KUNAPIPI

Journal of Postcolonial Writing

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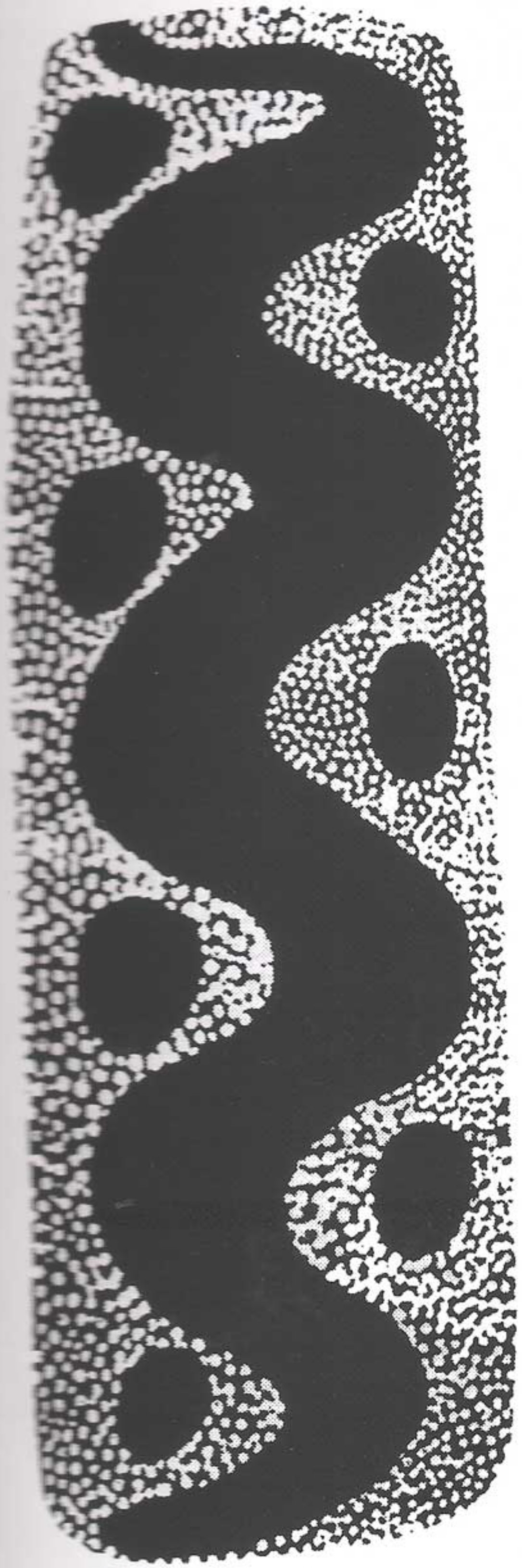

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Kunapipi is a bi-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

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Contents

EDITORIAL

I have just finished reading Unity Dow's *The Screaming of the Innocent*, a novel published in 2002[1] that reveals the practice and concealment of *dipheko* — the ritual murder of primarily pre-pubescent girls — in contemporary Botswana. It is a deeply disturbing novel, not so much for its revelation of the terrible violence done to the most vulnerable members of a society by those in positions of power and responsibility — the news media are replete with such stories every day of the week; nor by the revelation of a complicit silence that is perpetuated by all who see and hear but will not speak. The silence of the fearful or those guilty either by act or association is again a position with which we are all too familiar, our everyday environments at home and in the workplace offering any number of ordinary examples that corroborate the extraordinary. Rather, it is as Margaret Lenta and Margaret Daymond suggest in interview with Unity, the revelation of terrible guilt by one least suspected that is so shocking:

> Amantle looked at the gentle old face before her: was it the face of a man full of compassion and love? The face of a brutal killer? The face of a brave man? The face of a coward? The face of a man who'd held down a twelve-year-old girl as she was being cut up live, screaming, struggling, begging, bleeding? Was he a man who'd reached out to a grieving mother and offered her true friendship and support? Was he a monster? (215)

Yet the shock is not so much that a man portrayed as gentle and sympathetic, indeed empathetic, should be capable of an act of 'inhuman' atrocity; but the recognition of our possible selves in that act. As Unity observes, 'For me it was like investigating the potential for evil in all of us. Naturally that idea would tend to shock each one of us — that it could have been any one of us; that it could be someone we like very much. So who are these people who commit murders?' (52). What is most disturbing is the idea that an act of almost unimaginable violence may indeed be very human — human because it is in fact imaginable — not only as one drawn into such an act by fear or cowardice but as one drawn into such an act because compelled by the allure of horror and its implicit entanglement with power and desire. How then are we to eradicate such unconscionable acts when they lie so close — so deep and yet so near the surface?

> Cruelty has a human heart
> And Jealousy a human face;
> Terror the human form divine,
> And Secrecy the human dress.
>
> ('A Divine Image', *Songs of Experience*, 1794)

The words are William Blake's, for I have begun teaching the Romantics this week — a course in which I emphasise the importance of imagination and empathy in achieving a more equitable, free and humane society. The Romantic

poets believed that political goals could be achieved through poetic means — the latter would encourage and inspire the former; but the cynic in me, or the accumulation of life-experience, recognises that the relationship between the two is neither natural nor easy. Empathy would not seem to be enough. I can imagine the suffering of another as though I myself were suffering, but this act of imagination does not necessarily generate an equivalent action in the real world of human affairs. Literature inspires me but does it also lend me the courage to act? I do not have answers, but I would concur with Blake that, 'The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1793). I have to continue to believe that when literature brings awareness where there was ignorance, and acknowledgment where there was denial, there is at least the possibility of change. Unity Dow's novel does not end on an uplifting note — the enemy vanquished and the battle won — but neither does it end with defeat. It is a call to action:

> Her thoughts flew about in her head as she searched for a reason. Is there a monster lurking in all of us? And if we're so paralysed by fear, if we don't dare face this evil, who will heed the screams of the innocent? (215)

Many of the essays in this issue challenge or reveal a challenge made to orthodoxy or unhealthy, even dangerous, stagnation of opinion. They include visual artists like Mary Alice Evatt and Emily Carr, writers as diverse as Jamaica Kincaid, Dymphna Cusack, Albert Wendt, Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Judith Wright, dancers like Elizabeth Cameron Dalman. Many of the essays examine the injustices created and perpetuated by social orders that enshrine hierarchies of power and define themselves on principles of exclusion; but I have chosen to focus this editorial on Dow's call to action because the horrific nature of the reptile revealed when the stagnant water is stirred is particularly compelling and makes an urgent claim upon us.

Anne Collett

NOTES

1 Unity Dow 2002, *The Screaming of the Innocent*, Spinifex, Melbourne.

LYCIA DANIELLE TROUTON

Interculturalism and Dance-Theatre. Interview with Elizabeth Cameron Dalman, (OAM) Choreographer-Dancer

Bungendore, ACT, Australia, January 18, 2004

Inspired by two of the female greats in early modern dance, Americans Loie Fuller (1862–1928) and Doris Humphrey (1895–1958), Elizabeth Cameron Dalman has been at the forefront of transcultural modern dance collaborations in Australia since the late 1960s when she brought dance with a socio-political subtext to Australia through the work of her mentor-collaborator, the controversial Eleo Pomare.

(Photo: Robert Guth)

Study in Europe with Kurt Jooss at the Folkwanghschule in Essen, West Germany, and with Martha Graham, James Truitte, Alwin Nikolais, and Eleo Pomare in New York in the early 1960s, led to the founding of the *Australian Dance Theatre* (ADT) in Adelaide in 1965 with classical dancer, Leslie White. Elizabeth Cameron Dalman continued as sole Artistic Director from 1967–1975. ADT remains a leading choreographic institution in Australia — for example, it is currently demonstrating the 'ballistic choreography' combined with new media influences, of Director, Gary Stewart. Cameron Dalman is credited with imparting 'a passion for exciting new ways of moving to a new generation of modern dancers, including Jennifer Barry, Gillian Millard and Cheryl Stock' (Craig and Lester 421). Since 1994, Cameron Dalman has been the recipient of several awards for her contribution to dance in Australia. She is a senior associate of the *Australian Choreographic Centre* and continues to teach, as well as choreograph and dance in critically-acclaimed, small-scale productions internationally.

In this interview, I petition for 'attention to dance as theatre art with the same willingness and imagination we might give to other forms of literature' (Theodores 7). I am a sculptor and textile-installation artist who worked with

Elizabeth Cameron Dalman, in 2002–2004 on my artwork called *The Irish Linen Memorial*. Through working closely with Cameron Dalman, I have come to understand her emphasis on the sculptural use of space, and to appreciate the political imperative of her work.

LT: *You have a career history of working on social justice or humanitarian issues in collaboration with other artists, would you tell me about that? For example, when you choreographed* Release of an Oath *in 1972, a news-clipping from Dunedin, New Zealand called this work, a first rate drama. 'We have stepped beyond the experience of movement alone and are plumbing the depths of man's search for truth.' What was it that politicised you as an artist, which vaulted you into taking such an early lead in cross-cultural artistic productions?*

ED: The Vietnam war sparked it off. But, really, it goes back further than that — my father had fought in World War II, so I spent my early childhood without my father and that left a big impression on me. I felt deprived because he was away for three and a half years, and when he came back he took another year to recover from the trauma. So, in 1967, it was my opportunity to speak out about war. I created a work called *Sundown* that referenced, in particular, the horror of the Vietnam War. We [The Australian Dance Theatre] took it to Europe the following year.

LT: *That's interesting, because in preparation for giving a lecture about my* Irish Linen Memorial *and* The Art of Death *to a class at the College of Fine Arts (COFA) in Sydney last year, I interviewed my mother about her experience with the sectarian Troubles in Northern Ireland. These recent times were almost less disturbing for her as the palpable feelings of grief associated with losing out on not having her father during her childhood years of World War II — those same anxious feelings of which you speak. In Northern Ireland, conscription was not mandatory and so my mother's family was the exception in the community in which they were living. I think that people forget the traumatic intergenerational emotional consequences of war, even for those at a great distance from the actual events.*

ED: Adelaide, where I lived in the 1960s, was very isolated — Europe and America both seemed so far away. Artists used to talk about the 'tyranny of distance' — not just within Australia but also globally. Air travel was not as it is today. Besides, Adelaide had very little contact with other states and cities, even in the local newspaper; and there was little international news. It seemed that Australia was very turned in on itself.

As well, the situation for indigenous Australians was bleak — you certainly weren't able to work with them collaboratively, as I have done within the last few years. We did not study Aboriginal culture in schools,

and we saw very few Indigenous peoples in the cities. There were some anthropological studies made, but they were almost an invisible race for most Caucasian Australians.

LT: *So, globalisation and the ease of international communication and trade, together with the World Wide Web, have altered the sense of artistic community in Australia, today?*

ED: Yes, I believe so, but it is different today. In the 1960s we marched in the protest marches because we believed we could change the world. Like artists from other disciplines we [dancer-choreographers] were provocative and outspoken, idealists with a utopian vision, believing it was both our right and our responsibility to reflect the events of our time back to ourselves and to our society.

LT: *Marcia Siegel, New York dance critic, reflects your sentiment when she states,*

> *Modern dance, by its nature, must be constantly renewing itself.... Modern dance is the most eloquent and humanistic of theatre dance forms. In its several stubborn ways it speaks of and to the individual. For this reason most of all, we need to spare it from the increasingly mass-minded pressure of a depersonalised society. (99)*

What were your early influences?

ED: My first dancing teacher, Nora Stewart, had taught me Margaret Morris dancing. Morris was a modern dance pioneer in England who had studied with Isadora Duncan's brother. So at a very early age I had a taste of the Moderns and this prepared me for my study of other pioneers such as Loie Fuller, Martha Graham, and Doris Humphrey to name a few.

I have always been interested in the potential of new ideas about space, as well as with sound and image. In 1970, I toured a work called *The Time-Riders — The Oldest Continent,* across Australia that was a collaboration with the Polish conceptual artist, Stan Ostajo Kotkowski. This work included an early form of a laser beam projection with two screens — front and back projection. It was 'pre' new media! I would like to work more this way in the future with this kind of cross-disciplinary performance space.

One of my strongest mentor-collaborators was Eleo Pomare, with whom I am working again this year in Taipei. It shows how much the world has changed for minorities and for modern dance when you realise that three of his works have been documented by The American Dance Festival as masterworks and archived as important achievements by African American choreographers.

LT: *How did you both meet?*

ED: I lived in Europe in the late 1950s and early '60s. It was during that time that I attended a performance by José Limón in London. He changed my life forever! … I knew that I wanted to find a way to work like that — where the spirit and the heart moved through the dance and flowed through space. I searched for years to find a teacher who worked in this 'modern' choreographic style. I finally met Eleo Pomare at the Folkwangschule in Essen, Germany, which was then directed by Kurt Jooss (1901–1979).

Eleo, who had studied with José Limón at the High School of Performing Arts in New York, inspired me with his teaching and choreographic work. I studied and performed with Eleo from 1960 to 1963 for a period of gestation in Europe, yet, I finally came back to Australia. Then, Eleo came here in 1972 when I was directing the Australian Dance Theatre in Adelaide. Our work was about humanity, the human condition, and Eleo is the one I credit with training me in how to bring such concepts through the dance choreographically.

LT: *You and Eleo are credited with bringing a rhythmic strength to Australia's dance heritage. It is in this arena of modern dance where your achievements are listed most compendiously. For example, as listed in the Modern Dance chapter to the scholarly* Currency Companion to Music and Dance, *2003, (eds. John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell) in entries by Lee Christofis, Shirley McKechnie, Carole Y. Johnson with Raymond Robinson.*

[At this point Cameron Dalman brings out a 1972 book called Black Dance in the U.S.A, from 1619 – 1970, *by Lynne Fowley Emery. The book jacket, by Katherine Dunham, states,*

> *By the finish of the book, we are acquainted not only with the history of black dance, but we also know much more about the enslaved and the enslavers, the psychology of colonialism, and the nature of those who have danced their way out of poverty and racial prejudice into the opera houses and concert halls of the world.*

The book begins with an introduction about dance from the point of view of the Portuguese slave traders, 1441.]

ED: This book is of its time, written when the black/white racial relations in the USA were very divisive. Yet, the book speaks about the roots of the inspiration of those early years. Here is a picture of loading slaves onto ships bound for colonies in America.

> Dancing the slaves', on board ship was a common occurrence. It was encouraged for economic reasons; slaves who had been exercised looked better and bought a higher price. (Emery 6–7)

And, here, a passage about,

> Condemnation of dancing by the Protestant church, specifically Methodists. Many old dances became ritualised and were incorporated into secret religious services, as the only remaining link with the African homeland. (Emery 48)

During the period of the burgeoning civil rights and modern dance movements, Eleo stated, in *Negro Digest*, 1967, and *Ebony Magazine,* in 1969,

> Let's face it, the 'powers-that-be' are not interested in seeing 'Negroes' in any way but as rhythmic freaks about whom they say, 'They certainly do have a good sense of rhythm'. Well, I am not an animal and I won't tap dance … I am a human being and have the same feelings that any other human being would have. I don't want to *entertain* them. (Pomare qtd. in Emery 47–48 italics in original)
>
> Our role is to break ethnocentric thinking patterns which have led these people [the classical ballet establishment] — drunk with power — to believe that theirs, although dead, is the superior art. (Emery 309)

LT: *I have always liked the idea of* living art *and my sculptural practice centres around such notions. That is why I admire dance. For example, my memorial, even though it commemorates those who have died and are put to rest, is a* living memorial. *As well as being commemorative, The Irish Linen Memorial is also a type of direct-action social protest against violence — and that is why working with you has been so informative and meaningful. Your choreography, together with the original score, composed by Tom Fitzgerald, keeps the artwork alive in* real time.

When I lived in the United States in the 1980s, I was taught by the African American painter Sam Gilliam from Washington, DC, and recently, I worked with the African American architect, Mel Streeter & Associates in Seattle, Washington. In the USA the large African American population makes for much more racial integration than in Australia, although I am impressed by the year 2000 Arts in a Multicultural Australia Policy, *implemented by the Australia Council for the Arts, which has increased awareness of diversity in cultural production and audience reception, since the early 1990s.*

ED: Yes. I remember working with The Eleo Pomare Modern Dance Company in New York City, in 1966, when persecution of African-Americans in the United States was rife. Black people were regularly interrogated by the police for no reason — picked up on the streets, as it were. Often, dancers would come in to practice, talking anxiously about their friends or cousins who had been taken by the police for questioning. It was very frightening.

LT: *The political environment of the 1970s Civil Rights struggles in the United States, and working so intimately with Eleo, certainly grounded your work in themes about justice and the empowerment of the human spirit — issues that change democratic society. What brought you to create work on the troubles (1969 — 2000), the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland?*

ED: The work I choreograph tends to develop simply because I feel so strongly about an issue that I want to make an expression about it. The content may come from a particular story, which I then strip bare to its emotional core. For example, the work *Sun Down* is based on *The Women of Troy* by Euripides. I took the approach of an ageless and universal cry against war. The art came from a humanitarian point of view and a cry for negotiation rather than aggression.

In 1972, I read a newspaper story about a young woman in Belfast who was stoned, tarred and feathered because she fell in love with a man from 'the other side'. The barbaric actions towards this woman seemed absolutely medieval to me living in Australia, in the latter half of the twentieth century! I believe my work on human rights and anti-war produces a social comment about the present, but with ideas that are also universal. That's why I believe the young people in Taiwan, last year, had access to *Release of an Oath* (translated into Mandarin as *Prayer*), which was originally created in 1972. They understood the basic content about power relations and oppression, as Taiwan has had its own colonial history with both Japan and China.

LT: *I agree. I worked with the Taiwanese painter Chin Ming Lee in Belfast in 1999 and he was very astute about what was going on politically and culturally in Northern Ireland. We made a presentation together for a group called The Survivors of Trauma in North Belfast and tried to dialogue how some of the issues could be seen as interlinked. I am interested if you have any Irish heritage?*

ED: No, but I have a strong Celtic background. My mother's family, a Methodist family, came from Cornwall, England. On my father's side there are Scottish and Welsh connections — one ancestor and his family moved to Australia in the mid-1800s. In 1991, I took a trip to Cornwall, England, Scotland, and Wales to explore this part of my identity.

The Northern Ireland problem is very disturbing because it is religious, and since I often work with spiritual issues in my dance, I find this aspect particularly terrible and terrifying. You can see how I work on this aspect in the '*Holy are You*' section. There are three larger-than-life figures in my group vignettes. These figures are almost caricatures: a judge, a nun, a figure who embodies the Christian Cross, and dancers with money

symbols on their gowns. The dance makes a cynical comment on how power corrupts human nature but also on how the soul and spirit can never be crushed. This work opens with a lament that illustrates hardship, mistrust and injustice.

In the piece that I have been doing with your sculptural installation, the separate elements of the linen landscape are intentionally integrated into the choreography. This kind of choreography is considered highly dramatic. There is the handkerchief section, which includes waving goodbye … which is quite a traditional image. Some of the elements have a religious or a spiritual subtext: such as the bed-sheet which is a shroud and, at one point, acts like a wedding veil. And then, in the washing section we create the sense of emotionally washing away all the terrible things that war creates! The last section is a processional with three St. Veronica-like shrouds with large digitally-printed, black and white images on them.

LT: *For you, environmental justice and socio-political justice issues are intertwined. As artists, we have both been influenced by the pioneering research of Gloria Feman Orenstein on the women surrealists, and one aspect of their legacy — called an eco-feminist, or feminist-matristic, identification. Orenstein makes the claim that this identification, together with certain key recurring imagery, is a major thread which links a canon of work by female artists. Orenstein's 1990 book asserts that the arts are a catalyst of social change, not simply adjuncts to political activity, and that artists are healers, who can foster a live-giving culture. Orenstein states,*

> *The ceremonial aspect of art is now understood to be potent enough to raise energy, to evoke visions, to alter states of consciousness, and to transmit vibrations, thoughts, and images that, when merged with the energy of political acts (such as the protests at the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, the Livermore Weapons Lab, the Nevada Test Site, the women's peace camp at the Greenham military base in England, and the Women's Pentagon Action) can create a critical mass powerful enough to alter the energy field of the participants. The rituals enhance and augment the political actions, binding the participants together in a shared spiritual community and creating the opportunity for healing. (279)*

This passage of Orenstein's seems to reflect your artistic practice of dance and performance.

ED: Respect for nature and each other are key to our survival on the planet. This great rush towards materialism is very aggressive. If we are in partnership with the earth then we have to give up trying to be the economic materialist. The main themes that I have developed in my work over the 1960s and '70s were about the Australian landscape about which I am

passionate, the mythology of indigenous Australia and socio-political issues — which I position in a more humanitarian, rather than political approach. Then, in the 1980s and '90s a lot of us were exploring the New Age movement and the importance of finding one's self identity through art and self-expression, together with the importance of the arts in a new evolving consciousness.

LT: *So , you do not denigrate that movement of which many are now suspect, from the vantage point of the new millennium.*

ED: No, it has been mainstreamed into popular culture and marketed in an ugly way. Yet, if you look at the seriousness of it's prime movers — for example, Krishnamurti and his fellow Indian Philosophers and the Western interest in and re-evaluation of the ancient cultures, together with the brave work of new communities which have, indeed, lived out some social experiments, like Damanhur community in Italy — I don't think you can denigrate it. The New Age brought more of an understanding to our politics of wanting to change the world by changing ourselves. I feel this period confirmed for me the whole previous modern art movement. Perhaps there was an ancient era before humans took up warfare … and that relates to the work of Marija Gimbutas and Gloria Orenstein of which you speak.

LT: *I'd like to know more about your interest in multicultural issues.*

ED: In 1987, I came back from Italy because the land here pulled me. I really wanted to come back and find my Australian voice again. Contrary to when I came back in 1963, Australia was a really exciting place to be artistically — especially in the multicultural aspect of it. Finally the Indigenous voice was being heard, and, with that, an ecological consideration of place and identity was higher on the agenda for discussion. Most of my work, since 1987, has been about intercultural collaboration and our relationship to the earth.

LT: *In British Columbia, the 1970s brought a cultural renaissance of Indigenous art which started in the late 1950s. Where was Australia in that sense?*

ED: I can explain the state Australia was in, in 1991, in regards to racial relations, by telling you a story about one of my classes. I encouraged students to investigate their own cultural heritages. Most of the Australian students who were Anglo-Celtic felt that they were simply, 'Australian' and that there was no further investigation necessary — most were unconcerned that they were Settlers. However, one had memories of her grandparents, who had fled Latvia. Then, one black student (who indicated she was German) used a personal drawing to talk about herself. She said she had no memories of her childhood, previous to the age of five … I get

goose-bumps even thinking about this young woman.... It turns out that this girl had been adopted, a Stolen Child, who perhaps didn't even realise her Aboriginality.... The wonderful thing is that then she began her own search after that and found her Indigenous family in Australia.

LT: *That the arts can help heal and bring about transformation is rewarding. The grief in the Indigenous communities, here and in Canada, is palpable. The legacy you talk of is similar in British Columbia where Indigenous children were taken and educated in Residential Schools, against their families' wills, and a certain legacy continues today in the form of the provincial foster care system. In 1998, a Statement of Reconciliation was made by the Canadian government; infamous lawsuits have also been brought about in cases of extreme abuses and some financial support has been put in place to support community-based healing. Would you explain your background further about working with the Indigenous community in Australia?*

ED: In the 1960s, I began to explore Aboriginal myths about the Australian landscape as inspiration for my choreographic work. So, I met up with Aboriginal elders, including Kath Walker/Oodgeroo Noonuccal, (1920–1993). She used to see a lot of our ADT works. I would always ask her permission for the use of these stories as choreographic inspiration. One of her very strong remarks to me, I remember, was, 'Elizabeth, our people should be doing it, but they are not — somebody has to do it — so please keep doing what you are doing'. She used to send me poems and stories that she wrote, asking me to choreograph them and use them in workshops. So, in that sense, I felt that part of my mission was to assist the Indigenous voice to be heard, and I realised that this could be done through the dance, on a heart level, rather than a political one.

Around the same time, in 1969, I made trips to Darwin, to meet with Aboriginal elders and dancers. In 1970, I was very fortunate to meet Sandra Holmes in Darwin, who, at the time, was personally supporting and documenting the work of a well-known Indigenous bark painter, Yirawala, from Gunwinggu tribe Western Arnhem Land. We were invited to Melville Island when there was a very important Tiwi Pukamani ceremony. Sandra asked me to help document a lot of that material. We sat with the Tiwi people and discussed the possibility of forming a dance-theatre group that could travel throughout the mainland of Australia. Yet, it seemed much too early for such a vision and it did not eventuate — this is 1969, I am talking about. But it was a wonderful and very precious opportunity for me to be in that position — sitting and talking with the elders of Melville Island, asking them what they wanted and how they wanted to go about such ideas.

The ceremony that Elizabeth Cameron Dalman would have attended would have been similar in 1969
(Photo: Diana Wood Conroy)

Back in Adelaide in the late 1960s, I studied informally with Charles Mountford, who has written many books about Aboriginal culture. He had his own office in the back of the Adelaide museum. At that time, the Adelaide Museum had the artefacts collected by Mountford from the Australian American Scientific Expedition to the Arnhemland, 1949.

I was a regular student to his office — specifically for learning from him about his experiences with Indigenous communities and about his specific research.

Another researcher was Catherine Ellis, an extraordinary woman who went up into the Central South Australian desert. She recorded and notated the women's dances and songs. She was probably one of the first white women to start such research. Catherine Ellis was attached to the School of Music in the Aboriginal Music studies department in Adelaide. So, I was informally researching and trying to make contact with Aboriginal people wherever I went. Kath Walker's remarks gave me the strength to continue what I was doing.

LT: *After your directorship of ADT you returned to Europe, and lived in Italy for about ten years. What happened after that?*

ED: When I came back to Australia from Italy in the late 1980s, the Aboriginal voice was being heard. For example, *The Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Skills Development Dance School* and *Bangarra Dance Theatre,* Sydney, had been formed. In 1988 I went to the Mimili community, near Fregon in the Central desert, as an Artist-in-Residence. It was during the time of a huge *Inma*, where Indigenous tribes from all around came to meet, celebrate, and share dances together. We were included in many of the ceremonies and presented some of our own dances as well. There was no way I would have taken on Aboriginal themes in this period. It was just wonderful that this period marked their opportunity to express themselves.

It's only been in this last year, 2003, upon invitation from the *Ananguku* community at Fregon, Central desert, that I have embarked upon a new collaboration with Indigenous issues and Indigenous artists. The Mirramu Dance Company, which I direct, just completed the first creative development stage on a work called *Red Sun, Red Earth*. I see this as a continuing, ongoing process of exchange in creative development where we are working as two groups, listening to each other and sharing both sides.

LT: *Changing tracks now, in the mid-1980s to '90s Vancouver Canada was feeling its identity as a place on the Pacific Rim and we had a new wave of immigration from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Could you speak about the contemporary dancers you work with in Taiwan?*

ED: In general, I try to find the common artistic threads and expressions from the different backgrounds. I search out the things that connect us together as human beings. These young dancers in Taipei are from a culture different from my own. For example, why would things in Ireland have anything to do with them? I simply changed the way I passed my information on to the dancers. I talked about things they could relate to that had had the same effect as politics in other places. That was how I worked with *Release of an Oath*. Because it is a highly dramatic piece, I think they had more access to it. Certain costumes really freaked them out. Of course, they had no problem with the jeans and vests, and, once they got used to the other costumes, they really embodied them!

LT: *Yes, that is something I want to talk about, the use of textiles and costuming in your work.*

ED: Well, for me, the human body is a very important element, and, therefore, carefully thought-out and well-designed costuming is essential. This is as much a part of the dance as the dancer — the two elements work together and complement each other, one enhances the other. The moderns, inspired by Isadora, wanted to see the line of the body. The design of the movement in the space was as important as the steps themselves.

I have always been intrigued by silk since I danced an homage to Loie Fuller — one of the early modern dance pioneers who worked in Paris, in the early 1900s. She choreographed *with* the actual material. Fuller was famous for her use of materials. She was also the first person in the theatre to use electric light and is remembered for the theatrical effects she created!

In researching, I found that Loie Fuller had used twenty-two metres of silk for one dance — her *Serpentine Dance*, 1892. So, I consulted with designer Patricia Black who made large wings for me, out of silk, based on Loie's design. Instead of having the different coloured lights that Loie Fuller used, I used projected images on the silk, so you didn't really see me — the audience simply sees images dancing across the space. I loved that so much that, I remember saying to myself, 'One day, I will do a production that is *all* silk!'

It was many years later that the whole concept of *Silk-Lake* and, then, *Silk*, my theatre piece, happened. This was produced for The Street Theatre in Canberra, 2002. This work was based on the history of silk material, the silk worm, through the cocoon to the spinning and weaving of the silk and even the moth. Through research, I found out about how silk was taken out of China by a Chinese princess who carried the silk cocoons in her hair! In this production, I was exploring a fusion between *mobius kiryuho*, the Japanese art of flowing movement and contemporary western dance. In the final creation, we had sixty metres of silk hanging in the dance-theatre space! (see photo of Amanda Miller and Kyoko Sato)

Elizabeth Cameron Dalman, Mirramu Dance Company, outdoor production of *Silk* (Photo: Robert Guth)

Silk, Mirramu Dance Company, Amanda Miller (on chair), Kyoko Sato (seated), (Photo: Robert Guth)

In 1998, I collaborated on *The Lace-maker*, a solo dance for poet Kathy Kituai, at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts. This work explores a domestic interior and an inter-racial marriage. Kituai's words speak for themselves.

Threads

I am the night
I am my own shadow
I am the wind
        Lifting lace curtains
        on a woman's bedroom window—
the night
ensnared in the weaving

blackness
caught in a torn patch

bleeding
light onto a black lawn

Street lights
are white sequins
circling
as a woman circles
patterns in lace
breathing night

Sequins are cotton
woven into light
woven into dawn
        woven into birds

You are a woman weaving patterns
in white cotton
You are a woman dreaming
You are the torn patch

letting the night back
        into the room

(An excerpt from the beginning of *The Lace-maker* by Kathy Kituai.)

In your *Irish Linen Memorial*, the installation comes first and so I had to integrate the body with the material. The symbolism of the material then becomes a part of the choreography. A sheet, for example, can speak. To start with, I might ask, what does it arouse in us? The sheet becomes a third dancer. So, the duo actually makes a trio. We make the sheet move into a third body of the dancer in a symbolic way. That's what makes the choreography in that work, not just the separate elements of the linen landscape but an intentionally integrated choreography.

Transformation of Tears: The Irish Linen Memorial, 2004, Mirramu Dance Company at Craft Act Gallery and Design Centre. Elizabeth Cameron Dalman, Vivenne Rogis, Amanda Miller. Dir. Lycia Trouton
(Photo: Creative Image Potography, Canberra)

LT: *Did you alter your costuming for a different cultural context in Taiwan, when you reproduced* Release of an Oath*?*

ED: The nun's costume was made with more Asian tailoring and detailing, yet, for the rest of the outfits, nothing changed. Working with a costume which produces a dramatic effect may sometimes be more difficult because it requires characterisation and, therefore, you need theatre training, as well as movement training. The Taiwanese dancers were very dedicated and found the dramatic tensions needed in the work.

LT: *Were there any particular challenges you encountered when working in Taiwan?*

ED: The most difficult dilemma was language and my own sense of inferiority in not being able to speak it. My residency at the Taipei Artist's Village was for two months, which ís a long time to be immersed in another language. I love the symbolism of their language, but, tonally it is very difficult, unlike when I learned to speak Italian! I had a Taiwanese translator most of the time, but, of course, dance speaks across all languages. Especially, if you can speak emotionally, because this is the same wherever one goes. We had to re-title the work because *Release of an Oath* does not translate well in Mandarin, so we called it *Prayer*. The other pieces produced there, with The Taipei Tsai Jui-Yueh Foundation and The Grace Hsiao Dance Theatre, were *Sun and Moon*, *Motherless Child* (from *Sundown*), *All My Trials* (from *This Train*), *This Train* (from *This Train*) and segments from *Leaving* that was inspired by a Buddhist poem.

LT: *One could compare your practice with the 'spiritual interculturalism' of one of your peers, contemporary visual artist, Hossein Valamanesh (also from Adelaide) whose art installations, land art and quiet ritual artworks have influenced me since I came to Australia, in 2001. Ian North, writes about Valamanesh's work in a 2001 catalogue published for the Valamanesh retrospective by the Art Gallery of South Australia. He states,*

> *Valamanesh has been able to move 'in and out of cultures' in Adelaide...as if to recognise that people from all sides are players in the formation of contemporary social identity. The last point is crucial: Anglo-Celtic artists, for example, can and must be fully imbricated as anyone else in the formation, possibilities and limitations of the global paradigm for art. Adelaide, then, is nowhere (special), yet everywhere; by the same token it is not at all to aggrandise Valamanesh to suggest that he could stand for all contemporary artists. (68)*

ED: Australia is the oldest culture in the world and one of the youngest nations in the world. This happens nowhere else. In the last ten years much has

Release of an Oath, 1972, Choreography, Elizbeth Cameron Dalman
(Photo: Jan Dalman)

changed. The Anglo-Celts are a minority now. It is important for us to find out about other cultures, the Middle East and other strong traditional cultures, as well as acknowledging the terrible history with our Indigenous peoples. I love Australia, but unless we are willing to find out more about others, we are a lame multicultural society.

LT: *That is an apt dancer's metaphor!*

ED: We need to show more respect and understanding in active ways. It is easy to talk about 'integration' and 'reconciliation' but to actively participate requires much more listening and sharing. I have always believed in the potential of the arts and culture to explore and enhance the negotiation of intercultural territories.

With thanks to Elizabeth Cameron Dalman for her time in a hectic schedule. Additional thanks go to Sydney photographer/photo-archivist, Kalev Maevali, for introducing me to Elizabeth Cameron Dalman and Colin Offord, 2001.

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