

"MINHA PUNKA": THE WALLABY DANCE¹

Introduction

The act of dancing in traditional Aboriginal culture involves so much that is so different from the same act in western contexts that it makes writing about Aboriginal dance forms very difficult indeed. Dancers in these traditional contexts are doing and expressing very different kinds of things. On the whole, western dancing (whether high art forms or not) is done for entertainment - either for the entertainment of Self (as in bush dancing, disco-dancing and the like) or for others (as in the various forms of commercial dancing and theatrical dancing which exist). There are a few exceptions to these broad generalizations which can be brought forward, but on the whole, the role/rule relations of western dancers (whether in the idioms of ballet dancing, jazz dancing, modern concert dancing, tap, ballroom or aerobic and disco-dancing) turns around the notion of entertainment.

In its traditional setting, the Wallaby Dance was the culmination of several weeks of planning, negotiation and elaborate political manoeuvres on the parts of many people. It involved as many as sixty or a hundred people travelling (walking) for many miles. It meant that there were sanctions placed on entire communities regarding conflicts -- no fighting could occur during the time that these preparations were taking place, or until the whole event was over with. The Punka dance was embedded in whole sequences of political and familial relationships which were re-affirmed and re-understood in virtue of the performance of the entire ceremonial complex. It meant that whole clans and families participated in the event in many ways, and even the women and children, who traditionally did not participate in the actual dance, were considered to participate, even if they were not present when the danced part of the total event took place.

The Punka dance has only recently been 'opened'; that is, the dance is now being used to ensure that a vital part of the Wanam tradition is maintained in some form. It has already been changed. The specific nature of those changes is fully documented in a Master's thesis now in preparation at Sydney University that incorporates movement texts which can be used for the purpose of reconstruction (see Arnold, 1991). This brief description simply aims to provide a broad ethnographic account of the dance, its sections and general shape, so to speak. The most desirable result we can hope for is a clearer understanding of danced forms of life which are basically not similar to our own. The general tendency is unconsciously to classify the dances of other cultures into the

categories of our own forms of dancing. It is only with great difficulty that we can reach beyond these classifications to different levels of awareness.

The Wallaby (Punka) dance is not seen in the form in which I describe it anymore in Cape York. In any case, it was not a dance which was done very often. It occurred only perhaps once every eight or ten years. I was told in 1988 that the Wallaby dance had last been organized ten years earlier, and that previously, someone remembered that it had been danced in the late 'sixties, which is probably when John von Sturmer saw and participated in it.

The importance of this is that the spatial and organizational features of the Wallaby dance as described no longer pertain to the present modes of social organization of the Wanam people -- neither to the organization of the towns of Edward River and Aurukun, in which the owners of the dance live, or to the over-riding structures of the Queensland state government. Even the version of the Wallaby dance that our research group saw in August, 1988, was an indigenous interpretation of the old Punka dance, and it was this interpretation that is recorded on the videotapes which were deposited at the A.I.A.T.S.I.S. at the time. But that is important, too, because it is the internal, basically spatial structures of any traditional dance which endures, if anything does, even though some of the 'steps' and the outer forms may seem to change.²

The Geographical Context

The Wanam people, to whom the Wallaby dance belongs, no longer live on the specific land sites nor do they live in the 'country' (as they conceive of it) to which the dances belong. They live in one of two settlements on a Queensland government reserve³ which includes their land sites, but, instead of traveling between traditional campsites as they used to do, they now live more sedentary lives in the towns of Aurukun (to the north) and Edward River (to the south), both of which occupy small areas on the Carpentaria side of Cape York Peninsula.

A map according to western conventions does not agree in several ways with the conceptual map of the territory which the Wanam people have for the area. For example, where white Australians would use the term 'the Holroyd' only for the land close to the river itself, the Wanam people refer to 'the Holroyd' as the whole area between the Kendall River and Christmas Creek. For the comparatively few families of Australian Aboriginal people who own the Wanam tradition and the sites,⁴ and emblems⁵ involved, the rough schematic diagram in Figure 1., attempts in a simplified

fashion, to assist readers by presenting Wanam 'country' (known simply as 'the Holroyd') as they conceive of it.

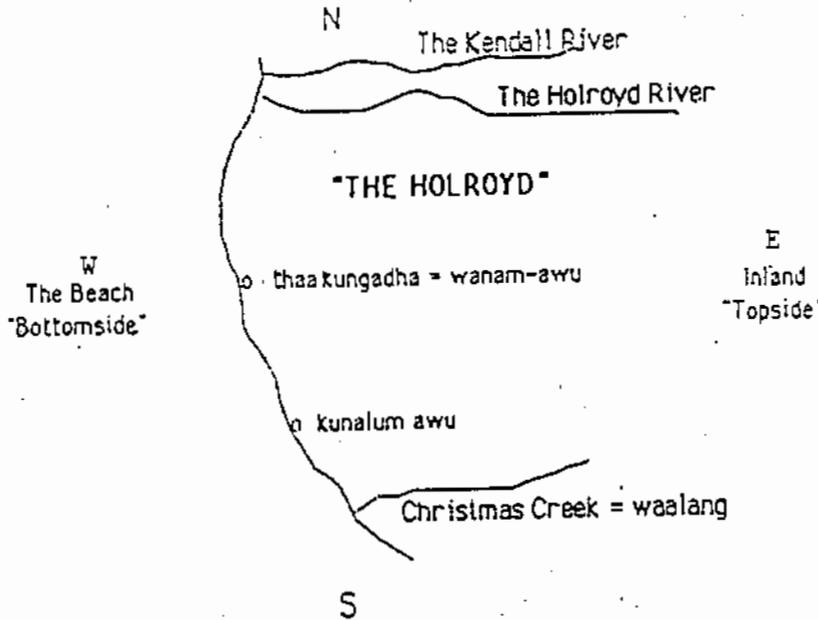
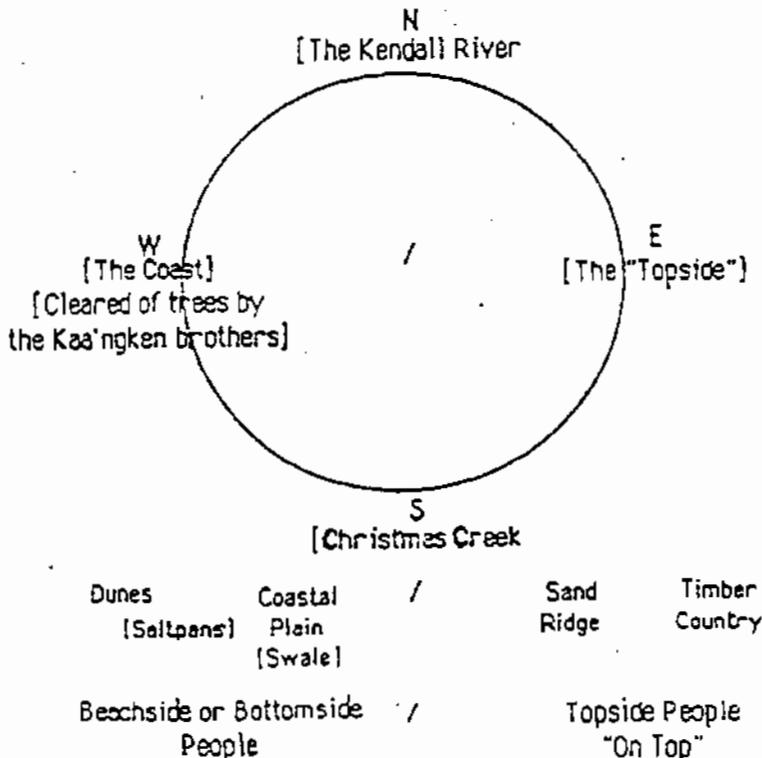


Figure 1: A Conceptual Map of the Territory

The diagram is important to an adequate understanding of the Wallaby dance because the geographical space diagrammed above is the foundation for the conceptual space of the dance. That is, the initial circular formation of the dance has internal 'north', 'south', 'east', and 'west' referents which are conceptualized as in the diagram below:



The Conceptual Space of the Dance

The initial circular formation of seated people which begins the dance corresponds to this conceptual map of the territory, because the 'Bottomside People' (i.e., the people who lived and who had land near the Beach, closer to the ocean, sat on the west side of the circle, and 'Topside people' (i.e., those who lived farther inland, towards the sand ridges and timber country) sat on the east side of the circle.

In pre-Government reservation times, the 'boss'⁶ of the Bottomsiders came from the north, from more or less permanent camps at the mouth of the Kendall. The other boss of the Wanam dance came from similar camps around the mouth of Christmas Creek; thus there was a north/south relationship, which indicated a certain status and prestige held by big men who oversaw the affairs of many people who lived near river mouths on the Gulf, where food was more plentiful and living comparatively easier.

The influence and power of the big men, whose residential identities were more or less permanently attached to the sites at the rivers' mouths was finite: the farther away from their estates and spheres of influence towards the 'Topside' (inland) that other people lived, the less authority these two men had over them. To summarize: there are two basic systems, residential and conceptual, expressed in the conceptual spaces of the Punka dance which focussed on the two big north/south sites because of the two bosses of the dance who took the roles of the two hunters in the dance.⁷

In other words, there were two basic systems. One was residential, (i.e., mouths of the Kendall and the Holroyd and the mouths of Christmas Creek and waterways to the south) and the other conceptual, (i.e., thaa'kungadha [wanam-awu] and waalang [kunalum-awu]) which focused on the sacred sites overseen and managed by the two bosses whose residences were generally in the big river-mouth camp sites. But there is yet another level of conceptualization involved. The two bosses of the dance, who take the roles of hunters in the dance, are strongly identified with the Kaa'ngken brothers, who were culture-heroes; two 'Dreaming' figures.⁸

The two Kaa'ngken brothers travelled south to the Holroyd River. As they travelled, they sang songs about what they saw and did, and they created dances which they taught to the people they encountered. At the Holroyd River they stole fish and were pursued from the camp. Still carrying the fish with them they continued southwards to Wallaby Island in the mouth of the Mitchell River. There were too many mosquitoes so they decided to return northwards. Throwing their boomerangs they

cleared the coastal plain of trees and left the saltpans which still remain today. Finally they arrived at Thaa'kungadhe at the mouth of the Holroyd, where they left the Wanam ceremony for the future generations.⁹

No one knows when these events took place, and the story above includes one event (the throwing of boomerangs which cleared the coastal plain of trees and created the salt-pans) which has to be classified in European terms as 'mythological'. The other events recounted in the story are not of the same nature in the sense that they are possible, i.e., stealing fish, wandering up and down the Peninsula, teaching dances, etc. Whatever assessments readers may make with regard to the historical credibility of this story of the Kaa'ngken brothers, the fact remains that it is the origin myth of the Punka dance, and indeed, of all the dances which the people would classify as Wanam dances.

And there is more which has to be said about this point of origins: the import of the above statements will be entirely misconstrued if the reader applies the commonly understood English-speaker's definition of 'myth' or 'mythological' to its usage here. That is to say that in talking about the Kaa'ngken brothers, we are not talking about personages who have the same existential credibility as, say, Greek gods or the Hobbits, elves and dwarfs in Tolkein's Ring legends. The Kaa'ngken brothers may have been actual people, or they may not have been. They may be ancestors who exist in spirit form only. We simply do not know.

The Dance

With regard to the dance we can think of the beginning of it as a circle of seated people which denotes 'the society', which is divided into two big camps. There are singers, who have much more spatial fluidity in this part: They get up, walk around, etc., but the other participants, at the beginning, tend to stay put. The next part of the dance is initiated by and involves abuse and fighting between the two bosses (the 'big' men). This throws everything into chaos (the fight also marks the bosses as people of status); people stand up, mill around and act as if they are in a confused state. After the fight, all the men form two lines.¹⁰

The two lines are organized facing the bosses, who carry spears and are the hunters. The two lines of men are low to the ground. Depending on the occasion, the hunters may lead the 'wallabies' around a bit, so that the dancers show patterns of movement and gesture pertaining to wallabies. But the hunters will finally turn to face the lines of dancers, because each pair of wallaby dancers then goes through the hunters' legs. That is, the hunters both stand in what a ballet dancer would call a 'very wide

second position', so that a crouched man can pass 'through' their legs, underneath their bodies.

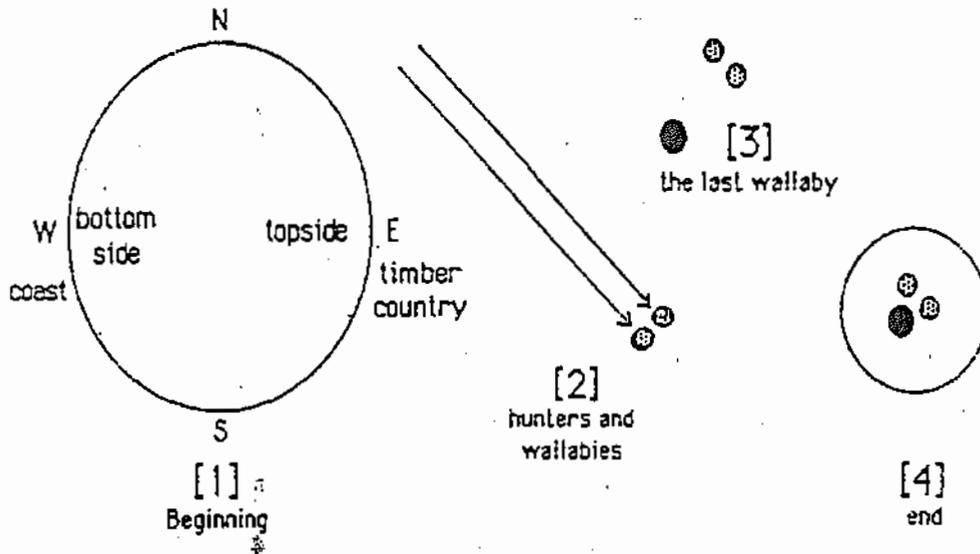
In performing this act, they are to be understood as being 'consumed'. It is relevant to remember that wallaby meat is also food that is consumed by this people. However, once they are past the hunters' legs, they are transformed: they are people. They stand up. They are no longer crouching low to the ground and hopping about. The 'low-high' spatial distinction indicates an animal (low)/human (high) opposition. There is a sense in which, therefore, they are symbolically 'consumed' in ordinary life by expending their labour, by giving their allegiance to the big men. At the same time, without the myth, and without the leadership of these men, they would be less than human. They would, in relation to the Kaa'ngken brothers stories, be nothing but 'rotten fish'. In the symbolism of the dance, they would be wallabies.

There are two significant gestures in the fighting sequence, which are apparent in the fights that take place after the two leaders have engaged in the abuse and fighting which starts the second section of the dance: (1) scratching themselves (an animal-like gesture) and (2) a gesture towards the mouth, which indicates consumption. As people, they eat. One of the things they eat is wallaby meat. As wallabies, they are speared (preparation for becoming food), and then they are consumed. The notion of being consumed (which is also to be metaphorically transformed) applies on several levels.

1. Actual wallaby meat is eaten by people, transformed into energy, and then excreted as waste;
2. symbolic wallabies (the male network of kin) are governed and given their place in society through their relationships with the bosses and 'big men', who consume their energies and use their labour, but here, they are not transformed into 'waste'; their transformation takes them to a higher level of being;
3. the Wanam people themselves are like the fish in the Kaa'ngken brothers story; that is, in another version of the story, the brothers threw the spoiled, rotten fish into a river, where the fish revived and swam away, meaning that the brothers story/history is what gives life and meaning to all Wanam men and their society. Without the story, they would be nothing but 'rotten fish'. There is, therefore, a sense in which the Wanam people themselves are 'consumed' and transformed by the brothers and by the myth itself;

4. the Wanam legends are used (i.e., consumed) in dances and rituals, and the people are transformed in the sense that the society is renewed and affirmed once again.

The form of the dance itself, the internal space of the dance, so to speak, falls roughly into four sections.



We have so far examined the first two sections of the dance, i.e., [1] is the rather orderly beginning, which is broken up by abuse and fights which occur between the two bosses of the dance, causing confusion, unease and movement among the rest of the people. One of the bosses (or, in the absence of these, a singer¹¹) breaks a spear over his knee, which signals his and his opposite number's transformation into hunters carrying spears, and the rest of the men becoming 'wallabies', doing characteristic moves low to the ground. The lines of wallabies face the hunters, as in [2].

Here, there may ensue a section where the hunters lead the two lines of dancers in curving patterns, but if so, they end up facing each other, and the wallabies go through the hunters' legs two by two. Now, an onlooker will notice that there is one dancer, called 'the last wallaby', who does not join (and has not joined) either of the lines of men facing the two hunters.

This 'last wallaby' stands for the biggest mob of people whose totemic emblem is Kugu'uthu (dead bodies). Von Sturmer told me that there was an actual person who started all this in the dance.¹² The interesting thing is that the last wallaby is always danced by a person who is of that 'totem' (dead bodies). When this dance was videotaped in 1988 at Edward River, there was no one from

this clan present, and the people involved made a point of saying that the person who danced the last wallaby was 'playacting' a person who should have been dancing it.

The last wallaby's dance moves between life and death, but then there is a lot in the total dance that does exactly that too, in the sense that any transformation involves losing what you were (death) to change into something else (life). The last wallaby dancer is actually claimed by both of the hunters (bosses), but he does not go through their legs as all the rest of the wallabies do. He is not consumed like the others, and apart from anything else, this means that he (and the clan he symbolizes) does not pay allegiance to either of the bosses, although they are in proximity to them geographically and ethnically. All of the other wallabies enact a rather passive relation to the two bosses in the sense that they all do the same things.

The last wallaby dances up to each of the hunters, but he always backs off [3]. In fact, the action signifies the fact that he doesn't feel bound by the system that keeps all the rest in tow. Eventually, he is claimed by both hunters. At the end, the three of them are very close together and are embraced by everybody. In other words, the dance ends with a move back to the original structure of a circle, but at the end, it is condensed [4]. Where the circle was wide open at the beginning, and orderly, with everyone in his (or her) appointed place, at the end, everyone is crowded around the three central figures en masse and the circle is really a dense mob of people. The figures of the hunters and the last wallaby are totally obscured.

Some Generalizations

Dancing was (and in many cases, still is) a medium for the representation and experiencing of a particular Aboriginal people's own past among themselves. This did not take the form of a chronology of events, as in a typical western historical format, but consisted of a chronological series of identity statements such as I have attempted to describe above.¹³ In the case of the Kaa'ngken brothers myth, the danced event was a statement of the origins of Wanam familial or clan identifications, partly because the bosses of the dance were identified with the culture heroes. The major themes of the dance all turn around themes which express the interdependence of the people on their leaders, who in turn are dependent on each other. Indeed, the clans would not exist as a society without them, nor would any of them exist without the stories of the Kaa'ngken brothers, who conferred social identity upon the Wanam people.

Another difficulty that these kinds of dances present to a westerner, to whom dancing is basically a form of entertainment, is this: in the past, traditional dancing was not a 'spectator sport' in the way that we know it. As recently as thirty years ago, everybody at a danced performance in an Aboriginal camp both knew and knew about what it was that was being represented. There was no distinction between people who knew (those who participated) and those who didn't know (an audience). To be taken into these stories through the dances; to participate, even by watching, in the danced representations of the identity of the clan, people, tribe or what-you-will, was to be connected with everyone there in important ways.

This is not really the case today, except for some of the older generations of Wanam families. On the whole, younger men and women do not know (and many of them do not want to know) about the dances and what they represent because they look upon the dancing and the traditional beliefs the dances entail as a kind of trap which they can never get out of. Members of younger generations have told me that they feel that they cannot allow themselves to know too much about the dancing and to be identified with it, because if they are, they will, through that knowledge, have embraced certain modes of thought and behaviour which are not compatible with the kind of lives they want to lead or have to lead. They simply cannot mix their modernity with the traditions because it causes too much pain and conflict.

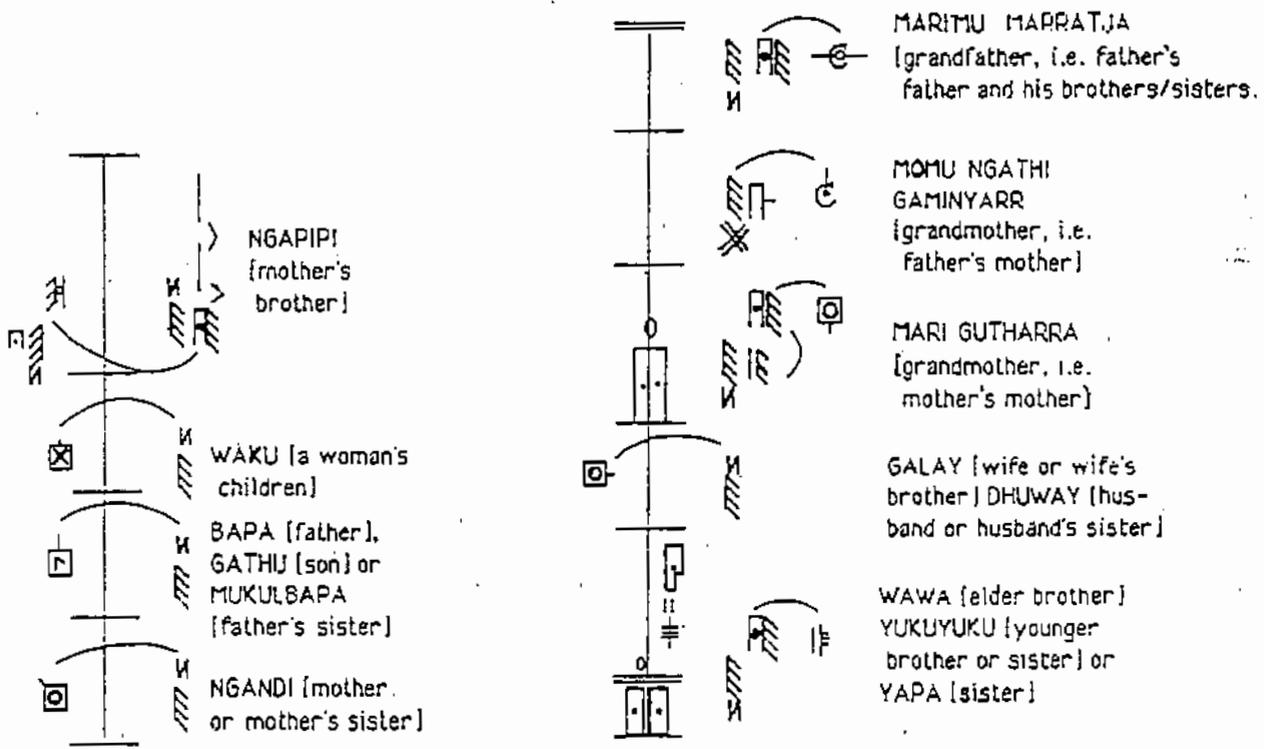
In fact, if we were to look at the dances favored by the younger generations of Aborigines in the western Cape now, we would not look at the Wanam, Putja, Winchinam or any other traditional forms of dancing, but at disco-dancing -- maybe some forms of Island dancing or forms of secular dancing, referred to by old people in the Peninsula as corroboree or "playing-about" dancing, which is much less serious in character than is the Wanam or any single dance included in that complex.¹⁴

About the only time one can see traditional Aboriginal dancing in Aurukun and Edward River now is at funerals. The Wallaby dance would not be done at such mortuary ceremonies, because it was not a suitable dance for that kind of occasion. In fact, I doubt if the Wallaby dance will ever again be done on the Peninsula.¹⁵ In five or possibly ten years' time, there will be no one who knows how to sing it, for a start.¹⁶ And this brings me to another important general point: Among the Wanam people, there are speakers of Wik Mungken, Wik Alwan, and Wik Nathan (dialects of the Wik languages), and the Wanam songs are often in different dialects of Wik, sometimes sung by Aborigines who have learned them by rote and who do not actually speak the dialect to which the song

belongs. The old singers are dying, and their children have not learned what their fathers know.

In Aboriginal contexts, dances generally do not exist apart from songs¹⁷, and the references to people and places in the songs pertain directly to the conceptual map of the territory.¹⁸ It is also the case that dances are connected with kinship and with kinship terminology in interesting ways.

Among all of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, there is strong use of sign language (see Kendon, 1988), although complete documentation has only been done in areas of the Northern Territory. Some of these kinds of gestures are illustrated, written in Laban script, as follows.¹⁹



[Taken from Williams, Don (1981); transliterated by Drid Williams, 1989]

The sign languages in Cape York Peninsula always include kinship terms which are in some ways similar to, but not the same as, those. Examples of sign language gestures are especially noticeable in women's complementary dancing, for they will dance using arm positions which signify the kin relationship they have to the man to whom they are related who is performing at the time.

In effect, they are saying, "This is my husband (or brother, father, father's brother, etc..)" Traditional dances are thus good starting places for the study of kinship terminology and relationships in Aboriginal contexts, and for subsequent understanding of family and clan structures.

Gender Distinctions

These days, women can dance before the Wallaby dance begins. They can dance afterwards, and nowadays, they can do complementary supportive dancing during the Wallaby dance, but they occupy a distinctly subordinate role, both with regard to the dancing and in a broader social sense. In fact, Aboriginal women have ambiguous statuses with regard to knowledge generally, to the access and expression of knowledge and "knowing" in particular.²⁰

There are several older women in Aurukun and Edward River who (judged by European standards) certainly know as much as the men, but they cannot often express what they know. Being women in those communities means that they have no rights to know according to the beliefs held by the community. This is to say that women may know as much as men, but the truth value of what they know can be denied or suppressed by members of their own society.

Denial or suppression of knowledge may also happen to males, but in restricted, temporary situations. Younger men who know things are usually silenced or ridiculed if they speak out about ritual matters or ceremonial knowledge, but it is not quite the same thing: Women have no right to know because they are women. Men may have no rights to know because (a) they are not initiated; (b) they are unfortunately placed in terms of birth order; or (c) their family group is politically not the most powerful family of a particular ceremonial group, for examples, but their access to knowledge is not ultimately controlled by their sex. Women's access to knowledge, their expression of knowledge and their 'right to know' is controlled in that way.

The problem is acute with regard to the study of dances, 'performance', ceremonies, 'art' and the like, partly because of the relationship between fieldwork and authoritative sources of knowledge.²¹ For example, while there now exist danced knowledges and performances which have been opened to public viewing in Cape York and which have been made accessible to documentation, research and preservation at the request of Aboriginal communities for the future benefits of the communities and everyone else involved, these performances by no means include all of the dances or ceremonies known or used in these societies now or in the past. It is doubtful if more than a small percentage of the secrets will ever be known -- even to the majority of people to whom the dances

belong -- because, except for comparatively few old men in each group, no one has access to this knowledge. The Wallaby dance and its accompanying myth exemplify Wanam ceremonial practices in important ways. As Maddock has observed,

The Wiradthuri myth and rite of separation typify Aboriginal practice in several ways. Firstly, women are deceived -- at least that is the appearance. Secondly, deception is conveyed dramatically through ritual as well as inculcated as belief ... novices are led to believe that they will suffer an encounter with a power. They are made ready for this meeting, which often is thought to involve their destruction, by being separated from the women and children among whom they have spent their lives. Then, accompanied only by a few men -- others are in hiding or disguised -- they go out to meet their fate. But instead of a direct encounter with a power, they are confronted with symbols made and handled by men ... Between man and the powers in whom they believe is interposed a screen of deception and symbolism ... (Maddock, 1982:109).

The old ceremony, of which the Wallaby dance was a part, seems to conform to this pattern. To draw attention to the secrecy and exclusivity which characterize rituals, dances and ceremonial knowledge in general in Aboriginal Australia is not new. In these general aspects of Aboriginal life and thinking, Cape York is no different. Many authors beside Maddock have alluded to the deceptions involved in the rules of gender distinctions and everyone knows they are there.

With regard to the dances, it is my considered opinion that maintenance of the secrecy will simply mean that they will discontinue when the old men who possess the knowledge about them die. There can be no other outcome, and there are Aboriginal people who favour this kind of solution to the problem, e.g., Mr. Eddie John, of the Chivaree tradition (Weipa South). The Wanam people, to whom the Punka dance belongs, seem to hold other views. They want such records as are available in the form of films, written movement texts, written verbal accounts and tape recordings to be kept so that the generations following them might know something of what their traditions and ideas consisted. It is in the interests of those people that this essay has been written.

Apart from gender distinctions, some kinds of knowledge are thought to be gained by 'revelation'.²² In western contexts, dance techniques and performances are not thought of in the same ways. Dance techniques (as in the ballet) and subsequently, a repertoire of dances, are learned in a formal sense. Skills are achieved incrementally over long periods of time. In many instances in Cape

York, the learning of dances takes place during the performances of it. Instruction is actually part of the performance. With regard to many traditional dance forms, although they are learned, it is in a different way: simply to see them is to have their meaning revealed to the onlooker, hence the belief that 'seeing is knowing', where the act of seeing itself is considered to be tantamount to knowing.²³ While seeing may, in fact, be knowing to a member of the Aboriginal families and clans to which (in this case) the Punka dance belongs, it does not hold for any outsider - even from another Aboriginal language group.²⁴

Conclusion

Because of current changes in the status of Aboriginal women and because the Wanam people have different views about perpetuating their cultural heritage, the Punka dance has been 'opened' to outside viewing. When von Sturmer saw the dance during the period of his doctoral fieldwork sometime in the late 1960's or early 1970's, it has not yet been opened to view by outsiders or to a wider viewing public.

Earlier on, it was said that the version of the Punka dance which is on videotape at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS], and the version of the movement representing part of the data collected by Arnold in 1988 and 1990, are indigenous interpretations or a kind of 'staging' of this dance, which, given the total situation, was necessary. In Arnold (1991), specific examples are documented, as, e.g., the fact that none of the men pass underneath the bodies (through the legs) of the hunters in the videotaped version. The reason that they don't is because they did not stand in the correct clan relationship to the men dancing the hunters; therefore, they could not rightly execute the movements.

Indeed, the one man who danced a combined role of two hunters was, in his own terms, 'playacting' those roles, as the two big men who danced the hunters at the time that von Sturmer saw the dance are now deceased. Still, much of the spatial and conceptual structures of the dance remain. It is enduring enough so that in the hands of a skilled stage manager, it could be presented on a western stage as "The Wallaby Dance" of the Wanam people; however, such staging would require that all the participating dancers would enact roles in a western sense. It would also require considerable knowledge of why the structure of the dance is the way it is, and provision would have to be made for including the audience without destroying the inner integrity of the spatial relationships and meanings of the dance.

Such developments would, in turn, reflect a process of social change that in reality (and thinking in terms of the whole context of traditional ways of life) seems to be inevitable. These processes are, I think, particularly evident when one looks through the symbolic and metaphorical lenses of events like dances, where, for a start, what remains is something called 'a dance' without any of its surrounding ceremonial or ritual events, or the many demands which those placed on communities of Aboriginal people in the past.²⁵

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NOTES

1. I should like to recognize with thanks the help of John von Sturmer, without whose detailed knowledge of Cape York Peninsula and the Wanam people this paper would not have been possible. In fact, what follows is based on an exegesis of the Wallaby dance presented by Dr. von Sturmer at the Aboriginal/Islanders Dance School, located in Glebe, in Sydney, on Wednesday, June 1, 1988. This was supplemented by my own research, which took place later in 1988.
2. The structure of the dance is diagrammatically represented on p. 45. In technical terms, this is one of the sets of 'p-structures' of the dance (a 'paradigmatic' structure), where the actual movements performed by the dancers, which are visible either in situ or on the videotape, are the 's-structures', i.e., the 'syntagmatic' structures.
3. This area may not now be a 'reserve' in governmental terms, but to the people themselves, it still is, and they refer to the settlements in this way.
4. 'Awu', or fish sites; the 'estates'.
5. 'Kam waya' or agnatic ancestors/antecedents, i.e., FFB+ and MMb+. Readers may wonder why I don't use the term 'totem' instead of 'emblem'. The reason is simple: The term is too problematical and far too ambiguous for my taste, especially with regard to the dancing, hence the alternative.

6. The term 'boss' indicating 'leader' is widely used in Aboriginal Australia; thus I use the term as the people themselves would do. A boss is a 'big man', indicating someone who has status, prestige, power and influence. People who are referred to in this way usually either own or manage ceremonial traditions; that is, they must participate in performances, and they must be consulted in all matters regarding the performance of any part of the ceremony.
7. In the notated version of this dance in Arnold (1991), only one 'hunter-figure' appears. The reason for this is that both of the former bosses are now deceased, and there were not enough people to do the dance 'properly'; therefore, a substitute was made.
8. The historical and mythological mandates for the Punka dance are rooted in the story of these two brothers, but the Wanam people do not use the term 'Dreaming' or 'Dreamtime'. I have used it in this context because of readers who may expect it. The term 'dreaming' is seldom, if ever, used in Cape York Peninsula. People there prefer the English gloss, 'story' for something which they might label in English, 'old, old talk' or 'talk from beforetime' (i.e., kugu kath, or in Wik Mungkan, wik kaath). The sense of this, briefly, is as follows: The notion of a 'story' equals 'history' in this context, and Awu means 'story place'. 'Story places' are places where historical events are believed to have occurred, which associate certain phenomena (genus/species) in a permanent way with those sites. The term 'kam waye' means 'ancestors', which is defined as 'story', plus the notion of patrilineal descent. The patrilineal ancestors were actual historical beings. The sites are called 'awu' i.e., fish sites, and the 'totems' are called 'kam waya', i.e., agnatic ancestors or antecedents (FFB+ and MMB+).
9. Transcribed from a verbal account of this story told to me by John von Sturmer in Sydney in April-May, 1988.
10. This is a somewhat 'frozen' representation of something that in the society itself is a process.
11. Arnold (1991) documents this act by a singer, as it actually took place in Edward River.
12. This might have been in the late 'sixties when von Sturmer was doing his fieldwork in the area, or it might have been somewhat earlier.
13. We all know that there is seldom a clear chronology with regard to 'Dreamings', but this is not the point. Although

this dance is 'historical' and it is characterized as such by the people themselves, it is not 'history' in a western sense. I do not mean to imply that when Aboriginal people give other kinds of accounts of past events, they are incapable of telling them historically.

14. I have not mentioned another feature of dancing in this area -- because the subject really deserves a paper on its own. Women of Cape York simply had no danced and ceremonial traditions which were the equivalent of the men's traditions. They could support male dancing on many occasions, and this was true of the Wallaby dance. They did some dancing before the dance started, and they could dance after it ended. In 1988, women could do complementary dancing while the men were dancing, but that is all.
15. Von Sturmer told me when I went to the Cape in 1988 that I would not see 'real' Aboriginal dancing. He reckons that what he saw during his field experience in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies was the last of it in its pristine forms -- by 'pristine', I mean those forms, which he saw, which were danced by a people who were still living primarily in their country and who still lived under traditional, rather than governmental, mandates. I can only agree with him. I saw Aboriginal dancing, to be sure, but it was dancing which had, according to the people themselves, changed a lot. For a start, women and children were allowed to be present in the 'shade' (the place set apart for dancing), and that had not been permitted before. Dances like the Wallaby dance were done for the purposes of recording and remembering what was in the past, not so much as an affirmation of the present.
16. The singers whom we filmed in August, 1988, are of this writing, very ill and dying. Arnold reported that they were unable to sing -- and too ill even to talk with him when he was in Edward River in July, 1990, although they said that they would have liked to.
17. Except in cases like some of the Winchinam people's dances, where the accompaniment is hand-clapping only.
18. See von Sturmer, 1987, for further discussion.
19. Many people do not know that such gestures can be written. Kendon's book also uses notations of the gestures, but they are in a script which was devised by the linguist, Stokoe. For future reference and comparison, it would be good to see them translated into Laban script, which would provide access to the material for more people.

20. The status of women in Cape York Peninsula is different from that of women in the central desert, where Diane Bell (1983), for example, has been able to document a clear-cut set of ceremonial knowledges which are 'women's business', indicating that male exclusivity with regard to the possession of knowledge is equalled by women in some Aboriginal contexts. However, such equality does not, in my opinion, solve the anthropological problem of access to knowledge; it merely compounds it, because in either case, investigators are prevented from gaining a view of the whole society. Furthermore, the exclusivity of knowledge is endorsed by traditional sanctions and beliefs. The investigator is not at liberty to violate any of these, nor would it be ethical to do so.
21. If the investigator is a female anthropologist, she tends to be categorized by the society in the same ways as women of her own age are. If the investigator is a male anthropologist, he is usually placed in the unenviable position of being a 'big man', which has its own problems. It is particularly troublesome in cases where an aboriginal 'big man' falls ill or dies, leaving his wife who is an actual source of ceremonial knowledge, but socially, not permitted to divulge the knowledge.
22. I do not use this term in its western theological sense, as in revealed religions, but in another, far more mundane sense that is meant, in this context, to be contrasted with incremental, 'learned' types of knowing. I also use the distinction in anthropologically neutral terms. That is to say that I do not imply that one kind of learning is 'better' than the other. They are simply different.
23. Here, we touch upon another difficult and complex subject which turns, in general, around the values and behaviour -- the differing "noetic structures" (see Ong, 1982) of oral, rather than literate, societies. I can do no more than mention such matters here, as space prevents further comment.
24. There is an interesting, and fully documented, case of 'hiding' the Wallaby dance which is on record in the 1962 film entitled "Dances of Aurukun". In that film, the dance that is presented as the Wallaby dance is not, in fact, that dance, but another, the String Dance. The reason? The Wanam people who were involved had just moved into Aurukun, and they were unwilling to show one of their major dances in front of their new neighbors.
25. It has been argued that this represents an artificial process of 'artifactualization' that is imposed by white people on

blacks (see von Sturmer, 1987). I do not, for a start, think that social change is entirely generated from outside any given culture, but that subject is too complex to enter into further discussion here. It has also been implied, by the same writer, that anthropological investigators contribute to the process, even by wanting to record the dances in some fashion. Ultimately, the arguments seem to come down to 'pro-documentation' vs. 'anti-documentation' partisans. If forced to choose sides, I would support the 'pro-documentarian' faction, because I should not like to think that the international global society to which Aboriginal culture belongs will be deprived of any knowledge of these danced forms.

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