

Bangawarra Naa

Ways of making and seeing

Creative Aboriginal knowledges

An interpretation and reflection of traditional Dharug Aboriginal Australian creative
psychological healing practices

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The Wollotuka Institute

August 2014

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this exegesis and exhibition is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank The University of Newcastle for their support in receiving the Postgraduate Research Scholarship in 2013. I also wish to acknowledge The Australian Government, Department of Education, in awarding me The National Indigenous Staff Scholarship in 2012.

My debt and gratitude extends to The Wollotuka Institute at Newcastle University for their support and encouragement, along with my supervisors Dr Greg Blyton, Dr Maree Gruppetta and Mrs Gilleen Shaw who have all been a constant inspiration. I also wish to acknowledge Dr Kevin McConkey for his additional support.

Recognition also extends respectfully to The Dharug Aboriginal Nation, both past and present, and various Elders throughout my life, who have offered encouragement, love and support in keeping me focused, committed and culturally strong.

My deepest appreciations and love to my three children, Jon, Paris and Mikaela, who taught me purpose in life. To all my unofficial foster children, who came and built their life around us, I thank you. In memory of my Grandmother Goggy, who showed me unconditional love and still guides my life.

PERSONAL NOTE

Embarking on this research four years ago my goals were to demonstrate that creativity in making and seeing, Bangawarra naa, has the potential to make a positive contribution to Aboriginal emotional, social and mental health. This investigation affirms through a heuristic inquiry and narrative portrayal the value of traditional creative knowledge. Within this dissertation both visual form and written analogies demonstrate that making is of scientific knowledge and seeing is a psychological process that remains valid within the realms of contemporary theories and practices.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

Acknowledgment	
Table of contents	iv
Abstract	ix
The perspective of the author	xvi
Chapter 1 Creativity as action based inquiries	1
Chapter 2 Traditional Australian Aboriginal creative epistemologies	29
Chapter 3 Ways of Making and Seeing	42
Chapter 4 Traditional Dharug creativity in healing	52
Chapter 5 Holism as an expressive interpretation of Dharug philosophies	76
Chapter 6 Traditional symbols of knowledge	83
Chapter 7 Incorporating our senses within creative healing practices	117
Chapter 8 Visual Knowledges of metaphoric symbolic content	139
Chapter 9 Defining Creativity within a psychological framework	167
Chapter 10 Creativity within contemporary therapies	203
Chapter 11 Addressing loss, grief and trauma through creative healing practice	232
Chapter 12 Conclusion and recommendations	274
Bibliography	255

VISUAL CREATIVE WORKS BY LIZ CAMERON

The collection of sketches, paintings and photographs

Fig No:	Storyline Title:	Fig page:
1.	Fingerprints left on the earth	ix
2.	Dharug Country	xi
3.	Come, walk with me	xii
4.	Country	xiv
5.	Dharug Country	xv
6.	Dharug Healing Circle	xvii
7.	Ways of Knowing	1
8.	Seeing Beyond	4
9.	Knowing, circular processes	6
10.	Gadang	10
11.	Expressing Knowing through creative multi layered form	11
12.	Process in Making - stage 1	16
13.	Process in Making Stage 2	20
14.	Process in Making Stage 3 Dilly bags	21
15.	Ngar Ngar	26
16.	Multi –layering, Depth of Salt Water	27
17.	Multilayered Knowledge	31
18.	Multilayered perceptions	32
19.	Seeing and interpreting different ways	33
20.	Dganu – ways of seeing through cultural interpretation	37
21.	Symbols hold knowledge	39
22.	Symbol interpretations	44
23.	Symbol interpretation of ritualised knowledge	45
24.	Dharug Cultural Symbols	48
25.	Symbol of knowing	49
26.	Symbol of the sun	50
27.	The circle, a symbol of relationships	53
28.	Making and seeing	57
29.	Cultural Loss	59
30.	Celebrating Culture	60
31.	Ways of seeing others	66
32.	Gunyalunglung	67
33.	Spiral Dreamings; process in making	69
34.	Learning symbols 1	71
35.	Learning symbols 2	72
36.	Holism	79
37.	Holism as a way of knowing	81
38.	Balance and harmony	83
39.	Making and symbols	87
40.	Individualised makings	89
41.	Descriptive breakdown	90
42.	Multi forms of Dharug healing symbols	92
43.	Dharug ground making	95
44.	Dharug transformative psychological makings	99
45.	Dharug processes of circular making in healing practice	102
46.	Dharug processes of spiral making in healing practice	104
47.	Repetitious making, a psychological effect	105
48.	Repetitious making of concentric circles	107
49.	Healing philosophies of concentric circles	108

50.	Place based ritualism	110
51.	Imprinted messages	113
52.	Symbols of guided Storylines	115
53.	Darda Dgngai	116
54.	The seven senses	122
55.	Seeing, exploring and sensing	125
56.	Struggle - Seeing beyond	126
57.	Struggle reflection	127
58.	Struggle identifying meaning	130
59.	Oolгна and the seven senses	133
60.	Oolгна rhythmical energies	137
61.	Natural metaphors	139
62.	Seeing outside	144
63.	Traditional Dharug visual knowledge	146
64.	Simplified form	149
65.	The black hole	152
66.	Traditional Dharug visual knowledge	154
67.	Shut down	157
68.	Eliminating pain	161
69.	Visual expressions	169
70.	Rudimentary symbols	170
71.	Symbols of reflective knowledges	171
72.	Oolгна healing symbol	173
73.	Ritual psychological creativity	174
74.	Creative expressions of Country	176
75.	The Healer, The Psychotherapist	180
76.	Ritualised relationships	182
77.	Creative Healer	184
78.	Oolгна making	186
79.	Oolгна energy	187
80.	Oolгна energy making	189
81.	Energy symbols	190
82.	Symbol 1	193
83.	Symbol 2	193
84.	Soul Loss, Loss of Oolгна	196
85.	Emotions related to creative making	198
86.	Imagery influences emotions	200
87.	Emotional responses with seeing – study 1	209
88.	Emotional responses with seeing study 2	210
89.	Emotional responses with seeing study 3	211
90.	Holistic relationships	217
91.	Relationship Space	220
92.	Destructivity	230
93.	Loss of Self	231
94.	Loss is never experienced in isolation	171
95.	The Songman	172
96.	Dyngai	174
97.	Being culturally strong	175
98.	Crumbling within	176
99.	The concept of birth	178
100.	Spirit	179
101.	Creative spiritual exchanges	180
102.	Yarning	181
103.	Trauma	183
104.	Traumatised	184
105.	Stolen generations	185
106.	Stolen	186
107.	Visual Narrative	187
108.	Creative expressions	191
109.	Cyclic growth of internalised trauma	193

110. Spiral visual space	194
111. Symbols communicate	195
112. Self-expression	196



ABSTRACT

Bangawarrara naa

Ways of making and seeing through creative Aboriginal knowledges.

Translation: 'Bangawarra' is an Australian Aboriginal Dharug word meaning ways of doing or making, 'naa' refers to deep and multiple ways of seeing.

A culmination of life's work as a practicing Dharug Artist within the realms of psychological creativity processes in traditional healing practices.



Fig: 1

Title: Fingerprints left on the earth

Descriptive storyline: Visual spirituality is a web of cultural knowledges, entwined within all living things. The land represents pathways travelled by ancestors, who left symbols of profound cultural importance.

This dissertation, investigates explores, analyses and illustrates Australian Aboriginal creative healing practices from a Dharug standpoint. The term Dharug refers to an Aboriginal Nation surrounding the North West region of Sydney, and focuses on the Murramurra clan group of the Hawkesbury River. Unlike other Indigenous worldwide populations, Aboriginal Nations purposely consisted of small groups based on the lores of Ancestral philosophies that place importance to natural harmonious lifestyles. Underlying theories of small group structures within many Aboriginal Nations is founded on the principles in sustainable living where our natural environmental are maintained, balanced and protected by not overburdening valuable resources. As such, small communities often consisted of ten to thirty peoples, living in harmonies relationships with all living things.

Within this dissertation expertise lies within Dharug Murramurra communal knowledge systems of psychological creativity within traditional healing. From this perspective, I argue that creativity within healing has the capacity to communicate cultural meaning and spiritual messages in addressing physical, emotional and social health through a restorative holistic framework. This dissertation defines the importance of creativity or ways of making (Bangawarra) and the need to revitalise traditional healing practices in addressing the ongoing inequities of loss, grief and trauma since colonisation within Australia.

Within this research I examine and demonstrate that visual creativity within traditional Dharug healing practices are expressions of both cultural and spiritual significance, rather than being categorised under western theories of art. I therefore propose to debunk the myths that spiritual visual makings are more than just a physical projection by exposing creative processes that illustrate healing.

As Dharug philosophies base knowledge through evolving processes, I highlight the importance of therapeutic approaches within making and seeing as having relevance in contemporary society.

Methodologies used within this dissertation are consistent to Aboriginal epistemologies where narrative and visual content exudes traditional knowledge. Visual content refers to transgenerational cultural knowledges that consider sensory input and the deep relationships within all living things. Visual knowledge illustrates cultural and spiritual values through the exchange of the Maker and the viewer. The maker is the narrator, whilst the viewer observes, analyses and interprets information. Cultural knowledge as a psychological process incorporates holistically guided reflections that considers all aspects of life and is central to health and wellbeing.



Fig: 2

Title: Dharug Country

Descriptive storyline: A rich cultural system of visual knowledges imbedded within ancestral pathways, a thriving ecosystem where relationships are based on all living things.

Personal note

This research grew out of my concern of the lack of understandings regarding the value of traditional Aboriginal creative making within healing. Unresolved historical transgenerational trauma continues to impact on Aboriginal health and wellbeing, with many culturally inappropriate programs acting as band aid effects with short term solutions.

I argue that healing associated with internal pain and suffering requires a comprehensive holistic approach that is inclusive of cultural and spiritual dynamics of individuals. Within this dissertation I highlight Dharug traditional practices as an example of culturally appropriate care as a way to address trauma.

By acknowledging past trauma associated with colonisation and present distress associated with situational circumstances, addressing internalised pain and suffering of Aboriginal Australian people's needs more attention. I argue that creativity within the realms of traditional healing is reactive and responsive process in dealing with unresolved internalised feelings and emotions that are often difficult to express. From a Dharug standpoint, I present how visual imagery has the capacity to communicate feeling where words may fail.

Background note:

Whilst working as a student nurse in the early 1980's, I could not comprehend the importance placed on what I term as aesthetical hospital care. I continually questioned the importance of patients being showered and dressed so early in the mornings to only sit in a room a deprivation of sensory isolation with nothing to do but wait. Waiting was a focused activity that dictated the lives of patients; dependant on health care professional timeframes and family visitation restrictions, yet was an interpretation of healing. But I witnessed numerous patients sitting in complete isolation disconnected from the internal and external worlds. Environmental monotony created a self-absorbed patient focusing entirely on their illness or pain that often led to a sense of disgruntlement.

I personally struggled with this type of care system as it greatly conflicted to Dharug traditional health practices. In elaborating further, simply focusing on the physical aspects of health conflicted with holistic understandings of Aboriginal philosophies to healing. Therefore I ethically struggled to justify my position as a health care professional.

Once completing my nursing, I undertook a Diploma in Diversional Therapy that offered a more social and emotional response to aspects of care. I later completed various Aboriginal specific courses in the Northern Territory including Tracey Waterman's Psychological Youth Assessment Tool. In 2008 I completed Post Graduate studies in Indigenous Social Health at Macquarie University and worked for many years as an Aboriginal Counsellor.

As an Aboriginal counsellor, I listened to many personal stories of social injustices, spiritual conflicts and cultural struggles that presented as internal disharmonies. Consulting sessions involved listening to interpretations of feelings often through metaphoric analogies in life experiences.

Many of these stories had similarities but there was no ethically sound pathway to retell personal storylines as a way of connecting to others. My strong desire was to share intimate storylines but place value and respect to original experiences. I began to paint personal narrative experiences as a way of placing importance on each story through a respectful process. Some of these paintings have been shared as they do not identify the individual, others have remained restricted.

As one of the few Aboriginal Counsellors in Australia, it is imperative to highlight the need for culturally validated understandings in working with Aboriginal peoples. Considering the vast contrasts in Aboriginal cultural and spiritual perceptions, this dissertation offers one understanding in comprehending and appreciating knowledge within healing.

This is where my journey begins.



Fig 3: Come, walk with me