

Writing Forward, Writing Back, Writing Black— Working Process and Work-in-Progress

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It is amazing how the bridge that one forms in one's life is crossed over and over again by different people and how the circle of connection and belonging keeps expanding. (Tur 147)

This is a paper about creative acts of collaboration—about building and crossing bridges and circles of connection and belonging. It considers writing forward, back and Black first as process and then as work-in-progress in the everyday practice of Indigenous education.

Working Process

Telling Black stories is important for historical, cultural, political and personal reasons. Each act of creation or re-creation adds to a store of precious resources which contributes to well-being, healing and the capacity to imagine change. Stories sustain communities. Some writers come from lines of story keepers, song makers and Elders on country. With the authority of continuity they write us forward. Other writers lack that direct, guiding narrative authority and—beginning with only fragments—write their way back to wholeness. At some point these writing pathways meet to reshape or restore ideas of time, space and country. They thread through all kinds of private and public, real and imagined spaces—sea country, desert country, parks, lounge rooms, sports grounds, libraries, classrooms—and those who travel with their stories are not always writers in one medium. They sing, dance, paint, and talk them as well. Each expression finds a new shape for dynamic language and—sometimes—ways of sharing that language with writers from other traditions.

This paper builds on the Piece for Three Voices scripted and compiled by Gus Worby (GW) and presented by Simone Ulalka Tur (SUT) and Faye Rosas Blanch (FRB) at the BlackWords Symposium at UQ in October 2012, but has origins in countless conversations about the place of writing forward, writing back and writing Black in shaping Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and Indigenous education¹. It draws on song-cycle and biography in Ngitji Ngitji Mona Tur's *Cicada Dreaming*², rap in Nunga space³ and the poetics of Faye Rosas Blanch's search for family and a place called Pinnacle Pocket, among memories and fragments of the official record.⁴ It does this with the aid of Simone Ulalka Tur's understanding of the Anangu philosophy and practice of Ngapartji Ngapartji.⁵ She writes:

In the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Dictionary Ngapartji Ngapartji is defined as: 'in return or later'; and 'I'll give you (something) in return.' The second reading of Ngapartji Ngapartji emphasizes the importance of mutual reciprocity and obligation between individuals, groups or communities. In doing so it foregrounds the notion of exchange where learning occurs through relationship responsibilities.

We have found this approach to 'responsibilities' instructive in unpacking and positioning ourselves in relation to discourses on sovereignty and social justice and their connection to safe space for Indigenous peoples. We've called this safe space Home.

‘We’ are two Indigenous women and a non-Indigenous man: colleagues, collaborators, mutual mentors, willing mentees and critical friends. For the past ten years we have storied ourselves into each other’s professional lives and work environments. Writing to, for and with each other has produced a sustaining correspondence, something beyond academic writing for publication. This is the basis of a ‘kindred’ relationship. Words signal our affinity, hold us together and to account, bridge our worlds, track our footsteps.

Each new story has been a mark of measured trust as we move back and forth, through circle after circle of experience. Each crossing has been careful and considered. Our stories are coded. There are things that can be said by Indigenous women to other Indigenous women, things that should not be said or known by non-Indigenous men. Over time such ground rules—sometimes spoken, sometimes intuited, never taken for granted in an ongoing process of negotiation—have formed a sufficiently strong foundation to contemplate a play of ideas and practices which permits some exchange and melding of voices. We enact the episodic story-of-our-stories by playing different roles to remind each other that privilege adheres even to those who try to think and act beyond its influence. By this we mean that critical reflection on equity at all levels of interaction is an essential part of contextualising our practice as colleagues, educators and agents. Black words and writing help us rethink our relative as well as nominal place in the layered processes of education. Our meta-story of something more than a working relationship is therefore both cautionary and celebratory. Respect for that ‘something beyond’ keeps the relationship, secure and alive.

It may seem that a Winnicottian approach to play as creative practice is at work in what we do (Winnicott).⁶ If so, it is by coincidence not design. The foundation and purpose of the relationship is as much political as psychological. It may even be physiological as well. Nancy Fraser, in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, writes of Foucault and modalities of power. She highlights how power is ‘capillary’ and operates at the extremities of the social body in and through everyday social practices (18). Writing Black and working in Black space must operate at these fundamental levels if it is to be effective and successful in countering privilege as a function of systemic corporate power in everyday life. Writing and having voice in places of power provide greater opportunities for a process of decolonising, unpacking and mapping that privilege.

We write for each other to test the tolerances of trust in ever-changing contexts and to contribute to the greater story of the role of powerful discourses in our lives. In the process we have found ways of rehearsing and then acting out our solidarity and sensibilities—of taking strategic educational risks. In *The Dancing Mind* Toni Morrison says that the embodied risk (and we would add pleasure) of writing is the dance of an open mind when it engages another (Morrison). What is generated in writing, reading and shared theoretical rigor is the capacity to disrupt and interrupt processes of power: to (re-)assert a purposeful self in the process of taking and giving. Black writing in places of power therefore requires bravery, skill, stamina . . . and a willingness to be partnered but not led in the dance of open minds.

This is why, as we see it, the politics of Black writing (Wright 10–44) has involved fighting for and creating an expanding network of Black communication spaces with their own conventions, safe havens, admission procedures and ethical requirements in which the importance of situated knowledge, speaking and subject positions and standpoint have grown and changed over time (Harraway 95; Harding 10). For example, in some circumstances speaking for one’s self, or with a deliberately circumscribed perspective, safeguards against homogenisation of Indigenous voices and positions. At times speaking only with the

permission of Elders or community is essential. Such approaches address anticipated appropriation as well as homogenisation of knowledge, culture and voice in and beyond the academy. Sometimes speaking and writing is just not possible, despite the expectations of the academy. Speaking out or not speaking, writing for or about, moving forward and back have contributed to an intricate Black communications culture in which agency and the path to transformation can be differently and disproportionately difficult to negotiate for Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors. Faye Blanch says: silence ‘waits’ for each of us to find a way, a time and a voice (Blanch and Worby 1).

For academics, writing and speaking out goes with the territory. It is expected. Restraint (should it be required) is normally a matter of professional ethics not culture. This can have consequences for collaboration inside and beyond the academy where the willing, strategic identification and subordination of White approaches to Black knowledge and position, and a re-ordering of ethical and intellectual priorities and permissions in acknowledgement of Indigenous interests, is yet to be fully understood. This is no surprising observation on the status of cross-cultural relations in academia but it does impact on Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals in their professional practice, on the reception and perception of that practice and on the telling of the meta-story of collaboration. It matters in both intimate and corporate interactions. Ignore the nuances and you put the security of your colleagues and collaborators at risk. Ignore the nuances and you risk becoming an ‘expert other’ or (worse still) an ‘expert’ on the ‘other’ (Hemming 152; Hemming and Rigney 90–92).⁷ Ignore the nuances and you may send students into their professional lives with a damaged view of what is to be done, when and how (Worby, Rigney and Tur 442–44; Worby 265–67). Over-sensitivity to nuance, however, can result in self-silencing and effacement to the point of invisibility—as colleagues working across borders and between spaces will attest.

The art of telling the story of the lives of stories requires a balanced response to contradiction, understanding of place in the narrative order and a capacity to shift register with ease in response to the vigour of the ‘capillary’ flow of power. This is where Black writing helps performance of acts of appearance and disappearance. It recognises layers of ownership of knowledge, hierarchies of utterance and enactment within Black space and shifts in receptivity beyond that space—to respond to changes of institutional administrative regime or government policy, for example (Baker and Worby 18–19). It requires sensitivity to time-frames: what can be said now and what must wait until there is ‘readiness’ for saying . . . which might take months or years. It relies on an understanding of the transfer of responsibility for action and weight of consequence from one to another and of when that load can be carried. It values the subtle interplay and inflection of differently powerful languages (language used in the Indigenous sense of the word as well as the languages of institutional procedures, statutes and academic practice) and seeks to interrogate and influence the lexicon in each case. It accepts the need to talk . . . and talk . . . and talk ideas into shapes that will sometimes recognise, sometimes transgress and sometimes re-define boundaries—always with an eye to strategic effect (Tuhiwai Smith). It reinforces the capacity to stay grounded and strong in the face of appropriative, opportunistic appetites for new and different knowledge at work in large and privileged institutions. Black knowledge, for example (Dyson; Seifa Dei; hooks).

When we began working, talking and writing together we acknowledged the speak for-yourself convention in Black space. For the most part, each collaborator contributed their discrete part to the whole. Each voice could be identified by content, syntax and sometimes section. This was one way of representing non-appropriative conversation in Indigenous scholarship.

Over time we asked: what would it mean to switch and share voices—not just according to the protocols of academic quotation and citation but in a more ‘playful,’ less protective exchange? What if we began with freedoms offered by ‘formlessness’ and found our way to shared expression through continuous reflection and mutual critical evaluation? How might this prepare us to think about colleague (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) as agent, actor and friend in a politicised, ideas-sharing ensemble? What might calculated role-switching bring to authorship . . . and to the generic teaching and learning space and the Black space within it? What would be lost? What gained? What strategic or tactical advantages might result?

In response to these questions we held on to the idea that harnessing the power of language involves appreciating the multifarious powers of voice, knowing that for too long those powers have been situated in a White hegemonic racialised context. But we also saw, with Derrida, that within the context of racialised constructed knowledge, Indigenous Australians have taken a stand in ‘arousing speech from its slumber as sign’ to ‘create meaning by enregistering writing, entrusting writing to engraving a groove, a relief, to a surface whose essential characteristics is transmissible’ (Derrida 13). We found that Black writing in Black space made the operation of surrounding Whiteness easier to identify and de-construct (Moreton-Robinson; Stephenson). We learned that addressing such constructs through ‘dance’ and ‘play’ encouraged the non-sequential and idiosyncratic characteristics of our daily interactions, especially since singing, rapping and mediated communication already had their place in our pedagogical practice. It gave us room to move. We felt that improvisation and its attendant risks—the relinquishing of focus to gain advantage and the juxtapositions of similar-but-not-same perceptions, the recognition of the nonsensical, disruptive and inherently contradictory—suited the performance of Blackness and unmasked so much that was otherwise taken-for-granted or suppressed in mainstream communication.

Ngitji Ngitji Mona Tur showed us this, as did many others of her generation. *Cicada Dreaming* is important, here, because Ngitji Ngitji drew sustenance from song, poetry, painting and prose in a spectrum of expression. She danced with her grandmothers, aunties, sisters and daughters. She sang her country. She wrote books. She composed and taught inma. She spoke her story. She translated her story. The overlaying of forms and registers she used in her work enhances our understanding of how we might approach issues such as responsibility, sovereignty, reciprocity, a just education—and Home as old and new space.

This is the provenance of our Piece for Three Voices. In Brisbane, at the BlackWords Symposium, it was performed by two of us, (SUT and FRB below) in response to appropriate representation and respect for context and event: an example of necessary presence and strategic absence. In this written version, where words stand for presence and performance, the complexities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaboration are re-inscribed with inclusion of the third voice (GW). Without three identified voices: no accurate representation of interplay and boundary-crossing solidarity. Without that negotiated crossing: less opportunity to consider our respective, different presences in Black communications space and our voices re-voiced. Without critical consideration and exchange: limited capacity to judge the manifold effects of telling. In this Piece we make a gift of our words, each to the others, on condition that the burdens, risks and opportunities of telling this story have been as carefully and responsibly distributed as we can make them. Ngapartji Ngapartji.

Work-in-progress

Here is our attempt to ‘arouse speech from its slumber as sign,’ to expand the ‘circle of connection and belonging,’ make play with Black words and consider the meaning of Home in A Piece for Three Voices.

I

SUT: We acknowledge country and Elders past and present.

FRB: We acknowledge our Yunggorendi colleagues.

GW: It’s the beginning of the second university semester and several hundred students are gathered in a lecture theatre. Eight staff members are part of the mob and on the hour they take to the front of the space and introduce themselves. This is a day in each teaching year which is significant beyond almost all others—not just for those attending but for the University—though few recognise it. Six of the teachers are Indigenous. Most of the people in the room will not have been in the presence of so many Indigenous people before. Most will not have been in a situation in which control (power) is in the hands of Indigenous people: over language, knowledge, scholarship, technology, space, time and careers. The students are teacher-educators in training. The topic they are taking is one they have to pass.

SUT: Most of the people in the room will have no idea of the complex costs of being here to those six members of staff and their communities, nor of the sense of achievement . . . and above all . . . no idea of the responsibility to succeed felt by those members of staff and their close colleagues.

FRB: But as Simone says, ‘It’s more than just responsibility’ that weighs heavy in the moment. She knows. She is in the room. Tracey Bunda is there too and she sees things this way:

Our sovereignty is embodied and tied to particular tracts of country, thus our bodies signify ownership and we perform sovereign acts in our everyday living. (Bunda 75)

SUT: This is everyday living. Faye is in the room as well. For her, each ‘contact’ brings with it a flood of conflicting and contradictory life experiences. She raps them into order:

FRB: Homi talks about a third space, students, teachers and community with grace create a new space to articulate a revolution for education, negotiate political persuasion for articulation of Australia as a nation / to embody and enact reconciliation, to understand black armband and white blindfold contestation.

SUT: For us, writing forward, writing back and writing Black are acts of obligation based on an age-old practice of give and give in return, yet to be understood by most of those who are required to learn, here and now. Anangu call it Ngapartji Ngapartji which can be translated, in this border-crossing context, as: ‘I’ll give you something in return.’ That’s the way we’re using it.

FRB: This presentation situates the exchange of ‘stories’ as life-affirming acts of education. They draw together person, place, culture and purpose. They presume a responsible listener and reader and speak directly to them. Our piece draws on Antikirinya-Yankunytjatjara Elder Ngitji Ngitji Mona Tur’s autobiography *Cicada Dreaming*, and the authority of a line of Anangu women healers, song-makers and keepers who have kept story strong. Simone is daughter and grand-daughter to such women. She seeks and respects their advice.

GW: It also follows Faye’s search for a story-line through her research in postcolonial and black feminist theory and popular rap culture, from classroom to the segregated place called Pinnacle Pocket in Yidniji country, North Queensland, where she spent her childhood.

FRB: For Indigenous educators writing forward, writing back and writing Black is writing Home . . . as old and new space.

GW: Our thoughts on their role in education begin with *Cicada Dreaming* and a daughter’s reflection.

II

SUT: The gift of *Cicada Dreaming* by my Ngunyntju (Mother) to my family is part of my story. I choose to share it with you. This draws on the intergenerational knowledge that I have been given by my late mother Ngitji Ngitji Tur who grounded me, nurtured me and taught me about strength, resilience and culture. I honour her in the process of re-telling, remembering in the moments of learning, to listen and learn and understand. Ngunyntju’s story has taught me about the colonial relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and about resilience. *Cicada Dreaming* provides a vision for a different-looking future, one that requires acts of determination, commitment and passion and an understanding of the ontology of Ngapartji Ngapartji—of reciprocation, respect, responsibility . . . and agency.

GW: *Cicada Dreaming* spans seven decades of a life, but calls up interlinked life-stories and the way such stories are told and received. Its range of recorded and remembered experience, from birth into country and language to later-life as interpreter, Elder and teacher offers a way of thinking forward to those who are open to Ngitji Ngitji’s use of intersecting narrative forms and histories and knowledge of the world in four languages: Antikirinya, Yankunytjatjara, Pitjantjatjara and English.

FRB: History is respected, but not to the exclusion of a poetic sensibility which orders experience whenever gaps in the ‘official’ record and fractures in patterns of life rob prose narrative of its ‘facts,’ direction or power. This overlaying of forms, in a play of meanings, is itself a representation of consciousness stretched to breaking point. It offers ways to and from the record, to different sites and constructs of authority and to different perceptions of being in the world. It’s a bridge built from materials and tools at hand, offered to daughters and their children to help them find ways of moving back and forth in time, space and Dreaming.

SUT: The key words in our translation of and negotiation through Ngapartji Ngapartji are ‘something in return.’

GW: The question which underpins Ngitji Ngitji's story is not 'Have I done enough of the right thing?' but (having given and done so much to connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of doing and being) 'Who is keeping the other half of the bargain and how?' There is a poignant section of her book which shows the inherent tension between systemic power and cultural expectation. In the chapter 'Interpreting, Breakdown and Recovery: 1973–1990,' the narrative turns this way:

SUT: In 1973 . . . the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement began helping Aboriginal people in their legal cases. They heard that I had been interpreting for Aboriginal people at Adelaide University and asked whether I could interpret for them too. I was very dubious about this due to my limited education and background, and the need to appear before educated non-Aborigines. It would be difficult for non-Aboriginal people to understand how I felt when asked to interpret in courts. I was terrified going into this new situation, the more so that I was totally isolated, not knowing how I would cope and with no one to back me up . . . The turning point in my role as an interpreter occurred in late 1973 when I had to interpret for a young man from Oodnadatta whom I had looked after in the Oodnadatta mission several years earlier . . . All of a sudden a word I had never heard of was used in the court. I can recall how I felt even though the word in question eludes my memory. My knees began to shake and I became hot and bothered . . . If I didn't get the proper meaning of the term that was used, it could follow that he would be sentenced more severely than otherwise. To this day I cannot get over how I turned to the judge and asked, using the same terminology I had heard in court so often: 'Your Honour, could you please explain the word that you have just used because I do not understand its meaning and cannot interpret it' . . . After the jury had passed sentence on this young man, I broke down in the dock before everybody and burst into tears either from the shock of my having been so forward or from anguish for my brother, I don't know which. It was a mixture of humiliation, pain and sheer fear. (112–15)

FRB: The Judge was 'kindly,' writes Ngitji Ngitji. What about his advice?

SUT: He told me that as an interpreter for my people I should never become personally involved in the cases. I had to be like a brick wall or I would never succeed. (115)

GW: What system of justice induces 'humiliation, pain and fear' in its facilitators and then offers a 'brick wall' defense for success?

FRB: What does 'succeed' mean if this is the price? What inter-generational lesson exists here and how can it find its way into contemporary education so that the past in the present is a benefit not an impediment? Does the answer lie in ways of thinking first about relationships built on 'something in return' rather than prescriptive, restrictive discourses?

GW: Ngitji Ngitji offered her vision of possibility in the poem Dedication:

SUT: *To my tjamu, grandfather*

*Love beyond expression,
Forgive my intrusion.*

*Hope has come at last
To explain your past;
To promote your culture,
For children of our future.*

*So they can learn your philosophy of life:
In this country,
Live as brother and sister
Without hate of colour or race. (i)*

FRB: For Ngitji Ngitji, finding the words and translating them, walking the line between ‘right’ and ‘true,’ interpreting the colonial mindset was task enough. Too much of a task on occasions. The chapter which tells the story of the ‘word I had never heard’ is called ‘Interpreting, Breakdown and Recovery.’ Breakdown. For the generations of daughters and grandchildren, however, a new Black language has been created with its own powerful logic and reason for being—and a new capacity for translation as well—in response to the inherited responsibility to hold colonialist assumptions to account . . . and to protect the vulnerable from harm. To help remember, ‘teach the true history’ and ‘make amends for Australia’s historical shame,’ as Ngitji Ngitji says.

SUT: The objective for a next-generation ‘translation’ is not just accuracy, to preserve an institution and its authority, but transformation: a re-making through language in action.

GW: The tools to hand used by Ngitji Ngitji’s generation are still there (in works like *Cicada Dreaming*) but new tools of critical deconstruction and reconstruction turn institutionalised, specialist languages and discourses to the task . . . including the provocative, self-conscious, political practice of writing and performing Black.

III

SUT: The story of the power of ‘a word’ to immobilise and render subordinate is etched into collective experience of Indigenous players engaged in practices of translation or instruction—whether in court or in formal education. For educators Race is such a word. So are White, Black and Colonial. Education can become such a word when linked to black, white and race (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It takes generations of accumulated courage to present them, to each new generation of largely non-Indigenous students, in the proposition that . . .

FRB: There is a need for anti-racist education for all of us—and a greater purpose in writing back and Black—to combat ‘double consciousness’ (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Writing Black talks up to constructions of identity compromised by popular discourses of disadvantage, victimhood and ingratitude, to assert more desirable ways of being in a world shaped and reshaped by colonialism and globalisation.

GW: Each year in large lecture theatres Black words enable shifts in collective as well as individual engagement with unfamiliar and (apparently) ‘common-sense’ ideas on what a relevant and just education means . . . and to whom (Koerner, Tur and Wilson).

FRB: The labour involved in mobilisation is huge.

SUT: The negative and positive consequences of engagement for all actors are equally large.

FRB: Each year stories are told—like Ngitji Ngitji’s story—to map and bridge the gap between thinking back and writing towards the idea of a just education and its flesh and blood, sovereign, embodied, ‘contractual’ reality in what Trinh Minh-ha calls the ‘to and fro movement of life’ (Trinh Minh-ha 375).

GW: But not all stories are like *Cicada Dreaming*: a layered, evocative first-person narrative, completed on its own terms.

SUT: Good teaching sometimes requires a more deliberately provocative approach to content, context and delivery: something unfinished, streetwise, campus smart. There are poetic ways of de-constructing colonial history which lead to the recorded and remembered past via imaginative engagement and acting out. This comes about when the objective is to produce an immediate, visceral awareness of the embodied past in present generations: to show, for example, that the reduction of grandmothers or great-grandfathers to brief entries in government ledgers produces—for the want of other connection—a generation of brothers and sisters bound together by imagination as well as socio-political and kinship ties, across time and space.

FRB: Absence from the formal record is not the end. The bridge to an individual’s ‘lost’ past may be someone else’s shared story: the loss of one family’s history, a part of the larger, shared and growing history of a people. On this long journey *Cicada Dreaming* is a guide and Ngitji Ngitji a companion in the search for a generation of women at Pinnacle Pocket.

GW: Faye brings these nuances to education in her poetic responses to the theory and practice of writing Black. She contemplates the challenges confronting Indigenous teachers and learners as they move between the ‘hidden and public transcripts’ of their lives (Rose 100). She reminds us, with Penny Van Toorn, that ‘writing never arrives naked’ (Van Toorn). She calls up the ‘Should we . . . ? Can I..? What will . . . ? What if . . . ?’ questions which surround trust and tests their mettle in a headlong assault on silences born of fear. She uses Gramsci’s ‘wars of maneuver’ and position (Rose 102; Gramsci) in her provocations to break down that brick-wall view of success offered by Ngitji Ngitji’s Judge and gives voice to silence. In the process, what began as self-propelled rap (Blanch, ‘Nunga’ 37), transformed with time into discursive, reflexive, interrogative verse and with a further shape-shift has become a performance piece for more than one voice:

FRB: My pen is my weapon, I sharpen its tip
I stab these pages, making changes, through the ages
In various stages, to explore, implore, pour the words
Out. Come about. Let shout.

Tryin to figure it.

Method in my madness.

SUT: To articulate, make haste.

To rectify, re-invent the rhetoric.

What's truth when people are playin, sayin, complainin

About right and wrong?

FRB: To map the past, present, future

Ensure the right, almighty fight, in places of power.

SUT: Knowledge gained, ashamed.

Insult, consult, translate.

FRB: Related.

SUT: The roles we take, the position we make, forsake the others

The spaces *we* shape.

FRB: My pen is my weapon. I sharpen its tip, to flip the other side

Of the coin, to see, hear, know, flow the silences waiting.

SUT: The silences . . . waiting . . .

FRB: I see myself as a speaker and a writer. I rap theory and practice. In the Derridian context speech is constituted through the very act of writing. As Derrida states: 'to write would be an attempt to forget difference, to forget writing in the presence of so-called living and pure speech' (Derrida 14). In force and signification, Derrida suggests that 'the power of true literary language as poetry is indeed access to free speech unburdened of its signaling functions by the word, it is born of language' (Derrida 13).

GW: Black, poetic writing opens up ways of accessing a past in the presence and absence of remembered or written detail. If the public record or memory alone were to be trusted, in Faye's case, family history might consist of just two archival notes and a shared anecdote.

SUT: The entries on the colonial record read:

FRB: Willie Tanner, native of the South Sea Islands had been living with the gin Annie and wishes to marry her, having had four children, two boys and two girls.

And:

The gin Annie is a native of Atherton and is willing to marry Willie against whose character I can find no blemish . . . I recommend they marry.⁸

SUT: The anecdote is even briefer . . .

FRB: The women built the church.

IV

GW: For Faye, five lines are enough to allow her to make connections between poetic, hermeneutic and teacherly practices. The past is not another country. She travels with history and through theory—keeping company with and comforted by memories of Mothers, Grandmothers and Aunties—to a place where the silences are waiting for her to speak. In the acting space Faye has created for herself, Silence and Home are living

presences, revealed (when convention requires) as characters in a transporting and transforming dramatic narrative. She creates text and subtext for them, this way:

FRB: My story begins with the attempt to see beyond the pages of archival documentation, to search for familiarity in the black and white photos of my family and to hear their voices once again . . . According to the memories of older family members the church at Pinnacle Pocket was burnt down and the women who were living on the reserve along with the help of a builder gathered together to help build a new church. It is not the church that I want to focus on but how memory can be reflected in how I tell the story and how I relate to this story. In my imagination I see my old women, my Grandma Annie, my Granny Topsy, Granny Lizzie, Great-grandma Mary, Granny Jemima. It is these women that I conjure up when I hear the words. [Then] I [am free to] explore between the hidden and the public transcripts [of my family's life], between what is said and what is not said.

I have connection, a place to stay awhile, a place to sit.
Yes I remember Granny saying that 'the women built the church.'

What is revealed to me as I write is that written and visual archival documentation acted against and for my people. What I understand is that the documented voices that determined my family's lives are as alive today as they were back then and that such documentations are not obsolete, but continue into the contemporary. They come together in this poem to my Father:

I look upon your face I search for you amongst the words.
They describe you a particular way, not the way I see you.
My thoughts connect with your eyes even though you are not
Here. You exist within my body, I see me in you
I see me in members of my family,
I want to talk to you, sit with you, walk with you.
I want your voice, I want you.

I reflect on the past in the present. The women who built the church, my Father . . . they are not absent.

I am their text.

GW: The poetic journey to family and Pinnacle Pocket began whilst another adventure in education was unfolding. In an examination of the value of rap and hip hop as teaching and learning tools for Nunga youth, Faye rapped the most difficult ideas in her thesis (Blanch 40), like this response to de la Tierra in *This Bridge We Call Home* (367–68).

FRB: hold ya head up its tuff ruff
ya know your stuff
bluff if ya need to
cruise smooth the process progress
our presence no invitation citation quotation equate
yourself to the discourses for courses resources
subjected objected rejected corrected at every turn

language manages codes of behavior
 save yourself my self
 students of life get a slice of selective reflective materials
 place of raw desperation participation in positions of power
 systematically categorically denied existence insistence on
 our right our fight no fright we can be subversive coercive
 within places spaces faces traces of ourselves here and now
 write the words describe prescribe arrive create change
 remember you me them us we have a right to be here

SUT: The outcome of this approach to presence in language, place and space continues to be a contemporary, edgy (rather than post-colonial, marginal) way of ordering theory and systems of knowing. In the ‘to and fro movement of life’ it connects socially just education to a deep sense of ‘something in return’ and what it means to find Home.

FRB: Home carries me away to places
 Spaces that won’t confine me
 Deny me, bound or confound me
 But saves me, plays with me and
 Contains me.

Power’s in the knowing
 Showing the way to move and groove
 Me, to cement pleasure, desire and
 Informed consent, where pride side steps
 The fall and calls to others
 Take note that I am in the house. (Blanch, ‘Nunga’ 148)

NOTES

1 We acknowledge the roles played by Yungorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research and AustLit in establishing the AustLit Indigenous Database (2006), precursor to BlackWords, the dedication of Kerry Kilner of AustLit, the vision of Dr Anita Heiss, the research skills of Yaritji Green, Shayne Martens Van Hengst and Anne Chittleborough, and the contribution of successive Flinders Chief Investigators Gus Worby, Prof. Tracy Bunda and Prof. Robert Phidian, in the development of the project.

2 *Cicada Dreaming* was runner-up for the Arts Queensland David Unaipon Award (2009). Its original title was *Only a Bridge*. Dr Ngitji Ngitji Mona Tur makes special mention of the help of her ‘adopted sister, kaku,’ Dr Olga Gostin, in bringing the book to publication and we add our thanks for her example and contribution to kindred collaboration. We pay our respects to Jozef Tur and Renee Amari Tur and thank her for her support and advice as we worked on this article. We also acknowledge Simone Ulalka Tur’s Kangkuru (older sister) Karina Lester for her feedback.

3 Nunga/Nungas: terms used by Aboriginal people in some parts of South Australia to identify as a collective. The Nunga Room is a safe, on-site caring space for Indigenous school students.

4 Pinnacle Pocket is geographically located in Yungaburra and is remembered by members of the extended Rosas family and other Aboriginal families in Atherton, North Queensland, with much love. The church is the Bethel Assemblies of God church which remains located in McKewon Road, Yungaburra.

5 Anangu: Western Desert Aboriginal person.

6 Winnicott’s *Playing and Reality* (1971) has relevance to approaches to cross-cultural interaction in education in its consideration of the relationship between creativity, play, trust and safe space—for children and adults. Summation and reflecting back, as acts of critical friendship, assist in creating a space in which the need for self-defense is reduced and fear of judgment and failure is replaced by a willingness to play with form and experiment with role and content.

7 Our colleagues Associate Professors Steve Hemming and Daryle Rigney are developing well-theorised and well-implemented approaches to partnerships and community-university-government relations. Their work on governance rejects the influence of what they call the ‘new protectors’ (2007, 2010).

8 A small amount of archival documentation was sent to Faye Rosas Blanch from the Queensland Government Community and Personal Histories Section, following her request to know more about her father after his death.

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