

Play introduction Ten Canoes - [Click here to view](#)

One of the most brilliant opening sequences in a movie ever, I reckon.

Good morning. Thank you, Uncle, for your welcome and your words. And thank you, Georgie and Carclew for the invitation to be here with you all today. My name is Jacob Boehme. I belong to the Narangga and Kurna Peoples of South Australia and Finnish people of Scandanavia, through my father and to the Irish and Scottish peoples of the UK through my mother. However, I was born and raised on Woiwurrung/Wurundjeri country in Melbourne, which I call home.

It's always a strange experience for me coming back to Adelaide, where I belong to a people and to a place but don't feel like I can truly say that I come from here. These streets are foreign to me. I don't have many childhood memories here, even though I came here often as a kid. I can't give you the shortcuts or tips to the best beaches or coastal spots - and this morning I had to google "best coffee near me". So Melbourne

But every time I come here there is a familiarity to the land and waters that I cannot explain, a reconnection to my father and grandparents who left this earth long ago - and there are the voices I hear on the wind, singing songs in language I don't yet know the dances to, that I somehow know to be my grandmothers and grandfathers I've never met, from 100 generations ago.

I opened today with the introduction from the film Ten Canoes, because I wanted to talk about stories relating to place and country: to the natural world. Ways of being with and relating to the land that could and can influence our organisations, influence the ways in which we do business and how we relate to each other as fellow human animals, not just as arts peers and competitors – as our respective state and territory (and federal) arts funding bodies would have us be.

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I'd like to ask you, if I may, to imagine for a moment your place. That place out in nature that you have a connection to: in the bush, by the sea, or deep in a rainforest. Close your eyes and breath. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Imagine your place. It could be a place from your childhood, it might be where you live right now, or a holiday destination you once visited that has had a lasting impression. Think of that one place that is somehow under your skin. In your DNA. Breathe into that memory. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, get a picture of that special place and see it in your mind's eye like a scene in a film – notice the sounds that are associated with that place – breathing in, breathing out, notice the colours around you, the animals, is that the sun or moonlight on your face? Breathe in, breathe out. duchessWhat emotions does this place, this piece of land (or water) bring up for you? Pay attention to what feelings are being stirred up as you see the landscape that you are so connected to. Breathing in, breathing out. Come back into the room now. Would anyone like to share where they just went?

Country and place and belonging are what has fuelled and been the foundation of arts practices here on this continent for thousands of years: some would say 60,000, others would say 80,000. The latest carbon dating would suggest 120,000 years of occupation. Whatever the number, it's a bloody long time. A long time to be singing and dancing and telling stories on this country, of this country and about this country. Thousands of years of artistic practice belong to these lands: stories told and retold, interpreted and reinterpreted by songmen and songwomen generation after generation. Ways of telling stories and gathering communities and connecting individuals to nature and each other. There is much to learn from the dances and songs that our songmen and women are guardians and caretakers of: astronomy, biology, water management and landcare, botany, architecture, science to name a few. And always, your relationship to the land, to the natural world, to your community and broader family structures and all of this in context with the past, the present and our collective future.

In dramatic or academic institutions, we could call these ancient storytelling techniques theatre methodologies or dramaturgies: techniques that every Australian and next generation of theatre makers, could and should learn from. Methodologies and dramaturgies that have originated right here and that are older than any other known

theatre practice in the world. I say methodologies and dramaturgies because each performance making technique or what we would call gurribungguja in Narangga, or inma from Central Desert, or bonggol way up north or what you might commonly know as ceremony or corroboree, is specific to and in alignment with its natural environment. What you find in way of content, approach and execution in the rainforests in the north of Queensland is completely different to central desert or Kimberley region of WA.

There is a saying that has been passed down from our old people, that some or most of you might have heard “if you look after the land, the land will look after you”. Meaning if the land is sick, we are sick. If our waters are dying, we are dying. This is not just a simple quote from a simple people from a simpler time. Our forests are burning and our rivers are drying up or already dead. This is actually happening. Our earth is sick. We are sick

The current generation of youth know this. They are leading the charge in the global environmental justice movement and rightfully so, our younger generations are panicked, fearful and well aware of the repercussions that economic, social and environmental policies and practices will have on the climate change disaster and their role in inheriting and having to deal with much of this damage.

The line of men travelling in single file at the start of Ten Canoes are a reminder of ways in which the continent of what is now known as Australia was kept pristine for over 1,000 generations. They walk in single file because we are taught to tread lightly on country, leaving one set of footprints so as not to leave too much destruction in our path. At multiple times throughout the year, fire would be utilized to spur on new growth. There is lore in the form of songs, dances and punishments that remind you to take only what you need. These are just a few examples to use as potential metaphors for how we might look to shape the functions and systems of our future arts organisations.

How can we as practitioners and managers lead by example and tackle some of today’s biggest issues, namely the climate crisis – not just as content for new work, but by using values and philosophies from Indigenous peoples around the globe to shape new trade and economic systems and to build new and equitable futures? There are indeed ways in which

we can work together to dismantle tired old systems and start afresh, but it will most likely require dissent and just a little bit of disobedience. And unity. This is not one of those times like the introduction of the catalyst grants where we all publicly protest the reimagining of federal arts funding and then apply for the grant anyway, coz “everyone else will”. There is too much at stake now. This is not just about art anymore.

If you are not already aware, I’d like to introduce you to a concept that has come out of South America called Buen Vivir. Buen Vivir is Spanish for “good living” or “living well”. Its origins are based in ancestral concepts of *sumak kawsay* from the Andean regions of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

Buen Vivir is exactly the opposite to the Fairfax Lateral Economic Well-being index which puts a dollar figure on national well-being. With Buen Vivir, the subject of well-being is not the individual, but the individual within a community in relation to a specific cultural-natural environment.

Buen Vivir is decolonial in its stance and calls for new ethics that balances quality of life with biocentric ideals honouring the inherent value of all living things.

Drawing on a wealth of Indigenous cultures from the Andean regions, it has emerged as a lived practice against commodification and a way of doing things differently.

Buen Vivir is a new paradigm of social and ecological commons – one that is community-centric, ecologically balanced and culturally sensitive. It’s a vision and a platform for thinking and practising alternative futures based on a “bio-civilisation” and has been adopted in the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia since 2008.

Professor Juan Fransisco Salazar proposed in an article for the Conversation back in July, 2015

“Buen Vivir may be taken up in Australia as an interesting perspective. First, as a way to engage more deeply and respectfully with Aboriginal communal ways of being. Second, as a

way to take part in emergent local movements, urban and rural, pushing to build sustainable non-capitalist alternatives. Buen Vivir does incorporate long-standing Western critiques of capitalism coming out of politics, economics, geography and feminist thought. As a lived practice, it is aware of – and connected to – global movements of local solidarities that promote collaborative consumption and economies of sharing and care. Yet, as a social–ecological transformation, it entails more than a move to take back the economy. Buen Vivir is a move to repoliticise sustainability.”

From emergent philosophies coming from the Indigenous peoples in the Andes of South America to ample opportunity to scope new partnerships between arts organisations and songmen and women in our own country, there are values and systems and ways of being that are being practised and led by Indigenous peoples around the world, which don't seek a return to an ancestral Indigenous past but where we can construct common ancestral futures, where different knowledges come together.

I want to remind you now of the words of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart: Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago. This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown. How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years? With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood. Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at

unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future. These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness. We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country. We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution. Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination. We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history. In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

Within hours of this statement being read back in 2017, the Uluru Statement was shut down by the Turnbull Government. What the Uluru Statement asked for then and asks for now is a shared future. As a provocation or invitation, how might our arts sector lead extraordinary change by doing what our governments wont and writing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in the constitutions of your organisations? What might that look like? And what change might that bring?