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NEPEAN COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

16.02.88

TO: Gordon Beattie/Anne Marshall
FROM: Dr. J.M. Maling
SUBJECT: MINILI REPORT

I appreciated receiving a copy of the Mimili Report : February 1988. The process of documentation referred to is, in particular, a fascinating one as is the ongoing nature of the contact being developed between this institution and the Mimili Community. I look forward to their participation in late September at the Third Aboriginal Conference that will be held at Nepean.

JILLIAN MALING

c.c. Mr. A.R. Dunsire

From January 21 to 30, Gordon Beattie and Anne Marshall again visited Mimili in Central Australia, with a group of four students, an ex- student and another lecturer. This was the seventh visit in the cultural exchange between Nepean staff and students and the Pitjantjatjara / Yankunytjatjara people of Mimili, and other interested participants.

On the Pitjantjatjara side, several new verses and sections of the INMA were presented and taught, including five new verses of the INMA MAKU by Bruce Umala and Sam Pumani. This meant five totally new sets of words, dances and body markings. The significance of these new dreamings is enormous - a real renaissance in interest in the INMA as a vital creative expression rather than just a ritual - no matter how important that ritual might be.

Significant advances in Pitjantjatjara language were made by some students, and the courses in language offered by South Australian tertiary institutions were considered.

Meetings between the elders of both sides discussed funding problems, and it became clear that, as the Australia Council had not funded the project for the second year, private sector sponsorship needed to be sought. Students had clearly found the task of raising the money difficult too, although this visit had been funded by their work in the Sydney Festival.

Discussion with elders about documentation and editing of tapes into sequence took place on two occasions. As the Mimili people have no access to equipment or skills, this task will fall largely to Ian Knowles, Anne Marshall and Gordon Beattie. Technical facilities at Nepean CAE will be crucial in the process.

The scope of the documentation includes:

1. Writing down the words of the verses in performance, or as dictated at another time by Sam or one of the other elders.
2. Translation of the verses (several levels of language may apply)
3. Notation of the rhythm, tempo, accentuation etc.
4. Notation of the melodic pattern
5. Videoing all dances in performance - maybe notation
6. Recording all painted body patterns - correlating these with verses to establish groupings.
7. Noting props and totems
8. Noting staging devices used

9. Explorartion of the dramatic content
10. Documentation of stories and dreamings associated with each verse, plus the levels of meaning where known and able to be recorded.
11. Producing this material into a workable document

Each of these tasks has been started, but none completed. Some, like the notation of the words of the verses and the translations are virtually up to date, but need refining. Musical notation is fairly up to date, but many other areas need some intensive work as soon as possible.

Funding for basic equipment is needed. (Tapes, videos, computer discs and programs, etc). Some payment in terms of fees will also need to be made to specialists - say, in dance notation, should that be necessary.

The final result will be a fascinating and valuable document that will be used by both the Mimili people and Nepean students in various schools.

The Mimili people also expressed a strong desire to have an organisation like the ABC make a program about their INMA for broadcast, as they have with other tribal groups. This may be able to be organised but is outside the present scope of this exchange due to lack pf professional equipment suitable for broadcast tapes.

Next visit to Sydney: In late September for the Third Aboriginal Conference, at Nepean C.A.E.

On the Nepean Side: The group that travelled up this time included Peter Kennard, a Musician who also accompanies in the Dance program at Nepean, Janet Swain (an ex-student) Peter Hennessy, Vince Crowley, Clara Witheridge and Jane Townsend (all current students about to enter second year).

This group had also worked with Gordon in the Kulini Company which was employed by the Sydney Festival for two weeks in January. The original group also included Mark Holloway, Cranston Brecht and Inger Adamson who did not go to Mimili this time. The mask work, which was developed in last year's Blacktown Festival and furthered during the last two Mimili Exchanges and during the Sydney Festival, was the basis on which the group built their performances.

The mask work now includes three separate styles:

1. identical mass masks working as performance art in the landscape (eg the 'enigma' figures.)
2. 'mythical' characters which have developed symbolic and archetypal roles and interaction, using also self devised musical instruments and dance.
3. naive characters in modern dress, who interact with each other and the audience in a more spontaneous manner, working in pure improvisation. These tend to be basically comic figures.

Within the Mimili context, further verses of the epic begun in July 1987 were explored and performed, building also on the theatrical experiments in our own playhouse in September, 1987. They included the mythical and naive characters. The ritual figures were photographed in the landscape only.

The new verses were also accompanied by percussion, directed by Peter Kennard.

A workshopping process for two hours each morning, before it became too hot to work, saw the emergence and refinement of 4 new verses and the introduction of two female characters of a stronger and more organic nature than previously. The symbolism and meaning of the work was discussed at length, with valuable input by Leon Petchkovsky. the Jungian analyst who has been present on the last four exchanges. His ongoing analysis of the content of what we are doing is a fascinating adjunct to the project.

The contact with the Mimili people was shorter than usual this time, as they were occupied with tribal business until 26th. However, after this, four intensive INMA sessions gave ample opportunity to study new sections of the work and extend our knowledge of their performance conventions. Our group also presented the new verses to the Mimili people, who expressed interest in the meaning and intention of the verses and were clearly entertained. Themes of territory were further explored.

This visit was particularly successful from several points of view:

1. Continuity and growth of knowledge of the INMA with new verses and meanings.
2. Re-affirmation of friendships and trust between the two groups.
3. Our performance work being accepted and discussed seriously by the Pittjantjatjara people.
4. More students have come in contact with the Aboriginal culture at first hand.
5. Our work in masked theatre in the environment is continuing to open up some extraordinary opportunities for studies in performance.
6. After 18 months we now have enough knowledge and confidence and material to begin on a project of serious collation and documentation of the performance material of both cultures
7. Increasing involvement by people outside the College.

Anne Marshall
Gordon Beattie

5.2.1988