

Indigeneity, Festivals, and Indigenous Festivals

It's late July 2017, and I'm sitting at Toronto's Fleck Dance Theatre next to Muriel Miguel (Guna and Rappahannock Nations) and Deborah Ratelle, both of New York's Spiderwoman Theater and director and project manager, respectively, of Material Witness, the show we're watching. The production is a collaboration between Spiderwoman and Aanmitaagzi, of Nippissing First Nation, Ontario, onstage as part of the Living Ritual Festival hosted by Kaha:wi Dance Theatre at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre. It is a searing revisiting of the serious subject matter of Spiderwoman's first show, Woman and Violence, in 1977, and yet Miguel is laughing uproariously from the audience as her nonagenarian sister (and Spiderwoman co-founder), Gloria Miguel, mugs shamelessly (Figure 2) and members of the cast don sparkling outer bras, aviation goggles, and ostrich feathers. This is not the sort of event where the audience, and especially the show's director, observes traditional theatrical decorum. It is a show and a ceremony honouring the women who, in a 'Pulling Threads' workshop, literally wove their stories into the large quilt that hangs upstage like a fabric cyclorama, gendered female, in a materialization of Spiderwoman's 'storyweaving' technique.¹ And as the closing event of this festival of Indigenous performing arts there is a celebratory feel to the evening, which is partly about witnessing. Like the Living Ritual Festival at which it was presented, Material Witness faces difficult truths head on, but does so as part of an 'international' gathering,² an affirmation and celebration of Indigenous resurgence globally. 'Because it's a ritual, and we're living', as Muriel Miguel asserted. 'We're living and sending things out into the world' (qtd in Commanda).

From long before recorded western history to the present the Indigenous peoples of the world have engaged in ceremonies and communal performance activities that could not without diminishment be called 'theatre',³ but might, from a western perspective, be called festivals, in ways that might productively unsettle western understandings of that term's definitional field. Settler scholar Shawn Huffman opens his 2003 article on



Figure 2 Nonagenarian actor Gloria Miguel mugs shamelessly in *Material Witness*, by Spiderwoman Theater and Aanmitaagzi at the Living Ritual Festival in Toronto in 2017. Photograph by Théo Coté

theatre festivals in what are now Canada and the United States with an account of the birch-bark ‘White Earth scroll’, which he considers to be a ‘pre-contact’ Midē’wiwin record of a ‘theatre festival’ in Anishinaabe territories on Turtle Island (North America). Depicting ‘the different stages of a theatrical initiation festival’, the scroll, he argues, ‘is no mere illustration; it contains rather the coded inscription for a ritual performance, readable only by the *Midewiwin*, the initiated protectors of the information it contains’ (57).⁴ As a settler scholar myself, I do not have access to that protected information, nor can I know whether it is appropriate to consider the initiation ceremony recorded in the White Earth Scroll to constitute a festival in any contemporary western sense. But given that all accounts of the origins of festivals that I have considered in my research trace them to some kinds of ritual or ceremony, usually western, and usually understood to have their origins in fifth-century Athens, I wonder whether Huffman has identified an alternative starting point – a different festival creation story – that might reshape, in a foundational way, scholarly understandings of festivals and their potential social functions. Like that of *Material Witness*, the social function of the Living

Ritual Festival that hosted it was in part ceremonial: it was an international gathering that required participation and witnessing rather than the passive spectatorship that is characteristic of western festivals, and the spirit of the event was less competitive, as at many festivals deriving from the Greek model, than mutually celebratory. As a trans-Indigenous gathering, it also enacted the kinds of generative decoloniality of many of the 'intracultural transnational' festivals that I analyse in Chapter 5, offering a related paradigm shift in the epistemology of festivals, particularly those that operate outside of western brokerage.⁵

In Australia, as on Turtle Island, Indigenous performative forms of exchange and negotiation that might now be called festivals existed long before they were witnessed, then popularized as 'corroborees', then banned or tightly controlled and commodified for western touristic consumption in the twentieth century. But as settler scholar Peter Phipps has argued,

among the many functions of Aboriginal ceremonial life is to bring different clan groups together to perform and renew the law at significant times and places in the presence of related peoples. It has been common for people entering one another's country (in the Aboriginal sense of ancestral domain, not nation-state) to engage in ritual and ceremonial exchanges, frequently exchanging songs, dances and stories with people from far away. ('Indigenous' 685)

On the northwest coast of Turtle Island, similarly, there was the potlatch, a gifting ceremony described by Keren Zaiontz as 'a multifaceted festival that is core to the social order of many Pacific Northwest Peoples and encompasses public ceremonies, the marking of family celebrations, the passing down of history, and the enactment of law' (*Theatre & Festivals* 59). Tseshaht writer, artist, and actor George Clutesi, in a book-length account of what he calls 'the last Tloo-qwah-nah' (potlatch),⁶ which he witnessed as a child, refers to the fourteen- to twenty-eight-day event in terms that align very closely with most contemporary definitions of a theatre festival (9): he talks frequently of the overarching meta-event as 'this great play, the Tloo-qwah-nah' (71), and refers throughout to the many individual performances that constitute the event as 'plays' (19, 88, and *passim*). He also refers to the location at which the performances took place as a 'theatre' (26). And certainly, the events he describes are both theatrical and festive, demarcating a 'time-out-of-time' (Falassi) in which both traditional and innovative performances, sacred and profane, were rehearsed and presented to the larger community as both participants and witnesses. Clutesi's account of the Tloo-qua-nah in his own community describes it, moreover, very much as an occasion for inter- and

intracultural exchange and solidarity, accounting for its purpose as the confirmation of alliances between visitors and hosts among the tribes that constitute the Nuu-chah-nulth on the west coast of Vancouver Island, solidifying common cause, and generally serving the purpose of ‘getting to know each other’ (136).

Like the corroboree in Australia, the potlatch was particularly threatening to colonialist, proto-capitalist regulators on Turtle Island, not only because of its role in forging international alliances among Indigenous peoples, but also because it conferred social status, not on the accumulation, but the dispersion of wealth. And like the corroboree in Australia, the potlatch, along with other ceremonial activity and performance, was banned in Canada in 1885, and the ban was not lifted until 1951. But the existence of the Midē’wiwin records, the corroboree, the potlatch, and other ceremonial practices among the Indigenous peoples of the world, as Huffman argues, ‘provides an expanded paradigm for the understanding of the modern theatre festival’ (57).

What, then, would it mean to see theatre and performance festivals, not as having begun within the competitive framework of ancient Greece but among the *relational* frameworks of Indigenous communities globally?⁷ What would it mean to understand festivals as conferring cultural capital through the dispersion rather than accumulation of worldly goods? To consider festivals as sites of the exchange rather than the commodification of cultures? To consider them as being grounded in the land and in Indigenous knowledge systems rather than in deterritorializing and decontextualizing programming practices? What would it mean to read Indigenous festivals as *living* practices rather than as having ended with the potlatch ban and other prohibitions? The reconsideration of festival origin stories might constitute an epistemological process of decoloniality, rewriting western definitions and understandings of festivalization itself to consider festivals, potentially, as performances of what Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson calls ‘relational accountability’ (77).

I have argued elsewhere that for thousands of years the world’s Indigenous peoples have negotiated difference and facilitated trade in part through performance in ways that might be considered to be trans-Indigenous, and that might speak to a reconsidered role for international festivals in the future (*Theatre & Interculturalism* 6). The term ‘trans-Indigenous’ is used by Chadwick Allen, of Chickasaw ancestry, to indicate a critical methodology for considering a single Indigenous work from a globally Indigenous perspective (in addition to equally valuable but more narrowly nation-specific ones): ‘The point’, he says, ‘is to invite specific

studies into different kinds of conversations, and acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts' (*Trans-Indigenous* xiv) by 'creating *purposeful* Indigenous juxtapositions' (xviii, emphasis in original), and employing 'multiperspectivism' (xxii). I suggest that international, transnational, and especially trans-Indigenous festivals provide unique opportunities for creating such purposeful juxtapositions, for enabling such multiperspectivism within the context of the festival event, not just for the purposes of analysis, but for those of the artists themselves and the cultures at large. As part of the ongoing process of decoloniality, understood as a decentering of European colonialist perspectives, it might, I suggest, prove useful to think about theatre festivals, not within the originary contexts of the competitions and judgements of ancient Greece and the detached eye of the civic *theoros* (see Zaiontz, *Theatre & Festivals* 6–7; Nightingale); not within the cathartic context of the medieval or Caribbean carnivalesque; and not within the context of international diplomacy and national identity (re)construction provided by the so-called 'founding' post-Second World War festivals such as Edinburgh and Avignon; but within those of ancient and contemporary trans-Indigenous negotiation and exchange, and what Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg artist and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson calls 'Indigenous internationalism' (*As We Have* 55).⁸ Unlike most festivals in the western world having to do with nation-building, competition, and exoticist display, Indigenous 'festivals', it seems, have always been about learning how to share territory and resources – how to live together 'in a good way'.⁹

Western Festivals, Fairs, and Mega-events

It's no secret that Indigenous peoples have not been well treated in western festivals, fairs, and mega-events, though they have featured in them prominently and consistently, and continue to do so. On Turtle Island, at events such as the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition (Chicago World's Fair), held to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the 'new world', Indigenous peoples from around the world were displayed as 'savages' benefiting from the civilizing influence of colonization in what amounted to an extensive 'human zoo' (Shahriari). At the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition (St Louis World's Fair) in 1904, 'Anthropology Days' displays scientized racial hierarchies while, adjacent to the fair, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show featured reenactments by Native performers of the Battle of Little Bighorn ('Custer's Last Stand'),

as well as ‘Indian’ attacks on settlers’ cabins, wagon trains, and the pony express (Moses). Indeed, according to Nancy Egan,

more than 25,000 indigenous people were brought to fairs around the world between 1880 and 1930. These people struggled under harsh and changing conditions. Many of them had to change their hair, their clothes, their entire appearance to fit the expectations of the organizers and the audiences they were supposed to perform for. Some people were the targets of racist violence while they were on display, while others experienced more subtle forms of violence and were used as subjects of scientific study on racial differences during the exhibition. And . . . many people died during these exhibitions. (qtd in Shahriari)

An unintended consequence of the displays, however – and one that the fairs’ organizers attempted to prohibit – was the after-hours mingling of Indigenous peoples from around the world, and, perhaps, the early formation of global trans-Indigenous conversations, partnerships, and solidarities. Festivals of various kinds have continued to facilitate such encounters throughout their history, and despite their early participation in a racist and genocidal colonial project, this may be considered one of their most significant beneficial side effects.

These exhibitions faded after the 1930s, but there seems to have been an almost seamless transition from world fairs to athletic competitions such as the Olympic and Commonwealth Games. This transition began in 1904 by virtue of the Louisiana exhibition’s coinciding in St Louis with the Olympic Games and staging sporting events that paralleled them, ‘featuring non-European boys and men of colour competing against one another in archery, tug of war, discus, racing, and other [European sporting] events’ for which they had no training (Zaiontz, *Theatre & Festivals* 58). Such unequally weighted competitions seemed to demonstrate to western audiences, according to Zaiontz, ‘that there was a “natural” racial hierarchy in which the fittest athletes were also the whitest’. They actively constructed ‘irreconcilable racial differences as part of the very apparatus of modern mega-events’ (*Theatre & Festivals* 58).

Mega-events such as the Olympic Games and their attendant cultural and arts festivals continued to be sites of struggle, sometimes negotiation, and sometimes intervention for Indigenous people in settler states throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. In Canada, Christine M. O’Bonsawin (Abenaki, Odanak Nation) has traced in detail the evolving struggle between Olympic organizers and the Indigenous peoples they wish to incorporate as national emblems. At the 1976 Montréal Summer Olympics, in spite of the closing ceremonies being

organized without Indigenous involvement, the Mohawk of Kahnawá:ke took the opportunity to put their proud history of showmanship on display and make themselves, their survival, and their resistance – what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor famously calls their ‘survance’ – visible. The Calgary Winter Olympics in 1988 served as the occasion for the tiny Lubicon Cree community in Northern Alberta (population 500), historically excluded from treaty agreements apparently by accident, to bring international attention to the exploitation and expropriation of their territories and subsequently gain broad international support for their struggle. By 2010 and the Vancouver Winter Olympics, the organizers recognized the need to partner with the Four Host First Nations (FHFN) early on.¹⁰ And in spite of considerable criticism of the organizing committee’s appropriation of Indigenous symbols, FHFN did convince the Vancouver Olympic Committee (VANOC) to include Indigenous participation in the official 2006 handover ceremony from Turin to Vancouver, in which the FHFN chiefs welcomed the world to their (therefore acknowledged) territory in a traditional Northwest Coast U’tsam (witness) ceremony. There were many failures on the part of VANOC to adequately dialogue with Indigenous peoples about their own aims and aspirations for the event, but the diligence and acuity of Indigenous partners did mean that the Vancouver Games achieved its goal of then ‘unprecedented Aboriginal participation’ in any Olympic event in Canada (O’Bonsawin 58).

In Australia, the 2000 Sydney Olympiad has been seen as a kind of landmark in the relationship between Aboriginal and settler Australians. The Games, and in particular The Festival of the Dreaming, the first in a series of annual Olympic Arts Festivals beginning in 1997 that led up to the Games, have received considerable scholarly attention. And the programme, along with the opening ceremony of the Olympics themselves, has received its share of criticism. Beatriz García makes the now familiar case that the arts festivals served up Australia’s cultural diversity as exotic entertainment for visitors and (white) tourists, while Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo note that ‘indigenous involvement in the Olympics was susceptible to being incorporated into a narrative of reconciliation that would redeem the [Australian] nation’s vexed self-image and enact a “national catharsis” of sorts’ (71, citing Neilson 20). Nevertheless – and in spite of the fact that ‘the Aboriginal peoples who became a focus in the international media spotlight and were the delight of the Opening Ceremonies were suffering Third World levels of poverty, poor-health and premature death rates’ (Higgins-Desbiolles 37) – the organizers *did*

collaborate. In fact, The Festival of the Dreaming itself was curated by Koori performer and director Rhoda Roberts (Bundjalung Nation), who agreed to serve as Festival Director only on condition that the event would remain under Indigenous control, and who delivered an address in Bundjalung at the Olympics' opening ceremonies, along with a history of the land on which they were held. The Festival's Project Coordinators, Lydia Miller (Kuki Yalanji) and Toni Janke (Wuthathi and Meriam) were also Indigenous.

And 'there is much evidence', according to Gilbert and Lo, 'to suggest that the Festival of the Dreaming managed to fulfil its brief as an Olympic event while also serving the interests of Indigenous peoples' (68). Roberts consciously used the event, housed in mainstream venues in Sydney including the flagship Sydney Opera House, to address ignorance about Aboriginal cultures, redress stereotypes, promote Indigenous languages, and create ongoing opportunities for Aboriginal people in the arts (Roberts). The festival included both traditional and contemporary Indigenous cultures, featured Indigenous performances ranging from 'high culture' (Shakespeare and opera) to street theatre, addressed political and social issues directly, and focused on the diversity within and among Indigenous cultures. Official documents of this, the first public face of the Sydney Olympics, included an official 'guideline of Authorship and Control' that promised Indigenous control 'where possible', particularly in programme content. The Indigenous team also produced a Protocol Manual to be used by staff when engaging with Indigenous communities (Roberts 9). Indigenous performances, moreover, were not ghettoized to this festival, but were also a feature of subsequent festivals leading up to the Games, and performances at the festival led to several tours beyond Sydney in its immediate wake.¹¹

The Festival of the Dreaming was potentially destabilizingly hybrid, in that it included individual performances, such as *The Edge of the Sacred*, that were collaborative, in this case between the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and in that as a meta-event it functioned in a manner that combined elements of western and Indigenous festival epistemologies. The overarching structuring of promotion, ticketing, and presentation followed western models, but the opening Awakening Ceremony at the Sydney Opera House framed the festival as ritual: 'for me', said Roberts, 'it was a religious ceremony' (12). Indigenous groups gathered from great distances within Australia as well as from Aotearoa, Greenland, and Turtle Island for a kind of relational, trans-Indigenous gathering, one that, as Roberts says, 'reinforced our cultural

community, our ties, and our languages' (5). It also, with a uniquely Indigenous emphasis, 'began a journey for Australians to hear the real humor, rhythm and music of the Australian landscape' (14). In ceding programming control to Indigenous artists, The Festival of the Dreaming opened an avenue for thinking differently about the potential meanings and social functions of festivals in the twenty-first century.

At the opening ceremonies for the Games themselves, Aboriginal participants were able to use ceremony, choreographed by the Yagambeh artistic director of Bangarra Dance Theatre, Stephen Page – later the first Indigenous artistic director of the 'destination' Adelaide International Festival – to cleanse the site. Page stated that his intention was to bring the clans together in a huge corroboree, 'not to send a glamorous postcard to the world, but to try to give a sense of the real spiritual experience of ceremony' (qtd in Gilbert and Lo 71). All Olympic events acknowledged twelve 'Gamarada Dignitaries'¹² as Indigenous hosts from the five land groups on which the games were held: Eora, Dharug, Ku-Ring-Gai, Tharawal, and Gandagarra (Hanna 60). The 2000 Sydney Olympics, then, not only served as a site of what Freya Higgins-Desbiolles calls (without apparent irony) 'reconciliation tourism',¹³ but it 'cemented the indigenization of Australian performing arts even while generating a store of images of pride and success specifically for the Aboriginal community' (Gilbert and Lo 72). Finally, The Festival of the Dreaming also served as the inspiration for one of Turtle Island's most important twenty-first-century Indigenous arts and theatre festivals, Vancouver's 'Talking Stick Festival', discussed below.

It is important, then, to recognize the complexity of Indigenous participation in and use of mega-events such as the Olympic games. Despite a history of the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and cultures, on many occasions such events have been exploited *by* Indigenous peoples for their own purposes. And of course, many Indigenous communities have established their own events, some of them culturally specific (such as the Dene Games in Canada's Northwest territories), but many (such as the North American Indigenous Games and the World Indigenous Games) serving as productively trans-Indigenous 'examples', as Zaiontz says, 'of the indigenization of the *mega*' (*Theatre & Festivals* 61, emphasis in original). Zaiontz cites in particular the Arctic Winter Games, which bring together Indigenous athletes from Canada, Alaska, Greenland, Norway, and northern Russia. 'Unlike the viciously racist Anthropology Days', she argues, 'the Arctic and other contemporary Games are not proxies for the empirical display of savagery, but complex sites of solidarity, and modernity, by and for indigenous people' (61).

Indigeneity and/at Non-Indigenous Theatre and Arts Festivals

There have been many efforts to incorporate or represent Indigeneity at non-Indigenous festivals of theatre and performance, some of them more successful, or respectful, than others. In Europe, in particular, these have often involved exotic display, cultural appropriation, or patronizing forms of cultural preservationism. But many festivals have also provided Indigenous performers with opportunities to exercise autonomous agency, to achieve a degree of international visibility, and to engage in trans-Indigenous exchange.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Indigenous entertainers in vaudeville and Variété exerted a control over their working conditions and to some extent their representation that was unavailable to the performers in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows (see Bold 48), but they were nevertheless sometimes exhibited in actual zoos, such as the one in Dresden, Germany, where their appearances are memorialized even today on plaques and signboards. And even today, at the 'Karl-May-Spiele' (festivals) in Bad Segeberg and Bischofswerda, Germany, blond, blue-eyed men, women, and children hobbyists engaging in 'ethnic drag' impersonate tomahawk-wielding, scalp-taking 'Indians' in frenzies of romanticized nostalgia for a far-away wild west that never was (see Sieg 73–150).¹⁴ Finally, in Wrocław, Poland, the well-meaning 'Brave Festival' still scours the world for cultures and people that are 'on the border of becoming extinct' (Brave Festival) – an unfortunate prerequisite for participation. It was founded by Grzegorz Bral after a trip to Mexico in which he attempted to follow in the footsteps of Antonin Artaud and visit the Tarahumara people, hoping, in a familiar exoticizing trope, to 'experience something, too' (Brave Festival). Bral returned to Poland and in 2005 founded a festival of 'authentic art . . . which can save and protect thousands of forgotten, abandoned, lonely cultures and people'.

Most festivals incorporating Indigenous work have, to varying degrees, been less problematic than the exoticizing 'Brave Festival' with its discourse of dying races; indeed, some have been positively enabling. These range from the free-market passivity of open-access fringe festivals which 'permit', as Bruce Willems-Braun argues, Indigenous work such as Algonquin playwright Yvette Nolan's *Blade*, to 'appropriate space for a variety of purposes' (80); through small curated festivals such as Toronto's SummerWorks, which has often included new work by Indigenous playwrights and choreographers; to mega-festivals that have headlined international Indigenous superstars such as the Samoan director, designer, and

choreographer Lemi Ponifasio. Ponifasio's work has appeared at many of the major destination festivals that are the subject of Chapter 2, including Festival d'Avignon, BAM, the Berliner Festspiele, the Edinburgh International Festival, Holland Festival, Toronto's Luminato, Ruhrtriennale, the New Zealand Festival of the Arts (where he was a guest curator in 2020), Chile's Santiago a Mil, Germany's Theater der Welt, and the Venice Biennale. Not all of Ponifasio's work focuses on Indigenous themes or employs Indigenous artists, though it was influenced by his own 'whakapapa' (qtd in Husband)¹⁵ and by the ceremonial culture of the Kanaky, Kiribati, and Māori. In work such as *I AM: Mapuche* and *Ceremonia de Memorias*, moreover, he has engaged in trans-Indigenous collaboration, and in *Stones in Her Mouth* he assembled a team of ten Māori women in a powerful *mélange* of chant, song, dance, and oratory of rage and resilience (see Sykes). In all his work, as he says, 'I'm on the stage because I want to change the world' (qtd in Husband). And he has had the elite festival circuit as his global platform.

Elite festival circuits, however, have elite ticket prices, and access to them is limited in a way that it isn't for the world's fringes. The biggest of these and the twentieth-century progenitor of all the others is the Edinburgh Fringe, where Indigenous artists from various global sites have often been found hawking their shows on the Royal Mile, often in exoticist ways and displays. Occasionally, however, Indigenous and non-Indigenous theatre-makers have been able to seize the opportunity proffered by the fringe to stage genuine interventions, as when ARTICLE 11 and its co-artistic directors Tara Beagan (Ntlaka'pamux) and Andy Moro (Mushkegowuk Cree) presented their variable-content piece *DECLARATION* at Canada Hub in 2017.¹⁶ The Edinburgh version, with the subtitle *Rematriation*, involved Beagan and Moro working with guest artists Kaha:wi Dance Theatre's artistic director Tekaronhiákhkwa Santee Smith (Kahnyen'keháka – Mohawk) and her daughter Semiah, together with Coast Salish poet and author Lee Maracle. The show began, the day I saw it, with a 2008 recording of then-Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper's apology to victims of Canada's abusive residential school system, followed by a tortured movement piece by Moro as a bureaucrat in whiteface charged with assessing abuse claims. Next came a dance piece by Smith, readings by Maracle, and an installation and ceremony remembering Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous women, all surrounded by Moro's assemblage of stereotypical dominant-culture 'images-of-Indians' video clips. The show functioned as its own mini festival after an Indigenous paradigm, bringing peoples together in performative

dialogue and invoking ceremonial practices. But it was at the end and afterwards that *DECLARATION: Rematriation* made its most significant intervention. Audiences were encouraged to join the artists across town at the National Museum of Scotland as the company petitioned for the rematriation to their traditional territories in what is now Newfoundland of the remains of two Beothuk people, Demasduit and Nonosbawsut, stolen by the Scottish William Cormack in 1828, and stored at the museum in spite of an official request from the Newfoundland-Labrador House of Assembly and an in-person petition by Chief Mi'sel Joe, Mi'kmaq Grand Council, Miawpukek First Nation.¹⁷

Curated festivals are more complex and conflicted when inviting Indigenous work, particularly if the curator comes from the dominant cultures. As Joyce Rosario, former Director of Programming at Vancouver's PuSh festival, asks, 'How do you decolonize a curatorial practice that emphasizes prospecting? That idea that "you go out and discover?" I think that a whole generation of programmers . . . fashion themselves as *the discoverers*' (qtd in Zaiontz, 'Festival Sites'). It helps if the collaboration between curation and presentation does not involve dominant-culture brokerage, and if curation is thought of less as discovering than as putting in conversation, as at the IMPACT Festival, run by the MT Space Theatre in Kitchener, Ontario.¹⁸ MT Space is dedicated to producing and presenting work from culturally diverse communities, and although it is run by its current artistic director, Gujarati Canadian Pam Patel, and the company's founder, Lebanese Canadian Majdi Bou-Matar, it consistently acknowledges the work of the traditional caretakers of the land and explores the relationship and potential for solidarity between Indigenous and arrivant populations.¹⁹ IMPACT is the company's small-scale international festival and conference, running for one week every two years in the culturally diverse heart of downtown Kitchener. In its five incarnations over ten years the festival, which specializes in cutting-edge physical theatre,²⁰ has presented eighteen events from Indigenous artists and companies from Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia as well as from Ecuador, Mexico, and different Indigenous Nations across Canada, including three works by Haudenosaunee artists, on whose (appropriated) land, the Haldimand tract, Kitchener sits. In its most recent incarnations Indigenous works have headlined the festival and constituted 25 per cent of its curated offerings. The festival's opening ceremonies always acknowledge and privilege Indigeneity, and Bou-Matar as festival director has invited Indigenous artists to serve on and chair conference committees that bring together 'culturally diverse and Indigenous artists' to address shared concerns.

IMPACT 17, in September 2017, was opened by Oneida elder George Kennedy, followed by an opening prayer, land acknowledgement, songs, and ceremonies. The featured opening night performance was *Mana Wahine*, by Aotearoa's Ōkāreka Dance Company, choreographed by Māori dancers Taiaroa Royal and Taane Mete in collaboration with Malia Johnston. It was extraordinary to see this show, inspired by a Māori story about a young woman captured in battle who returns years later to save her people from slaughter, take place on Haudenosaunee territory, and be there in conversation with ARTICLE 11's *DECLARATION*, Gwaandak Theatre's (Yukon Territory) *Map of the Land, Map of the Stars*, and perhaps especially Anishinaabe dancer Christine Friday's *Maggie and Me*, a one-woman show about women and healing. The powerful five-woman Māori show, weaving together gender and cultural identity while displaying the extraordinary skill and power of the women, spoke directly across trans-Indigenous differences in a way that is only possible at a culturally intersectional festival such as IMPACT, and set a tone and context for the week's conversations as well as for future contacts and collaborations. And to see the late-night participation of the extraordinary Māori dancer and choreographer Taane Mete (Ngāti Kahungungu me Ngāti Koroki – Kahukura) with Cheri Maracle (Mohawk), Sophia Moussi (Lebanese, a member of the cast of *The Raft*, an MT Space/El Hamra Theatre, Tunisia collaboration at the festival), the ARTICLE 11 team, and others in generative and exciting improvisation, was a model of the kind of cross-cultural, trans-Indigenous connecting that IMPACT does best and that constitutes the festival as a metaperformance that is more than the sum of its intersecting parts.

But perhaps the most appropriate and effective model for non-Indigenous festivals wishing to feature Indigenous performance in a good way is full-scale collaboration at the administrative level, again, across differently marginalized groups and organizations. This is what happened when Toronto's Aluna Theatre – founded as an intercultural, intermedial company dedicated to work from the Latinx diaspora in the Americas who run the also small-scale biennial RUTAS festival – initiated an ongoing partnership producing the festival with Native Earth Performing Arts – Canada's largest and longest-standing Indigenous theatre company – beginning with the festival's second iteration in 2014.²¹ The two-week 2018 festival placed *Réquiem para un alcarván*, by Lukas Avendaño (Zapotec) into conversation with the Mayan *Del Manantial del Corazón* (*The Heart of Spring*), with *Los Materiales de la ira y el amor* by the founder of contemporary Indigenous dance in Ecuador, Wilson Pico, and with

Amal, by Kitchener, Ontario's MT Space, a devised show that explores, in part, what it means for Syrian refugees to arrive in Canada 'as settlers in a land that is not ours' (MT Space).²² Taken together, on the stage, in the festival's conference component, and in late-night conversations at the festival cabaret, these shows served as occasions for exchange and analysis of mourning, celebration, ceremony, and resurgence that served as the bases for trans-Indigenous and transcultural solidarities that far exceeded issues of representation and visibility.

One performance at RUTAS 2016 raises several questions that are central to this inquiry. How might trans-Indigenous relational practices reshape the way festival protocols are understood? What might it mean for Indigenous peoples, whose very identity is tied to their relationship to their lands and waters and their human and non-human inhabitants, to perform at festivals that take place far from their traditional territories? My case study is a performance of Māori playwright Regan Taylor's *SolOthello* by Te Rēhia, a theatre company from Aotearoa/New Zealand at the Aki Studio as part of RUTAS 2016. Māori cultures, even more than most Indigenous cultures around the world, are deeply invested in protocol, and their protocols for reciprocal welcomes to lands and territories are particularly crucial and clearly developed. Also like many Indigenous peoples, the Māori are acutely conscious of the relationship between language and land; indeed, this is a key part of the mandate of Te Rēhia, which is 'to honour, revitalize, and transmit Te Reo Māori [the Māori language] through theatre to Aotearoa and the world'.

Before the show came to Tkaronto/Toronto,²³ many of the earliest performances of *SolOthello* took place in various *marae* (meeting grounds) throughout Aotearoa, where the company would have been welcomed to the space, the *wharenuī* (central meeting house), and the *iwi* (people, nation, tribe) through the traditional welcoming ceremony known as a *pōwhiri*. In Toronto the performance was nested among several layers of welcome, in several languages. The general welcome to RUTAS was extended in English and Spanish (with a sprinkling of Indigenous languages) to all festival attendees and participants by the organizers at Aluna and Native Earth. Secondly, every workshop, panel, performance, and screening at the event was preceded by an acknowledgement, in English and one or more Indigenous languages, of the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabe (particularly Mississauga of the Credit) as traditional caretakers of the land on which the event was held. Each event also included a welcome to Aki Studio, the home of Native Earth, which is a participant in a trans-Indigenous network of companies,

festivals, and funders in Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa.²⁴ In addition, the Māori company was invited to the Six Nations (Haudenosaunee confederacy) territory just west of Toronto on the Grand River, where they would have participated in the edge-of-the-woods ceremony, been welcomed into the acknowledged land of the hosts through song, speeches, and smudging ceremonies, and been invited to reciprocate by offering their own ceremonial songs, speeches, and greetings. The Māori performer of *SolOthello*, Tainui Tukiwaho, told me that to be welcomed to Haudenosaunee land and hear there, for the first time, some of the Indigenous languages of Turtle Island, was a highlight of his visit; it served as an important basis for the kinds of trans-Indigenous exchange that Indigenous festivals uniquely enable.

In the final welcome in this nest of welcomes, as the audience gathered outside the theatre for the performance of Te Rēhia's *SolOthello*, we were invited, by variations on a traditional pōwhiri, into a space that the ceremony itself, together with a Māori roofing structure outlined in light above the stage, *constituted* as a wharenuī, also constituting the audience as guests. In a symbolic sense the company had brought the hearts of their home territories with them to Toronto, where they engaged their hosts in mutual hospitality. The Māori understand the marae of their iwi as *tūrangawaewae* – a place to stand and belong that is used by the iwi for important tribal events. A pōwhiri is a ceremony by which outsiders are welcomed to the marae. This sometimes begins with a *wiri*, *wero*, or *taki*, a ritual challenge in which the visitors are identified, or constituted, as friends. But once so identified the *manuhiri* (guests), gathered in the *marae ātea* (courtyard), don't enter the marae until summoned by a *karanga* (call to enter) performed in Te Reo by the *kaikaranga*, women of the *tangata whenua* (host community). Once everyone has entered there is a round of *whaikōrero* (speeches), *waiata* (songs), and sometimes *haka* (a dance/challenge) for which protocol varies, at the end of which there are *harirū* (handshakes) and *hongi*, the ceremonial touching of noses that signifies the mingling together of the sacred breath of life, after which the *manuhiri* and *tangata whenua* (guests and host community) become one, and there is a sharing of food.

For *SolOthello* the pōwhiri was performed with variations. The audience-as-*manuhiri* were called into the space by a *karanga* performed by the show's Māori producer, Amber Curren. As we entered, we were greeted by performer Tainui Tukiwaho, who introduced himself and shook each audience member by the hand in a variation on the *harirū*. Once everyone was assembled in the space-as-wharenuī, Tukiwaho, wearing cargo pants, a

'Maid of the Mist' tourist sweatshirt from nearby Niagara Falls, a backward baseball cap, and bare feet, addressed us in a lengthy *whaikōrero*, delivered in Te Reo, followed by a 'support song' in Te Reo about 'remembering where you're from', performed by two women, one of them Amber Curren. The only language we heard for the first more than twelve minutes was Te Reo, which Tukiwaho then genially translated for us, explaining the significance of the welcome we had received. He also identified (as *whaikōrero* do), the *kaupapa* (purpose of the occasion), to which I'll return. The welcome, the various acknowledgements and explanations, in both Te Reo and English, took twenty-five minutes and also served as a kind of charismatic audience warmup. The show itself, of course, was the feast.

I dwell on this, and have introduced so many words in Te Reo, first, to support the company's mandate of honouring and transmitting Te Reo beyond Aotearoa. Ethical Indigenous research, as Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith was among the first to argue, is mandated to serve the interests of the community with which it engages, and researchers are understood to be accountable to that community. But the second reason is the pivotal importance of welcoming, and not simply as courtesy. Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson, from Turtle Island's Pacific Northwest, has made the simple but brilliant point that a welcome is also and always a declaration of sovereignty ('Welcoming' 16). I am using 'sovereignty' as it is understood by many Indigenous scholars to mean more than western legal definitions,²⁵ which have to do with property, legal documents, ownership, and power over others, as opposed, for example, to 'self-government', broadly understood to include self-determination, control over one's own culture, 'spheres of autonomy' (Anaya 79), 'a regime of respect' (Alfred 471), and what the Māori call '*mana*', one meaning of which is 'one's standing in one's own eyes'.²⁶ The welcoming ceremonies I have been describing, like most 'Indigenous protocols of welcome', Robinson points out, 'remind guests that they are guests':

To welcome presumes the authority and right to determine the proceedings that occur within the space. We welcome people into our homes, onto Indigenous lands, into countries, and to events we have organized. To welcome guests into each of these places is, to varying degrees, to signal sovereign control over the rules of the space and the authority under which such rules are enforced. ('Welcoming' 16)

'How', he asks his settler readers in Canada and elsewhere, 'are *you* accountable for the welcome you have overstayed?' (30).

This question, I believe, underlies the kaupapa, or purpose of the occasion, that Tukiwaho's address identified, genially and humorously, immediately after his opening whaikōrero and before proceeding to his performance of the 'play proper'. Issuing what might be understood as a displaced wiri (challenge to the visitors), 'Shakespeare', he said bluntly, 'was a thief (*SolOthello*). Students of Shakespeare with some knowledge of his treatment of his source material know this. Residents of Canada, particularly anglophone Canada, also know that 'Shakespeare' – as a primary cultural technology of colonization – has in many ways outstayed his welcome throughout the now English-speaking world, including both Canada and Aotearoa. But Tukiwaho went on to deliver a very funny travel narrative of exactly how it came about that the Māori stories that it was apparent to him provided the plots for Shakespeare's plays arrived in early modern Europe. Finally, he introduced the solo production that followed by telling the Māori 'source' story for *Othello*, as passed down through his 'great great great great great great . . . great grandfather', demonstrating wittily how Shakespeare derived the (to him) clearly Māori names of the characters, pointing out the Māori derivations of the plot, and occasionally commenting, 'Coincidence? I think not.'

What was this adaptation of Shakespeare about? I have observed elsewhere that as a verb 'adapt' can be transitive or intransitive: you can adapt something, you can adapt *to* something – or you can engage in *adaptation* (the process) as a way of both adapting *and* adapting *to*' (Knowles, 'Adapting' vi). I would argue that this last is what *SolOthello* did in Toronto. As the Indigenous hosts of the colonizing Europeans for whom 'Shakespeare' has been a cultural and educational agent, themselves hosted in Toronto by the peoples of the dish-with-one-spoon wampum,²⁷ the Māori creators and producers of this adaptation were adapting *to* Shakespeare, and to his seeming inevitability – he has perhaps outstayed his welcome in both Aotearoa and Canada, but he doesn't appear to be going away anytime soon. With *SolOthello* this Māori theatre company was welcoming *and using* Shakespeare, at this festival, with considerable grace and humour, to speak to their own culture *and* to trans-Indigenous cultures around the world. And throughout the show, within Native Earth Performing Arts's Aki studio, the protective roofline of the 'home' marae into which we had been welcomed at the outset hovered above the performance space.

What, then, does it mean for Indigenous peoples to perform at a festival in a land that is not theirs? How can contemporary Indigenous theatre productively perform trans-Indigeneity in the context of a theatre festival?

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, citing Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's concept of 'transmotion' (Vizenor 15), talks about continuities between traditional and contemporary understandings of territory, identity, and sovereignty through an emphasis on Indigenous patterns of circulation in space. Simpson writes: 'In Precolonial daily life of Nishnaabeg people, movement, change and fluidity were a reality' (*Dancing* 89), neither, as in many western theorizations, a metaphor nor a choice. In many Indigenous peoples' understandings, moreover, territory is defined, not by physical borders but by language, philosophy, way of life, and political structure, while territorial 'boundaries' constitute relationships and institute negotiations that at the RUTAS festival were played out through a nest of welcomes and mutual acknowledgements of sovereign ground. Simpson argues that the circulations of the traditional Anishinaabe did not consist of wandering, but of moving outward from a territorial centre, not to a border, but to a place of encounter – perhaps, in the contemporary as in the pre-contact Indigenous world, a place like a festival – 'where one needs to practice good relations with neighboring nations' (*Dancing* 89). To perform at a festival, then – at least one with an Indigenous mandate and location – is to travel to a trans-Indigenous place of encounter, to constitute new relationships, and to institute negotiations through reciprocal and respectful protocols of welcome: to at once acknowledge, and declare, sovereignties. The production of Te Rēhia's *SolOthello* and its surrounding protocols of welcome at the RUTAS festival, within the context of Native Earth's Aki Studio, carved out a trans-Indigenous space of encounter. That encounter can perhaps serve as a model of ways and practices through which a festival not exclusively devoted to Indigenous work but organized in collaboration with Indigenous communities can function productively to facilitate exchange. It also, perhaps, provides a model of reciprocal relationships that can apply to festivals beyond the trans-Indigenous world.

Indigeneity and Destination Festivals

Destination festivals, as discussed in Chapter 2, provide the anti-, or counter-model to the Indigenous festival paradigm that this chapter proposes, and in general tend to represent the festivalization and display of Indigenous cultures stereotyped for spectatorial consumption. But there are degrees to which destination festivals in different national sites have attempted in the twenty-first century to acknowledge or accommodate Indigeneity for different purposes and with different degrees of success,

and Indigenous artists have been strategic in their use of such festivals as occasions for cultural promotion and international exchange.

In Australia, a settler society struggling to come to terms with its genocidal colonial past and work towards Indigenous-settler 'reconciliation',²⁸ attempts by non-Indigenous festivals to incorporate Aboriginal content have seemed urgent. They have taken place primarily at the 'élite' and very visible level of what Sarah Thomasson calls 'the Australian Festival Circuit', which, she argues, functions as the country's dispersed national theatre ('Australian' 133). As Gilbert and Lo note, 'at international festivals [in Australia] Aboriginality functions as a metonym for the "authentic"' (18), and often, as at the Indigenous Arts Showcase in Perth in 2003, festivals have featured packaged Aboriginality: 'High quality cultural product, ready for the international and national markets' (74). That these productions and their Indigenous creators 'have found strategies not only to manage the deleterious effects of commodity relations in the global market, but also to mobilize market interest in indigeneity to garner international support of Aboriginal political and social struggles' (Gilbert and Lo 74) is perhaps a marker of Indigenous ingenuity. That Aboriginal Australians have used international festivals abroad as occasions for trans-Indigenous exchange is a mark of strategic trans-Indigeneity. In the late twentieth and first two decades of the twenty-first century, Indigenous artists have used international festivals as occasions to get together, even as they had, more surreptitiously, in the 'Anthropology Days' of international world fairs.

Within the country, festivals have struggled to include Indigenous 'cultural markers' (Malone) – acknowledgements that they take place on Indigenous lands and *displace* Indigenous peoples. The Adelaide Festival, 'the nation's premiere arts event' (Gilbert and Lo 112), might serve as an example. In an essay on cultural markers of Indigeneity in Adelaide since the 1960s – prior to which 'there was an almost complete absence of Indigenous public representations in Adelaide (and elsewhere in Australia)' (Malone 159) – Gavin Malone notes that the first major public artwork in Adelaide specifically to acknowledge Kurna people and Kurna land on which the festival sits – *Kurna meyunna, Kurna yerta tampendi*, by Kurna artists Darren Siwes and Eileen Karpány and non-Indigenous artist Tony Rosella – was unveiled at the Adelaide Festival Centre as recently as 2002 (163). But Malone also notes that, for the Kurna, the land, without monumental impositions, is itself a 'cultural marker', and among the recommendations with which he concludes his essay is a key one that applies to the festival itself: giving Indigenous peoples greater control over

public space, and over ‘both the commissioning and the creative process’ (165). The issue of Indigenous creative control, as modelled by Rhoda Roberts’s leadership of The Festival of the Dreaming, has been key to the degree of success achieved by destination festivals in Australia ever since.

Some attempt to cede control is what American star director Peter Sellars perhaps clumsily tried to do when he was appointed artistic director at Adelaide in 2002. But he started something that has been central to the (uneven) development of the Australian circuit. Sellars’s appointment and his curation of the festival were controversial. He has been celebrated for his vision and denigrated for his management style. Contemporary coverage of the festival included headlines such as ‘A Festival in Disarray’ (Caust) and ‘Festival Fractured by Chaos’ (Bramwell). But crucially, as Jo Caust argues,

Sellars wanted to have a different kind of festival that was not focused on major events imported from elsewhere. He wanted to have a festival organized to achieve very different kinds of goals from traditional festivals. He wanted the festival to operate within an organizational model that allowed for wide participation and consultation. He also wanted a festival that focused on communities not normally embraced by major arts festivals. (113)

He wanted, that is, a new, ancient festival paradigm. In attempting to address three key festival themes – the ‘Right to Cultural Diversity’, ‘Truth and Reconciliation’, and ‘Ecological Sustainability’ – Sellars introduced a new programming model that included a team of nine associate directors and several advisory committees in addition to the existing festival staff. The associate directors notably included two young Kurna arts professionals, Karl Telfer and Waiata Telfer (Higgins-Desbiolles 41).

This collaborative, power-sharing model was designed to recentre the festival on the local rather than the flashily international, and explicitly to embrace Indigenous, social-justice, and community arts practice. Sellars persevered with a controversial plan

to turn the civic Victoria Square into Tarndanyangga [‘red kangaroo dreaming’], the gathering place for the Kurna people, and the centre for the festival’s Indigenous program. For more than ten days Aboriginal artists from all over Australia gathered to perform and share their culture with visiting companies from New Mexico, South Africa and Aotearoa New Zealand. They also walked the streets of a capital city as welcome guests in a major festival. (Bramwell)

The festival’s opening ceremony, the *Kurna Palti Meyunna*, itself a mini-festival under an Indigenous paradigm and Indigenous control, ‘was conceptualized through Kurna spirituality as the spirit of the dreaming

ancestor, Tjilbruke, was invoked to bring peace and compassion, while all of the indigenous peoples visiting from near and far were called upon to carry out seven days of ceremonies prior to the opening and to which the non-indigenous were asked to respectfully stay away' (Higgins-Desbiolles 41).

The ceremony – 'the first major Kurna corroboree in a century', according to Gilbert and Lo (123) – was, by all accounts, 'spectacular and moving':

It ... brought together indigenous communities from around Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, New Mexico, and Tibet. Starting from the four squares of the city of Adelaide, processions of indigenous people, school children, and local communities walked to the central main square, or *Tarndanyangga*, lit a huge fire, and celebrated in dance, music, and storytelling. (Caust 111)

But Kurna and other Indigenous people were not just brought out to decorate an opening ceremony. The festival itself featured newly commissioned Indigenous films and work from several leading Aboriginal dance and theatre companies, as well as a free series of events showcasing local, regional, national, and international Indigenous performers at Tarndanyangga, 'who used the event to communicate with each other as well as perform for the non-indigenous in the audiences' (Higgins-Desbiolles 41). In a determinedly trans-Indigenous event, Gyuto monks from Tibet were accompanied by Aboriginal dancers from Anangu Ptjantjatjara (South Australia), a children's choir from Cambodia, Zuni dancers from New Mexico, and an African new music star (Gilbert and Lo 123).

Sellars resigned or was dismissed from his position in November 2001, months before the festival's 1 March opening, and while his plans were reduced somewhat, they were not abandoned, and most agreed that in the end the festival 'reminded festival-goers that indigenous Australia should be central to all things Australian. Perhaps part of the controversy that dogged this festival', Freya Higgins-Desbiolles suggests, 'grew from resentment against this message' (41). Nevertheless, Sellars had opened the door for more Indigenous participation at the leadership level at Adelaide, and his focus on Indigeneity probably led, more or less directly, to the appointment, as his successor, of Stephen Page (Yugambeh), the artistic director of the Indigenous Bangarra Dance Theatre, as the first Indigenous director of the festival, or, as far as I am aware, of any of the world's recurring elite, flagship, or destination festivals.

Using the catchphrase ‘the medicine of art’ (qtd in Gilbert and Lo 126), Page in 2004 quietly maintained the festival’s Indigenous content and succeeded with considerable grace and diplomacy in normalizing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work as an ongoing and necessary feature of subsequent festivals, and indeed as foundational to Australian culture. ‘Rather than being displayed as exotica, Aboriginal art forms were presented as diverse and dynamic expressions of mainstream contemporary Australia’, reterritorializing the festival’s hitherto European frames of reference by ‘framing it within a distinctly Aboriginal sensibility and spirituality’ (Gilbert and Lo 127). The show’s opening, the Awakening Ceremony, assembled 500 members of the Kaurra, Narrungga, and Nagarrindjeri peoples to light a fire on the riverbank ‘designed to reawaken the spirit ancestors, ignite the energies of contemporary indigenous groups and cleanse the site to shape a healthier future for generations to come’ (127), and again, perhaps, to model an Indigenous festival paradigm grounded in ceremony and witnessing and operating in tension with the dominant one of the destination festival.

The alternative, Indigenous paradigm did not take permanent hold at Adelaide, an aging and overwhelmingly white city with an only 1.4 per cent Indigenous population and with a proud ‘free settler’ history.²⁹ In the early 2010s, Indigenous performances featured prominently at the festival, often featuring commissions and co-productions with other Australian festivals, often with the support of the Major Festivals Initiative that was instituted by the Australian government’s Ministry for the Arts in 2006 (see Chapter 2). These included *Bloodland*, by Bangarra Dance Theatre in 2012, a ceremonial dance with a cast of twelve Indigenous performers directed by Stephen Page and performed in Yolŋu Matha (the Yolŋu language); *The Shadow King*, by Malthouse Theatre in 2014, an Indigenous adaptation and interpretation of *King Lear* directed by Michael Kantor in English and several Aboriginal languages; and *Black Diggers* in 2015, the stories of Indigenous soldiers in the First World War written by Tom Wright and directed by Wesley Enoch (Noonuccal-Nughi). And in its 2014–19 strategic plan, *A Culturally Ambitious Nation*, the Australian Council for the Arts articulated an ambitious set of strategies for investing in the arts based on the diversity of Australia’s culture. The final goal of the plan was to at once naturalize Indigenous cultures within Australian arts, support the intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledge, and increase engagement with Indigenous cultural production. Together with the Major Festivals Initiative this five-year plan suggested that Indigenous presence at festivals would receive a funding

boost. But governments change quickly in Australia, and with them, plans. The year after the Arts Council's five-year plan was to have ended, and without Indigenous leadership, Adelaide reverted to either tokenistic, exoticist, or minimal representation of the Kurna people on whose land the festival was held. When I attended in 2020, the festival, under the leadership of non-Indigenous Australian Artistic Directors Neil Armfield and Rachel Healy, had no Kurna presence on the programme. Indeed, it presented only one Indigenous show, *Bungul* from far-away North East Arnhem Land, a complex recreation of Yolŋu multi-instrumentalist and singer Gurrumul Yunupinju's final album, *Djarimirri (Child of the Rainbow)*, supported by the Major Festivals Initiative and shared on the circuit with the Perth, Sydney, and Darwin Festivals.

Subtitled or credited 'Gurrumul's Mother's Bungul, Gurrumul's Grandmother's Bungul, [and] Gurrumul's Manikay [ancestral song series]', *Bungul* was performed by nine male family members dancing, singing, and playing *bilma* (clapsticks) and *yidaki* (didjeridu) backed by the Adelaide Festival orchestra, all under the direction of the show's co-creators, Yolŋu elder Don Wininba Ganambarr and white settler Australian Nigel Jamieson. The downstage area had been transformed into a recreation of the sand, water, and bark ceremonial space at the Gulkula grounds on Gumatj clan country in North East Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory, where the Garma Festival is held (see below); upstage was the thirty-three-piece orchestra. Backing the stage was a large screen onto which were projected live images of the dancers, sometimes from above, intercut with prerecorded images of Yolŋu arts and home country. Some parts of the performance were traditional, some were accompanied by the orchestra, and some were orchestral only, playing Gurrumul's music. The performers risked self-exoticization, their bare upper bodies smeared with ochre and their faces painted in traditional patterns, performing in front of the orchestra in their European black formal dress and before the festival gaze of an almost exclusively Balanda (white settler) audience (Figure 3). But they also staked their claim to be taken with equal seriousness as art to western orchestral music, and greater seriousness in terms of their art's relational connection to the land, plants, animals, spirits, ancestors, and people's way of life. The twelve different manikays performed in Adelaide addressed the crocodile, crow, and octopus, the fresh water, sunsets, and dark clouds, as well as man-made ship's masts, calico fabrics, and musical instruments from the madhukin and djolinj to the electric guitar. But crucially, the songs were not just pieces of music; they were, as Wininba Ganambarr said in his programme note, 'our maps, our law books, our title deeds, and our family history'.



Figure 3 The performers in *Bungul* at the Adelaide Festival in 2020 risked self-exoticization, but also staked their claim to be taken with equal seriousness as art to western orchestral music, and greater seriousness in terms of their art's connection to the land. Photograph by Toni Wilkinson

This was a remarkable show, intercultural in its outreach and form and performed on their own terms by the Yolŋu as cultural ambassadors of Indigenous Australia, offering cultural context – partly through detailed programme notes on the manikays – for the understanding of Gurrumul's music. But there were only two performances of the show at Adelaide and they were located in the relatively seedy Thebarton Theatre in the city's relatively insalubrious Torrensville suburb, close to Aboriginal Community Services but outside of the city's famous central grid and surrounding park system, and far from the upscale Festival Centre where most of the headline European events had longer runs.

Bungul had been better placed a few weeks earlier at the Perth Festival in an isolated Western Australian city with a large English and Irish, and only 1.6 per cent reported Indigenous population, where it had three performances at the physically and symbolically central Perth Concert Hall and took part in an opening week dedicated to Indigenous work. The show shared the week with a thirtieth-anniversary revival of the iconic first Aboriginal Australian musical, *Bran Nue Dae*, by Jimmy Chi (Bardi,



Figure 4 Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company's *Hecate*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, performed at the Perth Festival in 2020, served as an effective assertion of the strength, complexity, and value of Noongar culture and language. Photograph by Dana Weeks

Nyulnyul Chinese Japanese, and Scottish), which premiered at Perth in 1990 and is set there but is no longer so new. It has been revived frequently and was made into a film in 2009, and the revival, like the film, was fundamentally a reproduction of the original, the optimism of which seemed a little less inspiring in 2020 and its question, 'Is this the end of our people?' a little more urgent.

Also sharing opening week at Perth in 2020, however, was *Hecate*, another Perth Festival commission and world premiere (Figure 4). *Hecate* was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by its director, Kylie Braknell (Kaarljilba Kaardn), performed by the Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company based in the Subiaco suburb of Perth and run by the Noongar peoples. Adaptations of classics have been frequent at the world's destination festivals and have been most interculturally effective when they have involved minoritized groups claiming the cultural authority of western 'masters'. *Hecate*, performed without surtitles entirely in Nyungar (the endangered language of the Noongar), recentred the play around a titular character who is usually cut from productions of the classic text. This

version's Hecate was an ancestral matriarch who, according to reviewer Laura Money, 'emerges from the very heart of the earth as she feels her land is dying. She laments the withering of her trees, her bushland, her water beds, her animals, and her people . . . , a silent figure striving to restore balance to Country.' Hecate was a constant presence, working throughout in consort with three 'mischievous makers' (Shakespeare's witches), a revenant Banquo, the voiced sounds of bushland nature, and a glorious projected cosmos to restore health to a land 'in disarray' – a result, of course, of colonization, a context not likely to have been lost on the show's overwhelmingly white audience. That the show relied on audiences' familiarity with the Shakespeare 'original' for their full understanding spoke to the continuing cultural authority of the classical text; that it asserted the equal cultural authority, expressiveness, and value of the Nyungar language spoke to Indigenous resurgence in Western Australia. Importantly, the festival presented *Hecate Kambarnap* in association with the show, an honouring of the Noongar people at which the audience shared a cleansing smoke as well as stories and speeches in Nyungar.

But the high point of Perth's opening week in 2020 was the exquisitely crafted *Bennelong*, created by Stephen Page for Bangarra Dance Theatre (Barangaroo, New South Wales), about the legacy of eighteenth-century Eora leader and British captive Woollarawarre Bennelong. *Bennelong* was collaborative insofar as its dramaturg, composer, and lighting designer were the non-Indigenous Alana Valentine, Steve Francis, and Nick Schlieper, respectively,³⁰ while creative control was firmly in the hands of the company's choreographer and director, Stephen Page (Yagumbah), its resident designer, Jacob Nash (Murri), and its cultural consultant, Matthew Doyle (Muruwari and Irish). *Bennelong* had premiered in 2017 at the Sydney Opera House on Bennelong point, where its central character had lived. *Bennelong* was in part an historical revisiting and revisioning of the beginnings of the European invasion of Australia, which is typically identified with the arrival of the First Fleet under Governor Arthur Phillip in January 1788 (a date which loomed blood red over the show). Phillip, having been ordered to 'open dialogue with the natives' ('Bangarra'), kidnapped the show's central character, the young Woollarawarre Bennelong, who learned English and served as an intermediary between his people and the settlers, was taken to England and presented to King George III, and finally returned to his home country and way of life to die.

As the show opened in pre-1788 Australia, men and women assembled on the bare ground and moved in curvilinear patterns beneath a large, earth-coloured ring to resonant surround sound and powerful Indigenous song. The audience bore witness to Bennelong's birth and early years among his Wangal clan before the colonizers came bringing stiff salutes, ragged rhythms, and angular patterns into a space that had hitherto been all stomping feet and swaying bodies. The easy flow of communal life was interrupted, permanently, by the rigid uniformity of military jackets and inflexible routines, as Bennelong awkwardly donned a uniform and a new, equally ill-fitting identity as a British subject. With the British came disease, and some of the production's most powerful moments occurred as writhing, convulsing bodies emerged through a doorway between life and death-by-smallpox. The show was not without humour, and certainly not without great beauty, but what lingers is its sometimes graphic, blood-spattered depiction of colonial cruelty and the profound sadness of Bennelong's life and death, never more powerfully than in the depiction of Bennelong's tortured final days. Rejected by his former allies as well as his own people and trapped within his cottage, the mirrored walls converging on him, Bennelong died at Kissing Point on 3 January 1813, and was buried on the banks of the Parramatta River where he was born.

Bennelong was an accomplished piece of work, *representing* the brutality of colonization and the recalcitrance of conciliation between the Global North and South, but *enacting* the power and beauty of Indigenous artistry and the promise of resurgence (Figure 5). Matching the charismatic virtuosity of Beau Dean Riley Smith (Wiradjuri) as Bennelong and the depth, intricacy, and maturity of senior Torres Strait Island dancer Elma Kris (Wagadagam, Kaurareg, Sipingur, Gebbara, and Kai Dangkal Buai), was a flawless ensemble of seventeen dancers enacting a powerful trans-Indigenous collaboration – Stephen Page touted the show's 'wonderful mix of Indigenous theatrical elements coming together' (qtd in 'Bangarra') – as well as collaborations between Indigenous and settler artists under Indigenous leadership. Kris, playing 'Psychopomp', evoked a future for Indigenous peoples in Australia that involved prisons and abuse, but also protests, demonstrations, and hope; Steve Francis, whose score blended Indigenous and European influences, saw the show, ultimately if somewhat optimistically, as a story of reconciliation: 'we could live side by side . . . understanding each other's culture, or cultural way of life, having respect for one another', he said. 'Really, that's what it comes down to' (qtd in 'Bangarra').



Figure 5 *Bennelong*, created by Stephen Page for Bangarra Dance Theatre and performed at the Perth Festival and elsewhere in 2020, enacted the power and beauty of Indigenous artistry and the promise of resurgence. Photograph by Daniel Boud

Perth's experiment in 2020, the inaugural year of non-Indigenous artistic director Iain Grandage's tenure, dedicating the first week of the festival exclusively to four featured works from Indigenous Australia, risked ghettoizing Indigenous work, but two of the featured shows extended into the second week, when a fifth joined them on the programme, and the festival film series featured two works by Indigenous filmmakers, one of them Noongar. The featured work, moreover, consisted of a wide diversity of Indigenous shows in different performance genres. There is no question, in any case, that the critical mass of highly visible Indigenous performance at Perth's main stages in 2020, in counterdistinction to the isolated staging of *Bunjul* in Adelaide, constituted the festival's first week, at least, as a meta-event of major significance for Indigenous Australia.

The production that opened in the second week at Perth featured a perhaps problematic, but historic collaboration, *BLACK TIES*, the first between Indigenous theatre companies in Australia and Aotearoa, and another commission by the Perth Festival funded by the Major Festivals Initiative. Co-created by John Harvey (Torres Strait Islands) and Tainui

Tukiwaho (Māori), co-produced by Te Rēhia Theatre Company in Auckland and ILBIJERRI Theatre Company in Melbourne, and programmed at the Sydney, Perth, New Zealand, and Auckland Festivals, the large-scale show, with a cast of thirteen including the band, was billed as an 'hilarious and heartwarming' musical rom com about intercultural marriage between a Māori woman and Aboriginal man. It dealt with their two families attempting to reconcile their prejudices and preconceptions while audience members, seated at tables as guests at the wedding reception, looked on. *BLACK TIES* was popular, it exhibited the considerable skill and dexterity of the Indigenous cast and creative team, and it raised important questions, if lightly, about vexed intercultural issues. But it was also subject to criticism by many, including Tokelauan (Te Kaiga o Fagatale, Nukunonu, Te Kaiga o Koloī, Uea) and Fijian (Kaideuba) reviewer Emele Ugavule, for failing to honour details in the tribe-specific history of treaty negotiations, for its 'comic' use of racial slurs, for the harmful representation of *takatāpui* (gay, lesbian, or transgender people), and for the damaging reinforcement of stereotypes about Blak (Indigenous) men and 'angry Blak women'. Ugavule left the theatre 'feeling hurt and ashamed'. The destination festival stage can be a fraught and very public site for the representation and negotiation of unresolved cultural difference within and between Indigenous communities.

Stephen Page, at Adelaide in 2004, was the first but has not been the only Aboriginal director of a major festival in Australia. Since 2017 Noonuccal-Nughi playwright Wesley Enoch has run the Sydney Festival, his hiring perhaps being one inspired response to the festival's forward-looking 'Reconciliation Action Plan 2015–2017', launched in 2013 with four major goals: 'respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures, offering employment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, offering development and presentation opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and art workers, and building cultural awareness among our staff, our stakeholders and audiences of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories' (Sydney Festival, 'Innovate'). Enoch has used the position to champion the interrelated issues of the use of Indigenous languages and the preservation of land, both within and beyond Australia.³¹ In 2018 he addressed the British Council and the Edinburgh Festival's International Culture Summit, advocating deep knowledge of the landscape through the languages that emerged from it and emphasizing the inter-imbricated issues of the preservation of land and language (Enoch, 'If You').

In his first two festivals, Enoch strengthened these commitments. In 2017, in fact, he introduced an Aboriginal language course series, 'Bayala', and commissioned one of the series conveners, Aunty Jacinta Tobin (Dharug), and others to write a song 'in language' to be performed at the WugulOra ('one mob') morning ceremony on Australia Day (26 January) near the end of the festival. He also supported emerging Indigenous writers by incorporating in the festival's closing days Moogahlin Performing Arts's Yellamundie National First Peoples Playwriting Festival, an important development initiative which continued into the 2020 festival. Indigenous work on the programme proper in 2017 included a broad range of trans-Indigenous performances such as *Which Way Home* and *Blood on the Dance Floor*, both by Melbourne's leading Aboriginal ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, the former about an Aboriginal girl and her aging father on a trip to his birthplace, the latter a blood-based physical theatre piece featuring Narangga/Kaurna dancer and writer Jacob Boehme trying to come to terms culturally with his HIV-positive diagnosis. Also included were *Burrbgaja Yalirra* (Dancing Forwards), a triple bill of spoken word and animated video, solo dance, and dance/violin by the extraordinary Marrugeku company, based in remote Broome in the north of Western Australia, and the harrowing solo work, *Huff*, by Cree actor/writer Cliff Cardinal, produced by Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto. In 2017 Enoch also introduced the Blak Out programme, 'excavating hope from a bleak political landscape' in Australia and in the world (Enoch, 'That's a Wrap').³² The programme, which included music, dance, and visual art as well as theatre by Indigenous peoples, was designed to represent the *diversity* of First Peoples and to avoid burdening any one or two shows with what Enoch calls 'the responsibility of representation' (qtd in Boon). 'When you have more than a single show from First Nations artists', Enoch says, 'you immediately relieve that show from trying to represent the whole of that community' (Enoch, 'That's a Wrap'). The sheer variety of Indigenous and non-Indigenous performances in 2017 created a festival experience throughout Australia's financial capital and most populous and diverse city (population ca 5.5 million, almost 45 per cent immigrant) that was at once international in the traditional sense, 'international' in the Indigenous sense, and actively intercultural. For Indigenous artists and audiences it was affirming; for settler Australians beneficially unsettling.

But perhaps the 2017 festival's most festive and most affirmative event was *1967: Music in the Key of Yes*, in which Aboriginal and Indigenous singers took the stage of the prestigious Sydney Opera

House to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the referendum in which Australians voted overwhelmingly to remove passages in their constitution that discriminated against Aboriginal people. Yolŋu artist Yirrma both opened and closed the show, his 'soaring vocals in language let[ting] us all know', according to Murri reviewer Emily Nicole, 'that despite continued oppression, Indigenous culture is enduring, resilient, and very much alive'.

Enoch's appointment was extended, and as I write he has completed his fourth season as Sydney's Artistic Director in January 2020, a season in which a full third of the events listed in the festival programme were Indigenous, some of them carrying a very high profile. These included *Bungul* prior to its tour to Perth and Adelaide; *BLACK TIES* mounted in collaboration with the Auckland Festival; and the revival of *Bran Nue Dae*, all part of the Australian circuit in 2020 and all discussed above. It also included two world premieres that involved Indigenous and settler artists collaborating in the lead creative roles of playwright and director. *Black Cockatoo*, by settler playwright Geoffrey Atherden, was directed by Enoch himself; *Black Drop Effect*, by Yuwaalaraay playwright Nardi Simpson, was directed by the Trinidad-born Felix Cross. The former, focusing on the retrieval from the depths of the archives of the story of Jarwadjali cricketer Johnny Mullagh's 1868 tour of England with an all-Indigenous team, consisted of a commentary on shifting and differing perspectives on history. It employed Wergaia language within a dominant English text, and a cast of six doubling in Black and white roles. It focused, often powerfully, on the historical injustices and contemporary neglect suffered by Australia's first Indigenous sports hero. The latter show accepted Enoch's challenge to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island artists to be ready for the 250th anniversary in April 2020 of the arrival of Captain Cook at Kamay (Botany Bay). Staging debates around the possibilities and problems of reconciliation through cultural enactment and encounter, *Black Drop Effect* used five Indigenous and two settler actors, an inventive choreography, swirling projections, and an evocatively eclectic sound score to clock Indigenous reactions over time to various official commemorations of Cook's landing. The titular black drop effect refers to the optical illusion that occurs during the Transit of Venus when two opposing shapes seem to merge, appearing to produce a teardrop on the lip of the sun. It was the attempt to measure the Transit of Venus that was the official excuse for Captain Cook's voyage of 'exploration' in 1770, and the effect served as an apt metaphor for Australia's diverging national narratives and the tears they continue to produce.

Finally, the 2020 edition of the Sydney Festival under Enoch extended the festival's trans-Indigenous outreach once again to what is now Canada, including performances by the musical sensation Jeremy Dutcher (Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) of the Tobique First Nation). But perhaps as important as the featured performances were the festival's efforts to engage in critical conversations about Indigeneity. These included 'Warra Warra What?' at the State Library, a consideration of the first words James Cook and his men heard ('Go away!') when they arrived on the coast of what is now Australia, and more importantly of Dharawal history and language in what is now New South Wales. They also included, closing the festival, *Procession*, a cleansing ceremony, song, and dance led by Aboriginal Elders through the streets of Sydney, and *The Vigil*, an all-night-long experience of performance and reflection at the Barangaroo Reserve waterfront park, both held on the eve of Australia day. These events, the opening and closing ceremonies, and many of the individual Indigenous events framed the 2020 Sydney festival within a decolonial Indigenous festival paradigm constituting its audiences, as often as not, as participants and witnesses to events that straddled the line between theatre and ceremony.

The evolution of the Adelaide, Perth, and Sydney Festivals, particularly under Indigenous leadership, demonstrates that destination festivals in the early twenty-first century have had the fragile capacity to broker conversations across Indigenous-settler differences and to showcase powerful Indigenous performances before local, national, and visiting audiences. Nevertheless, the overarching purpose of most such festivals necessarily remained nation, state, and city branding, and Indigenous work was always in danger of co-option, commodification, or even disappearance, even as it was exposed to the global festival marketplace. To consider the full potential of Indigeneity to shift the ways we think about festivals and the cultural work they perform, it's necessary to look at a model more fully under Indigenous control.

Indigenous Cultural Festivals: 'Irreconcilable Spaces of Aboriginality'

Cultural festivals organized by Indigenous peoples themselves vary in focus, size, and purpose and are rarely only about theatre or the arts as such, though they are certainly performative, and it's not difficult to trace their lineage to festivals that predate contact with the western world, western history, and the festival culture of ancient Greece. Perhaps more directly than any others, these festivals provide what can be understood to

be a decolonial festival paradigm that for western understandings can be profoundly unsettling. Some, such as the large-scale (1 million visitors in five years) Festival Internacional de la Cultura Maya (Yucatán, Mexico), are recognizably destination festivals in their appeal to visitors, but are focused on a single, in this case Mayan, culture. FICMAYA, as it is called, has broad ambitions, as signalled by the title of the festival and the conference that it hosted in its sixth incarnation in 2017: 'Cosmogony and the Preservation of the Planet'. The preservation and celebration of Mayan cultures, cosmologies, and cosmogonies (creation stories) are seen in this festival as invitations to the world to learn and heal. Other, smaller festivals, such as Riddu Riddu ('small storm at the coast'), held in Gáivuotna (Kåfjord), Norway, whose mandate is 'to promote and develop the Sami coastal culture', are primarily local and focus on cultural preservation, survival, and renewal in the face of resistance, sometimes violent. At the very beginning of Riddu Riddu the festival's young founders were ridiculed and spat upon.

Aboriginal cultural festivals, almost all of them in traditional, remote territories in far northern Queensland or the Northern Territory in Australia, have been among the most successful in at once negotiating Indigenous-settler political relationships *and* maintaining what Métis scholar David Garneau, from Turtle Island, calls 'irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality' (27), and they are, of course, under the exclusive leadership of Indigenous people.³³

Australia

In Australia's far north the Mapoon Indigenous Festival in Cape York was founded in 2007 as an assertion of the 'historical continuity, social legitimacy, autonomy and sovereignty' (Slater, 'Our Spirit' 134) of the small Tjungundi community of Mapoon, forcibly removed from their homes in 1963 by the Queensland police who burned their houses to the ground to prevent their return. The 2017 festival celebrated fifty years of resurgence. Other of the more than 100 Aboriginal festivals in Australia each year as of 2010 (Phipps, 'Indigenous' 683), such as the Yepereny Federation Festival (Alice Springs), the Barunga Festival (Barunga), and the Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival (Cape York), operate as 'a means of entering into intercultural dialogue, a testimony to ongoing political struggles and, for both Indigenous performers and their audience, provide an important context for the contemporary negotiation and transmission of Indigenous people's identities (Slater, 'Our Spirit' 130-1).

The Garma Festival of Traditional Cultures (North East Arnhem Land) is exemplary, part of what Peter Phipps calls ‘An effervescence of local indigenous cultural festivals [that] is one manifestation of [a] subtle shift toward a globalizing indigenous identity that emphasizes the specifically local’ (‘Performances’ 220). Garma is an annual, four-day festival held by the Yolŋu people at the Gulkula grounds, a sand-covered ceremonial site on Gumatj clan country. It is, as Phipps says, ‘an intercultural gathering of [Australian] national significance, and simultaneously is a local gathering of Yolngu [sic] clans on Yolngu land for Yolngu political, ceremonial and recreational purposes’ (‘Performing’ 110). The Yolŋu peoples have been prominent in Aboriginal rights movements in Australia, in part because of their late colonization and their having maintained strong connections to their ancestral lands, laws, language, and performance forms.³⁴ ‘Our ancient sovereignty is here’, said Djunga Djunga Yunupingu at a ceremonial welcome to Garma 2018 (Davidson), and the festival both grounds itself in that sovereignty and engages Balanda (non-Indigenous visitors) with Yolŋu cultural practices, language, and cosmology. Central to the festival is the *buŋgul*, a dance that encodes Yolŋu history, sovereignty, and law, is performed every evening on the festival grounds, and has in a mediated form been taken on tour to Australia’s major destination festivals, as discussed above. In its manifestation on home country, it teaches Yolŋu youth languages and cultural practices while also making Yolŋu epistemologies and ontologies – together with their capacity for intercultural, international negotiation, diplomacy, and trade – visible to visiting Balanda politicians and dignitaries. ‘Yolngu dance’, as anthropologist Franca Tamisari says, ‘because they hold the law’ (qtd in Phipps, ‘Performing’ 152). As a festival requiring ‘complex inter-clan political negotiations on a number of levels, from the sacred ritual and religious to the economic’ (Phipps, ‘Performing’ 118), Garma promotes and models Yolŋu Matha (language) on the land from which it emerged, and it encodes Yolŋu understandings of interdependence and relationality with other peoples as well as with the natural and spirit worlds. And in doing so it hails non-Indigenous Australians, including invited political leaders, to enter into reciprocal, nation-to-nation relationships with the people to whose land they have been welcomed *as guests*.

Garma, then, like other Indigenous cultural festivals in Australia, exists in a complex, deeply intercultural world, its goal being, as Lisa Slater argues, ‘to compose anti-colonial relations’ (‘Sovereign’ 132) or, I would argue, more generatively decolonial ones. ‘Indigenous cultural festivals’, she says, constitute ‘innovative responses to keeping culture alive –

meaningful lifeworlds comprised [of] local networks of production, circulation, exchange, sociality, and law, embedded in settler, liberal modernity'. (134). Also, however, as 'expressions and generation of, as well as experiments in, Indigenous modernity' (138), they enact what she calls 'relational ontologies' (137).

Cultural festivals are one ... *route* for reinvigorating significant relationships and social identities, with the express purpose of strengthening young people's capacity to navigate the demands of a deeply intercultural world, and to be innovators and agents of the new roles and possibilities generated by our shared present ... I am arguing that cultural festivals are peaceful weapons in a continuing ontological political contest. (144, emphasis in original)

This, for me, constitutes a paradigmatically different role for festivals than that enshrined in canonical histories of western theatre and festivalization, a direct and affective public assertion of the ongoing and independent value of cultures, epistemologies, cosmogonies, and cosmologies of peoples whose rights remain unrecognized in the Australian constitution.³⁵

Trans-Indigeneity in the Pacific

Festivals of Pacific peoples negotiate less with single national settler governments, as in Australia, than with the oceanic vastness of the region that they attempt to connect. Phipps's essay on Indigenous cultural festivals as 'Performances of Power' compares Garma to Hawai'i's Merrie Monarch Festival, which, however, focusing on the hula as a bridge between traditional culture and Indigenous modernities, brings together performances from across the Pacific, including Aotearoa and Tahiti. In this, the Merrie Monarch Festival is representative of festivals of Pacific peoples, which tend to operate on a more explicitly trans-Indigenous level than do Garma and other more culturally specific events. These festivals serve in part to forge solidarities across Oceanic cultures, including those of what French cartographer/'explorer' Jules Dumont d'Urville labelled Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia in 1832, each fragmented by its own complex colonial histories and contemporary realities in which the UK, Spain, France, Germany, Holland, Australia, Japan, Chile, and the United States have controlled, ravaged, and exchanged islands. The interventions performed by these festivals, then, function not at a national but a transnational level, creating trans-Indigenous solidarities, supporting cultural resurgence, and, like the festivals discussed in Chapter 5, forging links across latter-day national borders.

The Festival of the Pacific Arts (FESTPAC), founded in 1972 in Fiji, takes place every four years hosted by a different country and nation, thereby avoiding co-option by the agendas of national governments. FESTPAC is not designed for tourists. Its function is to bring Pacific peoples together in a spirit of regeneration. Its ambitious and wide-ranging guiding principles are as follows:

We, the indigenous peoples of the Pacific, assert our cultural identity, rights and dignity. We do so, mindful of our spiritual and environmental origins, through our dynamic art forms and artistic history and traditions. As indigenous peoples we share the following objectives:

- Encourage awareness of a collective voice
- Foster the protection of cultural heritage
- Explore the creation of dynamic new arts
- Cultivate global awareness and appreciation for Pacific arts and cultures
- Promote our traditional languages
- Value the wisdom of our elders
- Support the aspiration of our youth
- Advocate a cultural peace through dialogue with the cultures of the Pacific
- Promote cultural development within the social, economic and political development of our countries
- Encourage the indigenous peoples of the Pacific to continue their efforts for recognition. (Stevenson 4–5)

Although the initial goals of the festival were preservationist and functioned on the level of cultural exchange, it has developed in the twenty-first century into a site where young artists and contemporary arts – music, design, film, dance, and theatre – build on traditional forms and practices to forge new and forward-looking trans-Indigenous, trans-Pacific modernisms and form transnational political alliances. The 2016 festival, held in Guam with 2,700 artists and performers from 27 Pacific Island countries and territories – some arriving in a dozen handcrafted vessels guided by traditional navigators – also hosted a meeting of the Pacific Ministers of Culture to discuss a regional approach to the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, as well as a Forum on Culture, Arts and Sustainable Development in the Pacific.

But FESTPAC is only one of many festivals forging solidarities across the Pacific islands and their diaspora. In Aotearoa alone there are Pacific festivals in every major urban area, ranging from Northland through the central North Island and Wellington all the way down the east coast of the

South Island to Invercargill on the southern tip. These festivals forge and express pan-Pacific solidarities, celebrate Aotearoa as a new, rather than ancestral Pacific homeland, and establish relationships of trans-Indigenous solidarity between Pacific peoples and the Māori. The largest of these festivals, and the largest Pacific festivals in the world, take place in Auckland: the original, student-focused Polyfest (there are now sixteen) and the original, community-based Pasifika³⁶ Festival (there are now fourteen). In addition to these are the Tu Fa'atasi ('stand together') festival in Wellington, and the grandmother of them all, the Polynesian Festival in Rotorua founded in 1972, originally a Māori event but renamed Te Matatini o te Rā in 2004 to indicate its broadened scope (matatini in this context meaning 'many faces').

Auckland is now known as 'the biggest Polynesian city in the world' (Mackley-Crump, 'Pacific'), and its Pasifika Festival is the largest of its kind globally. The festival is a free, family-friendly event held over two days in late March in, as of 2019, eleven different 'villages' in Western Springs Park representing, respectively, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Aotearoa, Hawai'i, Kiribati, Samoa, Tahiti, Tuvalu, Tonga, and Tokelau. The festival's opening night concert involves each Pacific nation presenting a short performance that recognizes and draws upon the knowledge and experience of community elders. Along with honouring elders, the festival hires and mentors young Pacific people in roles within the organization and management of the festival. Finally, the festival focuses on differences between and diversity among the Pacific communities it represents and brings together. In a key essay that focuses on the Pasifika festival in Auckland, Jared Mackley-Crump argues that the festivalization of Pacific cultures 'creates notions of diasporic identity and belonging', with the festivals functioning as 'complex transcultural contact zones' that at once provide opportunities for exchange and solidarities among Pacific peoples and for the display of Pacific cultures to outsiders ('Festivalization' 59). Pacific festivals, he argues,

are transcultural spaces. They are in that they are meeting places of different Pacific cultures, diverse in their differences, unified by commonalities, and they are also where these different Pacific cultures and peoples meet others. Furthermore, Pacific festivals are transcultural because they are spaces through which Pacific pasts meet contemporary urban Pacific presents, a terrain upon which what it means to be of the Pacific in the twenty-first century can be contested. (28)

Mackley-Crump identifies (28–9) four types of ‘contact parties’ that occur within the context of the festival – the Intergenerational, Intra-Pacific, Intra-national, and International – which cumulatively provide a site for what he calls ‘a multi-local mapping of place’ (34), a reterritorialization of Aotearoa as a place, a ‘sea of islands’ that, drawing on James Clifford, ‘blend[s] together routes and roots to construct alternative public spheres’ (34, citing Clifford).

Pacific festivals are perhaps unique in constructing what Mackley-Crump calls ‘urban Oceanic spaces’ (31) in which diasporic Pacific peoples can forge identities that are no longer neither here nor there, but *both* here *and* there, at once based on traditional relationships to the land and, especially, the water, and grounded in newly forged trans-Indigenous modernities. Such festivals, then, as complex spaces of multiple belongings, function as sites of both the negotiation and consolidation of intercultural, trans-Indigenous diasporic subjectivities.

Indigenous-run Theatre and Performance Festivals

Indigenous cultural festivals such as those I have been examining have been important sites for the performative negotiation and constitution of identities within individual, intranational, and trans-Indigenous communities. (Trans-)Indigenous festivals dedicated to contemporary theatre and performance have taken on the extra role of negotiating across aesthetic and formal differences and the derivation of contemporary forms from the languages, territories, and traditional cultural texts and practices of different Indigenous nations. They play the mediating role, in the contemporary world and the aesthetic realm, played by ceremonial types of Indigenous performative encounter – ur-festivals – that predated contact with European colonizers; at their best they provide alternative ways of thinking about festivals in the twenty-first century in constituting festivalgoers, particularly Indigenous ones, as participants and witnesses. Insofar as they also attract settler and arrivant audience members, however, they do not constitute communities in the way that non-Indigenous festivals are said to do. The audience experience at most Indigenous theatre festivals is a divided one that consists of Indigenous people as hosts and relations, together with non-Indigenous attendees who are welcomed as guests and encouraged to experience the festival as real or potential allies.

Indigenous festivals dedicated to contemporary live art are relatively rare, but tend to come in three forms: play development festivals (represented here by Native Earth Performing Arts’s Weesageechak Begins to

Dance in Toronto); intra-National festivals (represented here by Full Circle's Talking Stick Festival in Vancouver);³⁷ and transnational, trans-Indigenous festivals (represented here by the Living Ritual International Indigenous Performing Arts Festival in Toronto in 2017, with which this chapter opened).³⁸

Weesageechak Begins to Dance completed its thirty-first annual edition over two weeks in November 2018, featuring new works and works in progress in theatre, dance, and opera.³⁹ It also featured work by emerging Indigenous artists who were part of the festival's Animaking Creators Unit dedicated to the diversity of new Indigenous voices, and (since 2017) a two-spirit Cabaret produced in conjunction with Buddies in Bad Times (queer) theatre.⁴⁰ Weesageechak is extraordinary in its intergenerational and interdisciplinary assemblage of developing work from First Nations across the land that is now called Canada, and increasingly over the past decade, from Aotearoa and Aboriginal Australia as well, in instances of trans-Indigenous outreach and collaboration. Weesageechak 2016, for example, hosted the first showing of *Waka/Ciimaan/Waka*, a collaboration among Native Earth Performing Arts, Raven Spirit Dance (British Columbia), and Tawata Productions (Aotearoa), involving artists from Canada, Aotearoa, and the Cook Islands whimsically exploring 'the effects of climate change and environmental capitalism on the people and animals of the northern and southern hemispheres' (Dickinson, 'Waka'). Its title means 'canoe' in the production's three languages.⁴¹

Weesageechak's focus on development is crucial in allowing it to support the exploration of new, or newly hybrid forms (such as Indigenous opera, which has featured several times at the festival), and of new relationships across Indigenous nations within and beyond Turtle Island, without the pressures or expenses of full production. The focus, moreover, is on relationships *within the room* – between artists, directors, dramaturgs, and local audiences from different Indigenous cultures, rather than on the festivalization of the space or the eventification and marketing of the festival for international or tourist consumption. Weesageechak is able to take risks. And far from the competitive frenzy of many fringe festivals, the atmosphere at Weesageechak is one of mutual celebration. It is, in short, festive.

Vancouver's Talking Stick Festival, presented annually by Full Circle: First Nations Performance, is a two-week interdisciplinary international festival featuring traditional and contemporary visual arts, dance, theatre, music, pow wow, and film by Indigenous artists from across what is now Canada. It was founded in 2001 in the wake of the experience of Full

Circle founder and artistic director Margo Kane (Cree/Salteaux) performing her solo show, *Moonlodge*, at The Festival of the Dreaming in the lead-up to the Sydney Olympics, an example of the beneficial effects of trans-Indigenous exchange (See Lachance and Couture; La Flamme). Organized on the horizontal principles of radical Indigenous democracy signalled by its name, the festival models ancient 'talking stick' protocols, in which only the holder of the talking stick (or in some cultures the eagle feather, pipe, shell, or wampum belt) has the right to speak, and everyone else is required to listen with attention and respect before the stick is passed to the next person in the 'talking circle' (see Indigenous Corporate Training). A festival modelled on these principles exhibits appropriate behaviour for audiences who are constituted as active, attentive participants engaged in meaningful exchange rather than as passive spectators or consumers of entertainment.

In 2018 Talking Stick featured, as 'headliners', *Scháyilhen (Salmon Going Up the River)*, an exhibition curated by mixed-race Cree artist Richard Heikkilä-Sawan; *Sokalo*, by Québec's [ZÖGMA], a percussive dance company, in collaboration with Vancouver's Louis Riel Métis Dancers; *Map of the Land, Map of the Stars*, a collective creation by the Yukon's Gwaandak Theatre in Whitehorse, combining theatre, dance, and music; and 'Reel Reservations', a 'cinematic Indigenous sovereignty series' (Full Circle, 'Headliners'). In addition, the festival offered a 'family fun' series consisting of Axis Theatre Company's *Th'owxiya: The Hungry Feast Dish*, a TYA show written by Joseph Dandurand (Kwantlen First Nation); Raven Spirit Dance's *Salmon Girl*, directed by Quelemia Sparrow (Musqueam) and choreographed by Michelle Olson (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in); a Métis kitchen party; and a pow wow. There was also 'Nightlife', which included *Heartbeatz!* and *Indigi Groove* (a performance series featuring Tutchone/Tinglit, Métis, Squamish, and other musicians); *Indigifemme*, a burlesque performance exploring contemporary Indigenous sexualities; and a closing Kw'iyilshwit dance party. Finally, the festival hosted the four-day Scháyilhen Industry Series for presenters, artists, scholars, and audience members interested in the development of Indigenous arts. It was, in short, an extraordinarily eclectic and trans-Indigenous meta-event fulfilling the festival's mandate to 'to showcase and celebrate Indigenous art and performance to a wider audience' (Full Circle, 'About') while enabling wide-ranging conversations across Indigenous nations, ages, sexualities, and performance genres.

But Talking Stick is more than simply a showcase. It is also, as Lindsay Lachance (Algonquin Anishinaabe) and settler scholar Selena Couture have argued, a nurturing space of embodying ‘Indigenous ideas of transformational love, “grounded normativity” and kin relations that cross earthly boundaries’ (11). Lachance and Couture draw upon the work of Karyn Recollet (Cree) on ‘kinestellary relations’, Glen Coulthard (Dene) on ‘grounded normativity’, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson on ‘decolonial love’ to discuss the ways in which the festival ‘activate[s] the territorial, radical relationalities that are bringing what is traditional into the future’ (Carter, Recollet, and Robinson 215–16). ‘Kinestellary relations’ are modelled on the movement and circulation of the constellations and constitute ‘reciprocal relationalities of kinship across the human and other-than-human worlds to open up multiscalar flows of Indigenous being and thinking’ (Lachance and Couture 13). ‘Grounded normativity’, according to Coulthard, is a ‘place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice . . . , the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time’ (13). And ‘decolonial love’ is a transformational process of joining together ‘in a rebellion of love, persistence and profound caring’ (Simpson, ‘decolonial’). According to Lachance and Couture, the Talking Stick Festival’s flexible, decentred, non-hierarchical organizational principles and practices model these Indigenous and deeply ethical and relational concepts in structuring ‘an event that honours and builds relationships and resiliency through deep love that aims to transform’ (18) – offering a profound Indigenous variation on the transformational properties and potential of festivals discussed in this book’s Introduction, and an actively decolonial festival paradigm. In my experience, the festival offers a profoundly moving and welcoming coming together of artists and audience/participants over ten days each February, powerfully modelling international encounter and Indigenous cultural resurgence.

While Weesageechak Begins to Dance and Talking Stick are long-standing annual events, the small-scale Living Ritual Festival with which I opened this chapter has only happened twice in a little over a decade, but in spite of its size is an example of a widely transnational, trans-Indigenous event based on sharing and exchange rather than on competition or spectacle.⁴² The first festival in 2006, organized by Kaha:wi Dance Theatre’s Kahnyen’kehàka (Mohawk) Artistic Director Tekaronhiàkhkwa Santee Smith from Six Nations of the Grand River, highlighted ‘ritual’,

was subtitled 'World Indigenous Dance Festival', and featured traditional and community-based work. The second, in 2017, again organized by Smith (along with Kaha:wi's Mohawk then General Manager Cynthia Lickers-Sage), highlighted 'living', was subtitled 'International Indigenous Performing Arts Festival', and featured contemporary, interdisciplinary, and experimental work.

Living Ritual was in many ways exemplary in grounding its international trans-Indigeneity in the local and programming meaningful encounters among all participants in the form of workshops, panels, and keynote 'provocations' rather than the often-underachieved aspirational rhetoric of festivals that are not so carefully curated. The 2017 iteration of the festival provided an opportunity for precisely the kinds of trans-Indigenous analysis that Chadwick Allen calls for by juxtaposing performances at Toronto's Harbourfront 'synchronically and globally' (*Trans-Indigenous* xxvi) over three intensive days in July 2017. It was presented as a forum for dialogue on decoloniality and artistic exploration, promoting trans-Indigenous creative cross-pollination. Living Ritual in 2017 was exemplary for also being deeply grounded in the cultures and practices of the Haudenosaunee (primarily Mohawk), who hosted artists from Turtle Island, Aotearoa, and Australia as well as arrivant and white settler participants. The event opened outdoors by the waters of Lake Ontario with an Onkwehon:we Edge of the Woods ceremony, in which visitors, having affirmed that they came in peace, were welcomed into the acknowledged territory of the Onkwehon:we, Anishinaabe (Mississaugas of the Credit River), and Huron-Wendat. In addition to songs, speeches, and smudging, each visitor was presented with a feather and a cup of water with which to clear the dust of travel from our eyes and ears and clear our throats in preparation to see, hear, and speak 'in a good way'. The hour-long ceremony – a living ritual – was powerful and gracious, and like the nest of welcomes surrounding Te Rēhia Theatre's *SolOthello* at the RUTAS festival, and like every welcome (as Robinson reminds us), it was also a declaration and acknowledgement of sovereignties. Indigenous visitors from Aotearoa and Australia also offered songs and greetings from their home territories before the ceremony concluded with an inclusive Round Dance.

The brevity and scale of Living Ritual 2017 meant that all participants were there for the duration, and in addition to sharing six eclectic dance, theatre, and dance-theatre performances in the evenings (open to a general public), they shared techniques and strategies throughout each day in a

series of intensive workshops, shared positions in keynote provocations, and shared information and strategies at participatory panels on such things as Indigenous ‘Process and Methodologies’, ‘Documentation’, ‘Platforms and Presence’, ‘Collaboration’, ‘Protocols for Consent’, and ‘Ensemble and Sovereignty’. The evening performances, two per evening, ranged from Indigenous variations on contemporary dance and documentary through Kapa Haka and a mashup of ‘hip hop, physical percussion, and rhythmic cultural pattern’ (Living Ritual), to theatricalized Inuit storytelling and, of course, the Spiderwoman-styled ‘storyweaving’ with which I began this chapter.

But one of the strengths of the festival was that the artists not only saw one another’s work, but they participated in intensive workshops that allowed for deeper aesthetic, technical, political, and cultural exchange than is available at most festivals. These workshops provided some of the most invigorating moments of the festival, as when Kalaallit artist Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, from Iqaluit, Nunavut, orchestrated a participatory full-body workshop on the Greenlandic mask dance, *uaajeer-neq*. Participants from various Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures around the world smeared our faces with black greasepaint (for humility) and then added white (to evoke the ancestors’ bones) and red (for female genitalia). Mouths were stuffed, grotesquely, with bits of apple and carrot (for male genitalia). (‘In our language’, Williamson Bathory said, ‘the word for “art” is “the making of eccentric things”.’) We were instructed to squat, keeping our genitals close to the ground so there would be a connection between our sexual beings and the earth; to move our eyes around; and to explore, in an orgy of improvisation, our animal, glutton, sexual, male and/or female, scary and suggestive selves – a very visceral and earthy kind of transcultural, interpersonal exchange.

From the other side of the world, the Māori Hawaiki TŪ Productions’ Kapa Haka warrior dance/theatre production of *Hononga* was complemented by a vigorous Kapa Haka workshop led by Beez Ngarino Watt, but also balanced by a different side of Māori culture through a much gentler workshop and solo performance, *Manawa*, by Taane Mete (Ngāti Kahungunu me Ngāti Koroki – Kahukura). Mete’s performative lecture and workshop was a highlight of the festival. Less demonstration than sharing, it began with a moving account of serving Mete’s mother by helping transport her to the other side, then shifted into a fluid solo dance-demonstration based on that experience, before concluding with a workshop in which he choreographed all of us, as participant-performers, in a

delicate exercise of connecting sky and earth worlds through a bucket and a cloud. Simple, evocative, and empowering, it felt exemplary of the trans-Indigenous sharing that the festival set out to enable.

The festival *was* limited in many ways. It was a small, physically and temporally contained one-off event without the pressures of long-term sustainability. Although well-funded by the colonialist Canadian government's settler nationalist 'Canada 150' programme, apart from the evening performances it was not broadly advertised, in part, I assume, because it was intended to be dominated by the participating Indigenous artists and performers rather than curious onlookers. And the conference and workshop components mostly took place in the intimate space of the Fleck Dance Theatre's lobby area, where Euro/Mushkegowuk Cree designer Andy Moro, of ARTICLE 11, had designed and installed a welcoming and flexible modular environment. This festival was not primarily meant for outsiders, and while visitors were made welcome, there were very few white settlers in evidence. But on its own terms, both physically and discursively, the festival enabled and modelled productive and empowering circles of conversation across latter-day artificial and divisive international boundaries, and it took care to situate itself on the land and to welcome visiting companies to bring their own land- and water-based epistemologies and practices with them as guests. Living Ritual was a partial realization of Allen's vision of a trans-Indigeneity that 'will require reviving old networks of trade and exchange – and creating new networks of Indigenous interactions as yet unimagined' ('Decolonizing' 392).

What Would It Mean?

I began this chapter with a series of questions: what would it mean to see theatre and performance festivals, not as having begun within the competitive framework of ancient Greece but among the relational frameworks of Indigenous communities globally? The chapter has suggested that festivals can perhaps best function when they are genuinely 'international'; when they feature Indigenous creative leadership and are grounded in the land, languages, creation stories, ceremonies, and knowledge systems that emerge from it rather than in the deterritorializing and decontextualizing programming practices of many international festivals; and when they constitute festivalgoers as guests, participants, and witnesses rather than consumers or voyeurs. As events participating in Indigenous resurgence globally, Indigenous festivals, in the words of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson about resurgent Indigenous organizing more generally, are

‘necessarily place-based and local, but . . . also necessarily networked and global’ (*As We Have* 178). I hope, in subsequent chapters exploring various types of international festivals worldwide, implicitly to measure their relative success in promoting intercultural negotiation and exchange less against the founding model of ancient Greece, and more against the foundational Indigenous prototypes and practices explored here.