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Bakhtin's Theory of the Utterance and Dhalwangu *Manikay*¹

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Ian Keen's groundbreaking work on Yolngu sociality is based on the fundamental premise of indeterminacy and heterogeneity in culture and practice, the idea that there is no sense of a singular 'Yolngu identity'. Yolngu social practices exhibited 'a mosaic distribution of variant forms' (Keen 1994: 4), and Keen emphasised that a 'relativity of perspectives was at the heart of Yolngu religious and other practices' (ibid.: 6). Although Yolngu people across northeast Arnhem Land developed shared forms of religious and social practice, these shared forms were interpreted differently, groups were distinguished by deliberately created differences, and 'systematic ambiguity was one basis for the constitution of religious mystery and secret knowledge' (ibid.: 7). Keen goes on to write:

The enactment of practices, institutions, and relations thus entails a constant interplay of utterance and interpretation, misinterpretation as judged by a speaker (or bystander), and deceit. Forms of expression and application of expressions are constantly subject to new, inventive, ill-informed, or aberrant recombination and extension ... But more fundamentally, perhaps no linguistic expression has an invariant interpretation; its 'fit' with the world is to a degree uncertain and contestable among users. (ibid.: 12)

1 My first introduction to Bakhtin came at the suggestion of the anthropologist Alan Mason, who supervised my honours thesis before I came under Ian Keen's tutelage. I had sent Alan a draft of some of my writing while I was conducting my fieldwork in Gapuwiyak, and his very perceptive comments included a suggestion that Bakhtin's work might prove to be useful. This chapter is dedicated to him.

Keen has made these premises the basis for much of his writing on Yolngu society: first, in an extended analysis of Yolngu religious practice, whereby ambiguity allows for the control of religious knowledge; and second, in his important reconceptualisation of Yolngu sociality (1995), which resists the unitary interpretations of Yolngu social forms that characterise much of the ethnographic literature.

In an otherwise favourable review of *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion*, Fred Myers calls for greater attention to the work of linguistic anthropologists working on communication and interaction as a way of furthering these analytical aims, and he specifically mentions Bakhtin's theory of the utterance in this connection (Myers 1995: 160). In my own research and writing, I have been interested in extending Keen's insights into Yolngu sociality, and have also seen Bakhtin's ideas as a possible way forward. Elsewhere I have written that Bakhtin's ideas on dialogism and heteroglossia have many significant parallels with Keen's analysis of the negotiation of shared religious forms (Toner 2005a: 41–2). In this chapter I would like to continue down that path that was inspired by Keen's work, and focus specifically on the theory of the utterance developed by Bakhtin and his contemporaries. Taking Keen's emphasis on heterogeneity and indeterminacy as a starting point for my analysis of Yolngu society, I argue that the ritual music of the Dhalwangu people of Gapuwiyak is best understood through the framework of the Bakhtinian utterance.² Not only are Dhalwangu *manikay* best understood as utterances in Bakhtin's sense, but the prominent place of *manikay* in Dhalwangu ritual life can be construed as one of the building blocks for social life more generally, in a manner consistent with Keen's own interpretation.

The Bakhtin Circle³

At the very heart of much of the work of the 'Bakhtin Circle' is an attempt to transcend subjectivism and objectivism in the study of language and, by extension, in the study of literature and of social life. As Gary Saul Morson has written:

Most of the social sciences have been plagued, before Bakhtin and since, with a recurring problem: Which is the fundamental unit, the individual or the group?

² I am not the first scholar to make use of the work of the Bakhtin Circle in analysing Yolngu culture; in his analysis of Yolngu bark painting, Howard Morphy (1991: 126) drew upon Vološinov's distinction between meaning and theme.

³ On the question of the 'disputed texts' attributed by some scholars to Bakhtin but published under the names of Vološinov and Medvedev, I adopt the position outlined by Dentith (1995: 8–10) that it is sensible to group these three writers together because of the important similarities in their thought, but that the evidence is not conclusive enough simply to attribute those texts to Bakhtin.

Whichever you choose, you tend to resolve the other into it. One choice leads to an enormous underestimation of the role of individual action, as with most Marxists; the other, to an insufficient appreciation of the manifold social factors which really make us who we are. Bakhtin's idea was to find a new minimal unit of social analysis ... from which both the social and the individual, the macro- and the micro-, the systematic and the unsystematic could be derived ... The double-voiced word, the dialogic utterance, would be such a unit and could form the basis for the general science of culture and for its constituent disciplines. (1986: 7–8)

The Bakhtinian position on language and language philosophy is perhaps best articulated in Vološinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. As with practice theorists like Bourdieu and Giddens who came after him (and whom I discuss later in this chapter), Vološinov is critical of both 'idealism', which locates consciousness somewhere above existence, and 'psychological positivism', which locates it in psychophysiological reactions. He writes that the real place of existence of the ideological 'is in the special, social material of signs created by man. Its specificity consists precisely in its being located between organised individuals, in its being the medium of their communication' (Vološinov 1973: 12). Continuing in a vein that is germane to Keen's analysis of Yolngu sociality, Vološinov writes that the interpretation of the sign within its social situation may help to resolve debates concerning the primacy of either the psyche or ideology:

Each word, as we know, is a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces ... Thus, the psyche and ideology dialectically interpenetrate in the unitary and objective process of social intercourse. (ibid.: 41)

Vološinov carries on a sustained critique of both extremes of the debate on language, each of which ignores the value of the social. In individualistic subjectivism, typified for Vološinov by Wilhelm von Humboldt, 'the laws of language creativity are the laws of individual psychology' (ibid.: 48), whereas in abstract objectivism, typified by Ferdinand de Saussure, language is based on a ready-made system of grammatical, phonetic, and lexical forms (ibid.: 52). For Vološinov, neither perspective does justice to language as a complex system that is social at its core. He seems to regard abstract objectivism as the greater threat as he devotes more time to its critique, in particular its view of language as a synchronic system. Vološinov writes that such a synchronic system of language can only exist in 'the subjective consciousness of an individual speaker belonging to some particular language group at some particular moment of historical time' (ibid.: 66) and not in any objective sense; likewise, Vološinov states that systems of social norms occupy an analogous position (ibid.).

These views are particularly important in the reassessment of Yolngu sociality along the lines suggested by Ian Keen in his critique of more systematic models of Yolngu society, and so I will quote Vološinov at some length:

The speaker's subjective consciousness does not in the least operate with language as a system of normatively identical forms. That system is merely an abstraction arrived [at] with a good deal of trouble and with a definite cognitive and practical focus of attention. The system of language is the product of deliberation on language, and deliberation of a kind by no means carried out by the consciousness of the native speaker himself and by no means carried out for the immediate purpose of speaking.

In point of fact, the speaker's focus of attention is brought about in line with the particular, concrete utterance he is making. What matters to him is applying a normatively identical form (let us grant there is such a thing for the time being) in some particular, concrete context. For him, the center of gravity lies not in the identity of the form but in that new and concrete meaning it acquires in the particular context. What the speaker values is not that aspect of the form which is invariably identical in all instances of its usage, despite the nature of those instances, but that aspect of the linguistic form because of which it can figure in the given, concrete context, because of which it becomes a sign adequate to the conditions of the given, concrete situation.

We can express it this way: what is important for the speaker about a linguistic form is not that it is a stable and always self-equivalent signal, but that it is an always changeable and adaptable sign.

The task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e. it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity.

In other words, the understander, belonging to the same language community, also is attuned to the linguistic form not as a fixed, self-identical signal, but as a changeable and adaptable sign. (ibid.: 67–8)

This passage seems admirably well-suited to the perspective on Yolngu sociality that I have tried to develop elsewhere (Toner 2003a) and which I am trying to advance here, providing that we are willing, with Vološinov, to extend the consideration of language to a broader discussion of sociality. An individual's self-conception is partly influenced by ideas about the persistence and regularity of social groups and other 'systemic' or 'structural' aspects of society, but we must also recognise that named groups and ideas about them do not determine individual social practice in any absolute way. What is significant in a ritual context like a funeral, for example, is not the participation of 'the Dhalwangu' or 'the Munyuku' in an abstract sense, but rather in the participation of particular Dhalwangu or Munyuku people, related to the deceased and to each other

in particular ways, and articulating their sociality through particular songs, melodies, and rhythms. What is significant to a person in this situation is not the formal qualities or structures of the Dhalwangu as one group in 'a system of normatively identical forms', but the meaning that being Dhalwangu takes on in that ritual context. The key is to focus our attention on sociality in use, as it is in use that both the systemic and individual aspects of sociality come together (cf. Dentith 1995: 28). Yolngu sociality does have a systematic character, but it must be completed, refuted, or altered in social practice.

An important point discussed by Vološinov is the evaluative orientation taken towards another's utterance, which is an essential feature of dialogic understanding. Vološinov writes that the process of understanding another's words involves 'lay[ing] down a set of our own answering words' (Vološinov 1973: 102). He continues:

Everything vital in the evaluative reception of another's utterance, everything of any ideological value, is expressed in the material of inner speech. After all, it is not a mute, wordless creature that receives such an utterance, but a human being full of inner words. All his experiences—his so-called apperceptive background—exist coded in his inner speech, and only to that extent do they come into contact with speech received from the outside. Word comes into contact with word. The context of this inner speech is the locale in which another's utterance is received, comprehended, and evaluated; it is where the speaker's active orientation takes place. (ibid.: 118)

To extend this insight to the study of Yolngu sociality, we might say that every individual's inner speech includes his or her 'apperceptive background' of previous social experience: previous rituals, social situations, and of course statements about sociality—what one might call a person's 'conceptual' social structure. New social acts—statements, songs, rituals—are received against this background and evaluated against it, and a reply is generated, whether of agreement, disagreement, cooperation, or conflict.

For many making use of Bakhtin, the classic text is the long essay 'Discourse in the Novel' (1981), written in 1934–35. The 'social diversity of speech types' (1981: 263) is one of the key themes of the essay—for Bakhtin, any language is broken down into social dialects and languages used by different professions, age groups, and classes, and the novel itself is organised according to this diversity (ibid.: 262–3). Bakhtin refers to such linguistic and social diversity by the term *heteroglossia*, and states that it is 'the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel' (ibid.: 263). The heteroglossia of the novel stands in contrast to the unitary language system represented by, for instance, poetic genres (ibid.: 264). Bakhtin posits that the philosophy of language and traditional stylistics, based

on unitary language and the individual monologic utterance, is inadequate for the understanding of both language as a heteroglossic phenomenon and of the novel as a heteroglossic artistic genre.

The philosophy of language oriented toward a centralising view of language, such as Saussure's, ignored the dialogic nature of language, 'which was a struggle among sociolinguistic points of view' (ibid.: 273), preferring instead to seek 'unity in diversity' (ibid.: 274). Of much anthropological theory concerning the nature of social groups, we might write with Bakhtin:

This exclusive 'orientation toward unity' in the present and past life of languages has concentrated the attention of philosophical and linguistic thought on the firmest, most stable, least changeable and most mono-semantic aspects of discourse—on the phonetic aspects first of all—that are furthest removed from the changing socio-semantic spheres of discourse. Real ideologically saturated 'language consciousness', one that participates in actual heteroglossia and multi-linguagedness, has remained outside its field of vision. (ibid.: 274)

This is reminiscent of Keen's critique of the 'orthodox model' of Australian Aboriginal social organisation, in that there has been a similar orientation toward the stable features of sociality to the exclusion of a dynamic social heteroglossia. As Keen writes, 'It has long been unsafe to assume a fundamental uniformity in Aboriginal social arrangements' (Keen 2000: 39).

In treating language as a unitary system, Saussurian linguistics views the word as neutral and as belonging to nobody in particular. Bakhtin, in contrast, points out that 'no word relates to its object in a singular way' (Bakhtin 1981: 276) but rather exists in a dynamic environment of other words about the same object. In this context of active engagement with other words, an utterance may enter into all manner of diverse relationships with them: agreement, disagreement, merging, resistance (ibid.). Yolngu social utterances may take a wide variety of forms, from actual statements about sociality, to social action in a ritual context, to the 'text' of a ritual (the sequence of songs, dances, and ritual episodes), to individual musical performances. Each of these can be understood as an utterance whose object is Yolngu sociality itself, and which contributes to a continually emerging Yolngu social theory—after all, anthropologists aren't the only social theorists around. These utterances concerning Yolngu sociality enter 'a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment' (ibid.: 276) of other utterances by other Yolngu. None of these is definitive, but each makes a unique contribution to an unfolding social dialogue.

Let us suppose that a Yolngu person passes away and his or her funeral is organised. The deceased occupies a node in a social network that indicates the potential involvement of a range of people. Some of these people will decide to participate in the ritual, and they themselves will mobilise a social network

of particular kin to join them. Others will decline to participate for a range of reasons and thus fail to mobilise other portions of the social network; still others will step in to fill the void. Once involved, senior men and women will discuss the overall structure of the ritual and how different groups will be involved. For instance, moving the body, painting the coffin, marking the grave, building a shelter in which to keep the body, and many other facets of the ritual all involve performances that will involve particular people. During each of these performances, particular songs and dances will be chosen, and each individual song will be performed using particular musical features, such as melody and rhythm, and using particular words and phrases in their song texts. At every stage and level of organisation, and in every aspect of performance, Yolngu are making social utterances, statements (whether verbal or not) about the nature of the social world and their place in it. These are not mere 'expressions' of an underlying 'social structure', but strategic orientations in an interminable social dialogue. When a singer names the people and places associated with a particular patrilineal identity in a song, or uses a distinctive melody associated with that identity (cf. Toner 2003a), he is in effect positing a relationship between those people and himself. This utterance enters an ongoing dialogue about the relations between those identities, and it may reinforce some utterances and contradict others. Other singers present may contribute to this conception of sociality through their song texts, or they may put forward alternatives. This social dialogue continues during the performance, and in other performances during the same ritual, and in other rituals. At no point is a definitive version established, but these events feed into each person's conception about the Yolngu social universe and their place in it.

A Bakhtinian approach to Yolngu sociality, then, is one that requires striking a new balance between structure and agency. While recognising the undeniable fact that certain features of Yolngu social life have a systemic and persistent nature, such an approach must also resist the kind of centralising, structuralist interpretation that has also been applied to language. Sociality can only be thought of as unitary when it is treated as an abstract social system of normative forms taken in isolation from concrete social life. An abstract social system—such as a system of Yolngu 'clans'—is, in actual social life, a multitude of social identities which each have their own semantic and ideological content. The language of Yolngu sociality is not neutral; it exists 'in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions' (Bakhtin 1981: 294), and it must be appropriated by each individual to be put to their own ends. Social action, in ritual, musical, and other contexts, is the site of intersubjective struggles over meaning.

A view of Yolngu sociality which accepts in an uncritical way the 'clan' as the main unit of social organisation is one which seeks, or accepts, 'fixed and specific socially typical ... traits' (Bakhtin 1984: 47); in this view, the 'clan' becomes the focus of 'unambiguous and objective features' (ibid.) which define a person's social identity in a normative way.⁴ One alternative is to examine the ways in which individual social agents develop their perspectives on the social world around them, and on their own sense of self, through an unending dialogue with others. When individual agents make decisions in social or ritual life, those decisions are shot through with the words of others; other people's ideas about sociality inevitably permeate one's thinking, meaning that social action is inherently intersubjective. Thus dialogue is an essential aspect of human being. Bakhtin writes that, for Dostoevsky, dialogue is not a means but an end in itself, and is not a threshold to action but action itself (ibid.: 252). He writes that dialogue

is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is—and, we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. (ibid.)

So the crux of the matter is that Yolngu social dialogue, or the musical dialogue that I am particularly interested in, is not a coming together of completed social identities; rather, it is through these dialogues that those social identities are actually generated. This is an ongoing process in Yolngu social life, but one that is especially notable in musical performances.

An important distinction in Bakhtin's writing, which he elaborates in detail in his essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres', is the difference between sentences and utterances. Bakhtin writes that there is no neutral, passive listener who simply receives another person's words; rather, listeners always take an active, responsive attitude, agreeing with or disagreeing with, acting on or not acting on what was said (Bakhtin 1986: 68). What is more, the speaker is oriented toward that responsiveness and fully expects it (ibid.: 69). The speaker is also a respondent to previous words, not 'the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe' (ibid.). It is this dynamic theory of language which leads Bakhtin to define the utterance as 'the real unit of speech communication' (ibid.: 71). The utterance has boundaries that are determined by a change of speaker, preceded by other people's utterances, and followed by other people's utterances (ibid.). In contrast, the sentence is a unit of language, and 'as a language unit is

4 It is certainly possible to develop a critical, dynamic, and ethnographically informed view of the Yolngu 'clan' while continuing to use that term. Howard Morphy, for example, grapples in a very productive way with the nature of Yolngu sociality and how best to understand it, but he opts in the end to continue to use the term 'clan' (Morphy 1990, 1997).

grammatical in nature' (ibid.: 74). This distinction between language as a system and language in use is helpful in considering the interplay between systematic and practical aspects of Yolngu sociality. Bakhtin writes:

The sentence, like the word, has a finality of meaning and a finality of grammatical form, but this finality of meaning is abstract by nature and this is precisely why it is so clear-cut: this is the finality of an element, but not of the whole. The sentence as a unit of language, like the word, has no author. Like the word, it belongs to nobody, and only by functioning as a whole utterance does it become an expression of the position of someone speaking individually in a concrete situation of speech communication. (ibid.: 83–4)

Again, we can rework the principles of Bakhtin's thought to think about the way Yolngu people interrelate. It is possible for anthropologists to think about Yolngu sociality in terms of abstract, neutral groups and their 'grammatical' interrelations, to construct *sentences* about Yolngu social life. In concrete social situations, however, Yolngu people construct *utterances* that are positioned, responsive, and part of an ongoing give-and-take of other utterances. The persistent and systemic features of Yolngu sociality are utterances that have been perpetuated more successfully, more widely, more influentially, and over a greater period of time, such that they are reiterated and reinforced by others in their own utterances. As Bakhtin writes, 'When we select words in the process of constructing an utterance, we by no means always take them from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form. We usually take them from other utterances' (ibid.: 87). In other words, Yolngu sociality is profoundly influenced by the social utterances of other Yolngu people: the actions and words of others feed into the sense of self of every individual, subtly changing their concept of the Yolngu social world and influencing their responding social utterances. Bakhtin writes: 'Our speech ... is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness", varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate' (ibid.: 89).

Although they are not identical, Bakhtin's intellectual project covers some of the same ground as practice theory, a point that deserves some discussion here. Numerous scholars have noted important points of comparison between Bakhtin and Bourdieu (Hanks 1987; Holton 2000: 92; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain 2001; Myles 2010: 49–50; Myles 2013). Among its aims, practice theory also seeks to transcend the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism. As I have written elsewhere, Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* and Giddens' theory of structuration both investigate the ways in which social actors work within the confines of particular structures, but whose social action itself plays a part in reinforcing or reconfiguring those structures—in other words, social systems

and individuals exist in a dynamic relationship in which neither can be said to determine the other (Toner 2003a: 79–81). More recently, Anthony King has criticised both Giddens and Bourdieu for lapsing into the objectivism they set out to critique: Giddens by continuing to draw upon a notion of structure (as in his concept of ‘duality of structure’) that is incompatible with his theoretically important idea of ‘practical consciousness’ (King 2000a); and Bourdieu by moving beyond his very useful concept of ‘practical theory’ into the a priori and deterministic structures of the *habitus* (King 2000b).

In both cases, King feels that Giddens and Bourdieu have developed genuinely important strategies for addressing the agency-structure debate, but have undermined those insights by recourse to notions of ‘structure’ that he feels are unnecessary. Giddens’ ‘practical consciousness’ emphasises the shared understandings between individuals that allow people to know ‘how to go on’ in social life because, like Wittgenstein, he recognises that ‘the final tribunal for action is not abstract reason but other individuals, engaged in a form of life, who mutually decide, given certain self-understandings, what constitutes appropriate practice’ (King 2000a: 366). Similarly, although the concept of the *habitus* represents a relapse into structure and objectivism, Bourdieu’s ‘practical theory’ emphasises the idea that ‘social agents are “virtuosos” ... who are not dominated by some abstract social principles but who know the script so well that they can elaborate and improvise upon the themes which it provides and in the light of their relations to others’ (King 2000b: 419). In both cases, the meaning of social practices is generated intersubjectively, which is why King concludes that their social theories have much to offer despite certain problems. Writing of Bourdieu’s ‘practical theory’ King concludes:

Social life is the mutually negotiated network of interactions and practices between individuals which is always necessarily open to strategic transformation ... All individual practice and the understandings which inform that practice are always social; they are always learnt from others and performed in reference to others, requiring the understanding of other individuals, even if a particular individual might reject and ignore that interpretation ... The intersubjective social context in which we are always already thrown constrains our practices and ensures that any practice we perform is social—it is always derived from shared understandings—but that context does not determine exactly what we will do or exactly what it is appropriate to do under any circumstance. We can never perform a pristine, individual act (as Sartre’s existentialism wrongly demands), but there is always indeterminacy in the relations between individuals, which allows for intersubjectively meaningful but creative social action. (King 2000b: 431)

This passage is very reminiscent of a number of important features of Bakhtinian thought outlined above, and points to some productive links between Bakhtin and practice theory in the reinterpretation of social life.

So to summarise the position that I am adopting: the features of Yolngu social organisation that we may recognise as persistent, systemic, or 'structural' are those that have been reiterated and reinforced by a large number of utterances over a long period of time, and which consequently may have considerable influence over subsequent utterances. The Yolngu term *bäpurru*, to consider just one type of social identity, is used in conjunction with proper names to refer to an individual's concept of his or her social world and the kinds of people that are in it; at any point in time, an agent responds to pre-existing utterances about named *bäpurru* like 'Dhalwangu' with his or her own utterances about that identity, how it is constituted, how it relates to other identities, and what it means to partake of such an identity. Clearly, a certain degree of consensus in utterances over time by different people produces a systemic effect that plays an important part in shaping how individuals go about their lives and interact with others, especially under the guidance of the powerful and influential—another point emphasised by Keen (1994: 11–2). The key point is that both structure and agency are meaningfully understood in the intersubjectivity of actual social situations. Individuals base their concept of society and their place in it largely on the utterances of other people, such as their elders or contemporaries, and especially members of previous generations. These utterances are sometimes verbal, but may often take the form of what we might call 'social utterances' such as marriages or ritual performances. When individuals go into social situations such as musical performances, their own utterances respond to all those which came before, and they anticipate the active responsive understanding of those around them. These others may, through their own utterances, agree with their point of view, or disagree, or effect subtle alterations. So Yolngu sociality is neither an objective all-determining structure nor a subjective creation of an isolated individual, but a robust dialogical interaction.

Sociality thus constructed is not a singular thing but a multiple one. Yolngu people go into social situations with a variety of different ways of conceiving of their place in the world, and all of these different ways exist simultaneously, although in particular contexts one identity may take temporary precedence over the others. But in ritual musical performances, it is often the case that many identities are articulated almost at once.

The Utterance in Yolngu Ritual Music: *Manikay* as a Speech Genre

In what ways can we construe Bakhtin's utterance as an appropriate analytical unit in better understanding Yolngu music? As stated above, for Bakhtin the utterance is where language is realised in various aspects of human activity;

he writes, 'Language enters life through concrete utterances (which manifest language) and life enters language through concrete utterances as well' (Bakhtin 1986: 63). He identifies three aspects of the utterance for focused attention—thematic content, style, and compositional structure—noting that all three are linked to the whole of the utterance. Furthermore, although every individual utterance is unique, there are relatively stable (although extremely heterogeneous) forms of utterance associated with different spheres of language use, which he calls speech genres (ibid.: 60). He distinguishes between primary (simple) and secondary (complex) speech genres, noting that the latter (including the novel) 'arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and organised cultural communication' and are made up of various primary genres 'that have taken form in unmediated speech communication' (ibid.: 62). He notes further that primary speech genres 'are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones' (ibid.), such as the difference between a rejoinder of everyday dialogue in the context of a novel and the same rejoinder in real life.

Bakhtin notes the important relationship between style and the utterance in its typical form as manifested in different speech genres. The individual style of a speaker or writer is characteristic of individual utterances, especially in artistic speech genres that do not require standard forms; indeed, in artistic speech genres, style enters into the very intent of the utterance. Bakhtin notes that style is also operative at the level of language styles (or functional styles) that correspond to particular genres and their generic unity, and indicates further that we must also consider historical changes in language styles as complex systems. Bakhtin also states that, although grammar can be considered separately from style, at the level of the individual utterance the two converge, as a speaker's choice of grammatical form is also a stylistic choice (ibid.: 63–6).

The form of song performed in the context of most public rituals in Yolngu society is known as *manikay*. Performed by one or more (sometimes many more) vocalists accompanying themselves with hardwood clapsticks called *bilma*, together with a single didjeridu (*yidaki*) player, *manikay* recount activities and events which occurred in a long-ago creative era known as the *wangarr*, when ancestral beings (also known as *wangarr*) walked the earth, gave it its particular features, gave birth to human groups, and created social institutions. Individual performances of songs (song items) are quite short, usually 20 to 30 seconds in length but sometimes up to around two minutes, and are separated from other song items by periods of talking, drinking a beverage, or smoking a cigarette. Each song item uses short and elliptical phrases to describe some particular aspect of an ancestral being or its activities in a particular place. Sets of three to six song items (song versions) focus on similar poetic themes and use the same clapstick rhythm, and from two to five different song versions are almost always performed in the poetic description of some ancestral animal, plant,

human, or meteorological phenomenon (the song subject). So, for example, a song subject about a particular freshwater stream may be performed in four different rhythmic settings (song versions), each developing some particular poetic theme pertaining to those waters (first bubbling up from underground springs, then beginning to flow, then swirling, and finally becoming calm); each of these song versions may be performed four or five times before moving on to the next. An entire performance of a song series can consist of perhaps 15 to 20 song subjects, and can take three to four hours to complete.

Manikay are well described as a type of secondary (complex) speech genre in Bakhtin's sense. They are composed of words and phrases often used in everyday life (primary speech genres), although they can also include certain words and phrases that only occur in ritual musical contexts. As a type of speech genre, *manikay* exhibit thematic content in their articulation of ancestral narratives (albeit in a more elliptical form than spoken narratives about the same ancestral beings and events); they consist of specific compositional structures that are unique to this artistic form, namely image, modal, formal, contiguity, and analogical tropes (Friedrich 1991, Toner 2005b); and they display elements of style at both the individual and generic level. Most importantly, performances of *manikay* display those dialogical elements that are so important to Bakhtin's overall scholarly and philosophical project: an active, responsive attitude on the part of the listener; the orientation of the singer toward the expectation of such a responsive listener; and the recognition that the singer is responding to utterances that came before him, both as individual utterances and in terms of the language system as a whole (Bakhtin 1986: 68–9). Individual singers of *manikay* use utterances consisting of strings of words and phrases to articulate some particular aspect of the song subject, and these concrete utterances have definite boundaries marked by a change in singer (ibid.: 71), although in *manikay* the utterances of different singers often overlap as strict turn-taking is not a feature of Yolngu singing. The utterances of *manikay* also display a second constitutive feature of the utterance, its finalisation that indicates that a speaker has said all that he wishes to at that moment (ibid.: 76). In the case of *manikay*, that finalisation is most often signalled musically by the end of a distinctive melodic phrase (see Toner 2003a). And these utterances are all linked to one another and to the extraverbal context of the performance (Bakhtin 1986: 72–3). Additionally, not only are a singer's individual phrases to be understood as utterances with these features, but also performances of song series as wholes are utterances at a broader and more complex level—these 'work-utterances' (ibid.: 76) respond to previous performances of the 'same' song series ('same' in the sense of bearing the same name and relating to the same ancestrally significant place), and anticipate the responses of future performances.

Bakhtin writes that the finalised wholeness of the utterance, which guarantees the possibility of a response, is determined by three factors linked in the utterance as a whole. The first is 'the referential or semantic exhaustiveness of the theme of the utterance' (ibid.: 77) which, in artistic genres like *manikay*, is only relative, 'a certain minimum of finalisation making it possible to occupy a responsive position' (ibid.). The second factor, necessarily linked to the first, is the speaker's 'speech plan' or 'speech will' that determines its length and boundaries and marks 'what the speaker *wishes* to say' (ibid.). The third factor is the choice of a particular speech genre, in this case *manikay*, which gives shape to the speaker's (singer's) speech plan and which has 'definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*' (ibid.: 78). In other words, Yolngu singers articulate their understanding of ancestral and social realities in particular generically stable ways in performances of *manikay*, recognising that the same ancestral and social realities can also be articulated in other stable generic forms (oral narrative, painting, dance, etc.).

Utterances in the Gurrumuru *Wängangur* Song Series

It remains to demonstrate exactly how performances of *manikay* can be understood as utterances. To do this, I will examine selected song texts from a 1996 performance of a song series called Gurrumuru *Wängangur*. Gurrumuru is one of the most significant places in the cosmology of the Dhalwangu people of Gapuwiyak, and the word *wängangur* ('at the camp') refers to ancestral events that took place right at the place where Dhalwangu ancestors lived during the *wangarr* era. The song subjects making up this song series consist of a range of ancestral activities (talking, walking, sitting, sleeping, fighting) and naturally occurring phenomena (flies, bush fowl, the north wind), but most notably items of material culture used by Dhalwangu ancestors (knives, tobacco, cloth, drums, mouth organs, cards, alcohol, rice, and flags). These objects were first introduced by Indonesian seafarers who visited the north coast of Arnhem Land searching for trepang, or sea cucumber, but they have become 'mythologised' and now are considered to 'belong' to the Yolngu ancestral being Birrinydji (Toner 2000). The overarching narrative on which this song series (and a number of others as well) is based describes an ancestral ship travelling from Numbulwar, to the south of the Yolngu region, along the coast to the north, around the Gove Peninsula, into Arnhem Bay, and down the Gurrumuru River, where it dropped its anchor.

Song textual utterances in this performance certainly demonstrate the features that Bakhtin posited for utterances generally. When individual phrases of different song items are analysed carefully, one can identify responsiveness on

the part of each singer as he⁵ listens to the phrases of others singers and formulates his own phrases in response. There are at least four types of responsiveness evident in this performance, which I will designate by the terms repetition, expansion, elaboration, and contestation.

In repetition, a singer hears another man using a particular word or phrase before him, and decides to incorporate the same word or phrase into his own song textual utterance. In one song item of the song subject *ngarali* (tobacco), for example, an initial phrase by the first singer was repeated by a second singer (which the first singer also repeated):

<i>gatjala</i>	<i>Bambangbuy</i>	<i>gatjala</i>	<i>Bambangbuy</i>
	<i>ah</i>	<i>gatjala</i>	<i>Bambangbuy</i>
tobacco	from Bambang ⁶	tobacco	from Bambang
	ah	tobacco	from Bambang

In another example, two singers initially sang at the same time but using different phrases, but the second singer continued by repeating the initial phrase of the first singer:

<i>marrngur</i>	<i>ditjburrkngur</i>	<i>murraygamanytja</i>			
<i>dhiyala</i>	<i>ngali</i>	<i>wurruku</i>	<i>marrngur</i>	<i>ditjburrkngur</i>	<i>murraygam</i>
at	at the home of the knives	sleep			
here	we	will	at	at the home of	sleep
				the knives	

More common is expansion, in which a singer will use another singer's utterance as a springboard for a poetically similar but expanded utterance using the same poetic form. In the song *matha* (talking), one singer's utterance was:

<i>dhiwilyun</i>	<i>dhiwilyun</i>	<i>lamutja</i>
talking	talking	talking

followed immediately by a second singer:

<i>marrtjila</i>	<i>dhiwil</i>	<i>dhiwilyun</i>	<i>nyilbum</i>	<i>wanga</i>	<i>Dharulya</i>
talking	talking	talking	talking	talk	people of Gurrumuru

5 Singers of *manikay* are always men, although women perform a poetically very similar but a cappella form called *ngäthi*.

6 This is an alternate name for Gurrumuru.

In this case, the word *dhiwilyun* (talking), used twice by the first singer, was then used by the second singer in the same form and in a grammatically altered form, in addition to a number of different words with the same meaning. In another example, a singer performing the song subject *dhamburru* (drum) used the phrase:

<i>djingarra</i>	<i>miwurryun</i>	<i>miday</i>	<i>miday</i>
the sound	the sound	drum	drum

followed immediately by a second singer's expansion upon his imagery:

<i>djingarra</i>	<i>miwurryun</i>	<i>guywuyun</i>	<i>wagalwuy</i>	<i>binydjan</i>	<i>liyawinydjan</i>	<i>Mayarra</i>
the sound	the sound	the sound	for fun	at	at	Mayarra ⁷

In this case, the first singer's emphasis on the sound of the drum was expanded upon by the second singer's indication of the purpose and the location of the drumming.

Very often, a number of singers will build upon each other's utterances, each adding a new and unique dimension to the narrative, but nevertheless attempting to fit in with the previous singers' 'speech plan', which can be referred to as elaboration. In one song item of the song subject *yiki* (knife), the first singer's utterance was:

<i>Gubanytji</i>	<i>Gubanytji</i>	<i>lirrbum</i>	<i>dhangatjayan</i>
Gubanytji ⁸	Gubanytji	clearing ⁹	clearing

responded to and elaborated upon by the second singer:

<i>Gunirima</i>	<i>Dharrwalawal</i>	<i>lirrbum</i>	<i>nganya</i>	<i>yuwukurr</i>
Gunurima ¹⁰	Dharrwalawal ¹¹	clearing	that	while talking

In this case, only one word used by the first singer was repeated by the second. However, it is clear that the basic poetic theme of 'clearing the camp at Gurrumuru' was elaborated upon by the second singer in his use of two additional alternate names for that place, a deictic word, and an additional image of the ancestors not only clearing the camp, but talking while they did so.

⁷ Another alternate name for Gurrumuru.

⁸ Another alternate name for Gurrumuru.

⁹ i.e. using the knife to clear away the brush in the camp.

¹⁰ Another alternate name for Gurrumuru.

¹¹ Another alternate name for Gurrumuru.

In another example from the *ngarali* (tobacco) song, the first singer's phrase

<i>warali</i>	<i>gatjala</i>	<i>warali</i>	<i>Bambangbuy</i>	<i>warali</i>	<i>warali</i>	<i>Mayarra</i>
tobacco	tobacco	tobacco	from Bambang	tobacco	tobacco	Mayarra

was followed by a second singer:

<i>gatjala</i>	<i>warali</i>	<i>wikun</i>	<i>marrtji</i>	<i>bulutjuwurr</i>	<i>warali</i>	<i>waralinyga</i>
tobacco	tobacco	smoking	smoking	through the beard	tobacco	tobacco

Again, some compelling additional imagery allowed the second singer to take the basic idea of Dhalwangu ancestors smoking tobacco at Gurrumuru, and to develop the elaborated visual image of the smoke from the tobacco appearing to come out through the men's beards.

In the *nhina* (sitting) song subject, one singer's phrase

<i>wayuklil</i>	<i>nhinanytja</i>	<i>maḍaywal</i>	<i>narrpiya</i>	<i>garrathawal</i>	<i>ganburrkwudhun</i>
on the arm	we sit	octopus	octopus	octopus	sit down

was matched by a second singer's contrasting imagery:

<i>nhina</i>	<i>bukman</i>	<i>ngamangamayun</i>	<i>marrlil</i>	<i>lukuwurrngulil</i>
sit	properly	properly	sit on	on the anchor

In this case, both singers are referring to 'the foundations' of Gurrumuru as an ancestrally significant place by indicating the most sacred ancestral beings associated with that place. The river mouth of Gurrumuru, on the coast of Arnhem Bay, is the subject of a separate song series known as Yikari (the name of that place), and the subjects of that song series (including *narrpiya*, the octopus) describe animals, objects, and other beings that exist in that part of the river and the associated coastline. *Narrpiya* is among the most important subjects of that song series, and is considered to be an icon of Dhalwangu identity. The anchor, *lukuwurrngu* or *ḍjalkiri*, is another centrally important and sacred symbol of Dhalwangu identity, referring to the ship's anchor, believed to lie beneath the soil of Gurrumuru. The first singer's reference to one important symbol of Dhalwangu identity led to an elaborated response on the part of the second singer in his reference to a second important symbol. The centrality of these two particular symbols is confirmed by imagery used in Dhalwangu funerals, in which flags decorating the shade in which a dead body is kept lying in state may depict images of octopuses or anchors, among other symbols.

Sometimes, a singer's utterance is a form of contestation, in the sense that personal rivalries can result in one singer either trying to displace the imagery of another singer by replacing it with quite different tropes, or else ignoring that singer completely. In the case of this performance, two of the singers had a rather tense relationship, one being an older, more experienced, but arguably less talented singer, and the other being a younger, up-and-coming talent. In this particular performance, there were a number of occasions where the younger singer was developing a particular set of poetic images, only to have the older singer come in over the top of him with a forceful delivery of quite different and incompatible imagery. One example comes from the *yiki* (knife) song:

<i>nyarkun</i>	<i>yukurr</i> <i>nhathin</i>	<i>bilaram</i> <i>dhay'yi</i>	<i>nyarkirrirngu</i> <i>dharrumbanytja</i>	<i>lingulingu</i>
sound	is how	sound this	sound clearing	clearing

In this case, the older singer cannot be said to be expanding upon the younger singer's phrase: not only is the second set of images quite different from the first (which focused on the sound of the knives clashing together), but the delivery itself was rather overpowering and not attentive to the younger singer's phrasing—in other words, he barged in and asserted his own utterance as an aggressive form of contrast or contestation with the immediately previous utterance. And in case there was any doubt of this interpretation, the younger singer pointed it out to me repeatedly when we later listened to the recording. However, even contestation is a form of responsiveness, as Bakhtin never implied that speakers always agree with one another.

With these different forms of responsiveness in mind, we can better appreciate the various ways in which *manikay* can be understood to be composed of many different utterances, interconnected with one another in the midst of performance. Far from being a musical and poetic tradition in which singers are shackled to fixed poetic forms, performances of *manikay* display in a condensed form the dialogic nature of Yolngu sociality that exists more generally. The following transcription of one entire song item of the *garrurru* (flag) song is highly elaborated, but representative of Dhalwangu musical interactions. This performance was somewhat more 'staged' than others, with the singers organising in advance who would sing and in what order, because they were going to give the recording to a visiting relative as a gift. The different singers are each designated with a letter.

- a. *garrurru Balawarrwarrngur garrurru ngarrakuntja Mitjbaralngur Garruburrangur*

ngubar ngarra lalanga dhananytja wilirr dhananytja ngarra lalangur ngunhunyitja dutjunmarang

garrurru ngarrakuntja wuyupun marrtji dhanggala mariwuy minytjinytja bundabunda warrgariny

- b. *ngarranydja warwuyun bingur buwapungal mathamirr dhangarrurru Gundjiwundji Wurindiwuy*

- c. *mathamirrdhan gunarangmirr miwatjdhan galawangmirr miwatjdhan garrurru Ngulpurrngur Dhaparawungur*

- d. *buwapum djalawa buwapum djalawa bingur ngarra buwapum Bambangur bili Bambang dhay'yi manydjarrka*

- e. *balandi nganguntja garrayiltjilyunar dhanggala wurrandjuna*

chorus: *ya gutharra warwu ngarra yawugay ya gutharra warwu ngarra laka marrilaka dhalalalalalala marrangmadji*

- f. *wanggaynguntja ngurukuy ganygulba dhanytja ngalimurr marrtji djalaywu nhathin dhay'yi minytjinytja*

- b. *gilung buwapungalwu dhanggala wananirru*

- e. *ngarrakuntja gunarrangmirr wupuy galawangmirr gilung ngarra Burruḷḷ Wangguwanggu djalay ngarra gunda Bathulumbu*

- a. *ngupar ngarra Yikamula dhananytja Mitjbaral ngarra ngupar Mungurru Lirrinmatji*

- f. *bayun dhanytja Warrunmatji Yandhala Mawuyul Walarrnga dhiyangga gurrurruri djalay marrtji ngalimurrung*

- d. *yakumirr Gurrumurumirr manydjarrkanydja maripuydhan barrngbarrngdja yakumirr Gurrumurumirr maripuya Barrthanakawuy Mayarrawuy*

- e. *gilung ngayiyun warwuyun*

Chorus: *ya gutharra warwu ngarra yawugay ya gutharra warwu ngarra yawugay dhalalalalalala garrurru*

- a. *flag/ from Warramiri country/ flag/ for me/ from Warramiri country/ from Warramiri country*

sailed/ I/ [from] Birrkili country/ that/ Birrkili country/ that/ I/ from Birrkili country/ that/ take it back

flag/ for me/ away/ moving/ flag/ of the war/ colour/ of the plains/ of the plains

- b. I [am]/ worrying/ from/ sailing/ with language/ that flag/ Nundhirribala country/ of Nundhirribala country
- c. with that language/ with Nundhirribala language/ [that is] different/ with Nundhirribala language/ [that is] different/ flag/ from Nundhirribala country/ from Nundhirribala country
- d. sailing/ sailing/ sailing/ sailing/ from/ I [am]/ sailing/ from Bambang/ because/ Bambang /this flag
- e. ropes/ see/ disappearing/ flag/ flag

Chorus: ya/ 'grandson' [ZDS]/ worry/ I/ worry/ ya/ grandson/ worry/ I/ flag/ flag/ flag flying in the wind/ flag

- f. another/ from/ Wangurri country/ this/ we [are]/ sailing/ sailing/ how/ this/ colour
- b. sailing/ sailing/ flag/ flag
- e. for me/ with Nundhirribala language/ Nundhirribala language/ with Nundhirribala language/ sail/ I/ Nundhirribala country/ Nundhirribala country/ sail/ I/ rock in the ocean/ in Wurramarrba country
- a. sailed/ I/ [from] Munyuku country/ that/ Munyuku country/ I/ sailed [past]/ ocean at Garrapara/ ocean at Garrapara
- f. leaving/ this/ Birrkili country/ Birrkili country/ Birrkili country/ Birrkili country/ with this/ this flag/ sail/ sail/ for us
- d. with a name/ with Gurrumuru/ this flag /of the war/ this torn one/ with a name/ with Gurrumuru/ of the war/ from Gurrumuru/ from Gurrumuru
- e. sailing/ sailing/ worrying

Chorus: ya/ 'grandson' [ZDS]/ worry/ I/ worry/ ya/ 'grandson'/ worry/ I/ worry/ flag flying in the wind/ flag

This version of the *garrurru* (flag) song is known as a *yuta manikay* (new song), which makes use of both traditional song texts and a unison chorus section that refers to contemporary events (see Knopoff 1992; Toner 2000). The composer was trying to heal his sick 'grandson' (ZDS) at Numbulwar (located near the country of the Nundhirribala people) and was worried about him. As a Dhalwangu man, however, his own ancestral country was at Gurrumuru. In composing this song version, he used the song subject *garrurru* (flag), specifically the idea of the flag flying from the mast of the ship that travelled around the coast from Numbulwar

to Gurrumuru during the *wangarr* era. The majority of the song texts used here are also found in other versions of *garrurru*, with the exception of the unison chorus that refers to contemporary events.

This song item clearly demonstrates that Dhalwangu singers are highly responsive to one another, attending to the poetic utterances which preceded their own and anticipating the responses of others. Each singer's utterances develop the central image of the ship and its travels to Gurrumuru, making particular reference to where it came from, where it was going, and the places belonging to other people who also have rights in this cosmology (Warramiri, Wangurri, Birrkili, Munyuku, Nundhirribala; and, in other song items in this performance, Gumatj). These various place references can be understood as examples of expansion. Each singer also uses forms of elaboration, consistent with the overall theme but developing unique images: the colour of the flag, the association of the torn flag with war, or the image of the halyards disappearing up the mast of the ship as the flag is hoisted. These poetic techniques illustrate that the central element of Bakhtin's utterance, the responsiveness that is essential for true dialogism, is unquestionably present in Dhalwangu *manikay*.

The above discussion demonstrates two of the key elements of the Bakhtinian utterance, thematic content and compositional structures. The third element, that of style at the generic and the individual level, remains to be commented upon. At the broadest level, the poetics of Dhalwangu *manikay* are centred around the evocation of ancestrally significant places, with singers 'painting a picture' of those places in the mind's eye of the listener (and, in keeping with Bakhtin's ideas about the utterance, anticipating the listeners' responses to that picture). They do so through a generic poetic style that is reminiscent of imagist poetry, making use of strings of names and images to evoke ancestral places in a minimalist and sometimes esoteric way; it is only through the combination of the utterances of a number of singers over several hours of performance that a kind of narrative structure emerges. Also characteristic of Dhalwangu *manikay* as a distinctive speech genre is the use of a variety of poetic devices for evoking the ancestral past in the present of performance, such as the use of the first-person singular and present-tense verb forms (e.g. referring to the ancestral flag flying atop the mast of the ship by the phrase 'I sail'), as well as deictics or 'pointers' (e.g. 'this flag', 'over there'). These poetic devices are powerful ways of conveying to listeners the idea that ancestral activity happened in the past, but also has a sense of ongoing occurrence in the present. The widespread use of parallelism is evident in the use of place names referring to the country of many different groups; not only do groups sharing the same cosmology believe that ancestral places are linked by ancestral journeys (cf. Keen 1994), but there is also a sense that the same events played out in their entirety in each place

(i.e. other groups sharing this cosmology may sing the same songs, but locate the activity in their own country). These and other stylistic elements seem to be characteristic of *manikay* as a type of speech genre.

At the level of individual style, we can see how broader elements of generic style are personalised for particular singers. An analysis of all 21 song items of the *garrurru* song subject in this performance (consisting of five different song versions) revealed a great deal of diversity in how individual singers interpreted this particular song subject and what range of poetic devices they used. Only a handful of words and phrases were used by all or most of the singers involved in this performance, and indeed each individual singer was notable for using certain words and phrases that were not used by anyone else. This somewhat unexpected poetic diversity may be accounted for by a combination of age and experience (more experienced singers come to know more alternate names for objects and places), pedagogy (who the singer learned from), personal motivation (a desire to develop an individual style), and talent. At any rate, it is certainly possible to identify individual style in Dhalwangu *manikay*, even though the song subjects themselves impose certain generic constraints on individual creativity.

The analysis above also shows that singers have a well-developed method of marking boundaries by changing singers, which is one constitutive feature of the utterance. The second constitutive feature, finalisation, is best recognised through the distinctive melodies to which song texts are set. All Yolngu *bäpurru* identities are associated with distinctive melodies; Dhalwangu people have four (see Toner 2003a). A singer's 'speech plan' for any utterance is partly based on the imagery on which he wants to focus, but also must be based on the physical limitations of how many words can be fit into a melodic phrase. Other performers are able to make educated guesses about how long a given singer will make an utterance, based on the words he is using, on gestures, but especially on the melody itself and how far the melodic phrase has progressed. In anticipating the end of an utterance based on melody, a singer is able to prepare for his own utterance with a calculated amount of overlap (usually quite small).

Take, for example, the *garrurru* song subject analysed above. This song was performed using a Dhalwangu melody referred to as the '*yuṭa* A' (*yuṭa* meaning 'new', and the 'A' distinguishing this melody from the '*yuṭa* B'). A graphic representation of this melody (Figure 8.1) shows that it consists of three pitches: a high note held for half of the melody; and two alternating lower notes, the first almost eight semitones¹² below the top note, and the second a further two semitones lower.

12 Each semitone in the scale can be divided into 100 equal increments called 'cents'.

Figure 8.1 The Dhalwangu *yuta* A melody.

Source: Peter Toner.

In practice, this melody is usually performed across two vocal phrases, with a breath after the end of the high note. The length of the two vocal phrases is about the same, although singers tend to prolong the second phrase as they complete the 'speech plan' of their utterance. It is during this short period of prolongation that another singer could join in with his own utterance with minimal disruption. It needs to be stated, however, that strict turn-taking is by no means a customary feature of *manikay* as a speech genre, and it is common for singers to overlap each other considerably. As a method of finalisation, however, the use of melody is a clear marker. As Bakhtin writes, 'When hearing ... we clearly sense the end of the utterance, as if we hear the speaker's [singer's] concluding *dixi*' (Bakhtin 1986: 76).

Conclusions

Bakhtin's utterance is evidently a useful analytical tool for better understanding the dialogism inherent in *manikay* as a creative form that meets the criteria of a speech genre. Space limitations prevent me from elaborating further, but it bears mentioning that the notion of the utterance is well suited to other levels of Yolngu ritual practice as well. The features of the utterance examined above (responsiveness, dialogism, style, boundary marking, finalisation) are also evident when rituals as wholes are examined, as evidenced by the most detailed

accounts of Yolngu rituals in the literature (Keen 1978; Morphy 1984). Indeed, the highly political nature of Yolngu ritual (Keen 1994) stands as a testimony to how carefully Yolngu consider the previous and future utterances of others concerning the depiction of Yolngu society and connections to country that rituals entail. Additionally, research conducted on the repatriation of archival audio recordings back to their Yolngu communities of origin indicates that Yolngu singers are clearly concerned with (and nostalgic about) the utterances of previous generations of Yolngu singers, and craft their contemporary performances accordingly (Toner 2003b).

For the purposes of this volume, what is most significant is that the challenges laid down by Ian Keen in his analyses of Yolngu social and ritual life are well responded to by a turn toward Bakhtin's thought. Keen encourages us to shed the orthodoxies of established analytical frameworks, to the extent that they accept the systematic and structured aspects of Yolngu sociality, in favour of greater attention to heterogeneity and contingency. Keen's perspectives have encouraged me to examine Yolngu social life as it is lived on the ground, even if that life does not fit easily within established analytical frameworks. Bakhtin also called for a focus on living language, on the utterance, as opposed to the more abstract formal structures that were prevalent in the language scholarship of his day. Bakhtin's notions of dialogism and heteroglossia are well suited to an analysis of Yolngu social and ritual life. There is no neutral word, nor any first speaker, in Yolngu life, and all Yolngu discourses and practices are shot through and inflected with the discourses and practices of others. Understanding Yolngu *manikay* as a distinctive speech genre, and Yolngu song texts as utterances, provides a coherent analytical framework that speaks to these larger social processes.

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