The Annual Greg Dening Memorial Lecture 2010:
Challenges to Dance!
Choreographing History in Oceania

It is not the nature of Dening’s criticism to boundary-ride or point-score; rather, it is to rejoice, inspire, and imagine.

Prelude for Postgraduate Students

Stephen Lade, a student in the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the Australian National University (ANU), submitted a video of students dancing a PhD thesis in Physics to the 2010 international Dance Your Thesis competition run by *Science Magazine*. The magazine awards prizes in the categories of physics, chemistry, biology and the social sciences, respectively. Lade’s dance video of his “Directed Transport Without Net Bias in Physics and Biology” won the physics prize. However, by far the most lively and engaging performance was by the chemistry students from Carleton University in Canada who performed Maureen McKeague’s, “Selection of a DNA Aptamer for Homocysteine using Systematic Evolution of Ligands by Exponential Enrichment”. A blog site

The title of this presentation is of course inspired by Greg’s famous *Challenges to Perform* postgraduate seminars as well as Susan Leigh Foster’s collection *Choreographing History* (1995). Note: This piece was written to be performed and read out loud against projected images. On paper it is a different thing altogether. Sincere thanks to Professor Kate Darian-Smith and her assistant Sharon Harrison for inviting me to give this lecture and organising all the logistics. Many thanks to Nancy, Geoff and Nick Mortimer, and all my love and thanks to Donna and Greg Dening. We last gathered together at their home in Kew, early in 2008 over gin and tonics celebrating my upcoming wedding to a boy from country Victoria, Nick Mortimer. We relished and then cherished every bit of advice they gave us about love and friendship and at our wedding in Suva later that year after Greg had passed, we remembered him in our wedding mass at St. Joseph’s the worker parish at Tamavua in Suva, Fiji.

called “Entangled States: Quantum Physics, Theology and World Mission… living at the Intellectual Crossroads,” posted this particular entry on its site with the title: “Dance your PhD thesis. Dorky Nerds Rejoice!” A respondent to this post, Mary Hileman, said:

Maureen and her friends did a wonderful job depicting DNA interactions. I believe I understood her main points - very effective!

I wonder, however, whether interpretive dance will catch on and become part of a standard Ph.D. defense in the sciences? For example, I am intrigued by how interpretive dance might be used in a Geology dissertation defense. Oh my, I’m starting to consider possibilities for music and choreography to depict Pennsylvanian depositional sequence stratigraphy.

I believe the challenge Maureen poses to those of us in the wider scientific community...is to find new ways to effectively communicate our technical and seemingly esoteric concepts to a wider audience. As I explored the internet and discovered hundreds of dancing scientists, I began to wonder — counter to the popular belief that scientists are the most inflexible in both their discipline and practice — if indeed it is scholars in the social sciences and humanities who are the least willing to play with form in their presentation of knowledge. I found no videos of writers, historians, anthropologists, linguists, or archaeologists dancing their research although I’m sure they exist. If Greg was still running his postgraduate workshops at the ANU, I wonder if Stephen Lade would have participated and if he would have danced.

Choreographing History

I participated in Greg and Donna Dening’s Challenges to Perform postgraduate seminar at the beginning of my PhD journey at the ANU in 1999 and it transformed my research and orientation to academic life. What began as a study of the political economy of pity in Banaban history and social life, became my PhD titled, “Visualising te kainga, Dancing te kainga: History and Culture Between Rabi, Banaba and Beyond”. Greg regularly used the concept of performance as a tool for encouraging the use of imagination and passion in our research.


4 Nicholas KniIsley for Mary Hileman, 18 September 2010 11:51 am, comment on ‘Dance Your PhD Thesis’.

5 Katerina Teaiwa, Visualizing te Kainga, Dancing te Kainga: History and Culture Between Rabi, Banaba and Beyond, PhD Dissertation, The Australian National University, 2002.
As someone with a background in dance this seemed to me a license to engage with dance as a valid tool for social science and humanities scholarship, especially at ANU, which does not have a dance department.

Dance Studies scholar, Susan Leigh Foster, completed her PhD in the History of Consciousness Doctoral Programme at The University of California, Santa Cruz, with Hayden White and James Clifford, and her ideas greatly aided my efforts to weave dance into my thesis. Along this journey I was invited to give two performances at Santa Cruz. The university had a growing and enthusiastic cohort of Islander scholars including my sister who was completing her PhD thesis with James Clifford. My first performance in 2001 was received positively and resulted in a second invitation to close the Tenth Annual Women of Colour Film Festival: Towards a Decolonizing Cinema. The performance incorporated still and moving images, text, and a dance, and was to close the event. A delay in the schedule meant that the performance did not actually occur until 10pm. By then I was exhausted and knew I was going to struggle to articulate why and what I was doing. Half the audience began to leave before I had even begun, however, thanks to the pleas of the organisers, most decided to stay. I walked on stage with a half smile and performed the dance section of my presentation after a very short introduction. Later, the partner of a very famous activist and scholar in the History of Consciousness Department commented that, ‘yes, dancing is quite interesting but at the end of the day, I needed to be able to contextualise, theorise, and explain my movement and my method’. I thought to myself: ‘What a stupid risk. What a failure. Next time I’ll read a paper.’

Susan Leigh Foster is famous for her corporeal approach to speaking at academic conferences. At the 2007 Congress on Research in Dance at Barnard College, Columbia University, I saw her accept an award for Outstanding Leadership in Dance Research. Like everyone else, she was reading a prepared statement at the podium. Then, all of a sudden she shot her right leg into the air and flung it way over her head. She then raced into the audience and proceeded to jog around the room while still reading her statement. The whole audience burst into applause. Their expectations for a brief, but infamous Susan-Foster-conference-moment fulfilled.

Foster began her introduction to choreographing history thus:

Sitting in this chair; squirming away from the glitches, aches, low-grade tensions reverberating in neck and hip, staring unfocused at some space between here and the nearest objects, shifting again, listening to my stomach
growl, to the clock ticking, shifting, stretching, settling, turning...I am a body writing, I am a bodily writing.⁶

These words were liberating for me. To have the realisation that as I live in the academy I am a living, breathing, fully aware body was not only how I moved through the world; it was how others did too. Foster went on to elaborate on the implications of corporeality, on how we engage with past bodies, and in Greg Dening’s terms, the implications of corporeality on how we represent or re-present the past.⁷

In the world of dance, choreography is the art of designing or arranging sequences of movement. It is usually understood that you need to be a dancer before attempting choreography. To extend this idea to Foster’s characterisation of choreographing history, a historian needs to inhabit history in the body — be the historical person — before s/he should attempt to re-present it. She writes:

To choreograph history...is first to grant that history is made by bodies, and then to acknowledge that all these bodies, in moving and in documenting their movement, in learning about past movement, continually conspire together and are conspired against...Together they put pen to page. Together they dance with the words. Neither [the] historian’s body nor historical bodies nor the body of history become fixed during this choreographic process.⁸

Challenges to Dance?

In 2009, I danced in a production directed by performing artist Padma Menon, titled “Mother: a tribute through song, story and dance,” at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. It was one of the most difficult productions I had ever been involved in. The theme required each dancer to choreograph their own steps, which Padma reshaped according to her broader vision. I was asked to come up with a few key words that invoked how I felt as a pregnant woman and later as a new mother. I came up with terms such as tired, intense, round, and joyous. I then had to choreograph a sequence of movements and gestures around each word and eventually string them together in a narrative of movement. I had given birth nine months earlier and completely overestimated my physical capacity and underestimated the availability of childcare in Canberra.

⁸ Foster, *Choreographing History*, 180.
In the middle of rehearsals on what was the aptly-named, “Tribute to Mother,” I was running to my child and breastfeeding. While the final performance went very well, I had risked and jeopardised my relations with the Director.

I’d auditioned for the production of “Tribute to Mother” for a number of reasons. For most of 2008 I was pregnant with my daughter Tearia and as I carried her in my belly I made up songs that I would sing to her in the shower. The most complete song had three verses imagining her in various states of joy: laughing, giggling, wiggling, twirling, and dancing. She would vigorously kick her legs as she floated about in the amniotic universe she inhabited and I could feel her little feet at the top of each hip bone going boom, boom, boom, boom, kick, kick, kick. As my body changed shape I could feel new tensions in my back and hips. I kept on imagining that after giving birth everything would elastically snap back into place. Susan Foster once wrote about how yesterday’s knee, bounding along the road, is not today’s same aching joint. The body is a thing in history, changing, expanding, contracting, aching, and adjusting.

Tearia was born in January of 2009 and by the time she was ten months old, she had taught herself to climb up the fifteen stairs in our house, forwards, and down again, backwards; hands and feet carefully feeling their way down the steep incline. Now, as a far more nimble toddler, she literally skates down the flight of steps at break neck speed on her tummy. Tearia loves music and dance, and her favourite movement is to first shimmy and wiggle her head in recognition of a musical sound. She then sways from side to side; her arms alternating up and down. All the while, building up the movement through her torso and feet to a crescendo that explodes into a never-ending twirl on the spot.
In *Moving History/Dancing Culture*, dance scholars Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright reflect on a performance in July 1953 of Virginia Tanner’s Children’s Dance Theatre. At what has now become one of the United State’s signature summer dance gatherings, the Jacob’s Pillow dance festival, girls aged from eight to eighteen improvised the idea of rhythms and water rushing over Niagara Falls. Dance critic Walter Terry wrote of their performance:

other children have danced such themes and there are other children... who have performed with...far more precociousness of a technical nature but none...have conveyed so perfectly the bright...purity of child-dance. It is difficult to describe even the most potent intangibles and the best I can do is to say that the children danced as if they had faith in themselves, had love for those of us who were seeing them, actively believed in their God and rejoiced in all of these.

Most of the children in Virginia Tanner’s Dance Theatre were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and Dills and Cooper-Albright go on to discuss the familiar image of a sweet girl dancing in the summer air: an image replicated in many popular American contexts.

A similar image was posted by a woman on a public photo-sharing site who was a member of Virginia Tanner’s dance theatre. She describes how they would wear ‘ginny’ gowns to perform. These gowns were named after Virginia Tanner, and the picture is of her daughter wearing her old ‘ginny’ gown and twirling with joy.

**Dance and the Church in the Pacific Islands**

What really strikes me is that the image posted on the public photo-sharing site captures perfectly the image that Dills and Cooper Albright describe as the cover of a 1950s *Life* Magazine featuring what they describe as ‘two blond Mormon angels’. The foundations of the Mormon Church in the mid-1800s clearly supported the practice and celebration of dance as part of their brand of

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11 Dils and Cooper Albright, “Historical Moments: Rethinking the Past,” 233.
13 Ibid.
14 Dils and Cooper Albright, “Historical Moments: Rethinking the Past,” 233.
faith. For Protestant missions, however, this was not the case during the same period. In the Pacific, many dance cultures were outlawed during their missions, and as a result, Islander dance culture went underground as most of the peoples and their leaders took on the material, spiritual, and corporeal values of the new religion.

In an editorial note to Arthur Grimble’s 1919 memorandum *A Discourse on Gilbertese Dancing*, Pacific Historian H. E. Maude noted that Protestant missionaries in the Gilbert Islands attempted several times to ban dancing. Eventually they realised that ‘should any further attempt be made to prohibit dancing to church adherents it would be the number of Christians rather than the number of dancers who would decline’.

Before the Protestant Church expanded its mission west to Pacific Islands in Micronesia, Missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) succeeded in converting key Hawaiian chiefs during the 1830s. This resulted in a drastic transformation of the whole cultural and political system including the division of lands, the end of the kapu (which forbade men and women to eat together), and eventually, the suppression of dance. Some Hawaiians became Protestant missionaries themselves, spreading the gospel to other Pacific Islands.

South West of Hawai’i in the central Pacific lay the Gilbert Islands (now known as Kiribati). Many of the Southern Islands were first proselytised by the ABCFM in the 1850s using several Hawaiian missionaries. Two such missionaries, Kapu and Nalimu, led the conversion of Tabiteuea North (the home of my grandmother, Takeua) in 1868. Having succeeded, they led a fierce Christian war in 1881 against the so-called ‘pagans’ in Tabiteuea South. This resulted in a massacre of many of the men and the loss of most of their lands to the Northerners. Up to the arrival of these missionaries in Tabiteuea, war had been forbidden between the north and the south of Tabiteuea. The name Tabiteuea (or Tabu te uea) itself means ‘no chiefs allowed’ and illustrates the egalitarian nature of the relations between the two.

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16 H. E. Maude, editorial footnote to, “A Discourse on Gilbertese Dancing,” 333.

By the early 1900s the ABCFM had been replaced with the London Missionary Society (LMS). In 1919 the local representative of the LMS, Reverend W. E. Goward, had accused the Gilbertese of unlawful dancing and brought the charges to the attention of the local British colonial authorities. According to H. E. Maude, in his editorial notes on Arthur Grimble’s *Tungaru Traditions*, Goward had spent twenty years trying to ban Gilbertese dancing, petitioning the government to impose dance prohibitions on Christians and non-Christians alike.18 Grimble was Resident Commissioner at the time and, as an avid collector of Gilbertese customs and traditions, he stepped forward in ‘defence of the rights of the pagan majority’.19 Goward had eleven specific charges laid against dancers, many of them with detailed sub-sections on the relationship between dance and what he called, the ‘evil doings of men and women’, such as sour toddy drinking, abortion, adultery, and love making.

Grimble proceeded to carefully challenge each one of Goward’s charges with the historical and ethnographic information he’d gathered over many years of his residency as a colonial official.20 In the end Goward retired and was replaced by ‘a more modern-minded G. H. Eastman, who in 1926 persuaded the Protestant Island Church Councils to rescind the prohibition on Christian dancing’.21

The consistent move by Protestant missionaries across the Pacific to ban dancing had a variety of implications for cultures in which dance, song, story, art, architecture, fishing, sailing, and so forth, were all bound up in an integrated complex of both identity and practices that had allowed Islanders to navigate, settle, and indeed thrive in a challenging and often limited physical environment. In the absence of mountains and valleys, forests and rivers, and all the resources these environments provide, the atoll cultures of the Gilbert Islands focused on the art of the moving body as the prime vehicle for expressing and consolidating their identities. The Catholic missions in the nineteenth century had recognised the primacy of dance in these cultures and incorporated it in the mass. They were far more successful at gaining converts, and today an I-Kiribati mass usually features an offertory dance rather than a procession.

The Gilbert Islands gained independence in 1979 to become the Republic of Kiribati and from then on the terms ‘Gilbertese’ and ‘I-Kiribati’ were interchangeable.

18 H. E. Maude, editorial note to “A Discourse on Gilbertese Dancing,” 314.
19 Ibid.
21 H. E. Maude, editorial footnote to “A Discourse on Gilbertese Dancing,” 333.
In the 1980s, Mary Elizabeth Lawson in her PhD research wrote that for the I-Kiribati, dance is *bai ni abara* - a ‘thing of our land’, passed down from the *bakatibu*, or ancestors. Like most dance traditions, Gilbertese dance was an integral part of the social fabric of Gilbertese life. To ban dancing would have been to unravel a whole range of values and practices that held communities together and mediated relations between the generations, between clans and between islands.

**Dancing difference**

Recently I have written about how dance was the primary tool for Banabans in their quest to differentiate themselves from the Gilbertese. The island of Banaba, also known as Ocean Island is situated four hundred kilometres west of the Gilbert chain and was mined for precious phosphate rock between 1900 and 1980 by a British, Australian, and New Zealand company known from 1920 as the British Phosphate Commissioners (BPC).

The BPC headquarters were here at 465 Collins Street, Melbourne, and in 1999, not long after completing Greg’s workshop, I spent four weeks combing the National Archives in the Lonsdale Street and Burwood offices, followed by two weeks in Adelaide at the Barr-Smith Library, which houses the Grimble and Maude Pacific collections.

Ocean Island was incorporated into the Protectorate of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in 1900, the year New Zealander Albert Ellis discovered the phosphate, and eventually it became part of the colony declared in 1916. Along with supplying Australian and New Zealand farmers with precious phosphate fertiliser at cost price, the phosphate deposits were central for the income and maintenance of the colony, and in the 1970s a reserve fund had built up from which to launch the independent countries of Tuvalu and Kiribati. In 1974 the Banabans petitioned the British government for the separation of Ocean Island from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, arguing they were a completely different race and culture from the Gilbertese. Both the British and Gilbertese governments refuted this

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24 Banaba is my grandfather, Teaiwa’s, ancestral home, along with Tabiteuea, which is also my grandmother, Takeua’s ancestral island.
claim. The Banabans proceeded to sue the British government for breach of trust and failing to replant those trees destroyed by the BPC. Contingents of Banabans travelled to the United Kingdom to argue their case.

As evidence of their difference, and based on the assumption that dance comprises all that is unique to a people and culture, the Banabans formed a dancing group. New Zealand dance scholar and critic Jennifer Shennan, a long time activist for the Banabans, wrote in her article on “Approaches to the Study of Dance in Oceania”:

In London, during the protracted court case involving Banaban compensation claims for the destruction of their Ocean Island homeland by phosphate mining, a daily newspaper posed the question: “Who are these Banaban people anyway?” A group of Banaban dancers were in London at the time and they responded to the question. They announced a performance of music and dance with the simple and powerful statement: “We, the Banabans, are the people who dance like this”.25

Both Shennan and Lawson’s work can be read with Elfriede Hermann and Wolfgang Kempf’s analysis of Banaban dance theatre on Rabi to contextualise the development and transformation of Banaban dance after their displacement from the Colony in 1945 to Fiji. Kempf and Hermann’s work is significant in that it is one of the few scholarly publications that explores relationships to the land and ethnicities in Fiji through the performing arts.26 Their analysis accurately portrays the politics of Banaban performance as both a

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means of remembering and reviving a lost homeland, and of carving out a physical, social, and political space for themselves on a new island in multicultural Fiji. They also highlight the ongoing agenda to construct ethnic difference through dance, quoting the former Rabi Council Chairman, Tebuke Rotan, who led the charge against the British government. Rotan explains:

The first time in history we Banabans make our own dance. We can call it our own. On Rabi. On Banaba, we always copied the Gilbertese dance…we made nothing of our own…One of the main reasons for this dancing is to show to the world that we Banabans have our own culture.27

Banaban dance on Rabi was deliberately created to perform an identity and culture that was distinct from the Gilbertese or I-Kiribati. Up until the 1960s, music and performance on Rabi had been dominated by Gilbertese forms with some Ellice Island influences. The mostly Gilbertese Catholic community in particular, while not so vocal in politics, was strong in the area of cultural performance. They had developed string bands and singing groups which were increasingly popular across Rabi, often attracting participation of the Banaban Methodist groups. During the lawsuit against the British government in the 1970s, the Rabi Council of Leaders helped to create a distinct Banaban Dancing Group as an emblem for the people and their cause. The dance troupe was to symbolise a unique Banaban culture, different from the Gilbertese and lending validity to the movement for independence.

Members of the dance group had previously toured the Pacific performing at the opening of the Sydney Opera House in 1972. It was just before this trip that the Banaban dance costume was established under the directives of one of the event organizers, Beth Dean, who strongly suggested that all costume materials be made of natural fibres rather than the beads, crepe paper, raffia, and ribbons which were popular on Rabi and in the Gilbert Islands. The principle choreographer for the group was a man named Tawaka Tekenimatang and from the beginning it was acknowledged that the new Banaban dance styles were deliberately constructed rather than ‘traditional’. Beth Dean later wrote, ‘The Banaban people have, through an imaginative choreographer…developed a style of dance of their very own’.28

These new dances involved choreographies that broke with set Gilbertese patterns and included a speeding up of the Gilbertese forms and rhythms, as

27 Hermann and Kempf “Reconfigurations of Place and Ethnicity,” 375.
28 Beth Dean, South Pacific Dance (Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1978), 87.
well as the incorporation of the popular western twist, Samoan taupati, Tahitian tamure, and Hawaiian hula. Later, when the community had access to film and video, Japanese karate and Chinese kung fu inspired male dancing styles.

While dance in the Gilbert Islands and Banaba was often a direct reflection of their lived environment, a reflection of the movement of fish, frigate birds, crabs, the travellers on a canoe, or the various methods of fishing, Banaban dance on Rabi is not a reflection of their physical environment, but rather of their history and current social and political environment. It is of a purely aesthetic nature; movement in space, rather than place. It is a reflection of every encounter Banabans have had with Others: with Europeans, Chinese, Japanese, Cook Islanders, Ellice Islanders, Hawaiians, Tahitians, Samoans, and Fijians layered upon a distinct Gilbertese substratum. Banaban dance is now almost completely appropriated and constructed in the same way that the Banaban land, that place which their dancing once belonged, was appropriated, removed, and spread over distant lands as fertiliser.

In his 2008 lecture for Greg Dening, Tom Griffith’s said: ‘History and Fiction weave an intriguing and complex dance’. The Banabans have a dance theatre that tells the “true” story of what happened in the past in a slightly different way each December 15, commemorating their landing in Fiji. They sing a song in both English and Gilbertese, which is a parable for their history:

It gave its price the BPC  
One pound note and 24 penny  
They said, they said  
*Ti tangira 24 penny bae plenty riki kanoana*  
* Ao an tanimai ao kare matam tei Buritan o,*  
You really gave a bad result  
Nakoia student of Ocean Island.  

Chorus:  
How pity...how pity...Oh  
They misunderstood the value of money!  
Our ancestors! *Ake ngkoa ngkoa*

(‘It gave its price the BPC  
One pound note and 24 penny

They said, they said
We’ll take the 24 pennies it must have more value
Face us and look this way O British,
You really gave a bad result
For the students of Ocean Island long ago.

Chorus:
How pity... how pity... Oh
They misunderstood the value of money!
Our ancestors! Of long ago').

The song speaks for itself and I usually feel emotional and awkward about what it means for Banaban history. To avoid having to deal with pity, I have always been more interested in the movement that accompanies the singing, the movement that re-enacts the landing of missionaries, the discovery of phosphate, the Japanese occupation, and the removal of the people to Rabi. As Greg Dening wrote in his essay on empowering imaginations,

All we observe is the past transformed in some way into history. All we ever observe are the texts made of living experience—whether these texts are something written down in a letter or journal, where they are oral traditions transcribed in some way, whether they are material objects...whether it is some story caught in a dance or a painting or a tattoo. We all make history by observing somebody else making history.

If Pacific Islanders are dancing or singing their histories, it behoves historians, anthropologists, and Pacific Studies scholars to consider the need for music or dance literacy. In her ‘five premises for a culturally sensitive approach to dance’, Deidre Sklar writes that movement knowledge is a kind of cultural knowledge: ‘to speak of movement as a way of knowing implies that the way people move is as much a clue to who they are as the way they speak’. She also describes how movement knowledge is conceptual and emotional as well as kinaesthetic, and how it is intertwined with other kinds of cultural knowledge. She writes:

One has to look beyond movement to get at its meaning: the concepts embedded in movement are not necessarily evident in the movement itself...movement is always an immediate corporeal experience: the cultural knowledge that is embodied in movement can only be known via movement.

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30 Teaiwa, Visulising te Kainga.
33 Ibid.
Sklar’s framework for approaching dance points to the potential application of dance or movement literacy in a research and educational context. In most cultures, if parents support and prioritise a child’s education, they are understood to be good parents. According to I-Kiribati artist and scholar Teweiaariki Teaero, there is a Kiribati saying: ‘You know your parents love you if they help you to dance’. In this is a whole host of meaning and, for me, particular significance in terms of the importance of a literacy of the moving body. My parents prioritised both the arts and education encouraging us to learn everything from ballet to hula. I hope to do the same for my daughter.

I Dare You To Dance

So in the last part of this performance, I’d like to focus on hula and look more closely at how the moving or dancing body engages or represents both history and the land.

“Okay, I dare you to dance!”

That’s the old saying, ‘a’ā ka hula, e waiho i ka hale.

I dare you to dance or stay home.

In 2005 while teaching at the University of Hawai‘i, I took on a new challenge to dance and joined a hula halau or hula dance school in Honolulu on the island of Oahu. Halau Hula O Maiki was founded by Maiki Aiu Lake in 1946. Aunty Maiki is described as one of the mothers of the Hawaiian renaissance, a period

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34 Teweiaariki Teaero, lecture delivered for The Body and Pacific Studies/World Dance course, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, April 2006.
of Hawaiian cultural revitalisation that began in the early twentieth century, and came to full political force in the 1980s and 1990s. The renaissance involved the production of Hawaiian music and dance, language studies, a revival of voyaging practices, political activism, indigenous scholarship, protection of the environment and a struggle for Hawaiian access to land.36

The halau approach to hula centres on the instruction of dance, the Hawaiian language and history conducted by specific kumu hula, or hula masters, and their students, who form hula genealogies that spread across the seven islands and today extend into the continental United States. All hula practices exist in relation to a history of diverse and ancient Hawaiian cultural processes, Christian missionisation, American colonialism, plantation economies and militarism that resulted in the incorporation of Hawai‘i as the fiftieth state of the United States of America. Hula, then, while inherently a vehicle for preserving and transforming culture and relationships with the environment, is also about Hawaiian spirituality, sovereignty and struggle for self-determination. It is a way of life, a way of being in the world, but also a profound expression of Hawaiian identities that are not homogenous, but vary from island to island, valley to valley, genealogy to genealogy, and from the mouths of volcanoes to the mists of mountain tops. Within hula families, older women are respected and called ‘aunty’ by younger members. Our hula ancestor, therefore, was Aunty Maiki and her way of hula originates on the island of Kauai.37

While I have spent most of my life learning some form of dance, from ballet to bharatanatyam, learning hula in Halau Hula O Maiki with Aunty Maiki’s daughter, Miss Coline, was the most moving, integrated, and concrete approach to dance I had ever experienced. Much of this had to do with specific pedagogical techniques and particularly the ways in which our kumu placed our bodies in time and place. For Miss Coline, hula was not merely a dance, but a way of living in and invoking the world. She would teach us values, particularly that of ‘ohana, or family, and aloha, or love, in an integrated sense, and describe the ways in which the respect for these values translated into body movement.

Miss Coline made us acutely aware of the specifics of the island environment. She first situated us with respect to mauka and makai or mountain-side and

ocean-side. Our very first instructions were directional, involving commands to *huli ewa, huli, mauka, huli leahi* and *huli makai*, that is, turn to the west (the dry side) of the island, turn to the mountain (the Koʻolau’s), turn to Diamond Head peak (on the wet, eastern side), and turn to the sea. The sea, and the ocean were not the same: the ocean, *moana*, is vast and deep, and the sea, *kai*, is shallower and closer to shore. You gather or fish, for example, for very different kinds of food in *kai* and *moana*, and one of the first dances we learned, *Ka ulu wehi o ke kai*, ‘Plants of the Sea’, described the picking of several kinds of *limu* or seaweed. We also learned about ocean currents and particularly the nature of the passages between the islands in the Hawaiian chain, thus gaining an appreciation for the various moods of the sea without actually being on or in the water.

Through an awareness of the island environment, our dancing bodies were spatially mapped onto the land and seascape. Immediately we were in a relationship with place and the choreography would literally bring the living, breathing environment, with some parts of Oahu now concreted over with high-rise hotels, back to life. We would breathe in the island and sea, we could smell it, we could feel the wind and the rain, and could invoke both the moon and sun in one motion of the hands and tilt of the body. I learned more about the islands of Hawaiʻi and Hawaiian history from my *hula* classes then I did in all my Pacific Studies university courses put together. Above all I learned that the original concept of *aloha*, that word that now dominates everything from tourist brochures to airline logos, was a sincere expression of love to be shared confidently through dance.

The very first dance we learned in Halau Hula O Maiki was a children’s dance that embodies the profound Hawaiian connection to their island environment:

> I’ll show you the sun  
> Or the moon  
> My house  
> Near the Pali  
> And the Mountains are high and green  
> And the rain will make  
> The waterfall  
> I’ll show you the ocean  
> Or the sea  
> The rolling waves  
> Upon the beach
And the wind is blowing up high
It makes the swaying palm trees.

In 2002, years after Hawai‘i became the fiftieth member of the United States and thousands of immigrants from across Asia and Europe had transformed the nature of Hawaiian society, a kumu hula, or dance teacher, originally from Hawai‘i and now based in Oakland, California, named Mark Ho‘omalu proceeded to take a risk. Ho‘omalu adapted a mele inoa, a song in honour of King Kalakaua, for the soundtrack of a Disney cartoon called ‘Lilo and Stitch’. Mark Ho‘omalu was always pushing the boundaries of hula, of both dance and music, and particularly the rhythm of the ipu and pahu drums that accompany hula. He has his critics, but has said he finds joy in the world’s embrace of the Hawaiian artform. And so, with the children’s choir of the famous Kamehameha School, he adapted ‘He mele no Kalakaua’ into ‘He mele no Lilo’ and it became a global hit.

King Kalakaua, also known as the Merrie Monarch, the King who revived and supported hula after years of missionary suppression, died in 1891 after reigning from 1874. He’d been forced to sign a decree limiting his own political powers, but he revived the indigenous performing arts and provided royal protection and patronage for music and dance practitioners. According to Amy Stillman ‘the themes that are cited frequently in mele inoa for Kalakaua [include] associating rank with metaphors of height and shining brilliance, fame in distant lands, and the chief as flower or a cherished possession’.

38 Mark Keali‘i Ho‘omalu with The Kamehameha Schools Children’s Chorus, ‘He Mele No Lilo’, released June 21, 2002 on Disneys’ Lilo and Stitch (soundtrack), Walt Disney Recods, audio CD.
39 See the Academy of Hawaiian Arts website: http://www.academyofhawaiianarts.org/Mark_Reali_Hoomalu.php.
I wish to share this performance in memory of Greg Dening, who is also brilliant, famed in distant lands and deeply cherished; and, in memory of his generous, profoundly creative spirit, and his path-breaking writing on Pacific histories, in which he honored the lives and deeds of a wide range of historical characters.

As Tom Griffiths remembers:

He was pleased to be called a Magical Realist. In his graduate workshops these invocations had stunning results. His students were inspired to perform, act, paint, tell, sing and even dance their theses. The only way to fail Greg was not to take a risk.\(^{41}\)

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