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Author/s:

Collett, E;Alsop, R

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Australia On Display

Tracing an Australian Identity through the evolving costume design for The Australian Ballet's production *The Display*.

Emily Collett and Dr. Roger Alsop, University of Melbourne

ABSTRACT

*The topic of costume for performance as a cultural marker is in its infancy within the context of cultural studies. As the means by which an audience relates to character (and so, the story), costume is central to our understanding of cultural identity. Here we consider costume for performance in Australia as an indicator of the developing national identity, using the 1964, 1983, and 2012 Australian Ballet productions of *The Display* as a case study. The original 1964 costumes were credited to expat artist Sidney Nolan, the 1983 version was designed by Sydney fashion designer Adele Weiss and the 2012 remount utilized photographs, written documentation and memories to recreate the original costumes. By examining the three sets of costumes, we aim to demonstrate how a study of the costumed body allows a deeper understanding of an evolving national culture and identity.*

Introduction

The performing arts often reflect a culture's concerns and identity. Here we consider costume for performance in Australia as an indicator of the developing national identity, using the 1964, 1983, and 2012 Australian Ballet productions of *The Display* as a case study. By examining the three sets of costumes created for this production we aim to demonstrate how a study of the costumed body acts as a lens through which to view a national culture and identity. *The Display's* 1964 production was iconoclastic (Potter, 1995; Sexton, 1985), the 1983 version could be seen as a commentary, and the 2012 version was nostalgic (Parris, 2012; Potter, 2012).

In the original production of *The Display*, for the first time, Australian ballet audiences saw themselves on stage in what was a sharp commentary on Australian society, and has been suggested as one of the most important moments in the nation's ballet history (Card, 1999: 86). The costumes, radically, reflected contemporary clothing and by shedding tradition were a key signifier of the ballet's layered meaning, yet they are rarely mentioned in existing discussions.

By first addressing an Australian identity, and then applying the essence of Gay McAuley's structure for performance analysis, the authors look to a reading of the evolving costumed body from *The Display* as a window into Australia's developing identity.

Australian identity

A discussion of national identity is problematic. Australian historian Richard White notes 'a national identity is an invention' (1981: viii) and is in a continual state of flux. Australian identity is commonly understood to be made up of romantic values such as mateship, egalitarianism and the fair go,ⁱ (Bryson, 2000; Clark, 1963; Duncan et al, 2004; Grant, 2016; Hughes, 1986; Pilger, 1989; White, 1981), but their roots are from a past which is no longer relevant, or in many cases, appropriate.

Australia as we know it began as a land colonized by the British in 1788, who claimed it *terra nullius* and perfect for their unwanted criminals. This convict colony blossomed into modern Australia where 'old Aussie favourites - the World War I digger, the sun-drenched lifesaver, the urban larrikin [...] continued to be a source of images for the construction of a contemporary Australian identity' (Card, 1999: 89). White (1981) examines shifting perceptions of an 'Australian Type' from the late nineteenth century 'Coming Man', whose qualities were tested and proven in the world wars to become 'The Digger' as national hero, toward the 1930s cult of 'The Lifesaver'. These images of masculine, white men celebrated mateship where women, indigenous people and minority races were excluded.

Much of Australia's history 'has usually been seen as a tug-of-war between Australianness and Britishness' (White, 1981: 47), but by the 1960s trust in the mother country was gone. The Fall of Singapore in January 1942 has been called 'The Day the Empire Died in Shame' (Murdoch, 2012), and Stan Grant suggests a post WW2 Australia whose 'new languages, new faces, new names needed a new identity. Australians found a sense of themselves constructed from a narrative that wasn't necessarily wrapped in the Union Jack' (2016: 61).

The 1960s are noted in our nations' collective memory as when The Beatles toured, sending trends and young women into hysterics. In reality, we were a conservative society still shaking off the White Australia Policy,ⁱⁱ three years from including the indigenous community in the census, only men were allowed into public bars and equal pay for women did not come into effect until 1969. The faces on the street were predominantly Caucasian and dress was modest.

The 1980s saw the dawn of a new era in politics with Bob Hawke elected as Prime Minister, although echoes of Gough Whitlam's controversial dismissal in the 1975 constitutional crisis were still felt.ⁱⁱⁱ Hawke's laid-back leadership can be summed up by a television appearance following Australia's victory in the America's Cup, where he casually announced 'any boss who sacks anyone today for not turning up is a bum' (Guinness, 2013). The leader's attitude was reflected by the Australian people who were by now far looser in their behaviour and apparel.

On the way to a modern identity, Australia has voted against becoming a republic (in 1999), made history in 2008 when then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a formal, public apology to Australia's indigenous peoples, and the nation gained its first and only female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. In October 2012, Gillard made an impassioned speech about

misogyny in Australian parliament which garnered attention worldwide, sparking debate on gender equality.

In *Imagining Australia, Ideas for our Future* Duncan et al (2004) see Australia as a project, an experiment in creating a new society, one that is unfinished and ongoing. They propose 'the great Australian values of egalitarianism, mateship and the fair go should be updated to better reflect modern Australia' (2004: 13), introducing notions of tolerance, compassion and most importantly, diversity into these updated versions.

Costume as a cultural marker

Costume for performance as a cultural marker is in its infancy within the context of cultural studies. As the lens through which an audience relates to character (and so, the story), costume is central to our understanding of cultural identity. In *Costume*, co-author Aoife Monks recognises costume works 'to reinforce and produce power relationships between the audience and images onstage, making appearance and identity seamless' (MacLaurin & Monks, 2015: 107). She further states 'costume may act as a social mask, but it is also capable of unmasking the very conditions by which identity is formed, performed and imagined on the stage and in the street' (ibid: 127).

There is much discourse on the body and dance in relation to cultural studies (Desmond, 1997; Desmond, 1993; Thomas, 2003), and of course on fashion, particularly historical clothing (often referred to as costume) in relation to culture and identity. Hilda Kuper's idea that 'clothing is a bundle of cultural symbols' (1973: 348) is developed further by work such as *Men in Black* where John Harvey (1995) looks to the writing of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco to read clothing as a language of symbols and codes. Barthes (1983) and Eco (1986) could be seen as the forefathers of contemporary approaches to the study of clothing and costume, their systems of reading the semiotics of clothing influencing the work of much film and theatre costume analysis (Bruzzi, 1997; Cook, 1996; Hecht, 2009; Lynch, 2016).

The four part structure for performance analysis developed by Gay McAuley (1998) draws on Taduesz Kowzan and Keir Elam's work on theatre semiotics (as does Thomas Hecht's system), and suggests 'some version' of the following:

[...] establish the material signifiers, note the sequence of events they present, extrapolate from this the dominant recurring paradigms or signifying ensembles, and then think about the overall significance to be deduced from the relation between the performance paradigms and the events or actions presented.

(McAuley, 1998: 8)

Donatella Barbieri's methodology which 'goes beyond semiotics, and engages with the performativity of costume, via material culture analysis' (2013: 282) and Hecht's

proposal of costume as a system of passive and active signs (2009) are interesting in their intention to extract meaning from material and contextual details.

These approaches tend to focus on a single costume or set of costumes, a sole performance or production. Our approach adopts relevant points from these methodologies to determine the material and contextual signifiers of both the story and costumes (from written word, spoken and recorded interviews, photographs, costume sketches and original costumes), in order to interpret the layers of meaning across the three productions, spanning nearly five decades.

Introducing *The Display*

The Display, choreographed by Sir Robert Helpmann, designed by Sidney Nolan and composed by Malcolm Williamson, was premiered at the third Adelaide Festival in 1964 by The Australian Ballet in their second season as a company. Commissioned by Peggy van Praagh, the production encouraged Helpmann's return to Australia after thirty years living, dancing and acting in London.

An original opening night program offers the simple note *"THE DISPLAY" a term used in ornithology to describe the efforts of the male lyre bird to attract the female.* Helpmann explained the title in a letter to van Praagh stating '[t]his is the method by which the male bird attracts the female which is the whole basis of the ballet.' He adds '[y]ou will see I have avoided using the word Australian or new Australian as the whole idea to me now is much more lyrical and abstract and the whole is much more a mood.'^{iv}

The ballet is set in Melbourne's Dandenong Ranges, where Helpmann first saw a lyrebird with Katharine Hepburn, to whom he dedicated the production. The lyrebird is unique to Australia, notable for its extraordinary ability to mimic sounds, be they calls of other birds and animals or artificial sounds introduced by humans. The male lyrebird has a striking plume of tail feathers which fan out in what is called 'a display', an integral part of a dance he performs when courting a female.

In the ballet, 'The Male' (the lyrebird), charms 'The Female', when she chances upon him in the forest. A picnic scene follows with a youthful group of men and women, led by the handsome 'Leader' and his young lady, The Female. The girls sit prettily, watching as the boys play footy – Australian Rules Football – and drink beer. 'The Outsider', a young man who happens upon them, rejects their offers to join the boys' game and shows displeasure at a taste of their beer, choosing instead to break the clear divide between the sexes and dance with The Female. Enticed, she dances away with him, only to be discovered by The Leader who, both enraged and full of beer, beats up The Outsider in front of the group. Angry and embarrassed, The Outsider wreaks his revenge upon The Female and assaults her in the forest. Alone, in only her underwear, she stumbles once more across The Male and offers herself to him, his spectacular feathered tail folding over her kneeling body and consuming her.

The Display was Helpmann's commentary on 1960s Australian society, and the consequences of artistic and gendered individuality. In *Violence, Vengeance and Violation* Amanda Card suggests the ballet 'offers a unique insight into the identification and manipulation of personal, professional and national constructions of identity in Australia as they were fashioned in the context of the 1960s' (1999: 77). Until this point, Australian identity was inextricably linked with masculinity – national images of the war hero, the bushranger, the lifesaver – were all men. This national obsession with identity 'has been a political and masculine quest that has by and large failed to include women' (Maynard, 2001: 4), however this image also excluded men who didn't conform to hegemonic masculinity. As a homosexual man and a ballet dancer, Helpmann:

[...] admits he was never one of the 'mob': 'When we were in rehearsal someone said to me the Outsider character was probably a New Australian. But he isn't. And most people think it's about the lyrebird. It's not at all. It's actually about *me* [...] The *one* man. The Outsider. The person defying the Group. The person who was not behaving according to the accepted norm.

(Bemrose, 2008: 131-2, original emphasis)

Helpmann questioned the relevance and integrity of the traditionally masculine notions of mateship, the fair go and egalitarianism through his own story.

His two chief collaborators, Nolan and Williamson, also lived permanently in London from the early 1950s. Australian researchers Philpott and Forbes see all three men within the character of *The Outsider* - 'the personification of the artist [Helpmann, Nolan and Williamson]', as such, 'removed from the environment and culture of Australia as expatriates, their collaboration gave them the opportunity to evaluate Australian culture from a distance – from the outside' (2016: 34). In 1962 Nolan had completed a series of 75 paintings inspired by the myth *Leda and the Swan*, which Philpott & Forbes (2016), Bemrose (2008) Card (1999) and Grove (Grove, 1965), all link to the ballet. There is no denying Helpmann has created a truly Australian story, although influences of the fable are present.

Masculinity in ballet

The use of sport on a ballet stage is a strong nod to male ritual, as Michael Mangan notes in *Staging Masculinities*, 'sport, of course, is an important symbolic arena of gender ideologies' (2003: 216), and allows the men to validate their masculinity as they perform primarily for each other. To ensure the football and fight scenes would look realistic (and for publicity), Helpmann enlisted local football legend Ron Barassi and ex-boxer Harry Lister to train the male dancers.

Carla McDonough's *Staging Masculinity* is useful for examining the power play in this ballet. She notes that in desiring an 'essential' masculinity, many men become aggressive or

violent to prove themselves in the face of insecurities, with women's bodies often used on stage as the vehicle for their empowerment. She explains:

Male fears that women, who are actually physically and socially disempowered, will ravage their manhood demonstrate that "masculine discourse" is, in fact, the locus of its own precarious relationship to masculinity, manhood and virility. It creates a need to "conquer" the female body, or at least the feminine, in order to establish its own existence.

(McDonough, 1997: 7)

From the point of literature, Harvey agrees that 'violence done to women has the same value in Dickens that it has in Shakespeare, it represents hurt done both to women themselves, and also at large to what is tender and loving and benign in human beings: to the side of human life that often is characterized as the feminine' (1995: 193, original emphasis). Similarly, the feminine can be seen in a body of land, which must be conquered by men to prove their worth.

There was already, in ballet, a strong male presence on stage, but this was the first example of Australian male bodies. The men's presence is threatening, evidenced by descriptions of them as a 'gang', 'street-corner boys', 'mob' and the 'surfie friends' (Bemrose, 2008; Grove, 1965; Kitcher, 2001). In *The Display*, Helpmann twists the traditional use of the female, or feminine, against this masculine energy into a quest for *other* gendered identity, his own and Australia's.

The Display became part of The Australian Ballet's first international tour in 1965, and was remounted in 1983 with a new set of costumes by Adele Weiss, a Sydney fashion designer. The 2012 revival aimed to represent the original as closely as possible from photographs and memories. Because these three sets of costumes each speak to the period of their creation, this article now looks to a reading of the evolving costumed body from *The Display* as it communicates the historical narrative of Australia's developing cultural identity, analyzing each set of costumes in turn.

The Original Costumes

It can be argued that this was the first ballet production in Australia which utilized contemporary clothing as costume. The Australian Ballet, Borovansky Ballet, Ballet Guild, National Theatre Ballet and numerous local ballet groups had all produced earlier works set in Australia, but they either looked to indigenous Australia for their content such as *Terra Australis* and *Corroboree*, or events from a European influenced past in *Melbourne Cup*, *The Outlaw*, *Black Swan* or *The Sentimental Bloke*. Biographer Christopher Sexton acknowledges the importance of this moment:

In *The Display* [Helpmann] sought a departure from the convention of traditional ballet costume. In this one ballet, by dressing the males in jeans and the females in summer dresses, Helpmann introduced on to the Australian stage perfectly ordinary-looking young people out in the bush for a picnic, partaking in normal Australian pastimes and social conventions. The ballet's plot naturally held a far-reaching, deeper significance but it was chiefly because of this iconoclastic approach to presenting ballet and thus making it more acceptable to a wider cross-section of the community that [Peggy] van Praagh valued the work.

(Sexton, 1985: 137)

Sexton understands the gravity of costuming the ballet this way, showing ballet audiences in Australia for the first time their own bodies imitated on stage, dancing in costumes similar to clothing they may own themselves. For an audience accustomed to traditional ballet costume, streetwear on stage would have been surprising, but also potentially disappointing. Recollections classify the costumes as 'boring', 'drab',^v and 'straightforward, inoffensive attire' (Potter, 1995: 63), yet it is precisely this reason that the costumes carried such weight. This article focuses on these 'ordinary' costumes, excluding discussion of *The Male*, whose lyrebird costume was made in London by Hugh Skillen where Nolan could monitor the progress. The lyrebird costume is a master of skill and creativity, but as a fantasy in the otherwise human world holds no focus in this discussion.

The Display, 1964

Costumes credited to Sidney Nolan

Although credited as the designer, it appears Nolan's involvement with the costumes wasn't clear-cut. Australian dance historian Michelle Potter's belief that the costumes 'may well have been based on an idea by the choreographer rather than Nolan' (1995: 63) is supported by various recollections of Helpmann orchestrating them which suggests, rather, Nolan's lasting impact and particular talent was the colour palette.

The men of the 'gang' wore modern cotton shirts with wide collars, tucked into tailored, high-waisted stretch cotton trousers in a soft array of grey, brown and fawn tones. Their shirtsleeves were casually rolled to the elbows, their fronts low enough to show a dash of chest. The change in music and powerful entrance choreography 'heavily coded in mateship' (Bemrose, 2008: 146), when combined with their breezy, youthful attire created a virile and assured appearance. The women arrived in simple dresses with fitted bodice and full 1950s skirts, above traditional ballet tights and pointe shoes. Their frocks were thick cotton in light rosy pink and what was recorded as 'brown', but in reality was closer to a mushroom or 'dog biscuit' beige.^{vi} Contrasted with the men's modern youthfulness, the women's heavy 1950s silhouettes and romantically traditional tights and pointe shoes were 'used not to liberate (perhaps celebrate) the body, but to insist on its entrapment' (Grove,

1965: 127). The women spent their time grouped as an audience for the men's display of sporting prowess.



Figure 1: Walter Stringer, *The Female and The Leader*, 1964. Transparency. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia, PIC/6558/1530.



Figure 2: Walter Stringer, *The Leader attacks The Outsider*, 1964. Transparency. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia, PIC/6558/1533.

The Leader's appearance was similar to his gang except for the colouring. Unusually for a man in 1960s Australia he wore a pink shirt, and was otherwise entirely in white. When read against Helpmann's tangled past with the Aussie mob, The Leader's costume indicates how the work 'mercilessly sends up the bullies' and 'mocks a sports-mad nation' (Vincent, 2012). Helpmann told of a time near Sydney's Bondi Beach in the early 1920s when he wore, amongst other flamboyant items, a pink shirt. A group of local lads took such offense to his appearance they picked him up and threw him into the ocean. One account even specifies the lads as lifesavers (Philpott & Forbes, 2016), a national symbol of identity. In the build-up to his violent encounter with *The Outsider*, The Leader performs a parody of the famous *Sleeping Beauty* rose adagio. Spinning along a line of four mates, The Leader stops at each to receive, instead of a rose, a bottle of beer from which he drinks. The image of this 'gang-leader', by now rather inebriated, dancing the role of a princess dressed in pink and white, undermines the power of the dominating masculine image, the sports star.

The Outsider was similarly dressed, but highly contrasted in colour and style. His sleeves were long and buttoned at the wrist implying formality and 'otherness' and he clashed against the soft, bush palette surrounding him. In a bold red shirt and royal blue trousers he was literally clad in the two main colours of the Union Jack. Whether intentional or not, this striking visual reference to Britain alluded to the political and cultural climate in Australia, and many critics saw him as a migrant (Philpott & Forbes, 2016: 25).

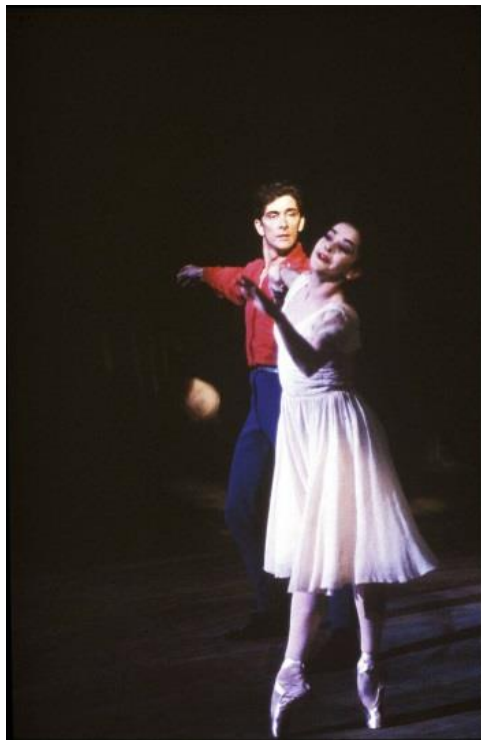


Figure 3: Walter Stringer, *The Outsider and The Female*, 1964. Transparency. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia, PIC/6558/1529.

Whilst we see Helpmann, Nolan and Williamson in *The Outsider*, they also appear in *The Female*. Her lightly layered white and fawn georgette dress floated about her, marking her texturally as 'other' from the women in their heavy dresses. It is *The Female's* journey we follow and she is the only character with multiple costumes, starting the ballet wrapped in a taffeta coat and pink chiffon head-scarf, and ending in sheer, white cami-knicker underwear. Biographer Anna Bemrose links *The Female* to the spiritual world, 'in her flimsy white chiffon dress [...] she moves on the forest floor like a spirited nymph' (2008: 146), and likens her to Sydney Long's late nineteenth century paintings of young women as spirits in the Australian landscape.

In the closing symbolic image of the ballet, the authors posit that Bemrose's 'spirited' Female represents Australia's coming of age. In the popular *Inventing Australia* White (1981) describes how Australia was conventionally depicted in cartoons and illustrations at the turn of the nineteenth century. One of the most popular images was 'the classical convention of the idealised young woman' (1981: 120), often portrayed draped in a white dress. 'Their popularity among cartoonists as symbols of Australia made them very powerful images for another two decades' (ibid: 120), crossing into Helpmann's early years in Australia.

White describes the common themes across these images:

Firstly, she often had a particular relationship with Britannia... there was a stress on the fact that she was the daughter, that she had parents, that she

was growing up, approaching adulthood, about to flower into womanhood. Secondly, there was a distinctive stress on her remarkable beauty, but also on her innocence, her purity and her vulnerability. She often found herself in difficult situations, modestly blushing at vice, naively shocked at corruption, or in imminent danger of being raped.

(White, 1981: 121)

The Female is the symbol of Australia, her vulnerability heightened by her sheer, white underwear. She has been raped by The Outsider wearing colours of the mother country, and now submits to The Male, the lyrebird, a feminine symbol of the land. Helpmann ends his damning portrayal of Australian society with the symbol of Australia 'flowering into womanhood' and maturing into an independent nation. However, his final comment comprises only feminine symbols, suggesting traditional masculinity is irrelevant in Australia's independence.

The Display, 1983

Costumes designed by Adele Weiss

The Display was re-mounted in 1983 to celebrate The Australian Ballet's 21st anniversary year, and Sydney fashion designer Adele Weiss designed new costumes at Helpmann's behest. The Weiss label was popular in the late 1970s for mix-and-match separates, and by 1983 had won two large corporate uniform tenders. Although the costumes successfully reflected contemporary streetwear, Helpmann didn't like them and the revival lasted only one season.^{vii}

Weiss strayed from the original colour palette, creating in the women's costumes a nylon confection of candy coloured party dresses in different designs. Bright lolly pink, blue, green and lavender gingham-check sheer nylons made up the women's collection with spaghetti strap leotards, oversized pockets and buttons, hair ribbons and wrap-around skirts all featuring (Figure 4). Maynard outlines 'the defining feature of Australian dress in the later 1970s and 1980s was a love of colour' (2001: 64), alongside a 'strong sense of the theatrical' (ibid: 61), this experimental phase growing from 'a period of serious questioning by the women's movement' (ibid: 60). However, their skirts were layered, full and hit below the knee in a silhouette strongly echoing the originals. Weiss is reported saying '[i]t's been updated this time [...] but I feel it's very reminiscent of the 1950s' (Wilkinson, 1983) indicating a nostalgic trend in 1980s fashion to refer back to a time when gender binaries were less complex.



Figure 4: Walter Stringer, *Artists of the Australian Ballet in The Display*, 1983. Transparency. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia, PIC/6558/1582.

In complete contrast, The Leader and his pack visually formed the menacing body of a gang onstage (Figure 5), wearing high-waisted denim jeans or overalls, many rolled up at the ankle, with a mix of cotton singlets and tee-shirts. The overalls had studded pockets and jeans were fastened with studded leather belts, with jazz shoes purpose-coloured to look like runners. In thick, natural fibers, a palette of muted tones and the addition of head and armbands, the men epitomized youth street culture. The Leader's jeans and singlet were terracotta red as was the strip of fabric bound around his left upper arm, and his jeans featured a line of silver studs down each leg. His singlet was pulled low, the dark red highlighting skin and muscles across his chest and shoulders; here, 'these men embodied their sex and, by assumption, their country' (Card, 1999: 87).

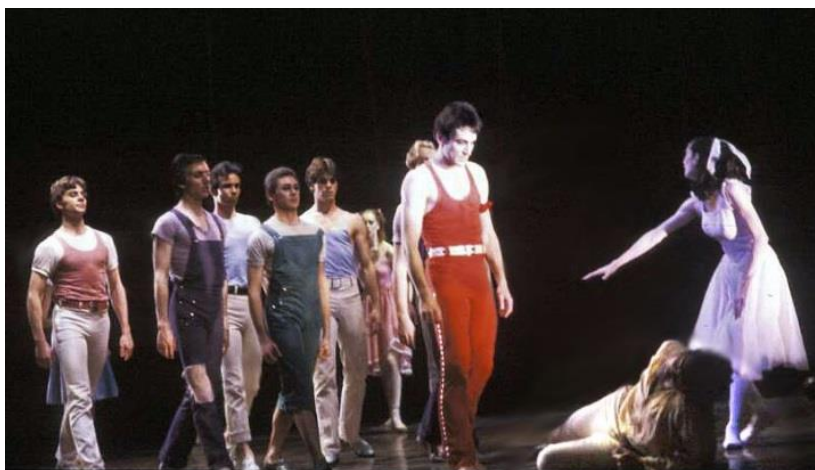


Figure 5: Walter Stringer, *Artists of the Australian Ballet in The Display*, 1983. Transparency. Courtesy of The National Library of Australia, PIC/6558/1549.

The Outsider wore a lemon-yellow cheesecloth shirt with a white mandarin collar, and palest yellow stretch denim trousers with nude ballet slippers on his feet. He was texturally and tonally feminine in comparison to the other men, his button-up shirt

reminiscent of the original men's costumes and a more formal, or old-fashioned, style of dress. No longer linked by his costume to Britain, the 1980s Outsider was categorized visually with the women. In the 1980s the sub-cultures of the gay community were beginning to spill into mainstream awareness (ABC Radio National Website 2014), and linking The Outsider to the women signified him as feminine, resonating with current masculine fears of the 'other'.

The Female's dress showcased a pastel rainbow of spotted net with pink organza overskirt, and pink spotted net over faille bodice – she, too, is texturally and tonally softer than her group. It was The Female's party dress in particular Helpmann took offence to, the style and colours too garish for his vision. However, The Outsider's lemon-yellow is echoed in her skirts, the texture of his cheesecloth shirt in her spotted net, clearly marking them (and the women) 'in the same social position; they are all alienated from the boys' club of mateship' (Bemrose, 2008: 148).

Contrasts are also evident within The Female's journey. When stripped of her frothy dress, The Female is exposed in a figure hugging silk slip trimmed with cream lace. Gone is the innocence of the original, replaced by a woman in lingerie who speaks of sexual maturity. At a time when the women's movement was challenging gender binaries, The Female symbolizes a sexually mature femininity 'as the thing that must be erased, possessed, or controlled in order to reach male identity' (McDonough, 1997: 58). Viewed alongside The Outsider and the group of women, whose nostalgic party frocks render them as decorative objects against the gritty body-of-men, the 1983 costumes show an independent nation struggling with an internal, gendered conflict.

The Display, 2012

Costumes created as close copies of the originals.

Part of The Australian Ballet's 50th anniversary celebrations in 2012 was the triple bill *Icons*. *The Display* represented the company's first decade, followed by Glen Tetley's *Gemini* from 1973 and Graeme Murphy's *Beyond 12* from 1980, the three works chosen because they were 'created for the company at pivotal moments in its history' (Douglas, 2012).

The costumes needed to be accurate recreations of the originals however the original costumes did not exist, so the task was carried out from production photographs, personal memory and scraps of documentation. After the costumes were completed, fabric swatch-cards were discovered from the 1970s when a new set of original costumes had been made. They are the best surviving indication of what the original colours may have been.

In terms of fabric weight and colour the three leads were well represented, but inevitably (given the age, and small quantity of images) the corps de ballet strayed from the originals, to interesting effect. The women's dresses became two very similar shades of pink rather than a mix of pink and beige, and instead of two colour combinations in the group of

men there were a total of seven. This created a stronger visual divide between the genders, where the women's bodies blended into one solid grouping behind the men, whose increased variations of colour amplified their dominating presence.

Criticism of the colour palette compared the overwhelming pink with colourful peasant costumes from *Giselle* (Potter, 2012), reading traditional, romantic connotations into this interpretation. Viewed as an historical piece, the complex gender relations of the original production are intensified as the heightened colours of the remount alter the visual image. National debate of gender equality was fierce, within a month of the ballet's premiere Prime Minister Gillard's famous misogyny speech would be 'hailed as [a] turning point for Australian women' (Rourke, 2012) and as we have seen, questioning femininity challenges masculine insecurities. This remount, a nostalgic and polished memory, was presented by a society mature enough to contemplate their own history, however the costumes highlighted some uncomfortable social and cultural similarities between the two periods of time. Dance critic Vincent wryly noted 'even nearly half a century later, there can be no doubting the bravery of Helpmann in making this work. I wandered into the foyer at interval wondering if, as the saying goes, "the more things change, the more they stay the same."' (Vincent, 2012)

In conclusion, a reading of the costumes as cultural markers from the three productions of *The Display* demonstrates Australia's struggling sense of identity beyond the surface history, particularly through the costumed bodies of *The Outsider* and *The Female*.

In the 1964 production Helpmann uses *The Leader's* costume to undermine the hegemonic masculinity, and we see the three collaborators embodied in *The Outsider*, whose costume marks him as 'other', and representative of the mother country in the royal blue and red of the Union Jack. His assault on *The Female* reflects strained relations between 1960s Australia and Britain, and in *The Female* we find the symbol of Australia's coming of age, importantly, free from notions of traditional masculinity.

The 1983 production features an *Outsider* from within society, grouped by his costume with the 'feminine' onstage. Contrasted against the gang of men, *The Outsider* and the women's bodies read as a commentary of masculine fears of a maturing femininity.

The 2012 production expresses a society mature enough to attempt re-presenting its history, but unintentionally produced costumes which visually heighten the gender binaries of the original. In reflecting on its past, the production highlighted contemporary issues of gender equality at a time when they were at the forefront of national debate.

Through these examples we see the trajectory of a nation's quest for identity as it battles a complex history and ingrained gender relations. By examining the nuances of the costumed body in each of these productions, we can more deeply understand the evolving Australian story.

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ⁱ Bill Bryson succinctly defines the fair go thus: 'If Australians have a single radiant virtue, it is the belief in a 'fair go' – a sense of the fundamental rightness of common justice' (2000: 166).

ⁱⁱ The White Australia Policy refers to a collection of policies put in place from the late 1800s in an effort to keep people not of a European (read, white) background from immigrating to Australia. It took until the 1970s to completely abolish the policy.

ⁱⁱⁱ The 1975 'Australian constitutional crisis', or 'the Dismissal', saw Governor-General Sir John Kerr step in after the Australian government had become deadlocked, and dismiss Prime Minister Gough Whitlam of the Labor Party, appointing the Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Fraser, as caretaker Prime Minister. According to Bill Bryson 'it was a humiliating reminder that Australia was still at root a colony, constitutionally subordinate to the United Kingdom' (2000: 104).

^{iv} Program and Letter viewed by Collett in the Performing Arts Collection (Australia)

^v Interviews between Collett and Colin Peasley (ex-AB dancer and ballet master) 16.02.17, and Collett and Michael Williams (ex-AB costume department manager) 23.02.17

^{vi} Reported by Potter(2012), Nolan used this as a colour reference

^{vii} Told to Collett in an interview with Michael Williams 23.02.17

Authors' Note

Costumes from *The Display* can be viewed on official Australian Ballet websites, for the 1964 production; <http://www.ausballetstory.com.au/2012/01/14-march/>, and for the 2012 production;

<https://australianballet.com.au/behind-ballet/the-display-on-stage>.

An excellent reference of 1980s Australian fashion can be viewed at

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/thelist/rennie-ellis/5352326>.