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COMPOSING CULTURAL RECLAMATION

Reconnecting to an Indigenous Cultural Heritage
through a Music Practice

by
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Composing Cultural Reclamation: Reconnecting to an Indigenous Cultural Heritage through a Music Practice Abstract

This thesis is a first-person account detailing my reclamation of my First Nations Australian cultural heritage through my creative practice. To understand the project, it is pertinent to first understand two important aspects of my identity:

1. I am a First Nations Jaadwa man, raised disconnected to culture as a result of colonisation. I did not always know this, but it has always been true.
2. I am a musician, engaged with composition and performance practices since I was a teenager. As a result, music and sound is an embedded part of my identity.

The aim of the research is to understand my Jaadwa heritage, and to realise this through my music practice. That practice consists of two creative outputs, the first of which consists of five long-form, improvised soundscape works which I call ‘Country-songs’ in consideration of their existing in the intersection of music and Australian Indigenous understandings of Country. These works aim to develop my relationship to my cultural Jaadwa Country, and to consider my place on Boon Wurrung Country, where I was born and continue to reside. The second output of my practice consists of six lyric-centred songs in the style of folk and country & western music, in which I share narratives of my experience as a Jaadwa man disconnected from, and reconnecting to culture. Composing and performing these songs allowed me to generate a space in which I can reflect on my ancestors, family, identity, and my social and political responsibilities in the context of cultural expression.

The research is embedded in four primary fields: Western understandings and creative expressions of soundscapes; sonic expression within Indigenous communities; histories of the relationship between Indigenous communities and developing sound technologies; and, Indigenous identity and reclamation through creative practice. The discussions I share around my creative works stem from, intertwine, and further these fields. My understandings of these fields, experiences during periods of field-work, and development of the creative works all contribute to an emergent conception of my Indigenous cultural heritage and its expression through composition.

The research consists of a written thesis, and digital audio recordings of the five ‘Country-songs’ and six lyrical songs, totalling approximately 45 minutes of audio. Together, the written thesis and the audio works document my observed changes in self, and positions my creative output as a space through which I realise and reflect these changes.

Declarations

I, James Howard, hereby declare that:

- i. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy;
- ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and
- iii. this thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, excluding tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed

James Howard

Date: 17/08/2021

Acknowledgements

I pay my respects to my ancestors, who I will never meet but always know.

I pay my respects to the Countries upon which I took this research journey: Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri lands of the Kulin Nations; Nyikina Country and the Countries of the three tribes—Ngarinyin, Worrorra, and Wunambal Country; and my own Jaadwa Country and the neighbouring Jadawadjali, Jupagulk, Wergaia, and Wotjobaluk Countries. Always was, always will be—Aboriginal land.

I acknowledge and dedicate this research to my grandmother, Aunty Beth Lyons, without whose hard work our heritage would have remained lost.

I thank my supervisors, Dr. Roger Alsop, and Associate Professor Sally Treloyn, for their feedback, extended yarns, and friendship. I would also like to thank Dr. Reuben Brown, and Lauren Gower for their mentorship and tutelage.

I thank the team at the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Culture, both past and present, for their assistance and support in navigating both cultural protocols, and the university system itself.

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Lastly, I thank my family for their support and dedication, both over the course of this research project, and beyond.

List of Creative Works

This list compiles the creative works included as a partial fulfilment of the degree. Each work is included in both wav and mp3 digital audio formats. This list includes the file names of each recording. In some cases, I have edited longer recordings (marked with *) into smaller sections. It is only necessary to listen to the shorter, edited recordings in order to fully engage with the discussions. However, I have included the full recordings as a reference point.

Country-songs (Chapter 3)	File Name:
*Wilin Singe the Fringe [full performance]	01-0 20180915 Fringe Festival Performance
Wilin Singe the Fringe Movement I: Acknowledgement [edited recording]	01-1 Singe the Fringe Acknowledgement
Wilin Singe the Fringe Movement IV: Urban Country [edited recording]	01-2 Singe the Fringe Urban Country
Feedback by the Train-Tracks	02 Feedback by the Train-Tracks
*Bungarun Marshlands, Western Australia – 18 th July 2019 (“Crescendo to Dusk”) [full recording]	03-0 Mowanjum Cave Project FTF INSTALLATION
Bungarun Marshlands, Western Australia – 18 th July 2019 (“Crescendo to Dusk”) [edited recording]	03-1 Crescendo to Dusk Extract
Response to the Bungarun Marshlands	03-2 300919 Response to Bungarun Marshlands Performance
Variations on Country	04 Variations on Country
Songwriting (Chapter 4)	
GPWM	01 GPWM
Arfa	02 Arfa
Nobody Knows	03 Nobody Knows
My Songlines	04 My Songlines
(One More Round for) The Family Home	05 (One More Round for) The Family Home
Yonder Comes a Rider	06 Yonder Comes a Rider

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Composing Cultural Reclamation is a project resultant of my own reclamation of Australian Indigenous¹ heritage through my music practice. The thesis is an analysis of myself, of the changes that I have undergone internally through this process of self-discovery. It charts the journey of progression, as I reconcile my creative processes and philosophies to gain better understandings of my Indigeneity. Within the process of researching, composing, and writing I aim to embed Indigenous protocol. This process is a means of decolonising my own thinking and spirit, the way that I approach my history, my identity, and my place within the Australian settler-colony and Australian Indigenous communities. In keeping with these cultural practices, I begin this document by introducing myself to you.

My name is James Howard, and I am a Jaadwa man living on Boon Wurrung Country,² to the south-east of the city of Melbourne. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of Boon Wurrung Country, on which I wrote the bulk of this paper and composed the accompanying sound works. Eualeyai/Kamillaroi woman, Larissa Behrendt says,

as Aboriginal researchers, we do not assume to be objective. We know there is no such thing. If we thought our position in the world could be passive we wouldn't introduce ourselves by our nations, our clans, our kinship networks. We place ourselves in the world as an act of sovereignty and it reinforces our worldview.³

¹ This document uses the terms "Indigenous," "Aboriginal," and "First Nations" interchangeably throughout. I typically use these terms in reference to people and communities whose cultural connections to the landmass currently known as Australia predates colonisation. At times, I also refer to Indigenous communities from countries outside Australia, which I will clarify when appropriate.

² This document uses the term "Country" (note, the upper-case "C") throughout to refer specifically to geographic locations of cultural importance to Indigenous communities. I reference the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies website to provide a clear definition of Country: "*Country is the term often used by Aboriginal peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity.*"

Source: "Country," Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, accessed 14 July 2021, <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/welcome-country>

³ Larissa Behrendt, "A Personal Reflection on Self-Determining Documentary Filmmaking Practice," Artlink, <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4757/a-personal-reflection-on-self-determining-document/>.

In this chapter I will not only present the content and concepts of the research process, but also share who I am, my family's stories, and the motivations for undertaking this work. Truthfully, both my identity and the research I present are inextricably intertwined. This document is an auto-ethnographic exegesis, examining my own growth and reclamation of my Jaadwa heritage. It is exegetical in that it co-exists alongside and contextualises a body of musical works which I composed through the research. The personal nature of the research means that it is a process that I alone have experienced, and that I alone can truly understand. The writing here, and the music it accompanies is my attempt at helping you (the reader) understand the changes that I have undergone, and the new understandings of self that I have developed.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that “‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.”⁴ As I use that word myself, I acknowledge the trepidation and mistrust that it conjures. The word “research” is used throughout this document as an act of reclaiming and destigmatising it. Bearing in mind generations of mistrust and imbalanced power relations between First Nations communities and academic institutions,⁵ I recognise the complexities of walking through these same spaces as I enact my reclamation. In spite of this, I hope that my own work here can be considered by First Nations community members as non-intrusive and respectful towards my own family, community, and the communities that I have worked with through the process.

Although this paper is not deliberately antagonistic, by “researching back”⁶ I aim to de-centre and decolonise philosophies of colonial academic research such as positivism or objectivism. Decolonisation has been discussed by Elizabeth Mackinlay and Katelyn Barney as “a way of knowing that resists the Eurocentricism of the West, [and] a moral imperative for writing the wrongs of colonial domination[.]”⁷ It is in the spirit of this notion that I assert my own Indigenous sovereignty in this research space.

⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books Ltd., 2013), 30.

⁵ *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 30.

⁶ *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 40.

⁷ Elizabeth Mackinlay and Katelyn Barney, "Unknown and Unknowing Possibilities: Transformative Learning, Social Justice, and Decolonising Pedagogy in Indigenous Australian Studies," *Journal of Transformative Education* 12, no. 1 (2014): 55.

While I did not always know that I was a Jaadwa man, it has always been true. The story of my heritage is one that has been passed down from my maternal Grandmother, Jaadwa elder and cultural knowledge holder, Aunty Beth Lyons. It is to her that my family and I owe a great debt of gratitude, for we would know nearly nothing of our cultural roots if not for her decades of tireless research. Her stories are a means of orally transmitting our shared history. By including them here I am actively de-centring colonial research practices. Through philosophies of Indigenous standpoint theory, I give those that have lived experience the right to draw on their stories and share them as an authority of knowledge.⁸ Martin Nakata outlines Indigenous standpoint theory as “a way to explore the actualities of the everyday and discover how to express them conceptually from within that [Indigenous] experience.”⁹ The centring of the Indigenous experience is a means of “generating accounts of communities of Indigenous peoples in contested knowledge spaces, ... [and] affords agency to people.”¹⁰ With that in mind, you’ll see no formal citations for these stories, they come from me, from my blood, from my family, and from our ancestors. My family’s authority over these stories should be recognised. The orality of these stories are as valid as the written word, even when they have been coloured by interpretation and understanding of the story teller. Specific information such as dates and circumstances are less important than the affect of the stories to me and my family. My family have embodied these stories, and my sharing them here, will inform your understanding of this paper and outline the motivation of this project.

Like many other Indigenous Australians (particularly in the south-east of the nation), I was born disconnected from my cultural heritage.¹¹ I attribute this to a need imposed on my ancestors to conceal their cultural connections to survive in colonial Australia. Since a young age, Aunty Beth had been aware that her family had lineage tied to Indigenous Australia. However, perhaps out of a sense of shame, or self-preservation, or a myriad of other complex factors, her parents never directly addressed these facts with her. As she was growing up in rural Victoria in the 1930s and 40s, it was always spoken of as a hushed rumour in her family.

⁸ Martin Nakata, *Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007), 348.

⁹ *Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines*, 349.

¹⁰ *Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines*, 353.

¹¹ I use the term “disconnected” in reference to the fact that I previously did not know about my family’s heritage, and as a result identified as White Australian, and was not engaged with cultural practices.

Aunty Beth told me a few stories about this, such as the recollection that her father would keep her older sister, out of the sun. This sister had a darker complexion, and extended time spent outdoors would bring that out further. Her father was worried that she would be taken away by the authorities if they saw he had children with too dark a complexion. On another occasion, two hired farm hands were overheard plotting to assault another of Aunty Beth's sisters. They decided not to after one responded, "don't be stupid, leave her alone—the Abo will kill you!" This was referencing Aunty Beth's father. Aunty Beth also noted the way that some other children would treat her particularly cruelly at school, for no apparent reason. She told me, that in hindsight, she believes this to be because the other children's parents may have mentioned her own father's Aboriginality with distaste.

Finally, when she was in her 20s, Aunty Beth was driving past Traralgon Station with her father. As they passed the cattle property, her father mentioned to her that his mother (Beth's grandmother) once worked there as a maid, and that she was "black". At this point, Aunty Beth knew for certain that there were further depths to her heritage that she needed to discover. These curious incidents she had experienced growing up began to paint a larger picture.

From then on, Aunty Beth was determined to investigate the mysteries of her heritage further, and was initially aided by two of her uncles and the Miriambac Land Council. It was from her uncles that she learned that she was the great-granddaughter of a man named Arthur Wellington. Arthur was born of Jaadwa parents in approximately 1849, on Old Brighton Station (which later became known as Horsham).

When Arthur was an infant, his parents were killed in a massacre. The lack of catalogued massacres around the Horsham area has made it difficult to determine why my ancestors were murdered. Through conversations with family and community members, I have hypothesised two potential motivations for their deaths. The first of these was for the theft of livestock, a common motivation for the killing of Indigenous peoples during this time period, and this is the theory commonly held by most of my family. The second suggests that Arthur's parents were killed when the area was settled by colonialists. I posited this theory through analysing several pieces of circumstantial evidence. The town of Horsham was formally founded in 1849 by James Darlot, the same year that Arthur's parents were supposedly killed. Where Horsham is now is understood to be the primary residential site of the Jaadwa people, potentially because it was a spot that allowed easy crossing of the

Wimmera River. It is within the realm of possibility that Arthur's parents were murdered as a part of a broader genocide in the takeover of the area. could point towards a greater conspiracy that the Indigenous residents of the area were wiped out in order for colonisers establish settlement at the site.

Following the death of his parents, Arthur was adopted by the local doctor, Dr. Wellington, who apparently gave him his name, raised, and home schooled him. When Arthur was around eight years old, Dr. Wellington died, and Arthur was taken in by Dr. Archibald MacDonald. Arthur lived on his Country until he was around 18, when he moved with Dr. MacDonald to Sale to set up a new medical practice. During this time, he was free to mix with the Kurnai Gurnai people, and other Indigenous communities in the area. When he was in his 20s, Arthur married Maryanne Rogers, a white woman. Because at that time an Aboriginal man could not marry a white woman, the Minister, and Dr. MacDonald listed Arthur as "half-caste, parents unknown." Misleading information like this introduced road-blocks needing to be navigated by my grandmother through her own journey of rediscovery and reconnection.

Arthur Wellington died on the 12th of March 1917. The story goes that the year before his death, he rode his horse all over the state to say goodbye to his children. He told them he was going to live his life out in an Aboriginal camp, and would deny ever having had children. He warned each of his children to tell no one that they were Aboriginal, as the government would take everything that they owned.

My grandmother spent decades combing through archives and tracing out the life of her great-grandfather. She spent several further years applying for Arthur to be recognised as an apical ancestor at the Barengi Gadjin Land Council, which was finally accepted in 2014. Upon the Board's acceptance of Arthur's descendants as community members, Aunty Beth relays that one Board member described her case and breadth of evidence as setting a 'gold standard' going forward.

In the early 2000s, when our ancestral heritage first came to light, the importance of my grandmother's research was somewhat lost on me. While the efforts she had gone to were appreciated, I naively did not understand the greater implications of these cultural revelations. Growing up, I had never considered my cultural identity as important, and did not understand why that should change. Perhaps this stemmed from the inherent privilege one

has growing up in a white Australian bubble—a site of privilege and naivety to the greater social struggles that people face on a daily basis. Others in my family had far less apathetic responses to this information. My grandmother maintained her passion for her heritage, and my aunt and sister both took up careers in Indigenous health departments. As I continued to grow older, and more mature, my line of thinking on the matter changed. After the years of hard work to which my grandmother had committed herself, I felt an obligation to continue along that path into the future. The question going forward was what I should do with this information, and how would I engrain it into my own identity to ultimately be passed to the next generation.

This was the challenge then, feeling so totally disconnected from my ancestral culture, imagining how that culture would be integrated into the identity which I had fostered over my life-time. I decided that I would leave my job, as a full-time audio technician working at a five-star hotel, to return to university as an opportunity to facilitate these connections through postgraduate studies and networking. At the time, I felt like I was approaching this from a position of deficit, treating my claim to Indigeneity as if it were something that could not just be given to me through blood, but through a lived experience.

Hindsight tells me that Indigeneity does not involve choice at all, but at the time, it did feel as though I existed outside of a shared community experience. Entering the postgraduate space, I was also entering the role of an Indigenous-identifying man for the first time. I had insecurities about my disconnection from my culture, the colour of my skin, whether others would perceive me as only identifying as Aboriginal to pursue an advantage in the academic space. Fortunately for me, I was put in contact with the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development, a space within the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne, which provides support for Indigenous students and researchers. At this point, I acknowledge the hard work and efforts of the Wilin Centre during my research project. Without the support and sense of community each member of the team shared with me without hesitation, I might not have had the confidence to see this project through.

The journey ahead is about reconciling my cultural heritage with a pre-established identity. That identity was one which I comfortably embodied—I am a musician, with an intimate relationship to song, sound, and soundscape. My passion for music began at around the age of 12, when I received a CD player for Christmas. That became a gateway to a new world of sonic exploration. A few months prior, my parents, siblings, and I had just moved

back to Melbourne after having spent eight years moving between Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States of America as expatriates for my father's work. As I was still acclimating to being back in Australia, with few friends, I found myself with a real motivation to listen intently to music for the first time in my life. I would regularly forage through my parents' CD collection over that summer holiday, quickly developing a new passion for 1980s popular and alternative music.

Before long, I was asking my parents for music lessons. I didn't have much interest in playing sport, so they were happy for me to engage with extra-curricular activities outside of reading comic books or playing video games. My first choice was to learn the synthesizer. Electronic music was having a significant impact on me, and the synthesizer as a musical tool seemed unique in its ability to construct distinctive timbres and sounds. This choice went against the popular instrument pick for a boy at my age. Many of my classmates were learning guitar, predominantly in classic and contemporary rock contexts. Music for me, at that time, was a space for introversion and reflection, and I could not relate to the grandstanding that accompanied my classmates' rock and metal preferences. As it turns out, the synthesizer had to wait, as lessons for the instrument were not easy to come by. Instead, I learned the electronic keyboard, as a substitute.

As I progressed through my teenage years, my interest in music composition and performance grew and expanded into sound technology and production. I pursued this interest into my tertiary studies, completing a Bachelor of Arts in Music Industry at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 2012. I played in several bands through high-school and university, often in the role of synthesist, singer, songwriter, and creative driver. During this time, I spent countless hours composing, rehearsing, recording, and performing music with different groups, allowing me to develop my skills in those areas. My interests, my friendship group, and my lifestyle has been built around music. It is an integral part of who I am.

Music is so important to me, and I want that aspect of my identity to provide the framework through which I could reconcile my cultural identity. I want both to co-exist, intertwine, and ultimately become indistinguishable. As the research progressed, I realised that I was undergoing a significant transformation in both my thinking and my position in the broader community. This was the result of my immersion in new social settings, which was then reflected in the music I was making, and my sense of self-identity. The research analyses

these changes in myself, and responds to the problem that there are Indigenous people, like myself, who have been brought up completely disconnected from their culture. The research question that guided the formation of the project is as follows:

How can I, as an Indigenous man disconnected from my culture, redevelop my Indigenous identity through my creative practice, as a composer and performer of music?

While this project documents my own reclamation identity, it has the potential to benefit many others who have found themselves in the same position as I have been. Through both the writing of this thesis, and the composition and performance of my music, I am putting forward a case study outlining my ongoing reclamation of a stolen culture. This is not intended to be a step-by-step guide to how a person should undertake such a process, as an individual's relationship to their culture is inherently personal.

This document is an auto-ethnographic exegesis accompanying the creative output I have developed throughout this research process. Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Carolyn Ellis write of the relationality of music and auto-ethnography, as both having “the desire to communicate engaging and personal tales, through music and words, which inspire audiences to react, reflect, and, in many cases, reciprocate.”¹² So too, does Gunggari and Kunja woman, Roxanne Bainbridge, suggest that auto-ethnographic writing in Indigenous contexts is a way “to investigate Indigenous authenticity and work toward new Indigenous methodologies.”¹³ I determined, therefore, that this mode of writing befits the research goal of cultural reclamation through music practice.

The creative output of this research is auditory, as befits my practice as a musician. During the early research stages, I became aware of two distinct ways in which my creative expression was developing. The first was in the form of producing extended, improvised soundscapes, which reflected a growing connection to both my ancestral Country, and the urban environment in which I was living. I have dubbed these creative outputs ‘Country-songs’—as they are the direct result of intersections of Country, identity, and sound. The

¹² Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Carolyn Ellis, "Introduction," in *Music Autoethnographies: Making Autoethnography Sing/Making Music Personal*, ed. Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Carolyn Ellis (Samford Valley QLD: Australian Academic Press, 2009), 8.

¹³ Roxanne Bainbridge, "Autoethnography in Indigenous Research Contexts: The Value of Inner Knowing," *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* 10, no. 2 (2007): 62.

second practice takes the form of more structured, lyric-driven songs. These songs act as direct reflections of my development and understanding of what it means to be an Indigenous man, born disconnected from culture, living within the settler state.

Consideration has been made around how I analyse my creative works in an academic context. There is a risk that by dissecting the song through the strictly critical lens, it will lose its *affect*, those unique moments in the synergy of melody, harmony, words, expression, performance, that come together to elicit reaction in those that experience it. xwélméxw (Stó:lō) writer, Dylan Robinson refers to this as “performative writing,”¹⁴ emphasising an apposite methodology in which the writing that accompanies the music supports it phenomenologically. The writing needs to be “aware of how its form constitutes knowledge and experience,”¹⁵ and consider its own subjectivity, rejecting the inherent objectivity that has historically permeated academic writing.

Anthropologist and creative writer, Ruth Finnegan problematises the opposition of “mind and body, intellect and emotion,”¹⁶ as traditionally held by Western¹⁷ academic epistemologies. This focus on the rational has ensured that music and musicology is first and foremost considered through the lens of “written formulations, and the intellectual elements of cultivated human society.”¹⁸ In my own opinion, such an opposition leaves little room for consideration of the affect of musical expression, and thus the prime motivation for an artist to create. So too, does Finnegan state “we do not have to accept the old mind-body dichotomies to recognize that sound resonates in the body, and that the experience of music includes its patterned corporeal engagements.”¹⁹ The question is, how should I write about these songs? In my own context, it is even more important to eschew the symbology of the music, beyond broad strokes, discussing melody and rhythm may not be as important as discussing the lyric, the chordal simplicity, timbral choices, or the extra-musical contexts surrounding the songwriting. What is important is examining the ways that my experience

¹⁴ Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening : Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 81.

¹⁵ *Hungry Listening : Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, 83.

¹⁶ Ruth Finnegan, "Music, Experience, and the Anthropology of Emotion," in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 181.

¹⁷ This document uses the “Western” throughout, and contextually indicates as being “of the Occident.” When used in the Australian context, it may also be as being “of settler-colonial origin.”

¹⁸ Finnegan, "Music, Experience, and the Anthropology of Emotion," 181.

¹⁹ "Music, Experience, and the Anthropology of Emotion," 191.

have impacted the course of the musical composition, and that those compositions are inherently reflections of the experience.

Storytelling as a research methodology is firmly embedded in the writing of this thesis, and is recognised as a “mode of research [that] produces creative, thoughtful and felt spaces[.]”²⁰ In drawing from this methodology, I aim to centre my own Indigenous experience and learned knowledges in a Western academic context.²¹ Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes of self-presentation in the context of her lived experience as a Koenpul woman operating within structures of white feminism. In presenting herself, she opts to use a mix of both Indigenous and standard English in the titles of her book chapters as a means of highlighting different bodies of knowledge that she carries and navigates.²² In their *Glossary of Haunting*, Eve Tuck and C. Ree write in the first-person as a means of positioning their idiosyncrasies, “to double-fold [their] wisdom and mask [their] vulnerabilities.”²³ This paper was written to reflect my identity and experience. I often share intimate reflections of self, and this requires a level of familiarity and trust to be built between you, the reader, and me. Because of this, I write with a unique voice that attempts to capture aspects of my personality, so that you as the reader might better engage with the content on a personal level. Therefore, I chose to write this with a voice that fluctuates based on the context. At time, this thesis adheres to a strictly academic and formal voice. At other times, I share personal anecdotes or interpretations of material, and as a result I will adopt a more informal approach to conversation.

The second chapter is a literature review, which encompasses primarily academic texts, covering a range of themes as follows: Western understandings of soundscapes and sound technologies; sonic expression within Indigenous communities; Indigenous engagement with archival recording and sound technology; and, reclamations and expressions of Indigenous identity through sound and technology. In this chapter I situate my practice in broader academic fields and conversations around the role of sound in Indigenous cultural practices.

²⁰ Louise Gwenneth Phillips and Tracey Bunda, *Research through, with and as Storying* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 13.

²¹ Craig Somerville, Kirra Somerville, and Frances Wyld, "Martu Storytellers: Aboriginal Narratives within the Academy," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 39, no. Supplement (2010): 100.

²² Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and White Feminism* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000), xxiii.

²³ Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (California: Left Coast Press, 2013), 643.

While the second chapter incorporates some musical reference points, it predominantly situates conversations about sonic expression and various modes of hearing. By engaging with these topics, I identify an intersectional space centred around sonic expression, particularly around sonic environments (soundscapes) and the shifting roles of audio technologies in First Nations contexts. By doing so, I can then respond to these themes within my own practice.

The third and fourth chapters outline how my creative practice philosophies have developed through the research, as informed by the literature review, experiences during fieldwork, and conversations and collaborations with other artists. Specific musical and artistic influences are also discussed in these chapters, providing additional information about the ways in which I merge my musical and cultural identities. The creative audio works accompany these chapters, and directions are provided in each chapter as to how they should be listened to in the context of the accompanying discussion. All of the audio tracks are provided as digital files. Each track is supplied in two different formats—wav, or mp3. The wav files are provided in 24bit-48khz resolution, the same resolution as they were recorded. The mp3 files contain the same performances, but are smaller in file size for ease of access.

In particular, the third chapter discusses my sound practice in relation to Australian Indigenous understandings of Country ('Country-songs').²⁴ These creative works alongside the contextual writing demonstrate the ways in which my connection to Country deepened through the research process, and, in turn, my reclamation of cultural identity. The fourth chapter examines my songwriting practice as a means of cultural expression. Where the creative works of Chapter 3 places Country at the centre of the creative narrative, Chapter 4 places my voice and experience in the centre. I embraced a songwriting practice as a means to share my own history and experiences orally, as well as to facilitate a space in which I could express my cultural identity, and position it in the context of broader socio-political Australian issues.

Preceding both the third and fourth chapters are subsections I have titled 'Interlude I' and 'II'. These are shorter instances of writing, in which I relay fieldwork experiences that have

²⁴ My 'Country-songs' are long-form pieces of improvised work, centring Australian Indigenous understandings of Country, and should not to be confused with genres of popular music such as *Country & Western*, which are more aligned with my practice I refer to as 'songwriting'.

shaped my development of the research. These experiences are particularly centred around a field trip I took to the North-Central Kimberley in Western Australia during July 2019. In the context of the thesis, the fieldwork provided an opportunity for cultural exchange, in which I could engage with other Indigenous creative practitioners and discuss their sonic practice in the context of their connection to Country. The outcome of the fieldwork was developmental (as opposed to extractionist), and built upon pre-existing relationships with participants which will be discussed further in the relevant chapters. These two interludes are written in a poetic style, and informs significant moments of development during the research, reflecting the ways in which I consider and adapt these developments into my creative practice. Interlude I prefaces Chapter 3, and Interlude II prefaces Chapter 4, and should be read with the consideration that in each case, the former informs the latter. Following these chapters, there is a concluding chapter that compares and differentiates the outcomes of each practice methodology, and analyses the way in which my creative process has informed, and been informed by my reclamation of culture. Through discussion and analysis of literature, and my creative practice in the form of Country-songs and songwriting in relation to cultural identity and creative sonic expression, this thesis outlines and demonstrates my own process of cultural reclamation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter identifies fields of knowledge which have informed my research, primarily focused on conversations around sonic environments and musical expression in Indigenous cultural practice. The resources that I draw from here are predominantly textual, and emphasise ideas and theories which I drew on as my creative practice developed. While occasionally referencing the practices of other musicians and sound artists, the focus of this chapter is mainly on theoretical knowledge. Artistic influences and creative considerations are covered in the two following chapters which outline details of my own creative practice.

By revisiting the research question, ‘how can I, as an Indigenous man disconnected from my culture, redevelop my Indigenous identity through my creative practice, as a composer and performer of music?’ I can begin to identify and unpack the foundational themes of the work. What is apparent upon closer examination, is the presence of two core aspects within a proposed study of self: that of my creative expression, and my developing Indigenous identity. The research I am undertaking lies in the relational space between these two foundational elements.

With that in mind, there are four themes I chose to emphasise in context of a literature review. The first of these is the Western understanding and technological expressions of soundscapes. These topics have been written about and performed extensively within Western academia, and are often central in discussions around the aural experience. From there, I will examine sonic expression within Indigenous communities. This particular field of inquiry is not a means of appropriating stylistic elements of performance practices, which I would consider at the foremost, immoral, and ultimately detrimental to the task of defining a personal Indigenous identity. Instead, this aids in decolonising and expanding my own understanding of sonic environments and musical expression. The discussion then shifts to an examination of the histories of relationships between Indigenous communities and developing sound technologies. This tracks from ethnographic field recordings made of (read, not “by”) Indigenous communities, through to the repatriation process of archival recordings, and community engagement with recording technologies. Finally, I will examine texts demonstrating expressions of Indigenous identity and reclamation, particularly through creative modes of expression. The literature featured in this chapter is drawn from both Australian and international contexts.

The aim of this chapter is to better develop my own understanding of soundscapes that exist beyond the Western knowledges, and to thus better develop my own sonic practices in a way that promotes Indigenous knowledges and identity. By doing so, I can position my creative practice and within historical contexts and knowledges of sound in both Indigenous and Western settings. It is not my intention to examine the ceremonial, musical, or cultural social practices of any given community for the purposes of adapting them into my own practice. Ultimately, this chapter draws a relational line between these various understandings of sound and place to facilitate an intersectional space which allows me to tie together my sonic practices and the reclamation of my cultural identity.

Western Understandings of Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Technologies

The study of sound in Western understandings is varied and multi-faceted. A quantifiable approach might consider sound in terms of energy transmission and physics, measured by sonic frequency (in musical terms, pitch), amplitude (volume), or harmonic content (timbre).²⁵ Alternatively, sound can be considered as experiential, an internalised, emotional response to aural stimulus, be that musical or otherwise. This approach might consider the social and cultural relationships to, and implications of sound. In philosophical terms, the quantitative understanding of sound might be described as materialist, pursuing the implication that “life [can] be reduced to a subset of physics, chemistry, and mathematics.”²⁶ Contrary to this, subjective approaches to sound might be considered vitalist, approaching sound as “elusive,” and ultimately, “indefinable.”²⁷ It is my own view that these different approaches to understanding sound need not be mutually exclusive. There is benefit to acknowledging the myriad facets of sound, and by remaining open to differing perspectives I aim to provide an overview of sound as it is understood as an expression of culture. The ephemeral experience of sound lends itself to ensuring one retains a multi-focal, reflexive lens with which to examine it.

Quantitatively, sound is energy—vibrations that pass through the air, through objects, entering our bodies. The vibrations can be felt in our bones. If those vibrations repeat

²⁵ Juan G. Roederer, *The Physics and Psychophysics of Music: An Introduction*, Fourth Edition ed. (New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media, 2008), 3.

²⁶ Ross W. Duffin, *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (and Why You Should Care)*, First Edition ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007), 142.

²⁷ *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (and Why You Should Care)*, 142.

between a certain set of frequencies, they enter our ear, are translated into neural signals, and are experienced as sound in the brain.²⁸ The human hearing range is approximately 20 to 20,000Hz, meaning that the vibrational repetitions are cycling between twenty to twenty-thousand times in a second. In this respect, to understand the aural experience is to do so from an entirely anthropocentric position. This is particularly evident when considering that other species have ears attuned to hearing a range of frequencies both inside and outside of the human band. The non-human sound experience is one that we can never truly understand. With age or sensory deterioration, the human frequency band narrows—higher frequency perception in particular tends to diminish. When considering this, the anthropocentric aural reality will change over the course of an individual’s lifetime.

Juan G. Roederer identifies three main characteristics that can be used when approaching objective discussions of sound: pitch, loudness, and timbre.²⁹ The pitch (or frequency) refers to the perceived ‘altitude’ of the sound, and can be described with terminology such as ‘high’ or ‘low’. The concept loudness is something that most people are familiar with, perceiving a sound as ‘loud,’ or ‘soft,’ ‘deafening,’ or ‘inaudible.’ Timbre might be considered the qualities of a sound, that which allows listeners to differentiate sound sources, such as between two people speaking, or a piano from a clarinet. Measuring the properties within these terminologies have foundations in Western discussions of sound and music, including in the scope of my own creative works in Chapter 3.

On a macro-scale, R. Murray Schafer’s concept of sonic environments aids in describing the ways that people experience sound in a geographical context and the impact of sound on a person’s lived experience. Schafer’s *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*³⁰ is a foundational text for many contemporary sound theorists, including my own understanding of interpreting sonic landscapes. The text introduces several key concepts that continue to be considered fundamental to geographic sound studies. Perhaps the most integral of these is the notion of the “soundscape,” defined by Schafer as “the sonic environment ... [which] may refer to actual environments or abstract constructions such as musical compositions and tape montages, particularly when considered as an

²⁸ Roederer, *The Physics and Psychophysics of Music: An Introduction*, 1.

²⁹ *The Physics and Psychophysics of Music: An Introduction*, 3.

³⁰ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1994).

environment.”³¹ Understanding Schafer’s concept of the soundscape allows an active listener access to a lexicon which can aid in verbalising the complex, intricate, and layered world of sound. This is true regardless of the listener’s placement in space, whether that be in urban, rural, or natural environments.

The terminological denomination of the soundscape immediately alludes to the visual notion of the ‘landscape,’ the key differential being the sensory shift in focus from the visual to aural stimuli. Typically, understandings of geography and place (and more broadly, the interpretation of knowledge and information in general) have been through visual interpretations in contemporary Western epistemologies. Anglophonic language structures tend to preference knowing through visual (scopocentric) over auditory (sonocentric) understanding.³² As contrasted by Bruce Johnson, there is a preferential hierarchy laid upon these two sensory experiences, which can be explicated by consideration of the sayings “seeing is believing” against “don’t believe everything you hear.”³³ Both phrases deal with structures of ‘belief’ or knowing, however the former suggests that vision can provide definitive fact, while the latter suggests that hearing requires further examination. Western reliance on vision as a source of knowledge is a cultural development which took place over centuries, and resulted in a diminishing of the importance of mythological narratives and anecdotes originally designed as a means of knowledge transmission.³⁴ Despite this, there are still societies (such as, Johnson exemplifies, the Finns³⁵) that have language structures built around aural cues and understanding. Schafer’s focus on aural environments promotes a sensory shift that prioritises auditory information and processing in a Western research framework.

Schafer purports that the soundscape is best thought of as a musical composition, suggesting that “all sounds belong to a continuous field of possibilities lying *within the comprehensive dominion of music*.”³⁶ Like most musical compositions, Schafer’s soundscape breaks down into smaller subsections, that make up the whole. Much like the soundscape

³¹ *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 274-75.

³² Bruce Johnson, "Sound Studies Today - Where Are We Going?," in *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory and the Senses*, ed. Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 9.

³³ "Sound Studies Today - Where Are We Going?," 10.

³⁴ Walter J. Ong, "World as View and World as Event," *American Anthropologist* New Series 71, no. 4 (1969): 643-44.

³⁵ Johnson, "Sound Studies Today - Where Are We Going?," 10.

³⁶ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 5.

itself, many of these subsections are identified by terminologies that allude to visual metaphors. The three primary elements that make up the soundscape are “keynote sounds,” “signals,” and “soundmarks.”³⁷ The keynote sound, (derived from musical terminology) is made in reference to the fundamental tonality of a place. Schafer suggests that keynote sounds are produced by geographical and climate factors.³⁸ In the case of natural spaces, the keynote sounds might refer to water, wind, or birdsong; or in the case of urban environments, the sound of traffic or even the low hum of the electric power mains. Schafer goes on to suggest that the ever-presence of keynote sound “may even affect the behaviour or life style of a society,”³⁹ a concept which I examine further through my creative practice in Chapter 3.

While keynote sounds exist primarily in the background of the soundscape, signals by nature are featured in the foreground and consciously addressed. Most signals exist primarily to convey information or warnings, but in reality if the listener chooses to focus their attention to any sound, it can in fact be deemed a signal and is thus defined as such by both the sound transmitter and receiver.⁴⁰ Finally, the term soundmark (derived from ‘landmark’) refers to a signal unique to a place or community which can resultantly act as an auditory source of identity for residents of that area.⁴¹ The soundmark can be considered an element of the aural identity of a culture.

The way in which these three terms can be applied to sounds interchangeably is inherently dependant on the human experience and relationality to the sound. The same sound might exist in the background as a keynote, shifting to a signal should the listener choose to focus on it, and then again, a soundmark if the listener associates it strongly with a specific place or culture. Here, I will provide an example of this in my own geographic context. The City of Melbourne’s soundscape could be described as an urban environment—it is a noisy space of traffic, construction, outdoor restaurants and cafes, street performers, conversations, and countless other sound sources. All together, these make up the keynote sounds of the City of Melbourne. As a pedestrian steps onto the city street, they might hear the ringing of tram bells as they approach or depart their stops. These are signals, designed to

³⁷ *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 9.

³⁸ *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 9-10.

³⁹ *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 10.

⁴⁰ *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 10.

⁴¹ *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 274.

be focused on by the listener and convey information. As a life-long resident of Melbourne, I might even be able to recognise the particular sound of those tram bells, associating them exclusively with city's soundscape. My ability to associate sounds with a specific geographic place accounts for them being soundmarks. The personal experience colouring aural interpretation speaks to how I consider sound in the scope of this paper, its quantitative and qualitative properties, and engages the need for me to share my own experiences to contextualise my creative practice.

Sonic researcher and archivist, Bernie Krause builds upon Schafer's soundscape with three additional terms that help define the soundscape as a whole. These units are identified as "biophonic," "geophonic," and "anthrophonic" sounds.⁴² Biophony refers to sounds produced by non-human life. Krause notes that in biomes unimpeded by human industrialisation, biophonic soundscapes are layered in such a way that each sound-transmitter occupies its own frequency band.⁴³ This lends itself to further Schafer's idea of engaging the soundscape as a musical composition, given that typically, Western compositional practices often groups instruments in such a way that they occupy a particular range of notes.⁴⁴ In both cases, these frequency structures aid in avoiding clustering or muddying of the sound, instead producing a cohesive, perceptible whole. Krause's geophony refers to sounds of natural environments not produced by biological sources, such as the wind, weather, or water.⁴⁵ His anthrophony is sound resulting from human output, ranging from simple biological sounds such as grunting, to noise produced through industrial means.⁴⁶ As demonstrated by Krause, industrialised anthrophony has caused ongoing disruption of both biophonic and geophonic soundscapes,⁴⁷ which in turn has had negative effects on the livelihood of non-human biomes.⁴⁸ Krause and Schafer's systematic approaches to describing soundscapes can be utilised in a complimentary fashion by auditory researchers to better interpret existing soundscapes.

⁴² Bernie Krause, "Anatomy of the Soundscape: Evolving Perspectives," *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society* 56, no. 1/2 (2008): 73.

⁴³ "Anatomy of the Soundscape: Evolving Perspectives," 73.

⁴⁴ A key example here is the symphony orchestra in which different groups of instruments play significant frequency roles as part of the greater whole.

⁴⁵ Krause, "Anatomy of the Soundscape: Evolving Perspectives," 75.

⁴⁶ "Anatomy of the Soundscape: Evolving Perspectives," 76-77.

⁴⁷ "Anatomy of the Soundscape: Evolving Perspectives," 76-77.

⁴⁸ Wouter Halfwerk et al., "Low-Frequency Songs Lose Their Potency in Noisy Urban Conditions," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108, no. 35 (2011).

Structurally, Schafer tracks the history of the global soundscape from its natural origins, the emergence of pre-humanity from the ocean, to the introduction of rural communities and agricultural developments, to the industrial age (identified as the birthing point of “noise,” by Luigi Russolo⁴⁹). When considering pre-human soundscapes, Schafer relies on conjecture and imaginative prose, relying on mythological narratives to paint a descriptive portrait of natural soundscapes.⁵⁰ Of course, the way in which we understand and interpret sound is an anthropocentric experience. As stated by Jonathan Sterne, “you can take the sound of the human, but you can take the human out of the sound only through an exercise in imagination.”⁵¹ The process of defining the world of sound relies on the sensory experiences of the body. To that end, as the evolving human body changes over extended periods of time, so too does our parameters of understanding the experience of sound.⁵² To project a narrative outlining the nature of sound pre-humankind, is to project our aural experience back through time to a point in which such modes of listening were not defined.⁵³ The purpose here is not to problematise Schafer’s description of pre-human soundscapes, but to emphasise the subjectivity that must be considered when discussing the world of sound. Sound is inherently defined by our bodily interpretations of audio signals, and to attempt to remove the body from that equation is to enter the realm of imaginative prose.

We can trace Western engagements with sound as a means of defining our aural reality, and extend it into the concept of hyper-reality,⁵⁴ uncovered through technological developments such as the radio and the sound recorder. In the context of sound, Paul Rodaway’s concept of the hyper-reality refers to heard experiences that are beyond the natural reach of our aural senses.⁵⁵ With the assistance of sound technology such as microphones and amplifiers, we are able to examine sounds in far more detail than the raw listening experience would allow. The chirping of a cicada, for example, can be recorded, and amplified to any conceivable volume, slowed down, re-pitched, background noise removed—

⁴⁹ Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004).

⁵⁰ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 15-28.

⁵¹ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 11.

⁵² *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, 12.

⁵³ *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, 19.

⁵⁴ Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994; repr., 2005).

⁵⁵ *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*, 175.

all in an effort to more closely examine the sonic properties of the sound in ways that the human ear cannot, without this technological assistance.

This ability to remove sound from its source can be traced right back to the examinations of Pythagoras, in which it was demonstrated by requiring listeners to focus on a voice speaking from behind a curtain.⁵⁶ Pierre Schaeffer later referred to this phenomena of sound and source separation as “acousmatic,” after the disciples who studied under Pythagoras, referring to it as “[emphasising] the perceptual reality of sound, as such, by distinguishing it from its methods of production and transmission.”⁵⁷ Through this process of separation, we are left with the “sound object,”⁵⁸ an aural event that exists independently of its source, with which the listener can begin to examine the acoustic qualities without preconceived notions of what it should sound like. This process opens up endless possibilities for engaging virtually any sound in a musical setting. Speaking of the same phenomenon, Schafer coins the term “schizophonia,” or “the splitting of sounds from their original contexts.”⁵⁹ Post-industrial, technological developments in sensory extension, Schafer laments, has led to a depreciation in aural experiences. It is fair to suggest that even in contemporary times, immediate access to a globally-sourced array of recorded sounds via the internet would lead to a lessening motivation to seek out unfamiliar sounds. However, there are implications that point to the benefits of these technologies, from both knowledge-building and creative standpoints. In the case of my own artistic and research practice, the harnessing of sound recording technologies allows me to better understand and connect with soundscapes, both immediate and further afield.

The artistic potential for acousmatic sounds was realised by Pauline Oliveros, when she received a tape recorder as a 21st birthday present from her mother.⁶⁰ Listening back to recordings of the world outside her window, Oliveros became aware of the microphone’s ability to pick up sounds she had previously not heard. These observations granted her the insight to initiate what would become her “deep listening” philosophy,⁶¹ which she describes

⁵⁶ Pierre Schaeffer, “Acousmatics,” in *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay across Disciplines* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 64.

⁵⁷ “Acousmatics,” 64.

⁵⁸ “Acousmatics,” 67.

⁵⁹ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 88.

⁶⁰ Pauline Oliveros, “Tripping on Wires: The Wireless Body: Who Is Improvising?,” *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* 1, no. 1 (2004): 2-3.

⁶¹ “Tripping on Wires: The Wireless Body: Who Is Improvising?,” 3.

as “listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing ... [including] the sounds of daily life, of nature, or one’s own thoughts as well as musical sounds.”⁶² Oliveros experienced a new perspective of environmental soundscapes with the aid of technology, and in the process, created a sensation of hyper-reality.

Having spent considerable time listening to the sounds of nature through a microphone and headphones, I too have experienced this artefact of compressing a three-dimensional soundscape into a recorded stereo audio field. Brian Eno describes this phenomenon as a “[clustering of] all the disparate sounds into one aural frame; they became music.”⁶³ This notion that by technologically converting acoustic sound spaces into recorded audio as a transformative process from pure sound to a sound with musical qualities is a cornerstone in the creative practices of this research.

This review of literature around aural experience has tracked my understandings of sound as they pertain to my creative practice. It covers soundscapes and the ways in which we understand them, while touching upon the implications of listening through technology and their creative applications. All the aspects of sound covered so far inform my understanding of sound as both a musician and a researcher, and have provided a lexicon that will be continually drawn upon throughout this thesis. However, I am aware that the previous section is significantly informed by Western conceptions of sound. Given that this research is about an exploration of my own Indigenous identity, I wish to now pay particular attention to non-Western modes of aural knowing and expression—particularly in Indigenous frameworks.

Sonic Expression within Indigenous Communities

The next section examines significant literature around modes of sonic expression in Indigenous communities. I do this particularly responding to themes of soundscape and sound technology covered in the previous section, both supporting and re-examining those themes through an Indigenous lens. In the context of this review, Indigeneity refers to the people, communities, and cultures that originate within a certain geographical area, especially in the case of colonised lands. This particularly refers to communities whose establishment predate

⁶² "Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (to Practice Practice)," in *Culture and Humanity in the New Millennium: The Future of Human Values*, ed. Kwok Siu Tong and Chan Sin-wai (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002), 27.

⁶³ Brian Eno, *Ambient 4: On Land* (Virgin; Astralwerks, ENOCD8, 724386649928, 1982), CD.

colonial settlement, and who may or may not practice their cultures, traditions, and ways of knowing despite colonisation. I use the term ‘sonic expression’ here, as it would be limiting use the label of ‘music’ in these practices. As will be demonstrated in the following texts, there are many cases of sonic practices within Indigenous communities which operate beyond the Western frameworks of music, and to attempt to define them through these frameworks would be detrimental to the knowledge gathered in this review.

To my knowledge, the cultural sonic expression of Jaadwa people has been stolen and may no longer exist in living memory. It is for this reason that I cannot include our cultural knowledges in the scope of this review, or in my process of cultural reclamation. During a trip to Jaadwa Country in 2019, I spent a morning in the Horsham Library hoping to uncover a more extensive history of Indigenous communities in the area. My findings were limited to a publication, *Horsham in Focus*, which within its 205 pages only proffered forty-one words on the subject: “The aboriginals [sic] in Horsham district were from the Jardwa⁶⁴ and Wotjobaluk tribes, who had a camp one kilometre downstream of the present site of Horsham. According to aboriginal legend, Horsham is the birthplace of the emu and *Wimmera* means ‘throwing stick.’”⁶⁵ In many cases, this is the extent of cultural engagement in settler-centric communities. In response to this lack of academic writing, this thesis is built around community-based interaction, instead of being a study involving extensive archival research into Jaadwa histories and cultural practices.

My understanding in this space must therefore be informed by other communities, with the aim of developing an over-arching view of Indigenous sonic expression. This section does not propose a pan-Indigenous sonic practice, as I would consider such a suggestion is limiting and disrespectful. Instead, I aim to provide an in-exhaustive overview of sonic practices as they are held outside of Western theories. I acknowledge here that structures of colonisation and societal power-imbalances have led to many Indigenous communities being talked about from the coloniser’s gaze, and unfortunately that outside position is embedded in many of the texts I refer to.

⁶⁴ “Jardwa” is an alternative spelling of “Jaadwa.”

⁶⁵ Noelene M. Jenkinson and Marie P. Foley, *Horsham in Focus 1849-1999* (Warracknabeal, Victoria: Horsham Historical Society Inc., 1999), 5.

To begin unpacking these sonic expressions, I will first outline the concept of Country as it is understood in Australian First Nations contexts. The importance of Country to Indigenous communities has been described extensively by anthropologists over the years,⁶⁶ however in this case, I will centre the voices of a group of Gay-wu women from Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. In the book, *Song Spirals: Sharing women's wisdom of Country through songlines*, the authors, these cultural knowledge holders write of Country as not only a geographic location, but as a complex layering of ancestral knowledge and the inter-relationship between all living things. They write of their Yolŋu Country as “the seas and the waters, the rocks and the soils, the animals and winds and people too. It is the connections between those beings, and their dreams and emotions, their languages and their Law.”⁶⁷ The centrality of Country in Australian Indigenous communities embeds it as a source for cultural expression, including sonic expressions. By expressing Country through sonic expression, the Gay-wu group write of how:

[the songs] connect us to that Country and to the person who was there, and has passed away, to the ancestors and to those yet to come, and they connect that Country to other Countries, to other clan homelands around it, in a great pattern of co-becoming and co-emergence. Through songspirals, we know where we are and we know who we are.⁶⁸

Peter G. Toner's writes about the Yolŋu community's sonic expressions and instrumentation can act as mnemonics for place and the ancestral spirits that reside in those places.⁶⁹ These musical instruments include those performed as part of the song practice (yidaki/didgeridoo, and bilma/clapsticks), as well as musical instruments that are featured in the text (dhamburru/drum, and djuling/mouth organ). Through analysing the poetics of song-

⁶⁶ William Edward Hanley Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938-1973* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979).

Deborah Bird Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in an Australian Aboriginal Culture* (CUP Archive, 2000).

Robert Tonkinson, "Landscape, Transformations, and Immutability in an Aboriginal Australian Culture," in *Cultural Memories* (Springer, 2011).

⁶⁷ Laklak Burarrwaja et al., *Song Spirals: Sharing Women's Wisdom of Country through Songlines* (Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019), xxii.

⁶⁸ *Song Spirals*, xxiii.

⁶⁹ Peter G. Toner, "Tropes of Longing and Belonging: Nostalgia and Musical Instruments in Northeast Arnhem Land," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 37 (2005).

texts, Toner highlights the inter-play between instruments and the imagery they conjure through the performance. The sounding of the instruments and their referral in the song-texts act as a mnemonic, to aid with the visualisation of, and emotional transportation to specific places and events subject to the performance. This is particularly powerful for those communities that live off-Country, or younger community members who have been removed from culture and country.⁷⁰ Further examination of Yolŋu song-texts provides a description of the sound of the instruments, an invaluable insight to Indigenous understandings of sound. As translated from Dhalwangu by the late Alan Wunungmurra, the song-texts as they relate to sonic experience is firmly embedded within experiences of sound in place. The sound “echo travel[s]/in the air.”⁷¹ The sonic expression within Yolŋu performance practice appears to be intrinsically connected to place, even allowing listeners the opportunity to be transported to those places through experiencing the performance.

Prominent in the field of examining the intricate relationship between soundscapes and sonic expressions is American anthropologist, Steven Feld. Feld’s 1982 publication, *Sound and Sentiment*,⁷² emphasises the importance of engaging with soundscapes in anthropological inquiries. Through his book, Feld highlights the importance of considering soundscapes as a focal point for anthropological inquiries. Stemming from the publication of the text came the field of ecomusicology, “the study of music, culture, and nature in all the complexities of those terms. Ecomusicology considers musical and sonic issues, both textual and performative, related to ecology and the natural environment.”⁷³ Feld, however, refers to his own research practice as “echo-muse-ecology,”⁷⁴ in response to Schafer’s suggestion that people “echo the soundscape in speech and music.”⁷⁵ Feld’s concept of the echo is “about presence, about reverberant pasts in the present, presents in the past... Sound is memory.”⁷⁶

⁷⁰ "Tropes of Longing and Belonging: Nostalgia and Musical Instruments in Northeast Arnhem Land," 21.

⁷¹ "Tropes of Longing and Belonging: Nostalgia and Musical Instruments in Northeast Arnhem Land," 10.

⁷² Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

⁷³ Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe, *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature*, Routledge Research in Music (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 1.

⁷⁴ Steven Feld, "From Ethnomusicology to Echo-Muse-Ecology: Reading R. Murray Schafer in the Papua New Guinea Rainforest," *The Soundscape Newsletter* June, no. 8 (1994).

⁷⁵ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 40.

⁷⁶ Feld, "From Ethnomusicology to Echo-Muse-Ecology: Reading R. Murray Schafer in the Papua New Guinea Rainforest," 5.

The crux of *Sound and Sentiment*, is thus about the intricate ways that aural modes of understanding, in a way that circumvents visual modes of understanding.

Feld's text focuses around the sonic expressions of the Kaluli community of Papua New Guinea, particularly in the ways that their expression relates to their immersive environmental soundscape. The geographic features of Mt. Bosavi, where the Kaluli community is located, primarily consist of dense rainforest, the result of which is the growth of a culture that has developed a keen reliance on aural perception. The development of perceptual reliance is informed by "continual exposure" to the environment.⁷⁷ The implication is that, for example, those communities living in dense rainforest (where depth of visual field is shallower) will have a keener reliance on aural perception, than those that live in a desert environment (where depth of visual field is greater).⁷⁸ This aural way of being has informed both social and song practices within the Kaluli community.

Feld emphasises these relationships in the folk story, 'The Boy who became a Muni Bird,' in which a young boy is neglected by his older sister and as a result transforms into a weeping bird.⁷⁹ Feld draws parallels between the story, and the community's expectation that the older sister should always look after the younger brother, and that to act against this norm will have drastic consequences. The story informs social interpretations of the muni bird's birdsong with a representation of weeping, which members of the community will emulate when under distress. Melodic content of birdsong is also represented in Kaluli song practice, in both day-to-day work songs, and during social events. Birdsong in the Kaluli environment is considered a spiritual reflection of real world occurrences. For example, in the case of the muni bird, should its distinctive cry be heard, the listener will conclude that, somewhere, a child is feeling abandoned, hungry, or isolated—reflecting the events of the associated folklore.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Eric F. Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25.

⁷⁸ Helena Simonett, "Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico," *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 1 (2014): 122.

⁷⁹ Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, 20-22.

⁸⁰ *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, 31.

In discussing the soundscape of the Kaluli community, Feld references the Kaluli descriptor “dulugu ganalan,” or “lift-up-over sounding.”⁸¹ The term refers to the dense Kaluli soundscape, and the ways in which the sonic expressions of the Kaluli people are considered a layering of the environmental soundscape. It describes the interplay between all the sounds of place, anthrophonic (such as singing), biophonic (such as birdsong), and geophonic (such as the sound of running water), and the absence of hierarchical structure; no sounded element being more important than another, and each having its own time. Feld further describes this interplay as being “in synchrony while out of phase.”⁸² This refers to the distinctive sound sources as being a part of a greater whole, but each following moving independently in a Western sense of rhythm. This concept goes so far as to suggest that any form of melodic or rhythmic unison would be the antithesis of Kaluli sonic expression.

Feld’s collaborative⁸³ research with the Kaluli community keenly demonstrates Schafer’s earlier proclamation that keynote sounds “may even affect the behaviour or life style of a society.”⁸⁴ This theory is amplified in the context of the Kaluli environment, in which depth of field is determined not by the eyes, but by the ears. It seems that the soundscape has informed not only the sonic expressions, but also the foundational social values of the Kaluli community.

Typically, Western understandings of music might identify and categorise a piece of music by its melody, rhythmic tempo and groove, timbre, or so on. However, as discussed in the context of the Kaluli sonic expression, rhythm and tempo are de-emphasised, and it becomes clear that the frameworks that define Western musics become less relevant. Shifting the focus to the sonic expressions of the Yoreme community of Northwest Mexico, I look to the writing of ethnomusicologist Helena Simonett.⁸⁵ There are some similarities between Kaluli and Yoreme sonic expressions, being similarly derived from ecological soundscapes.

⁸¹ "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style, or 'Lift-up-over Sounding': Getting into the Kaluli Groove," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 20 (1988): 76.

⁸² "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style, or 'Lift-up-over Sounding': Getting into the Kaluli Groove," 82.

⁸³ Feld has written about his responsibility to his Kaluli research collaborators in: "Dialogic Editing: Interpreting How Kaluli Read Sound and Sentiment," *Cultural Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1987). Further to this, he has also written about the (mis)appropriation and globalisation of Indigenous musical expression in:

"Pygmy Pop. A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (1996).

⁸⁴ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 10.

⁸⁵ Simonett, "Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico."

Simonett's research approach is also ecomusicological, deriving from Feld's own research practice. The Yoreme expression is based upon the melodic expression of birdsong, being played on a cane flute, and simultaneously accompanied by a frame drum, emulating the sound of a mouse patting its belly after a filling meal.⁸⁶ Due to the emulation of two different sound sources, the melodic and rhythmic content may be in or out of sync.⁸⁷ Matching the characteristics of biophonic sounds through sonic expression is a cornerstone of the Yoreme aural practice, stemming from the understanding that these sounds were taught to people by animals.⁸⁸

In the Yoreme context, practitioners of this sonic expression do not consider their practice 'music' in the Western sense. The term 'music' was a human invention, gifted to the Yoreme by baby Jesus (referring to the introduction of Christianity by colonialists).⁸⁹ This contrast is important, because it emphasises the Yoreme's interpretation of distinct forms of sonic expression. To use Krause's terminology,⁹⁰ these expressions are differentiated by being built upon either anthrophonic or biophonic aural signals. Such distinctions are important as they highlight the shortcomings of Western understandings of music when examining non-Western sonic expressions. In fact, Yoreme sonic practitioners do not consider their expressions to be something that is simply learned from aural reproduction. Instead, these expressions stem from multi-sensory experience—a lifelong immersion in the Yoreme environment.⁹¹ A player does not simply hear the bird and replicate its call, but must know the bird, recognise it by sight and understand its place in the greater ecology.⁹² This suggests that mere replication of sound is not a genuine sonic expression in the Yoreme epistemology, but a deeper understanding of interconnectedness between the human and the environment is required.

⁸⁶ "Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico," 113.

⁸⁷ "Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico," 116.

⁸⁸ "Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico," 113.

⁸⁹ "Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico," 112.

⁹⁰ Krause, "Anatomy of the Soundscape: Evolving Perspectives."

⁹¹ Simonett, "Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico," 125-27.

⁹² "Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico," 120-21.

Connections between Indigenous sonic expression and Country have been written about extensively in the Australian context. In describing the maritime songs of the Torres Strait Islands, Karl Neuenfeldt describes them as “expressions of longing and belonging,”⁹³ layering geographic locations with symbolic, cultural significance. In the South-Eastern region of the country, Jakelin Troy and Linda Barwick examine the reclamation of the “Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe.”⁹⁴ The song text featured in the article outlines the Ngarigu community’s attempt to “influence the return of the snow and all that is associated with snow and its subsequent melt that sustains the alpine ecosystem,”⁹⁵ reflecting a deep understanding of seasonal cycles and the importance of maintaining relationships with Country. This relationship with Country is an ongoing practice, expressed in genres of popular music, such as rock and country & western. Liz Reed describes Indigenous rock music as “a contemporary medium through which Indigenous performers around the country proclaim customary and continuing connection to land ... and show that this connection remains strong ... regardless of the intensity of the effects of colonisation.”⁹⁶ So too, Chris Gibson and Peter Dunbar-Hall recognise the connection between Country and sonic expression in popular music, highlighting this continuing practice as “an expression of land ownership, and therefore of group and individual identity[.]”⁹⁷ What is apparent in these texts is a strong relationship between place (Country, in Australian contexts) and sonic expression. The soundscapes of Country become a source for sonic expression—for connection and inspiration to place and the living beings within it. It is apparent that sound has transportive and transformative nature, which is a key consideration in the creative process. How this could be considered in the context of technologically recorded audio will be examined in the next section.

⁹³ Karl Neuenfeldt, "Torres Strait Maritime Songs of Longing and Belonging," *Journal of Australian Studies* 26, no. 75 (2002): 111.

⁹⁴ Jakelin Troy and Linda Barwick, "Claiming the ‘Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe’," *Musicology Australia* 42, no. 2 (2020).

⁹⁵ "Claiming the ‘Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe’," 95.

⁹⁶ Liz Reed, "Singing the Land," *PAN: philosophy activism nature*, no. 2 (2002): 67.

⁹⁷ Chris Gibson and Peter Dunbar-Hall, "Nitmiluk: Place and Empowerment in Australian Aboriginal Popular Music," *Ethnomusicology* 44, no. 1 (2000): 50.

Indigenous Engagement with Sound Recording Technologies

Here I will shift focus from broader soundscape to technological contexts. Given my creative practice strongly incorporates sound recording technology, it is pertinent to examine histories of those technologies and their impact on Indigenous communities. Before I can embrace my own cultural heritage through sound technologies, I am compelled to understand the role that those same technologies have played in Indigenous communities and how those relationships have changed. This section specifically looks at Indigenous communities' engagement with sound recording technologies in the context of ethnographic practices, and the shift from being the subject of research, to being the researchers ourselves.

I begin by briefly addressing the work of socio-cultural analyst, Walter Benjamin. In 1936, Benjamin analysed the value and authenticity of artwork in an age of technological reproduction, differentiating an original work of art from its copies by emphasising the "aura" of the original. The aura refers to the social and historical circumstances in which the original was created, or "it's unique existence in a particular place."⁹⁸ This also includes the ageing and slow disintegration of the work of art over a period of time. Benjamin calls for a reconsideration of the value of artwork and artistic technique in the social and political climates present in the age of technological reproduction, suggesting that technological reproductions do not contain this aura. This section refutes that notion, suggesting that Benjamin's position does not necessarily consider that audio recordings are embedded with an ancestral aura as through Indigenous modes of hearing.

Following the development of the phonograph by Thomas Edison in 1878,⁹⁹ audio recording became a site of (mis)representation of colonised communities for public consumption.¹⁰⁰ The earliest years are dominated by ethnographic field recordings, in which Indigenous people and our culture were clearly the object for Western examination. Wax recordings of made of Tasmanian Aboriginal woman, Fanny Cochrane Smith between 1899 and 1903 are considered potentially the oldest audio recordings of Indigenous song,

⁹⁸ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Second Version)," in *Selected Writings Volume 3 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 103.

⁹⁹ Thomas Alva Edison. Phonograph or Speaking Machine. United States of America Patent 200,5211878.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Reese, "'The World Wanderings of a Voice' - Exhibiting the Cylinder Phonograph in Australasia," in *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory and the Senses*, ed. Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 28.

language, and voice.¹⁰¹ Through to the mid-20th Century, Indigenous communities, particularly in remote parts of the country were subject to extensive examination and research in a manner that effectively objectified us as “the other.”¹⁰² The irony is that through this process of othering, Indigenous sonic expressions were also being appropriated in an attempt to craft a distinctive (settler) Australian identity.¹⁰³ This is outlined by cultural historian, Martin Thomas in his examination of the history of the recording and broadcast of Indigenous sonic practices, to better define Australian cultural identities post World War II.¹⁰⁴ Such recordings were even further removed from their original context by composers such as Sculthorpe, who appropriated Indigenous melodies into his compositions in an attempt to better define the (settler) Australian cultural identity.¹⁰⁵

The early 1970s saw a broad cultural shift when global efforts began being made to repatriate audio recordings to Indigenous communities.¹⁰⁶ In considering this, I begin a closer examination of the relationship between Indigenous communities and cultural practices, and audio recordings. By examining conversations around audio repatriation, Indigenous ways of thinking about sound recordings, their content and contexts are revealed. What will become clear here, is that audio recordings have the potential to be so much more than static representations of sound. Instead, they are heard as living and adaptive containers for spiritual transmission across generations.

The repatriation process of archival audio is examined by Robert C. Lancefield, who distinguishes it from the repatriation of physical objects given the reproducibility and ephemeral nature of audio.¹⁰⁷ The content of the recording, and not the physical media, is where the cultural value lies. The process of repatriation not only deals with logistical concerns, such as determining who should hold the returned recordings, but also navigating ethical concerns, such as who should have access to such recordings that hold protected content. Concern has also been voiced over the risk of certain recordings being privileged

¹⁰¹ Martin Thomas, "The Rush to Record: Transmitting the Sound of Aboriginal Culture," *Journal of Australian Studies* 31, no. 90 (2007): 110.

¹⁰² Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 89.

¹⁰³ Thomas, "The Rush to Record: Transmitting the Sound of Aboriginal Culture," 108.

¹⁰⁴ "The Rush to Record: Transmitting the Sound of Aboriginal Culture," 109.

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Paget, "Has Sculthorpe Misappropriated Indigenous Melodies?," *Musicology Australia* 35, no. 1 (2013).

¹⁰⁶ Robert C. Lancefield, "Musical Traces' Retraceable Paths: The Repatriation of Recorded Sound," *Journal of Folklore Research* 35, no. 1, Special Issue: International Rites (1998): 51.

¹⁰⁷ "Musical Traces' Retraceable Paths: The Repatriation of Recorded Sound."

over others, thus re-shaping and fixing wide variations of a particular sonic expression into a singular style (such as melody, text, or rhythmic content).¹⁰⁸ While there are ethical hurdles to navigate, there should be no doubt of the importance of recording repatriation. The opportunity to re-strengthen cultural identities through the sharing of recordings is immeasurably beneficial to Indigenous communities, particularly those with severed connections to cultural practice.

Lancefield describes an instance in which a group of Navajo community members visit the Wesleyan University's World Music Archives in Connecticut to hear a series of recordings. He describes recordings as not being "small bits of objectified sonic reality, but [as being] *made* things—and they [the Navajo visitors] easily listened straight down the line through the stray artefacts of the recording process."¹⁰⁹ Lancefield speaks to a performance being slowed down for the benefit of the recording, perhaps to ensure a clarity for the recorded content.¹¹⁰ This emphasises the ever-influential role of the recording agent, and differentiates the sonic expression in a ceremonial context against that of a recording session. In this case, the Navajo listeners immediately identified that the song was too slow and lacked energy,¹¹¹ but it's not hard to imagine communities less familiar with their cultural pasts being unable to differentiate the recording from ceremonial contexts.

Shifting back to the Australian setting, musicologist, Allan Marett describes the intersection between digital audio databases and cultural practices of the Belyuen community, specifically in regards to the Bangany Wangga song genre.¹¹² In particular, Marett examines the notion of the term "maruy," which has multiple applications, but can be strongly aligned with the idea of a ghost, spirits, or "disembodied manifestation of the Dead in the world."¹¹³ Of interest is the fact that this term "maruy" also refers to modern media, such as computers, audio recordings, photographs, and films.

¹⁰⁸ Sally Treloyn, Matthew Dembal Martin, and Rona Goonginda Charles, "Moving Songs: Repatriating Audiovisual Recordings of Aboriginal Australian Dance and Song (Kimberley Region, Northwestern Australia)," in *The Oxford Handbook of Musical Repatriation*, ed. Robert C. Lancefield Frank Gunderson, Bret Woods (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 594.

¹⁰⁹ Lancefield, "Musical Traces' Retraceable Paths: The Repatriation of Recorded Sound," 57.

¹¹⁰ "Musical Traces' Retraceable Paths: The Repatriation of Recorded Sound," 57.

¹¹¹ "Musical Traces' Retraceable Paths: The Repatriation of Recorded Sound," 57.

¹¹² Allan Marett, "Sound Recordings as *Maruy* among the Aborigines of the Daly Region of North West Australia," in *Open Conference Systems*, ed. Allan Marett Linda Barwick, Jane Simpson, Amanda Harris (Sydney: University of Sydney, Faculty of Arts, 2003).

¹¹³ "Sound Recordings as *Maruy* among the Aborigines of the Daly Region of North West Australia," 5.

As with many other forms of Australian Indigenous sonic expression covered in this review, composers of Wangga are visited by spirits in dreams, who share song and dance with the composer to be realised in ceremonial contexts. Marett quotes one elder from Kununurra as stating “when you put that CD in a computer, what comes up is exactly the same as what is sung into the head of a songman when he is given the song in a dream by that spirit.”¹¹⁴ Conclusions drawn here are that “maruy” and audio, be it recorded or performed, share the same sense of intangibility, while still able to be experienced by the senses. When playing back recordings of deceased singers and performers, their spirit is effectively being manifested. This manifestation gives the audio a living quality.

Following this, we can look to the research of Treloyn, and her focus on the Junba song tradition of the North-Central Kimberley.¹¹⁵ Junba is a genre of public-dance song performed throughout the Kimberley region,¹¹⁶ and in this particular context I look at the practice of Junba held by the three tribes, Ngarinyin, Worrorra, and Wunambal. Junba is shared within communities through a system of knowledge and cultural exchange known as “wurnan.”¹¹⁷ I am not unpacking the distinctive features of Junba here, as much as I am addressing the value of archival recordings in cultural reclamation.

In her conversations with Ngarinyin elder, Matthew Dembal Martin, the spiritual nature of these archived recordings is revealed. Dembal describes how the “burrunguma,” or “spirits of deceased ancestors,” reside in those recordings, and effectively remind the listener of how to sing an old song.¹¹⁸ Dembal goes on to explain that this transfer of information through archival recordings is in itself a form of wurnan. That, in fact, through wurnan, and through the recordings, knowledge can be shared through time, as a form of “gift” between the spirit and the living person.¹¹⁹ In this sense, the value of these “reproductions” is limitless as a tool

¹¹⁴ "Sound Recordings as *Maruy* among the Aborigines of the Daly Region of North West Australia," 6-7.

¹¹⁵ Treloyn, Martin, and Charles, "Moving Songs: Repatriating Audiovisual Recordings of Aboriginal Australian Dance and Song (Kimberley Region, Northwestern Australia)."

¹¹⁶ Sally Treloyn, "Flesh with Country: Juxtaposition and Minimal Contrast in the Construction and Melodic Treatment of Jadmi Song Texts," *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2 (2007): 90.

¹¹⁷ "Flesh with Country: Juxtaposition and Minimal Contrast in the Construction and Melodic Treatment of Jadmi Song Texts," 90.

¹¹⁸ Reuben Brown and Sally Treloyn, "Relational Returns: Relationships and the Repatriation of Legacy Song Recordings in Australia," *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*. (2017): 54.

¹¹⁹ "Relational Returns: Relationships and the Repatriation of Legacy Song Recordings in Australia," 55.

of both communication with deceased spirits, and the revitalisation of sonic expressions endangered by colonisation.

Moving further south from the Kimberley, to the Pilbara, I look to Andrew Dowding's experience with archival recordings in a community setting.¹²⁰ Dowding is a Ngarluma man who through engagement with his community, recognised the endangered status of the Thabi song practice, a public song genre that lyrically refer to both ancestral and contemporary events. In response to this, Dowding reclaimed a series of archival recordings from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), to present to his community in order to revitalise the practice.

Dowding writes of listening back to the recordings with community with great fondness, not only for the strict musical content of the recordings, but the extra-musical material picked up by the microphone: "All of these small details of these small details of the recordings gave colour and vividness to the image of my grandfather that was conjured in my mind. Subtle noises on the recordings—not just the songs—created a sense of context in my imagination."¹²¹ My reading of Dowding here suggests the incredible value of audio recording as a way of bringing the listener closer to the spirit of its subject, be that a long-departed family member or cultural knowledge holder. The unbiased microphone has the ability to bring to the fore such details that the human ear may not have otherwise registered. I would suggest that these details are where the spirit or aura of the recording resides, and maintain an integral part of my creative work going forwards.

Furthering this, Dowding recalls a particularly problematic incident in which the content of the archival recordings caused discontent amongst the community members listening in. During this incident, Dowding had briefly left the playback running as he left the room. Upon his return, a piece of restricted audio was playing that caused great distress for both the men and women listening in.¹²² This restricted audio refers to songs that are intended to be private in nature, and should only be listened to by a particular social group or gender based on their

¹²⁰ Sally Treloyn and Andrew Morumburri Dowding, "Thabi Returns: The Use of Digital Resources to Recirculate and Revitalise Thabi Songs in the West Pilbara," in *Recirculating Songs: Revitalising the Singing Practices of Indigenous Australia*, ed. Myfany Turpin James William Wafer (Hunter Press, 2017).

¹²¹ "Thabi Returns: The Use of Digital Resources to Recirculate and Revitalise Thabi Songs in the West Pilbara," 63.

¹²² "Thabi Returns: The Use of Digital Resources to Recirculate and Revitalise Thabi Songs in the West Pilbara," 64.

content and social context. This incident highlights the lack of appropriate metadata being generated at the time of the recording (in many cases, decades prior), and the challenges faced by those like Dowding when accessing archival recordings. It again speaks to the aura of these recordings, being the vessels of content that transcend what can be defined by objective sonic understandings. The recording is so much more than an ancient record, but also a container for living cultural knowledge that can and does have continued impact on communities.

Reclamations and Expressions of Indigenous Identity through Sound and Technology

The crux of this research project is my coming to terms with my Indigenous identity—understanding it, embracing it, and developing my confidence in it enough to share it both in and outside of Indigenous social and academic contexts. Due to my arts practice being such an integral part of my pre-existing identity, I determined that the most appropriate way to engage with this uncharted aspect of my identity was through an artistic framework. Within the following section, I examine identity reclamation through the arts in Indigenous contexts. Given the nature of identity being so personal, it would be futile to suggest that there is any singular, definitive approach to cultural reclamation through the arts. What fits into one individual's context may not apply in another's.

The process of reclaiming identity involves a significant degree of coming to terms with my identity and understanding my place within the greater scheme of inter-generational events. I feel this keenly given my fair skin, and apparent lack of social, cultural, and racial violence inflicted on my body and conscience. How can a person oblivious to their own cultural heritage for so long be negatively impacted by something they didn't know existed? Dylan Robinson discusses the sensory embodiment of intergenerational traumas in his chapter written following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).¹²³ While Robinson prefers not to use the term himself, he outlines the TRC's notion of the "intergenerational survivor,"¹²⁴ specifically referring to generations proceeding those who

¹²³ Dylan Robinson, "Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility," in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, ed. Keavy Martin Dylan Robinson (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016).

¹²⁴ "Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility," 44.

were direct victims of Canada's residential schooling system, establishments intended to assimilate Indigenous children into settler-colonial culture and society. The traumas inflicted on these children caused them to grow up not only disconnected from, but actively rejecting their culture, and that disconnection is passed on to the next generation.¹²⁵

Even as I write this, I feel a distinctive hesitation to label myself an "intergenerational survivor." Historically, my family have been effectively shielded from broader racial and cultural abuse by their white-passing appearance and obliviousness to our history. But as I reflect, I do relate to the embodied feelings of shame around embracing culture. There have been numerous occasions where I hesitate to make my cultural heritage known, even today, in the company of non-Indigenous associates, or friends. Sarah Maddison points to the structural violence against Indigenous identity by shining a light on the rhetoric of conservative commentators such as Andrew Bolt.¹²⁶ I have not read Bolt's original articles (primarily an act of self-preservation for my mental health and wellbeing), but his position, summarised by Maddison, is one I felt a dreaded recognition of. Maddison writes, "[Bolt points] to the alleged privileges ... won by a group of named, light-skinned, primarily urban-based Aboriginal people described by Bolt as 'political aborigines' who ... had chosen to emphasise their Indigenous heritage for material and professional gain."¹²⁷ This supposed quest for privilege could not be further from the truth in my own case. However, it is one of many narratives that perpetuate and poison cultural discourse in Australia that I am continually haunted by. Maddison concludes that "claiming an Aboriginal identity is an act of resistance," against settler colonial structures.¹²⁸ Instead of reacting to these negative discourses by shying away, Indigenous voice needs to be embraced and centred in Australia in order to strive for the dismantling of broader oppressive social structures.

A key theme of cultural reclamation through the arts involves the process of healing from the traumas of colonisation. Researchers, Katelyn Barney and Elizabeth Mackinlay suggest that by addressing, claiming, and reframing both lived and inherited trauma through song has "the potential to heal identities damaged by the violence ... experienced by the Stolen

¹²⁵ "Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility," 51.

¹²⁶ Sarah Maddison, "Indigenous Identity, 'Authenticity' and the Structural Violence of Settler Colonialism," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 20, no. 3 (2013).

¹²⁷ "Indigenous Identity, 'Authenticity' and the Structural Violence of Settler Colonialism," 296.

¹²⁸ "Indigenous Identity, 'Authenticity' and the Structural Violence of Settler Colonialism," 300.

Generations, and their families and communities.”¹²⁹ This is evident in the work of Gunditjmara and Bundjalun singer and songwriter, Archie Roach, particularly his song *Took the Children Away*.¹³⁰ Addressing his lived experience as a survivor of the Stolen Generation,¹³¹ Roach describes *Took the Children Away* as his “healing song.”¹³² “Every time I sing it,” Roach states, “I let a little bit of the hurt and the trauma go.”¹³³ As a survivor of colonisation, Roach’s music is not only a force for healing his own traumas, but also those who have experienced similar circumstances.

People were stunned. Women were crying. Men had their heads bowed, shoulders heaving. People from all across this Aboriginal nation came up to me at the front of the stage to tell me that my story, my family’s story, was also their story ... I was shocked. I was not prepared for how the song affected them.¹³⁴

Roach’s above recollection of performing *Took the Children Away* at the Australian Bicentenary in 1988¹³⁵ demonstrates the way in which the arts can create opportunity to recognise a shared, communal experience such as the trauma of colonisation. As an Indigenous man reclaiming my own cultural heritage through my creative practice, I suggest that this process is in itself one of healing. This is a healing that not only benefits me, but also my family.

In the previous section, I traced the coexistence of Indigenous sonic expressions and sound technologies, from the ethnographic field recording, to the repatriation of those same recordings. This relationship continues to shift and change, as evidenced in the wide dissemination and access to sound recording. With the relatively low-cost of recording equipment, particularly considering that most contemporary phones have an audio recorder

¹²⁹ Katelyn Barney and Elizabeth Mackinlay, ““Singing Trauma Trails”: Songs of the Stolen Generations in Indigenous Australia,” *Music & Politics* 4, no. 2 (2010): 9.

¹³⁰ Archie Roach, *Charcoal Lane* (Australia: Mushroom Records: TVD91063, 1990), CD, Album.

¹³¹ The Stolen Generation refers to the First Nations Australian children who were systematically removed from their families by government policy over the course of several decades.

¹³² Archie Roach, *Tell Me Why: The Story of My Life and My Music*, 2020 ed. (Australia: Simon & Schuster, 2019), Autobiography, 357.

¹³³ *Tell Me Why: The Story of My Life and My Music*, 357.

¹³⁴ *Tell Me Why: The Story of My Life and My Music*, 205.

¹³⁵ January 26th, 1988 marked two-hundred years since the arrival (invasion) of the First Fleet to Sydney.

and camera built in, Indigenous communities are “[producing] recordings with no overt connection to academic research.”¹³⁶ That uptake of sound technologies then helps define cultural identity and its perseverance through colonial structures, and is a rich site of contemporary cultural expressions.

Writings by Australian musicologist, Linda Barwick focus on the way in which digital sound technologies have interacted with cultural and social practices in Wadeye, in Northwest Australia.¹³⁷ Barwick particularly examines the way that easier access to recordings technologies have paved the way for new sonic expressions amongst Indigenous language communities of Murriny Patha and the Djanba song genre. What is emphasised is the role of ceremonial song at funerals, and the possibilities that emerge from being able to compose and promptly record songs for playback at funerals. This effectively frees up the composers and performers to undertake other ceremonial roles during funerals. Barwick highlights a recording that had been edited to begin with the roar of a crocodile, a relevant clan totem in that particular setting.¹³⁸ This expression of the “soundmark” (the distinctive roar of the crocodile) in the recorded audio is a practice that is enabled by access to sound technologies. This facilitates a new form of creative practice that promotes cultural identity. Barwick also points to evidence suggesting that repatriated sound archives are accessed more frequently in the lead-up to a funeral, and that composers will often borrow melodies, lyrics, or arrangements from archival materials.¹³⁹ As with bangany wangga, djanba song composition typically emerges from the visiting of an ancestral spirit to the composer in dreams.¹⁴⁰ Following the belief that ancestral spirits also reside in audio recordings, the process of revisiting archives as a preface to song composition is similarly a demonstration of the spirit in the recording gifting the composer song materials.¹⁴¹ This demonstrates the depth and value of these recordings in a cultural setting and the adaptiveness of ancient cultural practices.

¹³⁶ Karl Neuenfeldt, "Notes on the Engagement of Indigenous Peoples with Recording Technology and Techniques, the Recording Industry and Researchers," *The World of Music* 49, no. 1, Indigenous Peoples, Recording Techniques, and the Recording Industry (2007): 12.

¹³⁷ Linda Barwick, "Keepsakes and Surrogates: Hijacking Music Technology at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)," in *Music, Indigeneity, Digital Media*, ed. Henry Stobart Thomas R. Hilder, Shzr Ee Tan (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2017).

¹³⁸ "Keepsakes and Surrogates: Hijacking Music Technology at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)," 163.

¹³⁹ "Keepsakes and Surrogates: Hijacking Music Technology at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)," 168.

¹⁴⁰ "Keepsakes and Surrogates: Hijacking Music Technology at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)," 165.

¹⁴¹ "Keepsakes and Surrogates: Hijacking Music Technology at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)," 167.

This adaptiveness of cultural practices to emergent technologies is also evident outside of Australian, such as in the song genre of joiking, practiced by the Sámi people, indigenous to far-northern Scandinavia.¹⁴² In the context of the genre, Canadian ethnomusicologist Beverley Diamond contends that “recording studio practices are cultural arenas ... in which cultural values are embedded, rearticulated, and resignified in the recording/mixing process.”¹⁴³ Sámi musicians will demonstrate their cultural connections through contemporary recording practices, particularly finding creative ways to engage representations of extra-musical sensations within the recorded output. Examples include the sampling of archival recordings into new compositions. There are several layers to such a creative decision, including a means of tracing familial lineage to past singers, bringing the past traditions into the present, and of enacting the “answering” song-form that is embedded in the joiking practice.¹⁴⁴ Spatiality is also enacted through contemporary recordings of joiking, through the inclusion of elements such as field recordings or reverb-based effects. Instances of this may be done in order to try and disrupt the clean aesthetics of professional recording studios (make it sound more ‘real’), or create hyper-real spaces such as to emulate the imagined sound of the Milky Way (a cornerstone of Sámi mythologies).¹⁴⁵ What the contemporary engagement with joiking demonstrates is the reflexivity of Indigenous cultures in their adoption of and adaption to developing technologies. Diamond concludes that there is a need for conversation around decisions Indigenous musicians make in modern sound production environments, and how having those conversations could allow better opportunity to examine contemporary modes of cultural expression of identity.¹⁴⁶

Popular music forms a powerful mode of cultural expression, as is evident in Canada’s First Nations Innu community.¹⁴⁷ Popular Innu musicians will often sing in language, and incorporate rhythmic motifs reminiscent of ceremonial song forms. In contrast to this, I do not have a traditional repertoire to draw upon, I have an absence of language or musical

¹⁴² Beverley Diamond, "Mixing It Up: A Comparative Approach to Sámi Audio Production," in *Music, Indigeneity, Digital Media*, ed. Henry Stobart Thomas R. Hilder, Shzr Ee Tan (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2017).

¹⁴³ "Mixing It Up: A Comparative Approach to Sámi Audio Production," 107-08.

¹⁴⁴ "Mixing It Up: A Comparative Approach to Sámi Audio Production," 114-16.

¹⁴⁵ "Mixing It Up: A Comparative Approach to Sámi Audio Production," 118.

¹⁴⁶ "Mixing It Up: A Comparative Approach to Sámi Audio Production," 121.

¹⁴⁷ Véronique Audet, "Why Do the Innu Sing Popular Music? Reflections on Cultural Assertion and Identity Movements in Music," in *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada : Echoes and Exchanges*, ed. Anna Hoefnagels and Beverley Diamond (Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

styles that stem from my own Jaadwa heritage. But the similarities are that we both draw upon stories, experiences unique to us that can be related to by other community members. “Similar to the way elders tell stories and sing their dreams for the continuation of the Innu way of life, the singer-musicians ... [deliver] messages that affect the emotions, actions, and lives of listeners as much as themselves.”¹⁴⁸

Motivations for Innu to perform in popular Western styles stem from the same motivation for traditional musical practices, as a way of “express[ing] and affirm[ing] their existence in the world, engag[ing] in it, and thus giv[ing] themselves the power to take part in and change it.”¹⁴⁹ This ties contemporary popular music practices with traditional Innu musical expression, particularly those involving teueikan, a sacred (restricted) drum used in ceremony. The teueikan cannot be used in popular music contexts, however rhythms of the traditional repertoire may be apparent in popular music contexts, which accompany songs in language about contemporary Innu experience. This allows Innu popular performers the ability to express their culture and identity in a culturally safe manner. Sonic expression is particularly important in the Innu context, as it “reveals the lived essence of beings, their own identity.”¹⁵⁰ What is apparent is that Innu’s use of popular music forms is a means of positioning themselves in a colonial environment, a channel for communication extending beyond their own community.

Looking to practices of electronic music production and hip hop also provides examples of generating spaces for First Nations cultural expression. Practitioners like the Ottawa-based group, The Halluci Nation,¹⁵¹ combine Pow-Wow rhythmic structures with electronic dance music to form a decolonial presence in Ontario nightclubs.¹⁵² By mixing First Nations musical forms, colonial symbology, and electronic production, The Halluci Nation effectively “insert themselves into those [colonial] histories and rewrite them to decolonize them further,

¹⁴⁸ "Why Do the Innu Sing Popular Music? Reflections on Cultural Assertion and Identity Movements in Music," 382.

¹⁴⁹ "Why Do the Innu Sing Popular Music? Reflections on Cultural Assertion and Identity Movements in Music," 399.

¹⁵⁰ "Why Do the Innu Sing Popular Music? Reflections on Cultural Assertion and Identity Movements in Music," 380.

¹⁵¹ Prior to April 2021, The Halluci Nation were known as ‘A Tribe Called Red,’ and are referred to as such in the accompanying reference.

¹⁵² Gabriel Levine, "Remixing Return: A Tribe Called Red’s Decolonial Bounce," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, no. 35 (2016).

interweaving the pasts and futures of blackness and indigeneity.”¹⁵³ Meanwhile, Muskoday emcee, Eekwol, enacts a continuance of oral storytelling through hip hop.¹⁵⁴ For Eekwol, “hip hop culture presents many possibilities for reflection, speaking out, and returning to a place outside of colonial history.”¹⁵⁵ Both of these differing practices demonstrate contemporary popular music’s ability to create spaces for stories to be told and histories reconsidered.

This section has demonstrated that expression of First Nations cultural practices can vary significantly, even when limited to examinations of sonic expression. The practices identified here suggest that my own creative practice (particularly music composition and use of sound technology) provides a viable method for cultural reclamation.

Conclusion

This chapter emphasises a field of research situated between expressions of Indigenous culture, identity, and a range of understandings of sound, soundscapes, and sound technologies. The knowledges shared here are relevant to my own research through their examination of sound in a variety of contexts, which is the central medium of my creative practice. I began by examining Western understandings of sound, and soundscapes, demonstrating my own Western upbringing and disconnection to culture. This established a baseline and lexicon with which to then shift focus primarily to Indigenous understandings of sound. From here, I examined three modes of engagement with sound in Indigenous epistemologies, both in Australia and abroad: sonic expressions within Indigenous communities, engagement with audio recording technologies, and the role of those technologies in cultural reclamation. Beginning with concepts of sonic expression in Indigenous communities, the work of Feld helped to consider the ways that soundscapes can manifest themselves within Kaluli song practice. What became evident is reflected Schafer’s proposition that keynote sounds affect the behaviour of communities residing within a given soundscapes.

¹⁵³ "Remixing Return: A Tribe Called Red’s Decolonial Bounce," 35.

¹⁵⁴ Charity Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth: Storytelling, Identity, and Hip Hop in Saskatchewan," in *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada : Echoes and Exchanges*, ed. Anna Hoefnagels and Beverley Diamond (Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

¹⁵⁵ "Bits and Pieces of Truth: Storytelling, Identity, and Hip Hop in Saskatchewan," 366.

Drawing connections between soundscape and sonic expression, I looked to the role of sound technology in shaping the cultural practices of Indigenous communities, both in Australia and globally. This tracked developments from early ethnographic recordings, featuring distinct power imbalances between researcher and community, to repatriation processes of sound archives, to the ways in which communities currently access sound recordings. This access and the ways in which cultural practitioners adopt sound technologies to further develop cultural identity is a key site of research. This review has also highlighted the intangibility of sound recordings and emphasised that they are a conduit between living cultural bodies, and spiritual ancestors. The recordings are qualitatively alive in the ways that they are heard and transmit ancestral knowledge, and it is this site of interaction where my own creative output will focus. What appears to be lacking in this field is documentation by individual artists reclaiming their cultural identity in the context of the living audio recording. Specific conversations around cultural reclamation in technology-informed musical practice is an area of knowledge that this thesis aims to contribute to.

That contribution will be made apparent over the next two chapters, the first of which will centre my relationship to Country and engage with soundscape through audio recordings and creative practice. The second of the next two chapters will focus on my expression of self, and centre my experiences as an Indigenous man disconnected from culture, and the histories that inform those experiences. Coming up next, however, I offer a brief interlude, shifting the narrative to the north-central Kimberley in Western Australia, and share my reflections on the affects of recording Country.

Interlude I: The Bungarun Marshlands

It is May 2020. I am writing this from my living room, in Carnegie, on Boon Wurrung Country, home to the Yalukit Willam clan. The cold seems to have crept in early, the gas heater here has been getting a solid flogging the past few weeks. Despite spending a winter in Saskatchewan, Canada facing temperatures lower than 40 below, I will always contend that it simply *feels* colder in Melbourne during this time of year. I'm facing down the months of the year in which I will never truly feel warm no matter how rugged up I am. The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic has been at the forefront of society's collective consciousness for well over two months now. I haven't seen many of my friends or family face-to-face for at least that long. In fact, I haven't been able to leave the house for any reason beyond buying essential supplies, or going for a walk, getting a bit of sun on my skin. In all fairness, it's a good time to be stuck inside writing a PhD thesis.

At the same time, it is the 18th of July 2019.¹⁵⁶ Sometime between 3:32 and 5:09pm, depending on when you ask. I sit in the rental car that I picked up a few weeks earlier from Broome International Airport, in Western Australia. On the dashboard of the car is a Sound Devices 788T audio recorder, being fed audio from a Rode NT4 stereo condenser microphone situated outside the car. While I'm sure it's cold back in Carnegie, it rarely deviates more than a few degrees from 30°C during the day in Derby. This is Warrwa Country, although it has also been home to the Worrorra, Ngarinyin, and Wunambal people since they settled at the community of Old Mowanjum in 1956, before again shifting to Mowanjum's present location in 1978.¹⁵⁷ I parked the car outside the old Bungarun Leprosarium, located about 20km from Derby. I am here to capture field recordings, the soundscapes of this place, for a new, immersive installation launching at the Mowanjum Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre. The commissioned work is being financially supported by the Australian Research Council Grant 'Singing the Future: Assessing the effectiveness of repatriation as a strategy to sustain the vitality of Indigenous song' (FT150100141).

¹⁵⁶ Author's note: The consistent use of present-tense in this Interlude, despite depicting events which occur several months apart, is a deliberate choice made to poetically depict the concept that audio field recordings can "transport" the listener to a certain point in time.

¹⁵⁷ Daisy Utemorrhah et al., *Visions of Mowanjum* (Adelaide: Rigby Publishers Limited, 1980).

As I sit in the driver's seat, I wear my headphones and monitor the sound of the Country being picked up by the microphone outside. Schafer might call this the soundscape,¹⁵⁸ but I prefer the term 'Country-song.' The car acts as a sort of cocoon, which I have intentionally facilitated in order to canvas myself from the flies. That doesn't stop me from feeling their presence though. As they zip by the microphone, the signal of their movement travels up the cable and into my ears. Instinctively, and somewhat embarrassingly, I swat at the phantom flies. I reflect on the affect of hearing these flies, that their presence in the digital audio realm translates to a very real reaction on my part.

The affective quality of sound is part of what draws me to the medium as an artistic practice - the ways in which these auditory stimuli can cause such reactions in the listener. As a medium of expression, I'm fascinated with how something so ephemeral can generate such responses. I think about how the voices of old people, spirits, ancestors, and cultural knowledge holders are present in both old ethnographic recordings as well as my own recorded discussions with local elders. What is the affect of hearing their voices on young people today, on those cultural practitioners that remain? Australian First Nations peoples understand that ancestral spirits reside within audio recordings.¹⁵⁹ When we listen back to archival recordings of singers, they are with us, continuing a tradition of oral knowledge transfer. Perhaps that affective response is how we define the spirits that visit through audio, through our experienced, emotional responses to the sound of their presence.

Bungarun has a significant history to the local community. The Leprosarium that I am parked outside of was operational for fifty years between 1936 and 1986. I was warned not to stay after sunset, as that is when the old people, the spirits that reside there will come out. The last thing I want to do is disturb them. Sunset was at 5:20pm, so I am cutting it close by stopping the recording just eleven minutes prior, at 5:09pm. I later gave this recording the subtitle, *Crescendo to Dusk*. That title came from the way in which the soundscape of the birds, the insects, the animals and the spirits seemed to steadily grow over the 90 or so minutes that I sat recording. As the sun was going down, the chorus of the Country slowly emerged. That is the very reason I cut my departure as fine as I did. I could not pull myself

¹⁵⁸ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*.

¹⁵⁹ Treloyn, Martin, and Charles, "Moving Songs: Repatriating Audiovisual Recordings of Aboriginal Australian Dance and Song (Kimberley Region, Northwestern Australia)," 600.

away from the ever-changing and engaging sound of Country around me. At the risk of sounding dramatic, it was almost like a siren's call, testing whether I would actually follow the guidance of the locals, or flaunt it for my own benefit. Fortunately, I kept a straight mind, and I made it away without incident.

The next day when I play the field recordings to Ngarinyin elder Matthew Dembal Martin, I note a visceral, joyous reaction to the Country-song contained therein. This reaction particularly stands out to me, as just prior I had been playing him recordings of Junba performances which he was a part of, from the annual Mowanjum festival a week earlier. Hearing himself sing these songs, Dembal's reaction seemed muted, especially in comparison to when I would play the same recordings to younger performers. My reading of Dembal's understated enthusiasm to the Junba recordings were that they were a practice so deeply embodied, listening back to himself was of little interest. He was one of the lead singers on those recordings, so what could they possibly reveal to him? I did not have the opportunity to discuss his reaction to the environmental field recordings, as the topic of conversation was steered towards the appropriateness of the sound for the installation space. However, it was revealed to me that he had spent some of his younger years living at Bungarun. It occurred to me, and this is a personal observation, that the familiar sounds of that place may have been what triggered an emotional response in Dembal. I do not have many details about his time there, but his reaction to the recording was undeniable to me.

The field recordings are a time capsule, a transportive experience that can move the listener to a particular place and time. As I sit in my living room, on Boon Wurrung Country, in May 2020, I listen to the recordings I made approximately ten months earlier. They are a mnemonic that let me so easily, almost unwillingly, recall the sensations of sitting listening to the Country, and what it had to say at that exact time and that exact place. The response I observed in Dembal to hearing the recording of a familiar Country was one of attentiveness, his eyes lit up, his body straightening to attention, and leaning in closer to the laptop. Listening back to those field recordings, I too am reliving the emotions of undertaking fieldwork. Those emotions being mixes of excitement, a yearning to uncover new relationships, experiences, my own cultural identity, as well as anxieties, of being far from home, from friends and family, in an unfamiliar Country, and then offset by the welcome I received. The field recordings allow time to become non-linear. Through these recordings, the ten months ago from the time of writing this is closer to me than the Vegemite toast I had

for breakfast this morning. Through these recordings, the spirits of Nyikina Country are still speaking to me. Through these recordings, it is perpetually approaching dusk and the Country continues to sing louder on July 18th, 2019.

Chapter 3: Country-songs

This chapter is the first of two which detail my creative practice as it pertains to my cultural identity and the research project. It details my creative engagement with field recordings of Country.¹⁶⁰ This engagement is both informed by, and, in turn, informs my processes of reclamation to my Jaadwa culture and heritage. By approaching the creative processes from my relationship to culture, and then developing that relationship through the production of the works, I am effectively generating circumstances in which each work grows from the last. The pieces described in this chapter are improvisatory compositions and performance pieces with strong, spiritual ties to Country. These are pieces of music that respond to and attempt to exist within a space, be they physical or spiritual. They acknowledge the sovereignty of Countries on which recordings are made, and the privilege of being able to create in these places.

I call the pieces detailed in this chapter ‘Country-songs,’ informed by my experience at Bungarun on Nyikina Country as detailed in Interlude I. These are pieces that centre Country and my experiences within those places in relation to my cultural identity. Schafer suggests that listeners should consider the world “as a macrocosmic musical composition.”¹⁶¹ Everything that sounds is a part of the greater musical piece, to be heard in a myriad of ways, in isolation or relation to other sounds. I aim to further this concept, by considering practices of collaboration between the musician (me) and Country.

The collaboration process is one of deep listening on my part. Ngan’gityemerri artist, Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann describes the practice of “dadirri”—“inner, deep listening and quiet still awareness,” that “renews us and brings us peace.”¹⁶² I understand dadirri in the context of my own creative work as an act of reflection, of considering how I think about Country, and how that thinking has developed through my process of cultural reclamation. It is an opportunity to ask what Country has to teach me about myself. American composer, Pauline Oliveros, also developed her own practice she called “deep

¹⁶⁰ For further discussion about Country, see Chapter 2: Sonic Expression within Indigenous Communities

¹⁶¹ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 5.

¹⁶² M.R. Ungunmerr-Baumann, *Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness* (Port Macquarie, NSW, Australia: Emmaus, 2002), 1-2.

listening,”¹⁶³—in the context of her music practice, she described it as a process of listening, to not only her musical collaborators, but to acoustic spaces which in turn shapes her performance.¹⁶⁴ The similarities between these practices amount to a relationship between the person, and the spaces which they inhabit at any time. In my case, that relationship is realised and reflected through musical expression.

Five pieces of music will be discussed in this chapter, as listed below accompanied by a brief description. This chapter will analyse these pieces in the order that they were completed, interspersing discussions of practice and creative influences where appropriate, and conclude with an overview of findings. In the context of this research document, I suggest that these pieces can be listened to either actively or passively. As the reader, you may choose to either stop reading and listen intently to the works, or read along as they play. Having said that, the dynamic intensity of several pieces may distract you from the writing—I will let you determine what works best for your situation. I will signify when each piece should be played in the context of the written document.

Wilin Singe the Fringe is a 50-minute semi-improvised piece performed live at the Lithuanian Club on 15 September 2018, as a part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival. I led a band of five other musicians: Fred Gesha (guitar - Meriam Mer, Kalkadoon, Ambae), Allara Briggs Pattison (double-bass - Yorta Yorta), John Wayne Parsons (voice - Yuggerabul, Meriam Le), Michael Julian (drums - Koorie), and Colin Andrews (keyboards and synthesizers). Performers were asked to respond to field recordings of various environments. On stage, I guided these responses via improvised conducting and instrumental performance, directing shifts in dynamic and harmonic content. Environmental field recordings used in the piece were recorded on the island of Millowl (also known as Phillip Island) on Boon Wurrung Country. The included audio recording of the performance was captured on a stereo condenser microphone situated at the back of the venue. As a result, it is not a professional recording, but should be considered a historical document of the proceedings.

Feedback by the Train-Tracks is a 5-minute composition, arranged and produced at my home studio. Instrumentation includes guitar, amplifier, feedback, and a field recording of

¹⁶³ For further discussion about Oliveros’ deep listening practice, see Chapter 2: Western Understandings of Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Technologies

¹⁶⁴ Pauline Oliveros, Stuart Dempster, and Panaiotis, *Deep Listening* (San Francisco, CA: New Albion Records, 1989), Album, NA 022 CD.

rail-road crossing signals. The piece was intended to reconcile my negative feelings towards the nearby rail-crossing bells, as they were due to be removed around the time of recording. The piece demonstrates the way in which my creative practice could aid in recontextualising my relationship to my immediate soundscapes. Field recordings were made in Murrumbeena, on Boon Wurrung Country.

Bungarun Marshlands, Western Australia - 18th July, 2019 (“Crescendo to Dusk”) is a 75-minute audio recording of the marshlands near the Bungarun Leprosarium on Nyikina Country, approximately 20km outside of Derby, Western Australia. This recording was made with the guidance of local elders of the Mowanjum Community. It was commissioned by the Mowanjum Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre, and funded by the Australian Research Council, as a part of the project ‘Singing the Future: Assessing the effectiveness of repatriation as a strategy to sustain the vitality of Indigenous song’ (FT150100141). The recording features a natural crescendo of birdsong as the sun begins to set. The piece has been installed in the Mowanjum Centre’s interactive exhibition, which officially opened by the community in March 2021. The included reference audio is a 2-minute extract of the full 75-minute recording. The complete recording is made available in the appendices.

Response to the Bungarun Marshlands is a semi-improvised performance-installation exhibited in the Martyn Myer Arena at the Southbank Campus of the University of Melbourne, on 26 September 2019. The supplementary audio is from a personal performance given four days later on the 30th. This was an improvised musical response to my memories of recording the Bungarun Marshlands, and the stories associated with place. The “*Crescendo to Dusk*” field recording was used as a foundation upon which I built musical content, including pre-recorded audio loops, being manipulated in real-time. Both “*Crescendo to Dusk*” and *Response to the Bungarun Marshlands* feature field recordings made on Nyikina Country.

Variations on Country is a 10-minute composition, arranged and produced at my home studio. This piece was commissioned by YIRRAMBOI for their ‘Resilience in Isolation’ program during Melbourne second Coronavirus Lockdown, the hardest restrictions of which lasted from July 7 until October 28, 2020. This piece is a response to the monotony of living in lockdown and my immediate soundscape, whilst calling upon my connection back to Jaadwa Country for strength. Field recordings were made at my unit in Carnegie, on Boon Wurrung Country, and at Ebenezer Mission, on Wergaia Country.

While each of these works are distinctive from the other, they do contain some stylistic and philosophical similarities. These Country-songs tend to eschew the notion of fixed rhythmic or technological repetition, depriving them of a steady metronomic pulse. Instead the works replicate both the sound and the experience of being in a place through a creative lens. Each piece is built around field-recordings of Country, either of an all-encapsulating soundscape, “sonic environment[s]”¹⁶⁵ or, in the case of a piece like *Feedback by the Train-Tracks*, specific soundmarks¹⁶⁶ of place. With the exception of “*Crescendo to Dusk*”, each piece features additional instrumentation as an extension of my own sonic expression within the context of place, or, in the case of *Wilin Singe the Fringe*, that of the performers.

Each piece holds strong connections to Country, which are realised through the use of audio field-recordings within the works. I suggest that in the context of these Country-songs, the use of field recordings constitute a collaborative practice between Country and myself. I understand the process of collaboration as being a creative methodology which results in an output which could not be fully realised without the contributing presences of all involved parties. By considering the concept of collaboration with Country, I suggest that the Country-songs featured in this chapter are directly resultant of my (and my collaborators’) engagement within Country. This engagement could be defined by multiple factors, such as my physically being on Country, recollection of experiences had on Country, or an emotional or spiritual resonance held in relation to Country.

In my experience, creative collaboration is typically considered an anthropocentric process, enacted between humans. In these settings, the concept of collaboration with Country may seem redundant. However, within Indigenous Australian discourses—in which Country holds spiritual, ancestral, and familial resonances—the role of Country in the collaborative process may be unquantifiable. The sentience that Country is understood to have in Indigenous Australian contexts, and its relationship to Indigenous sonic expression suggests that collaboration with Country is already an inherent part of Indigenous arts practices. For this reason, I have signified where field-recordings were made in order to

¹⁶⁵ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 274.

¹⁶⁶ For definitions of Schafer’s soundscape terminology, see Chapter 2: Western Understandings of Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Technologies

acknowledge and pay my respects the communities of those Countries, as well as ancestral and spiritual beings that continue to reside there.

Wilin Singe the Fringe

By June of 2018, I was five months into my postgraduate research candidature, and had spent much of that time considering how I could express a connection to Country in a performance setting. My thought process was around integrating field recordings of significant Countries into performances, and using those sounds as launching points for musical improvisation. My attention was drawn to compositions by American composer, La Monte Young. A pioneer at the forefront of the minimalist music scene in 1960s New York City, what makes Young's practice so unique is that it so naturally spans both mathematical and the spiritually resonant properties of music - the quantitative and the qualitative. I was particularly drawn to Young's application of sustained tones of a means of representing the sounds of his immediate environment. As a child, Young grew up in rural Idaho, where he spent much of his youth listening to the soundscape that immersed his house. Young recognised the musical qualities of these sounds, an idea he would later pursue in his creative endeavours. In conversation with American author and composer, William Duckworth, Young recalls:

... standing by a single telephone pole and listening to it humming. The same with the crickets. I remember going out at night with my dad to do the chores and listen to the crickets outside. Then later, I worked in a machine shop after school in highschool, and there I used to operate a lathe. I would whistle and sing tones over this lathe.¹⁶⁷

These experiences during Young's childhood later informed his compositional practice, in which he uses voices, instruments, or electronic tone generators to recreate the harmonic ratios present in the sounds he heard as a child. For example, in his work *The Second Dream of the High Tension Line Stepdown Transformer*, Young utilises four tones (derived from the

¹⁶⁷ William Duckworth, *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and 5 Generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York, NY: Schirmer Books, 1995), 222.

12th, 16th, 17th and 18th harmonics) played by a collective of eight muted trumpeters.¹⁶⁸ When layered together, these four pitches reproduce the harmonic ratios found in the electrical hum of the step-down power transformers near his childhood home.¹⁶⁹ In order to accurately reproduce unique harmonic interactions, Young has adopted the use of a self-devised tuning system based on natural harmonic ratios which requires instrumentation capable of moving out of the standardised, Western twelve-tone equal temperament.¹⁷⁰ Young's appeal to my own work manifested in his practice of listening to and reflecting upon his immediate soundscapes, which are then realised through his creative output.

During the time, I was examining Young's work in the context of collaborating with Country through a musical work, I was presented an opportunity to produce a live show as a representative of the Wilin Centre,¹⁷¹ to be performed at the 2018 Melbourne Fringe Festival.¹⁷² I was determined that the show should be the realisation of my preliminary examinations into collaboration with Country, and that the creative content of the performance should be a manifestation of my research to date. With that in mind, I anticipated that this performance would be an opportunity to put my research into practice and allow for personal development both creatively, academically, and within the context of my reclamation of culture. By documenting this performance, and the creative works that followed it, I determined that I would be documenting the progress of the research.

Wilin Singe the Fringe was the product of my own creative vision and research. The performance approached the notion of artistic collaborations with Country through a means of performance which utilised audio field recordings to inform creative musical decisions. The methodology that I proposed when applying for the show was that I would form soundscapes (a preliminary term for Country-song) using both field recordings and electronic sounds produced by synthesizers. The soundscapes produced would then be responded to

¹⁶⁸ La Monte Young, *The Second Dream of the High Tension Line Stepdown Transformer from the Four Dreams of China* (Gramavision, R2 79467, 1991), CD.

¹⁶⁹ *The Second Dream of the High Tension Line Stepdown Transformer from the Four Dreams of China*.

¹⁷⁰ Kyle Gann, "La Monte Young's the Well-Tuned Piano," *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 1 (1993): 135-40.

¹⁷¹ The Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development, situated at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne.

¹⁷² The Melbourne Fringe Festival is an annual event held in Melbourne, Australia that showcases artists from a range of creative disciplines and champions freedom of artistic expression.

creatively by a series of (human) musical collaborators through means of structured improvisation.

To realise this vision, I formed a band, whose lineup was consistent with a typical rock band: guitar, bass, drums, voice, and keyboards. The choice to model off of a rock band was a deliberate decision. I foresaw the lineup as means to allow audiences an entry-point, a musical perspective with which they were familiar. This assumes that the demographic of our Melbourne-based audience would be familiar with a typical rock music structure. My intention was that from this setting of relative familiarity, I would then provide the audience with a gateway towards less familiar sonic territories. As I was coming to understand my cultural heritage from my experiences within Western forms of music, I wanted my audience to begin to understand their own relationships to, and the importance Country through that same musical lens. While I would have liked the opportunity to perform the works in non-standard tunings, as Young often does, it is not practical to do so using rock instrumentation.

Considering that the performance features the contribution of other musicians, I acknowledge that I am only speaking here from my own position. The insight I share is my own, and other performers may have experienced the work and considered their input differently. As the creative leader of the group, it was my responsibility to identify and recruit the performers, and relay my vision and the themes of the project to them. The conception of the performance was my own, and for that reason I feel I am qualified to talk about the overarching intentions and outcomes associated with the work.

The performance consisted of four key movements: 'Acknowledgement,' 'Fire,' 'Natural Country,' and 'Urban Country.' Each movement was built upon field recordings, and some pre-determined harmonic, rhythmic, or lyrical themes, that were then developed through responsive improvisation. I wanted the music to flow naturally, and for each performance to be unique. For this reason, these musical themes were kept vague, using simple signifiers such as the key-signature. The field recordings were looped, and included the crackle of an open fire, waves lapping at the shore, and urban environments, which were embedded elements of the instrumental line-up. Using the terminology of Schafer, these field recordings

could be considered keynote sounds¹⁷³ of the Country-song.¹⁷⁴ These sounds are intended to exist in the background of the soundscape, however their presence is a crucial in providing located context for the movements.

In total, we had approximately six hours of rehearsal time prior to the performance, mostly an opportunity to ensure that the technology worked, and the performers were able to get a feel for one another. During this time, the broad trajectory of the performance duration was explained to the performers. ‘Acknowledgement’ would open the show, performing as a duo of vocalist, John Wayne Parsons and me. Here I played the field recordings, processed John Wayne’s vocal performance with effects, and performed harmonic backing on the synthesizer. This movement acted as a performed acknowledgement of Country, incorporating the sounds of the ocean, and layering loops of John Wayne’s singing, as if to conjure forth the voices of his ancestors. ‘Fire’ would incorporate the crackles of a campfire, and I suggested to the performers that we evoke a sense of familiarity, comfort, and a safe place to converse. ‘Natural Country’ would incorporate sound recording of soft wave swells, which I had recorded in Grantville during a field-trip the year prior, as well as the sound of rainfall recorded in Murrumbena (where I was living at the time). I suggested that this movement be more dynamic, beginning with a soft sense of peace, before slowly shifting upwards in volume and harmonic intensity. This was intended to evoke the calmness, and ferocity of nature. Immediately following this was the ‘Urban Country’ movement, which focussed on noise and dissonance. It featured the sound of railway boom-gate bells, and sharp, electronic noises. The concept of this piece was to an overwhelming reflection of Melbourne’s city soundscape.

The performance was given twice, the first was the commissioned performance for the Melbourne Fringe Festival, at the Lithuanian Club in North Melbourne, which lasted approximately 50 minutes. The second performance took place approximately three weeks later in Federation Hall, at the Southbank campus of the University of Melbourne. The performance was abridged to approximately half an hour, while maintaining each of the

¹⁷³ For definitions of Schafer’s soundscape terminology, see Chapter 2: Western Understandings of Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Technologies

¹⁷⁴ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 9-10.

movements. This, however, seemed to work in favour of keeping the performance concise, particularly in the context of the evening being a student showcase.

PLAY AUDIO: 01-1 Singe the Fringe Acknowledgement



Figure 1: Performing the Fringe, Wurundjeri Country, 15th September 2018

L-R: Colin Andrews, John Wayne Parsons, Michael Julian, James Howard, Allara Briggs Pattison, Fred Gesha

The opening movement, ‘Acknowledgement’ demonstrates the process of conversing with the sounds of Country through music. It begins with the sound of crashing waves, recorded at Millowl (Phillip Island) on Boon Wurrung Country. Several weeks earlier, John Wayne Parsons and I took a day-trip there to make recordings for this project. We knew we wanted the sounds of waves to be integrated into the works, especially given the significance of water to John Wayne’s own singing practice and cultural connections. Through his Torres Strait Islander heritage, he has a strong connection to the water. That connection is central to identity, to the stories and lifestyles of his community and cultural expression.

When coming together with John Wayne in anticipation of the performance, I outlined my plan for the four movements and the themes of each piece. Knowing John Wayne held a repertoire of cultural songs composed by community members of the Kemer Kemer Meriam Le (eastern island nations of the Torres Strait) and by family, I asked him if there were specific songs he wanted to share in the three movements which featured vocals (‘Acknowledgement,’ ‘Fire,’ and ‘Natural Country’).

For the first movement, John Wayne sang a Torres Strait Islander emeret wed (“old song”¹⁷⁵), *Ter Ge*.¹⁷⁶ For the second, he sang a song written by him and his sister, Luana Pitt,¹⁷⁷ to honour their father, Johnny Horatio Parsons—*Daddy, Real Cool Dude*. And for the third movement, he sang an adaptation of a song written by Luana, *Mother Earth*. In a later conversation with me, John Wayne recalls, “even when you came to sit down at the table, and you said, ‘oh, this one’s about nature,’ and I said, ‘oh, I’ve got a song about mother earth,’ ... it sort of complimented that.”¹⁷⁸ What was important to us was finding songs that were culturally important to John Wayne, and simultaneously conveyed the narrative of each movement.

‘Acknowledgement’ began with the soft, looping sounds of water lapping at the beach shore. Once this keynote was established, I added swells of synthesizer tones on top—elongated chords that rose and fell timbrally. This was intended to integrate the sounds of Country with the sounds of musical expression into one place. The introduction of these tones also indicated to John Wayne which key to sing in. He began by vocalising non-verbal, sustained ‘ahhs’—which I then processed in a looping pedal. I would then feed the looping vocalisations back into the performance, which John Wayne could hear and respond to.

The looping of the waves, the vocals, and the synthesizer notes were all asynchronous, allowing for a very natural development of the music, which further shifted as the synthesizer timbres and notes changed. In the space we created, instrumental and extra-musical sounds co-existed, each living independently of the other, but contributing to the whole. This instance of performance allowed us to demonstrate the interconnectedness of Country, community and identity, and the practice of deep listening in furthering our understandings of these relationships.

In the weeks following the performances, John Wayne and I discussed the methodology of vocal sampling and layering. For John Wayne, this was the first opportunity he had had to

175 John Wayne Parsons, interview by James Howard, 9th August, 2021, Mentone, Victoria, Australia.

176 “Ter Ge is a song about the ocean, and it’s the sound and the motion of the waves that are crashing at the edge of the reef.”

Source: "Interview with John Wayne Parsons."

177 Luana (Mirror Child) sadly passed away shortly prior to the publication of this thesis. I respectfully acknowledge her life, and offer my condolences to her family and community. For me, her memory will live on through the beautiful lyrics I had the distinct pleasure of hearing John Wayne sing when we shared the stage.

178 John Wayne Parsons, interview by James Howard, 29th January, 2019, Southbank, Victoria, Australia.

perform in such a way, responding to his own performance with the aid of technology. John Wayne emphasised the way the technology was used to generate mnemonics for connecting to Country during the performance:

I remember thinking about the depths of that ocean, where them ancestors may have lost their lives, or travelled on that water ... when you was looping that voice, it sounded like the ancestors ... I just felt like that, the waves how they rolled in, and the voice was sort of rolling on top of each other ... that was a good feeling.¹⁷⁹

What became apparent through our discussions was the fact that a technological process (the digital sampling and replaying of voice) facilitate the ways in which we consider our relationships to Country. By playing these field-recordings, a hybridisation is at play, at which point modern sound technology has contributed to the spiritual tuning of a performance. This indicated to me the potential for harnessing sound technologies to strengthen my own connection to culture in a creative setting, and demonstrates a path forward for intersections between sound technology and culture as described in the Literature Review.

PLAY AUDIO: 01-2 Singe the Fringe Urban Country

The final movement, 'Urban Country' centred around me leading the band while playing electric guitar in an octave tuning (all strings tuned in octaves of the same note, E). This was the first project in which I played the guitar using this tuning system. The field recording used in this piece was that of rail-crossing bells, which were layered into a cacophonous, industrial wave of sound. This represented the noisiness of urban living, blocking out and changing the natural song of Country. The movement was performed loud, at a deliberately overwhelming level. Double-bassist, Allara Briggs Pattison was instructed to centre her groove around a fundamental E note, as I led guitarist, Fred Gesha, and keyboardist, Colin Andrews through a series of scales following the circle of fifths moving downwards (E-A-D-G-C-F-B \flat -E \flat -A \flat -D \flat -G \flat -B-E). As this proceeded over the next few minutes, the musicians had an opportunity to theoretically play every possible chromatic scale in the European scalaric

¹⁷⁹ "Interview with John Wayne Parsons."

system over the droning E key-note. The introduction of each new scale pushed us further and further into dissonant territory, until you're playing as far from the root as possible (around the F, B \flat , and E \flat scales) before returning towards a harmonic consonance.

During the penultimate scale, the B, we extended our playing. The B-E relationship is a V-I, which offers a musical resolution. By drawing out the fifth, we prolonged the resolution back to the first, increasing the audience's anticipation of the final resolved chord. This segment of the performance was effectively a sonic representation of the assault of structural colonisation on our senses. I wanted the audience to feel uncertainty, and unease here - the sensation of First Nations people living inside colonial structures. During this movement, I noted that several people removed themselves from the theatre, particularly during the second performance. I could not have been more thrilled. By responding in this way, I surmised that there may have been members of the audience who were unable to handle the stress and tension of the music. In that regards, the piece accomplished exactly what was intended.

Wilin Singe the Fringe demonstrated the affective power of sound as a conduit for Country. It was important that Country was centred during the performance, being the foundational element upon which the music was built from. This was achieved by ensuring that each piece began with the field recordings, through the naming of the movements, and through John Wayne's lyric choices.

'Mother Earth, she is our home/she shields us, and feeds us with spirituality/she whispers, "my children grow"' he sings during 'Natural Country.' Adapting lyrics written by his sister, Luana, John Wayne emphasises the intertwined relationship between First Nations Australians, our Country, our families, and cultural expressions. The beauty and the ferocity of Country is expressed through this performance, as well as the violence of colonisation. During subtler moments ('Acknowledgement,' 'Natural Country'), audience members shed tears, during moments of intensity ('Urban Country'), they left. To me, these visceral reactions are a testament to the ongoing story of our Country, amplified through musical expression. At this early stage of the research development, it proved to me that the affective properties of music held a key to understanding my own cultural heritage, and my broader understandings of Country and place.

Feedback by the Train-Tracks

Following *Wilin Singe the Fringe*, and my conversations with John Wayne around the application of sound technology as a cultural strengthener, I took the opportunity to transition these themes from the live stage, into the recording studio. Since first developing my recording practice around 2011, I have worked from a home studio, in my living room on Boon Wurrung Country. What's important to note is that this is a place of personal familiarity. When not composing or recording, it also acts as a space for me to eat my meals, read books, write postgraduate theses, catch up with friends over a glass of wine, amongst countless other things. That is to say, that it is a place of comfort and ease, which in turn gives me the opportunity to experiment while recording and producing without the stress of external factors such as studio hire costs.

The studio recordings immediately following the performance were a direct response to elements of the Fringe shows - particularly incorporating the boom-gate bells of the 'Urban Country' movement. There was a distinct reason I was so drawn to these field recordings. I made the recordings at the train-crossing near my house on Murrumbeena Road, on May 28th, 2018. This was just one day prior to the crossing being permanently removed and replaced by a rail overpass. I was determined to capture the sound of these bells before they vanished, as I had a close emotional relationship with them - albeit an overwhelmingly negative one. Since living in the area from October 2017, the level-crossing had been a source of regular frustration. I would often find myself sitting in my car as the gates blocked me from my so-close-yet-so-far destinations for up to fifteen minutes at a time. Sometimes I needn't even cross the railroad tracks, but the amount of traffic backed up would ensure I was trapped in the grid-lock. All the while I would hear the clanging of the rail-crossing bells mocking me as I sat powerless in my car. I knew that the bells would soon be dismantled for good, and for some reason I felt the need to make peace with them. Perhaps I was pre-empting nostalgia. Political promises had been made that all level-crossings in the state of Victoria would eventually be dismantled - meaning that soon these sounds might be permanently lost.

Listening to the field recordings, I paid close attention to the pitch of the bells - identifying them as having a fundamental tone of 260Hz (slightly flatter than middle-C), and was able to pick out several series of natural overtones above the root. My aim for the composition was to evoke the sensation of an auditory-memory, presenting them as a hazy representation of the bells as I hear them in my mind. My experience of memory is that recollection rarely plays out in a linear fashion, instead it is like a cluster of emotions evoking sensual stimuli like auditory and visual information. By recording these bells, I enacted the process of schizoponia,¹⁸⁰ removing the sound from their original source. Not only did I shift the bells from their original place and time, but through this composition, I will demonstrate how I also shifted their emotional affect on me as a listener.



Figure 2: Recording the Bells, Boon Wurrung Country, 28th May 2018

I posit that most people living in metropolitan Melbourne would still identify these bells as being familiar soundmarks of place. While manipulating the bell recording, I observed that by interacting with these sounds on a creative level, almost immediately my relationship with

¹⁸⁰ For discussions of schizoponia, see Chapter 2: Western Understandings of Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Technologies

them was changing. While the raw field recording still clearly represented the rail-crossing bells, the process of reevaluating and manipulating them in a musical context led me to feeling far more at ease, and less agitated by their aesthetic qualities. The creative process created a hyper-reality for the sounds to exist within,¹⁸¹ mutating beyond their natural life and the way that listeners would hear them.

During the composition process, I decided to tune the music to the fundamental bell tone. I tuned a guitar to octaves, matching the fundamental of the bell - each string at either 260Hz, or an octave-equivalent. I improvised a performance in my studio by playing the recording back through my phone speakers, which were held about the guitar pickup to excite the strings in sympathetic resonance.¹⁸² I positioned myself holding the guitar in front of an amplifier. As the strings were excited by the bell recording, coupled with the high-gain settings on the amp, a feedback loop was produced which rang at the fundamental tone of the original bell recording, as well as a series of over- and undertones. The result of this was an overwhelmingly immersive recording experience, during which time the whole house shook due to the volume of the amplifier. This engagement with the sound, amplification to extremes, and its (un)natural effect on the instruments and the space around me was a means of creating the hyper-realities outlined by Rodaway.¹⁸³ These raw recordings were then sliced up in Ableton, and arranged into a cohesive piece. The arrangement process occasionally used audio manipulation, such as reversing, re-pitching, or the addition of reverb to generate new sonic soundscapes. My creative interventions are apparent in my recording, processing, and editing of the original audio files - effectively centring my own interpretation of the audio and making my role as the recording agent clear.

PLAY AUDIO: 02 Feedback by the Train-Tracks

In the context of my Country-songs I looked towards non-conventional ways to apply instrumentation to the compositions. For *Feedback*, I turned towards the electric guitar. Being able to amplify the instrument made it far easier to manipulate it timbrally by incorporating

¹⁸¹ For discussions of hyper-reality, see Chapter 2: Western Understandings of Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Technologies

¹⁸² The phenomenon in which a passive object resonates in response to external sound vibrations of the same frequency. In this case, the vibration of the bell recording sits at 260Hz, and thus by playing it in proximity to the strings (also tuned to 260Hz), they also vibrate.

¹⁸³ Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*, 175.

additional effects to the audio signal. The amplification of the instrument offered me a new palette to create sounds with, contrasting against the sound of the synthesizer. Inspired by the innovative work of Glenn Branca's guitar symphonies, I experimented with his approach to tuning the instrument in an octave-system.

Glenn Branca was an American composer whose focus was on avant-garde applications of the electric guitar, often in symphonic settings. Active as a composer and performer from the late 1970s up until his death in 2018, Branca's playing style was typically non-conventional. He modified many of his guitars to further increase their sonic potential, such as by adding additional frets to the neck, using alternatives to guitar strings (such as wire), and atypical tuning systems. His guitar symphonies often utilised the octave-tuning system that I too adopted in my practice.

Octave tuning refers to a guitar setup in which all the strings are tuned to the same note, either at the exact same pitch or across octaves. The style of tuning first became popular when it was used by Lou Reed in The Velvet Underground, which lent itself heavily to their distinct sound in songs such as 'Venus in Furs' and 'All Tomorrow's Parties'.¹⁸⁴ The use of the octave guitar in the band's popular song format has been described as the 'point of articulation' between the folk and rock leanings of Reed, and the avant-garde practice of violist John Cale, who was also a member of La Monte Young's Theatre of Eternal Music.¹⁸⁵ By using the octave tuning in my own practice, I aim to acknowledge both my roots in Western songwriting structures, as well as the potential for new soundscapes and sound palettes in non-conventional forms.

Typically, when tuned in octaves, I tend to tune all three lower strings to an E (a whole-note above the D-string found in a standard guitar tuning), and the upper strings to an E an octave above (equivalent to the high-E found in standard tuning). Focussing on E as the fundamental pitch was influenced by my own comfortable singing range. By doing this I was effectively tuning the guitar to the natural resting pitch of my own voice. This notion prompts me to recall a conversation I had with Ngarinyin elder, Matthew Dembalali Martin (Dembal), in which we discussed the construction of bondorra—clap-sticks.

¹⁸⁴ Lou Reed et al., *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (US: Verve Records, 1967), V-5008.

¹⁸⁵ Mike Daley, "Lou Reed's 'Ostrich' Tuning as an Aesthetic Point of Articulation," *Rock Music Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 149.

James Howard (JH): So, when you're making those clapsticks, I imagine that you're probably testing it every now and then. And there's a certain special sound that you're trying to hear. Can you tell me a little bit about that sound?

Matthew Dembalali Martin (MM): How you hold that stick, you put it in the palm of your hand, and you hold it. And you hit the stick. If you don't get that sound, you turn it around, or swap the stick around, hold the other one. You get the good sound. The louder sound, you get your voice clear. So, when you sing, you sing clear with the clapstick.

JH: So, it's sort of got to match your voice a little bit?

MM: It's just like when you've got a guitar, you've got to tune it up. You get the tune, you strum a chord, you put the right chord on, and you can sing. You know you can sing songs.

JH: So, the clapstick has to, almost like, match your voice?

MM: Yes. It sets your voice free, you know? And clear.

JH: Do you think—so, would each person have their own clapstick sound?

MM: That's the main thing, you've got to have your own. Your own clapstick goes with your voice. The sound.¹⁸⁶

Here, Dembal makes clear the connection between a performer and their instrument. In the case of the singer, the instrument has to be able to support the voice in such a way that it can reach its full potential. In the case of the clapstick, it has to be carved, constructed, and performed so that a clear tone rings out at a pitch suiting the vocal range of the singer. The clapstick, crafted and struck in a given way, becomes the sonic extension of the artist's identity. I discuss the tuning of the instrument, but it goes beyond the notes and overtones of the emitted sound. The sound itself causes a visceral reaction in the performer. Hearing it,

¹⁸⁶ Matthew Martin, interview by James Howard, July 17th, 2019, Mowanjum Community Arts Centre, Mowanjum, WA.

feeling it in their hands grants them the strength of mind to sing out. In a sense, this is a spiritual or emotional tuning—when sound and spirit align. Similarly, tuning the electric guitar and the rail-crossing bells together was allowing me to properly express my own musical response to the sounds, and reconsider the affect that they had on me.

Upon initially experimenting with the octave tuning system, I became aware of two primary motivations to continue using it. The first of these was the potential to produce rich harmonic content. Given the imperfections inherent in the instrument, it would be near impossible to attain perfect tuning across all six strings. By effectively utilising the inconsistencies of the instrument, I am able to construct unique timbres to contribute to the soundscapes in ways both aesthetically pleasing, but not entirely consonant. These slight imperfections produce a chorus effect, as described below:

... if two strings on the guitar are both tuned to A, but one is actually resonating at a frequency of 442 Hertz (vibrations per second), while the other is resonating at 440 Hertz, a beat of throb will be heard at a frequency of twice per second.¹⁸⁷

The second motivation for using octave-tuning was the ability to generate drones as I played. The creative use of the drone in my music practice allows me to emphasise the tonal centre of the piece. Just as R. Murray Schafer's definition of the soundscape features "keynote sounds"¹⁸⁸, the ability to emphasise central droning notes into the work allowed me to draw metaphorical connections between the music, and broader soundscapes. Returning to *Feedback by the Train-Tracks*, I was able to use the octave-tuned guitar to 'tune into' the pitch of the bell recordings, giving me the capability to respond creatively to the signal.

The completion of the *Wilin Singe the Fringe* performance, and the *Feedback by the Traintracks* composition marked the end of my first year of research candidature. At this stage of the research process, both the performative and recording practices I had been engaging with were showing a strengthening to culture. In the case of the performance, the collaborative process with the other players in the ensemble had been invaluable. Observing John Wayne Parsons' connection to his culture, Country, and family through his singing, and later discussing these observations with him, demonstrated the strength of utilising one's

¹⁸⁷ Daley, "Lou Reed's "Ostrich" Tuning as an Aesthetic Point of Articulation," 153.

¹⁸⁸ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 9-10.

creative practice in making those connections. Furthermore, the opportunity to work with a predominantly First Nations group of collaborators facilitated the opportunity for us to develop the performance in a way that best represented our sense of connection to culture, and to one another. By contrast, the recording process was more insular, in that I was only working with the soundscapes of Country directly, without the interpretations and influence of other players. This process helped me to train my ears, to engage with soundscapes of Country in a new manner, and would ultimately inform the creative works that followed.

Bungarun Marshlands, Western Australia - 18th July, 2019

(“Crescendo to Dusk”)

and

Response to the Bungarun Marshlands

In August 2019, having just returned from my fieldwork trip to the Kimberley, I was once again asked to contribute to Wilin’s engagement with the Melbourne Fringe Festival, this year called *Fan the Flames*. The second year of Wilin’s involvement with the festival consisted of a student showcase, instead of the previous year’s highlighting the work of a single student. As the Wilin Centre’s student body consists of a wide range of creative arts students, including those with performative and non-performative practices, there would be artworks showcased in a gallery setting, as well as a performance area. The gallery would be set up in the Octagon, a space within the University of Melbourne’s Southbank campus; and the performance area would be held in the Martyn Myer Arena, a space immediately adjacent, separated by a sliding glass door and a short walkway.

Michael Julian, events coordinator at the Wilin Centre (and *Singe the Fringe* drummer) recommended to me that my contribution could be a piece of reflection, informed by my fieldwork in the Kimberley, and potentially incorporating field recordings made there. I found myself faced with the question as to whether I should perform a piece, or provide a sound installation to the gallery area. I did not feel like the creative direction my soundscape work was taking was suited to a stage performance. Stylistically it was lending itself more to immersive, ambient aesthetics that don’t always make for engaging stage shows. I also did not want to be restricted by the requirement of creating a concise piece of music with a clear beginning-middle-end structure that would be necessary when giving a performance in an allotted time of approximately five minutes or so. However, I also was not feeling inspired to

compose a static long-form soundscape. Approaching the end of the second year of my research journey, I felt I was making new connections, and reassessing old ones within the context of my cultural identity at an incredibly rapid rate.

In order to accommodate my ever-evolving relationality to not only my cultural heritage, but also the new relationships I had forged through community engagement, I decided to take this opportunity to effectively hybridise my practice. The prospect of submitting a static work lead me to feel that I was prematurely giving up some hold of agency over my works, and by extension, my identity. My cultural identity had become something fluid, broken down like the caterpillar in the cocoon. I personally felt that if I submitted a piece for the installation, even a few days before the launch, I might not be able to recognise myself in it by the time the exhibition opened. I needed my contribution to be reflexive to the changes I was undergoing, and that would require more of an ongoing approach by me as the artist. This concept of the artwork reflecting changes in the artist is something that I explore further in relation to my songwriting in the next chapter.

I concocted a loose idea to contribute an installation that I was able to maintain a degree of interactivity with. It would be performed in real-time in the exhibition space. Despite the performative aspects, I hoped to minimise drawing attention to myself. Perhaps I would physically be in the space, making sonic changes through my laptop, but there would be no indication to the audience as to the purpose of my presence. I anticipated that my contribution to the exhibition would be totally auditory, merely accompanying the visual works of other artists.

In the weeks leading up to the launch, taking place on September 26th, 2019, the proposed project shifted and changed in small ways. While the core of the idea was still present - an installation that is manipulated in real-time by the artist - some practical changes needed to be made. I was conscious of the dominance sound can demand on the senses in a space. Given my preference for occasionally using harsh sounds in my compositions and performances, it seemed unfair not only on the patrons, but more importantly, my fellow arts students. If there was any chance my installation piece would infringe on the patrons' engaging with other artworks, I felt I would be undercutting the agency and opportunity of other artists. This was something I was determined to avoid. In grappling with this issue, I decided that I would ultimately produce two contributions to the *Fan the Flames* showcase, one of which would be a development of the other.

The first was to be a mostly untampered field recording that I made near Bungarun, and previously discussed in *Interlude I*. The recording I used for the installation took place in the late afternoon on July 18th, 2019. This particular recording was made with the blessing and guidance of elders of the Mowanjum Community, particularly Matthew Dembal Martin, and Ngarinyin singer and cultural knowledge holder, Pansy Nulgit.

PLAY AUDIO: 03-1 Crescendo to Dusk Extract

As discussed, my choice to use field recordings in my music practice stemmed from feeling the need to embody a collaborative relationship with Country within my creative output. This was then informed by my discussions in the Literature Review around the ways in which we, as Indigenous Peoples experience the act of listening to audio recording.¹⁸⁹ My own practice of field-recording tends to focus on the recordings of places I consider significant for the purpose of creative production. This process generally involves me passively being in a space and recording the sounds of those environments, be those spaces natural, or urban. The process of both procuring, and listening back to the recordings, itself acts as a source of inspiration, from which new creative developments emerge.

Music producer and researcher, Michael Gallagher proposes four primary modes of environmental field recording.¹⁹⁰ I will relay those four modes here in the context of Schafer and Krause's descriptive terminologies of soundscape as established in the Literature Review.¹⁹¹

Gallagher refers first to the "nature style," which aims to capture biophonic or geophonic soundscapes, aestheticising natural sound signals and deliberately exorcising anthrophonic sounds.¹⁹² This implies a certain amount of auditory curation from the recordist, who makes intentional attempts to capture soundscapes with minimal human interference. This could be a matter of recording in isolated areas, or later editing out segments of sound that feature human interference (for example, removing audio when a distant car drives by).

¹⁸⁹ For further discussion, see Chapter 2: Indigenous Engagement with Sound Recording Technologies

¹⁹⁰ Michael Gallagher, "Field Recording and the Sounding of Spaces," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 1 (2015): 564-68.

¹⁹¹ For Schafer and Krause's terminologies, see Chapter 2: Western Understandings of Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Technologies

¹⁹² Gallagher, "Field Recording and the Sounding of Spaces," 565-66.

Gallagher's second mode is the "soundscape style," which is more accepting of any and all sounds present within the recording space, including bio-, geo-, and anthrophonic sounds.¹⁹³ Whereas the "nature style" incorporated the potential of recording specific sound sourced, this "soundscape style" tends to focus on the broader sound-field without discrimination. In the "soundscape style," the curation of the recordist is limited to where and when the recording is made, and offers a more accurate, untampered snapshot of the environment.

Thirdly, Gallagher describes the "acousmatic style," a reference to the practice of composer and writer, Pierre Schaeffer.¹⁹⁴ Instead of the recording presenting a clearly identifiable sound source, this style invokes a deliberate obscuring of the source in order to evoke an emotional response in the listener.¹⁹⁵ By de-identifying the sound source, Schaeffer aimed to grant the listener a means by which they could more accurately analyse the aesthetic content of the sound without any preconceived notion of what it should be.

Gallagher's final suggestion is the "sound art style," which more broadly refer to field-recordings obtained by non-conventional means.¹⁹⁶ The intention of the "sound art style" is to bring into focus elements that are not able to be distinctly interpreted by the human ear. This may involve replacing the recording microphone with a tool which measures and records sonic elements anthropocentrically indiscernible. Examples of this might be recording the magnetic fields or radio waves emitted by electronics, or subtle vibrations picked up by contact-microphones.¹⁹⁷

Clearly the role and interactivity of the recordist varies greatly between each of Gallagher's modes of field recording. In my own recording practice, I attempt to maintain a balance between letting the recording reflect the full range of sounds present, in keeping with the "soundscape style." In certain circumstances, I will attempt to reduce the limitations of the microphone (such as any low-end distortion from the wind) by adjusting particular frequencies to maintain clearer sound quality. In the context of my work, I want Country to

¹⁹³ "Field Recording and the Sounding of Spaces," 565-66.

¹⁹⁴ Pierre Schaeffer, *In Search of a Concrete Music*, ed. Richard Taruskin, trans. Christine North and John Dack, California Studies in 20th-Century Music (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2012).

¹⁹⁵ Gallagher, "Field Recording and the Sounding of Spaces," 566-67.

¹⁹⁶ "Field Recording and the Sounding of Spaces," 567-68.

¹⁹⁷ "Field Recording and the Sounding of Spaces," 567-68.

be clearly represented in the recordings in a manner that respects these places. This is apparent in the difference between “*Crescendo to Dusk*”, in which I provide a mostly unaltered presentation of place, and then *Response to Bungarun Marshlands*, which manipulates the audio recording to represent my own experiences and memories of the place.



Figure 3: Recording the Bungarun Marshlands, Nyikina Country, 18th July 2019

The raw audio file for “*Crescendo to Dusk*” was recorded in stereo at 24b/48kHz (a relatively high-quality recording setting), using a Rode NT-4 stereo condenser microphone, recording into a Sound Devices 788T field recorder. On this occasion, I had recorded for approximately 90 minutes, however the final submitted work was edited down to 75 minutes, in order to remove the sound of distant helicopters. This deliberate curation of the audio on my part lends itself to the *nature style* of field recording, as outlined by Michael Gallagher.¹⁹⁸ I ultimately made the decision to exorcise these anthroponic sounds, as I wanted to present an idealised auditory snapshot of the area as an examination of the layering of natural sounds without human interference. Post-production of the track was kept to a minimum. This was mostly a matter of adjusting audio levels, and removing the sound frequencies below 30Hz (which mostly consists of low noise and rumble). I wanted to ensure that this exhibited piece was less a reflection of my creative choices, and almost an uncensored shot of the landscape (to use the camera as a metaphor). For this reason, I felt at ease about letting this recording

¹⁹⁸ "Field Recording and the Sounding of Spaces," 565-66.

exist without my input and real-time manipulation. The piece was not a personal reflection of identity, but a (mostly) unfiltered document of a place and time. I include discussion of the work in this thesis, however, as it offers foundational context to the *Response to Bungarun Marshlands*.

The field recording submission was titled *Bungarun Marshlands, Western Australia - 18th July, 2019 ("Crescendo to Dusk")*. It was installed in the Octagon area which hosted the main visual arts exhibition pieces. The sound of the Kimberley birdsong, wind, insects, and other spiritual inhabitants would be projected into the space, at a volume level set in such a way that it existed in the background as if it were a *keynote sound*.¹⁹⁹ Attendees to the space would be able to speak over the audio, and it would not particularly draw attention to itself. However, those that chose to actively listen to it would have the opportunity.

The artist statement printed on a pillar within the Octagon exhibition space read as follows:

The audio exhibited in the Octagon is a field recording I made in the marshlands nearby to the Bungarun Leprosarium, approximately 20km outside of Derby in Western Australia. The recording was made in cooperation with the Mowanjum Arts and Culture Centre to be installed in a new exhibition space. The proposed space replicates a typical painted cave site found in the Kimberley, home to the three Wandjina tribes: Ngarinyin, Worrorra, and Wunambal. Conversations with local elders helped to identify important sounds heard in cave sites, and efforts were made to ensure the recordings captured the living nature of the country.

The second piece followed my original proposal, a more deliberate and personal response to my fieldwork experience. This installation was situated in the Martyn Myer Arena itself, however it was not on the stage, rather in an open area behind the seating risers which patrons had to walk past to get to the performance area. The installation audio was run from my laptop, using Ableton as the performance software. I set up a table with a MIDI controller keyboard, which also featured sliders and rotary encoders so that I could manipulate the audio in real-time. There was a pair of speakers set up either side of me, and the audio was

¹⁹⁹ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 9-10.

set up in a stereo configuration. The space I occupied was mostly black, with a red wash highlighting my audio workstation in the middle of the room. The red lighting was a deliberate choice to summon the rich, red soil that makes up so much of the North-Central Kimberley, to the point that it begins to colour your skin and your soul. This was the only visual element of my installation. Again, this was deliberate to emphasise the sonic experience.

In relation to the layout of the whole *Fan the Flames* event, I intentionally situated myself in the space that was right in the middle ground between the Octagon's exhibition, and Martyn Myer Arena's stage. First, and most practically, being positioned there would allow me access to some foot-traffic as I fished for the ears of patrons walking from the main entrance in the Octagon to the seating for the performance section. On a symbolic level, I chose this space deliberately as a way to carve out my own space, and reflect my distinct creative and cultural identity. I did not feel the work that I was producing fit in with either the exhibited works, or the performance space, but somewhat of a hybrid space between the two.

The audio component was based around a short loop of the field-recording made in the Kimberley, of approximately 9 seconds. I then duplicated the track, pitching the first down an octave, and the second down two octaves. This also extended the playback time of the loop, so the first ran for approximately 19 seconds, and the second for 38 seconds. These two loops were then hard-panned apart from one another, and processed with additional reverb. As I had done previously with the *Feedback by the Train-Tracks* composition, I was hoping to evoke the sensation of an audio-memory. In my opinion, from an aesthetic standpoint, digital audio recording is too precise to serve as a representation of memory. Speaking from my own experience, sensory recollection in the mind is always imperfect and coloured by one's own experiences. By effectively 'distancing' the recording through the audio processing, I am trying to get closer to the foggy, non-linear sound one hears inside their head. Of course, sensory recollection is entirely subjective - and so this representation of audio-memory is based on my experience, and mine alone.

PLAY AUDIO: 03-2 300919 Response to Bungarun Marshlands Performance

As was the case in the exhibition space, in the context of the performed installation the field recording was acting as a keynote sound. Layered on top of this was a variety of tonal instrumentation, which included electric piano, synthesizer, octave-tuned guitar, and

harmonica. Extra timbral and rhythmic content was added via my own pair of clapsticks, and a looped tambourine rhythm. Each of these musical voices contributed a small series of short loops of varying length. Given that none of the lengths of looping audio were rhythmically aligned, this allowed the soundscape to be ever-evolving, and combinations of each instrument's melodic or timbral phrases would never repeat the same way twice. This technique of looping melodic phrases at varying time intervals was commonly used by Brian Eno in the 1970s, on albums such as *Discreet Music*,²⁰⁰ or *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*.²⁰¹ The notion of music as a part of the sonic environment has previously been explored by Brian Eno, particularly on his early forays into what he coined as 'ambient music' in the 1970s. At this time, Eno proposed a new way of hearing music, "as part of the ambience of the environment just as the colour of the light and the sound of the rain were parts of [the] ambience."²⁰²



*Figure 4: Performing Response to Bungarun Marshlands, Boon Wurrung Country, 26th September 2019
Photo credit: Tiffany Garvey*

²⁰⁰ Brian Eno, *Discreet Music* (Europe: Virgin EMI Records, ENOLP5, 602567750420, 1975), Record.

²⁰¹ *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (Europe: Virgin EMI Records, 1978), ENOLP6.

²⁰² *Discreet Music*.

My interface with the music was via a MIDI controller keyboard that I had loaned from the music department at the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Fine Arts and Music. Through this controller, I was able to interact with a variety of musical factors that I deemed necessarily to guide the progression of the piece. This included access to timbral controls, mimicking the interface of subtractive synthesizers, as well as the triggering and volume adjustment of different audio elements within the mix, and the application of spatial effects (such as reverbs or delays). In many ways, these different elements that I was able to control were aligned with the sorts of parameters I might have been modifying when mixing a recorded composition.

The use of the electric piano, the octave-tuned guitar, and the Sequential Prophet 6 synthesizer stemmed from my own familiarity with the instruments. In particular, during our discussions, Matthew Dembal Martin spoke about a musician's instrument as being a part of their identity.²⁰³ In that context, he was discussing how the carver of a bondorra (or clapstick) would shape the sound of their instrument to that of their singing voice. As if they were tuning the instrument to their own spirit. Due to the individuality of each performer's instrument, Dembal claimed that if he heard sticks being played some distance away, he would be able to identify the player based on their distinct sound.

As discussed in the Introduction, I was initially drawn to the synthesizer as an instrument due to its inherent capability to carve unique and interesting sounds. This philosophy of timbral structuring has expanded over the years to audio production in general, using a variety of sound sources, and layering, processing, and changing them within the context of my arts practice. A key aim of my practice is the projection my own cultural identity, stories, and experiences via sound. The soundscapes rely primarily on non-verbal communication. Naturally, there are extraneous materials that accompany the works, providing context to aid listeners a perspective on the creation of the work. However, the works themselves rely predominantly on tonal and timbral changes. The way in which I build up layers of sound are designed to relay my experiences in place and the journey through my cultural reclamation. The works exist in a space that is both objective and subjective, drawing on physical place and spiritual connections.

²⁰³ Martin, "Interview with Matthew Martin."

Considering this, the particular inclusion of these sound sources are direct reflections of my musical identity, which continues to inform my cultural identity. Within the timbres of these instruments, I can hear the years of musical immersion and influence, which has accompanied and shaped my understanding of self and the world around me. If this Country-song (and the Country-songs I continue to produce) are about my response to a place - and particularly, my place in and changing relationship to Country - it is important to ensure that these elements of aural identity are included. And in the same way that my identity has shifted and changed, so too do the layerings of these instruments in their unsynchronised melodic and harmonic loops.

The performed installation was titled *Response to the Bungarun Marshlands*. The artist statement published on the wall of the exhibition space read, 'Following a month of fieldwork in the North-Central Kimberley, this improvised audio installation is a response to the landscapes and histories encountered there.' I enacted the performed installation twice, each taking place either side of the allotted performance time. The first instance of it was in all honesty, a blowout. The majority of patrons kept to the Octagon space during this time, and very few ventured into my allotted area. Those who did so seemed unaware that my performed installation was a part of program. At one stage, in the midst of the proceedings, I was approached by a patron asking me what time the show started, seemingly oblivious to the fact that I was an artist engaged with the program. A part of me could only laugh at the absurdity of the situation, whilst trying to shrug off the blunted blow of disappointment that so few had engaged with my work.

Fortunately, the second instance of the installation was allowed to become more fully formed. I had significantly more concentrated foot-traffic at the conclusion of the evening's performance, and approximately a dozen people stayed in the space to witness the work. The audio volume and use of light and darkness in the space allowed me to produce a wholly immersive experience. I really appreciated the reflexivity that producing a responsive installation allowed me. Knowing that the particular performed installation was unique to that place and time is very special to me personally, as it mirrors the way I sense my own cultural identity as being in an ever-changing state. Within the work were representations of both the Country that I had visited, filtered through my remembrance of experiences in those places, and my own experiences and growth as an artist and an Indigenous man.

Going forward, I appreciate that I will not always have the opportunity to produce works for commissions or spaces that allow the same level of real-time interactivity. However, the *Fan the Flames* installation piece did prove the concept to be viable. It is an initial instance of my blurring the ties between my own cultural identity, and the Countries in which I find myself. In the same way that *Feedback by the Train-Tracks* was an ode to a past experience, *Response to the Bungarun Marshlands* is a work that emphasises my own connection to a specific place and time. I kept written journals during my trip to the Kimberley, and while those documents are invaluable to referencing specific dates and events - it is the audio document that aids as an emotional mnemonic. Listening to the raw *Bungarun Marshlands* field recordings helps me to cast my mind back to that space, and then it is hearing my response, interacting with the sounds and melodies I composed in response to the experience that assists in the recollection of my emotional state during that time.

Variations on Country

Variations on Country was composed during Melbourne's Covid-19 lockdown period in August 2020—a circumstance that is embedded in the realisation of the piece. The work is an artistic means of reconciling the prolonged state of isolation with my cultural connections to the Jaadwa Country I was unable to visit. The piece runs for approximately ten minutes, and as with previous Country-song pieces, has no steady tempo or time signature. The composition is a result of living in that state of isolation for several long months. Waking up each morning, keeping a regular work routine, but also trying to introduce variation as a way to stave off the effects of cabin fever. I began taking time each day to listen closely to my immediate soundscape - the hum of the fridge, the steady flow of traffic outside, noisy neighbours, and the ever-present tick of the kitchen clock. I wondered how my constant immersion in these sounds might impact me directly. All the while, I longed to return to Jaadwa Country, to breathe in the air, and be strengthened by the ground beneath my feet.

On the 16th of March 2020, a state of emergency was officially declared by the Victorian State Government in response to the outbreak of coronavirus. Early on I often jested that if I was due to experience a pandemic in my lifetime, better it be during the process of writing up a thesis. But there can be no doubt that the restriction of one's movements, for however noble the cause might be, can have considerable effects on one's mental and physical state. Being cut off from friends and family with the exception of communicating primarily via the

computer which I already felt I was spending too much time in front of. I began taking the time each day engaging via listening to my immediate soundscape. As the months went by, I wondered at the effects of my constant immersion in this space, and considered examining this state of being through my creative practice.

That opportunity came to pass when I responded to a callout for applications from Yirramboi, an arts and music festival based in Melbourne, which caters for First Nations artists. Yirramboi were offering financial support through a program called ‘Resilience in Isolation’, designed to ensure that Indigenous artists were able to create new work during Australia’s lockdown period. All mediums of creative practice were allowed, and it would be showcased through Yirramboi’s social media platforms. Having been aware of Yirramboi for some time, and knowing several other artists who had been engaged with the festival, I was very keen to take part in the program, especially one that would allow me to examine my creative practice, cultural identity, and the ways in which the lockdown period had affected me.

I began by identify keynote sounds in the soundscape of my unit in Carnegie on Boon Wurrung Country. These being the sounds that provide the fundamental tonality of a place, which Schafer suggests might affect one’s behaviour.²⁰⁴ The two most prominent sounds emanating from within the four walls of my unit were the hum of the refrigerator, and the tick of the clock in the kitchen. While I was often coexisting with these sounds while not paying them significant attention, I noted that in the dead of the night, they could almost seem deafening. The tick of the clock rhythmically piercing the silence, a reminder that time was pressing on. I have a deadline for my thesis and I will be spending the last year of my 20s in a state of isolation. Meanwhile, outside my window was the subdued sound of traffic, birdsong, the noisy neighbours and the gurgle of plumbing in the units over my back fence. I recorded all these sounds using a Rode NT4 condenser microphone feeding a Zoom H5 sound recorder. I wanted to create a piece of work where the foundation was built up of those same keynote sounds, and layered with my own musical expressions.

Before finalising my pool of collated field recordings, there was one more sound field that I wished to harness - one that represented the *unheard* sounds that exist around us. Using

²⁰⁴ Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 10.

a small device called a Soma Ether, I was able to tap into the electromagnetic fields which emanate from electrical appliances. This specific practice of field recording was previously outlined by Gallagher as the *sound art style*,²⁰⁵ the collection of sounds beyond the perception of human hearing. Holding the device up to my Wi-Fi modem and router, I picked up some distinctive oscillations that pulsed in time with the LED lights on the router's display. I was capturing an auditory representation of the electronic devices with which I communicated every day. The Internet, so essential to quality of life in the 21st Century, whether it be for business or pleasure, that it might be considered a necessary right to access. The sound I picked up was oddly familiar to me, I couldn't place where I might have heard it before, but it almost felt like I had drawn my attention to a sound that was always there.

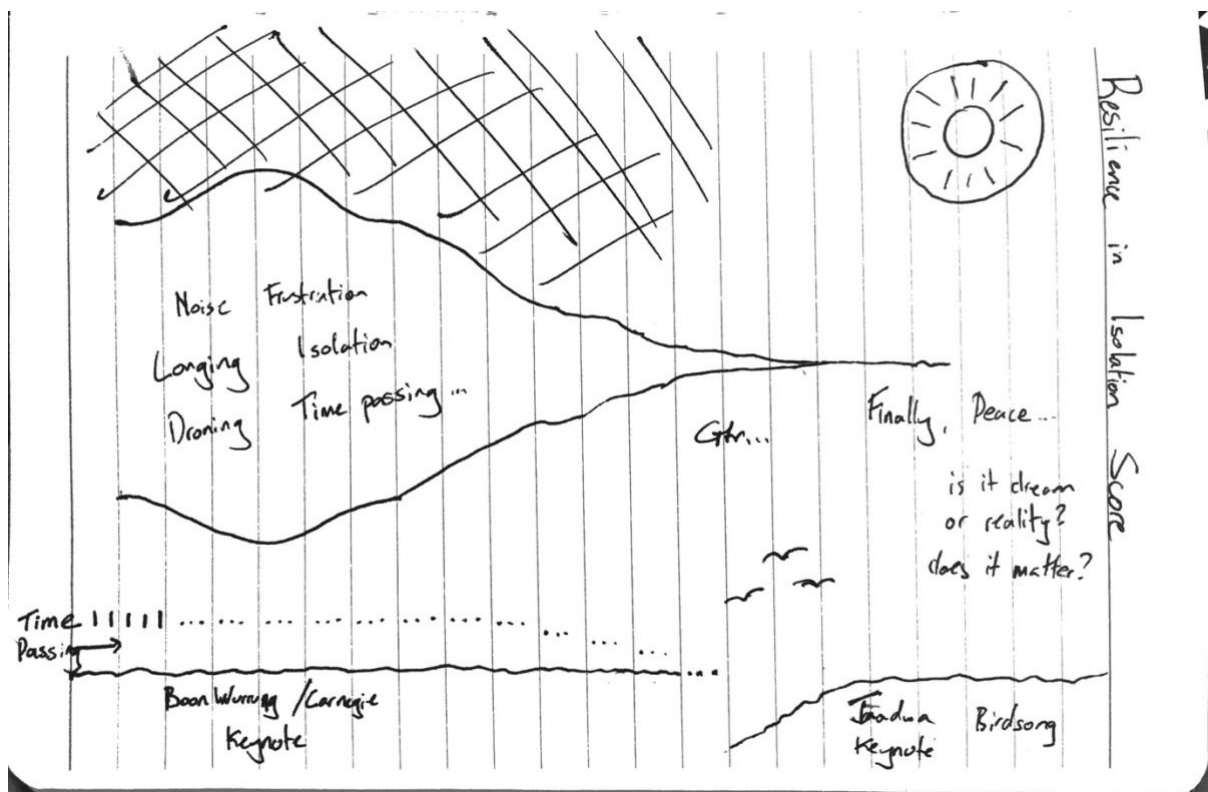


Figure 5: Variations on Country dynamic sketch

With that, the period of field recording was complete, and I began the process of composing a musical response, to both my soundscape, and my personal frustrations that accompany prolonged isolation. I layered the field recordings with the ticking clock as the main focal point, a metronome equal parts distracting and ignorable. I used the refrigerator

²⁰⁵ Gallagher, "Field Recording and the Sounding of Spaces," 567.

hum as a noise source, sweeping and accentuating frequencies to slowly build intensity, reflecting an inner-anxiety.

As I began the musical recording process, I sketched out a visualisation in my notebook to help me determine the narrative and over-all dynamics of the final piece. There was a line indicating the keynote sounds of the recording, the suburban soundscapes, the clock, and so on, that was ever-present. Even when you couldn't pick it out, it was always there. There were two lines that tracked from left-to-right across the page, sitting above the keynote line and mirroring each other. This was a guide to which I would arrange the sounds. It begins with a sudden burst of anxious energy, of confusion, asynchronous rhythms and noise. The frustration and helplessness of isolation. That would slowly subside, such violent energy can't be maintained indefinitely.

And as the frustrations and the noise subsides, what should remain? Being locked down in Melbourne dictated that I could not stray further than five kilometres from my place of residence. I thought back to my period of fieldwork on Jaadwa Country in October the year before. The longing I felt to return to Country must have been felt by so many other First Nations people across Melbourne, Victoria, or even Australia. Ultimately, I wanted this work to reflect not only the stress of lockdown, but the hope, longing, and fantasy of returning to Country. For that reason, as the high-energy first half of the work subsides, the ticking clock and suburban sounds of Carnegie fade away, and I introduced a different field recording I made on Jaadwa Country the year prior. This was a recording of birdsong made during a covert drive to Ebenezer Mission, a site of significance to local communities, being a mission station where First Nations peoples were forced to live in the latter half of the 1800s.

And that outlines the narrative progression of this piece, from mundane beginnings, to sharp turns into auditory stress and over-stimulation, to the fantasy of returning to Country. Whether that fantasy remains dream or become reality, it is a glimmer of hope for new beginnings and moving on from the pandemic. Despite being an instrumental recording, I endeavoured for the sounds, their arrangements, and production to tell a story.

PLAY AUDIO: 04 Variations on Country

I used a variety of instruments and sound sources for this piece, recorded over the period of around a year. Some instrumental parts were repurposed from old sketches and drafts. Fortunately, I record many of my sketches in the same key (G major, or the relative E minor),

so constructing a collage of different sound sources is often seamless. The instrumentation is as follows:

Percussive guitar
Bird guitar
Lawnmower guitar
Droned guitar
Droned cello
Droned trumpets
Bird violins
Inverted bass synthesizer
Wandering synthesizer
Yearning harmonica
Various arrangements of crash and hi-hat cymbals, plus tambourine and cooking pot
Ceaseless Refrigerator
Ceaseless Kitchen Clock
Electromagnetic fields of Wi-Fi modem
The world outside my laundry window on Boon Wurrung Country, August 2020
Birds on Jadawadjali/Wotjobaluk/Wergaia Country, 19 th October 2019

Before continuing, I think it is important to discuss the significance of my use of the synthesizer as a means of aural expression. The instrument is perhaps the most central, foundational aspect of my musical practice. My fascination for the instrument as a young teenager was the prime motivating factor for pursuing a musical hobby. At that age, I was

listening to pioneering German electronic bands, such as Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream, and English experimental producer, Brian Eno, all of whom had used this impenetrable instrument called the ‘synthesizer’ to create distinct sonic worlds that would be impossible to conjure forth using solely acoustic instruments.

I use the term ‘impenetrable’ here to describe the physical layouts of many of the synthesizers I was seeing in pictures of artists in the studio. The only recognisable element in any given instrument would probably be the keyboard, derived from that of a piano. On the instrument’s panel, however, there would be dozens of control knobs, each with a distinctive function that alters the produced sound in some way. The interface of the instrument allows deliberate control of Roederer’s three defining characteristics of sound, as outlined in the literature review: pitch, loudness, and timbre.²⁰⁶ I was fascinated with the idea that there might potentially be an infinite variety of sounds available to the technically skilled operator, dialling in precise values to produce wonderfully musical results. It seemed to be the perfect amalgamation of science and art. The fine precision of the controls leading to the creation of subjectively beautiful, musical sounds. I consider the use of the synthesizer important in my own research, first and foremost for the strong connection I have had to the instrument since my formative teenage years. My close relationship and familiarity with the instrument made it a natural tool which could aid me in creating works that reconciled my music practice with my cultural heritage.

Earlier, I mentioned German bands such as Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream’s use of the synthesizer to create new musical soundscapes. The work of these artists stemmed out of a particularly fertile period of creativity in West Germany during the 1970s, which became commonly known in the English press as ‘Krautrock’ (a term that both reviles and amuses German musicians from the scene in equal measure). Other artists from this scene included Can, Neu!, and Cluster. While all these of artists produced a stylistically disparate array of musical works, they were all united by a motivation to reconcile their own cultural identities. Their goal was to create new music completely independent of the past, a motivation to move past the shame and guilt accompanying the actions of the previous generation during the Second World War.²⁰⁷ I suspect that this is where I embedded the notion of reconstructing

²⁰⁶ Roederer, *The Physics and Psychophysics of Music: An Introduction*, 3.

²⁰⁷ Ben Whalley, "Krautrock - the Rebirth of Germany," (UK: BBC4, 2009).

one's own identity through art into my own practice. The parallels between building unique sounds with electronics, and building unique identities through those sounds are what has compelled me to pursue this particular philosophical practice.

The relative newness of the synthesizer (the first portable, self-contained instrument was the Minimoog Model D, released in 1970) means that it carries less cultural baggage than other instruments such as the piano.²⁰⁸ Many synthesizers feature a keyboard based upon the European piano keyboard, which in itself promotes Euro-cultural musical ideals (twelve equally-spaced tones in a scale). However, the adaptability of many synthesizers allows the user to bypass the keyboard entirely, by using the timbral controllers to enact musical progression, or integrating programming that caters for non-Western tuning systems. This adaptability is important as it allows the instrument to break beyond the boundaries of Western music and into a space dictated by the user, and responsive to different cultural positions. Instead of the instrument requiring non-Western music styles to bend to it (such as the case of the piano), the synthesizer's user-defined parameters makes it suitable for use in different settings.

I bear in mind that the synthesizer was initially cost-prohibitive and only used by elite musicians who had the financial privilege to afford access to them. As the cost of producing the technology went down, the instrument became more readily available to amateur musicians.²⁰⁹ Its range of sounds obtainable within a single instrument made it ideal for tracking entire song arrangements. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's 1982 single, "The Message"²¹⁰ is one such example. As one of the earliest hip-hop songs to achieve a wide audience, it offered a social commentary on marginalised Black communities living in the Bronx. Instead of needing to pay a full band of session musicians, full pop songs could be created by a single person with the skill to program and record synthesizers and drum machines. Canadian musician and academic, Paul Théberge, quotes inventor of the Moog synthesizer, Bob Moog, when he describes this cultural turning point as the "democratization" of music.²¹¹ Access to cheaper instruments and recordings equipment led

²⁰⁸ Kristine Moffat, "The Piano as Cultural Symbol in Colonial New Zealand," *History Compass* 7, no. 1 (2009).

²⁰⁹ Paul Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 72-90.

²¹⁰ Edward G. Fletcher et al., "The Message," (US: Sugar Hill Records, 1982).

²¹¹ Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology*, 73.

to the growth in ‘amateur’ musicians, and the long-term ramifications of this meant that financial disadvantage was lessened when it came to producing music.

The relevance of my using synthesizers in my creative practice has multiple aspects. Some of these are a continuation of the instrument’s historical role. This includes the reshaping of cultural identity and the accompanying musical soundscapes; or its role in the formation of music scenes born of voices from the margins. I also emphasise its minimal impact and flexibility when it comes to adapting to new cultural contexts. My use of it in *Variations on Country* allowed me to build intense layers of sound, directly simulating the emotional toll of lockdown.

The piece begins with fifty-four seconds of ambient field recordings, electromagnetic field recordings, and the ticking of the clock. The pressure of the noises subtly build, then cut abruptly. The following onslaught of noise is sudden and jarring, arrhythmic musical elements taking up the full aural spectrum. Holding the bottom end is the ‘inverted bass synthesizer,’ a Minimoog Voyager, with the output being routed back through the instrument to create a feedback loop. When this feedback loop was accentuated, the pitch of the instrument started to break down, collapsing into an atonal rumble of sound. Melodic improvisations and tones were layered on top of this foundation on the wandering synthesizer and lawnmower guitar. The frenetic layering of sounds holds a mirror up to my own inner turmoil. These stresses of cabin fever and isolation, going days at a time without holding a conversation with another person. The oppressive monotony, the subtle variations of living day-to-day. The noise is always changing, is always the same, and unescapable. When I did speak to other people, I would joke that I was no longer ‘working from home,’ but now ‘living at work.’

But it doesn’t last. Slowly, elements die down, fade away, and glimmers of sunshine begin to peek through the din. The clock makes one more concerted effort for relevance before being left behind. This is the dream of Country. My remembering my last trip out to Jaadwa Country, the landmarks I saw, the people I met. The sounds of birdsong out on Ebenezer Mission begin to seep in, as the tonality of the piece shifts from E minor to the relative G major.

I introduce the ‘bird guitar’ in response to the birdsong. This is the most apparent effort to play alongside the soundscapes of Country, to imitate their sounds and communicate with them. The bird guitar is performed on an octave-tuned guitar, with all the strings tuned to my standard, E. I played with a slide on the neck to break away from the fretted intonation of the guitar and move through melodic turns that felt harmonically natural. Instead of picking or strumming the guitar, I used a drumstick, holding it like a pencil and circling the base of it to excite the strings. All these different performance factors combined to make a distinctly unique sound, emulating the rise and fall of a dawn chorus. The ‘yearning harmonica’ accompanies the birdsong and the bird guitar. I used the instrument here for its intimacy. It is powered by the force of my breath, through which I perform the feeling of yearning. I played long, drawn out notes, pushing my lungs to keep the notes held.



Figure 6: *Variations on Country, the road to Ebenezer Mission, Wergaia Country*

The piece ends with the instrumentation fading away, leaving only the layer of field recorded birdsong to linger for the last minute or so. This is a moment of reflection. I make no melodic or rhythmic contribution, instead contrasting the long sonic journey of the piece with an opportunity for deep listening, to think back on the situation that arose out of the pandemic, and the strength that can be drawn from Country and culture. *Variations on Country* was an opportunity for creative therapy. Through it I was able to face and come to terms with some of the stresses and pressures I was personally facing during the Victorian

lockdown. It demonstrated to me the healing power of Country. By engaging with the site through the sound recordings, I was transported back to place.

Conclusion

If the fundamental purpose of this research is to understand my cultural identity through my music practice, then the question should be - has the work outlined in this chapter done that? Each of these Country-songs are inextricably tied to place, and have provided me an opportunity to engage closely with Country through practices akin to deep-listening and *dadirri*. Each piece has involved field recordings of places of significance to me, and it is through my creative processing of these sounds that I am able to better understand them and my place within them. This reconfigures the notion that Country is a direct source of cultural identity, instead facilitating a process and a mnemonic prompt for reclamation. The pieces detailed in this chapter have all provided the opportunity for me to reflect in place, and facilitated conversations with collaborators and audiences, which in turn help me to develop my own practice and understanding of self. Performances, such as *Wilin Singe the Fringe* catered for collaboration with other First Nations practitioners, allowing a space for mutual connection to Country. Field recordings such as “*Crescendo to Dusk*” cater for conversations to be had with cultural elders, to deepen my respect for the histories of certain spaces. Meanwhile, compositions such as *Feedback by the Train-Tracks* and *Variations on Country* signify a process of better positioning oneself in space, and reconciliation with circumstances beyond your control. Ultimately, these are pieces of reflection—opportunities for me to consider my place and role within Country. The reflection is as much in the making of the work as it is in the final work itself, and this chapter has intended to highlight the importance of these creative decisions, and that processes of cultural reclamation can take many different forms.

This chapter has demonstrated a means of collaborating with Country. It shows that these processes of collaboration can exist in contemporary, urban settings, using new technologies. By using an array of instruments, like the synthesizer, electric guitar and amplifier, and digital audio recorders I can demonstrate my own journey of cultural reclamation through my music practice. The creative output demonstrates that cultural expression through these modern technologies is still valid. The field recordings act as a way of holding the essence, the spirit of Country, and can generate an affective response in both the listener, and in the

artist who engages with those sounds. The focus was dominantly on non-verbal sound production, expressing these connections through the sounds of Country and the sounds of musical instruments. The next chapter will detail my songwriting, in which the focus shifts to verbal expression, and the song-format as a means of cultural expression.

Interlude II: The Derby Sessions

Johnny Divilli is perched on a bar stool, with an acoustic guitar in his hands. In front of him I have rotated a stereo microphone 90 degrees on its side, in a makeshift attempt to point one capsule towards his voice, and the other towards the body of the guitar. To his left, on a shorter chair, is Tremayne Tigulu, with a lyric sheet in front of him. And to his left again sits Lloyd Nulgit, with a second guitar. I've situated the second stereo mic between them so that both supporting musicians get coverage. These Røde NT4 stereo condenser mics are fed into the trusty Sound Devices 788T audio recorder, a costly bit of gear with hi-fidelity pre-amps and digital audio converters built in. I sit cross-legged on the floor in front of it, monitoring the performance through a pair of headphones. It is the evening of July 25th, 2019 and I am sitting in the living room of a residential partition of the Derby Bus Service. For the better part of a month, this has been the home-base for my fieldwork trip to the Kimberley. Earlier that day we had returned from a three-day trip to the Mt. Barnett community, about 300 kilometres east along the Gibb River Road, Ngarinyin Country, and home for Johnny and Lloyd.

All this recording gear belongs to the University of Melbourne. I certainly couldn't afford it on my research scholarship, nor would the fieldwork grant I received for the trip be adequate. The equipment would be even more difficult to come by in isolated Derby town. I'm also quite familiar with the gear, having used it to record a variety of natural soundscapes, conferences, and performance ceremonies over the year or so prior. What I carried with me on my fieldwork trip was not only the physical gear, but also the privilege and skill to effectively apply it to a variety of recording situations. This was a consideration I made during my trip. If I was going to be staying (and welcomed) onto a new Country for a month, I wanted to be conscious of what I could offer in return for the hospitality.

Since meeting Johnny and Lloyd at the launch of the Research Unit for Indigenous Arts and Culture (RUIAC) in Melbourne, November 2017, I've known them to both be avid musicians. They had always seemed far more interested in sharing songs in a small group setting, sharing the acoustic guitar around so each person could contribute. The following year, at the second annual RUIAC Symposium, I facilitated an area to be set aside as a 'jam' space. This expanded the acoustic guitar sharing circle to include drums, keyboards, electric rhythm and bass guitar, and microphones. Given the attendees of the symposium were from

communities all over Australia, the jam group provided an effective space where musicians could come together, play popular covers, original material, and rearranged folk songs.

In this jam space, I recall Johnny sharing an original piece that he had co-written with his brother, Francis, called *Take Me Home*. I played along with Johnny on this track, either on the bass guitar or the keyboard depending on which instrument was free at any given time. It was during these jams that I recognised that I could offer Johnny a recording of the song as a gift. I kept this in the back of my mind between the symposium and my visit to Derby, and I became determined that my reciprocation would be to gift Johnny a recording of the song, which I would record, mix, and produce.

So, it came to be the evening of July 25th, 2019. My time in the Kimberley was coming to an end. I would be heading back along the Great Northern Highway towards Broome in two days' time, and then onwards to Melbourne the day on from that. I had been out to dinner with Johnny and Lloyd at the local haunt, the Spinifex Hotel (locally known as the Spinny). Tremayne was with us, and Johnny wanted him to sing backing vocals on the recording. *Take Me Home* was completed in eight takes, five of those being complete run-throughs, one of them a rehearsal, and two of them false starts or breakdowns. The recordings came out remarkably clear, on four tracks of audio which gave me some flexibility when it came to mixing the track. The master that I gifted to Johnny was a combination of the takes designated T8 and T14. The former was a stronger vocal performance on Johnny's part, being a later take benefitting from a few prior rehearsal takes, but not so late that his voice was fatigued. Meanwhile, the later take featured stronger guitar solos on Lloyd's part. It was for these reasons that I edited the two takes together for a consistent master track, making my role as the recording agent apparent.

Making the most of the time and equipment we had available, I suggested that we might record another song. The boys decided on a local country rock number, *Gateway to the Gorges*. After four breakdowns, they made it through the whole track and we called that the master. During the recording process, the fellas would want to hear back each take immediately after it was recorded - something I had to put a hold on, or else we would be there all night! I don't blame them for that though, the recordings did come out clear, and it was more than likely the first time these performers had had the chance to listen back to a recorded performance of their songs in such hi-fidelity. It was far and away better than any phone voice memo recording could provide.

Two days later, mere hours before my departure from Derby, I managed to sit down with Johnny to discuss *Take Me Home*, how it was written, and the expression of his culture inherent within it. The song is played in the key of A minor, and features a verse-chorus structure. The lyrics deal with homesickness, specifically a longing to be back on his ancestral, Ngarinyin Country.

“We was homesick,” Johnny tells me, “me, Francis [Divilli] and Andrew [Wungundin]. We wanted to go back to Mt. Barnett - up the Ranges. We’d been in Broome too long. So, we said, ‘oh, we’ll write a song for home,’—make it feel like we’re in home when we’re singing it.”²¹² This sensation of longing for, and connection to Country described by Johnny is one which often appears in discourse around the Junba song tradition.²¹³ Junba is an effective means to reinvigorate connection to Country, and in the same way that Junba composers use the medium as a way to connect to place, so too does Johnny in this song. “It’s like the Junba songs with the boards. When old people see the boards ... they feel like they’re home. But we did it in an acoustic, classical version.”²¹⁴

Drawing upon the emotional resonance of Junba is particularly evident in the second verse, which Johnny borrowed from a Junba lyric and sang in language, juxtaposing the rest of the song which is sung in English. The original Junba was composed by song-man Watty Ngerdu, and contains the lyrics: “gubarrwardangu / balja gumandangi / wurre gowadnerri.”²¹⁵ It is the first in a set of three warmup songs (consisting of no dance accompaniment) telling the story of two young boys who were cruel to a bird, resulting in the Wandjina (Dreamtime spirits) retaliating with destructive rains.²¹⁶

Johnny’s use of language is significant in several ways, which he outlined in our conversation. The first refers to drawing distinctive connections between the expression of connection with Country that exists in Junba song-forms. By doing so, Johnny is tapping into generations of cultural practice, and demonstrating that his practice is a direct continuation of

²¹² Johnny Divilli, Interviewed by James Howard, 27th July 2019.

²¹³ Anthony Redmond, "Places That Move," in *Emplaced Myth: Space, Narrative, and Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea*, ed. Alan Rumsey and James F. Weiner (United States of America: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

²¹⁴ Divilli.

²¹⁵ Sally Treloyn, "Songs That Pull: *Jadmi Junba* from the Kimberley Region of Northwest Australia" (PhD, University of Sydney, 2006), 596.

²¹⁶ Divilli.

that. While utilising the Junba text, Johnny presents it in a Western country rock format, showing that his culture is living and adaptive to change. Secondly, Johnny describes a sense of pride in being able to sing Junba and express his ancestral culture, a song-practice that has been revitalised in recent years. It suggests that while he is embracing a Western style, he retains his cultural roots.

Finally, Johnny describes the differences in feeling he experiences when swapping between the English and Ngarinyin language: “It’s like I’m travelling, it’s like I’m making my way home with the English version. When I sing that Junba bit, I feel like I’ve arrived home.”²¹⁷ Singing in his cultural language, Johnny is able to feel considerably closer to the Country for which he is longing. This is reflected in the Junba practice which is a performative means to awaken the ancestral spirits of Country, by which performers “invoke an identity attached to their Country even when they find themselves in a new physical location.”²¹⁸

A final intersection between Johnny’s brand of country rock and Junba is in the song’s conception. Johnny describes sleeping at Francis’ house and, in his slumber, hearing his brother playing the chords in the next room. “And when I got up from sleep, I can hear him trying to write the song. But I had that song in my head. When he was playing it, I was writing it in my head. When I went outside I told him, ‘I got something for that song,’ —for that guitar he was playing.”²¹⁹ There is a similarity here between Johnny’s conception of the song, and a composer’s conception of Junba—as it is delivered by spirits in dreams.²²⁰ Johnny acknowledged this similarity in our discussion, and then outlined the difficulty of dreaming songs off-Country, especially in towns like Derby or Broome where vices were readily available. It is perhaps for these reasons that Johnny dreams of songs demonstrating a yearning to be back on Country, in attempts to feel closer to his cultural connections.

Take Me Home is Johnny’s means of expressing his culture through his song practice, encompassing aspects of both Junba and country rock music. This expression comes in the form of his connection to his Country, to which his cultural identity is inextricably linked.

²¹⁷ Divilli.

²¹⁸ Sally Treloyn and Matthew Dembal Martin, "Perspectives on Dancing, Singing and Well-Being from the Kimberley, Northwest Australia," *The Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement* 21, no. 1 (2015): 11.

²¹⁹ Divilli.

²²⁰ Treloyn, "Songs That Pull: *Jadmi Junba* from the Kimberley Region of Northwest Australia," 56.

Further, Johnny demonstrates his connection through his familiarity with Junba song lyrics and Ngarinyin language. The format of country rock allows him to have his voice heard inside a musical format accessible to many listeners within settler-colonial Australia, and to potentially draw a sympathetic ear to the value of his relationship to Country.

Around the same time as my trip to Derby, I began writing my own songs again for the first time in several years. When I recommenced writing, it was a means of escape from the research and thesis writing. However, as the songs developed, I recognised I too had developed my own means of expressing my cultural identity in the songs (albeit, unintentionally), that had not been evident in my previously existing song practice. The next chapter examines themes of my songwriting, and demonstrates the ways in which I express my own cultural identity, as only I can.

Chapter 4: Songwriting

This chapter focuses on songwriting as a means of cultural expression. It examines the ways in which my songwriting practice has been impacted by, and in turn, impacted my cultural identity. Through analysis of my lyrics and composition, this chapter demonstrates the ways in which my creative writing about cultural themes has enhanced my understanding of self. In contrast to the long-form, experimental ‘Country-songs’ discussed in Chapter 3, the creative works in this chapter are more readily recognisable as songs. They more often contain familiar song-structures, such as verses and choruses, as well as simple arrangements emphasising voice and simple harmonic backing. Beyond the aesthetic, these songs differ from the creative works of Chapter 3 by positioning my own experiences with identity at the forefront of the work. Through the process of singing my stories, I am creating a space in which I can have conversations with myself and with listeners that I might not feel comfortable having otherwise.

This chapter discusses six songs written over the course of approximately fourteen months:

GPWM (composed August - December 2019)

Arfa (composed September 11th, 2020)

Nobody Knows (September 25th, 2020)

My Songlines (October 2nd, 2020)

(One More Round for) The Family Home (October 30th - November 1st, 2020)

Yonder Comes a Rider (February 18th, 2020)

I begin each song discussion with a printing of the song lyrics. It is my recommendation that you, the reader, listen to each work and read along with the lyrics prior to reading the song discussion. The recordings that accompany this written document were all performed live in my home studio on Boon Wurrung Country, on May 21st, 2021. On these recordings, I sing and play guitar on all of the songs, as well as perform on harmonica on *GPWM*, *Arfa*, and *(One More Round for) The Family Home*.

In the second *Interlude*, Johnny Divilli discusses the difference between singing in English and singing in Ngarinyin in country & western song styles.²²¹ For Johnny, singing in the former gives the sensation of travelling home, while the latter marks an arrival back home. I reflect on this as I travel on my own journey back to culture. Like Johnny's *Take Me Home*, a common topic for many of them are that of travel. These songs are reflections of my own journey, covering themes of my relationship to ancestors, identity, Country, and socio-political responsibilities. By centring these topics in the song narratives, I co-presence people, spirits, and place through the act of singing them aloud. All of these songs are written in English, reflecting my own journeys towards cultural identity, and because I am yet to rediscover the language that was stolen from my family.

During the first two years of the research period, I had stopped writing songs altogether, choosing to focus on long form instrumental and improvisatory works that make up my Country-songs. My thinking was that my practice should be contained to the 'fine arts' field in which I was immersed at the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Fine Arts and Music. I also did not feel that I had the ability to deal with such themes of culture and identity in lyrical song-form. I had been writing songs since I was a teenager, and typically my lyric writing was more fictitious, built around fantastical imagery and world building. The thought of approaching heavier, personal themes through my lyrics felt beyond my established skill-set. Despite this, I knew that this research would consist of reconciling my creative practice and my culture. As a result, when I began my research I decided that I should shift my compositional and performance focus towards a path that favoured the abstract, unconventional, and designation of fine art. Instead of featuring my voice literally in my composition practice, I wanted to let the music speak for me and reflect my identity within Country.

However, about eighteen months into the research process I found myself sitting at home on a Friday night with no social callings. That Melbourne winter eve, my only company was a glass of whiskey and my cheap guitar set up in octave-tuning (a layover from the *Singe the Fringe*, and a tuning which I still regularly fall back on). I sat there, on my lonesome with the whiskey swimming through my brain, slightly dulling my senses and alleviating any personal inhibitions. I started noodling on the guitar, simple riffs in a modal style that the unison

²²¹ See Interlude II: The Derby Sessions

tuning lends itself to. The words came from a stream of consciousness—imagery of living in an uninsulated unit in the middle of Melbourne winter, self-deprecation, and reflections of the world. Before too long, I had the rough outline of a song, a series of rambling verses, with no clear structure, with tempos and moods that shift and change in quick succession. I recorded it into my iPhone memos, and left it at that. It was not much, but it was the first song I had composed in over two years.²²²

During the months following, I kept at my research, travelling to Derby where I engaged with community and Country through my sound practice, as well as back to Jaadwa Country to try and physically reconnect to my own heritage. All the while, I kept on composing and recording in my spare time, ultimately finishing an EP of five songs called *GPWM*, of which the title track will be elaborated upon in more depth in this chapter. The lyrics that I wrote at this time did not engage with identity on a conscious level, they were more reactionary without giving any thought to the personal implications of them. At the end of that writing and recording process, I reflected on the themes of the songs. The lyrical content of the EP was very politically charged, and I recognised that the stance I had taken was directly impacted by the fact that I was embracing my relationship to my Jaadwa heritage.

This chapter examines one song from that original EP, and five additional, original compositions written in the following year. I propose that the arc of these six songs demonstrates a personal development, not only from a songwriting perspective, but also a strengthening of cultural identity. I had returned to songwriting as a means of stress release and escape from the critical thinking required by the research, but the songs ultimately lent themselves to examination as I was beginning to unintentionally inject more and more of my cultural identity into them. My initial rejection and later reclamation of songwriting as outlined in previous paragraphs, demonstrates in itself a newfound confidence in my heritage—that I was able to foster a voice and a medium for cultural expression where before I had none.

Historical Influences

Before discussing the songs individually, I will begin by offering some context to the songwriting process. This includes both musical influence, as well as extra-musical,

²²² This song became ‘Society’ and was released on the ‘GPWM’ EP under my Slim Lee moniker.

historical, thematic influences. Of particular note is the use of popular music forms as a means of cultural expression in Indigenous communities. I consider popular music in the context of my own work as compositions stemming from rock, country, or folk genres of music. Where the previously discussed Country-songs can be musically and theoretically complex, the musical content of these songs are much simpler. Arrangements as presented here use minimal instrumentation, generally voice, guitar, and the occasional harmonica. This arrangement allows for emphasis on the lyrical narrative. The actual musical structure was kept relatively simple. Basic, open guitar chords that most beginners will be familiar with. This was intentional. These are songs to be shared in social settings, around the campfire, with community, at festivals, and in ceremonial practice. I offer these songs up to others in the tradition of folk music, inviting other musicians to adapt the work, and to transform the details of the music to reflect their own stories.

Each song recording featured in this chapter is exactly that, a recording of the song, a snapshot of it in a moment in time. In contemporary popular music, the song and the recording are often considered one and the same. We listen to the radio, or streaming services, and hear songs. The act of recording a song is an act of enshrining it. Speaking as a music producer, in my experience the mindset seems to be that once the tracks are mixed, the master file is exported, we think of the song as being finished. That is not how I want you, the listener to consider the recordings I share here. The act of recording these songs is akin to the act of photographing a painting, or filming a stage play. The recording represents a single instance of how the song might exist.

These songs have a right to mutate with the passage of time—lyrics change, melodies change, arrangements change. By maintaining the rights of these songs, I also maintain my own right—the right to change and tell my story in different ways. These songs and I are intertwined in that they reflect me, my experiences, my story, and my culture. As my understanding of these spaces change, so too will the songs. As my connection to culture matures, the songs will reflect that. Even in the brief months since originally writing the tracks, they have changed through performance and revisiting them.

These songs were not recorded with the intention of being widely released, but simply as demonstrations of the song's potential. By keeping the instrumental so stripped down, I aimed to emphasise the story I was telling. This also plays into the methodologies of other notable Indigenous singer-songwriters such as Archie Roach, who wrote much of his seminal

album *Charcoal Lane* sitting at his kitchen table with his acoustic guitar. The lyrics in this song require directness. An intimate song calls for an intimate arrangement, and that intimacy was not going to be constructed through my regular arranging practice using samples drums, electronic instrumentation, and highly detailed production techniques.

There is a long history of Indigenous artists using Western musical styles as a mode of cultural expression, both in Australia and globally. In the Australian context, Gurnu man, Dougie Young was an early adopter of country & western styles, using them as a vessel for sharing his experiences as an Indigenous man living in the settler-colonial state.²²³ Martin discusses Young's use of the genre as a means of giving himself voice and situating his position in post-colonial Australia, and addresses Indigenous uses of country music as "a genre in which Aboriginal people found a ready-made vehicle for personal and social expression and provided some of the roots for other styles of music."²²⁴ Martin also identifies Young's use of humour to highlight "the complex way in which Aboriginal people could react to injustice and oppression... Young's work shows that often the reaction was to laugh at the absurd double standards... and that satire could be an empowering weapon against injustices."²²⁵ I often try to incorporate absurdist satirisation into my own lyric writing, particularly in the context of direct attacks against political figures which I will demonstrate in the song *GPWM*.

Young's country music practice in the 50s and 60s marked a framework for Indigenous musicians throughout the following decades to express their stories through Western musical forms. From the rock of Yothu Yindi,²²⁶ the reggae fusion of No Fixed Address,²²⁷ folk in singer-songwriter, Archie Roach,²²⁸ and hip-hop in Adam Briggs.²²⁹ These creative spaces continue to allow Indigenous musicians to express their messages, their experiences, their

²²³ Dougie Young, *Land Where the Crow Flies Backwards* (Australia: Wattle Recordings, B-5, 1965), Record, EP.

²²⁴ Toby Martin, "Dougie Young and Political Resistance in Early Aboriginal Country Music," *Popular Music* 38, no. 3 (2019): 556.

²²⁵ "Dougie Young and Political Resistance in Early Aboriginal Country Music," 551.

²²⁶ Yothu Yindi, *Tribal Voice* (Australia: Mushroom Records: D30602, 1991), CD, Album.

²²⁷ No Fixed Address, *From My Eyes* (Australia: Rough Diamond Records: RDM 8804, 1982), Record, Mini-Album.

²²⁸ Roach, *Charcoal Lane*.

²²⁹ Adam Briggs, *Sheplife* (Australia: Golden Era Records: GER016, 2014), CD, Album.

cultures on their own terms, through a musical framework which is easily understood by settler colonial audiences. Roach addresses this in his memoir, *Tell Me Why*:

I was a folk and country singer, but a lot of what my songs were about, blackfellas had been singing for tens of thousands of years, well before country music even existed... They sang in their language, along with the didgeridoo and clapsticks. The only difference is that I sang in English, with a six-string guitar. The phrasing, language and instruments used are different, but I believe the emotion and soul of the music were similar.²³⁰

Indigenous popular music in Australia has a history steeped in political and social commentary. Gumbainggir activist and historian, Gary Foley suggests both historically and contemporarily, Indigenous historians and activists have been silenced in “the great debate of today’s culture wars.”²³¹ Despite this, Indigenous artists have a platform to share their views outside of the greater political discourse from which they have been excluded. The arts effectively become a Trojan horse for Indigenous politics being disseminated amongst a wider audience. Foley suggests the use of humour in artwork as a disarming method, however “the important point remains that the cultural/political integrity of indigenous Australia is as much as it ever was.”²³²

While I do not consider the style of my songwriting to be directly informed by any particular artist, I acknowledge that I am riding in the wake of Indigenous musicians’ use of rock music as a means to “confront and raise awareness about issues affecting Indigenous Australians and seek to educate other Australians about Aboriginal cultures.”²³³ This includes the works of singer-songwriters such as Archie Roach and Kev Carmody, as well as bands such as Yothu Yindi and No Fixed Address. I am also finding myself developing as an artist into a field inhabited by many other outspoken contemporary Indigenous musicians, such as DRMNGNOW and Allara. By simply existing in the space I have the opportunity to interact with these musicians, and experience their work and messages on a personal level. Perhaps

²³⁰ Roach, *Tell Me Why: The Story of My Life and My Music*, 270.

²³¹ Gary Foley, "The Inevitable Collision between Politics and Indigenous Art," in *Rarrk*, ed. Museum Tinguely and C Kauffman (Belair: Crawford House, 2005), 188.

²³² "The Inevitable Collision between Politics and Indigenous Art," 188.

²³³ Peter Dunbar-Hall, "Music and Meaning: The Aboriginal Rock Album," *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 1 (1997): 38.

by creative osmosis, I found myself unconsciously gravitating towards writing themes which intersect within commentary on identity and socio-political issues.

Aesthetic Contexts and Influences

Robinson and Martin write of “aesthetic action,” in relation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian residential schools; using the term to describe “how a range of sensory stimuli—image, sound, and movement—have social and political effects through our affective engagements with them.”²³⁴ Through my songwriting, I aim to better express my feelings regarding my Indigeneity, and how that aspect of my identity informs my views of broader society. I believe that music is an inherently emotive medium, allowing the performer to better share the affect of experience with an audience than through the format of an academic paper alone. This is a significant factor of why my creative practice is so integral to the research.

A key aesthetic inspiration for the way in which I have recorded and presented these songs was drawn from Bruce Springsteen’s 1982 album, *Nebraska*.²³⁵ I feature this album as a creative influence as it exemplifies the intersection of narrative lyric-writing, sparse instrumentation, and lo-fidelity timbral qualities that I seek to include in my own songwriting. The album, as Springsteen writes in his memoir, “began as an unknowing meditation on my childhood and its mysteries. I had no conscious political agenda or social theme. I was after a feeling, a tone that felt like the world I’d known and still carried inside me.”²³⁶ At the time of writing the album, Springsteen had invested in a four-track cassette recorder in order to save money on studio time. This way, he could write and record demos in his bedroom, with the intention of having an album of songs ready to go when it came time to enter the studio with a full band. Instead, the band sessions were ultimately fruitless—the atmosphere of the recordings held in the cassette that Springsteen had been carrying around in his jacket pocket for weeks were unable to be replicated in the hi-fidelity studio setting.

²³⁴ Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, “The Body Is a Resonant Chamber,” in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 2.

²³⁵ Bruce Springsteen, *Nebraska* (USA: Columbia Records, 1982), Studio Album, 88875014271.

²³⁶ *Born to Run* (Great Britain: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2016), 298.

The decision was ultimately made to release the demos as the completed album, with all its beautiful imperfections and lo-fi sound intact.

Further inspiration was taken from Johnny Cash's 1994 *American Recordings* album.²³⁷ The record was made during a time when Cash was experiencing a lull in his career, more considered an 'oldie' than a musical icon. He met producer Rick Rubin backstage at a concert, who was himself known for running Def Jam, a label that specialised in hip hop—far removed from Cash's 50s country style.²³⁸ For this album, Rubin wanted to strip Cash down to his essence, recording him at home, alone with his guitar. "I took my music all the way back to its roots," Cash later wrote, "... no reverb, no echo, no slapback, no overdubbing, no mixing ... [we] got the honest, unadulterated of Johnny Cash, whatever that is."²³⁹ This minimalist arrangement highlighted Cash's strengths as a performer, his voice and the stories he sang. Cash's work is significant as it is a cross-generational link between me, listening to the recordings of his latter career, and my grandmother, who would listen to his earlier material. In that sense, I hear him as a musical cornerstone of my family. The aesthetic of his deep baritone is something that I associate with family ties and our history.

With the works of Springsteen, Cash, and Roach in mind, I wanted these recordings of the songs to be boiled down to their essences, featuring the narrative of my lyric at the forefront and minimal instrumental accompaniment. In an age of recording which allows producers to endlessly tweak and finesse songs in digital environments, I wanted to work fast, and capture as much of the energy and spontaneity of songwriting as I can. To capture those moments of early uncertainty, when it is still not clear whether a lyric or melodic turn is quite suited. In many cases, these songs were written and recorded in the span of a few hours, some no more than within a day or two. The aesthetic of these recordings is derivative of Benjamin's concept of the "aura"—belonging to a unique place and time.²⁴⁰ A time may come when opportunities will arise for these songs to be have new lives, new arrangements with a full band - but for now they stand as stark explorations of my identity.

²³⁷ Johnny Cash, *American Recordings* (USA: American Recordings, 1994), Studio Album, 9 45520-2.

²³⁸ Johnny Cash and Patrick Carr, *Cash: The Autobiography of Johnny Cash* (Great Britain: Harper, 1999; repr., 2006), 274-75.

²³⁹ *Cash: The Autobiography of Johnny Cash*, 277.

²⁴⁰ For further discussion on Benjamin's "aura", see Chapter 2: Western Understandings of Sound, Soundscapes and Sound Technologies

As both the composer and analyst of these works, I am in a unique position to illuminate the intricacies of the songs that I write, and craft the listener's expectations. Instead of pulling the music apart, my discussion needs to compliment it. In the same way that a performer might introduce a song by providing an anecdote to give it extra context and significance. That context is my aim through the writing, sharing the stories that have informed them.

Song I - GPWM

*God damn those this mess we're in
I'm bringing up the suicide pact again
Push and pull as the Mother burns
They're promising tomorrow if we wait our turn*

*God damn those old white men
They're running the asylum where we've been forced in
While far above in a poison sky
Not even vultures circle when you're left to fry*

*Everybody knows ...
Everybody knows*

*Everybody knows the sea levels are rising
Everybody knows our Country is on fire
Everybody knows there'll be shortages of oxygen
And everybody knows their God prefers white men*

GPWM is the first overtly political song I ever wrote, and it was only after writing it that I realised I was staking my position from my cultural identity. Unlike other songs discussed in this chapter, this piece was originally composed using beat-making techniques on the computer—that version being released under my occasional music pseudonym, Slim Lee. In keeping with the philosophy of songs that grow and change with time, I present it here in a stripped back form, performed with voice, guitar, and harmonica, and with additional lyrical content.

The track was originally conceived in September 2019, not long after my return from Derby. I did not realise it at the time, but hindsight gave me the clarity to identify that the lyrics were founded upon social and political observations that stemmed from relationality to my Indigenous identity. With this composition, I intentionally embraced the political platform that creative expression affords. I found myself navigating new hurdles, particularly around positioning myself as an Indigenous musician for the first time in a public context.

With that, this composition shows a degree of naivety. I felt compelled to address issues I was observing in socio-political contexts, but I did not necessarily have the experience to do so with a nuanced dialogue. Instead, this song is less a nuanced response, but instead, a strong, emotional reaction to the themes which will be identified in this discussion.

Coinciding with the composition and lyric writing progress, I began work as part of the Wilin Academic Staff at the University of Melbourne, leading tutorials in a subject called ‘Indigenous Art and Changing the Nation’. This immersive experience gave me the space to learn as much as I was teaching. This opportunity to be exposed to other Indigenous Australian artists who made strong political statements through their artwork led me to re-evaluate the message I wanted to convey in my own song-writing. The experience also aided in sharpening my perception of identifying systems of settler colonialism and the racism implied in their structures. From that context, I injected several themes into the song, namely those of organised religion, social inequality, and climate change.

The title, GPWM, is short for ‘God prefers white men,’ a statement based on my own observation of high-ranking public figures such as politicians, business magnates, or religious leaders, and their affiliations with the Christian faith. I shortened the title to the statement’s initials, in order to avoid potential misinterpretation of me or my intentions. I can never forget that despite my cultural heritage and ever-developing Indigenous identity, I am a White passing man. This results in my being afforded a certain level of privilege in the settler-colonial state. The last thing I needed was someone coming across my song, seeing the title, and seeing my picture, and with no additional context, misconstruing my meaning. Making such proclamations might have presented me aligning with the very people that I was rallying against, something I wanted to avoid at all costs.

My target was fixated on figures of great influence, but also figures controversy, power and privilege in the Australian social-scape. Whether those people’s religious affiliations are spiritually genuine, or a prop for public support—I could not say. However, it seems to me that the selfish actions of many of those at the top of the social hierarchy directly contradict good-will teachings of religious doctrine. I was (and still am) tired of hearing these outspoken

figures offer “thoughts and prayers” to those affected by bushfires,²⁴¹ or assurances that climate change would be resolved by the will of God,²⁴² or high ranking members of the Catholic Church sexually abusing children.²⁴³ The misconduct is unceasing, yet nothing seems to change. I sing that, deep down, ‘everybody knows’ that this is abhorrent, but we seem stuck in a cycle of moving the bar of what is deemed acceptable behaviour for these figures further away from what should be acceptable.

The song is an attack against these figures, predominantly ‘old white men,’—those that benefit from a patriarchal settler-colonial power structure, as well as their faith-as-prop used to garner public support and validation. The song’s subject, ‘white men,’ refers to those white men in positions of power, who use their power to their own advantage, no matter the human cost of those with less fortune. The use of the term ‘white’ is loaded, but it’s use is only partially racially motivated. It is predominantly a generalisation referring to those at the head a patriarchal system of social control, specifically that of Australia, as it was imposed as a result of colonisation.

The second theme of the song emerged during the lyric writing process: that of human-induced climate change. To me, this felt like another circumstance ‘everybody knows’ about, but we have little control over. It is to the detriment of humanity that the fate of the global climate is caught up in the realm of capitalistic politics, and that it has in fact become a political issue at all. The perceived helplessness of my generation towards climate change has undoubtedly contributed some small anxiety that eats away at my psyche a small bit at a time. As narratives around climate change continue to grow, the term “eco-anxiety” has been attributed to these stresses felt by myself and many other (often young) people.²⁴⁴ The path of rediscovering my cultural heritage, and learning about Indigenous Australia’s reciprocal relationships with the land in a harmonious exchange further contributed to my understanding of social injustices, not just between Indigenous and colonial Australians—but the damage

²⁴¹ Scott Morrison (@ScottMorrisonMP), “Our thoughts and prayers are with those who have been so directly and horribly impacted by these fires,” Twitter, November 9, 2019, <https://twitter.com/ScottMorrisonMP/status/1192993222173188096>.

²⁴² Barnaby Joyce (@Barnaby_Joyce), “Merry Christmas,” Twitter, December 24, 2019, https://twitter.com/barnaby_joyce/status/1209372444726743046.

²⁴³ Kate McKenna, Sarah Farnsworth, “George Pell freed from prison after High Court quashes child sex abuse convictions,” ABC News, published April 7, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-07/george-pell-wins-high-court-appeal-child-sex-abuse-convictions/12048726>.

²⁴⁴ Pihkala Panu, “Anxiety and the Ecological Crisis: An Analysis of Eco-Anxiety and Climate Anxiety,” *Sustainability* 12, no. 19 (2020).

that those in power do to the masses beneath them. For the first time, I most clearly understood the cost of capitalism, and the strength of the controlled media to influence democratic societies.

Since the song was first conceived in late 2019, I have revisited and rearranged it from the beat-making production style of the original release, to a solo performance stripped down to voice, guitar and harmonica. Significant in my mind was the change from singing ‘God prefers white men’ in the coda, to ‘their God prefers white men.’ This was a way of bolstering my courage to sing the line in public, to make a clear dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and more firmly positioning Indigenous identity in the performance.

Revisiting this song with the passage of time from when I first conceived it allows me to be reflective and to appreciate my own growth as a songwriter. While this is the first time I explicitly voiced my views while subconsciously embracing the position of an Indigenous composer, I feel that GPWM is a tentative step towards fully understanding the power and responsibility that comes with being a Jaadwa creator. This song represents me wading in the shallows, acclimating to this newfound voice, and slowly mustering the strength to more fully embrace it. It is important to include in the context to be considered a starting point for how my voice has developed over the following songs, which more directly deal with issues of identity and story.

Song II - Arfa

*I'm only coming here to say goodbye
I have not come to raise the dead
The hand life gave, it calls for sacrifice
And soon I'll lay my head to rest
For the road was long
And 'cause our people live in pain
A better life for you is all I want
So hide yourself away*

*Search for survival in your solitude
And carry with you all you know
But now it's time to pick it up again
Oh Arthur, where did you go?*

*I hear your voice, though your lips are still
You're saying pride will block out shame
For now I've lost too much for broken pride
And shame will keep you safe*

*Search for survival in your solitude
And carry with you all you know
But now it's time to pick it up again
Oh Arthur, where did you go?*

Oh Arthur, where did you go?

I began writing Arfa as a way to hold conversation with my ancestor, Arthur Wellington. While GPWM was explicitly political, this song is personal. The challenge here came with knowing the story I wanted to share, but not knowing how to tell it. My previous songwriting practice typically steered clear of personal reflection within the content of the song itself. Perhaps this is due to an inherent level of discomfort at exposing my inner emotions so

publicly. Arfa follows traditions of storytelling evident in Indigenous songwriting practices, particularly those relating to personal experiences of identity.

This song is me telling Arthur's story, while simultaneously telling my own. As briefly outlined in the Introduction, Arthur was born around 1849, and fostered by a Dr. Wellington following his parents' murder in a massacre. He later married a white woman, falsifying papers to hide his Indigeneity to allow the wedding to proceed. I particularly want to focus on the end of Arthur's life, a story told to me by my grandmother, Aunty Beth Lyons. In the year before he died, it is said that Arthur rode his horse around to visit all of his children, to say goodbye. He told them that he was going to live in an Indigenous community, and that he would deny having a wife or children so to protect them. He also warned them to tell no one of their Aboriginality, because the Government would take away everything they owned. Such had already happened to his eldest son, Arthur Jr, who upon attempting to return to Australia after fighting in the Second Boer War was unable to re-enter the country because he was not a recognised citizen. He ultimately emigrated to New Zealand. That is to say, Arthur Sr. had good reason to feel compelled to protect his family from their heritage, having already lost one son to absurd and racist Government policy.

For me, this story answers so many questions centred around my identity. Why it was that I was raised so disconnected from culture. It was a question of survival above all else. To survive in settler-colonial Australia, Arthur shielded his children from their culture, and in doing so, equipped them to hide within that space. The space that I spent my childhood in, a life of privilege. By articulating Arthur's story, I am articulating my own journey to reconnect to my culture. Dismantling the protective shields that he erected, and embracing the strength of Indigenous voice as a mode of resistance. I am the next in line, responsible for reviving this buried culture. A culture rediscovered by my grandmother, and brought to the light.

What was important here was that the lyrics rang true to me, that they properly conveyed my connection to Arthur and in tandem with the music, that they encapsulated the affect of the story of my family's history to be shared with an audience. The weight of my responsibility to this story was not lost on me, and as a result it took considerable time to find the right words and musical accompaniment to properly support it. In the case of sharing Arthur's story in song, I am representing a figure important to so many others in my family, both immediate and distant. The story that I share, and the way that I share it, has to live up to

the legacy that he carries, being the last formally recognised Jaadwa man, forced into conceding to and concealing his family from settler colonial oppression. Although I do not do so intentionally, I am aware that by writing about Arthur's story in song form, I am in fact positioning myself as an authority over the story.

On September 11th, 2020, I found myself in the back yard of my little unit on Boon Wurrung Country. It was a glorious spring day, and I sat there with an electric guitar, a notebook, and a coffee. I had a series of chords revolving around G major, with a variation to the relative E minor. The feelings emoted in the progression had a strong presence in my body, and so I decided they would provide a good foundation for Arthur's story. A few days prior, I had composed an arrangement of these chord cycles in Ableton, using my familiar beat-making workflow to produce a dense layering of sounds, orchestral samples, synthesizers, drums and guitar. I felt that that arrangement was quite powerful, however I was unable to envision how it would carry the lyric. The density of the instrumentation did not allow the space for the story I wanted to tell to exist.

That is why I found myself outside with an unplugged electric guitar on that fine Friday morning, minimally strumming the same cycles of chords over and over, occasionally writing down a line that seemed to fit rhythmically. The warmth of the sun was liberating, burning away the chills that always linger through Melbourne winter; the coffee shaking off the mental cobwebs that accumulated overnight. That sense of space, of time for reflection, the feeling of the guitar vibrating against my body as I played it, really allowed my mind to be free and focus on the story I wanted to convey. In much the same way that Matthew Dembalali Martin described the feeling of the clapsticks setting the singer's voice free,²⁴⁵ the intimacy of the guitar as I strummed the chords allowed the words to come to me.

I began with a single line: 'Arthur, where did you go?' I was not sure where it would sit in the arrangement, but it spoke to the emotional core of the song I was aiming to convey. That question has so many others embedded within it. When Arthur left, his physical existence was not only absent, but also his knowledge of culture and stories. By asking 'where did you go?' I also ask, 'where have you been? What is your story? What do I do with the culture I have inherited?' It addresses all the mysteries of my family's heritage, some that

²⁴⁵ See Chapter 3: Feedback by the Train-Tracks

have been uncovered by my Grandma, some that are only partially uncovered, fed by anecdotes or circumstantial assumptions, some that are destined to remain hidden forever. From this single question, line by line, I began to build the song around the chords and a non-verbal melody line that I constructed.

Through the telling of this story, time becomes non-linear. The lyric allows me to embody two people, my ancestor, Arthur Wellington as he bids farewell to his children in the mid 1910s, and my own self in 2020. Arthur is in the process of hiding away his cultural identity, as I simultaneously pick it up over a hundred years later. The act of hiding one's cultural identity, and the act of publicly exposing and embracing that same identity, are both strongly intertwined. Perhaps they could be thought of opposing forces, both allowing for a myriad of possibilities. The former, an act of survival, and the latter, an act of reclamation and resistance, which itself stems from the need to revive and maintain culture. I would suggest that that is why this story resonated so strongly with me in the first place. My acts of reclamation, my research, my understanding of my cultural identity are all direct continuations of this act of survival. Only now the tables have turned, and my family no longer hide our heritage as a symbol of shame, but wear it as a symbol of pride.

This interrelationship between pride and shame is evident in the lyrics of the second verse, in which I embody Arthur having a conversation with myself that spans generations. Narratively, I envision the scene being Arthur with one of his children, telling them to hide their culture. In response, Arthur hears not his child, but my own voice, saying I will continue our cultural legacy, holding it as something to be proud of, instead of ashamed. Arthur, however, responds that in his case, it is not the time for pride, but the time for survival. And his position as an Indigenous man living in the settler colony of Australia necessitates hiding.

The narrative perspective in the choruses shift entirely to my own perspective, talking to Arthur. Through these words, I aim to acknowledge his drive for concealment, while lamenting all the cultural knowledges that he took with him. I speak as an act of reassurance, telling him, telling my ancestors, and telling my family that now is the time to uncover and wear our cultural identity. Doing so may not be entirely safe, nor comfortable, but there are networks of support that facilitate that journey of reclamation, particularly through artistic expression and the relationships which I have fostered through my research.

Objectively quantifying the impact of songwriting on my personal connection to culture is fraught with difficulty. I can only really attempt to relay the subjective quality that I experience internally through the creative process. I will try and do that as best I can, and wish to begin by saying I felt a profound sense of satisfaction in writing this song. A part of that satisfaction comes from my pride in the lyrical content, relaying the story of Arthur through poetics, without being trite or simplistic. Some lyrics are written to fill in the space of a composition, but these lyrics had to have weight and meaning that properly represented the complex relationship I have with a man that I have never met, nor anyone else who is alive today.

The process of writing of the lyrics also gave me an opportunity to talk to my Grandmother about their content further, in an attempt to prompt more information from her. Initially, she seemed quite adamant that I knew most of what she knew, and there was not much more to give. However, the next day she called me up, as our conversation had obviously stayed with her and she had revisited her own archives to seek further information. From there, she determined that Arthur Wellington passed away on the 12th of March 1917 at Gippsland Base Hospital in Sale. His death certificate states that it was heart failure that got him in the end, and his father and mother were listed as unknown. Two days later he was buried at Toongabbie Cemetery. Writing this song gave me the space and opportunity to ask these sorts of questions in a way that I may not have had I simply been looking for my own gratification. The small, but meaningful connection between songwriting and re-entering archives gave my Grandma the strength to revisit this information and uncover details that had previously been forgotten.

Song III - Nobody Knows

*I'm a stranger on the outside looking in
Dispossessed, but now I've been back home again
There's too many people lost amongst the ghosts
But I see my ancestors arise against the glow*

But it feels like nobody knows

*The consequences are not easy to live with
Reconciling who I am with who I've been
When you've been living on a stolen home
Then you're up to your eyeballs in a privilege you should own*

But it still feels like nobody knows

*Don't be misled by the colour of my skin
I'll take my time to find a heritage within
And some people might say it's all for show
To them I say you'll reap just what you sow*

Yet it still feels like nobody knows

With Arfa came the gift of a new musical space to explore, a palette of instrumental minimalism with a focus primarily on voice and my own stories and experiences. It allowed me to develop a voice and confidence that my earlier songwriting hadn't, to have conversations about my heritage and identity that I felt I couldn't have previously, both in and out of creative contexts. This confidence isn't always present, but it become stronger every day, and with that confidence comes my ability to address these themes in my songwriting. In that sense, I consider Arfa my first healing song,²⁴⁶ allowing me to discover a

²⁴⁶ For further discussion of healing songs, see Chapter 2: Reclamations and Expressions of Indigenous Identity through Sound and Technology

new creative space for cultural expression. As a result, two weeks after finishing Arfa, I wrote this next song, *Nobody Knows*.

The lyrics for this song came to me much faster than Arfa, beginning with the opening line, 'I'm a vagrant on the outside looking in.' There's a certain degree of metaphor and poetic license within this line, which speaks to my initial feelings as I first entered the Indigenous academic space (my first real extended foray into any Indigenous space). For the first time in my life I felt a strong encouragement to state, 'My name is James and I'm a Jaadwa man.' 'My name is James, and I'm Indigenous.' 'My name is James, and I'm Aboriginal.' At the time, I was making these statements of identity, but still did not really know what that meant.

Immersing myself in my community, fostered through my research, has consistently strengthened me to stand up and proudly proclaim my cultural identity. In this song, I aimed to reflect the growth of my understanding of heritage. I go from the 'vagrant on the outside looking in,' to travelling 'back home to Country,' reconciling with the 'consequences' of my identity, to embracing and ultimately fighting for that identity. This song speaks to both a personal sense of identity as well as a political one. It speaks to a right to self-determination, and a confidence to fight for that right. Gunditjmara artist Richard Frankland says that the arts are "in many cases about responsibility: the kind of responsibility embodied in significant ceremony, ritual, healing, political and social discourse."²⁴⁷ The responsibility that Frankland speaks of is something that I am very conscious of in my own songwriting. The voice that I use to speak through these songs needs to kick back against those outside voices that try to oppress and control Indigenous lives.

Each verse is broken up by a chorus that repeats the title of the song, 'nobody knows.' This is a deliberate juxtaposition to the repeated refrain of GPWM's 'everybody knows.' In that song, I was appealing to what I considered to be commonly-held truths (at least in my own demographic) about climate change and social inequality. In this case, the phrase is referring particularly to the last two lines in the second verse, 'when you've been living on a stolen home/and you're up to your eyeballs in a privilege you should own.' Australia is a

²⁴⁷ Richard Frankland, "The Art, Freedom and Responsibility of Voice: Multiple Narratives of a Gunditjmara Man, Father, Artist, Activist and Warrior" (Master of Arts by Project, RMIT University, 2007), 25.

stolen home, and it seems to me that, broadly, conversations around this tend to be swept aside and unacknowledged.

Song IV - My Songlines

*I was born in the city
Born dreaming of my Country
Living in a noisy city
Dreaming of Jaadwa Country*

*I've been living out of time
Out of place, and out of my mind
I've been looking for the Wimmera
Let the river map my songline*

*If you dig below the surface
See there's more than just a pretty face
Feel the memories of my ancestors
Hear them calling from that Dreaming place*

*If you're out at Ebenezer
A little way from the railroad tracks
And you tell the land your story
Hear the spirits sing it back*

*I've been living out of time
Out of place and out of my mind
I've been looking for the Gariwerd
Let the mountains map my songline
Let the Country map my songline
Let the spirit map my songline*

Sometimes you just need a solid chord progression that isn't necessarily going to set the world on fire. But what it will do is allow others to pick the song up and make it their own. That's what I hoped to achieve with My Songlines, written and recorded in a single Friday on October 2nd, 2020. It primarily revolves around the first, fourth, and fifth chords of the D Major scale—what I would consider the bread and butter of blues, folk, country & western,

and early rock n' roll music. A few of those chords are embellished as they transition with the dominant seventh, another trick out of the country & western handbook. Sparingly, the minor sixth chord shows up in the middle of the chorus, preceded by a D/C# transition. And with those simple elements, the harmonic content of the song is accounted for.

The reason I emphasise the relative universality of this chord progression (at least in Western canons of popular music) is that I wanted to demonstrate its accessibility to other musicians proficient in this field. I can recall sitting with the other fellas from Derby, passing around a guitar or two and playing songs. My Songlines is designed to be accessible in that space, with easy to follow chords—mostly dictated by harmonic progressions and resolutions. This simplicity was designed to make the song malleable, giving it a life beyond my recording, my performance, and even the details within my lyrics.

Speaking of my lyrics, as with previous songs written around the same time, they deal primarily with cultural identity. While Arfa deals with ancestral connections, and Nobody Knows with identity politics, My Songlines speak directly to identity in connection to place. It speaks to the experience of being of a Country, but never having lived there or even born there. Never having the opportunity to develop a cultural understanding of that place during one's formative years. In the time between knowing that our family was Indigenous, and actually discovering who our mob was, my aunty would often say to my grandmother, 'mum, I bet we're from Horsham-way, I can feel it.' My mum's family had grown up in Horsham, and our entire family would often spend the Easter long weekend out that way. Sure enough, it came to pass that our cultural connections were embedded in the landscape of the northern tip of the Gariwerd, and the winding Wimmera River.

The song opens at the very beginning, that being my own birth on Boon Wurrung Country. The four lines juxtapose the dual setting, the physical being on one Country, and the spiritual being of another. That is to say, even though I was born where I was, a part of me will always be an extension of Jaadwa Country, right from the beginning. The opening line also references the inaccurate notion of the 'urban Aborigine' being somehow lesser than our rural counterparts.²⁴⁸ Through the use of the word 'urban' I aimed to openly embrace that aspect of my Indigeneity. This statement affords me self-determination, a means by which I

²⁴⁸ For further discussion about this (all too common) misconception, see Chapter 2: Reclamations and Expressions of Indigenous Identity through Sound and Technology

can proclaim the way in which I own my Indigeneity, being physically separated from Country, living and operating in a space constructed by the settler-colony, but no less Indigenous for it.

I've been living out of time

Out of place, and out of my mind

This two-line chorus features twice in the song, once after the first verse, and a second time after the instrumental break to close out the song. It speaks to the sense of disconnection a person might experience from their Country. The feeling of longing to speak to and learn from that place that is so culturally important. Following these lines are variations listing two places of significance: the Wimmera River and the Gariwerd, emphasising that they are embedded in cultural identity. By doing so, I am highlighting two sites of significance of my own ancestral Country, further expressing my identity through song. This is also a means of introducing my Country and my relation to it to an audience in performance settings. Such an introduction is important in Indigenous practice, as a means of providing “information about one’s cultural location, so that connections can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established.”²⁴⁹ It also acts as a way of breaking down the relationship between Country and body, each as an extension of the other. These landmarks map my spirit and my connection to place.

I also refer to Ebenezer Mission, another site of significance, nearby to the town of Dimboola. It is not strictly on Jaadwa land, but instead on Wergaia and Wotjobaluk Country. It was the site that many local Indigenous communities were moved to following colonisation, and as a result has a historical relationship with mob that is fraught with mixed emotions. I visited Ebenezer twice while undertaking fieldwork in October 2019, and spent my time making field recordings and walking around the site. Arthur was never formally moved to Ebenezer during his lifetime—living with a white family, there was probably no need. Though, there are stories that suggest that he would often visit other mob living there. As I stood inside the chapel, I noticed the affect the building had on my sound perception and expression. The chorus of birds outside sounded more like ghosts as their song filtered into the space and reverberated, as if shimmering. I was compelled to join in, singing out elongated vowels, as the long reverberation time amplified and layered behind my voice. It

²⁴⁹ Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and White Feminism*, xv.

was an amazing feeling, as if the spirits that continue to live in that place were joining in and singing with me. This is the reference I make to ‘spirits singing back’ my story, in this significant place where so many of my community were forced to live.

While the music uses what are considered universal chordal forms as far as popular Western standards go, the lyrics are significantly individual. What I hope can be taken away from this track is a possibility for modularity, that specific lines and elements can be changed in the tradition of, say, folk music, which often evolves to suit the story being told by different performers. It wouldn’t make sense for my brothers from the Kimberley to be singing about the Wimmera, the Gariwerd, or Ebenezer; however, lines such as those could easily be replaced with relevant local references and stories such as Mowanjum, or the Gibb River Road. With that, this song offers narratives that are both personal, and adaptable to universal interpretation by other musicians, via a musical foundation that is accessible to many players familiar with Western song traditions.

Song V - (One More Round for) The Family Home

*I heard there was a party at my house
But I wouldn't be playing the host
I was waiting for my invitation
But it must have been lost by Australia Post
So I'm standing at my front door
I can hear the music coming from my stereo
But the doorman says I'm not on his list
And he's telling me to go*

*So I make way for another town
Got my thumb out to the sky
I may have been clean shaven
But the mamas in their hybrids pass me by
So I've just got me for company
I'll let the Country be my guide
But the big boss man's got other plans
Turns out he's still not on our side*

*I was feeling a lot of confusion
Not sure of who I'm supposed to be
An undercover Koorie
Who'll take this pale boy seriously?
I heard the barman back in Ararat cry
"Who'll kick out these dirty blacks?"
While the coal magnate with an unpaid tab
Is slipping on out the back*

*One more round for Country
One more round for the lonely voice in the crowd
One more round cause they ain't killed us yet
One more round to make our children proud*

One more round for the sacred ground that they sold for a strip of road

One more round for the ancestors who carried that heavy load
One more round for those that fight
Against the settler state who relentlessly tries
To take the past and have it swept aside
As if the ongoing crime of cultural genocide
Is justified by a God-given right
To rape
And pillage
And steal
And cheat
And own
Our family home

October 26th, 2020—a day that should go down in infamy. This was the day that Victoria recorded zero new cases of, and zero deaths caused by Coronavirus since well before our second lockdown began in early July. After months of hard work, of being separated from family, unable to see friends, and dealing with the mental toll of social isolation, we had reached our goal. My grandfather passed away in mid-September and we couldn't even have an in-person funeral. But it would be worth all the sacrifice to ensure the health and safety of every single person in our state. On that day, State Premier Daniel Andrews announced that now was the time to reopen, to begin to take steps toward normalcy. I was elated. I felt a weight lifted from my shoulders. I readily welcomed this new feeling of freedom. During a time at which it felt like people were more divided, both physically and ideologically, than ever before, we had all come together to push this through. That was until I checked my social media newsfeed.

The birthing trees located along the Western Highway are on Djab Wurrung Country, just down the road from Ararat. The site of the trees is a sacred place for the Djab Wurrung people, a place that has been used for hundreds of years. This area has been a site of contention for over two years now. Being earmarked for destruction to expand the roadway, the Djab Wurrung community, and the broader Indigenous community have rallied around the site, constructing a tent embassy to restrict access to workers. This had bought time for negotiations to be made between Indigenous representatives and the State Government. But as I scrolled through my newsfeed that Monday afternoon, the feeling of elation quickly

passed into a numbing shock. I was seeing messages, “Code Red”—a call for more bodies on site. As I kept an eye on the situation, it quickly became apparent that a sacred directions tree had been felled.

This situation ignited renewed feelings of conflict in me. We had worked so hard for a favourable outcome. Within an hour of that outcome being achieved, I was reminded of the value that broader Australia holds for Indigenous cultural practices. I was seeing people celebrating their newly earned freedoms, so much joy and happiness. But I could not take part in it, the shock was too overwhelming. In that moment, I could not even be angry. I was simply removed from myself. The message that this act of desecration sent was that the state institutions would not even give us a single day of happiness. Not even an afternoon to feel a part of a greater whole. To feel that our efforts were worth something. For me, and many others in the Aboriginal community, the message was ‘while the rest of us celebrate, here’s a reminder to keep in your place.’ Here was a clear case study that lends itself to the notion that colonisation is a structure that never ended,²⁵⁰ that cultural genocide is an ongoing act.

So, I wrote a song about it. Of course. I am a musician after all, and my muse is the motivation to come to an understanding of events such as these and my place within them. This motivation is not about capitalising on events of tragedy or sorrow, but more about reflecting on the ever-changing nature of identity. The constant state of reevaluation that comes with walking between two worlds, one of sacred culture, and the other with an ongoing history of eviscerating that culture.

The song is called (One More Round for) The Family Home, a title that only came once the lyrics were completed. I began writing the song on Friday, October 30th, coming up with the general narrative of the song as well as a few phrases that would be cornerstones of the song. I concluded songwriting on Sunday, November 1st, which is when I began recording the demo track, which I finished the next day. While the song responds to the incident on Djab Wurrung Country, a lot of the lyrics are metaphorical. I never call out the incident directly, instead opting to allude to it. This was done in favour of capturing the complexities of identity and responding to events such as these. The music retains the simplicity of the previously written song, My Songlines. In the key of G, it also utilises the fourth and fifth

²⁵⁰ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

chords in keeping with the country and early rock styles. During the third verse and instrumental bridge, the root note transitions to the relative E minor to provide an emotional variation. As with the previous song, I used this simplicity to make the song easily adaptable by other musicians should they wish.

The song begins describing a party that the I (the narrator) am not invited to. In a bizarre twist, the party is taking place at my own house. This metaphor was intended to work via two means. The first directly addresses the celebrations that Indigenous peoples are separated from in our grief for Djab Wurrung's sacred sites. Our mourning is a direct result of the settler state's violence, we cannot take place in celebrating our mutual victories. The second meaning is by virtue of the fact that celebrations are taking place on our home Countries which have been stolen and continually tarnished. The imagery of being locked outside of your own house while others occupy it seems like something out of a particularly stressful dream. A situation that the average person might consider so absurd is in fact a reality for so many Indigenous people. Not only is my personal living space being invaded, but so too are the objects that I hold dear to me. My sound system being taken over and used is merely an apt metaphor for the ongoing use and abuse of sacred sites and objects that are assimilated and appropriated by the invaders. The final nail in the coffin is that even as I try to get back in, I'm stopped by the door-man. He informs me that I'm not on the list of invitees, and directs me to move along. The outright rejection is at play here, that settler colonial systems are in place to ensure that we don't have a seat at the table.

Having recently read Archie Roach's memoir, *Tell Me Why*,²⁵¹ I was moved by his life of resilience in the face of hardship. The ways in which he channels his story into his music empowers and validates the experiences of other Indigenous people in Australia. Uncle Archie is an important figure to all Indigenous musicians, highlighting the ways in which contemporary popular music is a vessel for shaping Indigenous self-determination, and the ways in which the Indigenous experience is understood by the broader non-Indigenous public. Reading his memoir, I was particularly taken by his willingness to pack up his life, and travel into the unknown in search of his family and his cultural identity. At the age of 15 he left his foster family's home in Melbourne, hitchhiking his way to Sydney in search of the family he was separated from as a child, sleeping it rough in unfamiliar cities, and

²⁵¹ Roach, *Tell Me Why: The Story of My Life and My Music*.

establishing relationships with local communities. The lines about travel are a homage to Uncle Archie's bravery in pursuing his search for connection and culture. The strength to leave behind the familiar in pursuit of a deeper understanding of self. I only hope that by projecting the homage in these lines, I am able to fulfil even an ounce of that bravery in my own journey of cultural discovery.

In the bridge, I allude to the feeling of confusion, of being between two worlds. The pure elation at pulling through Victoria's lockdown, while being crushed by the sorrow of the devastation at Djab Wurrung. The feeling of being proud of a State Government for successfully guiding us through a critical period in our history, while also feeling absolute shame at their disdain for Indigenous culture. It is an uncomfortable situation to be in, and makes a case for the distinctly complicated nature of being an Indigenous man, raised in a settler colonial system. I double down on the same themes that I touched on in *Nobody Knows*, around identity politics and the broadly-held misconception that my pale skin and urban identity somehow makes me less Aboriginal than those with darker complexion living in rural areas. I intentionally change the topic of conversation abruptly midway through the stanza. The exchange I outline in these two lines are fictional. The line about the barman is an exaggerated approximation of a news report I saw around the Djab Wurrung situation in 2019, in which residents of the nearby town of Ararat were asked to give their opinion on the blockade. While I cannot recall exactly what was said, I can recall the mood was negative overall, with the mostly white crowd voicing the need for an expanded highway over the cultural needs of the Indigenous population. What was apparent to me was a lack of understanding for the significance of these trees, not only for Indigenous culture, but the unique culture of Australia as a whole. Meanwhile, the fictional coal magnate is silently leaving without having paid the tab, making the most of the barman's outbursts at a minority group. I chose the figure of the coal magnate as a person who makes monetary profit off the land, destroying sacred sites (as Rio Tinto did at Juukan Gorge in May of 2020)²⁵² with minimal repercussions.

²⁵² Calla Wahlquist, Lorena Allam, "Juukan Gorge inquiry: Rio Tinto's decision to blow up Indigenous rock shelters 'inexcusable,'" *The Guardian Australia*, published December 9, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/dec/09/juukan-gorge-inquiry-rio-tintos-decision-to-blow-up-indigenous-rock-shelters-inexcusable>.

After an instrumental interlude, I return with a renewed sense of strength and optimism—an outlook much needed and often held by Indigenous communities in the face of adversity. I call for a celebration of our own. ‘One more round’ for all the facets of our resistance and the culture that we hold so dear. The phrase ‘one more round’ has multiple connotations in the context of the song. It might refer to ‘one more round’ of drinks—a way of toasting and acknowledging our Country and culture. It also might refer to another round of boxing—that we will continue to fight against colonial oppression and violence. The final verse of the song pays homage to the warriors who fought before us, and for the children who will follow in our footsteps. This is an acknowledgement of Country, a reminder that we are on what is and always be Aboriginal land. The song ends with a tirade against the settler state, unable to be contained by the cycling musical structure. In it I spit at the ongoing crimes of the State against Indigenous peoples, that invasion never ended, and we are still here fighting back. As it wraps up, I bring it back to the location of the first verse, the family home. Our home, our Country. We don’t need an invitation to be here.

The Family Home represents a strong development of my outspoken political voice, responding directly to actions taken against First Nations communities in Australia. In that sense, I feel that it demonstrates a growth in understanding the role and responsibility of voice with far greater depth than a song like GPWM, written a year earlier.

Song VI - Yonder Comes a Rider

*Yonder comes a rider
On a big horse from outta town
Kicking up dust in the afternoon sun
A weight that's breaking ground
He carries his history on his back
And he leaves no clues behind
I call out for my ma and my pa
But they ain't payin' me no mind*

*Beyond the border line
Where I can take my time
Beyond the border line*

*I know they saw him comin'
But they won't tell me his name
They say, "forget you saw the travellin' man
Forget from where he came"
The years roll by and I still wonder why
There's thunder clouds in my mind
Echoin' from a Country
Outside of space and time*

*Yonder goes the rider
Into the setting sun
He took with him his stories
Of a culture on the run
A time to ride, a time to rest
For the road has been so long
Sing the spirit back
Sing the spirit back again*

I think about proximity to my ancestors. In a sense, we're only separated by something as trivial as time - and by writing this song, I aimed to narrow that divide. Through a track like *Arfa*, I managed to embody Arthur Wellington in a way which I did not know possible. When singing that song, I am both him and me. I think about the ways that Indigenous music and ceremonial practice calls upon and presences the spirit of ancestors and Country. In her publication, *Melodies of Mourning*, Fiona Magowan, through her work with the Yolŋu community writes about singers invoking ancestral beings in song, "reminding them of their own experiences in and of the landscape and seascape."²⁵³ Similarly, my invocation of Arthur in *Arfa* is a reminder of who I am, and the hard work of my ancestors and family. This was a conscious decision I made when approaching the writing of my next song, *Yonder Comes a Rider*. This time I do not sing to embody Arthur, but to witness him, to announce my connection to him and acknowledge that connection while also acknowledging the little my family knows about him personally. It is a reminder of our relationship, the journey of reconnection, and an acceptance of not knowing everything.

In the discussion of *Arfa*, I shared the story of Arthur riding across the state to farewell his children. In *Yonder Comes a Rider*, I revisit that moment from the perspective of a witness with no knowledge of the significance of what they observe. Once again, Arthur is riding, visiting family members, ancestral descendants. As I sing the lyrics, he rides into the room. I don't know him, but he is there as a reminder of where we're from. Once again, the distance of time is circumvented through the affective nature of music and performance.

The musical structure in the verses is an homage to country music of artists such as Johnny Cash, a favourite of my Grandmother. The sound is defined by the rhythmic pulse alternating between the first and the fifth of the chord, with the full-bodied chord accented in the off-beats (more colloquially known as the "boom-chicka-boom" rhythm). I chose to do this because of Aunty Beth's love for Cash, the music of whom is intrinsically tied to my image of her. These songs are not just for me, but for the legacy of our family, and Aunty Beth has been an intrinsic in the reengagement with our cultural identities. Stylistically, the content is also a mnemonic for many of the themes of Cash's music, cowboys, spirituality,

²⁵³ Fiona Magowan, *Melodies of Mourning: Music & Emotion in Northern Australia* (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2007), 141.

rural landscapes, and redemption. By referencing these themes in my own music, I communicate them to an audience as a stylistic shorthand.

In the first verse, I paint Arthur as a larger-than-life figure. The ‘big horse’ is a direct reference to my Grandmother’s own testimony: ‘the year before his death he rode his big horse around [to] all of his children to say goodbye.’ I felt it was important to include elements of her own words to honour her authority as an elder, and to recognise that her storytelling has shaped my own interpretation of events. This larger-than-life depiction is also an extension of my imaginings of Arthur, a mysterious holder of stories that I will never know, but I reach for regardless. This verse declares Arthur’s arrival, and through this verbalisation, I make it so.

The role I hold as the narrator is kept ambiguous. Perhaps I am the child of one of Arthur’s own children, witnessing his final visit with a sense of significance, but not knowing why. That would explain why my ‘ma and pa’ won’t tell me who he is or where he came from—they are sworn to secrecy out of survival. Or I am witnessing him now, as his ever-present spirit has guided this process of cultural reclamation. The second verse expands upon Arthur’s unknowability, ‘as the years roll by’, acknowledging that there is inter-generational trauma associated with not knowing your place and yourself. At the same time, I can hear the call of culture, and feel a connection to place and people that defies logic. That the trauma stems from an absence, hearing the outline of that absence, and the need to find the best fit for it.

The choruses are a respite. I shift from the ‘boom-chicka-boom’ structure of the verse, to a more syncopated two chord vamp between E-min and A, with an added seventh passing note. The rhythmic flow of the piece moving away from the rigid verse structure is reflected in the lyric, ‘beyond the border line.’ This phrase could be considered multiple ways, perhaps reflecting a rhythm that doesn’t adhere to beats on the main four. The emphasis is shifted with the downbeat often hitting later than the first beat of the bar. I also intended for this line to be a proposition of shifting one’s mind beyond the boundary lines as dictated by settler colonial cartographers. It invites the listener to think beyond the colonial idea of mapping, to forego the strict structures that we’ve been raised with. As Indigenous peoples, the opportunity to exist beyond border lines, beyond the strictures of the settler colony, is where we can truly be free.

The final verse drives home the mythology of this cattleman, giving the listener's interaction with him a sense of closure as he travels on to visit others. Just as the music in the verses makes thematic links to the idea of the cowboy, and rural living, so too does the image of riding a horse into the setting sun. This is my way of placing Arthur into a canon of legends—larger-than-life figures who affect great change. They enter a place, make their mark, and leave. In the same way, Arthur is not physically here, nor can he ever be. However, his spirit remains, and the echoes of the mark he made still lingers. This song draws attention to those echoes, effectively revitalising his spirit, and our shared story.

Conclusion

To provide a definitive statement outlining the findings of writing songs can be daunting, something I am keenly aware of as I contextualise my own compositions. How can I provide a definitive statement outlining the findings of writing a few songs? To the best of my knowledge there is no measuring stick in Western academia that allows me to quantify the emotional and spiritual change that has been informed by songwriting. Inevitably, I can only relay my own experiences and hope that the context I've provided for you, my audience, through my songs and my stories ring true in your own minds. Songwriting has given me a vessel to engage with my Indigeneity. I was not brought up knowing I was Indigenous. No one can teach me how to 'be' Indigenous. It is something that I come to on my own terms, which I have detailed in this chapter.

In *Arfa* I speak with my ancestors, and attempt to let them speak through me. I only hope that I do justice to Arthur's story in this piece, and bring new understanding to our family's history. This is also true for *Yonder Comes a Rider*, in which I revisit the events of *Arfa* from the perspective of an oblivious witness. In *Nobody Knows* I attempt to reconcile with the difficulties of identity politics, being a pale-skinned Indigenous man living amongst those who would deny and diminish my cultural roots. In *My Songlines*, I speak to my Country. I identify the landmarks of my Country and embrace them as a part of my being and my journey. And in *The Family Home*, I speak to the difficulties of living in the settler colonial society that still wants you to sit down and be quiet. I emphasise the absurdity of the actions of settler colonial systems, and call to celebrate our ongoing survival and achievements even through such harsh conditions. Charting the change in the lyrical content from *GPWM* to *The Family Home* (both significant in their direct political messaging) can provide some

indication of personal development. In the former, I was dealing with broader themes, and not necessarily examining my own place within them. In the latter, my relationship to specific events are made clear.

There are still so many different aspects of cultural identity to uncover in myself, I feel I could keep revisiting these themes and discovering new ones throughout my life. That is why I offer these songs as snapshots of their existence, tied to a specific place and time. As I mature, so will they. A way to chart my growth and unearth new understandings. I feel a profound sense of growth from engaging with these themes through song in ways that I have not previously. They have given me opportunities to open discussion with friends and family. When I sing them out loud, I am given the confidence to wholly embrace my cultural heritage, the strength to counter claims that my skin or my living in the city makes me less Indigenous. By sharing these stories through song, I can then share them in my everyday encounters. Songwriting has granted me considerable room to examine my own unique placement within broader conversations around what it means to be an Indigenous man in Australia.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the *Introduction*, I posed the question ‘how can *I*, as an Indigenous man disconnected from my culture, redevelop *my* Indigenous identity through *my* creative practice, as a composer and performer of music?’ Here, I emphasise the personal pronouns as a way to indicate that, from the beginning, my goal for the research was to facilitate a change in myself. This anticipated change would be in how I considered my family’s cultural heritage and the responsibilities I needed to fulfil in order to strengthen connections to my community, ancestors, and Country. This paper and the accompanying sound works are an outline for answering the ‘how’ of the research question.

I began this paper by introducing myself, my experiences, my history, my family, and my connection to culture and Country as an Australian Indigenous cultural protocol. The very fact that I can commit to paper these aspects of myself, and know them to be true and embodied is evidence of growth and change through the course of this project. I can recall that not so long ago, I would feel visceral discomfort and often conflicted about whether I should share my heritage or keep it quiet. There were often times during the early days of my reclamation process where I wondered whether I should leave this aspect of my identity behind entirely. That I can now introduce myself as James Howard, a Jaadwa musician, and sing songs of my cultural experience is testament to my own growth and confidence. It is not always easy, but that is part of the unique challenge that comes with positioning yourself as First Nations in Western spaces as a White-passing person.

This thesis and the creative output charts my process of cultural reclamation through my artistic practice. The over-arching goal of the work was personally motivated, navigating an aspect of my heritage that I was unfamiliar with, and me wanting to continue the process of cultural reclamation begun by my grandmother. I began from the position of an “inter-generational survivor”²⁵⁴—in my case, unaware of the value of my heritage, or the benefits of reigniting it. This position I was in, in the lead up to the research, promoted feelings of uncertainty and a motivation to hide my identity. Knowing that due to extensive, systemic attempts at cultural genocide by the Australian Government, I would not be alone with my

²⁵⁴ Robinson, "Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility," 44.

feelings of disconnection. With this paper, I aimed to provide a case study for others who may find themselves at similar crossroads with their own cultural identities.

In the Literature Review, I outlined four fields of knowledge that this project exists within and ultimately aims to contribute to:

- Western understandings and creative expressions of soundscapes
- Sonic expressions within Indigenous communities
- Histories of the relationship between Indigenous communities and developing sound technologies
- Indigenous identity and reclamation through creative practice

Beginning with understandings of soundscapes, the field is historically predominantly dominated by Western academics and knowledges, however it was important to consider these sources in the scope of the research in order to reconcile my established understandings of sound and music prior to the research's commencement, with my developing reclamation of cultural identity. If this research was to be an act of decolonising my own spirit and thinking, I needed to begin with these Western understandings that I already carried and reconsider them beyond the Western frameworks. This included the consideration of Country as a living, spiritual entity with which I had an embodied connection. I approached an artistic relationship to Country through a hybridised combination of both First Nations and Western practices, using sound technology to engage with place through First Nations epistemologies.

The writings of Schafer and Krause provided me with a lexicon of how I would consider and create soundscapes. Building from these considerations, I developed a new term and creative methodology which facilitates my relationship to Country, culminating in the creation of Country-songs. While this methodology stemmed from personal motivations of cultural reclamation, the creative intersection of Country and sonic expression may be applied by others. and my relation to the sounds of place.

As outlined in the literature review, Diamond highlighted the need for conversation pertaining to creative decisions First Nations musicians make in modern sound production practices as a means of examining contemporary modes of cultural expression of identity.²⁵⁵ I have contributed to this conversation through extensive discussion of my own practice and the compositional and production choices I made. The fusion of First Nations and Western

²⁵⁵ Diamond, "Mixing It Up: A Comparative Approach to Sámi Audio Production," 121.

understandings of soundscape and place through sound production practice manifested as the development of my Country-songs, as creative works and a methodology for connection to place. The findings of Chapter 3 demonstrated the facilitation of connecting to place through sound by using electronic sound technologies, such as an audio recorder, and musical instruments.

Country-songs gave an opportunity to enact cultural connection in the intersection of Country, sound, and musical expression. I considered my own relation to place through *dadirri*, as defined by Ngan'gityemerri artist, Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann,²⁵⁶ and deep listening, as defined by American artist, Pauline Oliveros,²⁵⁷ by making audio recordings of Country's expression and responding to them musically. Through the creative works, I was able to develop deeper understandings of my place within both my own Jaadwa Country, as well as the Boon Wurrung Country that I have spent most of my life on. By outlining my own creative decisions in relation to cultural considerations, I demonstrated the ways in which considerations of First Nations epistemologies can be enacted through contemporary music and production practices. This includes cultural protocols around recording Country, acknowledging Traditional Owners of Country, and ensuring these places are appropriately represented in the works.

Engagement with Country-songs also demonstrated the spiritual nature of Country being embedded in the audio itself. This is apparent through the affect that recordings can have on listeners, such as Matthew Dembalali Martin's reaction to the Bungarun Marshlands,²⁵⁸ or John Wayne Parsons hearing the voices of ancestors in recordings of the waves and his layered singing.²⁵⁹ This paper contributes to discussions by Indigenous people that reference the spiritual layering within repatriated recordings and sonic expressions (as cited by Marett,²⁶⁰ Toner,²⁶¹ and Brown and Treloyn²⁶²). This thesis furthers these conversations by

²⁵⁶ Ungunmerr-Baumann, *Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness*, 1-2.

²⁵⁷ Oliveros, "Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (to Practice Practice)," 2-3.

²⁵⁸ See Interlude I: The Bungarun Marshlands

²⁵⁹ See Chapter 3: Wilin Singe the Fringe

²⁶⁰ Marett, "Sound Recordings as *Maruy* among the Aborigines of the Daly Region of North West Australia."

²⁶¹ Toner, "Tropes of Longing and Belonging: Nostalgia and Musical Instruments in Northeast Arnhem Land."

²⁶² Brown and Treloyn, "Relational Returns: Relationships and the Repatriation of Legacy Song Recordings in Australia."

shifting them beyond ethnomusicological analyses of Australian Indigenous epistemologies, into creative works that deliberately utilise that spiritual layering as a methodology.

Interlude I discussed the transportive effect of sound recordings, with the sensation of reliving the emotional sensations of living in a certain place and time. This observation was then acted upon throughout the creative examples of Chapter 3, developing with each work and culminating in the final piece, *Variations on Country*. This composition is a deliberate attempt to utilise this transportive effect in order to treat the mental toll of Melbourne's Covid lockdown. In doing this, I tapped into my own connection to Jaadwa Country and my experiences in that place to effectively ease the burden. The works discussed in Chapter 3 in particular demonstrate the capability of modern recording and production techniques in aiding with cultural connection and expression.

A potential limitation of the study is evident in the fact that this is *my* practice, and the modes of creative expression that I used were those that resonated strongly with me. If someone were to read this paper as a step-by-step guide on how to reclaim cultural identity through a musical practice, it would inevitably fall short. I suggest that this is on account of the fact that reclamation of culture is an intensely personal act. Considering that, the paper should be considered a case study of how a single person was able to do so through their creative practice. I hope that by taking this process on myself, it encourages other First Nations peoples, unsure of their identity or cultural claim, to engage with their own modes of expression, and to forge their own paths with a distinctive voice that adds to the cultural tapestry of Indigenous Australia.

Chapter 4 shifted my focus from examinations of relating to Country, to the ways in which I express my histories and experiences as a man disconnected from my Indigenous heritage. The songs detailed in this chapter were a significant break-through for me creatively and culturally, being the first time in my life that I was able to verbally articulate themes pertaining to cultural identity. This newfound voice was a direct result of the research process. This includes speaking to my ancestors, reconciling identity politics, identifying self in relation to Country, and examining my unique placement within the Australian socio-political landscape.

The existence of these songs is an outcome of development of identity, as they would not exist were it not for the research process. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, contemporary

songwriting has been used by globally by Indigenous artists to create spaces for conversations around themes of culture and decolonisation (see Levine's discussion of A Tribe Called Red,²⁶³ and Marsh's discussion of Eekwol and hip-hop in Saskatchewan²⁶⁴), public expression of the Indigenous experience in colonial contexts (see Martin's discussion of Dougie Young²⁶⁵), as well as practices of reclamation and healing (see Roach's reflections on his song *Took the Children Away*²⁶⁶). My own discussions with Ngarinyin musician, Johnny Divilli²⁶⁷ highlighted the ways in which his songwriting and performance aided in maintaining connections to cultural practice and Country. These themes then became embedded in my own songwriting practice, allowing me to uncover understandings and expressions of self that had not been fully realised up until that point. The ability to creatively write about such themes stemmed directly from my own immersion in the research, and my cultural practices and embracing of identity. I found that I formed a new relationality to external events which had fed into the lyric writing, such as my response to the destruction at the Djab Wurrung birthing trees site in (*One More Round for*) *The Family Home*.

I did not want my development of cultural identity to supersede my established musical identity, but for that aspect of myself to be the foundation for a process of reclamation. As outlined in the first chapter, I wanted this project to indistinguishably merge my pre-existing musical identity with my unknown Indigenous heritage. Throughout the thesis, I highlighted a series of artists, musicians, and methodologies which I considered as significant creative influences in my own practice. These included the considerations of place held by La Monte Young, of tuning and guitar performance by Glenn Branca, of the exploration of electronic soundscapes by experimental German artists in the 70s, of the lo-fidelity acoustic recordings of Bruce Springsteen, and the nostalgia of Johnny Cash. Considering my experience of recording with Johnny Divilli,²⁶⁸ I came to realise that I wanted my songs to be shared with community, and for the songs to be allowed to change and grow. By maintaining a creative aesthetic that resonated with my own love of music, in both sound design and songwriting

²⁶³ Levine, "Remixing Return: A Tribe Called Red's Decolonial Bounce."

²⁶⁴ Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth: Storytelling, Identity, and Hip Hop in Saskatchewan."

²⁶⁵ Martin, "Dougie Young and Political Resistance in Early Aboriginal Country Music."

²⁶⁶ Roach, *Tell Me Why: The Story of My Life and My Music*, 357.

²⁶⁷ See Interlude II: The Derby Sessions

²⁶⁸ See Interlude II: The Derby Sessions

contexts, I know that I have maintained this merging of cultural and musical identities. Through the use of instruments such as the synthesizer and the guitar, as well as production techniques I had developed over years of practice, I was able to maintain my established creative tool set to enact my cultural reclamation.

My creative works built upon a long history of Indigenous expression through popular song format, both in Australia and overseas. They stem from the healing applications of Indigenous art,²⁶⁹ and as a means of drawing attention to issues facing marginalised communities.²⁷⁰ As a result of writing these songs, I feel a greater motivation to come to come to understandings of cultural violence enacted by settler colonial states. In turn, writing songs such as these gives me the voice to speak out against such actions, as heard in the songs *GPWM* and *(One More Round for) The Family Home*.

My awareness of, and engagement in social and political spaces has resulted in my taking on academic roles at the University of Melbourne. These courses in particular examine the role of Indigenous art within responsibility of voice, and political expression, and give me the opportunity to not only educate undergraduate students in this area, but to continue my own understanding of Indigenous expression in the Australian context. As a result of this, I find myself in a position of responsibility for the education of students around the histories of Indigenous civil rights movements and the arts in Australia.

My personal growth does not stop at the point that this thesis is published, and in your hands. This thesis is the first step in a lifetime ahead of me, in which I will continue to mature and deepen my understanding of my cultural responsibilities. While I conclude my initial findings around these intersections of musical expression and cultural reclamation, I acknowledge that there is this work will never truly end. It is in my blood, and will be in the blood of my children. Before commencing this research, I found myself at a fork in the road, at which I faced an ultimatum to either continue on oblivious to my cultural responsibilities—to ancestors, to family, to community—or embrace them. The former choice was undoubtedly the easier of the two, ignorance is bliss after all. But I thought of the years of hard work that my grandmother had undertaken, as a gift for her babies, and knew that the right path for me was to accept that gift so that I too might one day pass it along. To

²⁶⁹ See Chapter 2: Reclamations and Expressions of Indigenous Identity through Sound and Technology

²⁷⁰ See Chapter 4: Historical Influences

sit down and share embodied stories with my own children, as an act of continuing cultural presence and responsibility, in spite of colonisation and attempted genocide. It was a responsibility that extended outwards, back to my ancestors, forward to the next generation.

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