



Bound and Unbound: Sovereign Acts II

Ali Gumillya Baker | Faye Rosas Blanch | Natalie Harkin | Simone Ulalka Tur

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we are women of the earth from beautiful lands and multiple histories we are Mirning
we are Antikirinya/Yankunytjatjara we are Yidinyji/MBararam we are Narungga
we share a legacy of colonial categorisation-containment-archivisation and all
that was carried on tall ships across rolling seas this intergenerational effect of living
under Aborigines Acts of the State we want to share the weight of the colonised burden to
lighten this load

we are sovereign women we choose to act speak look give back in
critical-performative ways we sing we weave we project we disrupt
in order to transform we connect to multiple sites of past-present-future
and we share this space with you
with love we are on Kurna land



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, projection, State Library of South Australia, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Teri Hoskin

Following pages:
Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, performance and projection, State Library of South Australia, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Denys Finney





Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, performance and projection, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Steve Rendoulis

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Introduction

Bound & Unbound: Sovereign Acts – Act II builds on the success of *Act I*, extending these ideas and their expression through embodied projection and performance. Both Acts engage Aboriginal community members who have historically been contained and excluded within and beyond the mortar and boundaries of Adelaide's so-called 'cultural precinct'. When our ancestors' voices are heard and listened to, this compels a call and response engagement with the broader Aboriginal community. We can all speak back through individual and collective Sovereign Acts.

Unbound Act II was a multi-stage project created for TARNANTHI | Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, opening in Adelaide on 8 October 2015. It was comprised of two poetic-projection performances held in the Adelaide North Terrace cultural precinct, as well as a series of ten *Sovereign Love Poem* posters displayed on bus shelters through the Adelaide city and inner CBD from 5 to 18 October 2015.

Performance 1 took place on 8 October at the official opening of TARNANTHI at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Performance 2, held on 14 October, was a stand-alone act which spoke back to colonial institutions of power on North Terrace. *Unbound Act II* was performed, projected and responded to these imposed colonial spaces as dominant repositories of culture/knowledge. It voiced and embodied the rarely told histories of these spaces from Indigenous perspectives.

Facing the cultural precinct... In this space there is nothing between us and the stars. We return the gaze upon us and shed from us like a cocoon all manner of abjection; we project little and big illuminations onto the outside back walls of the South Australian State Library, South Australian Museum building and Armoury Building along the North Terrace precinct of Adelaide, South Australia. On Kurna land. What are the possibilities of our relational sovereignty? (Baker, 2010)

The Unbound Collective is Ali Gumillya Baker (curator), Simone Ulalka Tur, Faye Rosas Blanch and Natalie Harkin.

Ali Gumillya Baker shifts the colonial gaze through film, performance, projection, and grandmother stories. Simone Ulalka Tur's performance and poetics enact an intergenerational transmission of story-work through education. Faye Rosas Blanch engages rap theory to embody sovereignty and shedding of the colonial skin. Natalie Harkin's archival poetics is informed by blood-memory, haunting and grandmother stories.

The perpetual archive – ALI GUMILLYA BAKER

As in *Sovereign Acts I, Bound/ Unbound Act II* begins with the opportunity for our audience to participate in our collection of names and 'data'. The audience can enter their name onto the endless list of the Bound/Unbound Museum Register, one big, bound book to hold lists, once discarded and then reclaimed. In return, each audience member is offered a message from a woven basket, like a possible fortune; there are a range of messages that one could receive. These small slips of paper contain our *Sovereign Love Poems* and are a collective reconfiguration and response to the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of Indigenous peoples on *the record* in this colonised space. We will be re-inserting the performance and its artefacts including our presence into the perpetual archive. The audience (family, friends and communities) will be written into the pages of *this* constructed history. We have reclaimed the space and we circle the 'heart of the matter' (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989: 1).



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, basket of messages, *Sovereign Love Poems*, photo Ali Gumillya Baker



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, performance, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Steve Rendoulis



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, projection, State Library of South Australia, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Steve Rendoulis



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, projection, State Library of South Australia, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Steve Rendoulis

On Light and Whiteness in the cultural precinct – ALI GUMILLYA BAKER

We are tied with ribbons and material binding and lit with lines of tiny lights. Self-powered and sovereign. We emerge beside the white marble modernist architectural pillars of the back entrance of the State Library building, with our Uncle Lewis Yerloburka O'Brien wrapped in his kangaroo skin cloak over his black suit. His Kurna name, 'Yerloburka' means 'old man of the sea'.

Uncle Lewis opens our Act. He speaks as the light disappears. He speaks about the whiteness of the precinct, about how Kurna are represented in the space. He speaks about the ideas of knowledge and enlightenment and civilisation, of old exclusions and new beginnings.

In his deeply philosophical way, Uncle Lewis speaks of physics and light and whiteness, of Kurna history, of discovery and darkness and progress, all entangled in the present. He speaks to the audience gathered around us.



Uncle Lewis Yerloburka O'Brien's opening address, 14 October 2015, photo Steve Rendoulis

UNCLE LEWIS YERLOBURKA O'BRIEN

Light Horse Memorial Trough on the corner of North Terrace and East Terrace

Recognising the role of horses in the First World War

Ityamaitpinna lived in the Botanical Gardens in winter

His name means 'father of mushrooms'. Mushrooms are white

Royal Adelaide Hospital has Light Ward

Colonel Light was the surveyor of Adelaide, they painted him

White, but his complexion was dark

Adelaide University Sub Cruce Lumen. The light of learning under the Southern Cross

The Braggs won the Nobel Prize for Crystallography in 1915 using X-ray

They attended Adelaide University

Lawrence Bragg taught that light was a wave for three days and light was a pulse for two days at the Royal Institution in London

Then he taught that it was both

Lawrence Bragg is the youngest Nobel Prize winner at 25 years of age

The Festival ran Northern Lights last year and lit the buildings on North Terrace

The Library is a place of Enlightenment as is the Museum

The Institute Building on the corner of Kintore Avenue and North Terrace

Today we have the Kurna word 'Tarnanthi' meaning 'first light to appear'

A new beginning

Kurna Elder Uncle Lewis Yerloburka O'Brien

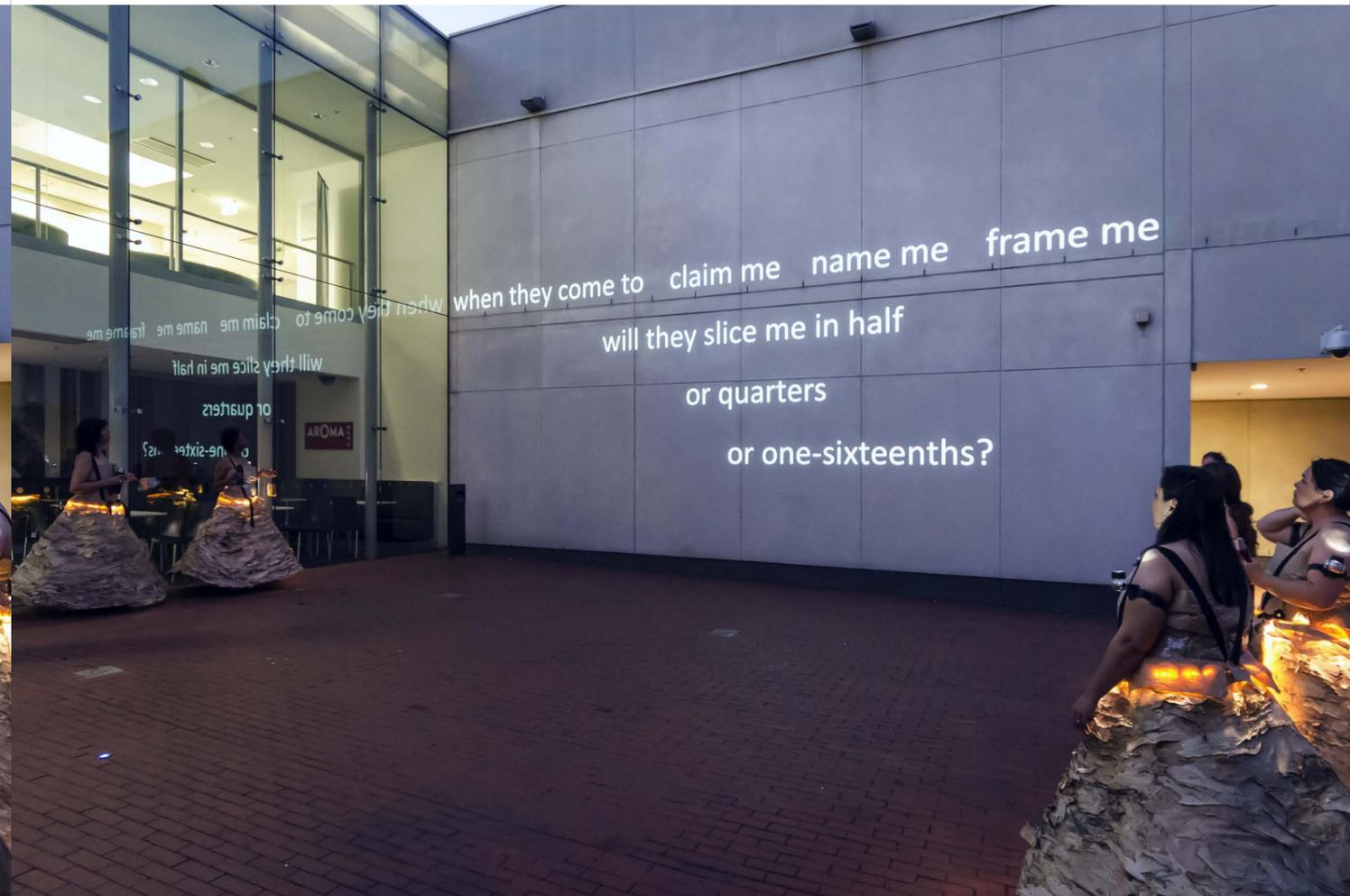
Opening address, *Bound/Unbound Sovereign Acts – Act II*, TARNANTHI | Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, 14 October 2015



May the spirits of our ancestors
be with us
photo Steve Rendoulis



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, projection, State Library of South Australia, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Steve Rendoulis



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, projection, State Library of South Australia, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Steve Rendoulis

Bus Shelters Reflections 1 – NATALIE HARKIN

We want to live in a culture where love can flourish.

bell hooks, 2000

In 2000, bell hooks wrote 'All About Love', offering radical new ways to think about the art of loving, and a hopeful, joyous vision of love's transformative power (xxix). She begins by sharing a story of walking to work every day, and passing a construction site wall with the brightly coloured graffiti-art-declaration – *The search for love continues even in the face of great odds.*

hooks reflects on how this public affirmation of love's possibility would always lift her spirits and give her hope, especially when facing great challenges. What happens when we bear witness to random acts of love in public places? What can a *Sovereign Love Poem* do in the mundane everyday?

Unexpected. A moment can take your breath away and hold it forever. Now, when you exhale, you are not the same. Unanticipated. How does this make you feel? Uncomfortable? Hopeful? Confronted? Self-conscious? Loved? What rupturing can occur, when lovingly reminded that this is Kaurua Land. Waiting. In the waiting these words can trigger thought, memories, yearnings, hopes. Something as simple as a QR Code can feed the curious who want to know more beyond what they are told; who want something else... What else might happen at a bus stop?



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Love Poem #7*, 2015, bus stop installation, Jetty Road, Glenelg, photo Denys Finney



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Love Poem #8*, 2015, bus stop installation, Goodwood Road, photo Denys Finney

Bus Shelters Reflections 2 – FAYE ROSAS BLANCH and SIMONE ULALKA TUR

*We are shadows, silence, stones, stories, never that simulation of light in the distance.
Trickster stones and postindian stories are my shadows, the natural traces of liberation and
survival in the ruins of representation.*

Gerald Vizenor, cited in Goeman (2014, p. 235)

Faye: *Girls it's started ... It's beautiful, full on!*

Simone: *Wow sis, how do you feel?*

Faye: *Nervous, got to stay out of Port Adelaide*

Simone: *True sis, I'm nervous too*

Text archive – Faye and Simone, 5 October 2015

It's started... In the following piece we reflect on the public placing of our images on ten bus shelters in the Adelaide metropolitan area of South Australia. What does it mean when we respond emotionally, with nervousness, fear, excitement and beauty, knowing our images are out there to be seen? We are very conscious that both our faces are the public images of *Bound/Unbound Act II*. Our reflection considers what it means to be in the public domain, both spatially and temporally. In the intimate performance of sharing our images, we claim our sovereignty. We allow ourselves to be gazed upon in the offering of love poems. We create the world we want to live in.

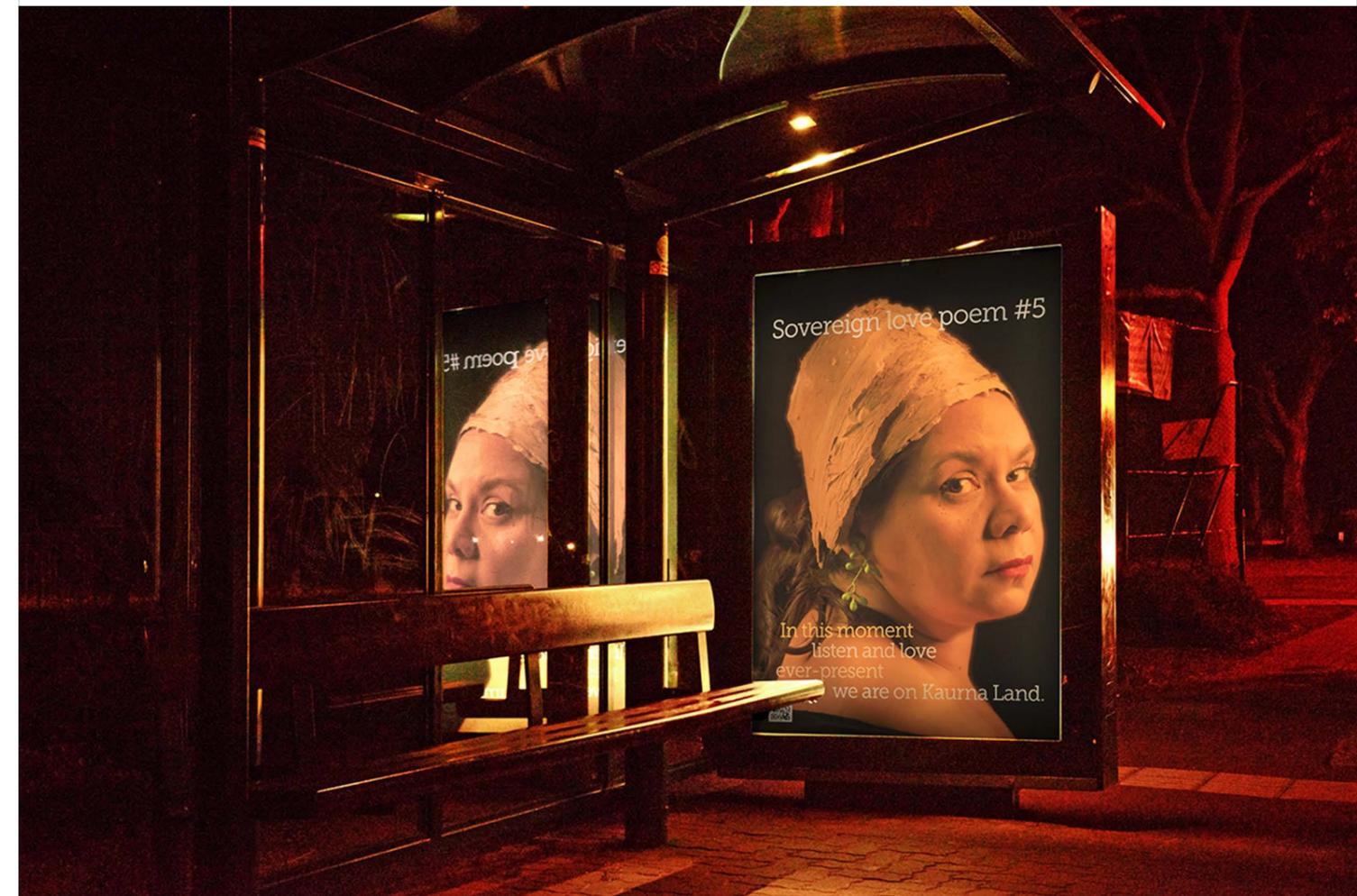
bell hooks (1995, 137) states: 'my flesh moves in a history of its own making'. In these acts we create propaganda and guerilla tactics for ourselves and for our community. We recall the words of Audre Lorde (1984: 40): 'I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood'. Drawing on the work of black feminist scholars such as hooks, Lorde and Camp (2017) we contend that we are not muted or silenced.

Our history tells us of how colonial institutions have represented us and produced 'collections' about us and our bodies. Such images challenge what Weheliye (2014) contextualises as 'racialized assemblages' around ideas of 'race' and the exploration of historical racial scientific thinking, including the juxtaposing of 'flora' and 'fauna' against human-ness. Our work demands the observer to consider such binaries and their associations with Aboriginal women's bodies (Moreton-Robinson 2000).

Such ideas about racialised bodies call to mind Sylvia Wynter's (2003) work on consciousness of being. Drawing on Wynter, we ask a critical question of who constitutes our body? We argue that the public images we create are about re-constituting the representation of Aboriginal people/women. Through our embodied love of ourselves, our love of people and country and a shared affirmation of love's possibilities (hooks 2000), our images are an act of public intimacy that involves love and risk.

In the fluidity of spaces people move through the landscape in particular ways. People come and go from bus shelters, they are dropped off to get on a bus and or are picked up, there is transiency to this place, some sit, other stand at bus shelters, we say hellos and goodbyes at bus shelters, there are lovers rifts at bus shelters, babies crying, school children waiting, workers travelling. Lining-up, sore feet, impatient, frustrated, thinking, stressing, talking, dreaming, facebook time, work emails, late-for-work, pick-up-kids, avoiding eye contact, strangers flirting, connecting with community, social isolation, weather-beaten, cold-shivers, hot-sweats, freedom, wishing for a car, community service, public transport bus-liberation car-free choice, my-time, no responsibility. But there is always a waiting...

We are vulnerable and exposed and possibilities can occur. Seemingly there is ordered chaos yet our images are visibly represented. Our images live in space.



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Love Poem #5*, 2015, bus stop installation, Henley Beach Road, photo Denys Finney



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, projections, Armoury building, photo Denys Finney
 Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, projecting onto the Armoury building, photo Tony Kearney

Limestone projections – NATALIE HARKIN

Tarnanthi. rise, come-forth, spring-up, appear. right here, in this potent-place, you will find festival offerings beyond a feast of art, for this cultural-precinct along adelaide's north terrace is no easy place for everyone to navigate....

Adelaide's North Terrace 'cultural-precinct' is a boulevard of iconic cultural institutions that celebrate South Australia's colonial history. They are promoted to be 'as rich as the collections they hold', and include: the Radford Auditorium, used as a military store by early Colonial and Commonwealth forces, and also the State Records repository; the Art Gallery of South Australia; the South Australian Museum, built to replicate the Natural History Museum in London; the Mortlock Library; the Mounted Police Barracks and Armoury complex that housed gallows and a small morgue; the first Aboriginal School, Destitute Asylum, Chapel, Lying-in Home and Girls Reformatory; a Rations Depot and the Aborigines Protectors Office, now the Migration Museum. Across the road, imposing sandstone walls surround Government House, and a steep parkland slopes into the Parade Grounds.

This sudden dip in the landscape was the old limestone quarry, located on a significant Kurna 'Red Kangaroo' dreaming site. Uncle Lewis O'Brien tells us that this site is sacred and important, and only partially documented for the public record. This site was mined as a limestone source for the buildings within this precinct, including the adjacent gothic landmark, St Peter's Cathedral. The racist irony is not lost here, as one sacred place was built at the expense of another.

The suppressed implicit violence underpinning this cultural-precinct resonates in particular ways for Aboriginal South Australians. The South Australian Museum boasts the largest collection of Aboriginal records, artefacts and human remains in the world, thanks to the *Board of Anthropological Research* expeditions comprising inter-disciplinary teams of 'experts' in biology, anthropology, pathology, physiology and psychology. They 'set up camp' outside our communities around Australia to take photographs, measure facial features, take blood and hair samples, conduct experiments, record genealogies and stories, make plaster body and face casts, collect skulls and bones, and so much more.

potent place

this is no easy place to navigate

Here, we consider the dehumanising acts that took place within the confines of these sacred-rock walls. We perform a quiet, rupturing poetic consideration of the archives we live in and in-between, and those archives we actively create and re-invent in response to State power. We confront the will of the State to eradicate the 'Aboriginal problem' through past measures that controlled and determined the lives of the living, and the remains of the dead.

We work affectively with space and time in this cultural-precinct to project new narratives beyond its established meaning. We make apparent and instigate the haunting of the haunted spaces and buildings, and collectively conjure memories and experiences. We repatriate love and agency back to our families and ancestors who were trapped in the confines of these walls. We leave an indelible imprint.

Cultural precinct

these limestone walls frame institutions of power shape the main story this
colonial 'free' State / these North Terrace statues bronzed famous faces
symbols of colonialism Empire-revered / next door the Parade Ground original
quarry raw materials morph grand buildings abound / limestone mined from this
old Kurna campsite Red-Kangaroo stories ripped from the ground / *these limestone*
walls *these limestone walls* / consider this Armoury that housed a morgue
cells and gallows watch our people hang / see mounted police perform military
functions 'pacified' our warriors on colonial frontiers / these wretched walls
this Armoury building hear horses-hooves gallop on cobblestoned blood / this
limestone heritage revered cultural-precinct our bodies stolen de-fleshed and preserved
/ *these limestone walls* *these limestone walls* / consider this place
the *South Australian Museum* their proudest collection wins the Empire's great race / an
uncanny replica London's Natural History Museum but what is 'natural' about their
history of this place? / they 'set up camp' on great expeditions to
study and collect us 'experts' in teams / their cabinets of curiosity their objects and
specimens their racialised hierarchy our human remains / *these limestone walls*
these limestone walls / the Migration Museum was the old Protector's Office the
Rations Depot the Colonial Store / blankets and flour sugar and tea the
removal of children the first Kurna school / and behind the Art Gallery the Radford
Auditorium the ammunitions-store for military-police / then a storage-place for
Aboriginal Records where paper-trails trace surveillance and control / consider
the paperwork the archiving process to consign and classify this resource maintained /
consider this fantasy monolith-archive its stunning all-knowing so easily sustained
/ *these limestone walls* *these limestone walls* / strive to navigate this
violent place be still and listen there are waterholes here / these fresh water springs
flow a limestone-memory erode and expose our truth will appear.



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, performance and projections, Armoury building, photo Steve Rendoulis
Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, TARNANTHI opening night, Art Gallery of South Australia, photo Steve Rendoulis



See the lights we shine – ALI GUMILLYA BAKER

We women, sisters, artists, friends, community continue the work of *Sovereign Acts I* (2014) where we imagined what it meant to be inside the archive looking out. This time, our *Sovereign Act II* considers what it means to be collectively on the outside of the institution looking in. We are sovereign people of earth; imagined again without fence-borders, our deep relationality and long-told stories of place walk with us.

We acknowledge that as Aboriginal people we are surrounded, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015, xiii) writes:

These cities signify with every building and every street that this land is now possessed by others; signs of white possession are embedded everywhere in the landscape. The omnipresence of Indigenous sovereignties exists here too, but it is disavowed through the materiality of these significations, which are perceived as evidence of ownership by those who have taken possession. This is territory that has been marked by and through violence and race. Racism is thus inextricably tied to the theft and appropriation of Indigenous lands in the first world.

In this performance we project our collective words and pictures back onto the space and onto the people gathered around, we respond to our ancestors call from within the archive, within the institutional walls; we project our responses to the flat surface of institutional-knowledge-production and subjection, onto their colonial wall, onto their colonial enclosure, our self-powered lights, responding, creating, refracting and directing the space, transforming the limestone/sandstone quarried sacred stone wall. The walls absorb our knowing. We have always been here.

The walls are between us – that which separates the outside and the inside. The walls of the buildings built on Aboriginal land, we question the ideas of whiteness in the 'cultural precinct' and the walls of authority. The seat of the free-settlers of the 'Adelaide establishment', conservative elite and the colonial architecture built as testament to the 'civilising' progress, of 'wild' place and 'wild' people, inserting order; knowledge/power/aesthetics/governmentality. The remaking of these ideas again and again, to the present where we stand.

The colonial outpost cultural precinct, with the buildings copied from the mother-monarch-coloniser, all in a row, along the grid of the map of the constructed city; enclosed by parks and gardens, manicured and controlled spaces. On Kurna Land. North Terrace; Church, Train Station, Casino, Parliament, Government House, (more statues of old-dead-white-men) War Memorial, Library, Museum, Art Gallery, University, Hospital, Botanical Gardens. Behind these buildings stand other buildings; of significance to Kurna and other Nungas from South Australia: Ration; *buildings to starve you*, Protect; *buildings to administer your children being taken away*, Define through Physical Anthropology; *buildings to dissect bodies and take bones and blood samples*, *buildings to send our bodies all over the world*, Defend; *buildings for mounted police to ride out from*, to protect the white-settlers, to create the representation of civilisation where we now stand, to push Aboriginal people outside the perimeters of the buildings,

Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, TARNANTHI opening night, photo Steve Rendoulis

Faye Rosas Blanch, Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, TARNANTHI opening night, photo Tony Kearney

past the gardens and the park lands, push us out into white administrative world, the wild world of stolen lands, where if you trespass you are shot. Buildings built on top of ancient fresh water springs. We mark these buildings with our performance.

Sovereign; our voice, our love, our response, illuminating the space, the words exist there and then they are gone. We exist, we are here, we remember. Our thoughts have always been here.

I lie awake at night thinking about the moment to begin the performance, the exact time between light and dark, the time when the sun sets, at dusk. Our dusky bodies in the treelike skin of paperbark, glued with flour, sugar, water and conversation and love and cups of tea, amongst our children, around the fire. Large paperbark skirts made of survival and imagination and determination and intent, our infinite landscapes that wrap around us, wrap us up, embracing our roundness. We become those who have risen from the earth at the moment of light going into night, with colonial largeness and bark stuck on wire mesh, mesh that is used to make chook pens and grow passion fruit.

She said to me: *I'm not word smart, but I can fix a fence and make a fire and make a rabbit stew.*

She said to me: *Forget your worries.*¹

I ask: What does it mean to forget your worries?

The skirts that we made for the *Sovereign Act II* performance look like cocoons. The cracking of their sound when we carefully help each other out of these outer shells. Helping each other into and out of the skirts. To be free. What does it mean to be free?

We hold old rusted metal billy cans containing blocks and shards of dry ice so cold it can burn the skin, and with little jugs we pour our warm water over our shivering, crackling, rattling billys and the rush of the ice-steam inside our cans bubbles and spews forth the misty-magical stew. Condensed frozen carbon dioxide steam that rises and falls in perfect theatricality from within the rusted can. We begin to walk, to circle, the large shared silence of many bodies envelopes us, we direct our feelings out through the intensity of our eyes, looking outwards, our necks lifted tall, our backs straight, we promenade around the rope enclosure and those who have gathered around us. What does it mean to enact *sovereign*?

To be brave and speak. The difficulty of the unrepresentable moment of emotional intensity.

We are massive in this country, we are present here, we are giants of our histories. Colonialism is a shallow 'I' at the end of this time, a peripheral greed, an aesthetic of a globalised culture that has lost the capacity to love. Our survival, despite all this evil, requires endurance and intimacy.

Three hundred people gathered around us. We were engaged in an active silence, full of stories and moments that transported each of us to places and times; the ancestors that brought us to this moment.² We are always surrounded.

¹ Personal memory of conversations with my Nana May and Aunty Shylie.

² Personal feedback from Karen Martin after our joint *Unbound* presentation for NIRAKN conference, Gold Coast, Queensland, 2016.



Ali Gumillya Baker, Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Tony Kearney

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Faye Rosas Blanch, Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, North Terrace cultural precinct, photo Tony Kearney



Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, projections onto State Library of South Australia, photo Steve Rendoulis
 Bound/Unbound Collective, *Sovereign Acts – Act II*, 2015, photo Steve Rendoulis

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For more background and updates go to: <http://www.flinders.edu.au/oise/unbound/about-unbound.cfm>

For more information about the Letters Patent 1836, go to: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/away/the-letters-patent/3803030>

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