The Tempest: Creating dialogue from points of difference

Angela Campbell

Dismantling imperial history is a complex process which requires more than merely filling gaps with untold stories, or substituting culturally specific narratives for Euro centric ones. It is inevitable that history will present a productive site for hybridity in post-colonial drama when several narratives coexist in however uneasy a union. (Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, Post-Colonial Drama)¹

Life, my little man, lacks rehearsals. That’s why it so often fails. Now in the theatre … (Rene de Obaldia, Exobiographie: Memoires)²

The most pressing cultural challenge for contemporary Australia, and perhaps for all postcolonial nations, is the interface between Indigenous populations and white ‘settler’ populations. The theatre, as Obaldia suggests above, is the perfect place to explore this kind of cultural challenge. In this article, the interface between white and Indigenous Australia is explored through the Queensland Theatre Company’s (QTC) version of The Tempest. Written by William Shakespeare, directed by Simon Phillips and incorporating the work of Jagera Jarjum, an Australian traditional Indigenous dance company, The Tempest opened in September 1999 as part of the Brisbane Festival. The play was subsequently included in the Centenary of Federation Festival in Melbourne in May 2001.

Initially, my involvement with the production was as an interested bystander and audience member. I had worked as an actor with many members of the white cast in other QTC shows and had an actor’s interest in how the production would approach the text. Although I had never worked with Indigenous cultures, I had many years of experience in making theatre with culturally specific material, both in Australia and overseas, and knew some of the risks inherent to this kind of theatrical project. My experience taught me that there is a process in such intercultural creative projects that I call cultural vanishing, whereby a mixing-up or melding of cultures, rather than creating a dialogue between equals or even a hybrid culture, results in one culture disappearing and leaving a state in which only ‘traces’ or pictures of the vanquished culture are distinguishable. At the curtain call, as I sat in the opening night audience, I realised that Phillips’s production had managed to resist this ‘cultural vanishing’. Rather than watching a main-stage, actorly version of Shakespeare’s text, the audience was presented with a rare and encouraging example of a vibrant, hybrid space where two distinct and highly evolved cultural voices could be heard and perhaps, more importantly, could start to communicate. I determined to explore the particular cultural interface that occurred during the making of this production.

Upon interviewing members of the creative and production teams, it became clear that the Indigenous performers’ political agenda drove much of the creative and production agenda, and the white team had entered the process with a certain
cultural, even artistic, naivety. As director Simon Phillips admitted, ‘I did go in with a conscious naivety, expecting to be educated but it’s probably fair to say … that the learning curve was more fascinating and steeper and more actually extraordinary than I thought it would be’.\(^3\) Phillips’s openness and apparent lack of agenda seemed to offer an opportunity for the two cultures to negotiate. Seen in its most ingenuous light, his approach might be likened to that of Bertolt Brecht, who insisted on ‘naivety as the primary category for his aesthetics’\(^4\) and found creative opportunity in ‘contradiction’ and improvisation.\(^5\) I aim to investigate the complex and often contradictory, improvisational process of cultural negotiation that created the unique theatrical ‘opportunity’ in this production of *The Tempest*. I will refer to the interviews mentioned above and also to Rebecca Schneider’s ‘Flesh, memory and the logic of the archive’, a paper that provides a vital critical framework for this investigation, placing issues of history and cultural re-enactment into a broader theoretical context.\(^6\) But first I will return to the production itself as I experienced it in Brisbane, 1999.

To set the scene, an English ship is wrecked on the shore of an unknown island (a fictionalised Australia) ruled by Prospero. Living on the island with Prospero is his daughter, Miranda, and his black slaves, Ariel and Caliban. The island’s first people, its spirits, who are named the same as those in Shakespeare’s play, also inhabit the land. On stage the ground is ‘covered with red Uluru-like earth’ and behind is a vast blue velvet drop suggesting the blue of the British flag thus representing a tension between two worlds.\(^7\)

As the audience enters, a group of white male actors are already on stage. Dressed in uniforms of the British Navy of the late eighteenth century, complete with powdered wigs, their likeness immediately suggests the familiar and iconic representations commemorating the journeys of Captain Cook and his landing at Botany Bay.\(^8\) The men are chatting and playing chess in what seems to be the comfortable, if cramped, officers’ mess on board a sailing frigate. Suspended behind them is an enlarged gilt-framed scene similar to Turner’s later work, depicting a ferocious, stormy seascape in which there is a solitary sailor clinging to a shipwrecked raft. It is obviously a cultured and privileged life, also an adventurous and manly one (although, thanks to the imagery of the painting, there are undertones of elemental chaos, danger and attendant anxiety). The men’s lengthy sojourn on stage while the audience is being seated suggests that they have been sailing forever. It seems as though the past has somehow been skinned, and, like the proverbial onion, we are seeing an under-layer of our own (colonial) history.

Once the audience is seated the action of the play begins, with a sound-cue of wind signifying the coming of the storm. The reality of a fierce and indomitable nature interrupts the quiet calm of the ship’s progress and like the wild (although framed and contained) romantic vision of nature depicted in the Turner-like painting, this storm destroys the vessel and strands its occupants on a foreign shore, in this case, Prospero’s Island. The scene is set for the cultured, manly men of our (Anglo-Celtic) past to be tested on foreign ground. For the Indigenous folk, represented by Jagara Jarjum, it is a moment of invasion; they watch as the boat capsizes and calamity is delivered onto their shores.
Phillips chose to dedicate enormous resources and energy to the spectacular creation of the storm and the destruction of the vessel. Stage machinery picked up and tossed the officer’s mess about, tipping the actors onto the imaginary shoreline and eventually up-ending the set altogether, flying it up and off the stage entirely. The operation of this set received a round of applause from the audience and two reviewers described it as a ‘coup de théâtre’. This production took place in an 850-seat theatre and was a central part of the QTC’s annual subscriber program. High production values and a certain standard of ‘excellence’ are part of such a company’s brief and are part of the expectations of audiences and funding bodies. Phillips stages the moment as a terrifying fall from civilisation, a fall from all that is known and understood by the white sailors. They find themselves in the ‘brave new world’, a secret-filled, spiritual place entered only after a full-immersion baptism. All things are turned upside-down, shaken up and emptied out (including the set and earlier imperialist readings of the play). For the predominantly white audience, Phillips is trying to present an opportunity to go back, to revisit our colonial past in a move that Susan Bennett describes as attempting ‘not to repeat [history] but to get somewhere else’, to engage with the “post” of going back, to bring to centre stage the gaps and omissions of History’s performance calendar.

Increasingly over recent years, The Tempest has been interpreted and performed as a postcolonial text. Phillips’s production taps into the rich vein of postcolonial ‘counter-discursive interrogation’ of the play, this time in an Australian context, casting white and Indigenous actors as well as incorporating Jagera Jarjum. Phillips likens Prospero’s Island to Australia, drawing parallels between Prospero’s domination of the Island and its inhabitants and white man’s domination of Indigenous land. As Phillips explains in the program notes, he was particularly drawn to themes of reconciliation and forgiveness in the play, and pushed the production to ‘allow those most deeply and sincerely regrettable of wrongs to be somehow acknowledged and ritualised … and [to depict the] handing back of land in a colonial context’. Phillips’s concept conforms with the general trend noted by Gilbert and Tompkins for productions from the ‘settler cultures’ of Australia and Canada to be ‘more inclined to dramatise a dispersal of Prospero’s power without necessarily centralising race relations, and to rework the coloniser’s relationship with the land’. Phillips’s production certainly emphasised the ongoing spiritual ownership of the land by Indigenous spirits and questioned the authority of Shakespeare’s text. It could also be argued that this pattern of contestation over the cultural landscape extended out of the text and was played out between the cast of actors and the Indigenous dancers in the rehearsal room.

The great conceptual challenge — one deliberately set up by Phillips from the start — was to incorporate a specifically traditional Indigenous presence into this main-stage production of a Shakespearean text. This initial dramaturgical decision became the driving principle behind the whole production, and it created complex political tensions in relation to issues of cultural representation and identity. Rebecca Schneider’s paper ‘Flesh, memory and the logic of the archive’ is particularly relevant in this context. Schneider begins by interrogating how history or versions of history are constructed and disseminated in western culture, and she
explores how alternative, performative cultural practices can act in opposition or resistance to mainstream, text-based cultural production. Her analysis can be applied to the way this production of *The Tempest* treats ideas of history, memory and re-enactment, reconstructing on stage a vision of Australia’s colonial past. She identifies the archive, that repository of western culture, as a place where material remains are stored at the loss of living memory, performative memory, the memory of bone over that of flesh. She likens text (words on the page) to bone, housed forever in the archive; the living, lived memory of performative culture is the flesh, which ‘slips away’.

Schneider’s images and ideas can be applied in a broader sense to Indigenous culture in Australia, an oral culture passed on from person to person, from body to body; it is a traditionally performative, non-text-based culture that in contemporary Australian society is constantly forced to resist the hegemony of the dominant, white, text-based tradition. Schneider links ‘the mapping of memory through material, quantifiable … remains … to a particular social power over memory’. This power does not admit the legitimacy of history told in an oral-based tradition, a tradition that keeps memory alive by the ‘body-to-body transmission of enactment’. Schneider contends that ‘the logic of the archive’ insists that only the visible object or document remains, at the expense of the living. The act of performance, being other than the official version of the past and the present, is made to disappear. It is precisely here that the dialogue between the two cultures in Phillips’s production began, as both Jagera Jargum and the actors speaking Shakespeare worked to understand (and subvert) the far-reaching implications of what could be described as the forced forgetting of lived cultural practice and the tyranny of text.

Applying Schneider’s ideas directly to the experience of the production of *The Tempest*, it can be seen that Phillips set up a fundamental clash in ways of being and connecting with the world between Jagera Jargum and Shakespeare. In so doing, he proposed an extremely interesting problem for the theatre group to solve. The standard, ‘high art’ version of the Shakespearean text, performed by English-speaking actors in a conventional western theatre, where written text is a driving force and (particularly in the case of Shakespeare) a repository of cultural power, had to be balanced against the enactment of the dance, song and ritual of a lived Indigenous culture on stage by Jagera Jargum.

If the primary task for the white actors, as they saw it, was about saying the lines beautifully and being truthful to Shakespeare’s text — and according to Wesley Enoch, the assistant director and cultural advisor to the project, it was — then for the traditional dancers, the text could in many ways be seen as hostile and alien territory. Bennett warns that reproducing: a classical text of the European imperial archive is always to risk its willing and wistfully nostalgic assent to (re)claim its own authority. Those texts are simply so heavily over coded, value laden, that the production and reception of the ‘new’ text necessarily becomes bound to the tradition that encompasses and promotes the old ‘authentic’ version.

Narjic Fogarty, one of the traditional dancers, was clearly aware of this. He stated that the dancers’ commitment to the project was not about the text but ‘was about showing that traditional culture is ongoing’ and that ‘a hundred years ago is a
completely different style but it is all completely traditional, ongoing’. As far as he was concerned, doing the dances and songs and rituals was real, not play-acting. Phillips’s difficult task was, to quote Bennett, to ‘expand the field of contemporary performance to enact these kinds of collisions between genre, race, nation and other positionalities’. Phillips’s determination to support the dancers’ vision and explore the politics and aesthetics of the different cultural ‘positionality’ of the Indigenous performers was crucial to the depth and resonance of the production.

Enoch recalls an example of Jagera Jarjum’s struggle to articulate a culturally appropriate, traditional response to an extraordinarily non-traditional environment. The final scene of the play was a celebration, a masque, and Jagera Jarjum did a dance using fire, earth and water. As Enoch remembered:

there were spirits up and they had to put them down. There was no opportunity in the show or at the end of the show, so Jagera Jarjum would go into the dressing room and watch the TV monitor of the stage and they would sing to it, to the monitor, saying we’ve raised spirits here, now we have to put them down again. And then Ian McDonald [the composer] found that out and recorded them playing [and then the recording was played] as a track at the end [of the performance as the audience were leaving] and Jagera Jarjum felt that … once it had been recorded [and played], they thought that was enough.

Enoch, for one, delighted in this improvisation between a modern technology and a traditional way of thinking, which allowed two oppositional cultural paradigms to appear together on the same stage, telling the same story, yet operating within two different performance logics.

Throughout the rehearsal process, the dancers’ understanding of the implications of these issues and the ways that history, memory and culture are constructed and reconstructed can be seen in the way that they could not, and would not, leave political considerations behind at the rehearsal-room door. They invested themselves with powers of veto based on cultural considerations, and the unspoken but very real threat of a walk-out at times caused tension. This kind of overtly political agenda is not uncommon in rehearsal rooms. Many Indigenous performers are equally aware of the power of theatre as a tool for social change. As Lydia Miller notes:

The fight to tell our stories our way has been a constant and long road, but our voice refuses to be silenced or disappear. The resistance by the dominant culture to an indigenous perspective indicates the immense power of image manipulation in maintaining the status quo.

Far from upsetting the rehearsal process or detracting from the success of the production, I would argue that the hard-won solutions to these cultural contestations between Jagera Jarjum and the mainstream white, cultural environment of the QTC were the source of the production’s greatest aesthetic strength, providing it (as part of the overall aesthetic package) with depth of meaning and social relevance.

The process of unpeeling the layers of colonialist assumption (and the point in the rehearsal room where the personal and the political began to merge) can be seen clearly in the production’s reworking of the complicated power relations
between Prospero and the spirit population. The negotiations that surrounded the interpretation of that relationship define the political territory through which the production moves. Prospero’s hold over Ariel and Caliban (played by Indigenous actors) and the cultural allegiance and racial bonds shared between Ariel and Caliban and the spirit people was one such site of negotiation. Phillips explains: ‘in our interpretation we’ve chosen to imagine that Prospero has managed to sufficiently tap into the belief system of the Indigenous culture that he has somehow usurped various dreamings to maintain power over them’. 29

As the rehearsal process evolved, fundamental differences in the cast’s reading of the narrative and understanding of the function of the narrative in the production began to arise. This revolved around power relations between the black and white protagonists. Enoch remembered that there was a moment early in the play where Prospero says:

‘I call upon my spirits …’ and [the dancers] were saying, we’re not for him, we don’t give a shit about him, this Prospero man comes from nowhere, if we are spirits of the land, we don’t give a shit, he can’t command us.30

This issue proved to be a pivotal point of contention. John Stanton, playing Prospero, would say, ‘but I’m Prospero, Prospero commands’. 31 For Stanton, Shakespeare’s story was primary and his interpretation of Prospero depended on his ability to dominate and control the stage. After all, if Prospero is not the master, who is he? Phillips’s broader reading of the play asks this very question; however, his response aligns with what Gilbert and Tompkins suggest to be a general pattern of postcolonial response to the play, leading to the eventual consolidation of a ‘black identity while the settler subject remains marked by ambivalence and radical instability’. 32 The dancers were very clear about this dynamic and refused to accept Stanton/Prospero’s ultimate authority on what was, in their version of the play, their land. As Enoch remembers it, after much discussion the cast worked out that ‘Prospero asks, no, commands Ariel because he has magic over her and Ariel will then ask the spirits and then the spirits do a favour to help free her’.33

In this instance, it was absolutely necessary for Stanton as a mainstream white actor speaking Shakespeare’s lines to control the stage. From Jagara Jarjum’s Indigenous point of view, it was similarly impossible ‘that these Spirits that came from the land would take orders from this white impostor’. According to Enoch:

we had to work this back story out to make sure all this cultural sensitivity of a white man telling a group of black people what to do … and in the end you never see it on stage and you think, John, why are you making it a big issue? But he was saying, I, John Stanton, playing Prospero have to understand that I have the power. And [the dancers] said ‘yeh, you can think that, that’s alright, we just go differently’. And I think everyone just chose to disagree. And in the end you don’t see [the back story] on stage in a massive way. But also, [John Stanton] is a brute as Prospero, which I think we were all really excited by, the way he works in that kind of world. 34

This ‘back story’ debate raised some highly fraught issues, as it presented a direct challenge to the white man’s hegemony in overtly political terms. Stanton’s ‘brutal’ acting choice to play Prospero not as the all-knowing, magical philosopher and prophet, as the part could be played, but as an exacting, insensitive master and
conqueror is a truly a fascinating one. It could be read simply as an acting choice made by a highly skilled professional who was prepared to defend his interpretation of a character’s journey through the narrative. Alternatively, it could be read as a statement about the kind of white men who colonised Australia and the type of cultural attitudes that still prevail. In this light, Stanton’s choice can also be seen as a contemporary reaction to an overt political challenge, which is then fought on stage as well as within the narrative.

The point of contention over who has ultimate authority within the story is part of a complex and subtle political challenge that is played out through the course of the production. Whatever the actor’s motivation, Stanton’s choice of a ‘brutal’ reading of Prospero as a man who demanded to be obeyed at all times was on one level supported, even manipulated, by the director (who cast him in that role in the first place). Jagera Jarjum’s resistance to Stanton/Prospero and the demands of the text was similarly supported. By creating and colluding with a power struggle, Phillips questioned the authority of the text and the standard interpretation of the power relations within that text. Prospero (and Stanton) and his followers (the other white performers) stood to lose power, both in terms of control within the narrative and in terms of cultural authority. *The Tempest* was no longer Shakespeare’s story; it became something else. Similarly, the contestation over the way in which the play was to be performed went beyond issues of textual interpretation. This was a very uncomfortable position for the white actors to be in, particularly when they thought they would be performing in a fairly text-bound, main-stage production. The process was not easy for Jagera Jarjum either. In this context, the lines between personal, artistic and cultural boundaries became extremely blurred; indeed, they shifted and at times became indistinguishable.

The acute political awareness of the Indigenous performers can be seen in the continuing challenge they made to the primacy of the text and the power of veto they asserted at various points in rehearsal. According to Phillips:

> there were the points in rehearsal where they would refuse to do certain things that, for them, were culturally inappropriate or politically distasteful. They would say, ‘no that doesn’t work for us, we can’t do that’. Then the white actors started to get really crabby and say, you can’t just say you don’t feel like doing that bit, we’re not doing it for you, we’re doing it for Shakespeare, it’s Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.  

As Enoch remembered it:

> Simon just said ‘no, that’s not what we are doing; we are doing a production of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* that I am deliberately pushing. We’ve had three and a half weeks where we have just talked about text, [what works for the dancers] is important, this is just as important as the text. If we don’t get this right then what you are doing means nothing’.  

From these accounts, it can be seen that the director consciously and vigorously defended the differing cultural priorities of the dancers from the opposing (and in a 850-seat Optus Playhouse, state theatre company environment, the often imposing) demands of the western text and white acting tradition. Through his insistence, Phillips’s production entered cultural and artistic territory that was genuinely new and exciting.
The different perspectives being negotiated did not stop on this relatively simple level of narrative interpretation. Even more difficult negotiations, and perhaps the greatest achievement of the production, occurred on the level of form. It is useful here to refer back to Schneider’s ideas about the ways that aesthetics and politics of performance operate in different cultures. To do this, she traces the idea of western theatre back to its ancient Greek origins in the ‘teatron’, meaning ‘a place for viewing’, reminding us that the teatron provided a space, ‘delineated for particular visual form, a form with a clear demarcation between viewer and viewed’. She states that at the basis of her exploration is the idea that:

the Western architecture of spectacle, with its habitual screenal divide, is linked to Western logic of the archive which preserves history as a collection of ‘original’ remains, given and available to display, a past divided from the present as viewer is divided from viewed.

Schneider likens western theatre to a museum display case where exhibits are held ‘under house arrest’, controlled within their form and presented to a passive audience.

According to Schneider’s argument, *The Tempest* is a prime archival document of western theatre, and Brisbane’s Optus Playhouse is a classic teatron space. However, with the inclusion of Jagera Jarjum, a different paradigm is introduced into this edifice of western culture. Here, instead, is an emphasis on ritual and repeated performance, where memory is mapped not through a text but by the body through dance and song, and is reflected in the rituals of everyday life. This is a paradigm where history is repeated in the present and stored within and on the body. Seen in this light it could be said that this production of *The Tempest*, on a very fundamental level, challenges ‘the logic of the archive’, and also thereby challenges (on the main stage of a state theatre company) the cultural ascendancy of white Australia over Indigenous Australia.

As an audience member, the point where I finally realised the extraordinary convergence of these two contradictory cultural/performance paradigms came at the end of the performance, when people were taking their bows. The ‘oppositional’ aspect of this example (in terms of Schneider’s debate) is that in it we see how the audience relationship set up by Jagera Jarjum is radically different to that of the actors. The actors had, as usual, rehearsed a detailed choreographed sequence for taking their bows, with less prominent actors being followed by those playing more central roles. Jagera Jarjum, however, did not bow and their whole demeanour was different to that of the actors. They re-entered as themselves, just people in a very large room. Sometimes they made little movements from their dance acknowledging the applause, but for the most part they just talked and joked with each other, with the other actors and even with the audience members seated in the first few rows. For the dancers, the performance they had given was real and was situated in the real, contemporary world, not a story from a far-distant past told in the pretend world of the theatre. In this western theatre space, Jagera Jarjum refused to collude with the idea (again quoting from Schneider) of ‘a past divided from the present as viewer is divided from viewed’.

It was important that this fundamental cultural difference be acknowledged.

As I understood it, the ritual paradigm brought by Jagera Jarjum was played out in real time. For the dancers it was really happening (and colonial history kept
happening), whereas the performance paradigm of the actors meant they were only pretending (and history was a story that happened in the past). The dancers’ resistance to western theatrical protocol could be seen as highly disruptive of the power of archival culture, implying that real power and real knowledge can be held within the body and can be acted out in real time. This alternative performative paradigm disrupts the dominant narrative of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, both in the final product of the performance and in the process of creating that product. By implication, it also disrupts white, mainstream cultural discourse. The friction or energy this disruption creates is precisely the aesthetic point of fascination offered by this intercultural project.

A concrete example of how the dancers invested enormous energy and commitment into their culture’s survival in the alien landscape of a mainstream state theatre company production can be seen in the painstaking negotiations over costumes. Gayle MacGregor, as head of wardrobe, and her team discovered that in making the costumes, they couldn’t take anything for granted. She found that:

feathers could mean all sorts of things, death, they can mean. We found that with some feathers, you just don’t go there. We ended up using chook feathers because no one cares about chooks.43

Wardrobe also found that cultural considerations affected the maintenance of the costumes. As McGregor recalled:

we couldn’t wash them because they belonged to their spirit, they belonged to their soul because it’s stuff they wear next to their skin, and it is only for them and no one else can touch it. Suddenly we are in the theatre and they’re wearing things that actually do need washing and we’re not allowed to wash them. But in the end we were given permission.44

It was also a point of cultural negotiation to allow female QTC wardrobe personnel to fit the male dancers for their costumes. It must be said that for both sides, the demands of adjusting to accommodate cultural customs and/or technical procedures presented difficulties. MacGregor felt that the dancers, in particular, were making ‘a big effort and exception to let us do this’. However, she also felt ‘frustration at production meetings where everyone would say they would sort out the problems with the dancers’ costumes, but nobody would’ and that ‘every step of the way, you’d get something organised with [the dancers] then you’d feel like you had taken ten steps backwards’.45

This problem arose partly because of a lack of direct communication between the traditional dancers and others in the creative and production team, a situation that could be traced back to a relayed communication system set up before the process began in order to facilitate cultural communication. Ironically, many people found this relay system difficult, as it created an unnecessary wall of mystery around the dancers. As MacGregor remembered it, ‘we weren’t supposed to really talk to the dancers without that proper intermediary’.46 She felt that this situation mirrored the racial tensions outside the rehearsal room, within the larger community.

McGregor’s criticisms point to some very real communication problems. She felt that the lack of a direct, workable cultural protocol was reflected in the production as a whole, aesthetically and technically. Her unease about the process
was based on a fear that the company was in danger of ‘creating our own version of the outside world, [and] that [the dancers] were totally segregated in the end because everyone was so scared that they’d upset them’. However, the fact that MacGregor and her team developed their own protocols by the end of the show is evidence of an overall growth in cultural understanding, and that in itself is part of the wider creative process operating within the production.

Continuing struggle within the production, both on stage and off, to articulate and negotiate political and artistic questions could be seen as part of a larger ongoing and incomplete process of reworking race relations in Australia. Phillips singled out:

the most difficult beat in the whole production was the last moment between Prospero and Caliban. That was difficult because I was playing against the text and because I was negotiating with two people who were kind of the most immensely proud representatives of their individual culture. I was treading on glass to make sure that that moment could be meaningful without making John, who hates to lose power on stage feel he was losing power and not make Glen feel like he was losing power. And it was also the sense to which that was reconciliatory. Because I think I managed to create a sense, visually in which Prospero said to Caliban ‘forgive me’. We were exploring the moment of Prospero holding out his hand and Caliban would then be raised up to his level and then there was that question, is it Prospero’s right to raise? Where is Caliban making the choice? And Prospero having said, ‘please forgive me’, does Caliban say, ‘fuck you’ I’m not going to forgive you, you have done too much damage to me, or does he go, OK, I will forgive you. Finally, the decision was that Caliban ran, having been freed, he left, didn’t stay and the sense being that he would be wandering for a long time. It wasn’t over yet.

Similarly, the debate and protocols between Indigenous and white Australia are still developing, as they are in other settler nations; the issues are still being teased out and new contexts created. These contexts can perhaps most easily be accommodated in a creative space that ‘provide[s] the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood — singular or communal — that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself’, to use Homi Bhabha’s words. Phillips’s production of The Tempest seems to provide such a site, one in which (for a short time, at least), traditional Indigenous culture, as it is being lived today — ‘the flesh’, to use Schneider’s analogy) — had a voice and a presence alongside the traditional western voice of Shakespeare as it is being performed today, to a mainstream audience — ‘the bone’. The process was largely improvised, its success driven by the articulate political agenda of Jagera Jarjum and by a self-confessed naivety and receptiveness on the part of Phillips. To give Narjic Fogarty the last word in this article, he hoped that the audience:

got to have a better understanding that in this place here, there are still, young people, old people, that still have traditional links to this land and have an understanding of traditional dance, song, stories — all of that. We wanted to get across that we still understand traditional laws. Still we live by them, even though it’s hard sometimes for the living. So that’s one thing I know, before we even come to rehearsal, we all sat down and spoke about that and said that’s what we want to put across. Let people know that we’re still alive.
The Tempest
Angela Campbell

This article is based on the production of The Tempest directed by Simon Phillips and produced by the Queensland Theatre Company performed in Brisbane on 23 September 1999.

4 Heiner Muller, ‘Fatzer +- Keuner’, in Margaret Herzelf-Sander (ed.), Continuum, New York,
Notes to pp 16–23

5 ibid., p 341.
6 Rebecca Schneider, ‘Flesh memory and the logic of the archive: or, driving the Lincoln’, unpublished paper delivered at Australasian Drama Studies Conference, Newcastle, 2000.
7 Helen Strube, QTC Teachers Notes for The Tempest, Queensland Theatre Company, Brisbane, 1999.
8 See E Phillips Fox, Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770, oil on canvas, 1902.
10 For a discussion on notions of ‘excellence’ and their bearing on the uses of cultural resources, see Sneja Gunew and Fazal Rizvi, Culture, Difference and the Arts, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, pp 13–34.
13 In fact, says Susan Bennett, ‘No Western text has played a more visible role in the representation and reconstruction of the colonial body’, ibid., p 119. Gilbert and Tompkins suggest a number of reasons why this particular part of the western canon has been chosen to question power relationships and versions of history in our postmodern world. They point out “the play’s figuration of racial binaries and the threat of miscegenation; its representation of the New World “other” as opposed to the European “self”, troped as a form of the nature/culture dichotomy, and its pervasive interest in power relationships involving dominance, subservience, and rebellion”.
16 Gilbert and Tomkins, op. cit., p 31.
17 Schneider, op. cit., p 9.
18 ibid., p 10.
19 ibid.
20 ibid., p 11.
21 ibid., p 3.
22 Wesley Enoch, personal interview, 3 April 2001.
23 Bennett, op. cit., p 145.
24 Narjic Fogarty, personal interview, 28 September 2000.
26 Enoch, op. cit.
27 ibid.
30 Enoch, op. cit.
31 ibid.
33 Enoch, op. cit.
34 ibid.
35 Phillips, op. cit.
36 Enoch, op. cit.
37 Schneider, op. cit., p 5.
38 ibid., p 3.
40 Fogarty, op. cit.
41 Schneider, op. cit., p 3.
42 Fogarty, op. cit.
44 ibid.
45 ibid.
46 ibid.
47 ibid.
48 Phillips, op. cit.
50 Fogarty, op. cit.