantly accepting that collaboration with non-Aboriginal partners was a resourcing necessity for First Nations stage creations, while also demanding that First Nations theatre be clearly defined as only that made by Aboriginal people.

ii. Rachael Maza

Rachael Maza is a Yidinji and Meriam woman of Torres Strait Islander, australian Aboriginal and dutch heritage. When we spoke, she had been artistic director of Ilbijerri Theatre Company for ten years. Maza has performed in screen and stage productions including *Radiance* (stage and screen versions), *The Dreamers*, *Holy Day*, *The Sapphires* and *Beautiful One Day*. She has directed theatre works such as *Stolen*, *Chopped Liver*, *Yandy, Show Us Your Tiddas*, *Jack Charles Vs the Crown* and *My Urrwai* (Australia Council, 2019a). Maza advocates for First Nations theatre and has provided arts leadership through roles on ACMI screen museum's board, the Circus Oz Indigenous Advisory Panel and Australian Opera's Indigenous Advisory Panel. She received the Australia Council Award for Theatre in March 2019. As already noted, Maza was part of a three-person panel who advised on Indigenous theatre for the Federal Government's *Revive* arts policy released in early 2023.

EDITORIAL NOTE: Maza had not yet provided feedback to me on this report of our conversation before this thesis was evaluated and then lodged in the Flinders University library. I am retaining our conversation in the thesis on the basis explained in section 5 (iv) of Chapter 5 (one of the thesis methods chapters). Maza's testimony is powerful and contains significant data underpinning key ideas emerging from this research. However, it must be recognised that this version of our conversation does not yet have Maza's approval. I would urge on any researcher or other reader choosing to quote from this reportage, or arrive at understandings based on it, that you must acknowledge these views and disclosures were expressed in 2017, not 2024, and have been curated by myself, a non-Aboriginal academic, not Maza. K.N.

Maza's father Bob Maza co-founded National Black Theatre in the 1970s, leading the emergence of australia's Indigenous theatre movement (Casey, 2004). A Maza biography said she was "both born into a movement and carving her own legacy" (2019a). Maza told me her flippant answer for why she works in Indigenous

theatre is that it was the world that she grew up in, so she was "doomed or destined, whichever way you want to look at it" (Maza, 2017). But her real reason for continuing was to give voice to First Nations people through narratives:

> The power of storytelling is central to our sense of identity and being—as a people, as a society. So, I see storytelling as integral to our well-being because it's inseparable from who we are; our identity is affirmed through our narratives. (Maza, 2017)

Maza said her experience of working in theatre has been vastly different to her father's:

> In my father's day there was no industry. And there were certainly no roles for blackfellas. The late 60s, 70s saw the birth of the first (Indigenous Australian) playwrights as we know them—the Kevin Gilberts, the Jack Davises—those early productions. (Maza, 2017)

Maza said old problems persist alongside new ones in today's Indigenous performing arts ecology and affect her work in the industry.

a. Collaboration trouble: shared creativity vs unequal dynamics

As discussed in previous sections, Maza had two years earlier raised problems she saw in Sydney Theatre Company's stage production of Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River* (Maza, 2015). Maza used *The Secret River* as an example of the kinds of colonial narratives which come out of theatre made about First Nations people through a White lens. She called then for a reset in the way that Indigenous theatre is categorised so that the label be reserved only for work which is made by First Nations people for First Nations people (2015).

> My provocation to us as an industry is to say, "Let's name it." And we might not always be able to achieve it, but we set the bar. Aboriginal theatre is theatre that is told by Aboriginal people. Made and told by Aboriginal people. Now we name that, we have a bar. Let's make the bar and then, then, we can make exceptions. But at least we know where the bar was. At the moment there's no bar. There's no standard. (Maza, 2015)

Her criticisms of *The Secret River* were refuted by its STC producers and First Nations and non-Aboriginal cast members. But Maza stood her ground: that it was a White story that was being told in *The Secret River*, not a First Nations story, and that it was not theatre made in service to First Nations people (Tan, 2016).

At the time, Maza called for non-Aboriginal people and their exercise of White privilege to get out of the way of First Nations storytelling (2015). But her position on collaboration between non-Aboriginal and First Nations theatre makers for staging First Nations stories is more nuanced than her *Secret River* stand might suggest. Maza insisted to me that there are non-Aboriginal theatre makers who work constructively with First Nations theatre makers. Ilbijerri Theatre Company has employed many non-Aboriginal people who contribute theatre-making experience to First Nations productions. Maza also said she was still grappling with defining how collaboration between non-Aboriginal and First Nations people should work:

> It's so hard. Because I definitely get that there is a place where we can work together in the telling of our stories. I mean, far out, my company's a living example of that. The most amazing team of half Indigenous/half non-Indigenous. There's a real meeting place where we genuinely share a passion to get our stories right, to get our history right. As a nation we all need to do that. (Maza, 2017)

Control of the story, not mere representation in the making process, is crucial, Maza said. But whether there is First Nations control is often unclear. When non-Aboriginal producers are putting the team together First Nations control is, Maza implied already lost and unlikely to be on their agenda. This is especially so when First Nations people are outnumbered overwhelmingly by non-Aboriginal creatives:

> There's this distinction; it's that seat of who's controlling. Who has authority and creative control of the story and how critical it is that that is black-led. I do understand that there is complexity around, say for instance, in a collaboration: you've got nine people and one person is a blackfella in that circle. And we're collaborating? (Plus) there are some blackfellas who are down this end of the spectrum and are just not in a position to be able to stand strong in that environment. It's not an equal environment. (Maza, 2017)

Maza said appropriate collaboration is more than having adequate numbers of First Nations people in the development process. It is important to hire the right First Nations people for the task and story: those with clear identity involving strong links to their community and their Aboriginality. They need these strong connections, Maza said, so they can stand their ground and know their responsibilities to cultural issues. But sometimes the First Nations person chosen will be someone the non-Aboriginal people desire to have on their team because that artist is culturally compliant or more like them (2017). That is often because, Maza said, colonial circumstance has separated that First Nations person from community for much of their lives:

> People are all at different stages in their own identity, their own sense of who they are. You've got the fellas who, fully, culturally know where they stand. They're strong, they know who they are, they know where they come from, they know their networks. Down the other end of the spectrum there are people who are fostered out, taken away, adopted; or, just not brought up in the community and they know nothing about who they are or where they come from. This end of the spectrum could very well have had a very good education, been brought up by a very good middle-class family. Often what's problematic is these people might get into positions because they present well; they know how to apply, they know how to sit for an interview. Because of this privileged upbringing. And yet they're the least qualified to speak for blackfellas. Yet they're on a valid part of the journey too. But they don't know who they are, they don't know any better. So, they'll often see it as 'Oh, opportunity!' But next thing, 'No! No! No!' happening behind them, by the community. It's unfair. It's unfair on them, it's unfair on the work. It's hugely problematic. (Maza, 2017)

Maza acknowledged here, as do Casey and Syron (2005), that in a colonised australia every First Nations person has a different, often fractured, experience of their Aboriginal or Torres Strait identities and Culture. Casey and Syron (2005) give examples of where trauma of being separated from Culture can be exacerbated in the rehearsal room, especially when gaps in a First Nations person's knowledge become an issue (2005). Maza suggested here, conversely, there are times non-Aboriginal theatre makers prefer to work with a less knowledgeable, less enculturated First Nations person: because they are less likely to raise cultural issues.

The non-Aboriginal producers could well be unaware that their preference for a less enculturated, less community informed First Nations person is driving their hiring choice. These are instances when the symbolic capital inherent in a First Nation's person's Indigenous identity is more important (to non-Aboriginal creatives) than the social and cultural capital that attaches to a different First Nations person with stronger cultural knowledge and community links. In fact, the (perceived) symbolic capital of the (unperceived) less connected First Nations person can be more valued, often unconsciously, by non-Aboriginal producers. This will be because that First Nations symbolic capital is *not* attached to those other forms of nonmaterial First Nations capital and is thus more easily subverted into colonial capital. I reiterate at this point that colonial capital is defined in this thesis as capital (originating from any social source) which has been deployed or transformed to maintain colonial structures. This includes catering to the expectations and comfort zones of White imaginations or promoting and extending those settler lenses' power and vocality.

b. White desire and shady consultation

Another persistent problem Maza raised also involves the deployment of First Nations symbolic capital for colonial work. That is, how non-Aboriginal theatre makers and producers consult incompletely with Aboriginal theatre makers and performers. Maza said that her name as a First Nations theatre maker and leader has been used by non-Aboriginal theatre and screen creatives to gain approval for projects involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and stories. This, she told me, is one of the dangers for Indigenous artists of being "consulted" on projects. "It's been so many times" that Maza has been consulted on a production, then had her advice ignored, and yet her name has remained on the project to suggest she approved of the result (2017). In one instance a television drama producer flew Maza to Sydney as a "consultant" to advise on six scripts for a television series set in a remote location where many of Maza's family relations live or are from:

> Directors and the writers were all in the room. And I gave intensive detailed feedback to the best of my ability. (The script had) that same trope. Black dysfunction and the white woman intervening to somehow salvage the situation. The chairman of the

> island, who is a highly respected, distinguished leader in the (local Indigenous) community, married, and all this stuff, is a slut. (That's) how it's written in this thing. And he's flirting with the white woman—trying to run off with her. That was one example that I pulled out. (Maza 2017)

Maza's suggestions to fix these script problems were rejected because the series idea was based on the head producer's White/non-Aboriginal sister:

> (I told them) 'Okay. Just for example, you've got all this dysfunction that's happening in the community and yet this white character seems to glide through flawless.' And I said 'How about dirty her up a bit. For instance, why isn't she the one that's cracking onto the chairman'. And (the head producer said) 'Oh, we couldn't do that because it's based on my sister, and that's not how it works'. (Maza 2017)

Maza reminded the room that the script's local Indigenous characters represented her relatives:

> I was like, 'And who are the rest of the characters based on? They're based on my family and my community'. I was so irate; I was so annoyed with her (the head producer). (Maza 2017)

It seemed that Maza was not expected to care about how her family might be portrayed; but the non-Aboriginal producer in control could insist that her own White relative was shown in a virtuous, capable, and self-aware light. Before Maza left the meeting the head producer told her there was no scope to change the scripts:

> She said, 'Look, they're basically, mostly locked-off anyway.' And I absolutely lost it. I was like, 'Well take me off it; you can still pay me because I've still put in all the work'. I said: 'I don't want anything to do with this project'. So, anyway, went home and then found out years later from community that she had been walking around community saying to community 'Oh, Rachael Maza has read the scripts.' (Maza 2017)

If the scripts were "already locked off", it appears the head producer had hired Maza so she could use the consultation with her as a rubber stamp process—with no intention of taking on board any suggestions. Alternatively, she told Maza the scripts

were finalised and could not be changed so that she could avoid applying Maza's advice. Either way the producers used Maza's involvement to indicate that consultation with a First Nations community member and artist took place: albeit at the end of the creation process and to no avail. Disturbingly, the producers also misrepresented Maza's involvement long after she had withdrawn from the project: her identity and the symbolic First Nations capital she thus embodied continued to be used by them. This included to recruit local people—her relatives—during the on-location production phase:

> They get away with (these stereotypes and tropes) because it's seen as a 'oh, how fantastic, an all-black production, incredible work opportunities'. I mean, my uncle was the head of casting up there and I was like, 'Oh God. They're all involved. They're all thinking I've read the scripts. Oh my God'. Drives me insane. (Maza 2017)

This lack of control Maza has over how consultation with her and the word *consultant* is used has had continuing ramifications. This includes that non-Aboriginal creatives will claim they have gained cultural competence from working with her and her relatives:

> The creative team who have the authority can take on as little as they want. They get to put your name on it, both on the funding and on the credits. And that person's name is dirt in their community and yet the whitefellas walk around with a big brown sticker tick on their resume. And, now, anyone who is working in the industry now and, for instance, is looking for a producer to be mentored by. Her name is put up: (that head producer) as the expert on all things Torres Strait. Even blackfellas will fall for it. It's like, 'Oh... you've worked with that other community. We want you to work with our community.' (Maza, 2017)

The Torres Strait series example exposes how little value the production team saw in Maza's cultural and storytelling insights. Maza was offering to share her expertise to make a richer, more truthful story that would better represent Torres Strait Islander people. But the non-Aboriginal producers rejected and rebuffed those capital offerings. Maza's creative, storytelling capital included First Nations cultural capital–cultural knowledges from being a Torres Strait Islander woman—and other dramaturgical capital related to her theatre maker experience telling First Nations

stories. Instead, the non-Aboriginal filmmakers sought only the symbolic and social First Nations capital inherent in Maza's artistic leadership profile, Torres Strait identity and community relationships. Invoking Maza's name and exaggerating her creative input provided them access to her people, their lives, their Torres Strait Islander bodies (as extras and gophers), their Torres Strait Islander social networks (as recruiters and fixers) and their island homes. The non-Aboriginal producers were also able to appropriate some of Maza's (and her community's) symbolic First Nations capital for their filmmaking resumes, if they so desired. Maza's identity, experience and ongoing role as a First Nations theatre leader, thus constitutes nonmaterial Bourdieusian capital desired by non-Aboriginal creatives pursuing conscious and unconscious colonial arts-making agendas.

c. Community accountability: Cultural capital vs colonial load

In conversations reported in previous sections, I explained I had for a time wrongly conflated cultural, community and familial *responsibilities* with cultural *load*. I had equated those aspects of First Nations culture and identity with the unequal weights that fall on First Nations people through living on colonised lands. As noted already, I am using the term "colonial load" instead of "cultural load" for two purposes in this thesis. One is to properly assign the cause of higher levels of disadvantage and distress affecting First Nations communities and people; the other intention is to separate my conception from the lived experience of my First Nations informants. I am therefore using an academic construction to stand in for a lived reality to which I don't have access. In deploying purpose one, substituting "colonial" for "cultural" separates those negatives of First Nations/colonised experience from the value of cultural knowledges, kin and community relationships and accountabilities which are Capital in the Bourdieusian sense. That is, they are First Nations nonmaterial/cultural capital or FNCC. Those accountabilities to community, I *had* erroneously seen as burdens on First Nations theatre makers and a major *load* they carry in the rehearsal room. This was even though I also understood that those accountabilities are key forms of cultural knowledge which inform and define appropriate First Nations theatre-making. As such, they are cultural capital important to First Nations Culture-making, cultural identity and community resilience.

It was in this next part of my conversation with Maza that I realised First Nations people do not necessarily experience accountabilities and lines of responsibility and care to communities as a "load" in a setter-colonial sense; that is, as something they would prefer not to carry or which impedes their creative work. But the fact that non-Aboriginal outsiders can often assume those responsibilities as burdens First Nations people should discard, can create forms of colonial load. That is, the load derives from a lack of cultural safety which arises when non-Aboriginal collaborators frame cultural practices and accountabilities to First Nations communities in negative ways. Alternatively, it also happens when they discourage First Nations artists from incorporating those responsibilities in rehearsal and other theatre-making processes. This includes not allowing the time, resources and cultural space for those community accountabilities to be considered and met. Such different worldviews can also be insidious: while it is still not rare for non-Aboriginal theatre makers to believe that cultural responsibilities impede First Nations artists, that attitude, when revealed, can come as a shock to Indigenous collaborators.

Maza gave this example when I asked how heavy the "load" is upon her as a theatre maker to have to advocate for First Nations storytelling:

> I had this realization some time ago when an artistic director of one of the major festivals, came up to me. It was a gathering of directors—a director's forum. People from all across the industry were a part of it. Anyway, there was an Indigenous director, a colleague in there amongst them. But this other non-Indigenous director came over and pulled me aside sometime later (and) he goes: 'Oh, I'm really worried about—about this person'. And I went 'Oh, why?' And I'm thinking 'Oh maybe they're not having a good time in this course and they're feeling a bit—the only blackfella there or something.' I'm going off like that in my head. And he goes: 'We're having this discussion and next thing this person starts saying that he's responsible to every other blackfella that's gone before him, to every blackfella that he stands alongside with, and to every blackfella that hasn't even been born yet. He says that he holds the responsibility to all that. And I said to him 'No you don't. That's not your responsibility, that's not fair on any one person.' (Maza 2017)

Maza went on with the story:

> Maza: And I cracked up laughing, I was like 'Oh, my God, of course he does'. I was like, 'What, are you crazy? Of course he's responsible. Anything he does, he has to answer to all of that.' And I said, 'That's why... the protocols and consultation and all of that is so important. You want to get this shit right.' And it was just this huge epiphany of 'Oh, my God! Whitefellas have no idea of the different cultural load that all blackfellas carry.' The responsibility to their family, to their community, to representing your people politically, culturally. And the complexity of the politics within each of our communities. Unbelievably huge. And you are just born with those weights on your shoulders. So, you don't question it. It's not like 'Oh my God, I've got this huge burden'. It's just part of the fabric of how you work. And hence, we get it all the time. It's friggin' complex and hard. And a lot of us have been brought up with the strong support of our culture around us. So, there's a lot of falling on our face and getting hit over the back of the head. That happens. And you just get better at it, actually. So, it was really interesting to be reminded in that one conversation of, 'Oh my God, whitefellas just make a production and aren't answerable to anyone'. And that's actually why they don't get it. They actually don't get that you, when you write that woman's role you are representing all women. People don't think like that when you're writing a play for a non-Indigenous person. Whereas you write a black role, that character is representing every blackfella.
> Nankervis: And is that as it should be? Or is that just a sign of-
> Maza: I just think that that's how it is. (Maza 2017)

Maza's story of this conversation with the non-Aboriginal artistic director recalled separate epiphanies she and he experienced. The non-Aboriginal director had not understood how integral cultural responsibility is to the way and why First Nations performers and theatre makers work. He had seen the Aboriginal director's sense of responsibility to his community—and all australian First Nations people—as a block to his creative work: an obstacle needing removal or an affliction which needed to be cured. As Maza described it, however, such responsibility is the "fabric" of how she and fellow Indigenous theatre makers create. Maza did at one point refer to those requirements as "cultural load", but she went on to say the requirement to do that cultural work is not a "problem", it just "is" even if it can be "a weight on your shoulders." Maza's epiphanies were: firstly, realising that non-Aboriginal australians have "no idea" of the different community responsibilities and additional cultural expectations with which Aboriginal theatre makers work; and secondly, she was reminded that non-Aboriginal australians, including those she works with, can make

theatre and film without being answerable in a cultural sense to anyone. The White/settler-colonist theatre maker or performer has no accountability equal or close to the responsibilities an Aboriginal artist has to their community. After describing this incident, Maza concluded:

> (Cultural responsibility is) not something that I skirt away from. In fact, I think it makes us all the richer and it just is what it is anyway. That Aboriginal storytelling is very much enmeshed and inseparable from who we are within our community, within the Country that you come from and on whose Country you're standing. That intertwining, that network... You never make a story that is not connected to that fibre-optic, kind of three-dimensional, that is going on. Whereas whitefellas don't have that same thing. And I think that's a good thing. I just acknowledge that that's what it is and that we need to acknowledge it. And that is why it's critically important that we have creative and cultural and political authority over our work. Because we understand those responsibilities. Whereas a whitefella looks in, they don't have responsibilities to no-one. (Maza 2017)

Cultural load is therefore a complex, loaded and layered term. It encompasses additional responsibilities and contingencies any First Nations person, including theatre makers, must grapple with in a colonised australia and across a colonised theatre landscape. Cultural load is not a phenomenon I can claim to fully know as a non-Aboriginal person. Nevertheless, I will venture two overlapping yet different forms of cultural load I have come to see in my discussions with Maza and other theatre makers. There is cultural work, such as accounting to and consulting with community; these tasks invoke First Nations Culture and thus engage and produce First Nations cultural capital. These requirements might be experienced as a load because, as Maza said, non-Aboriginal people can create, produce and live without those accountabilities. Therefore, predominantly White spaces where First Nations creatives and other Indigenous agents often work are structured for settler-colonists who do not have to think about community. Therein lies one way that load arises from First Nations cultural and community practices—even as those practices, at the same time, constitute capital (FNCC). Then there are additional loads other theatre makers have cited borne of entrenched disadvantage linked to colonial dispossession. These include higher rates of incarceration, illness and early death affecting greater numbers of Indigenous people or their families and networks—adding to stress and

trauma across communities (Frankland, 2015b). These disadvantages creating load are not Culture; they are colonisation. They are therefore not capital (FNCC) either. To help me work with these complexities of cultural load, I am positing a narrower term, *colonial* load, to cover the impact of colonisation on the circumstances and cultural safety of First Nations people. This is to distinguish that impact from those cultural and community responsibilities and practices which are, yes, difficult, continually evolving work inside and outside of theatre-making. But those cultural protocols and respect for community—including knowledge of them, how to work with them and the *requirement* to work with them—are key cultural capital (FNCC) in telling First Nations theatre stories which serve the communities they are about.

That cultural work, as already suggested, becomes a load alongside being valuable culture-making because it must occur within colonial structures. This can include when the work is undertaken in culturally unsafe surroundings. This can be where the storytelling is not under First Nations control, for example, or where funding is inadequate to pay for the necessary First Nations people and expertise to make theatre-making culturally safe. At a basic level, it occurs when non-Aboriginal collaborators do not respect and value the cultural accountabilities at play. Cultural responsibility also becomes load within a working environment when First Nations staff must provide more support for their families and communities affected by centuries of colonisation; the load becomes even heavier when non-Aboriginal employers and colleagues do not understand that responsibility and its colonial causes. As already raised in discussion on leadership research cited in Chapter 9 (Evans & Sinclair, 2016a, 2016b), I would argue that resilience and ingenuity by First Nations communities and leaders—artistically and generally—to respond to these colonial impacts and loads is ongoing Culture-making, which further develops rich First Nations cultural capital (FNCC). Primarily, it is cultural capital based on knowledge; but it is further empowered by the social capital linked to those strong First Nations communities, networks, leadership and relationships that are engaged in managing life under colonisation.

d. Colonial tropes, mission men and shared stories.

In our conversation, we turned to who has the right to tell First Nations stories. It is a debate which is not fixed, Maza told me, and has shifted much over twenty years, requiring complex and nuanced thinking to move forward with movements in Indigenous theatre itself. Maza distinguished between theatre works which position themselves appropriately—in terms of whose voice is being heard—from those which do not (2017). *The Secret River* is an example of a stage-play which claims to acknowledge shared history while Maza, as a First Nations person, sees in it only a White myth of colonial need, desire and conquest. So, it is a play which, along with other problems in it that Maza has raised, producers and critics failed to position truthfully.

Maza described what she calls *mission man* syndrome: where non-Aboriginal theatre makers gain artistic profile from entering communities to tell their stories but don't share authorship, nor do they provide options for new First Nations theatre makers to emerge from those projects. "Where's your succession plan?" (2017) Maza asked. Despite the continuing presence of mission men, Maza said that more positive partnerships were also emerging as the theatre and film industries increasingly wanted to learn how to manage the complex issues of shared storytelling:

> There is a meeting point where our stories overlap. So now I think the conversation is around this nuancing. My mob (are still trying to articulate what doesn't feel right. They say: 'Ah that made so much sense what you said. I thought, I felt a bit funny about it and I couldn't put my finger on it.' (It's) through this kind of clarity—the argument—that things start to change. (Maza, 2017)

e. Maza lessons: First Nations control and other creative uncertainties

This conversation with Maza provided further insight into ways that First Nations control of stories is maintained (or lost) across collaborations occurring in australian performance making. Maza suggested that where non-Aboriginal project leaders do not build the creative capacity of First Nations communities whose stories

they tell, then no appropriate cultural exchange has occurred: the White colonial power of the visiting 'mission man' as producer is maintained.

Maza also explained ways that her contribution as a First Nations theatre and screen story consultant has been misused when she has had no control over—or been misled about—its deployment. Maza's capacity to provide such cultural and creative advice on stories portraying First Nations communities is valuable First Nations cultural capital (if applied under First Nations control). However, Maza has presented evidence that this nonmaterial capital attached to her cultural story *skills* may not be valued as much by non-Aboriginal creatives as the symbolic nonmaterial capital contained in her First Nations *identity*. This arises because her name can be used to give ersatz First Nations authority to non-Aboriginal ideated work. Maza's identity has been used fraudulently to enable White/colonial tropes to persist in portrayals of relationships between First Nations communities and settler-colonist visitors. These are issues of First Nations control that the performing arts still wrestles with. This is even though key arts bodies insist that appropriate collaborations on First Nations stories must be under First Nations control. With increasingly explicit definitions for ensuring compliance, those bodies specify that such control must be evidenced in First Nations people being the initiator-ideators of such projects (Australia Council & Janke, 2019; Screen Australia, 2021a).

Maza provided an anecdote which helped to distinguish between (1) the load linked to colonisation First Nations artists might operate under, versus (2) the cultural accountabilities and knowledges they are required to observe in their creative work and which constitute First Nations Capital (FNCC). While those cultural responsibilities involve additional effort and complexity for First Nations creatives, and creative *leaders* such as Maza, they are the "fabric" (Maza, 2017) by which First Nations theatre and therefore Culture is made. They should not be confused with the loads on First Nations people created by colonial realities. That such confusion arises reflects another colonial reality: while colonisation hurts the colonised, colonial narratives blame that hurt on the colonised's Culture.

Maza also argued that appropriate collaborations between First Nations and non-Aboriginal people can be valuable, rich ways of making First Nations stories and

thus First Nations Culture. This is central to Ilbijerri's work, she said. I posit, as I have already in previous chapters, that the White/settler-colonist cultural and social capital non-Aboriginal collaborators bring to those collaborations in the form of their individual theatre skills, education and networks is transformed into First Nations cultural capital (FNCC) when deployed under First Nations leadership and, thus, control. This transformation can also be said to occur because deployment of the White/settler-colonist capital *results* in First Nations Culture-making and additional FNCC: in the theatre works themselves and as expanded First Nations theatre capacity. The work Maza does creating appropriate collaborative structures—building capacity, advocating for First Nations control of portrayals of First Nations experience, creating theatre on a tight budget and making the nuanced arguments to progress these outcomes—encompasses territories of First Nations arts leadership categorised by Evans and Sinclair (2016a, 2016b). This is also FNCC enacted (in practice) and embodied (in habitus) by Maza because of the combination of cultural and theatre knowledges she deploys in her leadership role.

In the next encounter with an "Ilbijerri woman", one of Maza's non-Aboriginal collaborators describes how she sees the arts landscape that First Nations theatre makers and leaders such as Maza must traverse.

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iii. Mari Lourey

Mari Lourey is a non-Aboriginal Australian dramaturg of irish descent, a playwright and theatre maker (*Bare Witness*, *The Bridge*, *Dirty Angels, Direct Cloud)* and a winner of the 2014 Rodney Seaborn Award and two Ross Trust Awards. When we spoke, Lourey was dividing her time between Melbourne and the Kimberley region in Western Australia. Her connection to that region had inspired her then work on *Dirt* Cloud (2014), a play supported by Australian National Playwriting Conference development and an Australia Council Literature Board

grant (Australian Plays, 2019). Lourey had also worked regularly at Ilbijerri—mostly with emerging playwrights.

Lourey's pathway into First Nations theatre was initially through her work as a musician and early story telling shows. The show *Digging Into the Green Mountain* and one song in particular, *Cries On the Wind*, opened up natural conversations and led to friendships between Lourey and First Nations people [1]. The themes of the show and the featured song combined reflections on her connection to the rural landscape of her birth in tension with her role as a descendent of settler-colonisers (Lourey, 2015). Lourey then joined a project of the community arts/theatre company *The Torch Project* in her home region of Warnambool in southwest Victoria and other regions. Between 2002-2006 she helped facilitate collaborations between First Nations and other artists, working as researcher, writer and performer (2015). This included researching and writing the Green Room Award winning *The Bridge,* directed and dramaturged by Rachael Maza, for its Melbourne season and north-west Victoria tour (Australian Plays, 2019). The collaborative and mentoring work she later undertook with Ilbijerri Theatre Company came out of her positive working relationship with Rachael and their shared theatre values:

> We went and saw a theatre show together and we haven't stopped talking ever since. I met a lot of people very quickly from doing the first *Torch* show, building on contacts I already had within the Victorian Indigenous community. Then we did another one that Rachel directed and I wrote. I was the main writer and that forged our bond because we were always talking about how do we get better at what we do; how do we actually become better theatre makers. (Lourey, 2015)

a. Should a whitefella like me be doing this job?

After Rachael Maza became artistic director of Ilbijerri Theatre Company she asked Lourey to help establish the company's new emerging dramatist program, The Black Writers Lab. Lourey co-facilitated from 2010-2013, seeding several new works (Australian Plays, 2019). Lourey drew on both her theatre-making experience and performance writing studies undertaken at RMIT, and then a Masters from VCA. She brought in her RMIT playwriting teacher Peta Murray to co-facilitate (2015).

She told me Ilbijerri very much wanted her to run this program, but that she had concerns about being non-Aboriginal:

> I felt very uncomfortable at being the coordinator of it when other Indigenous writers hadn't been asked. But Rachel was quite adamant that it's about craft and skills. I had to accept that she was exercising her own agency in making that decision; she knew exactly what she wanted. The purpose of those first Blak Writers Labs at Ilbijerri was to skill up Indigenous writers to tell their own stories. (Lourey, 2015)

Lourey said she had shown Maza her old notebooks from RMIT. It was exactly what Maza wanted for emerging Indigenous writers with good ideas to develop skills they didn't yet have in the nuts and bolts mechanics of what works on stage; this was so they could make theatre throughout their careers without remaining dependent on assistance from non-Aboriginal dramaturgs, playwrights and directors (2015). This theme occurs in three conversations reported in previous sections. That is, the value of (1) partnering with well-resourced arts organisations and (2) teaming experienced non-Aboriginal theatre makers with emerging First Nations artists: provided those combinations empower Indigenous creatives and provide succession pathways.

b. White desire everywhere: seeking First Nations connections

Lourey's work with Rachael as they both transitioned into being established theatre makers, and mentors to others, provided her a vantage point for observing ways that non-Aboriginal theatre makers and bureaucrats responded to Rachael's position within the industry (Lourey, 2015). Lourey suggested these behaviours she observed stem from a self-consciousness non-Aboriginal people in the arts have about their lack of relationship with australian First Nations people and culture. She said she was astonished to discover, at a cultural awareness training day for non-Aboriginal artists at Ilbijerri and other local small-size theatre companies, some years earlier, that even the most liberal-minded arts participants (Lourey, 2015) acknowledged that they did not know any Aboriginal people personally or anything about First Nations culture.

> Most could cite, if they were from Melbourne Wurrendjerri mob, former Perth artists cited Noongar, maybe one mentioned one or two other mobs… but that was about it. I realised how lucky I'd been, but also that all my connections had come about naturally, through bonding via arts and song making. (Lourey, 2015)

As non-Aboriginal audiences and theatre artists were becoming more aware they lacked cultural competence, Lourey said, non-Aboriginal "urban artistic elites" sought out conversations with Rachael—sometimes via Lourey—to address this self-perceived deficit in their knowledge of First Nations people and artists. However, Lourey pointed out to me as this thesis was nearing completion, White audiences and their understanding of First Nations culture have progressed since she made those observations. This includes the ABC acknowledging each separate Indigenous Country on their regular news: "a small demonstration of how far we have come since then." (Lourey, 2023)

Through a Bourdieusian lens, those theatre crowd behaviours common at the time we spoke in 2015 demonstrate non-Aboriginal arts patrons seeking then to access to First Nations non-material capital embodied in a First Nations theatre-making leader. In that framing non-Aboriginal patrons and artists are desiring First Nations cultural capital (FNCC): these are the arts knowledges and other valuables that Maza and other First Nations theatre leaders embody and which can, to some extent, be learned by non-Aboriginal others to understand First Nations epistemologies, experience, realities and ways of operating within First Nations communities. Such behaviour might also exhibit what Ritchie describes as, cited in Chapter 6, settler-colonist desire to signal their liberal bona fides as supporters of First Nations people and Culture (Ritchie, 2019). The *symbolic* First Nations capital in being able to name-drop having had such a conversation with Maza could be at play in this scenario. More charitably, it is equally possible that those non-Aboriginal arts patrons' desire to speak with a First Nations theatre leader is a genuine effort to become a more competent ally to First Nations people and storytelling. These are all guesses I make, prompted by a sense that what Lourey observed, all that time ago, rankled her as insincere in some way. Whatever the intention(s) of those desiring conversation with Maza, analyses by Sullivan, (2006) Moreton-Robinson (2006b), Said (1978, 1993), Puch-Bouwman (2014) and others

have shown there is an unconscious colonising agenda driving these attempts at understanding, or being seen to have relationship with, the Other; and that includes an expansionist desire to access and occupy the Other's non-White creative territories (Sullivan, 2006).

Rising Indig-curiosity (Harrison, 2012)—desire for First Nations cultural, social and symbolic capital—can manifest as non-Aboriginal desire to make relationship with First Nations people. The colonial, ontologically expansionist agendas unconsciously at play in the White psyche (Sullivan, 2006) to pursue nonmaterial value attaching to First Nations bodies and identities, however, potentially converts and reduces the First Nations capital embodied in First Nations artists to *colonial* commodity. When deployed for White arts agendas, First Nations people's symbolic, social and cultural capital can be subsumed into doing (re)colonising work.

Lourey, on reading my assessment here of White behaviours, cautioned that practices across the australian theatre landscape are changing rapidly. This includes the worldviews and cultural competencies (what I might equate with habituses) of all White theatre-goers and makers who encounter First Nations stage stories (2023). Lourey's point, that some of my commentary reflects circumstances which have altered at great pace, provides important context to the timing of this research's release. I acknowledge therefore that I am describing theatre patron actions which were occurring very early in my research and that Harrison's first coining of 'Indig-curiosity' is now more than a decade old. At the same time other theatre maker testimonies I recorded later than that with Lourey, alongside recent Australia Council research, suggest that White audiences still have varying levels of respect for and familiarity with First Nations Culture, people and theatre. A strong and growing contingent of non-Aboriginal theatre makers, such as Lourey, collaborate appropriately in First Nations theatre-making. First Nations theatre makers I have spoken with for this research, reported in other sections, have urged me to acknowledge these examples of positive theatre allies. It is also simplistic to suggest that all White theatre-goers are exercising colonising behaviours when they attend First Nations theatre productions or seek out First Nations theatre makers for conversation. However, I argue that many non-Aboriginal australians, including

audiences and programmers, still operate without needing to see their White privilege; therefore, White acts of possession will continue to operate in arenas where Cultural valuables of the Other become visible and valuable to non-Others. Additionally, Lourey acknowledged that her very positive lens might also be skewed by her closeness to the First Nations theatre sector and the calibre of the non-Aboriginal theatre artists she encounters in that Indigenous theatre field.

c. Cultural cornering and other exclusions

As already seen, many settler-colonist behaviours demonstrate White desire for capacities embodied by the Other so those skills can be diverted to colonial work: that desire and effect epitomises *White colonial habits* of ownership identified in Whiteness theory underpinning this research. Other White/settler-colonist responses, or White colonial habits, also previously outlined are where non-Aboriginal creatives assume First Nations people's capabilities are *un*usable outside of Aboriginal stories. That is, they are deemed unusable outside of what another co-conversationalist [2] in this research has termed "cultural corner" [Ch 8. ii. (f)]. These situations comprise further examples of how First Nations people are excluded from White spaces in ways that restrict their visibility, voices and activities. This propensity includes that most settler-colonists, even as they act in ways that exclude, do not see how non-White/Indigenous people's movement is thus restricted. Lourey, however, had encountered and perceived this phenomenon. She gave an example of when a non-Aboriginal arts worker could not fathom that Rachael Maza had theatre-making insights of universal value beyond solely First Nations related works:

> I've used Rachel as a dramaturg on my works, especially if it's a narrative play, because she's a stickler when it comes to character and story. On *Bare Witness* (Lourey's awarding winning play exploring the world of photo-journalism through fictional characters), for instance, she was dogged about the character journey of the main protagonist. If she doesn't buy something she'll say so straight up and I love that. She doesn't care if you've been up all night in preparation for a workshop. She's rigorous in interrogating from an actor's point of view. I remember being interviewed by someone from an awards body from whom I'd received two script development awards. He was doing a survey on recipients and he said:

> ‘I didn't realise *Bare Witness* had Indigenous themes.’
> I was like: ‘It didn't.’
> And he said: ‘But you said she (Rachael Maza) provided dramaturgical advice.’
> And I said: ‘Well yeah, she was one of the dramaturgs.’
> ‘Oh, were there Indigenous characters?’
> ‘No, she was just a dramaturg. She's a nit-picker on character journey.’
> And he just couldn't get it. He couldn't. He kept asking me about five times; I thought: ‘He's actually not getting it. He's not getting that I employed her as a dramaturg.’ (Lourey, 2015)

As a non-Aboriginal theatre colleague, Lourey can see, name and call out instances when her friend Rachael Maza’s expertise is valued for her “Indigeneity” and not to the same extent for her theatre-making skills. Here Maza’s First Nations identity and knowledge affects how she is seen (or not seen). Her Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander identity is perceived as a deficit to her ability to make that theatre which is not marked by race. Or, alternatively, her vast skills and experience as a theatre maker are simply erased in a non-Aboriginal setting. This constitutes the deficit effect noted in how Walter conceptualises “race capital” (2010). It is also a stark example of how First Nations nonmaterial/cultural capital (FNCC) has less or no value in some theatre fields. As a result, First Nations theatre creatives—*because* they embody additional theatre capital as FNCC alongside non-Aboriginal theatre knowledges—can become invisible and unregarded in White story spaces. Lourey noted on reviewing this paragraph that in her theatre circles “discussion has moved beyond this” but that my analysis could apply elsewhere in the australian theatre landscape (Lourey, 2023).

d. Lourey lessons: contradictions of White zero-point hubris

The inability of the arts body representative to see Rachael Maza as an expert dramaturg for a broad range of stage genres or theatre stories raises an important distinction or nuance of First Nations identity not easily understood, it seems, by White imaginations in the non-Aboriginal arts sector. This lack of understanding, important for First Nations’ people’s artistic freedom across australian theatre, operates erroneously as an unresolved paradox in some non-Indigenous arts

workers' thinking. This affects First Nations identity within arts spaces not prescribed specifically for First Nations work; these effects can be invisible and need unpacking. This must start with a point clear in First Nations academic discourse I have cited and which First Nations artists have said to me: First Nations artists cannot and do not relinquish their Indigenous identities and cultural responsibilities when moving into creative spaces regarded by non-Aboriginal people as White or unraced. An erroneous paradox of this, active in some non-Aboriginal thinking, lies in non-Aboriginal agents' difficulty synthesising (1) First Nations' people's rights to practice and honour their Culture in all spaces with (2) First Nations peoples' abilities to operate across cultures, including in spaces where First Nations Culture is not specifically sought or required. I label this White cognitive failure *Paradox Think*. This is the unconscious idea that a First Nations artist cannot be a First Nations person at all times and also operate in non-Aboriginal-designated spaces. It is the belief that to be (1) an Aboriginal artist and (2) an adept artist across unraced fields constitutes a paradox. This Paradox Think is evidenced in behaviours exhibited in Lourey's anecdote: where White/settler-colonists perceive First Nations artists to only have theatre skills—or capital—for creative spaces or fields marked as Indigenous. That is, strong First Nations Culture in an artist is seen to compete with, neutralise or taint that artists' non-Culture-specific knowledges and talents—as if the two forms of creative capital embodied by a First Nations theatre maker cannot co-exist in their practice in positive ways. Alternatively, such paradox thinking expects First Nations artists to abandon Culture and Aboriginality when they enter non-Aboriginal theatre-making fields.

Alongside exclusions of First Nations people and paradox-positioning, another effect of such White/settler-colonist cognitive habits is erasure. When a First Nations theatre maker moves into a space marked as White (and therefore as 'unraced' in White imagination), all their theatre capital—whether White-located or FNCC—can be erased or become invisible to non-Aboriginal artists and gatekeepers. Non-Aboriginal controllers of White creative spaces can interpret a First Nations artist's identity and Indigenous-marked creative capital as an absence of competence and relevance in that White space. In this effect of White habits of imagination, First Nations people are ontologically and epistemologically excluded from that field of endeavour marked as unraced or White. This occurs so unconsciously that non-

Aboriginal people will continue to perceive these 'general' spaces or territories as shared, non-raced fields. Yet those fields are in fact marked as White and are exclusionary in operation. White, erroneous, paradox thinking contributes to these exclusions: it fails to understand how First Nations artists can synthesise, in any space, Culture-informed theatre-making and the euro-based creative knowledges they also embody. These psycho-cognitive ruts in non-Aboriginal imaginations obstruct the rights, freedoms and safety of First Nations artists to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Indigenous and non-Indigenous marked spaces.

Alongside White colonial habits' propensity to exclude, there is another, similar critique within this thesis theory framework demonstrated by Lourey's example. That is, that White-euro-based worldviews and practices are assumed to be at the centre of, or represent the ideal of, human endeavour, including in creative practice; whereas non-White people, their concerns, their epistemologies and their ways of doing are located somewhere else. This de-centering of First Nations artistic work begins with marking the artists and their work as non-White/not euro-derived. The White colonising worldview firstly, and significantly, sees the "non-White" person: that is, that person is perceived as non-White or raced and thus their persona and identity is racialized by that White colonial lens. With that colonial racialisation, the non-White artist is then seen, on the one hand, as less competent to move with agility into and within outwardly non-raced (but in practice White) spaces of endeavour. But, additionally, they and their non-White ways of doing and seeing are perceived to be situated away from the White euro-based *centre* of best, universalised practice (Castro-Gómez, 2007, p. 434; Mignolo, 2009, pp. 159, 160). That centre is a mainstreamed social location which coloniser classes occupy across the globe and within colonial nation states. This White psycho-cognitive habit, demonstrated so explicitly in Lourey's anecdote, epitomises Castro-Gomez's zero-point hubris (2021; 2007) and Mignolo's "myth of the zero point epistemology" (2009, p. 160). As I have noted elsewhere, Castro-Gomez (2007, p. 434) and Mignolo (2009, p. 160) argue that this zero-point myth designates that people who are perceived non-White have expertise only within their designated Culture; whereas, people operating as White and unraced are adept at acquiring knowledge to understand Other Cultures alongside their own. At the same time, only the White-unraced are deemed capable of operating expertly within their White-unraced

spaces, located as they are at an imagined political, cultural and social cognitive centre. That imagined centre thus gives White cultures positioned there a vantage point: euro-White citizens have the shorter cognitive distance to travel to reach Other Culture locations compared to Other citizens not sited with them at their zero-point cultural centre.

I have returned here to discussion of several theories addressing colonial habits, despite covering them substantially earlier in this thesis. Firstly, they inform understanding of behaviours my co-conversationalists have revealed up to this point of my data reporting. In reverse reflection, the data shared demands renewed explication of the theories. That is, my co-conversationalists' narratives of White colonial behaviours give expanded meaning, clarity and substance to the Whiteness theories they exemplify. Meanwhile, all theories I am applying to understand habits of Whiteness indicate the same colonial reality for which this thesis provides continuing evidence: non-White Cultures and people face greater struggles to exist, to operate safely and to exercise artistic freedom than do those operating as White. More positively, the earlier sections of this conversation with Lourey, about her work with First Nations stories and theatre makers, provide strong examples of how White/settler-colonist creative capital can be deployed under First Nations control to make First Nations Culture and become First Nations cultural capital (FNCC).

iv. Participant 9: testimony withdrawn

One of the first theatre makers I interviewed for my research elected to withdraw her testimony in October 2023—some months after I had submitted my PhD for marking. The long conversation we had all those years ago had a strong impact on my thinking then, and therefore is still present in much of the thinking across all the final thesis chapters. This playwright, director and dramaturg shared many insights and several personal stories with me: affecting the direction my project took and helping me understand the responsibilities of First Nations theatre makers. I thank this artist: for your generosity and frankness on the day we talked—for almost two hours—and fully respect your decision to withdraw from your participation in my theatre research at this point. Best wishes and warm regards. K.N.

v. Ilbijerri conclusions

The Ilbijerri women I spoke with for this thesis talked about the need for First Nations people to be assured of creative progression when contributing to storytelling. Each co-conversationalist called also for emerging First Nations artists to have access to culturally appropriate theatre training and writing craft development. Maza said that some non-Aboriginal theatre makers provide only limited opportunities to First Nations performers within a project. They indicated those White artists' conscious or unconscious purpose for involving Indigenous performers was to cite their First Nations identity to give the project authority (Maza, 2017) .

Each of the women's stories showed ways that non-Aboriginal film and theatre makers seek symbolic capital attached to First Nations identity to give authority to work containing First Nations content. On other occasions White/settler-colonist theatre-goers and makers sought symbolic capital attached to knowing First Nations artists, for augmenting their desired reputations as pro-Indigenous allies. This accords with observations made by Djangadi scholar Craig Ritchie (2019), cited in Chapter 6, that some settler-colonist australians seek to establish and demonstrate relationships with First Nations people merely to convey their liberal bona-fides.

Conversely, the Ilbijerri conversations provided examples of positive appropriate contributions from settler-colonist collaborators. These exchanges occurred where non-Aboriginal creative and other White material and nonmaterial theatre-making capital was useful or necessary to First Nations Culture-making, such that those inputs transformed from White capital into FNCC. The key, of course, is when those White capital deployments are under First Nations creative and cultural control. Applying Bourdieusian concepts to those cultural exchanges helps make more visible when that Indigenous control is real vs when First Nations control is incomplete or absent.

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vi. Footnotes: Ilbijerri Women

[1] *Digging Into the Green Mountain,* directed by Susie Dee, played at La Mama Theatre in 1999 and toured various music festivals. One of the show's songs, *Cries On the Wind*, won the 1998 Apollo Bay Music Festival Songwriting Competition. (Lourey, 2023)

[2] I am not identifying theatre maker-participants in this chapter: to maintain their anonymity outside of the thesis section where I report our conversation. I have adopted this convention for all participants (except the late Andrew Ross): I am quarantining their identities and the fact they have taken part in this research within their specific thesis section. This is because at time of thesis submission I had not yet finalised with them their consent to their testimony being publicly available**.** That said, feedback was obtained—after submission—from all but one participant and incorporated into this version of the thesis lodged in Flinders Library. These steps are explained in section 5 (vi) in the Chapter 5 methods discussion.

11. WEST COAST STORIES

i. Introduction: Noongar players, Noongar audiences

The experience of First Nations theatre makers in Western Australia differs from that of those in Eastern states—for various reasons, including 1980s theatre relationships which inspired establishment of firstly Black Swan Theatre Company in the early 1990s and later Yirra Yaakin (Casey, 2004, p. 129; Haebich, 2018; Ross, 2017a). Kyle Morrison, when he was then Yirra Yaakin artistic director, told an Indigenous theatre session at the 2017 Australian Theatre Forum that West Australian theatre is strongly attended by First Nations australians. He was responding to an east coast First Nations theatre maker's observation that non-Aboriginal people still presume theatre about First Nations people is made for White audiences' education: that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander australians often don't feel expected or welcome within australian theatre audiences. How and why First Nations people experience theatre differently on the West Coast to that in other states—if such general state-based, geographically located distinctions can be claimed—is one of the themes emerging anecdotally from these conversations, which were undertaken in Perth over the same week in 2017.

This chapter section will examine the work contexts of two theatre makers: the late non-Aboriginal dramaturg and artistic director Andrew Ross, and Noongar theatre leader Kyle Morrison. Those contexts include their collaboration experiences and their perspectives on non-Aboriginal theatre makers attempting to portray First Nations realities.

ii. Andrew Ross

The perspective of Andrew Ross AM, who passed away in 2022, is important for his director-dramaturgy role working with late Noongar playwright Jack Davis (*Kullark, The Dreamers, No Sugar*) and the late musician-writer Jimmy Chi (*Bran Nue Dae*) (of Chinese, Japanese, Scottish, Bardi and Nyulnyul descent) in the 70s, 80s and 90s, bringing their most well-known theatrical works to stage. He was also the first Artistic Director of Black Swan Theatre Company in Perth, established in the

late 1980s to bring new global theatre, all australian stories and Noongar and other Indigenous West Australian voices to the Perth mainstage. He was still working as a theatre director and mentor to many West Australian theatre leaders when we spoke for this research.

a. Entry into West Australian theatre

Andrew Ross grew up in Victoria near Melbourne. His first career was teaching English: he engaged in theatre at the Melbourne Pram Factory (2017a) which was a key venue for the "New Wave" of theatre-making that was championing australian voices and challenging genuflection to american and british canons (Rees, 1978; H. Thomson, 2008). Ross moved to Western Australia in the mid-1970s, directing work at Perth's Playhouse Theatre, then home to the National Theatre Company of WA (NTC) (2017a). He also established a theatre-in-education company connected to the NTC which "toured all over the state" (2017a).

Ross sensed a stronger, more visible presence of Aboriginal people in Western Australia than in Victoria. There were more Aboriginal/Noongar words used by non-Aboriginal people, First Nations people were talked about more and this Noongar presence was even greater outside Perth (2017a). He engaged with the Berndts' detailed study of Noongar, Arnhem Land and other desert communities (Berndt & Berndt, 1964) to gain a starting framework for understanding traditional cultures should he ever visit non-urban communities (2017a).

b. Collaborations with Jack Davis

Ross has told the story of his work with Jack Davis several times to theatre historians including to Maryrose Casey (2004), and in a 2011 interview he co-edited with Anna Haebich (2018). These previous accounts are authoritative and eminently readable, with a different emphasis to how Ross and I discussed the same events. Haebich (2018) records Ross's perspective in his words whereas Casey combines sources, with Ross among them, for a lengthy account of Jack Davis's Noongar contribution to the larger australian Indigenous theatre canon she documented. For this research, I am relaying details of the Ross-Davis collaboration solely from the

recollections Ross and I covered in conversation in 2017. Each of our versions, however, has unique insights while corroborating each other's main details.

Ross saw Jack Davis' *Up and Fighting* in Melbourne in the 1970s (Ross, 2017a) when Davis was mostly known as a poet and activist rather than playwright. They first met at a Perth Technical College poetry reading in the late 70s. Davis asked him to read a play he'd written: "sort of a one act version of *The Dreamers*" (Ross, 2017a). Ross suggested they work on a theatre-in-education drama to provide a different slant to the looming sesquicentenary of british colonial settlement in Perth (Ross, 2017a). *Kullark* opened in 1979 at the Titan Theatre and toured widely through Western Australia, performed by Ross's theatre-in-education team.

Davis and Ross worked together over several years before *The Dreamers* opened at the 1982 Perth Festival. Ross said it was clear this was a great play which belonged at such an international event (2017a). *Dreamers* then toured nationally with Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust support (Ross, 2017a). From that came national support for Davis's next play, *No Sugar*. Ross said because *No Sugar* was a commissioned play it went straight to a mainstage; this began the West Australian phenomenon of large Aboriginal audiences in theatre venues coming to see strong Aboriginal stories and First Nations performers on the state's mainstages (2017a). Ross described Davis as the next great playwright to come out of Western Australia after Dorothy Hewett (2017a).

No Sugar drew on Davis's memories, archival records and living people's recollections of the forced removal of Aboriginal people from Northam, Western Australia, to Moore River Native Settlement. There was growing interest in correcting colonial history following Stanner's ABC Boyer lectures on "The Great Australian Silence" (1969) critiquing how White history had recorded australia's colonisation (2017a).

c. Reciprocal roles for Davis's work

Throughout our conversations (2017a, 2017b, 2017c) Ross was clear that only Jack Davis wrote *Kullark*, *Dreamers* and *No Sugar;* Ross and Davis could not be

considered “co-authors” in any way, notwithstanding Ross’s input of research and structural and dramaturgical advice for all three plays. It was Davis’s voice, his humour, his memories, his words, his story, his turn of phrase and his ways of seeing things at the heart of his plays’ values, entertainment, impact and success (Ross, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c):

> The way he used words often made something particularly funny. Plus, he was a young man; he was a teenager at the time [of the events he was portraying], so he could remember a lot of this stuff. He had an amazing memory for stuff. (Ross, 2017a)

Ross’s determination not to interfere with what Davis wanted to say—or how Davis saw his experience—illuminates the boundary Ross placed around dramaturgy’s purpose in playwriting:

> The play is the reflection of your inept perception of life and human behaviour. And it can’t be the dramaturg’s perception. That’s irrelevant. If the dramaturg’s got something to say about those subjects then let the dramaturg write a play. (Ross, 2017b)

Ross said failure to observe this separation can be a problem in non-Aboriginal theatre makers’ collaborations with First Nations playwrights and stories.

When Ross returned from London, Davis had expanded his *Dreamers* draft and asked for help ‘”writing this thing”’(2017a). Through 1981 Ross worked with him on the play structure but Davis wrote all the words:

> We used big sheets of paper, sort of one for each scene. Huge big chart outlining what was happening. He needed that sort of map. Where things were. And he just kept on writing scenes and rewriting them, and then finally had a play. (Ross, 2017a)

The next Davis play, *No Sugar,* needed extensive research in government archives and talking with older Noongar people to build on Davis’s recollections of the Moore River settlement: in particular, the removal of the entire Noongar population of Northam in 1933 to Moore River under powers in the state *Aborigines*

Act (W.A., 1905). Davis knew that many people removed were still living and had moved back to Northam (2017a).

Ross and Davis travelled multiple times there "in Jack's old Kombi van" interviewing "a whole lot of people" forcibly moved—or who had witnessed people being moved—by police to Moore River (2017a). Davis and Ross retraced the routes by which the police moved the community. "We spent several days on the road" (2017a) following the first train journey section from Northam to Perth and the full journey to Moore River other families took by road. The two men studied police occurrence books and reports held at Perth's J.S. Battye Library including the Northam sergeant's report of the journeys. They visited the Government Well Reserve and other significant Northam places. They accessed Mosely's Royal Commission report into treatment of Aboriginal people (1935) for testimony on the removals (2017a) plus oral accounts collected by other researchers. At Northam Town Hall, Davis and Ross worked through all court reports stored there involving Noongar people at that time. They read letters and reports between A. O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, and Moore River settlement manager, Arthur Neal (2017a).

These archives reinforced Davis' memories and provided stories illustrating the bizarreness of policies imposed on Noongar people:

> You can't imagine anything more bizarre than reality. Some people have said, 'Oh yeah, that was funny.' I'd say, 'Well, we didn't make up anything. We never needed to make anything up.' The only problem was we couldn't include it all. There were so many funny incidents and things, that either people had remembered or they'd been recorded. (Ross, 2017a)

Ross said the creation of *No Sugar* via this research and found material used what would now be identified as documentary theatre methods. But Davis created the dialogue illuminating the irony of what happened and what people did. At all times, while Ross's research was crucial for *No Sugar,* it was Davis bringing his own memory, vision and experience to the work which made the play:

> He knew people, particularly Aboriginal. He knew them very well, and every character was based on one or more people that he knew, and he found himself very amused at certain ways people would behave. (Ross, 2017a)

Ross and Davis became good friends (2017a). Ross met, and learned more about, Noongar people and Davis's Noongar community because Davis took him on visits to relatives and friends outside Perth.

> We'd talk and talk and talk and I'd hear so much. And I started to learn a bit of Noongar. I spent a lot of time on it. We spent hundreds and hundreds, thousands I suppose, of hours together. You know, talking over these things, and so there was a level of familiarity you could only get by having that sort of relationship. Just hung out, and chatted. (2017a)

Ross agreed he and Davis had complementary theatre-making skills. Reciprocity was in play. They exchanged the different cultural, social and symbolic capitals each possessed and applied to facilitate each other's contributions to *No Sugar*. It was via these exchanges that their collaboration bore fruit. Ross already respected Davis's writing before they met. Their collaborations began when Davis asked Ross (not vice versa) to read a play he'd written and, after *Kullark*, when Davis asked for dramaturgical assistance with the script he had already begun for *The Dreamers*. In that sense, Davis was the instigator of the first collaborations between them and he already had intellectual property (tangible First Nations Cultural Capital) he brought to the partnership each time in the form of a script draft. There was no question of his authorship or writing craft.

A living writer's script draft—intellectual property Australian copyright law recognises—is not always present when stories of First Nations experience, using knowledges held by living First Nations people, are being contemplated for stage production by non-Aboriginal theatre makers. Davis' script came from the cultural knowledges, relationships and personal experiences he brought to his playwriting while working with Ross. The memories of Noongar people they spoke with for making *No Sugar* also constituted First Nations cultural capital (FNCC). Ross drew on White symbolic and social capital he embodied as an established theatre director: his friendships with theatre craftspeople and artists were part of his capacity to get

Davis's play produced to professional staging standard before national and international audiences at the Perth Festival:

> I'd been in West Australia for a while by then, and I recruited lots (laughs) of people from the theatre to come and to light it, and you know, generally. So, I called in lots of favours. (Ross, 2017a)

d. Casting legacies

Many well-known First Nations actors today had their first paid roles when Ross cast them in Davis's plays (2017a). Ernie Dingo and Lynette Narkle performed in *Kullark* (2017c); John Moore started in *The Dreamers*, and went on to perform in *No Sugar* alongside Kelton Pell, then a teenager in his first show. Later, Ursula Yovich, Ningali Lawford, Stephen Albert and Leah Purcell started their careers in Jimmy Chi musicals, either *Bran Nue Dae* or *Corrugation Road*, both directed by Ross:

> The only actors that had any professional experience in *The Dreamers* were Lynette Narkle and Ernie Dingo. And that's because they'd been in *(Kullark)* because I cast them in that, and they joined that company for a year. So as those shows built up, so did the skills of the performers. The plays created the opportunity for performers and then the building body of skilled performers created the opportunities for the writers. (Ross, 2017a)

Ross thus indicated First Nations theatre flourishes when creative capacity (FNCC) operates across at least two key theatre-making roles: in his examples, playwright and actor. Ross saw a circular progression of developing skills around writers and performers. This was especially so when First Nations playwrights were both gaining experience and creating theatre material for experienced First Nations actors whose work they knew. Enabling skills-building in one area of theatre-making creates an environment where the practice of those in other skills areas also grows to yield original, quality work. In any field, this multiplier effect drives community capacity building and, of course, equals a process that expands a community's Bourdieusian capital.

e. *Bran Nue Dae*: a Black Swan is born

Bran Nue Dae's success inspired West Australian businesswoman Janet Holmes à Court to help create a theatre company to present stories of First Nations people:

> We were talking at the bar on (*Bran Nue Dae*'s) final night and she said 'We need to start a theatre company to do this sort of work. To do Western Australian work. To properly recognize the significant role of Aboriginal people in Western Australian theatre and all of this.' So, she is a person to get on with stuff. She well and truly got on with it. And that's how Black Swan arose. (Ross, 2017a)

Black Swan was, at least in its twelve years under Ross's leadership, a well-funded mainstage theatre which regularly staged First Nations theatre makers' work; it extended the impact of Davis's and Chi's works in developing First Nations writing, performing and directing talent (2017a).

Nevertheless, involvement of non-Aboriginal creatives helping produce First Nations stories can still sometimes tamper with the playwright's vision. Ross observed that First Nations creatives with eclectic interests outside of assumed Aboriginal Culture (such as country music, italian opera or japanese Butoh theatre) were sometimes pressured to leave out those influences from their work as they didn't fit with producers' notions of First Nations performance or Aboriginality. As already noted, Ross believed dramaturgs, directors and other theatre producers must make space for the playwright's voice, to honour their work and perspective (2017a, 2017b); that was the purpose of collaboration:

> A lot of plays gain strength from being viewed through the writer's lens only and his own environment and life and time. I wouldn't see any point in doing it otherwise. You've got to look at what's the most valuable component of what you've got. It is all the writer and the sort of reflection of their own world. Why would you want to add anything else? (Ross, 2017b)

f. White stories wrapped in blak

Ross said he'd observed some non-Aboriginal theatre makers attract funds to create stories with Aboriginal people but control the work to fulfill their own (White) vision:

> I see a lot more plays, with a lot of investment in them, that are really initiated by non-Aboriginal people and, in a way, a typical non-Aboriginal agenda as well. Both in the subject matter and the way it's treated. (Ross, 2017b)

He cited the Sydney Theatre Company's *The Secret River* and works by Scott Rankin's Big hArt company as examples:

> I don't want to get involved in the debate about *Secret River*, but it got a lot of resources. And all I can say, it's definitely not a play that an Aboriginal person would've written. And I think the same with some of the Big hArt stuff. It was definitely pushing a very particular political point. I find didactic theatre pretty boring, most of the time. I think what the theatre can do is reveal the subtleties and the contradictions and the complexities of something. If it can't give you an insight that's different from the insight you get watching a documentary or reading a monograph on a particular issue, then why do it as theatre? (Ross, 2017b)

Ross's dislike of didactic portrayals of colonial history included broad-brush representations of non-Aboriginal people:

> There isn't *a* white viewpoint. A danger is the notion that the early colonials behaved really badly because they just took the land and they shot people and they poisoned water holes and all of that and then another wave of baddie white people who are missionaries and various other crimes, supposed crimes. And then you've all made reactions to find someone to blame. If your automatic reaction is to try and understand what's going on, it's possibly more profitable than this constant pursuing of the blame trail. Somebody, a baddie, has to be at the end of it. Well, baddies aren't at the end of it. It's baddies and goodies and history is at the end of it. And that's what you're pursuing: some better conception of things that happened and what they mean and how they happened and what they mean for us now. (Ross, 2017b)

Ross was worried that Aboriginal characters in *The Secret River* had no use of words the audience could understand and how this positioned the Aboriginal characters and actors playing them. They were on stage "a lot", and in the absence of surtitles, they functioned as "almost an exotic and decorative chorus of victims" (2017b). There were additional problems with using Darug, a revived, partially recorded language that is not spoken every day:

> (It's difficult to find) somebody who can write it in a sophisticated way. It was sounding a bit oooga-boooga, I thought. Particularly, when I saw they replaced a couple of cast and they were (meant to be) speaking, I thought, an Indigenous language that was originally from the Hawkesbury Region (where *Secret River* is set). But one of them was speaking Yolŋu from East Arnhem Land. It sounded like (each actor had been directed to speak whatever Aboriginal language they knew) so I wasn't sure what was going on then. And that created even more confusion. They're things that I feel you need to be very specific about, you know. It's not like 'Aboriginal language is Aboriginal language, so long as it sounds like it.' That's meaningless and I think it's worse than meaningless. (Ross, 2017b)

Ross's impressions call into question the rigour *Secret River*'s makers claimed they applied to using Darug language. I have not heard from anyone else that non-Darug language was used in later productions as the First Nations casts changed. However, the fact that Ross had this impression reinforces concerns about how the play's creators managed the problems of giving the Darug characters words very few audience members, including First Nations people, would understand. If one actor was given the option of speaking Yolnu, when the creative team had made much of using Darug for the production, then this raises questions about whom they assumed would be in their audience.

g. Ross lessons: distilling director-dramaturgy modes

My conversations with Andrew Ross illuminated factors in his collaborations with First Nations playwrights such as Jack Davis, Jimmy Chi and others. In his work with both Chi and Davis there was genuine relationship built on respect and evolving friendship. There was a complementarity of skills shared by playwright and director-dramaturg. Similarly, the forms of cultural, symbolic and social capital each

theatre maker possessed separately as a First Nations or as a non-Aboriginal person—with particular status, networks and friendships in their communities—were complementary, acknowledged and regularly deployed and exchanged.

Ross had clear boundaries around his role as dramaturg-director; he was adamant that the best theatre is made when a playwright's vision is supported and their vision's nuances, complexities and unorthodoxies are respected. This, Ross said, is especially so with First Nations storytelling: a non-Aboriginal person cannot replicate Aboriginal humour or write it in a genuine way (2017b); a non-Aboriginal person cannot create fictional Aboriginal realities and stories which compare in complexity and insight to those that First Nations people experience in real life (2017a); and a non-Aboriginal person cannot bring to a theatre story the connections to community and Country which Ross said are significant factors in First Nations playwrights' work (2017b). The First Nations playwright is without doubt the expert on their world; this expertise and resulting authorship must be honoured in the way a director-dramaturg works with them. Ross also raised capacity building, achieved through the growth of First Nations theatre-making communities of skilled, experienced actors and playwrights alongside directors, dramaturgs and artistic directors (2017a). Developing Jack Davis's plays promoted this process: First Nations actors had roles in which they developed professional practice which could support new work from later emerging playwrights and theatre makers. The Davis-Ross partnership could be said to have begun the local theatre culture that put Western Australia ahead of east coast theatre in terms of original First Nations plays being produced on mainstages. Ross also nominates the creation of Black Swan Theatre Company—with a brief to make First Nations performance alongside other theatre stories (2017a, 2017b). The later establishment of Noongar theatre company, Yirra Yaakin, was built on craft of First Nations theatre makers and performers who had worked at Black Swan or on other First Nations theatre projects (Ross, 2017b). Yirra Yaakin in 2023 is the only First Nations capital city theatre company with a dedicated theatre space. These developments explain in part why First Nations stories have been popular on West Australian mainstages since the late 1980s, bringing higher volumes of mainstage theatre programming compared to eastern states. However, Ross said there were other factors as well pushing the state's theatre and First Nations storytelling along a different trajectory to that that in the

east: he listed Western Australia’s historic resistance to federalism, absence of a White Australia Policy when it was prevalent in other states and connection to asia via proximity and pearl fishing (2017c).

****

ii. Kyle Morrison

> One of the beautiful things about Yirra Yaakin is that we have a strong loyal ticket-buying Aboriginal community. So, we have one of the biggest Aboriginal audiences in the world, in contemporary theatre, because Noongar people buy tickets. And that's because Noongar people have seen their stories authentically told, authentically represented since 1978. (K. Morrison, 2017)

When I spoke with Noongar theatre maker Kyle Morrison, he had been artistic director of Noongar theatre company, Yirra Yaakin, for eight years. He continued in that role developing, directing and performing in First Nations stage stories for another two years. He has gone on to perform, direct and create with several east and west coast companies. His performance in the Noongar retelling of Macbeth, *Hecate*, won him Best Supporting Actor at Western Australia’s Performing Arts Awards in 2020. He played Oberon in Bell Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 2021 (Bell Shakespeare, 2021). He was creative associate, performer and teaching artist at the Western Australian Ballet in 2022 (West Australian Ballet, 2022), before resuming work with the Bell Shakespeare Company in 2023 (Bell Shakespeare, 2023; 2022) as a performing artist (Morrison, 2024).

Morrison became involved in theatre at a young age when his cousin performing in *Bran Nue Dae,* Della Rae Morrison, suggested he audition to play the boy in *Waiting for Godot,* directed by Andrew Ross (K. Morrison, 2017). Also in that *Godot* cast were Noongar actor Kelton Pell plus well-known non-Aboriginal performers Geoff Kelso, George Shevstov and Marta Kaczmarek. This was the first

time Morrison was not afraid of White/non-Aboriginal people: he met "a whole bunch of white people that were really nice" (2017). He also discovered then that theatre and the arts were the places where it was safe to be "really black":

> The only other places that I saw Aboriginal people in Western Australia was on Crime Stoppers, or on the news, or it was about native title or it was football. Theatre is the only other place that you can just be black, and you can live your Culture, you can live your ideas and you can actually share them with other people. (K. Morrison, 2017)

After *Godot*, Morrison stayed with theatre and, with Andrew Ross as his first theatre leadership role model, eventually achieved what he described as his ambition to become a theatre company artistic director.

a. Andrew Ross: First Nations Culture ally

Morrison was more direct in criticising non-Aboriginal directors and playwrights than other people I spoke with for this research, naming directors, devisors and works they'd made about First Nations people he found problematic. By Morrison's definition, however, he considered the projects Andrew Ross had worked on as Aboriginal theatre:

> I grew up seeing strong black people on stage. And this is where it might be debatable and a lot of people from the east coast might disagree with me, but I still call it Aboriginal theatre even though Andrew Ross directed it. Some Aboriginal people still don't count that legacy as Aboriginal theatre; and they better be really good at that conversation. Because it was dreamed by an Aboriginal person, it was imagined by an Aboriginal person and then all those characters were me and my uncles up on that stage where no-one else had been. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrisons' words indicated that Ross served First Nations stories ideated and controlled by First Nations people. Thus, Ross's White/settler-colonist nonmaterial theatre capital transformed into First Nations Capital or FNCC. Ross, Morrison said, honoured First Nations storytellers' visions over western theatre conventions including as leader of Black Swan theatre:

> What Black Swan were doing, was still a white's director's interpretation of Aboriginality, but I think that he was surrounded by so much strong Aboriginality, and so much strong dramaturgy that really it influenced his interpretation of it. So, the credit to Andrew was that he didn't override the idea of a well-polished play being more important than the truth of the situation. (K. Morrison, 2017)

b. And then there's other White directors

Morrison criticised the funding which had flowed to Sydney-based director Neil Armfield, Perth-based John Sheedy and Tasmania-based director Scott Rankin to make stories about First Nations people. "The faith to tell Aboriginal stories" was more invested in them he said and "still not in Aboriginal people" (2017). The problem was more prevalent on the east coast, Morrison said, due to non-Aboriginal practices there, compared to a stronger First Nations theatre legacy in Western Australia:

> We had David Milroy (Yindjibarndi and Palku theatre maker) and Lynette Narkle (Noongar theatre maker and actor) directing shows that presented Aboriginal people. They had Neil Armfield (laughs) doing that in Sydney. You kinda go, 'Neil Armfield is one of the best craftsmen in theatre in this country easy. He's like one of our best artists.' Still a colonizer in how he talks about us in a lot of ways. I've talked to Andrew Bovell (*Secret River* playwright) a number of times; I've talked through that it could be detrimental for Aboriginal audiences to go and see a play like *Secret River*, like *The Rabbits* (directed by Sheedy), like *Hipbone Sticking Out* (directed by Rankin). The authenticity of that representation is lacking. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison said these plays were created for *non*-Aboriginal audiences to have conversations *about* Aboriginal people:

> When I see stuff like *The Rabbits*, it gives me a sense that that story is not for all of us; it's for white people to talk about us. A lot of theatre that's not created by Aboriginal people, is more about the detriment and the 'poor bugger me' side of Aboriginality as opposed to the strength, the spirit, the philosophy that I want to

> show now, in our theatre. We've got to be bringing us all along and not leave Aboriginal people destitute and extinct in our theatre...
>
> A lot of white directors will use Aboriginal themes as a way of talking about their own guilt or their own paradigm, or their own entitlement or whatever (rather than) to have a conversation with Aboriginal people. *Secret River* is definitely a conversation about us, not for us, for white people. Something like *Rabbits*. I can't even work out who that's for. And it's definitely not for Aboriginal people. So, I see when Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Culture and Aboriginal philosophy are used to tell a white story. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison said Neil Armfield made theatre about Aboriginal people but not for them:

> I said to him, 'You didn't make this for smart Aboriginal people. Why am I in that audience? What have you got in there for smart Aboriginal people?' And he said from his own mouth, 'No Morrison, that's not made for you.' So why is it so important that Neil Armfield (be able) to make Aboriginal work, but not for Aboriginal people? Then we are a subject, and we are a piece of cheese for the trap of white guilt in a lot of ways. And the detrimental effect that it has on our Aboriginal artists is quite devastating, actually. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison's recollection here indicates non-Aboriginal director, Neil Armfield, was invested in creating theatre work for non-Aboriginal people to reflect on their relationship to First Nations people and colonisation. Portraying Aboriginal people for White audiences, Morrison suggests, excludes First Nations people from theatre conversations because of how those stage stories are framed, and for whom they are made. This relates again to what cultural and artistic freedom requires as advocated by the United Nations cultural rights rapporteur in 2013: that all of society should have access to express their realities through the arts; and this includes seeing themselves and their realities reflected truthfully in the artistic production available for them to enjoy (Shaheed, 2013). Morrison also raised here the lack of control First Nations people have over what work is made *about them* by those who are not them. As evidenced across all the thesis data chapters, such portrayals are enabled by

White/settler-colonist economic and nonmaterial capital embodied in non-Aboriginal creatives active across the australian theatre landscape.

The appropriative deployment of Aboriginal people and Culture in the ways Morrison critiques represents the redirecting of First Nations forms of capital (FNCC) to meet needs of both White audiences and those of White/settler-colonists generally. FNCC, contained in First Nations performance, people, stories and insight, is thus used to make colonial capital. That is, Aboriginal narratives, knowledges, bodies and commodities are deployed to create theatre art works justifying colonial structures. Because of how the FNCC is accessed and then used, it ceases to be First Nations nonmaterial capital and becomes, instead, colonial. Such White accessing and subjugation of First Nations forms of capital (FNCC) is a colonising process: colonisers acquire a resource created by the colonised so that they can continue their colonial project. This colonising behaviour is a White colonial habit, deriving as it does, auto-motively, from White solipsistic imagination deeply embedded in the White psyche (Sullivan, 2006).

Since my conversation with Morrison, Armfield has engaged in more First Nations stage stories. In Armfield's production of *The Long Forgotten Dream,* the playwright H. Lawrence Sumner complained he had to fight to keep parts of his script as he wanted them (Maddox, 2018). Additionally, he accused Armfield of "whitesplaining" (Harmon, 2018; Maddox, 2018) and "white washing" (Stayner, 2018) his play. A number of First Nations performers stood by Armfield's production and creative methods and were critical of Sumner's position (Harmon, 2018; Stayner, 2018). But Sumner's views sparked renewed debate about the problems of non-Aboriginal people controlling portrayals on stage of First Nations people and First Nations experience (Harmon, 2018; Maddox, 2018; Stayner, 2018).

I observe here the eloquence and certainty with which some non-Aboriginal theatre directors with reputational power—such as Armfield—will assert their artistic rights to stage, direct and lead the making of First Nations stories. This includes Armfield declaring publicly he used an adequate consultative process, invoking the presence of First Nations artists on stage and in rehearsal as authorisation for his non-Aboriginal control of the project (Arts Centre Melbourne, 2016a, 2016b; Secret

River, 2016). As I argue in Chapter 4, White claims to artistic rights are assumed and justified as universal rights. However, in cases such as *Secret River*, those assumed rights are *power* based on White access to material and nonmaterial capital, including monetary, economic, reputational, hierarchical and social power conferred on those operating as White.

c. How Rankin rankles

Scott Rankin, co-founder of arts organisation Big hArt, is another non-Aboriginal director who has received generous corporate funding to make performance around First Nations stories in ways Morrison found problematic. His work, as reported in other data chapters, has been a source of angst among First Nations theatre leaders and makers for some years. Big hArt has been operating for three decades. Its website in September 2021 said:

> We make art. We build communities. We drive change. Authentic, high-quality art made with communities. Big hArt *brings virtuosic artists into communities* to collaborate and create authentic stories which illuminate local injustice. We present these stories *to mainstream audiences to help raise awareness*. This builds public support for change and helps to protect vulnerable people. (my italics) (Big hArt, 2021)

As Big hArt's site says, their performance works are intended not only for audiences from communities about and with whom they are made, but also for "mainstream audiences to help raise awareness"(2021). Big hArt aims to educate empowered, enfranchised people within australian society so that they might act, vote, donate or agitate on behalf of less fortunate or struggling communities or, at least, become more "aware" (2021). That said, each project, the website says, also involves ongoing "legacy" outcomes and each community project includes support for community capacity-building or income-generating activity (2021). Many, though not all, Big hArt projects have been made with First Nations communities. A First Nations theatre artistic director whose testimony appears in Chapter 10, Section ii [1] described one collaborative theatre problem as the "mission man". This is a non-Aboriginal person who enters a community to make a story with them and at

exit point no-one in the community has developed or grown as theatre storytellers themselves: their own stories have become an artistic outcome for the so-called mission man. Big hArt's description of its work, I assert, fits within the model this First Nations artistic leader outlined.

Among Rankin's most well-known plays portraying Aboriginal experience is *Namatjira*, a part of Big hArt's Namatjira Project begun in 2009 with the family of late artist Albert Namatjira and the Hermannsburg community in Central Australia (Big hArt, 2021). The performance toured Australia over several years up to 2016 (Big hArt, 2021) and the "legacy project" continues (Big hArt, 2021).

CONTENT WARNING: readers please be aware this next paragraph and the one after will refer to the death in custody several decades ago of a young person in Western Australia. That young person is referred to by name. Commencing next page.

The Big hArt website also lists their Yijala Yala/New Roebourne project, with the Roebourne community in Western Australia from 2011-2015. It has led to (1) theatre production *Hipbone Sticking Out*, (2) an interactive comic *Neomad*, (3) a *Murru* concert and album commemorating John Pat's 1983 death in a Roebourne police cell and (4) the short film project *Smashed* (Big hArt, 2021).

Another First Nations theatre maker, whose testimony appears in Chapter 10, Section iv [1], criticised Rankin's use and portrayal of John Pat's death in *Hipbone*. Morrison also took issue with this work, yet found himself blamed for it by First Nations community members he said felt unable to complain to a non-Aboriginal theatre person about the play:

> I remember getting emails from Aboriginal leaders in my community asking me what that was all about, and why did I let that happen and I'm like: 'I've got no control over…' I've had to talk to the Noongar community, theatre-going community, ticket-buying community, middle class, Aboriginal people buying tickets. They are writing to me going: 'Why am I buying tickets to see this?' And I'm like: 'It wasn't a Yirra Yaakin show.' And they're like: 'Yeah but it's still Aboriginal theatre.' I'm like: 'Yeah but it's not Yirra Yaakin. That's a whole other thing. (This is) a white man doing his show. Here's his email address, write to him directly.' And they didn't do it because I'm the person they feel comfortable to have that conversation with. They still don't feel comfortable telling Scott Rankin that they feel bad about his shows, you know? (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison said *Hipbone* received generous mining company funding and a big mainstage venue while his company's work received a fraction of that support:

> Here's Yirra Yaakin, Aboriginal Theatre Company, scraping together what we can to put a show in the courtyard, that won best production; and there's a four-million dollar project upstairs telling us what Aboriginality is about. But no Aboriginal people feel comfortable in that audience. So, there's a few problems around the representation of us. And I think some of these white directors don't really care what Aboriginal people think or feel in those audiences. And that, I think, is a problem. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Corporate funding thus flows to so-called "Aboriginal arts" projects conceived,

controlled and directed by White creatives, Morrison said, because they have corporate trust to tell stories about Aboriginal people. That is, he said, corporations prefer to give their Aboriginal project money to theatre makers who are not Aboriginal. Non-Aboriginal directors funded this way, Morrison said, are less likely to care what Aboriginal people think about their work because corporate support doesn't depend on First Nations people's approval (2017).

Morrison told me that, at a Perth event acknowledging Woodside Mining support of Big hArt's major production (*Hipbone*) and Yirra Yaakin's smaller one, a Woodside executive said in his speech that Rankin had pitched his project to him by saying that Aboriginal stories "are a resource as yet untapped" (2017). Morrison was offended by the mining reference: "This is how Scott Rankin talks about Aboriginal stories to people like Woodside" (2017). This anecdote displays colonising language, imagination and impulses exhibited by a non-Aboriginal theatre creative and reflects one or more *White colonial habits*. A non-White Culture, valued for its nonmaterial capital/FNCC, is lauded in terms of what revenue and nonmaterial valuables (or cultural gold) can be extracted from it and directed to members of the White Culture. That benefit for White/settler-colonist communities derives from that Other, non-White/First Nations Culture (FNCC) being appropriated and then marketed, commodified and monetised. Describing Aboriginal stories as "untapped" also suggests that they do not exist until they are heard, seen or experienced by White/non-Aboriginal people: that Aboriginal people do not fully appreciate their stories or know how to use them. Plus, "untapped" implies that no matter how long stories have been part of First Nations Culture, history and experience, their capital is not recognised until settler-colonists take possession:

> It's not working for an Aboriginal audience, which isn't considered, so it's working for the white majority, it's working for exactly what they want it to do. It's not working for us. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Noongar scholar, actor and critic Carissa Lee Godwin (2021) also encountered disquiet over Rankin's work with Indigenous stories. First Nations theatre makers she Yarned with, as with my concerned participants, disliked devices Rankin used for his plays *Namatjira* and *Hip Bone Sticking Out*. Godwin's research participants

were troubled that Rankin relegated relatives connected to those stories to peripheral roles, without agency or voices, even when he placed them on stage throughout performances (pp. 90-91). They also criticised that he assumed full authorship of plays that were First Nations stories made with those First Nations communities. Godwin herself contends that Rankin wrote the Namatjira script primarily to amuse White audiences, potentially to "the detriment of the integrity of the story and the people represented in it" (p. 174). Conversely, non-Aboriginal academic Susanne Thurow (2020), had a production role on the Namatjira project while undertaking theatre research on Big hArt's methods. She attests that the Namatjira family were actively engaged in negotiating how their family story would be depicted. They were not compliant she argues, but instead exercised agency that was respected by Rankin and the Big hArt team (p. 94). Meanwhile, like Kyle Morrison, Godwin's co-Yarners queried the readiness of corporates to fund Rankin's projects with Indigenous communities over productions led by First Nations creatives. They were also dismayed when critics cited Rankin's work as examples First Nations theatre makers should follow (p. 119).

These issues are similar to those of Bovell's *The Secret River* I reported in Chapter 4. Those problems include that reviewers valorised Bovell's *Secret River* and Rankin's two plays as ideal theatre works for portraying colonial history and its effects. Godwin argues about reviews of Rankin plays, as I do about applause for *Secret River*, that First Nations play-makers are thus hindered from sharing "their work with the world" when "the first example that comes to mind of what an 'Aboriginal' story is supposed to look like is a play by a white man" (p. 119). Godwin posits that these attitudes reflect "the reviewer's lack of exposure to First Nations theatre" (p. 119). This, I would argue, is also true of *The Secret River*'s enthusiastic critics. She notes that critics with knowledge of First Nations theatre-making and people are needed to improve discourse on stage works about Indigenous people.

Godwin (2021) contends further that the popularity of theatre about First Nations people made by settler-colonists lies in the "audience's search for white leniency" (p. 174). This is a White colonial desire pandered to by both non-Aboriginal theatre makers and stage critics (p. 177). Godwin observes that Rankin's "writing and direction" seem to "prioritise checking in with the audience and making

sure they still feel welcome, among the truth-telling taking place" (p. 173). This includes using humour around sensitive subjects in ways that invite White audiences to laugh rather than absorb how such events and realities have and do hurt Aboriginal people (p. 177). White audiences' desire for leniency around their part in colonisation is why White critics approve when Rankin makes "light of sensitive themes such as race" (p. 177). Critics advocate for leniency to establish, as one *Namatjira* reviewer said, "a "bridge between blackfella and whitefella… given a little leeway on both sides" (p. 178). In these ways Rankin's storytelling and White critics' responses to it do colonial work by demanding First Nations people make compromises to preserve White comfort around ongoing colonisation.

It is notable that First Nations leaders held strong concerns about Rankin's plays before and during this research, but this fact was missed by most White audiences and critics. Theatre makers implied to me it had been difficult to criticise Rankin openly because their public critiques could have additional negative outcomes. These might include framing themselves and other First Nations artists as serial malcontents, discouraging collaborations that are appropriate; they also appeared concerned their criticism might destabilise First Nations artists who had been part of Rankin's problematic play-works. Morrison, however, said he felt compelled regardless to name White directors and their practices if they impeded First Nations theatre-making (2017).

d. Problem portrayals ongoing

Morrison was troubled also by Michael Kantor's *Shadow King* at Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre and John Sheedy's *The Rabbits* and *Storm Boy* at Barking Gecko. *Storm Boy*, Morrison said, presented Aboriginal people as unintelligent:

> I walked out of that really offended, because the only way that Aboriginal people were depicted was almost this kind of homo-erotic, noble savage painted up thing, you know? There's nothing in this conversation that suggests that there's an intellect in any of those people, or some kind of capacity for abstract thought, or anything like that. It just doesn't seem like that passes the dramaturgical question in the room, when it's not led by Aboriginal people. (K. Morrison, 2017)

One reviewer summarised Kantor's award-winning play, *Shadow King*, as a "powerful retelling of King Lear (that) uses Indigenous languages and creoles to transport us to remote communities" (Liddle, 2013). Morrison said Kantor's work presented a generic, non-Aboriginal person's vision of Aboriginal people and Culture with no effort to depict a specific First Nations Culture:

> People were up there almost representing different Cultures and you kinda go, 'How is Aboriginality ever going to show the authenticity of our uniqueness and the multitude of our uniqueness, if there's generic Aboriginality on our stages and the screen all the time?' (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison thus critiqued recent works about Aboriginal experience made by high profile non-Aboriginal directors able to attract corporate patronage for their White-led projects. He then shared insights into the cultural work made under his and other First Nations people's control and what considerations are applied by them to the way it is made. This next part of our conversation reaffirmed that First Nations theatre-making is significant, embodied identity and cultural work by both performers and audiences constituting Culture and Culture-making in its profound sense.

e. In our bones. Within our guts. Speaks to our blood.

First Nations Culture, Morrison said, is predominantly being made within european theatre traditions. Under appropriate First Nations guidance, those non-Aboriginal theatre traditions operating in australia can and do contain and enable creation and reproduction of First Nations Culture:

> I can be a strong Noongar but I can also be an inheritor of five thousand years of Western theatre culture; I inherited Euripides and Sophocles and Shakespeare and Molière and Brecht and Beckett. These are my ancestors. And when I put those ancestors with the storytelling of my other ancestors, we get to create a unique part of Australian Culture that you can't access anywhere else. And that's what theatre does.
> (...)
> The space is a western space. The theatre is a western concept; it's a western paradigm. But the Culture and the spirituality and the theosophy explored on that

> stage is unique to Aboriginal Culture. That was what *Bran Nue Dae* did. That's what *Honey Spot* did. That's what *No Sugar*'s done. And David (Milroy)'s work with *Runamuk* and David's work with *King Hit*: (They) created a space for authentic Aboriginal theatre. I get to be a strong Aboriginal man, and I get to see strong Aboriginal themes on stage, in the western concept. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison said he countered *generic* representations of Aboriginality in others' work by respecting the plurality of First Nations Cultures in his own practice and by being specific to them:

> I don't make Aboriginal theatre, I make Noongar theatre. I'll make Wongai theatre; I make Yamatji theatre, I make Bunuba theatre. I don't do Aboriginal theatre; I don't do Indigenous theatre. I'm not Aboriginal, I'm not Indigenous, I'm not in Australia. I'm not Australian. I'm Noongar. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison has felt rejected by non-Aboriginal people's impatience with how specific Culture is between different language and cultural groups of First Nations people. This included impatience with variations in responsibilities attached to different Cultures:

> I remember being in rehearsal rooms and (saying), 'I can speak for Yamatji Culture because that's where my mum's from. And I could speak a little bit about Noongar Culture. I can't speak for anything else.' And when people realize that, (they) go: 'Oh, maybe we should've got someone else.' I'm like, 'Nah. I think you've got the right person, but I just don't think you like how I'm kind of coming at this information.' So, the complexity of Aboriginality still needs to be recognized. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison went on to describe Aboriginal connection to theatre viscerally: it is "in our bones", "within our guts", and "speaks to our blood". These words drove home that First Nations theatre-making constitutes significant, embodied identity and cultural work by both performers and audiences. It is work which *is* and *makes* Culture:

> Aboriginal theatre is a microcosm of contemporary Aboriginality because we're in the western space. We're in the orthodox western sphere. But our Culture, our theosophy, is expressed *within our guts*. That live storytelling is *intricately in our bones as humans*. Theatre is still the best method for cultural exchange, and it's how

> we create cultural authenticity within that space. I don't think theatre is just art for Aboriginal people; because we've got that legacy and that strong history of human storytelling, of movement, of dance or song. *It still speaks to our blood.* So, I think that Aboriginal people in the audience, it's a natural kind of place for us in a lot of ways. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison made clear that when processes of making, engaging in, performing and experiencing theatre, including as an audience member, are under First Nations control—only then is what occurs First Nations Culture in its most significant, life- and identity- affirming sense. This accords with those distinctions discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis on meanings of Culture/culture. Noongar and other First Nations Culture is made in and through Morrison's theatre practices to account culturally to those people about and for whom the stories are made.

f. Cultural safety in practice and presentation

Morrison and other theatre makers have impressed on me the centrality of cultural safety to First Nations theatre as Culture. Cultural safety in the rehearsal room, on stage and in the theatre house is part of, and required for, making First Nations Culture and accounting to communities. The necessity of cultural safety in and of itself also constitutes First Nations Culture—especially as Culture responds to colonial realities. These practices, knowledges, developments in practices and the creative works made with them all constitute First Nations Culture, Culture-making and various forms of (social and cultural) FNCC.

Cultural safety is central to Morrison's work and a key dramaturgical element, for instance, in making Yirra Yaakin play *So Long Suckers*:

> It was a whole new process where we looked at cultural and spiritual safety as the cornerstone to the narrative, which is a whole different way of dramaturging contemporary theatre. And I don't know if it worked, but we're still trying to find out how that works. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Frankland, Bamblett and Lewis (2011), argue that First Nations cultural safety requires appropriate First Nations people or practice to be present actively

maintaining and making Culture and cultural meaning (p. 27). Thus, cultural safety includes the existence and support of the means by which Cultures are made and maintained. This is more than mere gatekeeping to exclude intrusions or attacks from clumsy or hostile outsiders. Morrison explicitly named cultural safety measures as central to his theatre-making and thus showed that his cultural safety methods involve Culture-making. Without saying so he thus provided further evidence that, as Frankland and colleagues (2011) contend, cultural safety action *requires* (and *is*) Culture-making (p. 27).

Morrison's cultural safety approach is developed to provide those participating in his theatre with *protection from injury*. Such dangers from which First Nations and other people need to be protected in theatre-making often relate to retelling painful colonial history. Morrison described rehearsal room measures he used when a violent colonial event was being revisited—especially amid cultural rules that limit talking about people who have died:

CONTENT WARNING: readers please be aware that the following quote refers to the 19th century deaths of three heroic resistance warriors and one of the three, a revered Noongar leader, will be named. Commencing over page.

> It's taboo to talk about dead people in a lot of our communities. So, when we were making a show about three dead freedom fighters and heroes, we spent a lot of time creating cultural safety. When one of the actors has to talk about the dead person of his obvious ancestry, we get to that point where it's starting to get really hard. So, we broke the show and put him into a dance, to create spiritual safety around his story. So, then he could come back and tell the story. You could just tell that it was Sorry business, and it was heavy on him. We just went, 'All right, we gotta recognize that and let's move that out and let's go back to your totemic dances. Let's go back to these songs of spiritual strength, to build back that strength and then we can tell the rest of the story.' So, especially in Noongar country when we're talking about (Noongar warrior and resistance fighter) Yagan, talking about our leader, we had to really make sure that the actor was safe in talking about it. So, we had to smoke him all the time, build dances and songs around him to keep him spiritually safe in that production. But also we needed to stretch that to the audience. (K. Morrison, 2017)

I am concerned with how quoting Morrison's description of what actions he took in this rehearsal moment might be inappropriately generalised by non-Aboriginal readers. He has summarised how he dealt with the cultural safety of one actor in one play in relation to one story; the actor also had specific relationship to that story because a deceased figure in it was an ancestral relative. I infer Morrison's approach might also have afforded cultural safety for all those in the rehearsal room and audience. I warn readers against assuming that any general ways of proceeding should be extrapolated from Morrison's words and methods here or applied to other stories or other issues or incidents of theatre cultural safety. Morrison's practice example is only instructive for showing what sorts of individual sensitivities can arise for each theatre practitioner, alongside broader safety issues affecting First Nations people. Every rehearsal room, project and story will present a unique set of cultural safety issues and cannot be generalised. This reality reinforces that such creative work, applying Culture to make Culture, can only occur safely if the methods are designed and implemented by First Nations people working together in a unique space created by them to deal with that story or colonial event. As AIATSIS CEO Craig Ritchie attests, First Nations Culture will always be present when two or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people are together, because they will find *a unique way* to embody First Nations identity, values and ways of looking at the world (Ritchie, 2019).

What Morrison described was Culture being both created and safeguarded. This was done via Morrison responding to the cultural and Sorry sensitivities of that colonial history. This included managing the reality that portrayals of colonial cruelty and deaths of First Nations people confront First Nations audience members and creatives with what was done to their *families*. Blunt portrayals of massacres, murders, exploitation, dispossession, child removal and other violence are not the brave truth-telling that settler-colonist storytellers might intend their work to be. First Nations audiences can experience these White-devised renderings as insensitive appropriation of their suffering and as dehumanising, as if what occurred happened to other people not their families. This occurs whether White theatre makers make light of colonial events or present them brutally. Cultural safety is thus unlikely when a non-Aboriginal person exercises their artistic freedom to tell a Sorry history story; there is too much clumsy, benevolent settler-colonist guesswork at play.

Despite the different impacts of colonisation on First Nations and non-Aboriginal people, Morrison said settler-colonists also need cultural safety considerations around Sorry stories:

> Our space might not be safe for a lot of white people, because of the themes and the ideas that we talk to. So, we go: 'I know how it feels to be unsafe in an audience. I don't want anybody else to feel unsafe in that audience.' Including everybody. Every single person in that space is a spirit. And they have spiritual safety to take care of, and their cultural safety to take care of. This is a shared ceremonial spiritual space for all of us. Has to be safe for all of us, including anybody that comes into that space. (K. Morrison, 2017)

Morrison's insistence on protecting settler-colonist audiences from the anguish of their place in colonial stories is held in tension with Godwin's demand that White audiences not be let "off the hook" (2021, p. 177). It is likely there are complexities in both practitioners' positions such that they are not inconsistent with each other. It is possible to provide White/settler-colonist audience members cultural safety while also ensuring they engage with difficult truths First Nations stage stories can present to them. Further drilling down on what cultural safeguards work best for First Nations and non-Aboriginal people, project by project, is ongoing

work beyond the scope of this thesis or of my creative and cultural knowledges as a settler-colonist theatre maker.

iii. Yirra Yaakin lessons

Morrison's methods of instilling cultural safety in the rehearsal room and around experience of Yirra Yaakin storytelling were still evolving, as ongoing dramaturgical and cultural questions central to his practice: "We're still trying to find out how that works" (2017). An east coast First Nations director [1], whose conversation is reported in Chapter 7, Section ii., made a similar point to me: that First Nations people are "still working this stuff out". This practitioner in that earlier chapter was explaining that cultural safety and accounting to community in theatre-making are in continual development and need cultural space for that work to proceed. I would expect that this work will never be settled: as with First Nations Culture generally, cultural safety practices of First Nations theatre makers must be dynamic and responsive to continually changing colonial circumstances and challenges.

Through speaking with Morrison, I saw distinctions in meanings of culture/Culture as applied to theatre made by and for White/settler-colonist people vs theatre's significance as Culture for First Nations people made by and for them. Morrison's insistence that First Nations theatre in australia has more profound cultural meaning for First Nations people than non-Aboriginal theatre has for non-Aboriginal australians was implicit in all the conversations of this research. But it was my conversation with Morrison which compelled me to investigate, and summarise in Chapter 6, the ways that culture/Culture must be understood. He vocalised this distinction between non-Aboriginal theatre/culture as mere artistic endeavour, albeit enabling self- and cultural reflection, compared to First Nations theatre/Culture as profound Culture-making. These distinctions are important for defining First Nations or Indigenous theatre: a key marker being that First Nations Culture in its most profound sense is being made. This understanding, in turn, is important for applying Bourdieu's concepts of nonmaterial capital appropriately to the specific, profoundly cultural field of *First Nations theatre-making*.

iv. Footnotes: West Coast Stories

[1] I am not identifying theatre maker-participants in this chapter: to maintain their anonymity outside of the thesis section where I report our conversation. This is a convention I have adopted for all participants (except the late Andrew Ross): I am quarantining their identities and the fact they have taken part in this research within their specific thesis section. This is because at time of thesis submission I had not yet finalised with them their consent to their testimony being publicly available. That said, feedback was obtained—after submission—from all but one participant and incorporated into this version of the thesis lodged in Flinders Library. These steps are explained in section 5 (vi) in the Chapter 5 methods discussion.

PART IV. IMPLICATIONS OF THEATRE INQUIRY

12. BLAK GOLD/WHITE DESIRE: FROM HERE TO WHERE

i. Cultural treasure/colonial desire: new moves?

As this inquiry draws to a close the australian theatre stage is primed for a reset which might, or might not, move First Nations theatre to the centre of the nation's performing arts landscape. The implications of this research for new arts policy, led by the Federal Government's *Revive* arts-culture strategy (2023) are therefore considered in this chapter. My discussion begins firstly, however, with identifying what this thesis has investigated.

ii. Inquiry terrains

This project has illuminated some effects of non-Aboriginal theatre makers and structures on the capacity of First Nations communities and artists to make and control their own stage stories. I have explored past practices and issues since the 1970s to now; but my conversations with theatre makers, about their experiences of collaborating to make Indigenous stage-works, have focused mostly on the last ten years. I have *not* documented First Nations practice in the rehearsal room, ethnographer-style, or in the different, embedded ways that Syron (2021), Godwin (2021) and Thurow (2020) have over the same period I was conducting this research. Nor have I sought to encapsulate from conversations what is happening in those spaces when appropriate collaborations are taking place. The data I have gathered suggests instead what structures, personnel and relationships are present in appropriate collaborations. What I have identified about First Nations theatre is my argument that it constitutes Culture in its profound sense, and those First Nations creatives and communities engaged in making it embody and exchange various forms of First Nations nonmaterial/cultural-creative capital (FNCC); these First Nations forms of capital are required for making Indigenous theatre stories which therefore constitute Culture.

Conversely, conversation and case study data plus literature cited in this study provide examples of what happens when those appropriate collaboration elements are not in place. Mostly the data is about settler-colonist behaviours in relation to First Nations theatre-making. This includes positive creative relationships in collaborations between First Nations and settler-colonist artists and communities. But even more palpable in the creative structures discussed, are problematic White actions and outcomes making this research necessary. An important finding of this inquiry, therefore, is the continuing impact of settler-colonist actions and structures on the artistic freedoms and cultural rights of First Nations people in australia. This is despite White institutional efforts to protect communities from non-Aboriginal interloper-creatives, through initiatives such as Indigenous arts protocols. Meanwhile to further understand what cultural rights are being infringed, it is helpful to review the artistic freedom structure developed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

iii. Cultural rights terrains: artistic freedom checklist

This framework acknowledges that a group or person has artistic freedom when they have: (1) freedom (or right or power) to create (or be part of the process of creating), (2) the freedom (or right or power) to disseminate what is created (to reach audiences or to have a voice which is heard) and (3) the freedom (or right or power) to have access to and enjoy the arts (to experience the creations of other people). Additionally, enjoyment of the arts, crucial to artistic freedom, includes (4) being welcomed into spaces to access the arts, (5) that people see themselves and their social group in arts portrayals, and those portrayals are truthful, and (6) that people have access to arts which speak to their own or their group's questions. These elements include that those with artistic freedom (7) can see themselves portrayed by people who are them or, at the very least, in combination with those who genuinely know and respect their perspectives. In element (8) those having full artistic freedom control how they and their social group are portrayed, or, members of their community have more control and access compared to agents of other social groups - to how their own community or social group's identity is portrayed. The framework also acknowledges that (9) erroneous belief in the universal availability of artistic freedom can mask artistic inequities and silence efforts to redress them.

This framework does not address cultural property issues, such as the rights of Indigenous communities to own and control their stories, or to control how other non-Indigenous arts makers portray a First Nations community's experiences. Further development of this artistic framework is therefore appropriate, informed by cultural heritage issues affecting First Nations stories, old and new, raised in this thesis and addressed elsewhere, including in arts body protocols. That said, the artistic freedom requirement that a group of people can see themselves in art, portrayed truthfully, implies that First Nations people themselves or their recognised social group must have control over what is made about them. Control emerges persistently as a key to First Nations people's cultural rights and can extend to the need to protect cultural heritage in First Nations stories and experience. However, even the concept of First Nations 'control' falls short of full story and cultural Sovereignty: because the word 'control' acknowledges the presence of non-Aboriginal contributors who have a financial or creative stake in what is being made. There is still the need to negotiate how that control works and to deal with the expectations of White creatives, producers and companies—all of whom have different, unpredictable levels of cultural respect and insight into why Indigenous creative and cultural control is important.

iv. Shifting terrains, elusive control

Indigenous artistic and cultural control—of stories, practices, portrayals, rehearsals and performance spaces—has been at the core of First Nations theatre struggles and innovations traced in this research. This is even though First Nations control of theatre addressing First Nations experience has long been touted as integral to the artistic freedom and cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences and creatives. But as theatre leaders have told me, Indigenous theatre-making control is impeded by structural realities, including scarce resources, limited performance and rehearsal space and an absence of culturally appropriate and safe theatre training for emerging First Nations artists. These issues are exacerbated by the power and resources that non-Aboriginal theatre makers and organisations have to make theatre, including stage-works about and employing First Nations people. As funding bodies have adjusted criteria to ensure First Nations creative control, or

at least First Nations input, these limits on non-Aboriginal theatre makers have triggered new White strategies to circumvent them. These White circumventions offer further evidence of the impact of settler-colonist people, actions and structures on the artistic freedoms and cultural rights of First Nations people in australia.

My research traces a period when the distinction between consultation and collaboration was first being advocated and explained by First Nations theatre leaders. *Collaboration,* where a "cultural exchange" (Maza, 2015) takes place between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, means First Nations story owners and Indigenous artists with cultural accountability are more likely to have agency in the creative process. With *consultation* there is often no requirement for the settler-colonist creative to make changes responding to First Nations advice or feedback. Yet, there are plentiful examples, in my thesis and elsewhere, of non-Aboriginal producers and theatre makers citing consultation with an Aboriginal community member or artist as evidence of appropriate practice and community approval. As argued in the data sections of this thesis, this behaviour involves a preference by settler-colonist creatives for the symbolic and social capital in an Indigenous person's identity or 'Aboriginality' over their First Nations knowledges and theatre craft (constituting their cultural-creative capital). At least until 2020, therefore, some works portraying Indigenous people and stories continued being made without First Nations control or collaboration and with little consultation.

This struggle by First Nations theatre leaders over the past decade—to educate settler-colonist creatives on appropriate collaboration—has itself been a position of compromise dictated by colonial and capital realities. In 2015 Ilbijerri theatre leader Rachael Maza, was reluctantly accepting that full autonomy and creative independence for First Nations theatre makers, separate from settler-colonist creatives and their resources, was too much to expect:

> So, while there continues to be this great divide of privilege and power. We will continue to see these partnerships; I absolutely get that. So that's not the issue. (Maza, 2015)

But Maza looked forward to a time when collaboration with non-Aboriginal people and organisations would be a choice, rather than a colonial necessity:

> When we will no longer need to collaborate. I believe that there will be... When this divide between those who have the privilege and power in this industry starts to shift, then ideally, we are collaborating in a way that is not based on a need, but rather on whether we *choose* to collaborate. And we're not there yet. (Maza, 2015)

As I have already argued, First Nations 'control' of stories does not equate to the artistic freedom assumed by settler-colonist artists in australia. Nor does 'appropriate collaboration'. Collaboration requires compromise and negotiation to an even greater extent than 'control' signifies. In both arrangements settler-colonist artists, directors, institutions and venues must be accounted for, either directly in collaborative practices or obliquely when First Nations 'control' is operating. The missing element for First Nations theatre makers and their communities to move towards artistic freedom is full autonomy; this is where collaborations and complex manoeuvres to explain and establish control are unnecessary. What is significant about the ambitions of the Federal Government's *Revive* policy is that the catchcries of 'collaboration over consultation' and 'First Nations story control' are giving way to a new, more ambitious agenda: the holy grail of full autonomy.

v. *Revive* terrains: Five Pillars

The "centrepiece" of the federal government's *Revive* arts and culture policy (2023) is a new entity, Creative Australia, comprising the existing Australia Council and several other, smaller arts bodies merged with or created within it (p. 17). Creative Australia began operating on 1 July 2023 with the task of implementing *Revive's* objectives. The *Revive* strategy expands on five pillars in the Gillard Labor government's 2013 *Creative Australia* arts policy (pp. 5, 6, 17). The second of these pillars is used in the new policy's full title: *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*. However, the pillar listed as first in *Revive*'s priorities is "First Nations First" (p. 2).

In keeping with this positioning, First Nations arts support structures at Creative Australia, including a new First Nations-led arts board, will be prioritised to

commence in 2024. The First Nations board will focus first on performing arts, before "broadening to other artforms" (p. 27). Consultation with First Nations communities on how that First Nations arts board should be constituted was set to start in mid-July and finish by October 2023 (Australia Council, 2023, p. 8). *Revive* and Creative Australia have several key tasks ahead of them, indicated by this thesis inquiry, to bring First Nations stories to the centre of the australian arts/theatre landscape. They include addressing: (1) First Nations capacity building, (2) ensuring First Nations creative autonomy alongside control of stage stories, (3) production resourcing, (4) provision of culturally safe creative spaces and (5) the cultural knowledge limitations—including unconscious racism—of non-Aboriginal audiences, programmers, creatives and critics.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture.

Under this pillar, the *Revive* document (2023) promises to increase funding and provide other supports to free First Nations theatre-making from reliance on larger, non-Aboriginal theatre companies. This is a key component in the move to autonomy: providing sufficient funding so that First Nations theatre-making does not require collaboration with non-Indigenous people and companies. This accelerated support will include financial assistance allocated by the First Nations-led board: to enable First Nations producing teams to make work which can "grow in scale and reach while retaining Indigenous creative control" (p. 23). The pillar also promises touring support so that First Nations audiences, wherever they are, will have access to First Nations made work. Funding will be available too, the document says, for artists and First Nations companies to keep developing practice, skills and capacity. There are no specifics about what these funding amounts will be; those figures might be awaiting the establishment of the First Nations board.

These intentions, if enacted, will support the artistic freedom and cultural Sovereignty of First Nations people in two ways: (1) giving resources to Indigenous creatives to "express to their own insight" and (2) providing First Nations people

access to enjoy the arts in forms which speak to them and address their concerns. That is, touring funds will provide more Indigenous communities access to theatre made by First Nations people for First Nations people. This might offset, to some extent, mainstage reliance on settler-colonist patrons as fee paying audiences for First Nations theatre. At several points the document states that First Nations arts must be First Nations-led.

Increasing "the number of First Nations peoples on the governance boards of all arts organisations and cultural institutions" (p. 23) will go some way to centering First Nations performance and audiences within the australian theatre landscape. Increasing First Nations voices in arts decision-making across the theatre sector has scope to change organisations and the habituses of the majority settler-colonists who populate them. Efforts to "embed First Nations protocols across the sector" will also help centre First Nations theatre in White creative imaginations. That this embedding is necessary twenty years after the first Australia Council Indigenous protocols were made available indicates there has been little non-Aboriginal uptake of these guidelines.

This reinforces one co-conversationlist's view [reported in Chapter 7, Section ii. (g)] [1] that it was unlikely non-Aboriginal creatives and other arts staff worked with the protocols:

> There's no evidence to say they are. The only time we ever see them being in practice is when there are Aboriginal people working in those companies. What tends to happen is the Aboriginal people are given those responsibilities to implement them when in fact…that work is about non-Indigenous people taking responsibility for implementing those things. (name withheld here by researcher, 2015) [1]

In the *Revive* document, Indigenous Australians minister Linda Burney acknowledges that ensuring First Nations people lead First Nations arts bodies "requires a commitment to training and skills development for First Nations cultural and creative practitioners" and more "pathways for young First Nations people to enter the arts, entertainment and cultural sector" (p. 9). Elsewhere *Revive* acknowledges that there is "an ongoing problem of training and skills shortages in First Nations arts jobs, including management, technical and administrative positions" and this creates "limitations for the growth of First Nations arts and

related organisations, and contributes to a lack of autonomy"; the "First Nations body within Creative Australia" will "put together a work plan" to address these skills and training shortages (p. 25). Three First Nations theatre makers [1] interviewed for this research [Chapter/sections: 7. ii.; 10.ii.; 10. iii] cited skills shortages, including in theatre-making craft, for why collaborating with non-Aboriginal theatre makers was often necessary. Therefore, increasing the number of First Nations artists with requisite skills could free First Nations producers and companies from enforced collaborations.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

This pillar, while not First Nations specific, argues that stories from all cultural and social groups and places must be encouraged and enabled. The policy suggests that all sorts of platforms and audiences can be accessed to receive and respond to *every* story. The promise of *a place* for every story highlights how few dedicated rehearsal rooms and stages across australia, especially mainstage-sized venues, are designated for First Nations theatre-making, performances or audiences. This absence impedes the artistic freedom and cultural safety of First Nations theatre practitioners. There is no specific promise in the *Revive* document to change that.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators.

This pillar addresses the need for artists to be valued and to have opportunity to earn a sustainable living. It also notes the importance of mentoring, education and sustainable pathways across all stages of an artist's career (p. 53). A similar recommendation about career pathways, education and mentorship was in the First Nations-specific Pillar 1 principle. Pillar 3, however, encompasses the establishment of a Centre for Arts and Entertainment Workplaces, within Creative Australia, to develop pay, safety and resource advice. It notes that all workplaces should be safe

places, including *culturally* safe (my italics) (p. 53). This has relevance for concerns raised by First Nations creatives across literature cited, and in research conversations, that they found some rehearsal spaces were not culturally safe. This was especially so when rehearsal processes, engaging with First Nations themes, were led by non-Aboriginal practitioners. I posit that the structural effects of Whiteness and colonialism on First Nations people's creative freedoms and cultural safety are enacted by and embodied in settler-colonist *individuals*. Institutional measures are needed to compel culturally appropriate behaviour by settler-colonists in relation to First Nations people. Such measures have been attempted in arts body cultural protocols and rules attached to authorship and ideation of work attracting First Nations funding. However, unconscious racial privilege and racism must be tackled at individual/single-agent level as well, to change the habituses of settler colonist creatives, bureaucrats, audiences and critics. Each habitus is formed, and constantly re-forming, with the individual. My data has demonstrated that appropriate collaborations depend on relationship between individuals; therefore, the individual habitus of a non-Aboriginal collaborator is key to determining if they can collaborate with the respect and humility needed to be a culturally safe artist to work beside.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage.

This pillar outlines the purposes and structure of Creative Australia, as the Federal Government's new principal arts investment and advisory body. A major aspect of Creative Australia is, as already noted in Pillar 1, the establishment of a First Nations-led Board to fund, create and produce "First Nations works of scale, with priorities and funding decisions determined by First Nations leaders". The board will also devise a "First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy". Another key remit is that it will "promote best practice cultural protocols, self-determination and cultural safety training across arts and cultural organisations" (p.70). Given that recent Australia Council research has identified signs of racism in some performance venue staff's attitudes, cultural safety training across non-

Aboriginal organisations is urgent and necessary. This also aligns with my argument that structural racism and other infringements on First Nations cultural rights are enacted through individuals; therefore, those White colonial habits need to be tackled at all of structural, institutional and individual agent levels. That said, *Revive* merely "promotes" such a training roll out: this is different from imposing, through legislation or funding conditions, a structural requirement that White/settler-colonist arts workers build their capacity to work in culturally safe ways with First Nations artists and communities. Cultural safety training and other cultural competency programs are urgently needed to bring all non-Aboriginal arts workers up to speed on appropriate collaborative and inclusive practice.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad.

This pillar acknowledges the many different places and platforms where artistic work can be delivered to audiences—arising from continually emerging digital technologies. This includes plans to develop and impose requirements for Australian screen content on streaming platforms by mid-2024. It also promises secure five-year funding for ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) and SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) (p. 89). The pillar notes the value of "cultural tourism" as "increasingly important for Australia's regions and First Nations communities. Celebrating and preserving First Nations cultures presents opportunities for higher value-added tourism, skills development and job creation" (p. 91). There are dangers, of course, in promoting "cultural tourism" when such advertising might preference presentations of 'Aboriginality' deemed to attract tourist dollars. This pillar also plans to appoint "an Ambassador for First Nations People and establish an Office for First Nations Engagement to embed First Nations voices, perspectives and experiences into Australia's foreign policy, and help grow First Nations' trade and investment" (p. 93). Such a move, building recognition of First Nations people as a Sovereign group of Peoples able to engage across national-global borders, recognises the economic capital potential of First Nations cultural-creative capital (FNCC) when it is operating across an international arts field.

vi. Revival realities

Revive's policies on Indigenous arts incorporate structural and financing changes with potential to provide economic and other support for First Nations creative and cultural work. The most potent of these changes will be a First Nations-led art board operating autonomously within Creative Australia to allocate funding and other infrastructure for Indigenous arts projects. Such a move gives more First Nations creatives the opportunity to make theatre without having to involve non-Aboriginal artists. However, other *Revive* measures, such as *promoting* cultural safety training across arts organisations do not guarantee any inroads on the White arts worker, audience and programmer problem. Adjusting settler-colonist habituses via cultural education is necessary to broaden worldviews driving White behaviours. However, without a mechanism that compels organisations to undertake this cultural work, it is unlikely to occur at the rate needed to change the australian theatre landscape for First Nations stories and theatre makers over the plan's five-year remit—or beyond.

vi. Terrains of desire and departure: the mottled landscape

Theatre maker testimonies [Chapters 7-11], responses to White-controlled theatre made about First Nations people [Chapters 3, 4, 11], and arts body research [Section: 3, iii. (g)], tell a confused story about where First Nations theatre sits within the australian theatre landscape or field. That broad australian arts landscape is still not a culturally safe environment within which First Nations artists may stage their stories, where First Nations communities may share their stories or where First Nations audiences can find stage stories which speak to and represent them. I rely on critiques of Whiteness, arts body research and again, theatre maker testimonies, to argue that the typical non-Aboriginal theatre maker, programmer, philanthropist and their White habituses are the agents and source of this cultural lack of safety. Every history and oral history chapter in this thesis tells stories of colonial desire alongside cultural responses by the colonised to the effects of that White desire. Appropriate processes of First Nations/settler-colonist collaboration around Indigenous stage portrayals are not a structural given. They depend on relationship between collaborators, and that, in turn, is dependent on the capacity of individual non-Aboriginal creatives to work respectfully with First Nations fellow artists,

communities and stories. Similarly, there is no structural impetus currently for White mainstage programmers to upgrade their cultural literacy, to host more First Nations works or to distinguish between Indigenous portrayals made by Indigenous people and those created outside First Nations control. The same is true for theatre critics, who at least until recently, assume they are writing for settler-colonist theatre-goers and evaluate First Nations theatre through that broad White lens. It is unclear if arts policy such as *Revive* (2023) can shift these personnel problems or if generational change is the only evolution available on this front.

That said, this research itself could be marking the end of a particular era and generation of First Nations theatre leaders and their strategies for managing the australian landscape. The practitioners I have interviewed are among the most senior, experienced theatre creatives in australia. Their careers are not over yet, but there is another generation coming up behind them moving into leadership roles. That next generation, I believe, will benefit from the new 'autonomy' phase of First Nations theatre arts policy and practitioner advocacy. The struggle and debate about First Nations story 'control' and replacing consultation models with 'collaboration' and/or 'cultural exchange' could make way for that bigger, clearer and more self-determined demand of 'autonomy'. The promise of that autonomy is that First Nations theatre-making will be free from reliance on partnerships and collaborations with non-Aboriginal entities and creatives. If that intention is realised, then large parts of my thesis and practitioner testimony within it are about the past. I have thus recorded oral history marking a period that might be about to move behind us.

Nevertheless, it would be hasty to assume that this promise of autonomy for First Nations artists is going to be matched by conciliatory changes in the White colonial habits of theatre makers, programmers and audiences. Continued monitoring is warranted to record what new behaviours of White colonising desire First Nations arts autonomy will trigger and in whom. As Sullivan (2006) argues, the ontological expansion of White privilege, such as assumed right to work in First Nations creative spaces, is an unconscious habit (p. 144) and will continue. It involves a habitual assumption and execution of free movement by White creatives into fields of theatre endeavour belonging to those not operating as White (p. 122). It is what scholars have critiqued as the desire of the White middle classes to engage

with First Nations people and perspectives: to demonstrate their progressive bona fides or to understand "the Other" (including: Harrison, 2012; Ritchie, 2019; Spivak, 1988, 1990). Noongar scholar Carissa Godwin (2021) terms this simply "cultural consumerism" and explains it as "white people wishing to purchase, embody, or commodify a cultural experience as one would approach a form of entertainment or a service" (p. 185). This includes seeking out First Nations performance as "as an act of wokeness" (p. 185) or in search of "grief porn" (p. 214). These White behaviours, assuming rights to all spaces and cultural experiences belonging to the Other, are insidious because they are unconscious and/or intended as benevolent. They are unlikely to stop, therefore, but they might change in focus and effect. I predict new problems of White expansionist desire as First Nations arts autonomy, if it happens, results in more Indigenous work occupying australian mainstages. White desire to retain and acquire creative territory will trigger new responses to the growing salience of First Nations theatre-making capital.

My research therefore demands that non-Aboriginal creatives and producers, accustomed to making work to their perspectives and desires, must now step back: to become a White resource of use in First Nations theatre Sovereignty for deploying First Nations cultural-creative capital (FNCC) on colonial stages; not a source of ideas. It is time for White artists genuine about First Nations Sovereignty to move into ontological retreat. It is time to listen to what protocols developed by First Nations artists say and to consciously resist leading with ideas, which will be unconsciously White and colonial. It is time for restraint: to only bring settler-colonist material and nonmaterial capital to spaces under First Nations control when those White capitals, endowed by privilege, have been distinctly requested under First Nations creative autonomy. First Nations story Sovereignty requires White retreat via restraint in action, words, visibility and exercise of White privilege. This White restraint begins with waiting to be asked.

vii. Footnotes: From here to where

[1] I am not identifying theatre maker-participants in this chapter: to maintain their anonymity outside of the thesis section where I report our conversation. This is a convention I have adopted for all participants (except the late Andrew Ross): I am quarantining their identities and the fact they have taken part in this research within their specific thesis section. This is because at time of thesis submission I had not yet finalised with them their consent to their testimony being publicly available. That said, feedback was obtained—after submission—from all but one participant and incorporated into this version of the thesis lodged in Flinders Library. These steps are explained in section 5 (vi) in the Chapter 5 methods discussion.

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APPENDICES

I. Arranging and conducting interviews: process documents

Materials approved by Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC).

A. Cover letter

This was the generic request letter approved by MUHREC and sent to potential participants. At the time of conducting my interviews I was still enrolled as a Monash University candidate; so, this letter carried the letterhead of the Monash Indigenous Centre where my supervisor, at that time Associate Professor (now Professor) Maryrose Casey, was based.

Request for your participation in performing arts research

Project: Collaborative representations of Australian Indigenous perspectives in dramatic performance writing

I am a Monash University PhD (Creative Writing) student conducting research into the role of non-Indigenous performance writers seeking to portray and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in their writing.

I am writing to ask if you, as a theatre-making professional, would be available to take part in this research. This would involve being interviewed by me on issues surrounding collaborations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous practitioners with particular focus on drama projects exploring contemporary Indigenous realities.

If you took part, the interview would be conducted at a time and location convenient to you. I would aim to conduct this interview from between May and November this year subject to your availability.

If you would like to consider this request, an explanatory statement is attached setting out the purposes of this research and what would be asked of you if you agree to take part. If you do agree I am required to get your signature on the attached consent form before I interview you.

If you would like more information about the project, I would be delighted to give you further background and can be contacted via the phone numbers and email address on the explanatory statement and included below. The Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee from whom I have sought approval for this research and my PhD Supervisor/Chief Investigator, Associate Professor Maryrose Casey, can also be contacted

if you would like further information from them. Their contact details are on the explanatory statement,

Regards,

Kay Nankervis

B. Explanatary Statement

This was the detailed description of the project and how participants' responses to questions and disclosures during our conversations would be used. This included rights to withdraw from the project and my intentions for checking back with participants during thesis writing and analysis. Participants were given a hard copy of this statement and nearly every person interviewed had been emailed a copy of the statement as part of my contact to request their participation. The exception was Geoff Kelso and Kelton Pelton because our meeting was only organised after I arrived in Perth and was arranged through Andrew Ross. They were given hard copies and signed their consent forms at the start of our meeting during which the interview took place. These words were presented on a Monash Indigenous Centre letterhead:

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Creative artists and arts bureaucrats (dramatic performance)

Project: Collaborative representations of Australian Indigenous perspectives in dramatic performance writing

Associate Professor Maryrose Casey
Chief Investigator (PhD Supervisor)
Monash Indigenous Centre
Phone: (03) 9905 2970
email: Maryrose.Casey@monash.edu

Kay Nankervis
Student Researcher
Monash University PhD candidate
Phone: (02) 6338-4178
(m) 0419-486-605
email: kbnan1@student.monash.edu

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect **of** this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

This PhD research project explores the role of the non-Indigenous playwright attempting to represent Indigenous Australians in her work. This builds on others' research into what has happened when non-Indigenous writers portray Indigenous Australians and Indigenous realities. This PhD will investigate what has happened since the start of the 21st century with

focus on the period since 2007. The research component of this project will aim to improve the practice of non-Indigenous artists seeking to collaborate with Indigenous artists to represent Indigenous realities in drama. In a later component of the PhD project the PhD researcher (Kay Nankervis) will create a stage-play exploring contemporary Australian issues: the findings of this research stage of her PhD project will influence how or if she can include Indigenous characters and experience within the creative work.

For this research you will be asked to take part in an interview of up to one hour conducted by Kay Nankervis. This interview will involve questions relating to your experience of collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists in the dramatic performing arts: your views of where collaborations have succeeded and where there have been problems – especially where the project involves non-Indigenous writers portraying Indigenous Australians. Wherever possible the researcher will travel to the city or town where you are living or working to conduct the interview face-to-face at a place agreed with you. The interview will be recorded on an audio recording device. You will be sent copies of the interview transcript and given opportunity to comment on the way in which what you have said has been interpreted or included in the PhD thesis and other publications arising from the research. The student researcher might contact you again during her PhD project to clarify a point or to update what you have said.

Why were you chosen for this research?

If you have been approached for this research it is most likely you are an Indigenous Australian theatre or film artist (actor, director, writer, artistic director) or an Indigenous arts bureaucrat with standing in the performing arts. A smaller number of non-Indigenous Australian theatre and film artists and arts bureaucrats of similar standing will also be approached on the basis that they have worked collaboratively with Indigenous artists. You will have been emailed directly if your contact details are available on the public record (such as the website of the organisation where you work). If your contact details are not in the public domain this request for you to participate will have been sent to you via your agent, a professional organisation of which you are a member (such as the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance) or another industry contact who knows both you and the researcher. It is appropriate that, if you receive this request, that it has been made clear to you who passed it to you on behalf of the researcher.

About the student researcher, Kay Nankervis.

I am employed as a lecturer in the School of Communication and Creative Industries, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, NSW. However, I am undertaking my PhD through

Monash University to ensure I have appropriate supervision for this research project – and it is Monash University which is responsible for this research. Before becoming a university academic and PhD student I trained as an actor but worked mostly as a journalist (with ABC). I have come to playwriting only recently and have had one full-length play produced (*The Sand Dwellers,* 2010) and one short play has toured regionally in NSW (*Assistance,* NSW Central West Short Playwriting Festival).

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

If you agree to participate in this research, you are asked to sign the consent form accompanying this explanatory statement – and to return the signed form to Kay Nankervis via her Monash University email address. If emailing is inconvenient the consent form can also be posted to Kay's work address in Bathurst, NSW:

Kay Nankervis
Room 104 Building 1435
School of Communication and Creative Industries
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795
Australia

Once you have indicated you agree to take part in the research Kay Nankervis will be in touch to arrange a date and location for the interview.
After agreeing to take part you have the right to withdraw from participation at any stage of the project right up to publication of the research. You might also choose to exclude just part of what you have said in your interview from the research if after reviewing it you decide some parts should not be made public. These decisions can be made during and after the interview right up until the point of publication or thesis submission. These choices you make will be acknowledged in writing by Kay Nankervis so that you can check that your wishes have been heard and understood.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

The object of this research is to improve the practice of non-Indigenous artists (especially performance writers) engaged in projects involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait artists or addressing contemporary themes of significance to Indigenous Australians. The research will aim to bring together opinions and experiences relevant to current debates about

collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists in dramatic performance works.

Your involvement in this research will take up some of your valuable time and draw upon your personal experience in the arts. It is possible some of what you contribute will conflict with the views of others interviewed and may create professional disagreement with fellow artists. Additionally, because your views will be written about alongside those of others you may be disappointed that your position is countered by the representation of those other views. Therefore if you consent to this research it is important you bear in mind that your contribution will be among a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous views represented.

Services on offer if adversely affected

It is possible that some of the information you offer during the interview may include incidents from your career which are uncomfortable for you to revisit. It is not the intention of this research to seek out unpleasant memories that trigger anger or sadness. It is hoped but not assumed that much of what emerges in the interview process will be positive news. However, if recounting an incident does bring up uncomfortable emotions that stay with you after the interview you may wish to seek independent counselling.

Counselling by a psychologist can be provided without charge under Medicare if deemed appropriate by your doctor (GP).

There are a range of organisations – some only found in your local area – which provide counselling services at little or no cost. The following nationally accessible organisations provide lists of counsellors at these links attached to their websites:

Beyond Blue: http://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/suicide-prevention/helpful-contacts-and-websites/counselling-services
Black Dog Institute:
http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/public/gettinghelp/consultingaprofessional/psychologistscounsellors.cfm
Aboriginal Counselling Services: http://www.aboriginalcounsellingservices.com.au/

Payment

There will be no formal payment made to you for your involvement in this research. However if there are costs for you in taking part (such as travel or refreshment) the

researcher will cover these moderate expenses or reimburse you for them. As already said, you can withdraw your participation in this research at any point up to publication. There is no obligation to remain part of the research even if some expense has been incurred by the researcher in conducting an interview with you.

Confidentiality

Who you are and your position in the performing arts is important information for this research. It is hoped that the information and opinion you share can be attributed to you by name in the published research. However, you may decide that some of what you contribute can only be used anonymously – without the published results showing that the opinion or information came from you. In these cases your view will be described as being made by "an experienced Indigenous actor" or "the artistic director of an Indigenous theatre company" or "a non-Indigenous film director" and so on – as the case may be. Care will be taken in these instances to ensure that such descriptions do not identify you. Decisions to contribute all or part of your interview anonymously can be made by you during and after the interview right up until the point of publication by informing the researcher. These choices you make will be acknowledged in writing by Kay Nankervis so that you can check that your wishes have been heard and understood.

Storage of data

Interview material collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations.

The audio recordings and transcripts of these recordings will be kept on Kay Nankervis's work computer up to five years after the completion of the PhD project (under Kay's candidature with Monash University this must be completed by November 2020). A record of this location will be filed with the Head of the Monash University department responsible for this research. Only Kay and her PhD supervisor, Associate Professor Maryrose Casey, will have access to the original recordings and transcripts.

Results

Where your contribution has been used in journal articles or the PhD thesis you will be sent draft copies of the articles before publication and the draft of the PhD thesis before submission. This is to enable you an opportunity to comment on the way in which the information you have provided has been used. On publication of the thesis and/or journal articles you will be sent details (such as an Internet link) of where the published research can be accessed.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the:

Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics MUHREC):
Executive Officer
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Building 3e
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you,

Associate Professor Maryrose Casey
Chief Investigator (PhD Supervisor)
Monash Indigenous Centre

C. Consent forms

This is the consent form participants were asked to sign to confirm their willingness to take part in the research. This was sent to all participants before the interview meetings but in every case the forms were signed in hard copy at the interview location and just before interview commencement. This was presented on the letterhead of the Monash Indigenous Centre.

CONSENT FORM

Creative artists and arts bureaucrats (dramatic performance)

Project: Collaborative representations of Australian Indigenous perspectives in dramatic performance writing

Chief Investigator:
Associate Professor Maryrose Casey
PhD Supervisor
Monash Indigenous Centre
Phone: (03) 9905 2970 Email: Maryrose.Casey@monash.edu

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
An audio recording of interview with me conducted by PhD researcher Kay Nankervis lasting approximately one hour	☐	☐
That material I contribute during the interview be used in published journal articles, conference presentations and Kay Nankervis's PhD thesis – unless I indicate otherwise at a later date before publication	☐	☐
That material I contribute during the interview be attributed to me in journal articles, conference presentations and Kay Nankervis's PhD thesis – unless I indicate otherwise at a later date before publication	☐	☐
Being sent a transcript of the interview	☐	☐
Being sent draft copies of journal articles and conference presentations pre-publication and all or part of the PhD thesis pre-submission - with the opportunity to comment on how interview material from me has been used	☐	☐
Being contacted on subsequent occasions during the PhD project to clarify or update material in the transcript of my interview	☐	☐

Name of Participant ______________________________

____

Participant Signature ______________________________ **Date** ________

D. Interview questions

These are the interview questions which served as my guide for conversing with my research participants. They were also presented as part of my original ethics application to MUHREC and were approved for use as part of that ethics approval.

Data collection instrument: open, semi-structured interviews

Project: Collaborative representations of Australian Indigenous perspectives in dramatic performance writing

Questions-content to be covered:

These questions will be adjusted to suit the flow of conversation during the one-hour interview. Some of the questions are intentionally broad and open. Supplementary questions will be used to draw out and clarify points and to move into the specifics of the practice areas of each individual interviewee.

Some questions may be posed specifically regarding projects in which the researcher knows the interviewee has been involved.

(1) Career history of interviewee

In your own words could you give me a potted history of your career in the performing arts... Starting perhaps with what brought you to the performing arts/when you first knew you wanted to be involved in the performing arts.

What have been important career turning points for you?

Has the performing arts in Australia been a welcoming space for you?

(2) role of (drama) performing arts in Australia

How do you see the performing arts work in which you are involved – that is, how it fits into/contributes to Australian life?

How do you see the role of the performing arts work in which you are involved in addressing the realities of Indigenous Australians or the various positions of Indigenous Australians within Australian nationhood.

(3) Questions for interviewee view on who can contribute to the representation of Indigenous people in the performing arts

Now I'd like to look at the dynamics at play when Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people are working together.

What's been your experience of collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous performing artists? Especially in the last seven-ten years.

How many have you done/been involved in? (Important question for how much authority they have to speak on this)

What is your opinion of non-Indigenous people who want to involve themselves in presenting Indigenous viewpoints to audiences?

Is it possible to generalise or do the results depend on the individuals involved? Or on the structure of who is undertaking what role? Or the production company? (E.g. differences between mainstream company or Indigenous company)

Can you give examples of positive collaborations?
What about when one of the performance <u>writers</u> is a non-Indigenous person?

What do you think about non-Indigenous performance writers writing Indigenous characters?

What do you think about non-Indigenous writers who do not write about or include Indigenous people in their work?

What has changed over the decades and in recent years (in relation to a number of the previous questions – this supplementary question may be asked in several places)?

What has changed over the decades and in recent years for young artists coming in?) (In relation to a number of the previous questions – this supplementary question may be asked in several places)

What else needs to change? (In relation to a number of the previous questions – this supplementary question may be asked in several places)

What's your ideal? How do you think things should be done? (In relation to a number of the previous questions – this supplementary question may be asked in several places)

(4) Expectations of collaborations into the future

For Indigenous artist interviewees:

What are the issues that Indigenous artists face:

- Working with a non-Indigenous director?
- Working with a mainstream company?
- Being the only Aboriginal person in the cast?
- In regard to the availability of arts funding for projects (give the example from Creating Frames (Casey) of the first Australia Council grants being refused to an Indigenous company because they couldn't prove expertise – but for the two successful non-Indigenous companies their expertise was assumed, not questioned. Does this discrimination still happen.. forcing collaborations?)
-

For non-Indigenous interviewees:

What are the issues that non- Indigenous performance artists/ administrators need to consider:

- When they are a non-Indigenous director working with a mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous cast?
- Working with an Indigenous theatre company or a mainstream company?
- When there is only one Aboriginal person in the cast?
- In regard to the availability of arts funding for projects that address Indigenous issues but where a large number of the collaborators are non-Indigenous.
-

Non-Indigenous playwrights/script writers:

- What issues arose for you in addressing Indigenous themes and perspectives in your writing?
- What issues arose for you in creating Indigenous characters in your work?

- How did you deal with these issues/ what process did you undertake to represent Indigenous people in an informed and culturally respectful way?
-

All Interviewees

Are cultural advisers being hired appropriately: is there a role for cultural advisors in the dramaturgy process when the playwright/scriptwriter is non-Indigenous?

What work should a non-Indigenous writer do if they plan to write parts in their performance work that represent Indigenous Australians? Under what circumstances is this work by a non-Indigenous writer useful?

Should more Indigenous people be represented among the characters portrayed in work presented to Australian theatre and film audiences? Is that wanted… even if the scripts that are produced come from non-Indigenous people?

(5) Policies and Protocols

What Arts policies – Federal or State – affect the way collaboration works between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. Are there policies in existence which affect whether collaboration is required… or whether it is not possible?

How useful are the Australia Council Indigenous Arts protocols for guiding the practice of non-Indigenous performance writers?

Are there policies and/or protocols in your State/Territory which assist in collaborative work involving non-Indigenous writers working with Indigenous issues and Indigenous artists?