Tracking knowledge

in North Australian landscapes

edited by Deborah Rose and Anne Clarke
Tracking Knowledge in North Australian landscapes

studies in indigenous and settler ecological knowledge systems

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Introduction

In November 1997 smoke from the catastrophic Indonesian bush fires came rolling down over Darwin on the north west winds. Globalisation, transnational hyper-disaster, and the interconnectedness of life on earth became sudden lived experience—embodied, emotional, political and urgent. The impetus to this book arose prior to the 1997 experience, but was driven by a similar sense of urgency. North Australian ecosystems are threatened by many factors, almost all of which are ultimately of human origin.

The social imperative is to gain understandings of how the many human groups in the region conceptualise land and life processes, how they understand their past and imagine their future in the place, and how their cultural concepts inform their assessments of their practices within the places where they act. There is a body of experts whose knowledge is developed through western scientific/academic methods, and whose authority derives from this knowledge; there are groups of people who claim expertise through their own indigenous intellectual traditions; and there are many groups and individuals, indigenous and non-indigenous, who claim expertise and authority on the basis of their past and current experience interacting with particular ecosystems and places.

Thus diverse knowledge systems produce different criteria for expertise and authority. These systems cannot be bounded neatly by
conventional categories such as race, gender, social class, educational levels, or political dominance. Social boundaries and social relations are destabilised, and it is tempting to think of this phenomenon as a frontier characteristic—as a particular quality of a transitive moment in time-space that is soon to be superseded and made orderly. The essays in this book suggest that the apparent disorder is not simply a frontier quality, but rather that the view from a landscape vantage point elucidates the arbitrary quality of social boundaries.

Apparent disorder, then, is evidence of a shift in analytic perspective. We gain a quick focus on this shift by considering the recent history of anthropological theory. During the 1970s and 1980s we saw the emergence of a major inversion of research questions: from the nature of culture to the culture of nature. This inversion drew attention toward problematising ‘nature’, and thus necessarily toward querying culture from new directions. The shift is in progress; one would look in vain for consensus on any of the major issues. Moreover, it is not an anthropological movement, per se, but is part of a set of changes that is occurring in many social and humanities disciplines, with their emerging emphasis on place and space, signalled by terms such as landscape, cultural ecology, environmental ethics, diaspora, exile, and belonging. Les Rowntree’s opening essay in this book provides a lucid and erudite assessment of this shifting ground.

The essays presented here were originally presented at the first Northern Landscapes Symposium ‘Tracking Knowledge: Northern landscapes, past, present, future’, held in Darwin (NT) in December 1996. Annie Clarke and I aimed to bring together a number of speakers whose expertise was representative of, or sought to analyse, several of the different knowledge systems which form the basis of human interactions in these northern landscapes. These revised essays cut across cultures, academic disciplines, epistemologies and ontologies. There are gaps, incommensurabilities and contradictions. I have not taken steps to fill in the gaps or smooth the contradictory, disjunctive spaces. Gaps are themselves a form of information; we need to know their regions and shapes, origins and consequences.

In light of the deliberate attempt to cut across boundaries, the continuity of themes running through these essays and reverberating among them is notable. The two major continuous themes are aesthetics and politics. I am using the term ‘aesthetic’ in the expanded sense proposed by Steven Feld (1996:66) in his study of ecological and aesthetic co-evolution. Sidestepping aesthetics as abstraction, he focussed on the ‘feelingful dimensions of experience’. In this expanded sense, the term is able to encompass what might otherwise be described as cultural value, emotion, and spirituality. The term is to be understood in a recursive sense, such that the feelingful dimensions of
cultural and social life inform, and are informed by, the ecosystems within which people make their lives and places meaningful.

Similarly, I intend the term ‘political’ to encompass a domain of contestation, power, and hierarchy. Rowntree speaks to the recursive linkages between politics and landscapes in his discussion of social categories:

The social sciences now probe more deeply into the mechanisms through which society constructs and maintains discriminatory, racist, and sexist social categories; landscape, territory and space have been implicated in those processes as individuals and institutions shape and control the environment to produce and reinforce power relations (p. 13).

Many of the authors use the term ‘reading’ to convey a process of active interaction toward meaningfulness. Arthur takes up the issue of layered readings in the context of colonisation: she reads the text in which colonisers construct the meanings of place, and re-reads the texts back onto the maps to show how the unfolding colonising project both naturalises and celebrates itself.

Recursivity is seen more personally in a number of essays. Gill and Rose, for example, each draw on information from white pastoralists concerning the permeability they experience between their own bodies and the country with which they interact. The symbolism of blood, dirt, and skin inform this permeability (the country ‘gets into your blood’, the dirt gets ‘under your nails’), producing densely textured assertions of belonging. Gill’s analysis shows the reciprocity in this permeability: sweat and labour go into the land, so that the totality of permeable relations between person and country form the basis of claims to privileged knowledge and privileged possession. In contrast, Rose looks to colonising narratives and finds a failure of imagination, as the very structure of white pastoral presence in the far north is framed by successive forms of settlement in which broad acres pastoralism is held soon to be superseded.

The Aboriginal contributors communicate a more recursive relationship to country. They speak of their country as part of their interior body (Deveraux, Tarran), and of the country itself as body, subjected to rape and other forms of violence, as well offering comfort, repose, and nurturance. Both Deveraux and Tarran begin with their right to speak, and only then do they seek to communicate the local, grounded, collective knowledge that articulates mutual identity between people and country. They speak of the life and death issues of country, connecting culture and people with place. They assert an ultimate meaning marked by a willingness to die for country. Unlike the individualised permeability of white pastoralists’ articulations, Deveraux
and Tarran each speak to a groundedness of time: their ancestors are in the country, and they emphasise the right to their own landscape/social histories. In addition, they assert not only the right to imagine their future, but also the absolute inalienability of their future in their respective countries.

The politics of place pervades these essays, and comes to the fore in the final essays around issues of social justice in planning (Jackson); incommensurabilities and failures in cross-cultural communication about country (Walsh); changes to the land brought about by colonisation (Lucas); and problems of time, scale and cultural categories in co-management (Allen). In their various contexts, these essays link up history, knowledge, practice, and imagination to examine how we—any of us—may conceive a future for human life in these places.

Allen takes up the continuous theme of culture and nature in the context of the on-going boundary between cultural and natural heritage in Kakadu National Park. He states: ‘Aboriginal people are clear about what they mean by a cultural landscape. They maintain that the physical and biological world is culturally produced and that continued Aboriginal action and labour is necessary for the life of the countryside’ (p. 148). This clear articulation of the indivisibility of cultural and natural categories, linked with practices of care, knowledge, and use, brings social and environmental justice into a single field of action.

Jackson notes many of the impediments to the achievement of decisions based within a single field of justice, particularly the political use of landscape to exclude people, and the kind of development mindset that sees cultural values (usually Aboriginal) as impediments to planning. Walsh examines contexts of Aboriginal language in relation to land, demonstrating some of the concepts of embodiment that underlie the mutual permeability so evident in Tarran’s and Deveraux’s contributions. His analysis clarifies some of the contentious political issues that arise in cross-cultural communication about land. Walsh’s detailed analysis of some of these incommensurabilities is itself a step toward overcoming them, and thus constitutes another move toward social and environmental justice.

Lucas’s fine-grained depiction of the indigenous people’s historic and contemporary resource use at two key sites in west Arnhem Land (along with evidence from many other sites) provides a closely framed analysis that is complementary to the much larger temporal and spatial frames that Allen addresses. Allen, in turn, takes up large scale issues of time, myth, culture, and landscape, opening up conceptual and practical problematics of contemporary shared practice.

Taken together, these essays demonstrate Les Rowntree’s summation of the promise of landscape analysis. As we track landscape knowledge through diverse cultures, exploring systems and gaps, we
find that the promise of landscape analysis lies in its capacity to link domains previously held to be separate (in the western world), and thus to bring cultures and disciplines into productive conversation with each other. This dialogue starts to delineate the extent to which social justice and environmental justice require and enhance each other. The promise turns back into the world as an appreciation of diversity and an expanded awareness of complexity. We will meet the challenges of these northern landscapes better through our growing understanding of social and ecological imperatives.

Reference
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There is little question that the concept of landscape is very much in fashion these days, used and promoted, it seems, as an attractive tool for framing human interaction with the environment. A growing literature tells us landscape is text and carnival, place and region, artefact and knowledge system, power and poetry, even nested food webs and bioregions. And this expanded use of landscape cuts across academic and intellectual boundaries from the humanities to social sciences; from life and physical sciences to the vernacular. Today, landscape is commonly used as an organising theme (or at least a conceptual tool) in archaeology, geography, biology, cultural resource management, environmental planning, poetry, and ethnography.

What, we might ask, is behind this expanded use of the term landscape? Has there been a conceptual or theoretical breakthrough of late empowering the concept, or are we simply caught up in academic faddishness and jargon? While some foreground the socially constructed dimensions of landscape, others see it as an objective, empirical reality. Are these two views contradictory? Or can these contrasting views be complementary, offering us an exciting synthesis that softens epistemological barriers?

Eric Hirsch writes in *The Anthropology of Landscape* (1995) that ‘…landscape has received little overt anthropological treatment’ and, further, the concept is largely unproblematised. He sees a distinct tendency to bracket landscape as a black box, then set it aside. So
Hirsch suggests opening that box and bringing its contents into view for critique and reflection.

I would like to add my own perspective to Hirsch’s unpacking project by offering an interpretation of how the concept of landscape has been used in North American geography over the last seventy years. There are four parts to my essay. First, a brief discussion of the etymological roots and definitional ambiguity of the concept. Second, an examination of landscape’s entry into North American geography during the 1920s when it was promoted as a conceptual salvation of sorts, then subsequently assassinated and discredited by proto-positivists, thus creating an epistemological polarisation that has been overcome only in the last decade. The third section examines the post-war period, primarily the 1970s, when landscape became central to the rise of interpretative geographies that blossomed as humanistic reaction to excesses of the quantitative revolution. Finally, I will offer a taxonomy of contemporary landscape usage, leading to some reflection and discussion on the promise and problems of the concept as a vehicle for social inquiry and resource management.

Some qualification is necessary before beginning. My perspective is from North American geography; while this folds in some aspects of the larger Anglo world, it is not comprehensive by any means. References and citations will guide readers to other interpretations and evaluations of the landscape concept, particularly to those works by Australians. Until very recently my familiarity with Australian works was very limited, and I’m afraid this shows. I offer sincere apologies for this, along with a deep commitment to rectify these oversights. A second point reminds the reader that although I speak primarily as a geographer, my discussion also draws upon work done by scholars outside of this discipline. My reason for including these articles is to portray a broader sense of how landscape usage is applied to a wide range of social and environmental issues. Geography has no hegemony over landscape; though the discipline has contributed to enhanced conceptual sophistication in recent years, and has had a long acquaintance with the notion of landscape, other disciplines have also contributed much. That point should become clear in this paper.

Definitional ambiguity

To many, both the problems and promise of landscape come from its dichotomous etymological roots. Reduced to simplicity, one root seems planted firmly in the Old English notion of the landscape as a district owned by a lord or an area inhabited by a particular group of people, while the second derives from late sixteenth-century Dutch landscape painters who emphasised the visual or aesthetic traits of place. Region
or scenery, space or place? Can landscape be both simultaneously? (For more on this definitional and etymological matter, see Cosgrove 1984, 1985; Gosden & Head 1994; JB Jackson 1986; Otwig 1996; Rowntree 1996; Williams 1987).

Until recently, geographers have troubled over the perceived contradiction between the notion of landscape as a region or place, which carries an implicit assumption that this homogenous space can be analysed objectively, and landscape as scenery. This visual or aesthetic dimension clearly implies human values and attachment, sentiment and emotions that are usually socially constructed through contestation and negotiation. Ironically, it is precisely this historical bugaboo that probably carries the most appeal for contemporary scholars.

Because of landscape’s dichotomous roots, there is little agreement today on a precise definition. Instead, ambiguity reigns. And perhaps that is the appeal. Perhaps it is this postmodern fluidity and capriciousness, along with the built in tensions and contradictions that intrigues us and informs our work. As Gosden & Head write:

> it is the very fullness and ambiguity of the concept of landscape that makes it so useful and helps span the gaps that might otherwise exist between a number of disciplines (1994:115).

The beginnings: landscape in pre-war North American geography

Conventional wisdom posits that Carl Sauer, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, led early North American geography out of the dead end of environmental determinism with his 1925 essay *Morphology of Landscape*. In that work Sauer argued that humans—through the medium of culture—were active agents of environmental transformation. This clearly contrasted with the prevailing deterministic view that implied the opposite, that human culture was a product of environment.

Additionally, Sauer held landscape as the vehicle that evidenced this truth; through the historical examination of a place or region, the transformation of the physical environment into a cultural artefact would be clear. Explication of those social processes and their environmental implications empowered what has been called a ‘Berkeley School’ of human or cultural geography (Price & Lewis 1993).

However, Richard Hartshorne, a proto-positivist of the regional analysis school, argued that landscape was contaminated and impure because of the subjectivity associated with the ‘scenery’ dimension of the concept (Smith 1989). In fact, according to Hartshorne, it was this very muddling of environment and culture that had led to the debacle
of environmental determinism in the first place; only an overtly objective spatial science that separated space and society could redeem American geography from this intellectual morass. Additionally, Hartshorne was a rigid Kantian who argued that spatial and temporal studies should be separate. And because Sauer promoted landscape analysis over long periods of time, the polarisation was complete.

As a result of this Sauer/Hartshorne debate, the landscape concept was central to defining two distinct geographic traditions or schools in North America: one, the Berkeley School drew heavily on historicism, interpretation, even humanism; the other (and, frankly, the more dominant) championed empiricism and positivism. Landscape as a conceptual tool was associated with the first, and studiously avoided by the second.

But Sauer and the Berkeley School continued to use the notion of cultural landscape in their quest for understanding and assessing human transformation of the environment. Legitimisation for this perspective came in the landmark conference, 'Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth', held in 1955 (Thomas 1956). Sauer was adamant about stiffening the conference with diachronic and empirical depth to counter the reductionist, futurist and prescriptive tendencies of 1950s social scientists (Williams 1987). A clear call for this kind of environmental geography was Sauer's own contribution, 'The agency of man on the earth' (Thomas 1956:49–69).

**Landscape in postwar North American geography: the humanistic alternative to hyper-positivism**

As was the case with many social sciences in the postwar period, mainstream geography turned increasingly to quantification and computer analysis; empiricism and positivism reigned supreme as the discipline sought full legitimisation as a spatial science. However, in reaction to this ‘quantitative revolution’ a full-blown humanistic geography emerged by the late 1960s, and landscape was central to this intellectual countercurrent. In contrast to the fetishisation of objectivity that characterised the spatial science, humanistic landscape geography instead celebrated subjectivity by foregrounding human values, sentiment, and aspirations.

There were two intertwined thrusts to this new humanistic geography. While one saw landscape as a form of material culture and was preoccupied with the 'look of the land' (Lewis 1983; Meinig 1979), a second approach placed interpretative weight upon cultural perception, visual preferences, and the social meaning of our surroundings. John K
Wright startled the Association of American Geographers with his presidential address in 1946 entitled ‘Terrae Incognitae: The Place of Imagination in Geography’, then two decades later David Lowenthal offered a series of articles on ‘landscape tastes’, the visual biases that control—explicitly and implicitly—human activities in the landscape. Using eclectic sources, Lowenthal gave insight to how these values resonate through a culture and interact with other social values. In so doing, Lowenthal offered descriptive taxonomies that linked perception and visual biases to other cultural patterns. English landscapes, for example, reflected that society’s proclivity for the bucolic, picturesque, and the tidy (Lowenthal & Prince 1964, 1965). These English values contrasted with the ‘casual chaos’ and ‘cult of bigness’ that ruled the American countryside (Lowenthal 1968).

Another major influence came from JB Jackson, who sent a clear message to landscape students: look at the vernacular, the landscapes of the workaday world and of the common person. This equalitarian call contrasted with other landscape studies (such as Lowenthal’s) that focussed primarily on the elite and powerful (for more on Jackson, see Meinig 1979).

While the works of Jackson, Lowenthal, and Yi Fu Tuan (1974, 1976) inspired many to retrieve ‘landscapes of the mind’, their writings also produced unease within an intellectual context dominated by positivism. Critics charged their pronouncements were personal and intuitive, mental gymnastics not easily (or ever) replicated by other scholars. Mere anecdotes, frivolous—even distracting—to the main tasks of a spatial science. However, for others these articles constituted a refreshing alternative to the methodological rigour and tyranny of the quantitative revolution. If these works reaffirmed the positivist’s worst fears about intermingling space and society by attempting to capture human emotion about places and landscapes, they also gave broader academic footing to an emerging humanistic geography.

**Contemporary landscape usage: promise and problems**

As is the case with neighboring disciplines, geography is currently rethinking many fundamental concepts, theories, and methods, and the notion of the cultural landscape is central to this scrutiny. More specifically, there has been discussion over the last decade about a ‘new’ cultural geography that is more interested and sensitive (its proponents claim) to contemporary social issues of gender, ethnicity, and class. Because landscape expresses and captures the tensions of socially constructed space, it is a useful tool for articulating issues of structure and agency (for a fuller discussion, see Duncan 1993; Gosden

If its proponents are correct, then, this contemporary use of landscape sets it apart from traditional North American cultural geography that used the notion of landscape in a largely unproblematic way. Such a simplistic division, however, is debatable.

But the details of that debate are way beyond the scope of this paper. What is germane, however, is that this sometimes heated discussion has brought clarity to what we mean by landscape and how we use the concept. My interpretation is that the following points are held in common, a complementarity with a contemporary orientation in other social sciences and humanities is obvious.

- A reformulation of the concept of culture emphasising human action over passivity. Culture is thought of as a process and expression of negotiated, even contestatory, personal and group interactions, hence it is constantly changing and contingent on context. This contrasts with a traditional superorganic conceptualisation.
- An emphasis on the symbolic, as well as the behavioral interaction or recurrence between humans and their environment that attempts to reconcile the tensions between individual action and cultural structures.
- A problematisation of social categories, such as gender, ethnicity, class, and race, and examination of the ways landscape is implicated in the construction and maintenance of these categories.
- The centrality of symbolic expression in the landscape and metaphorical conceptualisations of human-environment interaction as `text’, `theatre’ `carnival’ and `spectacle’ to emphasise arrangement and manipulation of environments by power structures.
- An awareness of the power of language by subjecting landscape narratives (and authors) to critical reflection and self-conscious interpretation that reveals ideological bias.
- Explicit or implicit connections to theoretical frameworks, such as neomarxism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism, though, that said, one should also appreciate the blurring of traditional epistemological categories (Rowntree 1988).
- Finally, landscape offers a fluidity of scale in the examination of social and environmental concerns in an attempt to find a more meaningful analytic unit. To illustrate, we find interactive and circular scaling from place to region, from local to global, from species to habitat. And back again.

With these points in mind, let me now offer a heuristic scheme that illustrates the many different uses of the landscape concept. In this scheme I have deliberately refrained from commentary on the ‘new’ versus ‘old’ cultural geography so as to not privilege or grant special
status to either. My wish is that readers look at substance without being swayed by contemporary intellectual fashion and politics.

Additionally, there are many important contributions that cut across my categories by folding together important issues such as maintenance of social categories, discriminatory power relations, sentiment of place, and art. To place a work in one organisational section could deny its relevance to another, so I ask readers not to typecast any one work but, instead, to appreciate its contribution to the larger issues of human relationships with the environment. That said, I offer as example a major work on the emotion and sentiment of the Australian Aboriginal towards their native landscape—Deborah Bird Rose's marvellous work Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness (1996). In this book, the author draws upon Aboriginal art and poetry to explicate the different ways Aboriginal peoples are linked to the landscape. But this is much more than poetry; it is a vivid testimonial to the recursiveness of humans and environment, of how one is inseparable from the other.

So do keep in mind that the following comments are offered only as tentative signposts for a serendipitous exploration of landscape.

The ecological landscape

As noted earlier, Carl Sauer saw the landscape as a primary source of information on human transformation of the Earth, and researchers continue to ask similar questions today that position the landscape as the ultimate authority on and evidence for environmental change and disturbance. Following Sauer, many of these studies emphasise change to vegetation because of human influences. An example is Conrad Bahre's study A Legacy of Change: Historic Human Impact on Vegetation of the Arizona Borderlands (1991) where he challenges conventional wisdom that historical vegetation change resulted from climatic change and instead, posits that cattle grazing, fuelwood cutting, and wildfire suppression are the causes of historical landscape change. Another laudable example is Nancy Langston's landmark study Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares (1995), which traces how fire suppression policies have created forest health crises in Western forest landscapes.

A common form of evidence in these landscape studies is repeat photography, where present-day photos are compared with historical scenes to document vegetation change. Another example of this method is found in Veblen & Lorenz (1991) in their study of landscape and ecological change in Colorado's Front Range.

Because of the ascendancy of specialised proxy information (such as palynology) for environmental change, there is an increasingly interdisciplinary scientific tone to landscape research (see, for example,
Birks et al. 1988; B Roberts 1987; N Roberts 1989; Simmons 1988). Hard data and rigorous testing have moved this traditional form of landscape study into the contemporary arena of global environmental problems (Kates 1987) where physical geographers and cultural ecologists interact with other disciplines in compiling documentation of large-scale environmental change, much in the spirit of the 1956 ‘Man’s Role in Changing the Face of the Earth’ conference. The most prominent current example is the “Earth as Transformed by Human Action” conference organised by Clark University in 1989 (see Turner et al. 1990).

Important for an understanding of the Australian environment are recent articles by Lesley Head (1993, 1994), who deftly weaves together sound empirical paleo-environmental practice with appropriate concerns regarding the social construction of cultural landscapes, both prehistorically and contemporaneously, through human activities such as deliberate burning of the landscape. This study is an outstanding model of landscape study that integrates persistent geographic themes with contemporary social theory.

Outside of geography, environmental historians use landscape as the organising theme for work generated primarily from archival sources. William Cronon’s Changes in the Land (1983), a study of human impact on the ecology of New England, is exemplary. In his bibliographic essay, Cronon (1983:217) directs readers to the works of Sauer, linking the emerging field of ecological history with traditional landscape study. Carolyn Merchant’s Ecological Revolutions (1989) puts New England’s environmental transformation into the context of larger social currents, specifically gender and science politics. While the documentation of landscape change remains resolute, the abstract causes of those changes is the primary focus of her work.

Landscape as evidence for origins and diffusion

The landscape also contains and corroborates historical information on the development and spread of human technologies and subsistence strategies that have had lasting effects on global environments. In these works, as with Sauer’s paradigmatic study on agricultural origins (Sauer 1952), the landscape is primarily a backdrop for developments inferred or deduced from other sources. The landscape, then, is modified as a result of these changing subsistence strategies. However, the nature of that environmental transformation is secondary to the emphasis placed on the spatial and temporal spread of cultural assemblages. Two studies by Karl Butzer illustrate this theme: one (1985) examines the diffusion of early irrigation techniques in Spain, and the other (1988) the historical antecedents for livestock strategies that were transferred from Old to New World.
A subset of this category traces the origin and diffusion of overtly material traits, such as Kniffen’s classic work on the diffusion of folk housing (1965), or, more recently, Jordan’s tracking of log buildings (1985). Diffusion methodology is also used to trace the abstract values and sentiment behind the material and visible landscape as Hugill (1986) shows by documenting the spread of English landscape biases into the United States. He argues that these can be linked to changing conditions of class, labour, and social control in a work illustrating the marrying of new emphases on power structure and social categories with traditional research questions.

Landscape as material culture

Very closely related to the previous category, and yet with less evidence on the spatial dynamics of origin and diffusion, are those studies that look to the landscape for visual or material information on human occupation and settlement, an approach Lewis calls using the landscape as ‘cultural spoor’ (1975). Fundamental emphasis is given to the ‘look of the land’ (Hart 1975)—barn types, fence architecture, field patterns, the arrangement of outbuildings, all occupy the attention of material culturalists.

While this interest brings geographers together with other disciplines such as folklore (Glassie 1975; Schlever 1983, 1985a, 1985b), historical architecture (Stilgoe 1982; Upton & Vlach 1986), and certain kinds of historical archaeology (Leone 1986; Ruberton 1989), the ultimate use of this material culture information often differs. While geographers may find explaining the visual landscape an end in itself, or use landscape mainly to reinforce notions of origin and diffusion, those researchers closer to anthropology often use material culture (including the landscape) to draw more detailed conclusions about social values, the creation and maintenance of social activities, group boundaries, and subsistence strategies.

Art, literature and landscape meaning

Long central to the humanistic enterprise of uncovering human experience and meaning has been the perspective that much can be learned by the way people depict the landscape in their art, be it written, drawn, or in other media. Further, an assumption is that these artistic renderings feed back into society by elevating and privileging certain scenes or ways of looking at the environment that often become symbolic of larger cultural constellations, such as the American sense of historical eclecticism (Lowenthal 1968) or the English proclivity toward cultural connoisseurship of certain views and perspectives (see for example, Cosgrove 1984, 1985).
Obviously, landscape research of this kind emphasises the aesthetic or scenery component of the term's heritage. But this pursuit is not unique to geography and is also found in various humanistic endeavors, such as art history and folklore, producing a literature too vast to mention here. Instead, the reader is advised here on accessing geographic approaches to this topic. That can be done with the content and references given in articles such as Sandberg & Marsh (1988) and an important volume by Norwood & Monk (1987) *The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art.*

This last-mentioned work is particularly important because it attempts to redress the hegemony of a male point of view in humanistic geography. Put differently, the male experience, be it through art, literature, or diaries and journals, has been privileged and taken to be the common human experience; men—the assumption went—speak for all culture. Obviously this view is invalid, yet only recently, and only in a few articles, do we hear female voices about landscape (see also Monk 1984). This project, of course, is framed within the larger issue of a feminist geography.

**Landscape as managed cultural resource**

Also tied closely to the etymological root that connects landscape to aesthetics is the domain of research, both within and outside geography, that treats the landscape as a visual resource. This perspective pushes beyond mere scenic appreciation of landscape, for it is usually driven by a legislative mandate of control, regulation, and protection (Groth 1990:i-x) This movement is founded on the assumption that visual quality is an integral part of a larger environmental quality; visual blight, for example, is analogous to air and water pollution and can be mitigated (if not exorcised) by direct legislative action. There are strong connections between the geographer's traditional interest in art and landscape and their participation in the study of visual resources. These are discussed in Kennedy, Sell & Zube (1988).

However, despite this long-standing involvement with visual resources, geographers seem less willing than design professionals to move their landscape analyses into the realm of prescriptive measures through legislated aesthetic controls. Compare, for example, the works of landscape architects (Litton 1990) with geographers (Jakle 1987; Relph 1981) and note the difference in applied orientation.

Increasingly important (mainly outside of geography) is the broader notion that a people or a group's history and prehistory should be protected on the landscape scale. This, of course, is done through the regulatory framework of cultural resource or heritage management. An excellent overview of this field as practiced in Australia is found in

The landscape as ideology

Landscapes are studied for what they reveal about ideologies—the ideas and objectives that act as political and social guidelines for a national culture. Lowenthal and Prince's pioneer work discussed earlier for example, coupled ideas about English national character with landscape expression (1964, 1965) and many urban geographers were inspired by Mumford's (1960) analysis of the historical city as an ideological stage or playing field for promoting the visibility and power of the elite.

This theme continues today, often associated with the critical perspectives of postmodern theory, where national culture is intertwined with the economic goals of late capitalism to produce such distinctive landscapes as franchised strips (MacDonald 1985), suburban malls (Hopkins 1990), high-tech corridors, gentrified neighbourhoods and preserved historical buildings and neighbourhoods (Knox 1991).

A more highly and explicitly problematised theme is treated in Ghazi Falah’s recent article on de-signification or place annihilation of the Palestinian cultural landscape following the 1948 Israeli War (Falah 1996). In this important article, Falah shows how the horror of ‘ethnic cleansing’ also involves the systematic elimination of the target group’s attachment to their landscape.

Understanding that process involves an articulation of factors central to Israeli ideology and political claims to the land of Palestine (1996:257).

For historical landscapes, an important stimulation comes from the fields of historical geography and archaeology, where researchers test archival material against an excavated empirical record to tease out discontinuities between the two that reveal ideological manipulation of the landscape. Probably the two best examples are ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective (Baker 1992) and Landscape. Politics and Perspectives (Bender 1993).

Landscape’s role in the production and maintenance of social categories

The cultural landscape is conceptualised as a repository of information for social behavior (Wagner 1972, 1974), a visual expression, we might say, of the cues and clues that guide society. While earlier studies tended
to use this assumption in subtle ways, contemporary social theory, with its emphasis on abusive expressions of power, has increasingly problematised this notion over the last decade. The social sciences now probe more deeply into the mechanisms through which society constructs and maintains discriminatory, racist, and sexist social categories; landscape, territory, and space have been implicated in those processes as individuals and institutions shape and control the environment to produce and reinforce power relations (Wolch & Dear 1989:5). Anderson (1987) for example, shows how racial definitions were structured through the interaction between Vancouver’s Chinatown landscape, social structure and political practice, and the Duncans (1984) reveal how conspicuous consumption is embodied in suburban landscapes so as to construct and reinforce class and status categories. Finally, Peter Jackson (1989), drawing upon the growing interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, has suggested ways of integrating these perspectives in his book Maps of Meaning.

The metaphorical landscape

Landscapes have long been treated metaphorically, as texts that were ‘authored’ and, hence, could be ‘read’ by insightful observers. This metaphor is evidenced in the titles of professional works on landscape reading (Clay 1980; Lewis 1979; Meinig 1979; Watts 1975), landscape authors (Samuels 1979) and landscape signatures (Salter 1971, 1978). More recently, this traditional conceptualisation has been enriched by scholarship from other disciplines on the symbolic interaction between environments and humans. Daniels & Cosgrove (1988) for example, look to iconography as a vehicle for landscape analysis, while others draw upon the interdisciplinary study of semiotics (Duncan 1987; Foote 1985; Hopkins 1990; Preziosi 1986) that conceptualises landscape into sign and symbol systems.

Contemporary social theory interacts with critical literary analysis (Eagleton 1983) to form a new foundation for the metaphorical treatment of landscape as text (Duncan & Duncan 1988), where the interaction process between reader and text becomes as important as the material objects themselves. The best current example of this is James Duncan’s The City as Text: the Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom (1990). However, one should also read the review of this work by Peet (1993).

Conclusion

In this essay, I have traced out the complicated intellectual heritage of landscape within North American geography. Though landscape for
some, at least, carries a checkered past and a qualified future over issues of objectivity and interpretative licence, the notion still remains in everyday usage because of its temporal and spatial fluidity. For many geographers, landscape is the traditional focus for work on understanding the human transformation of the Earth. While some place analytic and descriptive emphasis on those social processes responsible for that transformation, others foreground the end product itself, be it tangible and intentional expressions of culture or the inadvertent (perhaps even costly) consequences of environmental change.

More recent is the emphasis on the social loading or signification of the environment, and the recursiveness of those sentiments resonating through a larger cultural matrix. Put differently, landscape is implicated in constructing and maintaining power relationships and social inequities; this perspective seems to be a revelation for many social scientists, thus explaining much of the current interest in landscape.

The question remains, though, whether this new perspective will actually empower us to better understand—and cure—social and environmental ills, or if it is merely the latest fashion in intellectual hand-wringing. Will landscape, too, be discarded soon and replaced with another concept du jour?

Because I believe that landscape can be substantive and analytically empowering and, further, that it can be a useful tool for addressing and redressing social and environmental problems, let me end this essay with a two evaluative comments.

While I applaud the interpretative turn placing more emphasis on the social construction of landscape, I am concerned about the tendency to emphasis the mental agility of the individual scholar or interpreter over an agreed-upon foundation of evidence (yes, call it ‘data’) that supports the analysis. In my deepest moments of despair I feel landscape has become the latest plaything for egocentric academics who are much more interested in self aggrandisement than having a genuine concern about social inequity or environmental crises. We end up knowing much more about how their minds work than either the social processes intertwined with landscape or the environment itself.

I end, however, on an optimistic note. I feel landscape has a bright future in those endeavours connected to a sounding board of civic reality. More specifically, I find landscape extraordinarily well adapted to cultural heritage management, issues of environmental justice, environmental histories, habitat conservation, and just about all forms of environmental planning. In these arenas landscape is an efficacious heuristic for generating community consensus about social and environmental issues, much more so than, say, an ecosystem, food web or other abstract concept. In contrast, landscape is readily grasped and understood by lay people because it has an intuitive purchase of sorts by capturing our feelings about land and life. That is the promise of landscape.
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Chapter Two – Deborah Rose

The Year Zero and the North Australian frontier

The term post-modernism, various scholars contend, describes the current world through our perception that our master narratives have failed. The concept speaks to a modernity without illusions of universal equity and other signifiers of progress (Bauman 1993:32), and without promise that the pain of the present will be justified by the future. Natthammer (1992:2), for example, suggests that we experience a world without hope—‘not the termination of a dynamic structure, but the dispersal of the hope associated with it’. My research in North Australia leads me to examine the contemporary world from the perspective of the colonising frontier. From here it is clear that the frontier is a matrix of modernism, and thus a key site from which to examine the anatomy of modernism. It is a time and place where modern culture simultaneously reveals its capacity for destruction and re-invents its own myth of creation.

On the frontier, the modern world fulfils its self-designated historic mission of civilisation precisely through the savagery it claims to disavow. Thus, while the frontier is not post-modern, for this term implies a temporal sequence (modernism followed by post-modernism), it is a time and space in which are destabilised all the illusions of modern culture and in which destruction is vividly present as a core practice in making and shaping the contemporary world. The hand of destruction and the hand of civilisation mutually shape a set of space–time coordinates that disperse hope, meaning and purpose. This is done
through practices such as genocide, theft, dispossession, and the extinction of non-human species, as well as through scientific and popular schema which define the indigenous as the precursor to the invader. Subsequently, of course, hope, meaning and purpose become dispersed for the invaders who have become settlers.

In this paper I analyse one small segment of the frontier chronotope (to use Bakhtin’s phrase): the Year Zero. My purpose is to engage analytically with the structure of some relatively commonplace concepts of time and space. In the first instance, I want to examine their everydayness, to unpack the quality that has enabled them to be so taken for granted. As I do this, the everyday begins to look exotic, which is what happens once the taken for granted is queried afresh. My larger purpose emerges from the fact that the intense contestation around pastoralism (see Gill, this volume) and around frontier mythologies tells us that we are confronted with the urgent necessity of re-imagining our future (Kittredge 1996:7). I will suggest that the unsettling of imagination is itself a direct product of the culture of frontier modernism, and thus that if we are to discover possibilities for linking our lives to place through time, the culture and practices of modernism will have to be radically altered.

Ground Zero

Frederick Jackson Turner’s landmark essay ‘The Significance of the Frontier in American History’ articulates a myth of national character and purpose formed through the encounter between the colonising settler and the land he conquers. His analysis is demonstrably pertinent to a number of settler societies including Australia. Mary Durack (1986:17–18), for example, contends that in both the US and Australia, ‘frontier conditions...have left a lasting impression on national character and government’. Webb’s (1980) unreflective but provocative study of the frontier is built on the hypothesis that a frontier boom has enabled modern global history. While there are many insightful critiques of Turner’s frontier thesis, his work continues to provide an important starting point, precisely because it focusses on the myths which give life to modern settler society. Its counterpart in the Australian context is Ernestine Hill’s popular study The Territory. Written as both history and contemporary observation, her purpose is to present a mythologised and unchanging Territory whose epic characters and events fill the whole frame of colonisation from the 1860s to the 1950s.

The question of where or when the frontier ends is inevitably vexed. A conventional measure of the boundary is population density. The American Bureau of Statistics defines as frontier those regions in which
the population density is less than two persons per square mile. In the metric system, that is about three quarters of a person per square kilometre (two persons to 2.6 sq km). Most of Australia falls within this category. The American frontier was declared closed in 1890 because there was effectively no more ‘free’ land. Population densities were increasing with increasing density of settlement and land use, as indicated by factors such as fencing, plowing, the growth of towns. Australians, however, have never declared the frontier closed. In part this is a marketing strategy for development (including tourism), and in part a symbol of identity in the Territory and other outback regions. In part, as well, it is a recognition of the fact that the broad acres of the savanna are still relatively open. As I will argue, the vast Australian outback is still a frontier time–space, still the Ground Zero of the settlement of Australia.

Turner contends that, in contrast to the old world, the history of the American nation is a history of expanding settlement, and that the advancing frontier has been the site of the formation of both the nation and the national character. In an exposition that is as remarkable for its elisions as for its imagery, Turner (1994:33–34) writes:

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the mocassin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick: he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier, the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe...

The fact is, that here is a new product that is American.

Turner’s analysis describes cultural concepts that are also present throughout much of Australian history, and informs much of the writing on national identity. Indeed, so many studies of Australia have commented on the impact of the land on the colonist, and the subsequent transformation of the old world person into a new world type, that the notion is entirely commonplace. A good example of the working out of this mytheme in North Australia is Ernestine Hill’s description of the Australian Bushman:

The first bushman rode out of Sydney in Governor Phillip’s time, something new in the rank and file of mankind, civilized man with no
need of civilization. He could live like the blacks in a black man's
country, and build a white man's empire... He carried his traditions
in his swag for two generations across a continent (Hill 1970:422).

Mary Durack invokes frontier mythology in describing some of the
changes her family went through. She notes, for example, that her
grandfather was changing his outlook: 'Already the outlook for the
cowherd was becoming that of the pastoralist, the dream of acres
swelling to a vision of square miles' (Durack 1986:61).

As is well known, all of the frontier concepts in which these accounts
of nation building are embedded are contested: the concept of
wilderness, the concepts of savagery and civilisation, the maleness of
it, the whiteness and the inevitability of it, and the use of Indigenous
people as media through which the new man is authenticated as an
autochthonous new world human (see Rose 1997). My concern in this
paper is most specifically with the central, and vigorously contested,
emptiness of it all (see also Rose, forthcoming b). As White (1994:11)
notes, Turner constructed conquest as a contest between nature and
the white, colonising man. The erasure of indigenous people was
necessary to Turner's myth of man and land; his description of the
making of the new man is replete with references to Indians, even to
named groups, but they are there as part of the environment of the
frontier. Frontier mythology depends upon the creation of a vast
emptiness in which the new nation forms itself. Turner (1994:27) speaks
of 'free land', erasing Indigenous people's land tenure systems through
a sleight of hand: 'The existence of an area of free land, its continuous
recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain
American development'. American scholars for decades continued to
conceptualise the frontier as the site of free land. Webb (1980:13), in a
study that is excellent in many other respects, speaks of the new world
as 'inherently a vast body of wealth without proprietors', while Athearn
(1986:2) takes the concept of free land as the defining feature of what
he calls 'the mythic west'.

Hill, less scholarly but more vivid in her prose, says: 'this passionate
land...held their hearts in thrall with the pagan glory of its rolling jungles,
its silences, its freedom' (Hill 1970:260). In Hill's work, the vastness of
space and the forever distant horizons signal free land and evoke the
power of the land to make the man. Likewise, Durack articulates the
myththeme of open (free) spaces in describing the migrations of settlers
westwards from Queensland:

Cattlemen, chafing at fences and the restriction of closer settlement,
grown nostalgic for the good old semi-nomadic days of the open
range, had moved north to Queensland and were spreading now
over the borders into the Territory (Durack 1986:206).
Transitive time-space

Just as indigenous people are represented in frontier imagery as destined to fade away, the conquerors are represented as destined to press 'forward'. Turner (1994:35) writes of 'the universal disposition of Americans to emigrate to the western wilderness in order to enlarge their domination over inanimate nature'. For reasons that I shall discuss shortly, Hill takes a more romantic view of the coloniser, but she, too, sets the Aussie bushman within the larger frame of the inevitability of the white man's empire, pursuing a visionary quest:

He colonized a continent with a water-bag on the saddle, swung clear of his own world to find a new one' (Hill 1970:421).

In Australia and America both, in the nineteenth century, settlement was made meaningful against a grand narrative that is the foundational story of civilisation. The story is grounded in a sense of destiny that is fundamental to its power. On both continents, emptiness and inevitability are closely related, so that the emptiness or openness beckons the settler, and the land itself can be thought to call out for civilised peoples (see Arthur, Chapter 3, this volume).

The explorer, Stokes, sailed up the Victoria River in the north-west of what is now the Northern Territory, in 1839 and he expressed this narrative of predestined transfiguration perfectly when he wrote:

... I would fain hope that ere the sand of my life-glass has run out...cities and hamlets will have risen on the shore of the new-found river, that commerce will have directed her track thither, and that smoke may rise from Christian hearths where now alone the prowling heathen lights his fire...to share in this great work by opening new fields of enterprise, and leading, as it were, the van of civilisation, fills the heart with inexpressible delight (quoted in Makin 1983:40).

This little passage, so self-conscious and mannered, tells virtually the whole of the story. It positions the white man as a time lord, bringing the history/time he knows and space he does not know, together for the first time. It positions the country as newly found. In this way, it defines the country (and the people) as without history, and thus situates it (and them) in a narrative structure of disjunctive change. This is a country that is about to be transfigured: from wilderness to civilisation, from heathen to Christian, from nomadism to sedentary cities and hamlets.

This story thus describes the conditions of disjunction followed by an inevitable sequence labelled progress. Turner's explicit use of geological and archaeological analogies indicates time concepts that
include a universal relative chronology stretched out across the land to form a set of spatial juxtapositions:

The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read this continental page from West to East we find the record of social evolution. It begins with the Indian and the hunter; it goes on to tell of the disintegration of savagery by the entrance of the trader, the pathfinder of civilization; we read the annals of the pastoral stage in ranch life; the exploitation of the soil by the raising of unrotated crops of corn and wheat in sparsely settled farming communities; the intensive culture of the denser farm settlement, and finally the manufacturing organisation with city and factory system... Particularly in the eastern States this page is a palimpsest. What is now a manufacturing State was in an earlier decade an area of intensive farming. Earlier yet it had been a wheat area, and still earlier the 'range' had attracted the cattle herder. Thus Wisconsin, now developing manufacture, is a State with varied agricultural interests. But earlier it was given over to almost exclusive grain-raising, like North Dakota at the present time (1994:38).

This marvellous imagery gives us two main dimensions: by going down archaeologically, so to speak, in any given area, one uncovers the history of the 'evolution' of that place. By going west, one passes through the history of development, moving back in time toward the origins. Beyond the frontier there is as yet no history. Behind the frontier, lies the future which is the civilised transfiguration of the frontier.

This narrative is present throughout the Durack family history as Mary Durack interprets it. Her grandfather's vision of the Kimberley was virtually identical to that of Stokes' vision for the Victoria:

... he saw the roads pushing out to the little bush towns and station settlements on the rivers. He heard the rattle and rumble of the coaches, the noise of the big house parties, the sound of music and dancing and the merry laughter that he had missed in this great quiet land (1966:307).²

She credits his success to his ability to fit himself into history:

Grandfather's almost phenomenal rise to prosperity and the contribution he made to the development of an empty land was largely due to the way in which his particular ambitions and ability meshed with the trends of his time... He took the stage in an era of expansion and built up his fortune in an area to which the tide of closer settlement was already due to turn (1986:15).
As Durack makes clear, her grandfather helped generate and fill a disjunctive and transitive moment. The white man on the frontier is in a paradoxical position: if destiny is fulfilled, the work of his life will not reproduce the conditions of his life. His imagining of the future quite explicitly excludes the conditions of his own life. On the one hand an agent of transfiguration, on the other hand he is a living fossil, for the changes he intends to set in motion will transform not only the land, but also him and his progeny. His compelling presence is about to produce his own absence.

Imminent absence

In an essay on Turner’s and Buffalo Bill’s frontier representations, White (1994) argues that the two together express the full parameters of frontier mythology. Turner’s references to Indians acknowledge their presence primarily as an imminent absence. Civilisation is represented as a ‘disintegrating’ force in the wilderness, and in encountering civilisation, ‘Indian life had passed away’ (Turner 1994:40). The Indians who are generally absent in Turner’s work are the focus of Buffalo Bill’s performances (and later, of much of Hollywood’s mythologising of the West).

In spite of the marvellous reversals by which Buffalo Bill represented settlers as victims and Indians as aggressors (White 1994:24), the whole point of the performance was to assert a post-frontier world of mythic encounter. Taken together, the two ways of representing indigenous people—imminent absence and mythic presence—represent death and resurrection: the death of the indigenous people, and their rebirth as a central mythic dimension of settler nationhood and settler identity (see also Rose 1997).

Hill’s (1970) point is similar. While her work abounds with imagery of indigenous people ranging from fauns and hamadryads (p. 350) to artists, musicians and dancers whose gifts could enrich the world (p. 346), the theme that carries the narrative is that of erasure: ‘The white man’s coming... hurled the whole [Aboriginal] race, as a race, into oblivion’ (p. 369). Like many other authors she assumes and expresses the death of indigenous people; ‘the passing of the Aborigines’, the ‘dying race’, the ‘last of the tribe’ and other familiar tropes reinforce the comfortable notion that those who are being conquered are actually fading away as a natural consequence of their encounter with civilisation. At the same time, Hill (pp. 27–28 and many other authors) resurrects indigenous people in mythic dimensions: not only fauns and hamadryads, but also happy, carefree, environmentally sensitive founts of wisdom.
The creation of a land devoid of human inhabitants is not only a process of myth. It is a practice of destruction: the wholesale killing of masses of people, and the enforced confinement of survivors. Hobbies Danaiyarri and other indigenous survivors of the North Australian frontier explain how Captain Cook, the emblematic whitefella invader, came looking for country, ‘cleaning it up’ for occupation by his own people:

That’s the Captain Cook been really shooting lotta people. Clean em out. And he reckoned he been clean em out, but some fellows still alive... Shooting... all the way round, because that country belong to Aboriginal people. That land, that’s his land. I think Captain Cook make a lotta wrong with this people... And they [Aboriginal people] been tell the story mijelp [themselves]: ‘Whitefella been come up cheeky one, here, killing lotta man. Getting ready for some new mob.’

Likewise, the resurrection of a mythologised indigene requires that the living survivors be muzzled. Hobbies well understood this practice too. ‘Captain Cook been coverem up me gotem [with a] big swag,’ he said again and again (quoted in Rose 1984:34).

It may be rare for a social myth to be tested in the courts, but the High Court of Australia has ruled decisively against the concept that Australia was an empty continent. In doing so, it ruled against the myth that all indigenous people have died out or faded away, and in deciding a case brought by an indigenous person, it effectively removed the tyranny of the muzzle. As we in Australia are aware, these destabilisations have generated a political fury.

The Year Zero

Ground Zero is also the Year Zero: the moment at which history will begin with the arrival of the outliers of civilisation. I take the term ‘Year Zero’ from the Christian calendar. It seems to be a convention in Western thought that we move in a world structured by a concept of linear time. It is therefore important to consider that the Western calendar is not linear in a conventional sense, even in its secularised form. A palinstrophic structure underlies the calendar and is also an ancient and persistent narrative structure. A verbal palindrome can be read from left to right — MADAM I’M ADAM — or from right to left, without loss of meaning. The letter ‘I’ in this palindrome is the central mediator, and moving out from the centre there is an identical structure in each direction. Rosenberg (1986) shows that many of the stories in the Hebrew Bible are structured by palinstrophe, and Northrop Frye’s (1982) literary study of the Bible demonstrates that this structure holds between Hebrew and Christian texts.
The difference between a verbal palindrome and a palinstrophic narrative lies in the centre, for that is a site of transfiguration. Thus, while a palindrome is read identically from right to left or left to right, palinstrophic narrative is diagrammed: A - B - C - D - C' - B' - A (Rosenberg 1986:205). Frye (1982:78–80) contends that a meaningful reading of the Christian Bible starts at the centre and works outward in both directions. In that way, an event on the older side (the Hebrew Bible) can be understood to correspond with an event on the newer side (the Christian section), and from a Christian perspective the newer event is the realised form of something foreshadowed in an older event. The technical term for these events are ‘type’ (the prefiguring event) and ‘anti-type’ (the fulfilling event). Each, it must be understood, is essential to the other. In Biblical analysis, for example, Adam is the type for which Jesus is the anti-type, and the relation between the two is that of prefiguration and fulfillment. The story is not complete if either is missing.

The Bible, in total, constitutes a history of the world, and the initial creation and final destruction (with the creation of a new heaven and earth) mirror each other and define the absolute beginning and absolute end of time (see also Cohn 1993). The second coming of Christ and the unmaking of the world is the final part that will correspond to the very first story of creation, so at this time, in strict Christian thought, we are suspended in a moment which has a known past and a known future, and we wait for the rest of the story to be fulfilled. Frye (1982:81) thus contends that typology is a theory of historical process (but certainly not a post-modern theory): ‘an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history... Our modern confidence in historical process, our belief that despite apparent confusion, even chaos, in human events, nevertheless those events are going somewhere and indicating something, is probably a legacy of Biblical typology...’

The stretching of time between two key moments of ontological significance enables us to talk about linear time because we live in a portion of it that can be thought of as linear. The palinstrophic structure we see in our calendar, and in certain narratives, rests on two core features: disjunction, and irreversible sequence on either side of the disjunction. With the concept of disjunction it was possible to break up the history of the world into epochs, each of which was differentiated by disparate inner values (Gurevich 1985:118). The concept of an irreversible sequence shapes time, and has proved to be a powerful tool in modern culture.

To summarise this discussion and return to the frontier, the Year Zero is the medial point in a palinstrophic structure. After zero we move toward the present, before zero we move away from the present. That which exists before the Year Zero prefigures and finds its realisation in that which exists after the Year Zero (see Arthur, this volume). The Year
Zero is thus a disjunctive moment when not just history, but a wholly different kind of life, is about to begin. I am contending that in settler societies the frontier is culturally constructed as precisely this moment: a disjunction between wholly different kinds of time. I suggest that we imagine the frontier as a rolling Year Zero that is carried across the land cutting an ontological swathe between ‘timeless’ land and historicised land. Re-reading Stokes’ little memento concerning the Victoria, we see these Year Zero features: the construction of paired type and anti-type, or as we should read them using more familiar terminology: prototype and developed type. Thus at the centre of the passage we find the key contrast: the fires of the ‘prowling heathen’ and the anticipated Christian hearths. Other contrasts invoke absence: cities and hamlets will fill in what is currently ‘empty’ space, commerce will fill in what is currently ‘unused’ wealth.

Perhaps we should not be surprised that the outriders of civilisation seem to believe that they have a special relationship with God, and that they are exempt from ordinary social accountability. Mary Durack writes of her grandfather as a patriarch in Biblical as well as secular terms:

And who could say that he had not been blessed when he rode into the lonely land with his hand in the hand of God? He had loved the country and its wild people and both had served him well. His family had grown up about him with strong bodies and good minds, his flocks and herds had increased and multiplied. He had brought people and life to the wilderness. There were homes now on the inland rivers and roads criss-crossed the vast, grass plains (1986:280).

Hobbles Danayarr and others experienced the attempted transfiguration Stokes described as a series of violent deceptions enacted place by place across the land. In his extended account of Captain Cook’s colonisation of Australia, Hobbles gives Captain Cook a repeating utterance of disjunction and destruction: “Really beautiful country.” Captain Cook reckoned. “That’s why I’m cleaning up people, take it away...” (quoted in Rose 1984:32). Whereas the settler perspective shows the hand of God bringing people and life to a wilderness, indigenous people experience and recount violence, loss, death, and disorganisation. “Captain Cook reckoned, “I bin want to clean that people right up. That’s good country. I like to put my building there. I like to put my horses there. I like to put my cattle there”’ (quoted in Rose 1984:32). He was creating a new order through the destruction of a pre-existing order: ‘But you, Captain Cook, I know you bin stealing country belong to me fellow, Australia, what we call Australia, that’s for Aboriginal people... You bin take that land, you bin take the mineral, take the gold, everthing... You reckon “white man’s country”’ (quoted in Rose 1984:34).
Year Zero is a moment of transfiguration—an ontological disjunction violently thrust into indigenous space and time. To the extent that it is reasonable to speak of frontier rituals, Michael Taussig (1987) directs our attention to rituals of terror that enforce the violent destruction of the life of the place. In ritual, the time and space in which transformation actually occurs is defined as liminal. Liminal time–space is a medial point between past and future, a suspended arena that is powerful, dangerous, and affirmative of the transformation that is to emerge (V. Turner 1974). The colonising frontier partakes of these qualities; it is a place where something is going to happen, where nothing has quite happened (yet), where everything is in transition. Looking at the frontier in the transitive mode of the conqueror, we see a liminal moment in which history is about to begin, but has not yet quite begun.

Liminal time

In the Australian outback we see the Year Zero stretched across virtually the whole of the continent. The frontier has expanded, but the rest of the story has not yet followed along behind. In addition to being stretched across space, the Year Zero is also stretched through time; it has been held constant through 100 years of conquest, waiting, so to speak, for the rest of the story to happen.

This is the theme of Hill's representation of the Territory. She delights in civilisation's failure to domesticate the land, presenting failure as a positive virtue. The triumph of the land is expressed vividly in a description of expermental farms, with the conflict heightened by pitting science against nature:

For the Government farms were doomed to shabby failure. They came to nothing in the first year, and were mercifully drowned in the next monsoon...crops withered in hot winds, then rotted in wet ground. They were riddled with pests and smothered in weeds. Science could not save them, for all solutions washed off in the wet, and there was no hope of driving back the weeds. Everything useful was overrun by everything noxious. Even pumpkin vines were devoured by pumpkin beetle. Prize fowls gave up the ghost to water-snakes and goannas... (1970:279).

The whole study can be read in terms of two themes: the triumph of nature which is what makes the Australian frontier unique; and the eventual triumph of civilisation, which is what makes Australia part of the modern world. It thus affirms the centrality of the white man's frontier, and offers a funeral oration for it. Hill's work thus generates a sustained time–space of liminality in which is formed a unique white Australian
person/identity. The two themes are linked by sorrow. On one hand the failure of the settlers to tame the land resulted in disappointment and despair for many of them: ‘In any case the flood and the jungle would take all their labour. Nature was never cut and trimmed to man’s little pattern of profit and loss in this passionate land...’ (Hill 1970:260). On the other hand, she asserts the imminent arrival of civilisation; for white people the passing of the frontier is both a death and a fulfilment, and thus a bittersweet and inescapable destiny.

Outback story

The liminal quality of this extended Year Zero enables the perpetuation in time and space of a set of time–space coordinates that invokes time but does not record it. It is a moment suspended — waiting for the rest of the story to arrive. The holding pattern has been the broad acres pastoral industry of North Australia. This industry has been around for a long time, against expectations, and there is far more variation than I can hope to engage with (see Gill, this volume). In order to demonstrate some of the dimensions of this liminal time space in the lives of contemporary white pastoralists of the north, I look to a documentary film called Outback Story. Made in 1991 by an Australian film maker, Hugh Piper, it was funded by an American TV corporation. It was shown first in America, and subsequently in Australia on the ABC. The film concerns Bradshaw Station, owned by Ian McBean, and is organised around a year in the life of this cattle station family: Ian and Kay McBean, and their two children.

The station is 10 000 square kilometres; when the film was made, McBean and his family had owned it for ten years, and lived on it for eight. At one point in the film Ian McBean offers a very brief autobiography. It encapsulates most of the points I have made thus far:

I came in '52, worked as ringer and stockman for a number of years down around in Alice Springs and up on the Barkly Tableland. And then I started droving. In those days there weren’t nearly as many white people up here, all the camps were made up of mainly Aboriginal stockmen. They were first class stockmen. It was a lot of fun working in the camps, for a young fellow to come up in those days. It was a bit of the Wild and Woolly West. 'Last Frontier’ type of thing. It was as such an adventure. While you were still young you didn’t worry about money. It was just an adventure. I suppose, in latter years, I stayed here too long. ’Cause it got into my blood and I just never wanted to leave the country. I just sort of got married to the country, got married to my stations.
Early in the film, Mrs Kay McBean says that they are not sure what the future holds for them. They are not in financial distress, but they are burdened with uncertainty. Throughout the whole film there is a tension between the continuity of family, and the lack of certainty about their future in the place. Sam McBean, aged 12, was invited to discuss his plans for education and his hope of gaining a foothold in the pastoral industry. Asked about Bradshaw specifically, he says:

I think that by the time I get old enough to own Bradshaw or to look after Bradshaw, it'll all be cut up into little places like down in New South Wales. It'll be really small, really small tiny places, where you can only run a few hundred head or whatever.

One hundred and fifty years separate Captain Stokes and Sam McBean. Stokes saw himself as an initiator of disjunction, and a forerunner in a story that would follow almost inevitably. In 1991 the disjunction has occurred, but the next stage of the story has not. Sam McBean articulates the contours of the grand narrative of civilisation. In spite of his youthful optimism and his hard work and responsibilities on the station, his words convey to me the paradox of the transitive moment. The temporal dimension of the place does not include him in the future tense. Consequently, his own temporal future does not include the family place.

Since making the film, the station has been sold to the Australian Defence Force. Its future is still in question pending the impact surveys, and McBean has purchased a much smaller property in an area that has been subdivided.

Imagining a future

The white people who have conquered this country find themselves in a liminal and paradoxical time-space, unlike the indigenous people for whom it is neither liminal nor paradoxical. Those white pastoralists who live in the north, who defend it so passionately and speak of it with such love, are unable to imagine a future that is anything like the present. The grand narrative really does not include a future for them, and they continue to see themselves in a transitive mode in which the work of today will not result in the reproduction of their way of life into the future.

Looking at the frontier in this way, we see a liminal moment in which history is about to begin. But until history begins, it is possible to assert that nothing is really changing. This transitive quality is particularly evident when one considers the nature of the pastoral lease. Pastoral lands are held under leases that require certain levels of stocking and other evidence of use, and allow the government to resume the land when
something better offers. Durack (1986:125) makes this point forcefully in respect of the family's leases in Queensland:

On this right of resumption the State, mindful of its duty to posterity, had of course to stand firm, for although leases might be indefinitely extended, even to ninety-nine years, the title deeds remained with the Crown together with the right to use the land for other purposes should the need arise.

Further:

It was a clause of the Pastoral Leasers Act of '69 that they must be prepared to give up the land on demand for cultivation or closer settlement and certain small resumptions were already going on. Although these did not much trouble the settlers since they were compensated for improvements and pioneering work, there was no guarantee that government demands might not at any time force them out of the country (1986:177).

Reservations in favour of resumption make no sense at all unless one assumes that current land use does not have a significant impact on the land. They thus reflect cultural structures of disjunction and transition. The logic is that change is occurring but is not accumulating. The reservations in favour of continuing indigenous use of the land assume that settlers and indigenous people can co-exist. History has proved this to be the case, and the High Court's 'Mabo' and 'Wik' decisions confirm this point within the legal system. Co-existence was deemed possible because civilisation had not yet arrived, and the land had not yet been altered. Indigenous people could continue to use the land because in this transitive moment, nothing of major significance was deemed to be happening to the land. By the same logic, future cultivators would be able to use the land for their purposes.

Mary Durack's grandfather went to the Kimberley with a vision of civilisation, and died disappointed. Another of the Duracks, Long Michael, was more pragmatic. He asserted 'I'm going to Kimberley to make money. Not to make a home' (Durack 1986:259). Both visions involve wealth: one the wealth built up through settlement and investment, the other the wealth of extraction. On the Australian frontier, extraction has proved to be immensely profitable. In a land where extraction rules, certain land use practices are favoured. As Durack explains:

Some day they would build a fine house — a mansion indeed — and there would be time for the proper husbanding and cultivation of the land. For the present, as was the custom in this country of
prodigal, fenceless acres and labour shortage, they would turn their stock loose to pasture on the virgin land and would ‘tail’ their cattle until they became accustomed to their legitimate boundaries (Durack 1986:60).

This a-historical moment is marked by a particular type of production which is most succinctly defined as plunder. Indeed, a key feature of the frontier, from first settlement to today, is a form of exploitation that tips wealth out of the land without regard for the long-term consequences. Lewis Mumford described this form of exploitation in America as ‘spread and plunder’, while Athearn (1986:89, 128) provides the American vernacular: you ‘git and git out’. The logic of plunder is that you do not have a future in this place. Rather than building for the future of the place, extraction severs reciprocity between persons and place, removing wealth without responsibility. Freedom becomes a gloss for absence of responsibility toward the place. Plunder is immensely wasteful, and thus becomes a driving force to conquest. As the productivity of land is wasted, conquerors move on to plunder new lands (Turner 1994:46). The cultural expressions of plunder include freedom and untrammelled action (Athearn 1986:116).

By the 1930s, according to Durack, it was becoming clear that plunder was producing consequences other than wealth, that the timeless land was neither timeless nor unchanging:

All those indications of a sick land in a bankrupt economy — the drought-stricken, eroding plains, the dwindling herds, the shortage of stock horses, the deteriorating homesteads, the dearth of traffic on the neglected roads, the out-of-work bagmen camped on the creek banks, the spread of disease among the Aborigines, the company’s ten thousand square miles estate scarcely covering the cost of wages and stores—we saw as evidence of the need for change in which we hoped to play a part when times improved. Father, naturally enough, could see them only as evidence that his family had done no good in the country and should get out (Durack 1986:399).

Images of timelessness, of transition, liminality, and transfiguration all direct attention away from the land and people of the here and now, and toward a future in which everything will be different. It is clear to many thinking people that North Australian frontiers are in radical need of care and attention in their here and now. One approach is to look to the transformation of land and production, aiming often enough to intensify output rather than responsibility.

In contrast, I argue that we must look to the transformation of society and culture. The challenge is to find ways to imagine a future that will
include this place as a productive home, and us as people whose labour will sustain for us a future in this place. The first principle of this endeavour must be reconciliation and reciprocity with indigenous peoples, for their cultures and practices are founded in long term reciprocal interactions with home countries which are neither liminal nor mapped by absence.
Endnotes

This paper builds on ideas that I explore in greater detail in a number of other analyses of frontier mythology, for example Rose forthcoming a & b, 1997, 1996, 1992.

His life ended in disappointment because 'the towns and the homes had not come as he had hoped' (Durack 1986:382). Her own father saw a declining economy and determined that the family should get out (ibid.:399). In fact, however, at least two members of Mary Durack's generation continued to live in the north and to run cattle, while other members of the extended family have remained in the area.

Hobbies Danaiyari, Tape 30, 24/3/82; See Rose 1984 & 1991 for longer versions of the Captain Cook Saga.

Cohn (1993) discusses Zoroastrian origins of beliefs in the return of the warrior hero, and the concept of bounded time and a post-time state of bliss.
References


Chapter Three – Jay Arthur

An unobtrusive goanna

The Ord River district is the landscape of an Event, that of the transformation of a landscape through the damming of the river. I want to look at this transformation as a particularly colonising event, in which the colonising language constructs the transformation as a response to the needs of the landscape, as an answer to a question posed by the land itself.

The Event was and is a controversial one, in its real costs and in its possible benefits. It has produced a landscape which is both typical and atypical of northern Australia. For most of the time of non-Aboriginal occupation of northern Australia there has been an anxiety about ‘emptiness’, a concern that the occupation has in some way been ‘insufficient’, not only as a ‘deterrent’ to an unspecified threat from Asia, but also as a failure of the imperative of occupation itself, which demands a certain clarity of mark to be laid upon the landscape. The anxiety is expressed in the Australian English term the empty north, first recorded in 1918; the situation is usually presented as a problem.¹ The impulse which drove the support for the project had much of its origin in this anxiety. On the other hand, with its intensive agriculture and permanent and relatively consistent water supply, it is an atypical landscape in an area dominated by the low-intensity European cattle industry and by great fluctuations in water supply between the Wet and the Dry.

This Event can be traced in a series of texts written over a period of 25 years. These texts include newspaper reports, magazine articles,
tourist material, speeches given by the Prime Minister and the Premier of Western Australia at the opening ceremony, government reports and other state publications dating from 1965 to the present day. Within these particular texts the arguments concerning the value of the project are 'pro-development'. This article focusses mainly on material from the opening and closing of this period and looks at the terms used within these texts to construct the Event of the Ord River Project and the landscapes this Event produced. This analysis is part of my concern with the way the major colonising language has constructed Australian landscapes.

In the 1979 edition of the *Australian Encyclopaedia* the entry under 'Ord River' reads as follows:

ORD RIVER, a stream in the Kimberley district of Western Australia. In 1970–72, it was dammed about 40 kilometres south of Kununurra ... to form a main reservoir, called Lake Argyle, for the Ord Irrigation Project; nearer the town is a diversion reservoir, Lake Kununurra. Below the dam the river meanders through broad alluvial flats, including Packsaddle and Ivanhoe plains, before entering the East Arm of Cambridge Gulf. The river was named after Sir Henry Ord, Governor of Western Australia from 1879 to 1880, and the main reservoir covers the former Argyle pastoral property owned by the Durack family...

The foundation of the dam was sunk in 1970 and it was officially opened in June 1972; the first (400 hectare) farms, dependent upon the irrigation project at Packsaddle Plain, were sold in 1972–3.²

The four landscapes

From these texts, four landscapes emerge. Two belong to the land before the flooding and two belong to the land after the river has been dammed and the plains irrigated.

**Landscape 1 – see Figure 1**

Before Lake Argyle, before the irrigated plains, there was a different place. A version of this landscape is constructed in texts written when the original landscape was still visible, and in recollection in texts written twenty years later. The landscape is constructed almost entirely as a pre-European place, but the region had experienced nearly a century of colonisation, as part of the Kimberley cattle industry. Argyle Downs Station, which was flooded by the waters of Lake Argyle, had been
Landscape of the Ord River before the dam was built, as described or remembered in the language of the texts, with the imagined lake and irrigated plain.

Figure 1: Landscape 1 - pre-dam landscape 1

- 'IRRIGATED AREA'
  - only flowed in Wet
  - reduced to chain of pools
- 'LAKE ARGYLE'
  - sleeps in the past
  - ruined and desolate
  - vulnerable and empty
  - drumming drooping crooning
- ORD RIVER
  - haunting cry of wild geese
- stony
- silence
- baking wasteland
- scorching heat
- dust/debris
- sheer isolation
- sparse vegetation

Remote
founded by the Durack family, the best-known European family in the Kimberleys. Although the presentation is of a pre-European landscape, it is not seen as Aboriginal. There are few references, especially in the earlier material, to the indigenous population. The landscape is primarily seen as a ‘natural’ one, the home of eagles. One of the few references to the resident Aboriginal society refers to a drumming, drooning, crooning sound supposedly made by the Aboriginal people; sounds positioned in opposition to the wind, but nonetheless almost non-human.

It is a ‘natural’ rather than a human landscape, but it is a deficient nature. It is stony, sparse, vulnerable, lonely and empty, a place of silence, dust and flies. Its emptiness is underlined by the sounds of the haunting cry of wild geese. It is a landscape not fully functional—it sleeps in the past, its water is wasted and its major river only flows in the Wet and is reduced to a chain of pools in the Dry. It is located in a particular place—it is remote, a place of sheer isolation, lonely. Such references as there are to the pre-irrigation European use of the landscape (as opposed to comments on the cattle families as ‘pioneers’) continue the images of deficiency, the land being ruined and desolate, rendered a baking wasteland by the activities of cattle grazing.

Landscape 2 – see Figure 2

If the first construction was one of deficiency, there is an alternative one to be found in these texts, often within the same text, which presents a landscape of excess, out of control, out of knowledge, out of scale. It is a very old, ancient landscape, vast, hostile, wild with an unfamiliar climate and untapped resources. Within this construction the river is particularly important—it is a rampaging giant, the scourge of fertile soil. It demonstrates a staggering force and a raging fury. While the land is deficient, the river is excessive.

In some sense, though, both these landscapes are ones of excess. This place is too much—it is too dry, too wet, too hot, too lonely, too empty, too stony, too violent, too isolated, too wasteful, too desolate. The excess is produced by the natural state of this landscape; the human experience is presented as absence, ruined and desolate, or as meaningless sound, drumming drooning crooning. The land in this form belongs neither to the indigenous people nor to the colonisers. Human history in terms of marks upon the landscape, as visible evidence of human ownership and human activity, is absent and activity is found in the anarchic, natural energy of the river. The dehumanising of the landscape is reinforced by its location in time and place—it is away, remote, and in the past, ancient. There are no terms for the future in the pre-dam landscapes.
Figure 2: Landscape 2 – pre-dam landscape 2
A second lexical image of the described or remembered landscape before the dam
The dam is built, the land is changed. After the flood, two different landscapes emerge from the text.

Landscape 3 – see Figure 3

This post-dam landscape is full of light—shiny, shimmering, bright and energy and change—innovation and images of release—opened up. This light and energy is connected with the activities of the colonisers, particularly those associated with damming and irrigating. The new sugar mill is shiny, the dam water shimmers, and it is colonisers who open up and unlock. This new energy however is denied the river which is no longer a raging giant; tamed and harnessed, it quietened and grew fat. This new energy is presented as ‘appropriate’, in contrast to the destructive, anarchic energy of the earlier construction. It is presented as balance—it will increase rainfall but moderate the heat.

Words of deficiency and loss are replaced by those of fertility—ample bosom, larder, spawn, reaps, progeny. The water is now permanent.

The future, which was absent from the previous constructions, is present here as a bright future, a promise, as a dream come true. It is not only the future but a ‘good’ future and a future which was not accidental but intended—a destiny, a vision. The place is also relocated—it is no longer remote, but the hub of the universe to be. From being old and far away, it is now new and central.

This future, this fertility, this centrality, are caused by human activity—this place has become creative and fulfilled as a human landscape, but a non-Aboriginal one. The transforming human agency is non-indigenous.

Landscape 4 – see Figure 4

The fourth landscape is one of absences. This is the construction of indigenous space, of the indigenous world, both human and non-human. In the post-dam time, Aboriginal people are said to have announced that the Dreamings for the drowned land are finished; they are said to be affected by the drowning of their countries, they must surrender land; land purchased by new settlers will be issued with heritage clearances in reference to Aboriginal sites; land claims may retard progress. Their role is passive or obstructive; Aboriginal communities either become invisible or, if they insist on their presence in the landscape, are presented as obstructive, a presence to be cleared away before the possibilities of the landscape are fulfilled. Aboriginality is conceived as having no place in the post-dam world.
Figure 3: Landscape 3 - post-dam landscape, with Lake Argyle and the irrigated plans

The Ord River after the building of the dam, with Lake Argyle

spawn a marvel
bewildering abundance wildlife
opened up
energy
reaps
quietened
progeny
shiny
IRRIGATED AREA
wildlife sanctuary
tamed
tadger of prosperity
remedy
opened up
bright future
promise
moderate heat
larder
grew fat
shimmering
ample bosom
harness
natural beauty
increase rainfall
innovation
dream come true
permanent
ORD RIVER
hub of the universe to be
decide destiny
The indigenous landscape as imagined or described once the dam was built and the land flooded has not appeared to have destroyed any unique ecosystem.

Inadequate monitoring likely affected Aboriginal people.

No record suggests little monitoring.

Aboriginals surrender land limiting a few species little knowledge little known.

IRRIGATED AREA land claims retard progress.

ORD RIVER

LAKE ARGYLE

dreamings finished

heritage clearances
Indigenous flora and fauna enter the argument, predominantly in discussion of the effect of the dam on the ecosystem. Most references imply that the effects of the dam on the ecosystem are not generally known, with terms such as little monitoring, inadequate monitoring, no monitoring, little knowledge, little known, suggests, likely, no record. But there are few references (except for terms such as inadequate) implying possible future unpleasant disclosures from this lack of knowledge. Negative effects are presented in phrases such as limiting a few species. The underlying assumptions are summed up in the statement from the 1979 Ord River Irrigation Area Report

[Lake Argyle] does not appear to have destroyed any unique ecosystem.

The new country of the post-dam landscape is without lack, it is complete and flourishing. The indigenous human presence is either retreating or is seen as a bar to fulfilment; the indigenous natural presence may be altered, but in that altering nothing of value has been lost. Plants and animals which have prospered through the changes brought about by the dam are seen as examples of the dam's beneficence rather than of value in themselves. The new world of the dam is complete without the indigenous presence, either human or natural, and is not deprived by any indigenous loss. The new world has closed, complete and shining, and there is no language of loss to mark the absence of the indigenous and no words of belonging for the indigenous to claim a place in the new world.

Visible and invisible

The Ord River Project, Second Stage, was officially opened on 30 June 1972 with a ceremony held at the foot of the dam wall of Lake Argyle (see Plate 1). The wall, which is 100 m high and over 300 m wide, is constructed of local earth, and the two explosions used to quarry this earth were the largest non-nuclear explosions in Australia. In his speech at the ceremony, Premier Tonkin of Western Australia commented:

It is remarkable because of its capacity when you come to think of it, that a wall of this size, an earth wall, is capable of holding back a volume of water equal to about 8 or 9 times the volume of water in Sydney Harbour. It lies here in this valley as unobtrusively as a goanna upon a rock. As [sic] it has only been here a short time, it will not be very long before it merges into the general landscape of the Carboyd Ranges as if it were here quite naturally [my emphasis].

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Twenty-five years later, in an article on the Ord River Project in *Australian Geographic* July–September 1996, the dam wall was described as being *barely discernible* from the air amid the sprawling Carboyd Ranges.\textsuperscript{27}

In these two texts, the wall is simultaneously highly visible and celebrated for its size and its effect, and almost invisible. It can be described as *barely visible, unobtrusive, and barely discernible*, if the landscape is read in two particular ways. In the first reading, the indigenous landscape is understood as having no meaning in its present shape so therefore, as long as the new shape resembles the indigenous shapes, it cannot be ‘seen’. The resemblance is achieved by building the dam wall of local earth. In the second reading the indigenous landscape is seen to be incomplete, is understood as chaos. Radical alteration within this reading can then be understood as completion, as remedying lack and inserting order. For Tonkin to refer to the wall as *unobtrusive as a goanna* and for the *Australian Geographic* to refer to the wall as *barely discernible* is a question not of aesthetics but of landscape reading. In these constructions, modifying the landscape is presented as working with the landscape, as creating something which is as indigenous as a goanna, and thus it cannot be seen. This indifference to the original shape of the indigenous landscape as it is can be correlated with the lack of valuation of indigenous knowledge, with the indifference to the cultural loss represented by the ‘finished dreamings’, with the indifference to the lack of knowledge about the massive ecological changes brought about by the introduction of such a large body of water, as well as by the drowning of such a large land area.

But this indifference to indigenous loss can be understood to represent a more radical view. The most interesting comments refer to the *natural beauty\textsuperscript{28}* of the dam and its environments, although the natural beauty may be *man-made.*\textsuperscript{29} These constructions present the colonised and changed landscapes as not so much transformed as fulfilled, the changes brought about by the introduction of this colonised method of land use being not change but completion. The alterations make the land ‘naturally’ beautiful, because the kind of changes brought about make it more like it ought to be. The dam wall lies across the valley ‘like a goanna on a rock’ because it expresses the true nature of the place; it ‘grew out’ of the landscape because the changes wrought in some way fulfil a potential which had been there and which this colonising act has brought to fulfilment.

Colonisation has, in these constructions, enabled this particular northern landscape to realise its full potential; what was lost is irrelevant as a function of the deficient and unfinished past. The country under Lake Argyle is not drowned but saved. Colonisation is not occupation, but the eighth day of creation.
Plate 1: A view of the opening ceremony at the Lake Argyle dam wall, 30 June 1972
[Photo courtesy the West Australian]
Endnotes

5. Northern Times 6 July, np; Sunday Times 2 July, np; Australian Geographic
6. Prime Minister McMahon, Opening Ceremony 30 June 1972, Sunday Times 2
   July 1972, np.
8. Prime Minister McMahon 30 June 1972; McLennan 1965, p 16; Ord Project
   1992 vol. 1 p 11.
11. It is interesting to note the dissociation in these texts between the acknowledged
    damage to the landscape and the perpetrators of this damage—the ‘cattle kings’.
    In neither is there a direct connection made between the people and the land
    degradation; the people are generally lauded as pioneers while the degradation
    is acknowledged only as an extra justification for the flooding of the landscape.
12. Australian Geographic July/Sept 1996, p 81; McLennan 1965, p 16; Sunday
    Times 2 July 1972, np; McLennan 1965, p16; Ord Project 1993, vol. 3 p 1;
    McLennan 1965, p 16.
13. Sunday Times 2 July 1972 np; ibid.; ibid.; Australian Geographic July/Sept 1996,
    p 85.
14. Australian Geographic July/Sept 1996, p 72; ibid. p 83; McLennan 1965, p16,
    Australian Geographic July/Sept p 86, 91.
15. Sunday Times 2 July, np; Northern Times 6 July, np; Australian Geographic
17. West Australian 22 Jan 1972, np; Northern Times 6 July 1972, np; West Australian
    22 Jan 1972, np; Australian Geographic July/Sept, p 82; ibid.
18. McLennan 1965, p 16; Premier Tonkin Opening Speech 30 June 1972; Northern
    Times 6 July 1972, np; ibid.
22. ORIA 1979, p 111; ibid. p 113; Ord Project No. 1 1993, p 76; Ord Project No. 2
    111.
24. ORIA, p 111.
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Tonkin, Premier, Opening Speech, Lake Argyle Dam, 30 June 1972.
The contested domain of pastoralism: landscape, work and outsiders in Central Australia

Extensive cattle grazing has long been the dominant land use in Central Australian rangelands. Today, however, the pastoral landscape is increasingly fractured and contested by indigenous and environmentalist claims on land. Pastoralists in Central Australia are responding to environmentalist claims by reasserting territory. Territory is being constructed with reference to particular forms of social nature and social space. Identities of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ have developed. These identities commonly correspond to pastoralists and others, such as conservationists and government, but the place-specific nature of pastoralists’ environmental knowledge has the potential to render pastoralists as ‘outsiders’ as well. Moreover, as debates over rangelands are about creating new places, such knowledge may become less effective in resisting non-pastoral valuations of rangelands.

The arid and semi-arid grazing lands of Australia are in a state of flux and contention. Since European settlement, the dominant land use of these rangelands has been extensive pastoralism, mainly involving grazing of cattle and sheep. Over the 1980s and 1990s, however, the pastoral landscape is showing cracks in the face of reassertion of Aboriginal rights to land, the conservation movement and questions regarding the economic returns from pastoralism relative to benefits from alternative uses and tenure regimes (Heathcote 1994; Holmes 1994). The National Strategy for Rangeland Management (NSRM), set
up by the Commonwealth government in 1993, is one reflection of concerns from land administrators, conservationists, Aboriginal people and organisations and scientists that current tenure and management arrangements for rangelands are inadequate for the realisation of the diverse values and aspirations regarding them (National Rangeland Management Working Group, 1996). No longer can it be said that the dominant concept of Australia’s and semi-arid lands is pastoral. These landscapes are being rewritten in indigenous and ecological terms and the legitimacy of pastoralism is being challenged.

The significance of these challenges is not lost on pastoralists. In a survey of South Australian pastoralists1, Holmes & Day (1995) found that ‘unrealistic demands from the conservation movement’ ranked highest amongst perceived threats to pastoralists, outranking even ‘poor market prospects’. ‘Aboriginal land claims’ ranked third as a perceived threat, narrowly outranked by ‘increase in lease rentals’.

The challenges to pastoralism come in a variety of guises. In Australia as a whole, Aboriginal title to leasehold land has been reaffirmed in the High Court ‘Mabo’ and ‘Wik’ decisions, in 1992 and 1996 respectively. As a result of these decisions, pastoralists cannot assume sole rights to the land they lease from The Crown, as Native Title has been held to remain in existence under common law. At the time of writing (February 1997), this issue is high in the national political agenda as the National Farmers’ Federation seeks a legislative response to overide the ‘Wik’ decision and ‘to give Australia’s pastoralists the exclusive occupancy on their leases’ (Weekend Australian, February 1–2 1997:2).

In the Northern Territory, land rights legislation has been in place since 1976 and, as of 1994, 21 pastoral leases had been purchased by Aboriginal interests (Central Land Council and Northern Land Council, 1994). About half of these are operating as fully commercial enterprises and many have been converted to Aboriginal freehold title under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.2 Pastoralists in the Northern Territory view Aboriginal ownership of land as an erosion of the pastoral estate, as undermining the viability of the pastoral industry and as a loss of productive land (for example see the Northern Territory Cattlemens Association Yearbook 1991/92:57).

Pressure on the pastoral industry from conservationists has also intensified in recent years. This pressure has come in the form of specific proposals such as those for World Heritage listing over parts of the Nullarbor Plain and the Lake Eyre Basin (see Wood 1993 for a pastoralist’s view on these issues) and in the form of programs for systematic reform of rangelands tenure and use throughout Australia. Based upon concerns about land degradation and reductions in biodiversity on pastoral lands, conservationists are calling for a representative reserve system in arid and semi-arid Australia and the
identification, reorganisation and implementation of new management systems' (Ledgar & Stafford-Smith 1996:21). According to Ledgar (1995) the development of such systems would include ensuring that pastoral land use is based upon land capability assessment and ecological criteria; the immediate removal of non-native grazing animals from known marginal areas; the removal of the massive subsidies that still characterise Australian agriculture; and ensuring that Aboriginal people are able to resume their role as land managers. Conservationists also believe that the 'views of the whole of the Australian community' should be taken into account 'when assessing priorities for land use allocation and the protection of biodiversity' (Ledgar 1995:44).

Conservationists have been able to realise this view in the political arena. The Arid Lands Coalition (ALC) was one of three interest groups, along with the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and Aboriginal interests (the Central Land Council (CLC) coordinated the submission from Aboriginal interests) to receive federal government funding to enable them to participate in the NSRM. They were also represented on the working group for the NSRM.

In this paper I look at some of the strategies employed by pastoralists to deal with these challenges to their place in the rangelands, by drawing from a case study of settler pastoralists in the southern Northern Territory in the Alice Springs pastoral district, hereafter referred to as Central Australia (see Maps 1 and 2). I will focus on how pastoralists have responded to perceived threats from the conservation movement over the 1980s and 1990s. I use the term 'conservation movement' to refer to the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), the ALC, the Environment Centre in Darwin (ECNT), and the Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) in Alice Springs.

There are a number of strategies that pastoralists have employed to deal with the challenges from conservationists. The best known action by pastoralists is the formation of a landcare group, the Centralian Land Management Association (CLMA). This group has its origins in a 1988 meeting on Mount Skinner Station. In this paper, however, I want to focus on strategies that are more diffuse and which are embedded in discourses produced by pastoralists and by the Northern Territory Cattlemens Association (NTCA). The strategies examined in this paper are those through which Central Australian pastoralists draw upon knowledge of land gained by working and living on it, to demarcate boundaries and construct territory, and which are deployed to structure 'insider' and 'outsider' identities. In these strategies socially constructed nature and space come to inscribe boundaries of territory and social difference.
Map 1: The Northern Territory of Australia

Map 2: The study area
Space, nature and exclusion

Social construction of space is a process charged with relations of power. Demarcation of space and inscription of meaning onto space are processes in which social relations and strategies of inclusion and exclusion are both played out and constituted (Jackson 1989; Sibley 1992; Anderson 1993; Gelder & Jacobs 1995; Jacobs 1996). Similarly ‘socially constructed nature is involved in the production and reproduction of unequal social (power) relations’ (Silvern 1995:269). In recent years, overcoming the divide between nature and society has become a significant focus of both theoretical and empirical research (for example, Fitzsimmons 1989; Katz & Kirby 1991; Dake 1992; Everden 1992; Rose 1992; Simpson 1992; Whatmore & Boucher 1993; Harrison & Burgess 1994; Anderson 1995; Castree 1995; Silvern 1995). This work has shed light on a wide range of social relations ranging from development and natural resource management conflicts to gender and race relations.

Here I want to build on Silvern’s (1995) paper in which he examines a conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous Americans in Wisconsin over fishing practices and rights. In doing so, he builds on the theme of ‘the mutually constitutive relationship of nature, cultural identity and territory [space]’ (Silvern ibid.:268). Part of his agenda is to examine how social nature is ‘incorporated into the resistance strategies of politically and socially marginal groups’ (Silvern ibid.:269). I want to undertake a similar task but with respect to a relatively powerful group, settler pastoralists in Central Australia. I will show how pastoralists draw on a form of social nature constituted through labour, to construct space/territory and identities of insiders and outsiders.

Knowing your land

Pastoralists have responded in a number of ways to the reimagining of Central Australia. One of the more common responses of Central Australian pastoralists to criticism of their land management practices, as is often the case amongst rural landholders, is to assert their right to manage their land as they see fit. The corollary of this is that others, such as bureaucrats, conservationists and academics have no right to say how pastoral land should be used or managed. In the following sections I will consider, at least in part, the basis of the Central Australian pastoralists’ claim to sole decision-making rights on pastoral lands, relying on information gathered during fieldwork in Central Australia in 1996 and on texts produced by pastoralists and the NTCA. I will look at two scales—that of the individual property, and that of the Alice Springs pastoral district as a whole.
Property boundaries/spaces of self

At a Northern Territory Landcare meeting south of Alice Springs in August 1996, the chair of the NT Landcare Council, John Lugg, a pastoralist from the Darwin area, noted that one can read a lot about biodiversity. He went on to say that this material comes from people who haven’t experienced it, and intimated that their view of biodiversity was derived from computer-based mapping and modelling, conducted in places distanced from the daily landscapes of rural people. He said that there are, however, things that one cannot put on a computer screen, and these are people’s feelings. In calling for speakers at an after-dinner discussion, Mr Lugg said he wanted to hear first from those with ‘dirt under their fingernails’. In this he was making a clear distinction between the pastoralists present and others such as government staff, representatives of ALEC and ECNT, and academics like myself.

Work is fundamental to human relations with nature; it embeds us in nature, and is implicated in where boundaries are drawn, if at all, between nature and society, by different groups such as loggers and wilderness bushwalkers (White 1995). Work and nature are also implicated in drawing social boundaries and constructing space. John Lugg’s comments above are doing precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists’ work does precisely this in relation to a specific type of work.

Pastoralists value particular forms of work, physical labour expended in managing a cattle properties, over other forms of work, such as the predominantly office based work of government staff and conservationists. This contrast has been mobilised previously to fend off conservationists. For example, in the 1987/88 annual report of the NTCA (p 24) the association’s executive director lambasts conservationists.

It is about time for the folks who purport to have an interest in our environment—‘Greenies’—to come down from their ivory towers and dismount the bloody great white horses they ride, and get out and do some constructive work for a change ... either GET ON with helping to solve the problems (instead of redefining them ad nauseum) or GET OUT of the way.
It is not just that pastoralists' work is valued over other forms of work. Crucially, pastoralists' work generates environmental knowledge that is both specific to a property and its owners/managers and to Central Australian pastoralism.

Knowledge of their stations is vital to the financial survival of pastoralists. This is not to say that sound knowledge of one's land will prevent problems—many factors may cause the demise of a cattle business—but such knowledge is necessary for the possibility of financial survival. Pastoralists' knowledge of their stations is gained largely through their work and can be detailed. Station work is physically demanding, potentially dangerous (Plate 1), occurs in extremes of temperature, is often repetitive and involves long days and long weeks. The day typically begins before dawn and depending upon the time of year and the work being done, may not end until after dark.

![Plate 1: Drafting cattle on Lyndavale Station. In such situations there is a risk of the cattle suddenly coming back through the gate.](image)

Photo: N Gill

The tasks that are undertaken on a station are many and varied and often involve moving around the station, or camping where work is being undertaken (Plate 2).
Plate 2: Repairing a damaged tank on Lucy Creek Station. To undertake such jobs pastoralists regularly drive long distances. Photo: N Gill.

One regular feature of life on Central Australian stations is driving around the property. Pastoralists will drive hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres per week in the normal course of running a station. Bore runs, when pastoralists check each bore on their station, are a weekly task, and provide a means by which large areas of the stations are regularly seen under a wide range of conditions. The main purpose of a bore run is to check the functioning of bores, tanks and troughs. Such travel, however, also facilitates observation of the property as a whole, be it pasture condition, soil erosion, water flow or changes in the land due to rainfall, or changes in management practice. It is possible that as bore runs typically follow roads and tracks on the stations they may in fact provide only a limited perspective on the station. However, on bore runs, pastoralists may also check property features not on the tracks, driving cross-country to reach them. Furthermore, other station activities, such as mustering, doing bore runs by plane or moving cattle, facilitate observation of areas of the station away from tracks.4

This sort of travel and work around stations allows time on the land and intimate contact over long periods. Bill Waudby, former owner of Central Mount Wedge Station discusses this process below in an interview with me:
NG: So what did looking after your cattle involve?
BW: Well it became a matter of once you came through the boundary gate you were back on the job again, you had to look after your waters, you had to look after your stock. You had to maintain this, that—yards, fences, and the waters. All this had to be taken into account. It was a twenty-four hour job, three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. It was a way of life; it was a good way of life.
NG: To what extent did managing your pastures come into looking after your cattle?
BW: Well, if you’ve got country that—well I will say this, that you’ve got the big areas and you can move your cattle around if you’re managing your pastures properly. If this area is getting eaten out and hasn’t had any relief from rain and that, if you’re on the ball you’ll move them to somewhere else, you know, on to feed, and also you must have water there. So you’ve got to look ahead a bit. Quite a bit, actually.
NG: So how did you keep an eye on how the pastures were going around the property?
BW: Well you’d be going around all the time, looking here, there. You know, you’d never really let up, you just had to—you know, you had to be very observant and on the ball (Interview 10/10/96).

In the course of such contact with land, pastoralists are able to observe how their land responds to their management practices—to their work. In observing their land and how it responds to their actions, such as rabbit control by shooting, or warren ripping, or changes in stocking rates, pastoralists accumulate environmental knowledge that is vital to managing their stations. However, this knowledge is not simply a useful resource in station management. It also plays a key role in pastoralists’ response to conservationists in that this knowledge is a key symbol in constituting self and other. This environmental knowledge is a means through which to explore the relationship between identity and landscape.

There are two basic ways in which pastoralists have communicated their environmental knowledge to me. One is in terms of explaining particular phenomena on their properties, the other is in terms of dealing with complexity in the land around them.

The knowledge that people have of their properties is intimate in its detail. As one moves around properties one sees grasslands, woodlands, areas of dead trees, dense stands of particular trees, bare areas, erosion gullies. Everywhere there is evidence of rain, flood, fire, lack of fire, rehabilitation work, too much stocking, light stocking, no stocking. Yet much of this is invisible unless one asks, particularly the signs that are related to management actions of the pastoralists.
themselves. Ecological knowledge of how particular land systems respond to various grazing regimes will assist a trained or experienced observer to infer what has transpired in a particular place, but it does not provide access to personal landscapes of work. To the pastoralists, everywhere they go there is evidence of past work—they know they spent months shooting rabbits here five years ago, they know they have been stocking this paddock lightly for a few years, they know after which rains stands of trees came up, they know that on this bore the previous owners ran three times the number of cattle they now run. They know what has happened on their property in some detail and they know how their land responded to various events and processes. This is a landscape of work and activity, of successes and failures that is known only to them.

The second aspect of pastoralists’ knowledge of land that I want to mention is complexity. The biophysical landscape processes of arid lands are highly variable in time and space (Griffin & Freidel 1985; Freidel et al. 1990; Stafford-Smith & Morton 1990). The pastoralists are dealing with this in their daily lives and seeing changes in the land as a result of their own actions and as a result of biophysical factors. They are not always able to explain what they see happening but they are always watching and as one older man put it to me ‘things change, you never stop learning’.

I have found this same view across properties in Central Australia, sometimes stated clearly as above, sometimes implicit in how people talk about their land and how they watch it in order to make decisions.

On one property a low flat-topped hill was pointed out to me and I was told that the sediments that form the hill are what’s left of an ancient lake bed, the remainder of which has now been eroded away and may be found scattered across the Simpson Desert. The point of this was to illustrate to me that change is always occurring in the biophysical landscape. They weren’t saying that erosion should not be worried about, rather they were illustrating their view that one shouldn’t look at the land and form views based on the here and now. Rather, one needs to return or remain a while to appreciate that the landscape is dynamic, everchanging and hard to pin down.

Understanding is gained by sitting in one spot and watching to see what happens. Without knowing what has gone before in a particular place it is hard to make judgements about the current situation and it makes certainty a faint possibility. As the same man I quoted previously also said to me ‘who can say if you are doing the right thing—the country’s too young for anyone to know’.

Amongst pastoralists, this highly specific knowledge has engendered an ethic that one doesn’t talk about anybody else’s properties or pass comment on what other pastoralists should or should not do.
Pastoralists will often end a comment on their views on land management with the qualifier that they are of course speaking only in relation to their patch, and I'd have to talk to others about their properties. To presume to speak for another's property is not only to speak for land you don't know, but is to ride roughshod over the knowledge and experience of another. One does not only transgress property boundaries but also social and personal space. To speak for another's land is to intrude on that person's or family's self. Respect for these boundaries is strong amongst the pastoral community and this informs the response of pastoralists to outsiders who criticise their land management practices.

Watching the world go by

In formulating the NSRM, the working group held 30 workshops throughout Australia as part of their community consultation process. In the draft report on the Alice Springs workshop (August 1994) all participants are identified, in part, by 'years of experience in the rangelands'. This identifier reflects the importance attached by pastoralists to the stability of themselves and their industry over time.

In the time that pastoralists have been in Central Australia they have seen many people, ideas and projects come and go. Through this they have remained as an industry, even if not as individuals and families. Those who have remained carry forward the memories of events and people that have come through in the past, touched the pastoral world and moved on. One such passage through the pastoral world occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s. At this time, Animal Industry Branch (AIB) of the NT administration appointed a botanist, George Chippendale, to its staff. This appointment was concurrent with an emerging concern amongst the bureaucracy about the effects of grazing upon vegetation and soils in Central Australia and with a prolonged drought.

At the time of Chippendale's appointment little was known of the vegetation of Central Australia and even less was known of the effects of cattle and sheep grazing upon it. Chippendale embarked upon a program of ecological research which led him to criticise the pastoral industry's land management practices (Chippendale 1963, 1965). Such comments did not endear him to the pastoralists, and according to his assistant, Des Nelson, his views did not find favour amongst some of his colleagues at the AIB (Interview 14/11/96).

This time is commonly referred to by pastoralists when I speak to them. For example Bill Prior, former manager of Hamilton Downs Station, said in relation to recent allegations of overgrazing:
This is the only group left that are making those allegations. Now if you go back ten years ago you even had government people saying, like Lands Department people, saying this. I remember in our sixties drought—which was very bad, worse than this one—we had botanists saying the country's buggered ... they were stationed here at the time, working out of probably Lands Department, one of those departments, telling us how the country's been buggered by overstocking and it would never ever recover. And of course, the funny thing, none of them came back afterwards. When it did rain, well towards the end of the sixties, and then it really started to rain in the seventies, this country came back better than it ever was. Now, the old, old fellows that were here in the thirties drought used to say: 'Don't worry boy, she'll recover. Its good country. When the rains come she'll come back.' And it did. Interview 11/10/96.

For the pastoralists it is an example of a situation somewhat analogous to the one they now see. As they put it, they were being criticised by outsiders with little experience of the country, who possessed knowledge derived from books and theory, rather than from intimate knowledge of country gained by working it over many years. This distinction is drawn on by Bob Waudby (son of Bill Waudby, quoted above) when addressing a CLMA field day at Central Mount Wedge Station in November 1990. In relation to his family’s observation of native fauna on the station, he says many animals ‘are observed by the people living here, and rarely seen by the untrained eye of the passerby’.

Today pastoralists see conservationists from ‘down south’, NT government employees who roll through in a succession of white Toyotas and Canberra bureaucrats who control the purse strings of Landcare and drought relief, and who run processes such as the NSRM. The pastoralists remain and many remember the late 1960s and what occurred. They also remember that rains came after the drought, exceptional rains that justified their views of themselves, their cattle, their faith in the land. These rains are remembered by pastoralists for, in their view, the rain and the growth it produced proved the experts wrong; the country wasn’t flogged, the country comes back, the cattle hadn’t damaged it. For the pastoralists, the inability of outsiders to understand the land, its cycles and its bounty, was confirmed.

These events, the prophesies of doom and the subsequent rains, are not mere relics of the past for the pastoralists. That the country came back, that the experts were wrong in the 1960s, are fundamental to contemporary understanding of the pastoralists’ views of the land, themselves and outsiders.
Cultures of exclusion and slippage

Julia Kristeva (1993:2–3) writes of a 'cult of origins', a 'defensive hatred' of others 'who do not share my origin and who confront me personally, economically, and culturally'. She is writing of nationalism and hatred of foreigners or rival ethnic groups, yet this notion of a cult of origins may be useful in conceptualising the reaction of pastoralists to those deemed to be outsiders. Jacobs (1996) finds it a useful point in her analysis of how both powerful and marginalised groups seek to fix identity and place in the course of struggles over space in urban areas. More specific to this paper is the observation concerning South Australian pastoralists by Holmes & Day (1995:211). They conclude that pastoralists 'are a cohesive reference group with a strongly developed, tightly shared value orientation, founded upon a clear sense of identity and self-worth'. They go on, however, to argue that 'this distinctive value orientation has long proved highly effective in ensuring survival in periods of economic and environmental stress. It may be less effective in meeting emerging challenges where pastoralists must adjust to a more complex decision context, in which other influential interest groups have values and goals markedly at variance with those held by pastoralists' (ibid.). The comments refer both to pastoralists' strong sense of identity and social cohesion, which I have explored from one angle in this paper, and somewhat more obliquely to how their sense of identity may influence their response to outsiders.8

Knowledge of their land and of personal landscapes of work, and the survival of the industry while its critics have passed on, has engendered an exclusionary culture among pastoralists—one that exists alongside their social cohesiveness. Close association with their land and the development of personal property—specific knowledge plays a role in defining for which spaces one is qualified to speak. As noted above, to speak out of place, as it were, is as much about crossing personal and cultural space as about crossing property boundaries. The survival of the industry and of the land, despite criticism from non-pastoralists who have moved on, leaves pastoralists sceptical of contemporary critics and of the value of their views. For pastoralists it is not so much the state of the land that provides an indicator of sustainability, as their continued presence.

Yet the identities of insider and outsider are not necessarily as fixed as my discussion of these terms in relation to pastoralists and others, particularly conservationists, may indicate. There are areas in which slippage of these identities may occur, revealing them as not essential, but more fluid and more open to contestation. One such slippage is that of Aboriginal pastoralists in Central Australia. Where does their cattle work leave this analysis, and perhaps more importantly for the
struggles over rangelands, where does such work leave the view that only those 'with dirt under their fingernails' have a claim on the land? To what extent does this view encompass a racialised notion of work?

With respect to this paper’s focus on the conservation debate, another slippage of the identities relates to the possibility of pastoralists themselves becoming outsiders. The culture of exclusion also operates within the pastoral world and pastoralists who step outside the sanctioned parameters for public comment may find themselves ostracised. In this way the limits of public discussion on land management issues are set and the CLMA itself may well be limited in the actions it can take and the comments it can make. The CLMA exists within a world of power relations amongst the pastoralists, and pastoralists involved in the CLMA themselves tread a fine line between being insiders and outsiders as the CLMA is not universally popular amongst the pastoral community. There have been occasions when, in talking with pastoralists, I have been unsure as to whether their comments about 'greenies' refer to conservation groups, government land management departments or the CLMA. It is clear from discussions with pastoralists that they have strong views on which among them are not managing their land well and are overstocking. In the context of the pastoral culture which encompasses both exclusion and cohesion the possibility of this being publicly articulated by pastoralists is remote.

Conclusion

Pastoralists construct identities for themselves and others, such as conservationists, according to how one is embedded in nature. Embedding is a process that occurs through work and in time. Pastoralists’ everyday life working on their properties creates a nature in which is inscribed their labour, their sweat, their plans and their past and future. Through this work, over time, they gain an intimate knowledge of their properties that is unique to them. This knowledge, gained through work on the station, is one means by which a pastoralist constructs a sense of place, a sense of self and and a sense of others. It is not the only means through which such a sense is generated—bringing up children, developing gardens, burying deceased family members, having picnics, etc. can also play a role in developing a sense of place and in articulating claims on land, at times in opposition to Aboriginal associations with land.9

This chapter has concentrated on non-domestic labour on stations as it is most concerned with the acquisition of knowledge associated with intimate contact with the land as pastoralists move around their stations.
Work and knowledge are spatially constituted, informing the demarcation of territory and underpinning an authoritative discourse in articulating property rights. Those with ‘dirt under their fingernails’ are embedded in a landscape that is about them, on both a personal and a regional scale. From the pastoralists’ point of view outsiders are embedded in a nature that is distanced, non-personal, spatial and abstract. This is a nature of biodiversity, representative reserve systems and regional planning. There is some irony in this, as resistance by conservationists to planning processes, impact assessments and development proposals that invoke abstracted and geometric notions of space and nature for their authority has frequently relied upon themes that include social relationships to landscape, aesthetics, uniqueness and context. In this situation, however, they find themselves drawing upon discourses that are abstracted from place and context to advance their cause. In turn, the pastoralists are invoking a sense of place and attachment to land to fend off Aboriginal claims on land, particularly as Native Title assumes greater relevance in Australian land tenure systems.

It is possible that pastoralists’ resistance to the admission of a wider community interest in land use and management may backfire. Central Australian pastoralists draw heavily on the 1960s experience when outsiders criticised their management practices to meet current challenges from the conservation movement. In the 1960s the rains finally came, the industry survived and many of its critics moved on. However, in the 1960s the conservation movement did not exist as it does today, nor was there such a body of ecological research on the effects of grazing in arid lands as now exists. Arguments that depend heavily on attachment and commitment to land are not likely to meet the concerns of contemporary environmentalism. As White (1995) notes, such arguments have a lot of history going against them and they avoid the fundamental questions posed by Aborigines and by the conservation movement concerning the future of rangelands. Furthermore, the efficacy of such arguments may also be eroded when compared to earlier and still extant Aboriginal relationships to land, which now find support in legislative and common law.
Endnotes

1 The sample for the survey by Holmes & Day (1995) was drawn from a random sample of South Australian Farmers’ Federation members who are rangelands pastoralists, thus they are not necessarily from northern South Australia. It is worth noting that there are strong links between pastoralists in northern South Australia and those in the southern Northern Territory. These links comprise social links as well as industry focussed links. For example, pastoralists from northern South Australia participate in Landcare activities organised by the Alice Springs based Centralian Land Management Association.

2 As outlined by Rose (1995) the reasons behind decisions by Aboriginal people on whether or not to run cattle can be complex and are influenced, among other things, by the level of past involvement in the industry and preferences for alternative land uses which may be exclusive of pastoralism.

3 The Arid Lands Coalition (ALC) was formed in 1993 and comprises the Arid Lands Environment Centre (Alice Springs), the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, the Conservation Council of WA, the Environment Centre NT, Friends of the Earth Adelaide and Melbourne, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Queensland Conservation Council, Conservation Council of SA and the World Wide Fund for Nature. It is supported by the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Wilderness Society, the Australian National Parks Association and the Threatened Species Network. The ALC aims to ensure the ‘ecologically sustainable management of Australia’s arid lands’ (from ALC briefing notes 1994) and campaigns at both state and federal levels. As well as participating in the NSRM, the ALC has campaigned for the reform of Landcare in rangelands, arguing that the production focus of Landcare is inappropriate in rangelands where the issues go beyond reform of existing land uses to more fundamental questions about which uses should be practised and by whom.

4 Research concerning the influence of modes of transport on knowledge of land may be worth pursuing in more detail. For example, did the transition from the use of horses to the use of four-wheel drive vehicles influence pastoralists’ knowledge of their stations?

5 Pickup & Stafford-Smith (1993) note that the view ‘country always comes back’ (i.e. the biophysical environment is resilient and able to remain productive despite even heavy grazing pressure) has become one of a set of ‘convenient myths’ (p 479) which have endured mainly because they cannot be readily disproved. As James et al. (1995) summarise, the impacts of grazing in arid and semi-arid rangelands can be more complicated than allowed for by such one dimensional ‘myths’.

6 ‘One pastoralist’s point of view’ in NTCA Yearbook, 1990/91:73.

7 Here I use some of the characterisations of outsiders employed by pastoralists.

8 See also Heathcote 1969.

References


Looking at country from the heart

I am a representative of my clan, the Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu\textsuperscript{1} from Gurrindju\textsuperscript{2}, part of the Wagait homelands (recently renamed as Twin Hill Station). We belong to the Daly/Wagait family of languages.\textsuperscript{3} The homelands are approximately 100 kilometres south-west of Darwin, accessible via nearby Litchfield National Park, in the Northern Territory.

A special person we are extremely proud, grateful and privileged to have with us, is a Ceremony Woman\textsuperscript{4}, a respected teacher and friend to us all, who is the last of our ‘old people’\textsuperscript{5}—my mother, Nancy Ngulikang Daiyi.

From birth, through correlative immersion and spiritual affiliation with the land, I have acquired over four decades a wealth of traditional knowledge, concepts and values from my peers. However, there is still a lot to learn, and with the personal attributes we’ve managed and maintained as keepers with this intricate source of information, we are nonetheless still considered as babes in the eyes of the ‘old people’.

Note: This text has been written in a number of languages. Translations are included both in the text and in the footnotes.
Ownership and land claims

Today, evidence of the Dreamtime can be seen to have sustained the twentieth century. The discourse and delivery of knowledge, cultural maintenance and practice of spiritual beliefs which have been handed down in an unbroken succession of lineages (time, people, use and occupation of the land) have been challenged in the High Court of Australia. As we were able to satisfy the criteria of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, many land claims on unalienated Crown Land like ours were upheld, granted and secured under section 12 as a Deed of Grant to become Aboriginal Land Trust areas.

Timing

Timing is a crucial factor where circumstances often prevent the participation of elders imparting with historical information on natural explanations. Especially those who have living memories of the olden days prior to contact with non-Aboriginal people and the events which occurred at the turn of the century. Aboriginal people are unaccustomed to rushing about, travelling from one point to another to meet deadlines, and without a council of elders, make uninformed, hasty and on-the-spot decisions. There has never been a need for commercialism as uninterrupted, nomadic existence was just a matter of easing in and out with the seasons. Elders have a unique and complex code of passing on information. Therefore, as we race against time, we feel a greater sense of loss every time an elder passes away with all that precious source of information and knowledge. We mourn, too, for the irreplaceable loss of their unique identity, character and spirit.

Affects of conditional and contemporary advancements

Then suddenly, around the world, with the explosive speed and impact created from a thirst for new knowledge, mechanical, hi-tech, innovative and creative learning and education—every Aboriginal man, woman and child, has to some degree become affected and channelled or conditioned into thinking about living contemporary lifestyles. In an endeavour to incorporate and balance new living and learning patterns, Aboriginal people are imposed with onerous expectations to cope with the declining rate of cultural survival. People all over the world are moving to and fro because of state and federal governments enforcing laws, policies and acts and using monetary values and systems as a bait to induce social and political reforms.
Despair

Meanwhile, increasingly adverse affects are clearly evident on the bearing this has had on proper traditional Aboriginal lifestyles. It's the process of coming to terms with the world and the global standards of doing things that have resulted in creating misery and apathy, crippling Aboriginal people with the attitude of self-abandonment and destruction. Dysfunctional and unsociable patterns of behaviour, Aboriginal deaths in custody and genocide are apparently where we have been swept up to today.

Around the traps

Permanent remote communities and families residing even further out on outstations suffer the most as there seems to be a disregard for unity and strength. Dissatisfaction, restlessness and the lack of communication and flow of information are often the reasons used by people opting to shift into an urban environment. Younger people are frequently attracted to towns and cities like Christmas beetles and often stay for long periods at a time. Then, once lured and trapped in pursuit of gaining commercial and material wealth like their urban counterparts they find they have nowhere to stay and overcrowding, disorderly and anti-social behavior becomes a major crisis. Some go home, others finish up becoming 'long grass people' and eke out a mere existence around public areas in large communities, towns, and suburbs. A vicious cycle of unemployment, alcohol and substance abuse, communicable diseases and other health issues occurs and often results in incarceration and/or premature death.

Overview of ‘Looking at Country from the Heart’

Now I would like to pause for a moment as we take a step back in time and look back on the way it was, just for a moment, when time stood still.

From a Rak Mak Mak's point of view, 'Looking at Country from the Heart' is aimed at helping the public gain a deeper insight, respect and a greater understanding of Aboriginal lore influenced by a contemporary society. This is about a clan group caught in a cross-fire for recognition, and equality while struggling to survive and maintain a balance within a black and white culture. It's about autonomy and control, the incessant pressures of reforms and expectations in meeting the demands of post-colonisation. It's about shifting, juggling, merging and blending the unique and complex boundaries of Aboriginal customary laws and
tradition so it can be tailored and streamlined into a system that should be both fair and equal. Above all, it’s about a push in the right direction in demanding full restitution for all the wrongs to be made right, without denial of natural justice.

This is also about a spiritual battle by one clan group in an attempt to protect their fragmented heritage, which is under the possible threat of extinction; the determination of a remaining few who, against all odds, take a stand to defend their primary and spiritual ownership rights for a piece of land they belong to, a land passed on to them by their forefathers, a land they have been denied for two decades, not only socially, economically and politically from the powers to be, but even worse, morally wronged from their own kind!

Current and modern changes

Acquisition and thirst for new knowledge. Researching, methods and delivery of teaching and learning, developing skills, techniques and strategies to invent bigger, better and faster technology and machinery has always been a catalyst and an aspiration in mankind’s pursuit of conquest, empowerment, advancement and economic development.

Passing on knowledge

Aboriginal pedagogy originated from the Dreamtime. It’s the foundation of ancestral history. I am fortunate to have some of this background knowledge. My mother, (Alangany) and I share a great understanding and intuitive bonding. The information is available; it’s only a matter of wanting to learn and being receptive. That’s when instant transmission of knowledge takes place. We could be seen enjoying lunch together in the park while the rushing traffic seems to have little affect in distracting us during this process. It can happen anywhere, anytime. Time is too short to be taking things for granted. There is so much to learn.

Learning about customs

Out of a the blue one day I asked Alangany what might happen at the mention of the names of our tribal homeland at night. Her reply was, ‘Ngupel nini winiga, wuwe nganguny yim trembul, yim tyeik lili bit. Tyen leik tyet erth trema. Nu merra wat neim yu kolim, yim tyeik’. (When it’s dark, the ground trembles as if there were an earth tremor around the name of the site which has been mentioned. It doesn’t matter where or what site name it is, it shakes). I am amazed at the simple logic from her answers. I asked her that because, from experience, I know Aboriginal people are afraid of the dark!
Then she went on to tell me about the practice of *pe meminy*—the removal of the first joint on the right forefinger, tied with a silver thread from the big spider webs found in the rainforests and creeks! This was the finger they used to stop the earth tremor when they tapped it on the ground. Mother has an answer for everything!

**Reflections**

'What's the first thing that enters your mind when you hear the name of your country?' ‘*Matri lerrr weti ngirrbuty tyen.*'" (I am happy now), sometimes referred to as having a 'good binyi' (meaning of being glad all over). 'I can look every place. All the sites pass by me like a slide show. I see the my (old people) walking across the great plains, making camp, I can still remember their voices as they would cry out, laugh and chatter to one another. I can still see their faces one by one and I hear the haunting sound of the Kenbi and the rhythmic clicks of the nangananga beating in time to the songs that are sung at the Wangga ceremonies. I vividly remember my childhood. Once again I am there with them.'

**Visiting other places**

I ask Mum, ‘When you travel around other places for ceremonies, down the Daly River to the outstations like Wudikapildiyerr, Nemartark, Peppimenarti, or Pulumpa, how do you compare your country with yours?’ Her reply, ‘I feel like a foreigner because my heart doesn’t belong to their country. I feel very vulnerable for I have not the same intimate knowledge they have for their land, just as they do not have for mine. I am totally reliant on closer relatives to share their customs and beliefs, to teach me the geographic characteristics of their land as it is dangerous to trespass on to sacred property. When I go on ceremony business to the Daly River I’m only there as a guest and a visitor on someone else’s country, I don’t have to prove anything. They provide for me, and we do the same for them.’

**Glad to be back**

‘You don’t stay away for very long, do you?’ ‘No. I can never stay too long. Otherwise I will get properly homesick. I mean really sick. I miss the smell and the sound of the swamp and all the activities and characteristics of the animals. I can picture them. My senses taste the sweet smell of the *memekem* or floating grass on the billabongs when it gets burnt and starts shooting again. The fat from our turtle, geese and barramundi is not the same anywhere else in the world. When I
travel around my country I won’t starve. I know I’ll find good tucker\textsuperscript{22} because I have the right sweat for my country\textsuperscript{23}. It’ll look after us, because we are one and the same. You only need to call out. Talk to the land, it gives us life.’

A \textit{milityin} (good hunter)

An exceptional good hunter-gatherer is known to have \textit{milityin}\textsuperscript{24} powers. They are regarded highly for their hunting prowess in providing food for the camp. A \textit{milityin} rarely comes back empty handed. At home in their element, they have the natural ability to find food. When hunting wild game, the \textit{milityin} may not only have to consider where a barramundi or long-neck turtle may be resting in the middle of a hot day, but must take extra precautions for the big crocodile who regularly cruises up and down his territory. A \textit{milityin} has to out-think and out-smart them all in order to survive.

Uncle’s story

This is a recount of a story told to us by one of our late uncles. When he was a boy his father (a master didgeridoo player) took him hunting for \textit{munyirr}\textsuperscript{25} (long-neck turtles). His father said, ‘Ngowana tyabat me, awa munyirr nala’\textsuperscript{26} he’d wade around waist or chest deep—not the least bit afraid of the numerous crocodiles inhabiting the lagoon—and grope around underwater catching as many turtles alive as he could with his bare hands). Usually when a turtle is caught like this, the hunter will wade across and give it to someone to keep an eye on. If the hunter is alone, the turtles are buried in soft mud on their backs, or placed in a deep hole where they can’t climb out, or they’re put in a \textit{tupu}\textsuperscript{27} (a long, woven hunting dillybag)—designed with a wide band to be set across the forehead and carried over the shoulder and down the back where food is then dropped into it.

So, my uncle patiently waited for his father on the bank of this large crocodile-infested lagoon. After a while, the old man decided he’d had enough and brought his hands up as a sign that he’d been unlucky. That is, a gesture of a blade running across the throat with one deft stroke as if he’d had his throat cut, meaning, ‘Well, we’re dead, it looks like we’ll have to starve.’ Then, as he waded into shallower waters, Uncle couldn’t believe his eyes. To his delight, his father had caught several \textit{munyirr} and had tied them by the neck to the tassels of his hair belt, ‘Mi fatha bin trien trik mi! Ha maty tharran’\textsuperscript{28}, he laughed clapping his thighs.
Mother Nature's perfume

Travelling through the bush, we catch a whiff of a refreshingly sweet smell. ‘Nyaa’\(^2\), we say as we deeply inhale the tantalising perfumes released by Mother Nature. This is our way of describing the delicious scents mingling in the air. The smell of the bush is therapeutic, healing and soothing mind, body and soul. ‘Wana thawarit mitityin kemina’\(^3\) (just like medicine).

Malinpepek

It’s early December and the air is thick with the fragrant smell of ripened little sweet green plums\(^3\) and shiny black plums\(^4\). Passing by, you make a mental note of the area and revisit later on where they can be found in abundance. It’s Malinpepek\(^3\) (Springtime) now, with its pretty new colours, growth and appealing smells.

Wurrum

Soon it will be Wurrum\(^4\) (the big Wet season). The stiff cracked black soil plains wait in anticipation for the early rains. The smell of rain on dry earth has an awesome affect on people, flora and fauna. It’s an earthy smell that is almost edible, it can be tasted on the wind. It’s a sign of continuity, a happy time. A time to prepare for the Wet, taking refuge along the escarpment.

Walmarra

This is the Dry season. Burn grass time. It’s a time when banangalain (long spear grasses) need to be burned for regrowth, hunting and access. The new green shoots attract kangaroos and wallabies.

Taking in the scene

When strangers visit our country, we observe with a keen interest the way they respond and react to the panoramic view stretched out before them. What are they really seeing and thinking? We reckon they may be thinking about the beautiful scenery or just simply enjoying the peace and quiet or the wide-open spaces. Together we stand gazing at the same scenery. We look beyond the pristine beauty of the bush decked out in all its glory. The land contains our stories, it’s enriching and powerful. Perhaps they really have eyes, wana awa werremben kemena\(^3\) (like the crocodile), who have protection for their eyes in the form of a transparent overlay to enable them to see underwater.
Feeling good

There's a powerful bond with the land. It's full of stories and wonders. We recall the events of the Dreamtime which take us back in time to when things were normal! Where time stood still, and there wasn't a care in the world. All sorts of emotional tides are conjured from deep within the wells of the bowels. It bubbles, surges, hits the surface and bursts. Blup. The heart is said to miss a beat. But really, we refer to the belly wherein lies the seat of emotions. Some people rely on their gut feelings. 'Matri kati tyen ngumunit a' (I'm feeling better now). It's a warm, fuzzy state of contentment.

If you have ever experienced racing through a yellow light which turned red in the middle of the intersection, did you have a mild panic attack? Sure, your heart was racing, but truthfully, for a split second wasn't it your stomach that went flippity flop? 'Kumun ngin burrk matri a', we say. This is describing the stomach being pierced! We all know what it's like when we refer to being sick of something, or when someone makes us really 'slack'. Whereabouts is that feeling? It's the stomach of course. It doesn't take a doctor or a psychologist to tell you that emotional 'hunger pains' are gratified by food or drinks. We do it to help us feel better.

Here is one saying we use quite often. 'Swell up ribs'. It's a Marranunggu slang about puffing up with pride. In this instance, the emphasis is based on the heart, puffed up like a balloon extending the rib cage. It's meant to be pumped to its full capacity, almost bursting under pressure with pride and happiness. We are very proud people of our country and our heritage.

Caring for Country

A large portion of our homeland is infested by a noxious prickly plant called Mimosa pigra. Although it has spread over large hectares of the wetlands, we still remember how it looked and the significance of those areas prior to its intrusion. Some outsiders may think it looks like rubbish country, but not to us; home is where the heart is. It'll always be 'home sweet home'. It's not hard to choose between a five-star hotel or a night in a swag under five million stars!

Taking time out

We chatter and chortle over the top of each other and reiterate from events and experiences about the Dreamtime stories. The old people passed through this area. Ngum. Hush. Listen to the bush. Hear the different creatures and their music arranged and orchestrated with one
another in perfect timing. Tiny little birds dart and dip on the water. There’s a splash and the rippled water glitters with sparkling jewels reflected by the late afternoon sun. It’s nice to relax besides the tranquil beauty of the lagoons.

White Eagle Aboriginal Corporation

White Eagle Aboriginal Corporation is a registered organisation which services the needs and aspirations of its members, who are of the Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu clan and their beneficiaries. Other than providing opportunities for better health, housing, education and training and an economic base in the cattle industry, it has taken on board a program to strategically manage and control further outbreaks of mimosa to reclaim our cultural sites of significance.

Ngirrwat

Creatures great and small are our ngirrwats. Fire is a ngirrwat,42 trees are a ngirrwat. Ngirrwats are also part of the kinship system. The White Sea Eagle is my mother’s father. We relate to it as our grandfather. The panypiya duk43 (big-headed possum) is mother’s mother. That makes it our grandmother.

Totems and kinship

I like the call of the wuk wuk44 (Tawny Frog Mouth Owl). From birth we grew up with the sound of the wuk wuk. That’s its Mak Mak name because of the sound it makes. ‘Wuk-wuk, wuk-wuk.’ Most birds and animals are named after their characteristics and sounds. Mak-Mak-Mak-Mak is the repetitive sound of the White Sea Eagle, the big totem for our language and the Wangga ceremony.

Dinner camp

When we make ‘dinner-camps’45 there is always the knowledge and appreciation that this is an old stamping ground, used for hunting, foraging and camping. When our children laugh and shriek, chatter or cry whilst climbing trees or splashing around in the shallows, fishing, plucking geese or mungit bat46 (searching for long-neck turtles in the mud) we still have fond memories of the old Marranunggu who came here too. They visited this site to do these very same things. It gives us a magical sense of inner peace and contentment. It’s a delight to wait for the billy to boil and to smell the wood smoke burning from the campfires, with the strong mouth-watering aroma of wild game grilling
over the glowing red coals. The smoke slowly rises and swirls around as if to wrap us up and capture this moment forever, before it escapes through the thick paperbark roof tops, whisked away on a ray of sunlight.

Whirly-whirly

Wulgamen cries out one long and loud, ‘Yuuu’. We pause for a moment, look toward her as she acknowledges the home of our ancestors for reassurance, then carry on with whatever we’re doing. When the tide turns and the breeze comes, she talks to the wind, ‘Yigaaii’ she says, meaning ‘Ahh what a relief, this feels so good’. From nowhere, a whirly-whirly kicks up its heel and starts a dust storm beside her. She growls at it and beckons it to go away. ‘Tyuk.’ She curses it with fine spit and directs it with a show of jerky arm movements and a string of real curses, so it can disperse.

Nostalgic

‘Kala ngany da mari’ is Mak Mak or Marrawarrgat, a reference for our Marranunggu language by another linguist group. ‘My heart is heavy with sorrow. I am grieving.’ Or ‘I am missing someone or someplace.’ This phrase can be used in either context, about people and places.

A bleak and dismal time

The Mak Mak clan were challenged beyond their means and endurance. We felt the whole nation stood against us in our pursuit for recognition as traditional owners of Gurrindju. We were set back near on 20 years as a result of counter claims for the same land. It was a bleak time for our families when we stood together without seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. This was a time when we felt the impact of social injustice at its worst. Having no defence, with our backs to the wall, it seemed so unfair that our young people were being incarcerated and getting killed, that our old people had been kicked off their land in no uncertain terms and had resorted to living in poverty as fringe dwellers, destitute and dying from undue stress and pressures which were hard to resist. Yes, we were humbled before our enemies. The contending tribes, with many of their friends and supporters, scorned us in every way they thought possible to break our spirits and intimidate us in an endeavour to snuff out any resistance. Our life is our land. It was a big challenge to hurdle the bureaucratic red tape in getting this land back. We fought hard for our rights and recognition as a land-owning group with unbroken ties to the land. Eventually, the case was re-opened, only we went in alone without Mum’s elders who had, during this period, regrettably passed away.
Making our mark

The greatest prize of this century was the Wagait. Not a shot at the millions of dollars televised in the evenings on ‘Sale of the Century’ or accumulating wealth from the ‘Wheel of Fortune’. It would be taking a gamble before any of our names ever came up to enter the draw. Our total resources belonged to a few individuals who held day jobs and were kind and generous enough to assist in the struggle. We desired nothing more desperately than to be in control of the land, and that was now! We set our course to take affirmative and remedial action. Nothing could side-track us in setting the records straight. Long into the night we’d burn the midnight oil. We sacrificed homes and valuable family time to re-right the cruelty of being set up to fight black against black. Today, families are split and bitterness is ongoing as a consequence of the disputes over land ownership rights.

To this day we feel we’re still owed an apology for the gross injustices we suffered. At the end of the day we may have won a small victory, but it did not happen without a lot of bloodletting.

Wouldn’t it be like ignoring an act of injustice for the sake of peace and safety? Only too often people repeat and echo these cliches, ‘Mmm kepentha’52 or ‘Mmm o libim na’53 (Forget about it! Put it in the too hard basket. I know nothing), or simply turn their backs and look the other way. It took a lot of guts and determination for the Marranunggu mob to take up the fight without letting go while staring down the cold hard steel of bureaucratic red tape.

Here’s a thought for the day penned by an unknown author. ‘A life filled with love must have some thorns, but a life empty of love will have no roses!’ We could relate to that. How then could we enjoy a million dollars without our heritage. After the laughter and cheer, and blowing the money on meaningless things, what then? Can anyone be so insensitive to the cry of their country? It was all but raped and pillaged and laid bare for anyone to take her and do what they wanted. And here we were, chained by political circumstances, sitting on the sideline, nursing a big hole in our hearts.

Loyalties

Marranunggu people experience love, though we don’t have a single word for it. Feelings have to be described. What comes to mind when heart is mentioned? It’s love. Pulsating heart-wrenching love. Tender and sweet or fierce and passionate.

There are all kinds of love—family love, brotherly love or lover’s love. The love in this context is of a patriotic nature. A kind of love where one is loyal and true to their country. An unselfish love. One where sacrifices
are made—life, health, family, time, money or assets. It’s about fighting for something you believe in, regardless of the consequences. To be able to get out there and give it all you’ve got for what it’s worth while something can be done about it. To die for, with pride and honour in pursuit of peace and justice. It may not be as dreadful and horrific as the two World Wars, or any wars for that matter, and the Wagait Dispute pales in comparison to the crimes and atrocities that occur when those things happen. What counts is the core of the matter, the principle of the thing. A code of ethics. It’s a quest for justice and peace, social equity, recognition, acceptance, awareness and tolerance. This is the kind of love that makes people tick.

The older clan members laid down the basis of our ownership claim, and left it up to us to resolve, achieve and implement the aspirations for their children and grandchildren. So, with thankful hearts for their integrity, we may fulfill their dreams and have it easier than they did.

Our inheritance

It makes no difference where any of our other clansmen may be—whether they be dead or alive, or spread out from one end of the earth to the other. We all have this one desire, to belong somewhere and to be responsible for our freedom. Someone has to keep in contact with the land. To care for it, to keep up with the appearance at the ceremonies and meet all those daily requirements and formalities, to function as a clan group. This desire encircles and unites us. We walk together. We see it from the heart. We beat our hearts as a sign of respect. It’s a measure of how compassionate we can be. We’re not perfect and, yes, we have our social hangups and we live diverse lifestyles because we are individuals and we are allowed to make choices and mistakes. It doesn’t matter. No-one can be denied their heritage. Our brand or identity is still intact. We are *Lambu Tyenti*. Rak Mak Mak, our language, is *Marranunggu*. The homeland we speak about is called *Gumindju*. Our ancestors passed on this knowledge; it is our history. We speak in this particular accent because we are unique, socially and culturally different. We have our own boundaries founded a long time ago in the Aboriginal ways of determining customary laws. Our own set of bylaws and practices fit perfectly within the other tribal clans groups which belong to our family of languages. Each and everyone of us are all kinsmen. This is how we have applied ourselves in order to survive. Following the law, whilst functioning as individuals and as a family within the greater circle of the Daly/Wagait family of languages.
Endnotes

1 Totem and linguistic identity of the Mak Mak Marrunggu clan group.
2 Aboriginal reference to the Wagait Aboriginal Land Trust.
3 Geographically linked by strong kinship, language and ceremony.
4 A person who follows the Aboriginal Customary Laws.
5 An elder.
6 No such beetles. A term used for being attracted to bright lights.
7 Itinerants living in makeshift camps around towns and cities.
8 Mak Mak Marrunggu (MMM) language for my mother.
9 MMM and North Australian Kriol. Text is explained.
10 A ritual involving the removal of the first joint of the forefinger on the right hand.
11 Mamthiel language. Text is explained.
12 Feeling glad.
13 Mother’s elders.
14 Didgeridoo, a length of hollowed wood used as a musical instrument at corroborees.
15 Two ironwood clapsticks used as a musical instrument at corroborees.
16 One of the three major ceremonies performed at a corroboree for initiating young men.
17 A Mamthiel word. Big deep water. A Resource Centre on Mamthiel land located in a remote area on a portion of the Daly River Land Trust. Nancy Ngulikang’s mother was Wilmerre, a Mamthiel ceremony woman from this region.
18 An outstation near Peppimenarti where we have close relatives (in-laws).
19 A large Aboriginal community which belongs to the Ngangkikurungurr language people.
20 Another Aboriginal community on the way to Port Keats.
21 A native grass of coastal flood plains.
22 Food.
23 The right to use the country. The land recognises and acknowledges this person.
24 MMM language word for an exceptional hunter.
25 MMM language word for the freshwater long-neck tortoise in floodplain areas. A staple source of food.
26 MMM language. Text explained.
27 MMM language. Explanation provided. Made from Fan Palm (Marrepen) fibres. Stripped, dried, naturally dyed and woven.
28 North Australian Kriol. First part: Unde’s father had tricked him into thinking he had not caught anything. Second part: He’s asking, “How much that one?” which really means ‘Oh you’re so deadly. So invaluable!’
29 MMM language. Explanation provided.
30 MMM language. Explanation provided.
31 MMM word for this is Wurmulg.
32 Mamthiel word for this is Mi-matlima.
33 MMM word for the Spring season.
34 MMM word for the wind in the Dry season.
35 MMM word. Explanation provided.
MMM word to describe the action of something gently breaking the surface.
Marrithiel language. Explanation provided.
Marrithiel language. Explanation provided.
A state of being drained by a situation or someone sapping levels of energy.
North Australian Kriol. Slang we use. Explanation provided.
MMM language. Explanation provided.
MMM language. A system used to identify tribes and clans.
MMM language. Explanation provided.
MMM language. Explanation provided.
Australian slang for a favorite spot to rest awhile.
MMM language. Means 'to poke around in the soft mud with a stick in search of awa munygin'.
North Australian Kriol. Means 'old woman'.
MMM language. Means "Yes".
MMM language. Word to express relief.
MMM language. A term when you want something to happen. It could be good or bad.
MMM language. Homesick or lovesick.
MMM language. Means, 'Let it be, Oooh'.
North Australian Kriol. Means, 'Oh let's leave it alone'.
MMM language. The name of the path we have pertaining to cultural matters.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter Six – Mary Tarran

People, country
and protection of culture
and cultural properties

My name is Mary Tarran. My traditional name is Gurnid. I was born in Ngartlanbur (Beagle Bay Mission). I’m proper salt-water woman belong to Dampier Peninsula. I live in Broome. This area belongs to my grandfathers’ people. They were Yawuru people. One of my grandfathers, my nyami (my mother’s father) was Minyirr jarru—belong Minyirr (Gantheaume Point)! He was born at the foothills of town water tank near where the prison now stands. His father belong to Mararr mob, across the bay, Jungu side (Thangoo Station). His mother come from Minyrr. Her father belong to Minyirr and her mother belong to Minarriny (Jabirrjabirr country). The totem for Minyirr is the burrembarr (blue-bone fish). They spoke the Jugan dailect belong Yawuru.

My galu, father’s father, was born under a tree. Later his father died there, and my galu’s son, my father, was born under that very same tree. Even though he was born on the outskirts of settled Broome, his mother came from Wallaning (Coconut Well area) and his father came from Yalanbanun, south of Broome in the Jungu area.

My grandmother, my mimi, was born on the tidal flats, marshlands, of the Nurrugun (Carrot Bay). She was JabirrJabirr. Both her parents was JabirrJabirr, Wallai and Nelagumia. My mimi was last of the full-blood JabirrJabirr. She passed away in 1984.

Note: This text has been written in Aboriginal English and no grammar or spelling has been changed, at the author’s request.
My gurli, my father's mother, she was born on Ewany (Sunday Island). Her father comes from Gumbarnan—Bardi country in the One Arm Point area. And her mother comes from Ungalian (Long Island) in the King Sound—Jawi.

I first started to think about the protection of cultural property when I became committed to protecting the country from developments. When I wanted to look after country I realised I had to give out cultural information, myself and my family. We knew people would come to us, being the traditional owners.

If you just look at the country, at the natural environment, it holds plenty of information. The country in the Aboriginal sense is like a book—you learn to read the country—and you respect it, you grow up with it, and it's good for your inner being, what we call liyan.

I grew up knowing what place I had the right to speak for. Not only people in my community but people from surrounding areas who were in contact with our people during law time and cultural activities, they knew as well, that way there's no conflict about who had the right to speak. In Aboriginal society when people mix together they know who is who and who can speak for what area.

Old people were starting to get very concerned about what was happening to the country so they more or less turned to us young people to help them and guide them because we can relate to gadiya, or non-Aboriginal people. For instance, when they started to fill in the creek to make way for the new shopping centre in Chinatown, they had to pile in dirt which didn't belong to that area. They put pindan, the red soil, there instead of having the sand from close by, from Garl-garl, its proper mangrove, tidal creek swamp country. Pindan is soil from the bush.

The way they were making way for real estate everywhere was of concern too. Houses and shopping centres over all—just raping country! The belief I had—believing that all that has been taught to me wasn't being looked after. It wasn't because I had the power to stop it, but because I was helpless. I had a responsibility.

One proposed development was the Malcolm Douglas Crocodile Farm on marshlands close to the Dampier Creek and One Mile Reserve. This was an issue where people got together and said 'enough is enough—we have to stop this'. This is right in an area of great significance. I don't want to say anything here that is secret or sacred because it is not my place to do so. But I know that people used to dance right through this country coming in to pick up boys waiting behind the One Mile Reserve; at least about 200 men come dancing, stirring up the earth making a big dust storm. People used to hear this thumping through the ground. The place is still significant, people still cross the other side for ceremony, and they fish there as well.
When we first found out that Malcolm Douglas wanted to put his crocodile farm there, we got all the head people together to give the relevant people, like Kimberley Land Council, enough information for them to protect it for us. My young father, my father’s brother, was then chairperson of Yawuru Corporation, he and his family protested on the site for three months. We had so many meetings with the developer, trying to make him understand that crocodiles don’t belong in our stories, so it is not important in our country, and it is something we have to keep away from our country. We felt for the safety also because crocodiles could dig themselves out of the fence and then our fishing place wouldn’t be safe. We told him many times why he couldn’t build there. When Tickner put that heritage ban on the crocodile farm, Douglas still said ‘You’ve given me no information—how do I know if it’s secret or sacred when you’ve given me no information—there’s no information for me to know that’.

Another place I’d like to talk about is my family’s place—Minyirr. As a child, I grew up with nyami and mimi, which is my grandparents from my mother’s side. My nyami belong Minyirr. He was a Jangan-Yawuru man. I had good hearing and I still have. They’ve told me so many things about country. My mimi talked about a spiritual birthplace called Munbun, a sand bar in Nurrugun (Carrot Bay area). She was Jabirr. Jabirr.

The first law came from Minyirr. Minyirr is the south-western tip of the Broome Peninsula which is set in a network of dreaming sites and trails in the Aboriginal song cycle. This place was known deep into the desert country right up to Yagga Yagga and Lake Gregory, near Balgo, down south to Karrjari country and throughout the peninsula up to Bardi country. There are about 12 recorded sites done by the WA Museum, but we know there are more. I can trace my family to two generations before the white man came, from information given by great grandfather in 1927.

In 1991 the Broome Planning Task Force were asking for comments on a proposed five-star resort at Minyirr, or Gantheaume Point, in Broome. It got my family in a great panic because we knew we were responsible for this area. I started gathering information and talking to the people to strengthen what we were protesting about. We wrote a submission with the two Yawuru head man with the support of my family and the rest of the community.

We tried to get support from the state government to stop the resort, but they kept asking for the same information about sacred sites for different proposals. First it was the resort, then it was a carpark and information centre and then it was a private house.

Even the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee, who we thought would be a powerful agent did not stop a house from being built at Minyirr. We didn’t expect this house to be built. We’d written submissions
before but we never knew what was going to be built when they were asking us for information.

Culture is life and death. Its so important—what about the things that are silent, the things that we hold in secret? With Aboriginal sacred information where custodians cannot protect themselves, they can will themselves to die. They die for country. This happened to both my uncles. One paralysed himself for two years. And another one went into a big coma.

These men were important people, they were story-tellers and julangnurr (doctor men). I come from a long line of good medicine. That Minyirr place, like medicine place for my mob. All my descendants come from a long line of spiritual healers. These people are regarded as very powerful. People would walk miles to see them, or find them in their dreams, or when they used to go for ceremony.

In those days they weren't giving out that information about country. It was a communal thing and a thing for the families and people associated with that cultural experience. They were the people that gave the forecast for hunting, whether it was the sea or the land. The julangnurr would advise people about important events like pregnancy and spirit-beings.

The knowledge that my uncles had was only given at the right time so that we can protect the country and the people that hold the information; because they are tied in together. It was a gift to give at the right time. It was the biggest gift because you had this very special knowledge.

All through land claims, or every time a development occurs, information has to be fed to them. I think it's part of the procedure of your right to negotiate for country—what is required through the Native Title Act. When they asks us for information, I think 'here we go again'. It's stressful for me too. As soon as something happens in that country we have a strong connection with, they'll come to my house, they'll come to me and my mother.

We've given plenty of information to the Land Council because we know they'll help—they'll be there for the people. But even with the Land Council, different people come for the same information. It should only happen once, and then we can review it with one person to make sure we haven't left anything out, or they haven't got it wrong. It's just like if I go to you and say, 'Hey, will you keep this secret for me?'

You give that information to one person only because you trust them. With cultural information it's not just like work—you have to trust that person—it's personal. I need to trust them for giving that information and trust that they're going to protect my country.

For the consultations nothing effective has come out of us feeding the Broome Shire Sacred Sites Department and developers information.
They can say, 'we've spoken to them', and they'll come back when they want to lay the concrete. Just the last minute before. Every time they do that. Just at the point when it's too late. We've got no faith in the way they approach us. There is no way we can reach them.

I've come here today to give this talk to help protect my country and my culture and our lifestyle. I've recently started a job as Coordinator of the Bugarrigarra Nyurdany Cultural Centre. This Cultural Centre represents eight language groups of the Broome region. I was very happy to get this job so we could set up enterprises to get enough money to protect and maintain our culture. The pearling era didn't do anything for us, the cattle time didn't, now the tourism time promises more.

With our cultural centre we are going to set up a unit for cultural affairs which will be for:

- a keeping place for traditional performances
- archives
- language centre
- museum
- exhibitions
- library
- traditional performances
- arts and crafts.

That way, some of our cultural property will be safe and in proper hands. And if we do it in the right way with the right people, it might make the gadiya start respecting us and our laws.
The principle of access to environmental decision-making and land use planning by all members of an affected community is widely accepted in today's debates about land use, environmental protection and development. Yet the degree to which certain cultural groups in society can influence the outcomes of these processes is extremely unbalanced. This observation prompts the question, to what extent can different cultural groups be represented by a conventional notion of the public interest? Planning theory and practice has been noticeably silent about the difference culture makes to the efficacy and equity of the planning system and land use outcomes. In Australia, planners have given negligible attention to Australia's indigenous people as a distinct group with special rights and needs; rather they have assumed a homogeneous public throughout the development of land use plans. In the interests of social justice, the planning system will have to address issues such as recognition of past wrongs against indigenous peoples, respect for and accommodation of cultural difference, and the acknowledgment of indigenous peoples' special rights.

This paper focusses on land use planning as practised in Broome in the Kimberley region of north Western Australia. Broome is a rapidly growing coastal town serving a thriving tourism industry. It is located on the eastern side of a peninsula ten kilometres long and five kilometres wide. Adjacent to the township is an extensive mangrove system and to the west a gently curving beach of approximately seven kilometres
Cable Beach is the main tourist attraction. However, for the local Aboriginal community, the entire land and sea-scape is patterned with places valued for fishing, bush Tucker, cultural traditions such as mythological sites, educational purposes and for camping.

Map 1: Broome townsite and surrounds
Source: Department of Planning and Urban Development, Broome, Planning Strategy, 1993, p 2

Aboriginal people comprise 28 per cent of the total Broome Shire population, whereas in the Broome township this proportion is reduced slightly to 21.2 per cent (Aboriginal Affairs Department 1995). Just as the non-Aboriginal population has been growing and is expected to increase, so too is the Aboriginal population.¹ Significant to the population dynamics of the region is the mobility of the non-Aboriginal population. Comparing 1986 and 1991 census figures reveals that approximately 80 per cent of the Aboriginal population (over five years
of age) of the Broome local government area were living in the same statistical area five years earlier, whereas only 34 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population were (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1993; Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996).

Behind the rapid physical development of the township lies high levels of poverty within the Aboriginal community. The benefits from an increase in economic activity in the Broome Shire have not been evenly distributed across all sectors of the community. For instance, Aboriginal families in 1991 had lower incomes than non-Aboriginal families, with individual incomes 40 cent lower than the State average.

Indeed, inter-censal figures point to a worsening of Aboriginal people's living conditions, as does an Australian National University housing study which revealed a dramatic increase in the proportion of Broome Aboriginal households living below the poverty line between 1986 and 1991. In 1986 20 per cent (88) of households were considered to fall into this category, which by 1991 had grown to 36 per cent (213), after housing costs were taken into account.²

In Broome and Warburton, in particular, the number of households in after-housing poverty more than doubled. It seems, in fact, that there is almost a one-to-one correspondence between additional indigenous households and additional households in after-housing poverty in these two regions (Jones 1994:1332).

As a point of comparison, the percentage of non-indigenous people living below the poverty line for Western Australia in 1991 was 12.2 per cent (Kullani Regional Council 1995:19). The authors of the ANU study conclude that the population of Broome is disproportionately disadvantaged by housing costs. The Broome result was the second highest of all ATSIC regional councils with 215 of 605 dwellings living in poverty in 1991, after housing costs (Jones 1994:90). Broome has experienced steady growth in housing construction since the 1990 recession into the current period. Since much of this growth has been in the private housing market and, in 1991, almost half of the Aboriginal population occupied public housing, this growth is unlikely to have met the very great demand for housing for Aboriginal people.

Development planning, and its subsidiary, land use planning, have implicit distributional objectives in directing and harnessing the rate and type of development, so as to benefit all sectors of the community. Numerous planning studies conducted in Broome have identified Aboriginal disadvantage and marginality within the town economy, yet as the above thumb-nail sketch illustrates, planning and economic development have failed to redress these economic injustices. The concern of this paper, however, is primarily with other issues of injustice relevant to land use decision-making, those of recognition and cultural difference, leaving the distributional dimensions to future work.
Land use planning in Broome

Since the mid-1980s government efforts to regulate and coordinate land use decisions in Broome have intensified. Land use planning has become a critical means of ordering space, coordinating decisions so as to enhance economic growth opportunities, and articulating a vision of the kind of place into which Broome should be transformed. Society's normative values underlie the production of plans—the values which the community feels should be reflected in land use decisions. These include aspirations for development and economic growth, respect for, and protection of, heritage, a desire for open space and conservation of resources, and freely available coastal access.

It is argued through the planning discourse that plans will assist the resident community to influence and adapt to changes in their social and natural environments: physical changes to the environment as land is developed and certain parts conserved, social and economic changes to the fabric of the town as migration to Broome increases, and changes to the image of the town—the way it is represented and marketed to tourists. However, land use planning in Broome has become so integrated into economic development processes that it is difficult to observe any distinction between planning as a stimulus to development and planning as a means of modifying or resisting undesirable rates and types of development.

A most disturbing consequence of this trend is a noticeable change in the interests that the decisions about land use, or the plan, are designed to serve. In Broome, it is increasingly the case that the local communities' needs have been displaced from the planning process by those of tourists. Historically, the Aboriginal community has had to compete with the interests of the non-Aboriginal community for a voice in the process. Today there is added competition from the non-local occasional visitor. For example, in determining future development areas in a Broome housing strategy the planners were heavily influenced by the need to provide a link for tourists between Chinatown and Cable Beach.

Future development areas are designed to link the Cable Beach area back to Chinatown and the Old Broome Precinct in order to encourage a strong connection with what is Broome's premier tourist locality—Cable Beach. Therefore, in order to link the tourists with Chinatown (the second most popular tourist attraction), it is necessary to create a strong link between the two for both accessibility reasons as well as commercial reasons (Hames Sharley 1996a:31).

Housing needs were to be addressed in such a way as to accommodate a design for a road system which would serve the needs of tourists, industrial traffic and lastly, it appears, residents. Last of all the residents was the Aboriginal community at One Mile Aboriginal
Reserve. Much to the astonishment of the native title claimants who had spent many hours in dialogue with the planners, the drafted plan showed the construction of a road through the middle of the tiny Aboriginal reserve, Nillir Irbanjin.

In a locality such as Broome, where a significant proportion of the population has been dispossessed of its land base, development planning and land use decisions have done little to improve the marginalised position of the Aboriginal community. Planners and planning agencies have never advanced the view that imbalances in power, autonomy and socio-economic status between sectors of the community should be redressed through the planning process. Indeed in the past, land use plans have been overtly hostile towards the Aboriginal community. In the early 1980s the preparation of a Town Planning Scheme was used as a means of asserting the Broome Shire Council's wishes over the future use of the foreshore reserve at Kennedy Hill, when it attempted to change the zoning, or permitted use, from community purposes to commercial development (Broome Shire Council, Special Council Meeting Minutes, 29 November 1983). At the time, a large hotel was proposed for the area adjacent to the Aboriginal Reserve. Similarly, Aboriginal living areas were omitted from a 1990 plan (Department of Land Administration 1990). Aboriginal residents from Broome were particularly alarmed by this omission, viewing their public invisibility as a threat to the security of their residential areas (correspondence from Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority, 3 September 1990, to the Broome Shire Council).

It is the historical and continual imbalance in power relations which has been taken up by the Rubibi Working Group and the Kimberley Land Council, local Aboriginal organisations representing the Native Title claimants. Native Title claims have precipitated intense scrutiny and questioning of land use decisions and planning processes by the Aboriginal community, and created a more formal role for the Aboriginal community to participate in land use debates through the signing of a Heads of Agreement between the shire and the Rubibi Working Group. Reform of town planning procedures and policies has been identified as critical to the incorporation of Aboriginal people's economic, social and cultural needs into the planning process in Broome, and indeed to the process of reconciliation. A cooperative project, entitled the Local Government Development Project, has been initiated between the Broome Shire Council and the Rubibi Working Group, its purpose being to provide an increased recognition of Aboriginal people, their culture and traditions and to incorporate these experiences and factors into the development, management and decision-making processes for the Broome area (Agreement between the Department of Housing and Regional Development and the Shire of Broome, February 1996, Schedule 1).
As will be shown, the failure to redress the socio-economic imbalances is comparable to the inability of planners to comprehend and address the cultural needs of the Aboriginal community. Broome's cultural diversity would possibly be the most frequently mentioned characteristics of the coastal town, after references are made to the pearling industry's contribution to its history and geography. It is usual for plans to commit governments and developers to 'preserving' features of the social and cultural environment—the 'atmosphere' or the area's 'unique lifestyle'. Beyond preservation of physical references to the past in the form of heritage conservation, and some landscape features, such as significant trees, planners and decision-makers in their efforts to order and minimise the impacts of development on the landscape, have been unable to address the cultural differences which the Aboriginal community asserts. I am referring here to cultural difference as Aboriginal people's aspirations for recognition of their different identity expressed in their relationships with their traditional estates, and their rights to control and manage that country.

Relationships to kin and country

One of the most consistent features of Broome's planning experience has been the reduction of Aboriginal people's rights and interests, in land, sea and the economic geography of the area, to an institutional obligation on the part of a developer or government agency to protect sacred sites. Compelled by law to avoid the desecration of sacred sites, local government has sought to incorporate this aspect of Aboriginal cultural heritage, as it is defined by the legal system, into its development planning. The policy response was once to identify the correct traditional owner, obtain the cultural information, map the site, and if possible, develop around it.

Following prolonged conflict over the rights of different people to speak for particular areas and the increasing attention given to site protection by the Aboriginal community, the policy shifted slightly as decision-makers sought a more strategic and definitive approach. Almost every new site dispute resulted in a call for an expert and a comprehensive assessment of all sites in the entire area. It was thought the expert would ensure authenticity and legitimacy and the definitive map of every site would provide the security against future Aboriginal claims. It would enable the shire to clear the country of development impediments and to determine the future pattern of development as it saw fit, leaving sites undeveloped where it chose, making compromises where it had to, and no doubt granting permission to developers to proceed as required. The ideal process was outlined in a shire submission to the Broome Planning Strategy.
Given the importance of aboriginal (sic) heritage matters within Broome, the [Broome Planning] Taskforce should provide clear guidelines on how to handle development proposals which may be affected by aboriginal (sic) heritage matters. Aboriginal sites should be immediately identified and documented to enable any developer or the community to know what land is unencumbered (Broome Shire Council 1992:1).

Broome’s Shire President considered that a participatory and on-going process would be inefficient and cumbersome:

But the Shire has said it repeatedly ... they have sought to have all Aboriginal sites ... within the townsite of Broome, declared, so they can be protected within their planning. But of course the Aboriginals won’t do that because ... So its really a Catch-22 situation. So every parcel of land that has to be developed you’ve got to say ‘what do you think of this’ ... there’s been suggestions many, many times, that, you know, who should go and clear the land, you know, its too fragmented, you know there should be a one-stop-shop type thing ... you know, there was that strategic plan, there was a hell of a lot of involvement with Aboriginals and that, you know, that was fully supported by the Shire ... What I want to see put in for Broome is short-term and long-term strategies and so that you can clear broad- acres, you can leave land that you’re going to leave protected forever. And surely in those involvements there will be a lot of discussions with all Aboriginal groups where they are genuine traditional owners of Broome land or not (Field interview with Ron Johnston, 25 August 1994).

Since the late 1980s the shire has consistently argued for a map which delineates sacred sites (preferably such delimitation would limit the sacred to its most minimal configurations) and a rational plan to develop around them. This call echoes the desire of Perth planners and local authorities to contain the recovery of the repressed Aboriginality of Perth by the limits imposed by a combination of planning pragmatism and ‘representative’ categorisation. Precise mapping of sites of significance was seen as a specific requirement for their compatible incorporation into the framework of planning for urban space (Jacobs 1996:114).

When, in 1989, a section of the Aboriginal community responded with their own plan, the shire refused to accept its recommendations. The Lurrujarri Heritage Trail Management Plan applied to a section of the Broome coast and proposed a two kilometre exclusion zone to ensure the protection of the coastal song cycle—the path of mythological beings. In a determined campaign of opposition the shire lobbied the Premier and the WA Sites Department to have the non-development zone removed from the plan.
By 1991 a number of state government reports had identified the need to involve Aboriginal people in the planning process (Broome Planning Taskforce 1991 and Cabinet Minute of 29.6.1994). One report attributed the conflict over sacred sites and their perceived impediment to development to 'the nature of the land use planning and land acquisition processes' and not to the Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1972 (WA), as was sometimes argued (Marlborough & Waterman 1991:1).

Ultimately, what was being avoided in Broome was an ongoing and equitable dialogue with the Aboriginal community where cultural differences were recognised and respected. The desired map would be easier to consult on receipt of every development application and was not likely to respond in ways unpredictable or contrary. A spatial representation of cultural relationships between kin and country was perceived by decision-makers as efficient and categorical. It in fact represented a means of appropriating and controlling Aboriginal cultural knowledge, and furthermore, of excluding Aboriginal voices from future planning decisions. An added damage would be that people's cultural relationships with the country would be frozen at the point in time when the map was produced.

There has, over the past ten years, been little appreciation of the need to establish planning procedures and land use policies which are sensitive to the contextual and culturally embedded nature of Aboriginal people's relationships to their country—relationships between people and places. As Patrick Sullivan, an anthropologist with extensive experience in Broome, has commented:

If we want a simple means of summing up the totality of Aboriginal culture we could envisage it arranged in a pyramid with three levels—sites, ceremonies and daily life. It is just the tip of this pyramid, the existence of sacred sites, that we usually call Aboriginal heritage ... The Shire of Broome is known to have a sympathetic concern with the preservation of sacred sites. Studies have begun, but not concluded, to identify all of them so they can be protected and development proceed unhindered around them. This approach is based on a fundamental misunderstanding. There are just too many sites in the Broome area for them all to be catalogued ... It is the preservation of knowledge, belief, practices, and the according of respect to people because of these that is more important than the identification of a 'heritage' place ... The preservation of mythological sites and areas is important not so that a piece of heritage may endure, but so that the people themselves may endure and progress as a distinct and valued culture (Sullivan 1995, emphasis added).
A progressive and just response would have to establish flexible but lasting processes if it were to faithfully respond to the dynamic and changing nature of cultural traditions. Jacobs and Mulvihill have identified the principles required to ensure that development planning and land management are multicultural and pluralistic. Importantly, they stress that development itself is fundamentally a multicultural process and that new approaches which recognise this cultural context must ‘integrate a variety of perspectives, values and agendas’ and demonstrate a ‘strong commitment to equity in all its dimensions’ (Jacobs & Mulvihill 1995:11).

In its deliberations with the Broome Shire Council and state government planners over land use matters, the Rubibi Working Group and Kimberley Land Council have been attempting to build suitable institutions and develop joint planning procedures and policies which ensure that Aboriginal people's rights and interests are continually heard through their participation in decision-making. An alternative town planning framework is a central component of this project.

Throughout the course of the Local Government Development Project and consequent interventions in land use decision-making, the Rubibi Working Group has identified a number of areas of planning policy and town character which they wish to influence in the short term. There is one in particular which will be examined here. It is an environmental design concept which is now being widely referred to as ‘cultural reserves or corridors’.

Cultural reserves or corridors

Perhaps one of the most challenging concepts being advanced by the Aboriginal community is the ‘cultural corridor’. Conscious of the very rapid rate of suburban expansion, where houses are ‘going up like bloody anthills’ (Frank Sebastian, 25.7.1994), and critical of the density and design of the new residential forms of Broome, the Rubibi Working Group has developed a design which conserves corridors of bushland throughout 'greenfield' neighbourhoods. In the early stages of conceptual development, these corridors were referred to as ‘Aboriginal desire lines’ by the planner preparing a number of plans for Broome. Seeking a more comprehensive, and possibly, more 'down-to-earth' expression of their aspirations, the Rubibi Working Group chose the term ‘cultural corridor’. The notion builds on the statutory requirement for the retention of a small proportion of public open space in every neighbourhood development. Rubibi sees the cultural corridors as the defining feature of urban development where Aboriginal cultural needs for open space, bush tucker, walking access, and privacy can be met in a townscape which houses thousands of people (see Map 2).
Map 2: Environmental and cultural corridors in the Broome townsit
Source: Kimberley Land Council

These corridors are not intended to be reservations of land which are sufficient to protect sacred sites or areas, and all land use within the neighbourhoods will require further scrutiny in order to determine and mitigate its impact on Aboriginal heritage. This Aboriginal design for the townscape does, however, represent a more strategic approach to protecting large portions of the landscape than the simple mapping of sites once preferred by the shire and many developers and government agencies.

Rubibi's community newsletter describes the planning project, the results of Aboriginal community input into Rubibi's work and the value of the cultural corridors.

The results of [this] consultation ... is this map. This is the first attempt to put the views of Aboriginal people down on a map. This a draft
map, in other words it is ideas to talk about and discuss - not the final thing yet. When the final map has been done and agreed on by Rubibi, then it will go to the Broome Shire Council for consideration in the new Town Planning Scheme that will be finalised soon. This scheme is the Shire's recommendation on the future planning of Broome. On the map the black areas are the cultural reserves. These are the areas that Aboriginal people want to leave in a natural state. The purpose of these reserves is to protect and maintain areas for Aboriginal traditional cultural use, protect and maintain the plants and animals, provide native bush areas between housing and other developed areas (Rubibi News, No. 4, October 1996).

A comparison between the Rubibi plan and two earlier development plans reveals a greater portion of land being retained for cultural use in the Rubibi plan than in the shire's existing Town Planning Scheme (circa 1982) and the Broome Planning Strategy (1993), which both map future uses. The value of bushland for bush tucker, in particular, is consistently stressed by members of the Aboriginal community in Broome. As an Aboriginal Shire Councillor, Elsta Foy remarked:

They (Aboriginal community) do worry about it (degradation of the environment) because their livelihood, you know the kangaroos, the wild trees, the fruit and everything, yeah I'm quite sure they are quite aware of the changes to the environment, and they are feeling sad and sorry about it all. I know we can go into the shop and buy an apple and an orange and a lettuce and a tomato, but it is still not the same. I mean if we discourage our kids from eating gubinge\(^9\), which is the highest vitamin C content in the whole world, you know, we're just moving backwards like the Europeans. This is something we have to, as older people, have to encourage our kids to learn about these bush tucker, because we never as kids grew up, never been sick in our lives, and we come from big families ... So it's just that society has made it so that Aboriginal people became dependent to the white race, and now it is difficult for some of our people to get out of it ... but it's here for you [cultural knowledge], use it while it's here before it's taken away. That's what we're frightened of, it all being taken away from them [bushland] before they had the chance to teach their kids (Field interview with Elsta Foy, 20 August 1994).

Elsta Foy is expressing a desire for the Aboriginal community to have the choice to maintain a different relationship with the natural landscape of Broome than the one adopted by the non-Aboriginal population. From this statement it is easy to observe the importance of culturally specific knowledge about the environment which will be at greater risk of loss if the extent of bushland is further reduced, or the ecosystem degraded. Social relations between adults and children formed through
the exchange of knowledge of the country and its uses, and the part that those relationships between country and kin play in the physical and mental health of the community are critical values in any discussion about the Broome landscape.

Rubibi's alternative vision for Broome is perceived to be compatible with the quest for a new urbanism which is currently gaining popularity in planning circles. New urbanism seeks to avoid the social segregation of past urban forms by creating a sense of community through the creation of walkable neighbourhoods, interconnected streets, a diverse mix of housing types, greater emphasis on public space which is integrated into the rest of the neighbourhood and marketing strategies which recognise the value of community to potential residents (Brown 1996:6). As the planner working on the Broome Local Government Development Project notes:

Development is moving beyond the simple supply of land to the establishment of community. There has been a renewed focus on the re-establishment of a sense of community leading to the planning of an urban environment that is responsive to community demands (Hames Sharley 1996b:8).

This trend may be observable in the planning literature, or in cities such as Perth, where there are pockets with depressed housing markets; however, in Broome, where the market value of residential land is high and construction costs great, the economic pressure to maximise residential lots is too intense to wholly embrace the cultural corridors concept. Rubibi is currently experiencing significant opposition to their concept as it is perceived to conserve and quarantine too much land from development. Broome's pattern of urban development (see Map 3 for Rubibi's concept for suburb names) illustrates how intensely each square metre of residential land has been used in the new residential estates on the west coast of the peninsula, in comparison to the larger older blocks arranged in a grid pattern. Opposition is also being expressed by key decision-makers on non-economic grounds. When discussing the concept, Rubibi members have been told that the cultural corridors are undesirable because they will become unsightly crime belts where illicit activities thrive. It seems that an Aboriginal landscape, salvaged before it is completely suburbanised, is still too wild for the settlers.

We can get on and plan the future of Broome ...

Broome's Aboriginal community is currently challenging the planning system to address cultural difference in its epistemology, methodology and practice. Rather than excluding Aboriginal people by appropriating,
Interpreting and representing their cultural information in ways designed to serve the interests of the dominant culture, planning systems are now having to confront Aboriginal voices asserting their rights to be
given special recognition as the original inhabitants of the area, as people with distinct relationships with their country and as people who wish to effectively participate in decisions about their country.

Despite some gains for the Aboriginal community in Broome, the impediments to overcoming oppressive policies and practices in such a short period, in order to participate as equals in decisions about their country, are substantial. Michael Dodson, Australia's Social Justice Commissioner, warns of the power imbalances in Native Title negotiations over land use, where claimants can find themselves merely responding to, and not directing or controlling, land uses and development paths (Dodson 1996; Jackson 1996). In this situation the Aboriginal community's influence is conditional upon acceptance of the non-Aboriginal community development path.

The best outcome for the indigenous side would be the imposition of a few conditions on the development. But this result is not inevitable and more importantly it is not fair. Discussions between Native Title parties and prospective users of Native Title land do not have to revolve around a proposed future act or conventional patterns of land use. Instead, negotiations could operate to an agenda that emphasised, for example, cultural issues, community development and the preservation of ecologies. Proposed development could be discussed in terms of its consistency with indigenous aspirations on these issues. Industry positions would then have to be relevant to the way indigenous peoples might want to divide up the world and not the other way around (Dodson, 1996:10).

In Broome, representative Aboriginal organisations are attempting to avoid reactionary strategies; however, the weight of market forces, the limitations of the Native Title Act, non-Aboriginal resistance, and an inadequate resource base, are impinging on their ability to determine their own agendas. A very significant issue is time. Envisaging your community's future is a complex and time-consuming process requiring sufficient political support and resources to research, consult, question, imagine and consider all possibilities. In Broome, the climate in which the Aboriginal community is being expected to create their future is highly pressured and largely unsupportive.

Another important requirement is a conducive policy context or policy space. In my experience in Broome, when the Aboriginal community articulates agenda items such as those described by Dodson—cultural issues, community development and environmental care—they receive well-meaning looks from people wondering when they are going to get the real information—map references for sacred sites, delineation of a song cycle which might 'encumber' development, locations for outstations, zones allowing development or the converse, conservation. This information or knowledge can then be worked into the government's or developers' agenda or plan, whereas when the non-Aboriginal
community tackles these issues—cultural, community development, environmental—they engage government, and increasingly, consultant planners, to analyse, categorise and strategise in order to produce seemingly rational and implementable cultural plans, housing strategies, coastal management plans and the like. These documents give a spatial and policy framework to non-Aboriginal community aspirations as they are fitted into the work programmes of government agencies. An expression of the Aboriginal division of the world of Broome is still some time off.

The Kimberley Land Council has been resisting the reduction of planning to the production of plans or spatial representations of relationships and community aspirations. One of the longer term planning exercises currently underway in Broome involves examination of the future use of a large pastoral station to the north of Broome to cater for a range of uses: the town’s expansion, the relocation of the airport, new horticultural developments and tourism infrastructure, amongst other economic activities. Aboriginal people’s needs are being addressed in that investigation; however, for many people who wish to first consider what degree of control and management influence they will have in any future land use scenario, the difficulty of conceptualising future uses and planning in the abstract is immense. Abstraction for the purpose of determining future land use leaves the community without any sense of certainty about where the power will lie in future decisions about the country. By removing context and contingency from consideration, this approach runs a great risk of producing inappropriate results, as it denies the dynamism of people’s relationships to each other, the non-Aboriginal community and their country.

Doubt remains about the ability of the Aboriginal negotiators to influence the deeply ingrained normative values which are so influential in determining the objectives of planning and the economic framework in which land use plans serve as decision-making instruments. Getting on with ‘planning the future of Broome’ in the words of the shire president (Radio interview on 6KP on 26.5.96) has, in this town’s experience, inevitably meant encouraging rapid and dramatic changes to the landscape, economy and social life of the town, in the name of development and progress. These values and processes remain largely unquestioned by the Western Australian planning system, nor does the system require that they demonstrate their contribution to social justice.

Conclusion

Development planning in Canada and North Australia is now facing what Jacob and Mulvihill call a multidimensional challenge, brought about by a sharing of power across cultures and the re-shaping of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.
In this context, terms such as cooperative, horizontal, inclusive and adaptive become key indices and signposts of appropriate attitudes and behaviours. They invite shifts from confrontational to more cooperative endeavours (fragmentation to integration); from imposed to negotiated positions (from consultation to people sharing decision making); and from short term to longer-term planning (Jacobs & Mulvihill 1995:9).

As the above account of Broome demonstrates, the challenges being made by the Aboriginal community are indeed multi-dimensional. Their scope encompasses regard and respect for cultural difference, renewed efforts at equitable returns from development, and new approaches to land use and landscape management. On other levels they are challenging the cultural assumptions of the land use system, environmental perceptions, the construction of the public interest, and planning methodologies. In response, the efforts of the Broome Shire Council and state government to open their processes to Aboriginal participation and to develop cooperative approaches to problem-solving are an attempt to meet some of these multidimensional challenges.

However, there are finite limits to the area of land and especially coastal sites, available for transformation from an undeveloped state to residential, commercial and tourism uses. Whether the development and re-development of Broome can be harnessed so as to ensure that Aboriginal people have sufficient land, privacy, and resources to "divide up the world" as they see it, and pursue their preferred lifeways is likely to pose the greatest challenge of all to the land use planning system.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

1 AAD predicts an increase in the Broome region Aboriginal population to 4000 by the year 2001 from the current estimate of 3166 (Aboriginal Affairs Department, 1995:2).

2 The author of this study warns that census comparisons at the regional level must be treated with care because of changes to the ways in which information was gathered and the relatively small populations at the regional council level.

3 For a history of the relations between the Aboriginal community and the Broome Shire see Jackson 1996.

4 This fear was founded on the significant reduction of the Anne Street Aboriginal Reserve in the 1980s for residential development.

5 As of October 1996, 15 Native Title claims had been lodged and accepted by the National Native Title Tribunal. The determination of these claims has been adjourned whilst negotiations between the parties proceed.

6 This Agreement contains eleven clauses pertaining to the recognition of past injustices against Aboriginal people and the need to recognise the importance of the Aboriginal community to Broome’s future. Clause 9 commits the parties to seek the support of the state government for cooperative agreements which involve the development of a planning strategy for inclusion in the town plan. Such a strategy will identify areas of land of ‘special significance’ to Aboriginal people, areas of land subject to joint management arrangements and areas of land to be developed, albeit with the interests of Aboriginal people recognised and protected.

7 These are internal documents which can be obtained by contacting the author.

8 Bush fruit found in coastal vine thicket.

9 Over the past three years, Broome Shire has commissioned a Cultural Plan, a Housing Strategy, a Commercial Strategy, a Chinatown Strategy and a number of area or precinct plans.

10 I am grateful to Patrick Sullivan for clarifying a problem I had often encountered in planning discussions in Broome.
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Chapter Eight – Michael Walsh

The land still speaks?
Language and landscape in Aboriginal Australia

Relatively little attention has been directed towards language and landscape in Aboriginal Australia. This is surprising because it is obvious that the land is of crucial importance to Aboriginal people and it should also be obvious that one of the most important channels for expressing this importance is through language. Referring to the Western Apache one investigator has this to say:

Ordinary talk, the ethnographer sees, provides a readily available window into the structure and significance of other peoples’ worlds, and so (slowly at first, by fits and starts, and never without protracted bouts of guessing) he or she begins to learn to listen. And also freshly to see. For as native concepts and beliefs find external purchase on specific features of the local topography, the entire landscape seems to acquire a crisp new dimension that moves it more surely into view (Basso 1988:101).

Much the same could be said of Aboriginal Australia. However, all too often those with a long familiarity with Aboriginal languages have not transmitted the richness of this knowledge to outsiders. In this paper I will approach this knowledge under three broad headings—in Speaking about the Land, I will attempt to give some appreciation of what little we know in this area; in Speaking for the Land, I consider some of the problems involved as Aboriginal people have increasingly been required
to talk for country: for the protection of sacred sites, for land claims or for Native Title negotiations; and in Speaking to the Land, I ponder the effect of the apparent rapid decline of Aboriginal languages on the necessity for Aboriginal people to address the land in their own language.

Speaking about the land

One rather obvious question is: how many Aboriginal place names are there? As might be expected, the answer is not so obvious. One general work on Australian place names proposes: ‘Australia has over four million place names … Nearly three-quarters of Australian place names are of Aboriginal origin’ (Kennedy & Kennedy 1989:5). On the other hand Hunn (1994) ventures the universal claim that each indigenous language group will have about 500 place names. On this basis, Australia, with around 250 distinct languages at first contact, would be expected to have some 125 000 place names.¹

What is clear is that wherever a language and culture have been studied closely there is an abundance of place names. One example is provided by Dixon’s study of Yidiny in the Cairns-Yarrabah region of Queensland (1991). A relatively tiny area (a little over 200 square kilometres) has around 90 place names (Dixon 1991:124ff). In the same area, the distribution of non-indigenous place names is rather sparse. Of the 90 indigenous place names, around two-thirds have known etymologies and there are stories about Dreamtime figures who assigned these names to the country. So little is known about Aboriginal place names that it is even hard to say whether this proportion of ‘transparent’ to ‘opaque’ place names is typical. As languages fall into decline, it will become less easy to establish whether a particular place name is ‘just a name’ or has a known etymology. For example, in central New South Wales there is a town called Gulargambone.² As it happens, it is connected with the word ‘galah’ which has entered Australian English as the name for a kind of bird, but for most this connection is likely to be obscure.

Names can establish a relationship between person and place. It is not uncommon for an Aboriginal person to have a personal name which is also a place name, and this name might also be shared with another person. To my knowledge, little is known by outsiders (non-Aboriginal people) about the details of these naming practices but it seems clear that a linkage between person and place is set up which has considerable importance in connecting a person to the land and to other members of the group. This kind of connection is not achieved in Anglo culture merely by having a name like Jack London or Susannah York.³ Whatever the origin of such surnames, their personal linkage to land is by now very slight.
Another link can be through dogs' names. Kesteven (1984: 54) reports that in the Oenpelli area a dog may acquire a name which is also the name of a site in the dog owner's country.

Stories in Aboriginal settings are often peppered with place names. Consider a portion of the English translation of a traditional story from the Nunggubuyu people of the Northern Territory:

He paddled along. He dropped the hook at Nuntadnimaij and fished, but no! The fish were small. He went to Aljiyanbaj, paddling, and he fished at Anmira, but again they were small. He paddled to Aljiyanbaj and fished at Amabira, but again they were small (Heath 1980: 109).

Non-Aboriginal people often wonder when such stories are going to get to the point. One could wonder whether this extract is atypical, but in fact it is highly typical. Indeed there is a sequence of elements that recurs many times in this text: paddle/move; arrive at Place Name; no! fish are small (Heath 1984: 591). Is there something the matter with the storyteller? On the contrary, the narrator was a leader of his community for much of his life and was judged to be an outstanding storyteller (Heath 1980: 8–9). The point is that a text of this sort can be thought of as a kind of travelogue in which a single sequence of events recurs at place after place across the country. It is not a matter of a 'stuck record' but a way that a storyteller can celebrate the land.

It would be surprising for Aboriginal listeners to become impatient with place names. Place names are supremely powerful in linking the listener to their heritage through land, people and ancestors. As Jackson observes for Central Australia: 'A person gains an important part of their identity through particular places' (1995: 62). Across Aboriginal Australia, often the mere mention of a place name will be sufficient to conjure up a wealth of allusions. In non-Aboriginal culture the mere mention of places like Lilliput, Camelot, Troy is enough to evoke not just an incident but a whole world of story and characters. An important difference is that the non-Aboriginal places just mentioned are mythic and scarcely real, whereas the Aboriginal places are at once suffused with myth and with lived personal experience. Again this account that focusses on the Western Apache is quite apposite for Aboriginal Australia:

We gave her clear pictures with place names. So her mind went to those places, standing in front of them as our ancestors did long ago. That way she could see what happened there long ago. She could hear stories in her mind, perhaps hear our ancestors speaking. She could re-know the wisdom of our ancestors (quoted in Basso 1988: 110).
Place names in traditional stories serve to anchor the events of the story to ‘country’ in a way that is relevant to the whole group. By contrast there are stories about places which are essentially personal—they refer to the births or conceptions of known individuals—they might recount an amusing and seemingly trivial incident about a particular individual, or they might relate events in recent history. For want of a better way of describing them I call these ‘just-so stories’ about country. These stones are suffused with personal meaning. While the traditional stories have a corporate identity ‘just-so stories’ have a personal identity. Rose (1996) has referred to the ‘dailiness’ of places: the way in which places receive layers of meaning through the day-by-day accumulation of personal contact. As people cross the country, they are passing by, stopping at, and passing through places they have known for their whole lives. Each place acquires a special familiarity, not just through their own lives but through the life experiences of their ancestors and fellow travellers. These experiences reside in the places and are recalled when people pass through so that when a place is mentioned in a ‘traditional story’ it evokes this accumulated experience. There is a tendency for outsiders to think of these ‘just-so stories’ as somehow less important than the stories of Dreamtime figures who have created and named the landscape. Is this because the ‘just-so stories’ are in some sense, temporary knowledge while the stories of the Dreamtime are eternal? Whatever their relative importance, there is little doubt that both kinds of story are significant ways of talking about the land.

Aboriginal languages are repositories of knowledge about country. This includes specialised vocabularies describing the details of the terrain. Like place names, this is a surprisingly neglected area of study. In part, this is because few outsiders gain sufficient fluency in an Aboriginal language to be aware of such details. In part, this may be because of the need for a team of researchers to cover the area adequately. A significant exception can be found in Richard Baker’s account of land use in the Borroloola region (1993). This reveals a richness of detail which is uncommon in the literature but I doubt is uncommon in other Aboriginal languages. It is no surprise that Baker, as a geographer, should focus on the vocabulary of the environment. He has also been assisted by the longterm research of John Bradley who provides even more detail (Bradley et al. 1992). These scholars rely heavily on the knowledge of local Aboriginal people and among them we can expect varying degrees of knowledge. This need not merely be a product of age: some people simply have a greater aptitude and enthusiasm for detailed knowledge—they are experts about the terrain. It is timely to consider how such indigenous experts on the environment in Aboriginal Australia can be better utilised.
For the most part, the vocabulary of landscape appears opaque. Among the numerous examples provided by Baker (1993) there are two exceptions. The term for 'midden' (li-wankalawu in Yanyuwa) literally means 'for old people' reflecting an obvious connection between middens and the ancestors of the Yanyuwa. The term for 'hill' (nawuku) literally means 'back'. The latter is a rather transparent metaphor linking a feature of the environment with a body part. This practice is pervasive within any Aboriginal language.

In every Australian Aboriginal language there is a rich array of metaphor and semantic associations. A metaphor will often derive from a perceived association with a body part. Let us first consider some rather transparent examples from Murrinhpatha (some material derived from Street & Street 1989; see also Walsh 1996; Street 1983). In Murrinhpatha the word for 'foot/feet', me, is also used for 'track'. The expression (nanthi)³ kamarri 'eye, face' can be aligned with (da) kamarri 'waterhole' where the connection between 'eye' and 'waterhole' seems clearly enough to rely on shape. The term for 'back', (nanthi) pangkin, has the counterpart (da) pangkin, 'ridge' which is reminiscent of the semantic association of 'back' with 'hill' in Yanyuwa.

Slightly less transparent is the next set of examples: (nanthi) nithinu 'branch of tree' cf. nithi 'arm'; (kura) nithinu 'tributary of river'; (da) nithinu 'side track'. The body part term, nithi 'arm', resembles the first part of the form, nithinu, and the meanings involved make it plausible to propose that it is another example of body part metaphor. The same would seem to be the case for thinang 'promontory' cf. thimu 'nose' where the initial portion, thi-, is identical to the initial portion of the word for 'nose', thimu. Finally consider the body part term: marda 'belly, stomach, abdomen'. This can also mean 'pregnant; large bamboo'. It is easy enough to see some semantic connection among the meanings involving such notions as convexity and being a container. But what of:

(da) bekramarda 'open country'
(kura/lalingkin) bekramarda 'open sea'
(da) mardanu 'underneath'

Does the recurring partial, marda, connect with the basic body part meaning or is it just a coincidence? Unfortunately such questions cannot always be answered in a definitive way, not merely because of some lack of skill in the investigator but also because whatever the connection might be it is beyond the limits of awareness of the native speakers. For many years Geoff O'Grady has been observing such possible connections, not just within one language but across many languages. One of the more celebrated examples is the recurrence of forms that refer both to 'ear' and 'ground' (after O'Grady 1979):
Warrpiri, Djaru | langa 'ear'
Warman | langa 'ground'
Yulbandja, Pintupi, Wadjari | pama 'ground'
Thalendji, Burndu | pama 'head'
GulpapuyNu | buthu. ru 'ear'
Malgana | puthu 'ground'
Nhandha | uthu. lu 'ground'
Wadjuk | budjor 'ground'
Neo-Nyungar | puju. r 'ground, earth, dust'
GulpapuyNu | muna. tha 'earth, ground, sand'
Yulbandja | muna. rta 'ear'
Nyungumarda | jungka 'ground, earth'
Yindjibamdi | thungka 'ground, earth'
Bayungu | thungka. ra 'ground, earth'
Wadjuk | tonga, twonga 'ear'
Neo-Nyungar | twangk, twongk 'ear'

Could this just be a chance resemblance? The odds against it are extremely high. If it were merely one pair of forms, the prudent course would be to treat it as coincidence but five cognate sets from widely separated languages makes the connection undeniable. However this connection still awaits cultural foundation/explanation. It is this kind of conundrum that has prompted some linguists to explore the cultural foundations of semantic association. I will exemplify this program through the work of two of its most significant practitioners: David Wilkins and Nick Evans.

It is well known that a given sign can be polysemous in semiotic systems other than language: the same visual sign, a circle or a set of concentric circles, may be a symbol of, i.e. stand for or 'mean', a waterhole, a camp, a woman's breast, or her womb, according to the context in which the sign is used... (Stanner 1979:63).

Evans and Wilkins are interested in exploring networks of associations within a semiotic system and across semiotic systems within one cultural group as well as across cultural groups. Wilkins (1997) details the semantic associations of some Arrente handsigns and their connections with everyday (spoken) language. For one handsign there are a number of everyday language counterparts, including: ileye 'emu'; kamule 'camel'; tywarpe 'ironwood tree'; lelarre 'chocolate bush' and ilkute 'desert cucumber'. Clearly there is nothing about the forms of these words that can link them together. Rather, it is a matter of particular semantic associations. The introduced animal, camel, is linked to the already known animal, emu, by being long-necked and because it is regarded as having similar head movements. There is a metonymic link...
between emus and ironwood trees because it has been observed that emus use ironwood trees for shelter. Emus are also metonymically linked with *lelarre* ‘chocolate bush’ and *illurte* ‘desert cucumber’ because emus eat these plants. So this single hand sign might be thought of as a summary of a range of semantic and cultural associations among the Arrernte. It serves to demonstrate the crossovers that can occur between semiotic systems within a single language/cultural group. But there are also widespread semantic associations across cultural groups. One example is the connection between ‘emu’ and ‘the Milky Way’, especially the dark patches of the Milky Way referred to as the ‘Coal Sack’. This connection relies on a similarity of shape and recurs across Australia (Morton 1985). One can choose a language at random—as I did for Mayi-Kulan in the Gulf country of Queensland (Breen 1981)—and be fairly confident that the same word applies to ‘emu’ and the ‘Coal Sack’. It does!

Another good example of a network of semantic associations is provided by Evans’ fire/camp/country nexus. Only summary details can be given here (for details, see Evans 1992). In at least some languages there is a polysemy between ‘fire’ and ‘camp’: the same word includes these two senses in its semantic range. Even a minimal knowledge of Aboriginal Australia would accept the cogency of this connection. Much less obvious is a single word that includes in its semantic range: saltpan; string; manner, custom, way, tradition. Evans, however, is able to indicate how such connections can be made—through a series of culturally grounded links a chain of cultural connectedness is forged. Evans suggests that there is a connection between ‘firestick’ (more specifically, ‘fire drill’) and ‘string’ because both are entities which are habitually twirled. Traditionally, string is made by twirling on the thigh. There is then a possible metonymic link between ‘fire drill’ and ‘salt pan’ because the bush from which fire drills are made grows close to salt pans. Because the fire is a central feature of a camp which is itself central to the transmission of cultural knowledge, a chain of connection can be established: fire stick—fire—camp—home—country—territory—manner, custom, way, tradition.

It is way too early to be sure just how such knowledge is distributed throughout Aboriginal Australia, but what little such research has already uncovered suggests that we have only, as yet, a very limited awareness of the wealth of semantic associations. It is likely that much of the overall vocabulary is affected by these networks of semantic associations—and one small but significant part of this vocabulary relates to land. It is this largely hidden language of the land that Aboriginal people bring with them when they are asked to speak up for their country.
Speaking for the land

Since the land claim process began in the Northern Territory in 1976, there have been frequent demands for Aboriginal people to speak for their country. They must first transmit knowledge about country to researchers, later to lawyers who represent their interests and finally, in a more public setting, in a hearing where there is a judge, lawyers representing various interest groups and many other interested people. Aboriginal people must talk about their land, mostly to strangers, in a strange setting, in a strange language. Here Warlpiri women describe the process:

Yes, we have spoken continuously, strongly and stubbornly, to keep the Law and the old ways... On paper after paper we spoke out at the Land Council. We talked hard to keep the old ways and the Law, the things that belonged to our ancestors, the things that belong to those who brought us up: our mothers, our fathers and our grandparents (Vaarzon-Morel 1995:105).

More often than not the language used to ask about and receive answers to questions about country and people's connectedness to it, is English. Particularly in northern Australia Aboriginal people have multilingual repertoires which include Standard Australian English (SAE), Aboriginal English/Kriol and a range of ancestral languages.

In these public expositions about country Aboriginal people can often appear halting or inarticulate. Despite the very considerable linguistic difficulties in public expositions about country, I do not believe it is merely a matter of linguistic competence that can make Aboriginal people often appear halting or inarticulate, it is a matter of the ineffable and the unspoken.

The ineffable is not really that which cannot be spoken of but that which cannot be spoken of readily and quickly. The non-Aboriginal legal system, despite the best will in the world, all too often imposes a kind of cognitive logjam on any kind of free flow of discourse for the Aboriginal witness. It is not that there are no words—the words just have too much attached to them. An emu is not just an emu, but is inherently linked to a whole range of cultural and semantic associations within one cultural group and then across other cultural groups. Those networks of associations connect up with people and place in myriad ways that are progressively enriched as one's knowledge develops over a lifetime. Little wonder that an Aboriginal person might appear halting when asked: what is this place? and yields the answer: emu. Taken one way the answer is quite expansive but to the average non-Aboriginal hearer the answer may be quite uninformative.
There are some other common enough Aboriginal responses which, to the outsider, appear rather uninformative. In response to repeated questions about why a particular practice is carried out an Aboriginal person might say: 'that's just our way'; asked whether this practice is the same as something else the response comes back: 'same but different'. It seems pretty clear that there is no intention on the part of the Aboriginal person to be uncooperative.

On arriving at a Dreaming site, someone might say: 'that's the one now'. Despite the considerable enthusiasm of the Aboriginal person announcing this, chances are it is very little help to the non-Aboriginal person first encountering this place. A partial analogy may help: a Sydney-based scholar who has studied Arthurian legend for many years at last travels to Great Britain to the site of Tintagel and says: 'this is it'. They have been rendered inarticulate not through ignorance but through a surfeit of knowledge. The Aboriginal situation is different in many ways but particularly in that the knowledge is about the world they live in day by day.

Apart from what is difficult to talk about, the nature of the control of knowledge among Aboriginal people can make it unlawful to divulge knowledge. In the context of land claims this can result in an apparent lack of knowledge. In order to assess responses properly both in day-to-day interaction and courtroom situations, it is clearly necessary to understand this knowledge system in advance; hesitancy, awkwardness, embarrassment, even unwillingness to respond, cannot be taken necessarily as evidence of ignorance (von Sturmer 1987:12). Let us consider an example from the Kenbi land claim (Darwin area). The barrister appearing as the counsel assisting the Aboriginal Land Commissioner is trying to find out about the location of certain ceremonial activity.

This is an extract from the Transcript (Australia 1990:2301–2):

BARRISTER: Did, did the Larrakia women have ceremonies around here? Where abouts?
WITNESS: In the corner there.
BARRISTER: At Belyuen here? Anywhere else along the Cox Peninsula? Or on the islands?
WITNESS: One in that Two Fella Creek.
BARRISTER: Where?
WITNESS: Two Fella Creek.
BARRISTER: Two Fella Creek. This is for women I am - - -
WITNESS: No, man.
BARRISTER: No, man. I am asking you more about women's ceremonies.
WITNESS: Oh, well, you better ask him, M__ B__.
BARRISTER: Better ask M__, eh? You do not remember—I do not want to
ask anything about the ceremonies, but I want to ask you where they held
the ceremonies?
WITNESS: In that other side, there.
BARRISTER: At Belyuen?
WITNESS: Yes.

BARRISTER: Do you have names for those places where those ceremonies
were held? Aboriginal names?
WITNESS: Two Fella Creek.
BARRISTER: Pardon?
WITNESS: Two Fella Creek.
BARRISTER: The women's ceremonies, you said that we - at Belyuen, down,
down to the, that way, to the south.
WITNESS: Nijkurum. Oh, Nijkurum.
BARRISTER: Say that again.
WITNESS: Nijkurum. That is the woman one, there.

This is not a matter of the witness lacking knowledge but being careful
about divulging information about ceremony. A male, white barrister is
asking a senior Aboriginal woman about women's ceremonial business.
Particularly when talking about 'business' in a public setting, it is
culturally appropriate to be vague. The witness gives the name of the
ceremony (Nijkurum)—eventually—but does not clearly give the name
of the place where the ceremony takes place. There are lots of hedges:
'in the corner'; 'you better ask M__'; 'in that other side, there'.

A major problem for interpreting the transcript is that traditional
knowledge must be inferred from a relative absence of detail. Knowledge
about country can be divulged in part or withheld altogether and this is
part of day-to-day negotiations in an essentially oral situation. Such
negotiations are relatively fluid but the circumstances of a land claim
are such that knowledge of country divulged on one particular occasion
is recorded on audiotape and later transcribed. As knowledge of country
is fixed in place by the written word, the changeability of language about
country becomes more apparent.

One feature of this process of change is to be found in group names.
An example is provided by the Kokatha and Adnyamathanha groups of
South Australia. Norman Tindale drew on decades of research to provide
a comprehensive map of Aboriginal groups in Australia. While it varies
in accuracy, much of it is probably a good reflection of where informants
stated their groups should be. Tindale (1974) places the Kokatha
somewhat to the west of the centre of South Australia and the
Adnyamathanha are shown as being north of Adelaide in the Flinders
Ranges area. Based on fieldwork in 1981 Jacobs (1986) presents quite
different tribal boundaries. Aboriginal people she worked with give a range of views about the boundaries and these only partially coincide with Tindale's view. Kokatha now takes up either a much larger area, or has moved further to the east. Adnyamathanha's territory has also expanded and has moved further to the south; two people have its easterly boundary coinciding with the South Australia/New South Wales border!

Kesteven (1984:52–4) briefly describes the shift of territorial and linguistic allegiances in the Oenpelli area from early this century. While there may be an ideology of permanence about people and the land these kinds of shifts must make us question the status of names applied to groups and territories in Aboriginal Australia. Elsewhere it would be strange to think of the Germany of 1915, 1945, 1975 and 1995 as being the same. While there is continuity, there are also major changes.

Speaking to the land

Languages are landed: each language is associated with a particular territory. At the same time, places are empeopled and languaged. Languages are owned by particular groups of people as surely as those groups own particular tracts of country. The spirits of the land speak particular languages and Dreamtime figures would change their language as they moved into another country: another territory, another language. The land is often spoken to as people pass through it, but there are some places which must be spoken to. Without a senior Aboriginal person addressing the spirits that inhabit places of danger many people will be put at risk. The senior people must address the place in an appropriate language announcing the arrival of new people and vouching for their good intentions.

Aboriginal languages have declined at an alarming rate in the last 200 years. Schmidt (1990:1–2) estimates that 160 of the original 250 distinct languages are now 'extinct'. Another 70 are in a weak state and unlikely to survive, while just 20 are in a healthy state and are being learnt by children as part of everyday life. At a rough estimate, she suggests that only ten per cent of Aboriginal people speak their own languages. This would mean that 90 per cent of the Aboriginal population do not actively speak their language: they may have fragmentary knowledge through limited vocabulary and some phrases but they do not regularly converse in it, nor is it being transmitted as a whole system of communication to the next generation.

But these grim statistics should be treated with caution: they do not necessarily reflect the resilience of Aboriginal culture. Although the knowledge of language may be 'fragmentary', it is clearly quite important
to those Aboriginal people who have managed to retain this knowledge despite generations of outside interference (Aird 1996). Particularly over the last ten years there has been strong interest in language reclamation, even when a language has been thought by some people to be "extinct". Although the last fluent speaker of Kaurna, the language of the Adelaide Plains, may have passed away in 1929, there is now a very active process of regaining knowledge (Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia 1996: esp. 179ff). While some knowledge has been lost, some has been retained and more is being regained.

This raises important questions for Aboriginal people: what language does the country speak/hear. Will the country hear us? Does the loss of language close up the country?

There was no way of existing in this land, or of making your way through it, unless you took into yourself, discovered on your breath, the sounds that linked up all the various parts of it and made them one. Without that you were blind, you were deaf, as he had been, at first, in their world. You blundered about seeing holes where in fact strong spirits were at work that had to be placated, and if you knew how to call them up, could be helpful. Half of what ought to have been bright and full of the breath of life to you was shrouded in mist (Malouf 1993:65).

Acknowledgement

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The first part of the title of this paper resembles that of a major review of indigenous language maintenance (McKay 1996) and has been adopted with the permission of the author.
Endnotes

1 Elsewhere in the world place names tend to be great survivors: in some instances they are all that is left of an otherwise extinct language. It could well be that this is so in Aboriginal Australia as well.

2 See Donaldson 1980 and 1984 for details.

3 Of course Aboriginal people may have nicknames, like ‘Pine Creek Charlie’ but this kind of naming is fundamentally different from that which involves indigenous place names.

4 I am well aware that there are problems with a term like ‘traditional stories’. Suffice to say that I am attempting here to draw a crude distinction between one kind of story that might include accounts of the creation of the world and another kind of story which deals with more mundane events affecting people’s daily lives. A more considered typology of narrative needs a paper to itself.

5 In this section the words in parentheses are nominal classifiers. In a nutshell, each noun associates with a particular nominal classifier each time that noun appears. The sense of the noun can be made clearer by the presence of a nominal classifier, as when a noun like kamarl is ‘eye, face’ with one classifier and ‘waterhole’ with another. For details, see Walsh (in press).

6 A semantic connection between ‘head’ and ‘ear’ is widespread and well-attested in Australian languages.
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Chapter Nine – Diane Lucas, Minnie Gapindi and Jeremy Russell-Smith

Cultural perspectives of the South Alligator River floodplain: continuity and change

As a means for examining connections between past and present natural resource use and management practice in a contemporary northern Australian setting, we present data from a study undertaken of resource use, management practice, and perceptions of change, from the fertile floodplains of the middle reaches of the South Alligator River, in present day Kakadu National Park. The original study was undertaken both as an exercise to document the fading fabric of a way of life now foreign to many Aboriginal custodians, let alone the wider community, and also to document important cultural and ecological information which could assist directly with the management of Kakadu. As these data indicate, such knowledge has a utilitarian value with respect to vital, sometimes contentious, management issues (e.g. fire management): equally, such knowledge provides us with the means to see floodplain systems of the South Alligator River (and, by extension, other northern Australian landscapes) as a cultural landscape managed intensively over millennia. Such knowledge, we contend, has value to us all.

The data presented and discussed here were derived from a study of resources utilised by Aboriginal people, and associated land management practices, on floodplains, billabong systems and other
country surrounding the middle reaches of the South Alligator River. The study was undertaken with the collaboration of mostly elderly Aboriginal women in the early 1990s as part of a larger study collating resource use and fire management practices in the central Kakadu region (Lucas & Russell-Smith 1993; Russell-Smith et al. 1997). The ethnographic data cover a period of some 50 years based on the collective memories of the women involved, particularly that of Minnie Gapindji, a senior woman who has mothered eight children and lived on and around the South Alligator River floodplains some 60 years. Figure 1 presents a map of site locations on the South Alligator River that were documented as part of that study; site names and associated habitat details are given in Table 1.

As with other regions of northern Australia, Aboriginal population sizes and patterns of occupancy have changed dramatically over the past 150 years since the advent of Europeans. At the time of first contact with European explorers in the mid nineteenth century, there were likely to have been upwards of 1500 people occupying a 10 000 km² area surrounding the South and East Alligator Rivers (cf. Russell-Smith et al. 1997). By the first decades of the twentieth century, the regional Aboriginal population probably amounted to little more than a couple of hundred people; a collapse attributable mostly to the advent of devastating European diseases, and the attractions elsewhere of new economic opportunities (Keen 1980; Levitus 1995). From the turn of the 20th century until the 1960s the Kakadu region continued to be sparsely populated, with most residents engaged, in one form or another, with a range of frontier economic pursuits: the hunting of feral Asian water buffalo for hides and meat; the shooting of crocodiles for skins; the shooting of both as part of safari-style ventures; low-intensity cattle pastoralism; and various minor mining and timber cutting activities.

In more recent times, the combined Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population has returned to pre-contact levels associated with localised, but intensive developments involving mining (principally for uranium), conservation-based tourism, and infrastructure development. Currently, relatively few families go hunting, fishing and gathering yams in the area considered by this paper.

Resource and management information

To collect the data with Minnie, other family members, relations and friends, we travelled to sites by vehicle, walking, or boat. Sites were selected according to the seasonal availability of resources, accessibility, and the inclinations of the older women. At these times, resources were collected and stories told. The processes of collection and preparation were recorded on video and camera slide film.
Figure 1. Study location: the middle reaches of the South Alligator River
Table 1: Major habitat types, and seasonality of use, of sites located in Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site No.</th>
<th>Site name</th>
<th>Habitat(s)</th>
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<th>Bang</th>
<th>Yegg</th>
<th>Wurr</th>
<th>Gurru</th>
<th>Gunu</th>
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<td>BIL(R)</td>
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Habitat types as follows: BIL(F) = floodplain billabong; BIL(R) = riverine billabong; FPN = seasonal floodplain; JUN = jungle; SPR = perennial spring; WDL = upland woodland (see text for description of seasons)
Stories, information concerning resources gathered both in the past and present, management practices, and perceptions of change were recorded with a professional tape-recorder, and later transcribed. Edited transcriptions of all site information are included in Lucas & Russell-Smith (1993), and provide the basis of data presented here.

Throughout this paper reference is made to Gundjeihmi/Maiali seasonal calendar terms as follows (cf. Figure 2.1 in Brockwell et al. 1995):

Gudjeuk: heavy drenching rain associated with the north-west monsoon (typically Jan through Mar);
Banggereng: wind starting to blow from the south-east; last of the 'knockem down' storms, laying down the cured spear grass (anbedja), (start, typically Mar/Apr);
Yegge: wind blowing from the south-east, cool time beginning, burning commencing (May/Jun);
Wurung: wind from the south-east, cool time, the main burning period (Jun/Jul);
Gurrung: light winds, intense heat radiating from ground, care with burning (Aug through Oct);
Gunumeleng: wind starting to blow from the north-west, first storms arriving, new seasonal grass starting to grow, burning resumes (Nov/Dec).

Reference is made also, in English, to a number of major habitats and resources. Conventions used are given in respective tables. Gundjeihmi language equivalents are given in Lucas & Russell-Smith (1993).

Continuity and change over the past 50 years

Data concerning the collection of resources from sites along, or adjacent to, the South Alligator River over the past 50 years, and their contemporary usage, indicates a substantial level of continuity of resource utilisation over this period. All major animal and plant staples (cf. Lucas & Russell-Smith 1993; Russell-Smith et al. 1997) continue to be exploited, albeit often at reduced site frequency into the present day. Food resources which no longer are collected, or which are very rarely collected (e.g. for demonstration purposes), include relatively unimportant/incidental items such as bandicoots, brolga, freshwater crocodile eggs (although still collected elsewhere), emu, darter, witchetty grubs, djidjiroc (i.e. water from the trunks of paperbark trees), the menstems (or 'cabbage') of Livistona palms, and woodland yams from Typhonium spp. (Table 2).
Table 2: (following on pages 127–130)
Frequency of site visitation for collection of resources on the South Alligator River floodplain over the past fifty years, and contemporary Gundjeihmi seasons as given in the text. All data derived from Appendix, and detailed description of resource terms as given in Lucas & Russell-Smith (1993)
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Many important resources show a reduced level of site collection/utilisation in the present day compared with usage over the past 50 years. Notably, such items include bush honey, freshwater mussels, file snakes, goannas, a wide array of waterbirds, and most yams (e.g. long yams (*Dioscorea transversa*), water lilies (*Nymphaea* spp.), red lilies (*Nelumbo nucifera*), round yams (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), water yams (*Aponogeton elongatus*)). The reasons for such reduced usage are various, but include ready access to substitute shop-bought items, significant landscape change (notably loss of billabongs) associated with the impacts of feral water buffalo and, particularly for resources collected by wading in billabongs (e.g. file snakes, many yams), increased danger from saltwater crocodiles. As well, fish-nets, and string bags which once were used for soaking/leaching yams, are now seldom made. Conversely, many other resources are collected from a similar or even greater range of sites than utilised over the past 50 years (e.g. many fish species, magpie geese). Additionally, whistle duck, which prior to guns were too fast to catch, are now a favourite prey. Collectively, these popular items are readily accessed in the present day using four-wheel drive vehicles, fishing lines, hooks and guns.

Following on from above, a fundamental difference in the use of or access to resources in the recent past, compared with the present, is the availability of four-wheel drive transport. Whereas people in the past would ‘footwalk’, use horses, or go by dugout canoe and, as a consequence, spend a relatively considerable time travelling to and stopping at any one place, now people can gain rapid access to a site by vehicle, gather and hunt, prepare meals, and return to camp by nightfall. Reliance on vehicles also limits access in the Wet season. An important further consequence is that people travelling slowly through the bush had greater opportunity to undertake detailed fire management of the country (Lucas & Russell-Smith 1993; Lucas & Lucas 1993).

**Moving through the country**

Likewise, landscapes of the South Alligator River floodplains have been far from static over the past 50 years: whole billabong sytems have vanished under seas of mud and saltwater intrusion associated with the buffalo era; the buffalo have come and gone; and food and other resources have been displaced from entire sites, sometimes to emerge elsewhere under reworked habitat conditions. Here we examine the changing resource base, and corresponding changes to patterns of movement, at two contrasting sites on the eastern side of the South Alligator River, *Gina* and *Bandja*. 
Gina

Gina is a site visited seasonally, in the past as a camp site, and in the present as a day-hunting and gathering site, because of the abundant resources available. In the past, during the Wet season, Gudjeuk, people camped next to the jungle that fringes the floodplain. Paperbark huts, 'almimukberri', were constructed to shelter from the rain and mosquitoes. Gudjeuk is a lean time to gather bush foods, because of floodwaters, so people tended to depend on jungle yams, in particular, bush honey, wallabies, and other woodland game. Trips were taken by dugout canoe to collect goannas and snakes from the trees and, towards the end of the Wet, to collect goose eggs. In the following season, Banggerrang, when the monsoonal rains have ceased, waterlilies become abundant; woodland yams are also abundant at this time but much less preferred. The roots, stems and seed heads of a number of water lily species were an important staple food. Various preparations were undertaken for the different parts, and people left grinding stones at camp sites for this undertaking. At this time also, people burnt the grasses fringing the small jungle and paperbark patches to protect the trees and yam resources. Burning more widely through the adjacent woodlands also commenced, and continued onto the floodplain as it dried out.

During the Dry season months resources such as file snakes, long-necked turtles, magpie geese, goannas, water pythons, water lilies and jungle yams were collected. As the floodplains dried, people continued to burn the fringes to 'clean up the country', 'clean up the old grasses to make way for new growth' so people could hunt and gather resources more easily and avoid wildfires. People travelled from the escarpment at this time, joining others on the floodplains to partake in the hunting of the abundant resources and to share ceremonies. 'A big camp, all that Ambukala mob would visit to get goose when Gina was dry', says Minnie. Leichhardt (1847) recorded a similar scene as he passed by Gina in the late Dry/early Wet of 1845.

During the days when buffalo roamed the country, especially from the 1950s through to the 1980s, floodplains surrounding the Red Lily Billabong at Gina were eroded and cleared of vegetation, and resources became scarcer as buffalo destroyed the habitats of animals, plants and people. The Nymphaea waterlilies, red lilies (Nelumbo), and water chestnuts (Eleochans) disappeared at this time. Just to the north, at Gumungoi, the small jungle patch was severely trampled. Since buffalo have been removed as part of a national bovine disease eradication program the floodplain vegetation has re-established rapidly, allowing animals such as long-necked turtles, file snakes, and magpie geese to return. Nowadays lilies and native hymenachne grass cover the billabong at Gina, water chestnuts have returned en masse to the surrounding
floodplain, and people go for day trips to gather long-necked turtle, file snake, goose, waterlilies.

**Banidja**

Banidja is a site visited especially during Gurrung in the past, as people travelled the floodplains hunting magpie geese. It was a good camp with plenty of resources. The billabong was covered with waterlilies (*Nymphaea*), the seed heads and roots were gathered and prepared to eat. Freshwater mussels could be gathered from the shallow waters surrounding the billabong. File snakes could be gathered from the billabong banks. Mullet and barramundi fish could be speared. *Madjuparr (phragmites)* edged the levee banks and was collected to make fish spears. Platforms were erected in trees to hunt magpie geese. Hitting sticks were shaped from *Anbaandarr (Calytrix exstipulata)* and soaked in water to throw at the geese as they flew by. Minnie says, 'In the past, when we came Gurrung time, this country had already been burnt by other people from Banggereng. The paperbarks needed to be burnt around early so young ones were not killed with late fires.'

When buffalo occupied this area, the levee banks protecting the billabong from tidal waters of the South Alligator River broke down allowing salt water to enter, reverting this system to saline conditions, thus the habitat for the existing plants and animals collapsed. 'No burning went on at this time because buffalo ate all the grasses', says Minnie. A big fire went through here late Gurrung (October 1972) killing all the big and small paperbarks alike. 'Early burning, you got water there; but late burning with no rain, that fire keeps on going, all the way', says Minnie. This billabong no longer exists as a freshwater billabong, no longer the necessary habitat for animals and plants as found here in the past.

**Past and future**

Data presented here illustrate that, although the South Alligator River floodplains have witnessed considerable changes over the 150 years since Ludwig Leichhardt and his companions travelled through the region, substantial cultural knowledge concerning the old ways, the resources, the places, the 'hows and whys' of burning country, prosper in the present day. That knowledge is held by relatively few people, of course, and will continue to be lost, to be modified, to evolve as all cultures do. Today the region is included within a major World Heritage National Park, and increasingly, the responsibility for managing country, controlling the weeds and feral animals, doing the burning, devolves to
Park staff (including indigenous custodians), and a relatively few people who still go hunting and fishing and gather waterlilies and yams when they have time off in their busy lives. Contemporary approaches to management of country, therefore, are a far cry from those undertaken even 50 years ago.

In conclusion we make two observations. The first is that the open, mostly unwooded floodplains of the South Alligator River can hardly be considered a natural, unpeopled wilderness; they have been formed as much by the fire management activities of people over millennia as by underlying late Holocene geomorphological process. It follows, furthermore, that in the absence of large-scale systematic burning, or the equivalent fuel-reducing effects of large herds of browsing/herbivorous buffalo, woody plants may well come to transform these formerly open vegetation systems. A challenge for the park management is to effectively emulate widespread, labour-intensive past burning practices with few human resources.

A second, related observation is that an understanding of past/present resource use by Aboriginal people, and the application of associated fire-management practices, is highly relevant to landscape management in the present day. While such an observation should be self-evident (especially when one considers that past Aboriginal managers, like their contemporary counterparts, have been contending with recurrent problems associated with living in a highly fire-prone environment), we note with concern that few formalised educational opportunities are available for young people through schools, etc for them to be seriously and properly acquainted with such issues. This applies equally to regional schools with a large component of Aboriginal pupils, let alone those in the wider society. We suggest that such lost opportunity, such cultural myopia, ultimately deprives us all.
References


APPENDIX

Seasonal use of resources over the past 50 years, and contemporary usage, from sites on the middle reaches of the South Alligator River.

All data derived from Lucas & Russell-Smith (1993). Numbers in parentheses are site frequencies. Site numbers as per Figure 1 and Table 2; an asterisk following a site number or resource indicates only occasional site visitation/resource use. Acronyms for resources as per Table 2, and for seasons as given in the methods.
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At various times between 1972 and 1979, I was engaged in archaeological research in western Arnhem Land. I was also a member of the conservation and land rights movement that opposed uranium mining and promoted the creation of Kakadu National Park. Visiting western Arnhem Land after a gap of 20 years has been a salutary experience. Many places look the same but now the park, Jabiru township, and the Ranger mine exist where once there were pastoral leases, Aboriginal reservations and wildlife reserves. Driving on the Oenpelli Road past Paperbark Dreaming, I can still hear Frank Gananggu beginning one of his unsettling tales with the words, ‘You know Harry…’

Revisiting the archaeological places investigated in 1972 and 1977, I discovered their interest had shifted to the people I was there with, rather than what had been found. Once again I find myself in conversations with friends about what the future might hold.

The aim of this paper is to use documents relating to the interpretation and management of Kakadu National Park in order to examine the differences between the academic disciplines of archaeology and ecology and Aboriginal viewpoints, particularly as regards their use of the concept of time.

Gould (1987:10) notes that one of the oldest and deepest themes in Western thought is the distinction between linear and circular time. He continues:
At one end of the dichotomy — I shall call it time's arrow — history is an irreversible sequence of unrepeatable events... At the other end — I shall call it time's cycle — events have no meaning as distinct episodes ... apparent motions are parts of repeating cycles ... time has no direction.

He points out that our understanding of nature requires a knowledge of both the sequence of events and the timeless order of structure. Linear and cyclical time are metaphors for different parts of an indivisible reality. The division between them, however, is central to the definition of a number of Western academic disciplines. Historical sciences, such as archaeology, create long sequences where history is directional and cumulative, while ecology stresses synchronous and cyclical processes, such as tidal or seasonal change. A consideration of the way that these sciences deal with aspects of time which are not part of their disciplinary definition, i.e. how archaeology deals with short term processes and ecology with long term directional change, provides an understanding of each discipline's strengths and weaknesses.

Archaeologists differentiate between ethnographic time, where short-term episodes can be observed, and archaeological time, involving patterns produced over long periods (Binford 1981). They are, however, uncertain about how the two might relate to each other. Stern (1994:101) argues that the manner in which the archaeological record is accumulated destroys the evidence of ecological fluctuations and short-term relationships leaving only persistent, long-term trends (see also Bailey 1981). She maintains that explanations which involve ethnographic analogies should be dispensed with. To a large extent, Australian archaeologists have followed these strictures and concern themselves with establishing the date of initial human colonisation of the Australian continent and documenting the broad pattern of environmental and human changes since that date (Allen 1996a:145).

The archaeological use of 'deep' time is complex. Fabian (1983:29) discusses physical time, where an objective method, such as radiocarbon dating, is used to provide a scale independent of the events being dated. In this usage both time and the historical processes are judged to be external or independent of the social actors and their intentions, and also of the concerns of the present. Origins and first appearances are stressed — history produces society rather than the other way around.

A second usage concerns typological or evolutionary time (Fabian 1983:11-12, 30), where societies are classified in terms of their economic or social attributes with each class being given a position in a temporal succession. Thus the term hunter-gatherer refers to an economic form but also to a position relative to other economic stages.
such as agriculture. Fabian (1983:32) notes that this allows peoples who share the present with an observer to be regarded as anachronistic, maintaining a superseded life style in the face of progress elsewhere. This use of time involves the conversion of cultural distance into a temporal relationship (see also Hamilton 1982:230–1).

Archaeology in Kakadu

Sixty years ago, DS Davidson (1935:148) concluded that so little archaeological work had been done in northern Australia that no archaeological problems could be defined for the area. McCarthy and Setzler were unable to recognise the distinctiveness of the northern archaeological record in their 1948 excavations at Inyaluk and Argaluk hills, Oenpelli, and instead reported (1960:286) the presence of every archaeological culture known from the entire Australian mainland. Since 1960, however, western Arnhem Land and Kakadu National Park have been intensively surveyed and investigated. Defining archaeology broadly, so as to include the recording of rock art and the study of middens to date geomorphological processes, the published results of these investigations includes monographs by Allen & Barton (1989), Brandl (1973), Chaloupka (1993), Edwards (1979), Hiscock (1994), Jelinek (1989), Jones (1985), Kramminga & Allen (1973), Layton (1992), Lewis (1988), Schrire (1982), Taçon & Chippendale (1994) and, finally, Woodroffe et al. (1986). This already impressive list can be extended by including unpublished theses and consultancy reports on archaeological and art topics and publications on geochronology and landscape change.

From an archaeological point of view, western Arnhem Land is one of the most intensively studied areas in Australia. It contains the oldest recognised dates for the presence of humans on the entire continent (c. 60 000 years BP at Malakunanja II, Roberts et al. 1994). This long record demonstrates significant discontinuities in landscapes, vegetation, camp-site locations, art and artefact styles. These begin with an ancient past (30 000–c.10 000 BP) of lower sea levels, semiarid plains, and a sparse Aboriginal population which manufactured hafted axes and decorated its rock shelters with spectacular naturalistic and dynamic figures using hunting boomerangs and hand-thrown spears (Allen 1996b:198–9, Lewis 1988: 80–86, Taçon & Chippendale 1994:217). The intermediate period (c.7000–3000 BP) is one of rapid and complex change. A rise in sea levels caused the valleys of the East and South Alligator Rivers to become choked with mangroves. Stone and bone spear points appear, shelters are filled with shell middens and fish bones, and rock faces are decorated with rainbow serpents.

Some of these landscape changes are potentially reversible. A rise in sea level of 0.5 m could rejoin the tidal waters of the East Alligator River with the freshwater wetlands of Magela Creek, reversing the long term transition from salt to freshwater environments. On the other hand, the succession of landscapes that have emerged on the floodplains since the mid-Holocene have changed the setting, but not the nature, of the adjacent latentic lowlands and plateau escarpment. Aboriginal people have made their lives between the dynamic landscape of the floodplains and the stability of the plateau and lowlands. In terms of the emergence of Kakadu as a lived-in landscape, each change, including the most recent, to corporate tourism in Kakadu National Park, has brought a reorganisation of Aboriginal practice and probably of mythical charter as well. These changes are complexly determined. In addition to the environmental changes, they involve technological innovations, the extension of social networks and the creation of new forms of ritual and artistic expression.

Given the fullness of the archaeological record for Kakadu National Park and the number of research consultancies that park authorities have commissioned, it is interesting that the presentation of archaeological information to the public is so sparse. A visit to the Bowali Visitor’s Centre, the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre, or even to the Anbangbang archaeological site (excavated by Jones and others in 1980) provides little archaeological information beyond the often repeated phrase that ‘Aboriginal people have probably lived in Kakadu for 50 000 years’. While changes in rock art styles are described in park brochures, these are located relative to environmental changes, thus giving the environment a creative role in human affairs (Brochure JR 6/96, Australian Nature Conservancy Agency). This conclusion is reinforced by the absence of additional historical information that might be capable of demonstrating the complexity of human interactions with the landscape over time.
Only selective use is made of archaeological information in the *Kakadu National Park: Draft Plan of Management* (Australian Nature Conservancy Agency 1996). Mention is made that Aboriginal people have lived continuously within Kakadu for 50,000 years and that this is one of the most important aspects of the cultural significance of the park (1996:4). In addition, it is noted that the age and extent of Aboriginal rock art in the park was one of the main arguments for the inscription of Kakadu on the World Heritage List. The draft plan acknowledges that archaeological sites can provide information on people’s daily activities in an area – what they did, what they ate, how they hunted, how they processed their food, what type of shelter they used. It also notes that archaeological sites are varied in type, rich in artefacts, and possibly date back over 50,000 years (ANCA 1996:75, 81).

These statements emphasise the great age of sites and their function. No statement is made that these sites document changes in the organisation of Aboriginal activities over time. Where change is mentioned, it is restricted to short term seasonal change and to the arrival of, and interaction with, Balanda² (ANCA1996:124, 75). The ascription of great age and stability to Aboriginal culture is certainly one pillar of our understanding of Kakadu history. However, the dynamic aspects of Aboriginal culture and its ability to constantly recreate itself under very different circumstances (even when living in the heart of a major national park) should not be lost sight of. Archaeological research has the potential to convey to the public an understanding of the importance of the park to its traditional owners, and also of the dynamism of Aboriginal history.

An audit of research conducted in Kakadu National Park between 1992 and 1995 was carried out by Smyth (1995). While traditional owners expressed some general concerns regarding research projects in the park and their wish for greater involvement in them, their most stringent comments were reserved for archaeological research. Smyth noted (1995:12, 42) that the traditional owners thought that archaeological and rock art research had been over-emphasised. The newly formed Bininj Heritage Management Committee argued that cultural heritage research should be directed away from archaeology and art site management towards the oral history of elders associated with the park. Finally, the Heritage Management Committee argued that any further archaeological research should be left until Bininj people themselves are suitably trained to undertake it.

These statements reveal a tension between Aboriginal and archaeological viewpoints which reemerges in the *Kakadu National Park: Draft Plan of Management* (ANCA 1996). The *Draft Plan of Management* (1996:75) notes that previously the management of cultural heritage in the park was in the hands of Balanda who consulted with traditional
owners on specific projects. The traditional owners argue that this system places their skills and knowledge 'at risk'. As a result, they have asked that ANCA support them in protecting their traditional intellectual property rights by giving them control of how their lands are managed and particularly how their culture and history is interpreted (ANCA 1995:44). The Bininj Heritage Management Committee then outlined a number of conditions they wished to be fulfilled. Firstly, to be involved in deciding what research on cultural heritage matters is most important, particularly any archaeological and rock art research. Secondly, to set up guidelines for the management of rock art and other archaeological sites. Thirdly, to become more involved in the planning, development and presentation of communications programmes. Finally, to be consulted at each stage when interpretation projects are being developed to determine project objectives and content (ANCA 1996:158, 160, 81, 124–5). These requests suggest that traditional owners believe that archaeological research and its interpretation has had a considerable negative impact on them in the past and that they wish to be in control of future research and the manner in which the research is interpreted.

The presentation of ecological relationships within Kakadu National Park

The history of Kakadu National Park, where concurrent and competing interests of conservation, mining and Aboriginal land rights must be reconciled, is unique. Stage 1 of the park was declared by the Commonwealth government under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975 in 1979. However, the area was also subject to an Aboriginal land claim under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. This land claim was subsequently dealt with as part of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry set up under the Environmental Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974 (Press & Lawrence 1995:1–3).

The Aboriginal land claim was successful but was granted on condition that the land be leased to the Director of National Parks and Wildlife for a national park. Additional Aboriginal land claims resulted in Stage 2 of the park being added in 1984 and Stage 3 in 1987. There have been additional proclamations in 1989 and 1991.

Although physically within the boundaries of Kakadu National Park, a number of mining leases (Ranger, Jabiru and Koongarra) and the area of land controlled by the Jabiru Town Development Authority were excluded from the grant of Aboriginal land. While they are part of the ecology and landscape of the park, they have a separate legal existence.
Consequently, their land tenure is outside the system of social relationships joining the traditional owners of the park with the land. Smyth (1995:53–4) observes that the unity of nature and culture in Aboriginal belief, whereby animals, plants and habitats are integrated into the social world via kinship, creation stories and Aboriginal action, was not reflected in the separation of cultural from natural heritage within the park management structure. He also noted that park managers were frustrated by the compartmentalisation of the Kakadu environment into natural and cultural components. Smyth suggested that the idea of a ‘cultural landscape’ approach to the park might have some utility though he argued for the retention of the two streams of research management (natural and cultural conservation) with measures for greater communication and coordination between them.

It has taken the park nearly 20 years to come to terms with the fact that it is Aboriginal land as well as being a national park. Part of this process has been the creation of an Aboriginal majority on the Kakadu Board of Management and the setting up of the Bininj Heritage Management Committee to deal with cultural heritage, defined as including knowledge, beliefs, customs and practices, and tangible evidence of these such as artefacts, rock art and other archaeological sites, historic sites and sites of significance’ (ANCA 1996:75). Replacing the older planning system based on zones will be one that reflects Kakadu as an Aboriginal cultural landscape. The concept of a ‘cultural landscape’ represents the new direction the Board of Management wishes to move in. There are a number of statements within the Kakadu National Park: Draft Plan of Management which relate to this concept. Firstly, that Kakadu National Park is an Aboriginal cultural landscape and its future is in the hands of its traditional owners; secondly, that the park is an Aboriginal place, a living cultural landscape, and that it should be interpreted as such; and, finally, that Kakadu is a landscape that has been shaped by many generations of traditional owners (ANCA 1996:1, 3, 15, 43, 94, 125).

Presenting the park as a cultural landscape is an important challenge. ANCA and the Board of Management of Kakadu National Park have made a substantial contribution to this understanding through the excellent Warradjian Aboriginal Cultural Centre. However, despite the fact that this is one of the few places where visitors can access an Aboriginal view of history and the park, the centre receives little attention in the Draft Plan of Management.

European thought separates concepts that Aborigines join together. This is most true of the concepts of culture and nature. This separation is central to the definition of a national park as an area that protects fauna and flora through their separation from other economic and cultural activities. Such conceptions have also affected planning within the park
which, until recently, was divided into management zones where appropriate activities and facilities were stipulated. Within this context, Aboriginal owners stressed that the concept of a 'wilderness' zone was especially unsatisfactory.

Aboriginal people are clear about what they mean by a cultural landscape. They maintain that the physical and biological world is culturally produced and that continued Aboriginal action and labour is necessary for the life of the countryside. They criticise the restriction of the terms culture and heritage to things that can be seen such as rock art or archaeological sites adding that culture also includes the intangible. Within the Kakadu National Park: Draft Plan of Management, however, there is evidence of more restrictive ideas regarding the landscape. Natural and cultural heritage are separated in the 'Guiding principles of the park' and they are dealt with in different parts of the planning document (ANCA 1996:21, Sections 11-16, 17–22, Attachment 2).

The ecological richness of Kakadu National Park and its changing seasonal patterns are at the centre of the rationale for the park's existence and of national park philosophy in general. It is unremarkable that the primary emphasis of visitors displays, brochures and available publications (Press et al. 1995, Morris 1996) should be these ecological relationships. Somewhat more interesting is that, while the classification of landscape habitats makes use of ecological terms, e.g. coastal fringe, woodland, plateau and wetlands, presentation of the seasonal cycle uses an Aboriginal (Gundjeyhmi) calendar and a mixture of Western and Aboriginal seasonal concepts, Gudjewg – monsoon, Banggereng – harvest time, Yegge – cool weather time, Wurreng – early dry season, Gurnung – hot dry season, Gunumeleng – pre-monsoon season (Kakadu Visitors Guide, ANCA Brochure JR 4/96, Morris 1996).

Within Kakadu National Park, there are good reasons for the joining of an ecological with an Aboriginal point of view. Both are constructed in terms of similar time-scales which emphasise cyclical relationships. Aboriginal knowledge systems concentrate on human relationships and they deal with existing social, ecological and mythological linkages. Thanks to the information traditional owners have provided for park interpretation and as evidence to various public enquiries, we know enough about sites and ancestral tracks to conclude that they relate to the present day landscape of Kakadu. The mythological charters are probably constantly in the process of being reformulated to take account of changing social and biophysical circumstances. The stones, places and associated human groupings relate to the present, they are not fossilised accounts. Ecological and Aboriginal thought here share a degree of uniformitarian thinking. The historicity of Aboriginal concepts, as with our knowledge of the seasonal aspects of nature, works as an extension of the present back onto the past. Superficially, the narrative
form of the stories suggests that ancient events are being projected onto the present landscape. However, at a deeper level, it is clear that the stories concern contemporary processes, which require continuous human involvement for their historical and ecological effectiveness.

It is at this level, however, that a mismatch between European and Aboriginal thought can present significant dangers. If Aboriginal economic and social relationships are portrayed in timeless, cyclical terms and if Aboriginal culture is presented as being ancient (50,000 years old), then the connection with the present is lost. The Dreamtime becomes a time, not a process, and the Aboriginal authorship of the landscape becomes a projection of the past onto the present. The outcome of such a reversal is a system of thought that is not grounded in the reality of the Kakadu landscape. A cultural landscape is transformed into a mythological one.

A second significant effect that comes from dealing with Aboriginal culture as if it is timeless and outside of history is to make it a part of nature. Conceptualising Aboriginal culture in this manner preserves the fiction that a national park is a place where ecosystems and ecological relationships are protected from human use. Rather than seeing the landscape as the outcome of Aboriginal cultural activities, these are relocated as part of the natural relationships within the park. Aboriginal culture becomes naturalised. This process can be illustrated by reference to the use of fire as a management tool. As far as national parks were concerned, fire was regarded as a destructive agent and it was suppressed. More recently, the cultural use of fire by Aboriginal people in northern Australia has been redefined as an ecological process, one that is necessary for the well-being and long-term survival of natural habitats (Russell-Smith 1995).

Again, there might be more similarities between Western and Aboriginal thought than is being recognised. Jeans (1983:173) notes that culture and nature are categories of Western thought that are used to debate social issues. An example is debate between socialists and conservatives as to whether human nature is essentially cooperative or competitive. The conceptual separation of culture and nature does not remove the ambiguity that both are cultural categories of Western thought. The fact that a national park has a corporate legal existence should be sufficient to demonstrate that it is a part of Western cultural relationships rather than natural ones. The reality is that Kakadu is already a cultural landscape created by the actions of politicians, miners, conservationists, tourist operators and Aboriginal traditional land owners, working within the institutional framework of laws and practice. As a landscape, Kakadu includes roads, visitor accommodation, camping, interpretation facilities and commercial tourist enterprises. Physically it contains a town, a fully-functioning uranium mine and a
processing plant. It is a conservation enterprise that receives 230 000
visitors a year. There is a very large infrastructure that is designed to
facilitate the commercial use of the park. Finally, Kakadu tourism
represents a significant part of the economy of the Northern Territory.

Difficulties emerge, however, when a park is presented as if it is a
part of nature rather than a culturally created entity. Conceptually, it will
take more than the statement that Kakadu is an Aboriginal landscape
to help visitors to understand the diverse scene in front of them. They
are seeing one cultural landscape and being told it is another. Sadly,
they might conclude that it is the Aboriginal viewpoint which has little
relevance to their present day concerns. Instead of exploiting the
emotional impact of the beauty of Kakadu as a wild place, park
interpreters might be surprised to find that visitors respond favourably
to being shown the complexity of cultural relationships that Europeans
and Aborigines bring to the park.

Provided the conservation values of the park are maintained and
Aboriginal social and cultural relationships are enhanced, there is nothing
wrong with the commercial use of a national park. In fact, some national
parks in England and continental Europe retain traditional European
cultural and economic use at the core of their philosophy (West & Brechin
1991). However, it is the American rather than the European concept
of a national park which has been adopted in Australia. This is sometimes
termed the ‘Yellowstone’ approach. This concept has been incorporated
into the International Union for the Conservation of Nature definition of
a national park as an area where ecosystems have not been materially
altered by human exploitation and occupation, and where human
exploitation and occupation has been eliminated (West & Brechin

Such a definition is inadequate for a national park that is also
Aboriginal land. The Aboriginal conception of the cultural landscape
demonstrates a greater utility for park philosophy as one that correctly
identifies the human role in the creation of landscapes. The adoption of
the term ‘cultural landscape’ in the Kakadu National Park: Draft Plan of
Management is a welcome attempt to bridge the divide between the
cultural and the natural as categories of Western thought. However, I
wonder whether there is sufficient clarity about the concept for it to
carry the heavy conceptual load it is being given. As discussed above,
the term ‘cultural landscape’ clearly has many meanings which do not
appear to be fully comprehended. Without a strategy to grapple with
the richness of its meanings and implications, it could become an empty
slogan, one that contributes to a devaluation of Aboriginal culture.
Conclusion

Aboriginal discussions begin with existing social and ritual relationships. They have concluded that archaeology, as an academic discipline, deals poorly with such relationships and, furthermore, that its orientation towards excavation has the potential to disrupt social connections. Archaeological interpretations of history within Kakadu National Park are seen to represent a threat to Aboriginal traditions. Finally, Aboriginal people are aware of the continued public acceptance of an evolutionary framework which locates them, as hunter-gatherers, in a distant past where their society and traditions are considered irrelevant for the contemporary world. Consequently, they would like archaeological research and interpretations in the park to be subject to their supervision and control.

At first glance, ecological interpretations, particularly the presentation of Kakadu National Park as an Aboriginal landscape, might seem to enhance Aboriginal social and economic relationships. However, the ecological viewpoint deals more adequately with short-term than with long-term changes. Consequently, its usage creates the danger that Aboriginal society will be seen as existing outside of history. Both archaeological and ecological interpretations have the potential to misportray Aboriginal relationships with the land as if they are the projection of ancient beliefs and practices onto the contemporary landscape. As a discipline, archaeology needs to be able to take Aboriginal social relationships into account. By the same token, ecology needs to rework its approach to human history and culture as vital parts of the ecosystems it studies.

Archaeologists in northern Australia have begun to work closely with Aboriginal communities in a manner that should eventually allow the creation of historical narratives which do not damage the social fabric of Aboriginal life (Davidson et al. 1995). Archaeological, ecological and Aboriginal interpretations might all be necessary to show the rich and diverse historical significance of Aboriginal life in Kakadu. Such a future, however, requires that academic disciplines recognise the cultural content of their practice and seriously examine the conceptions of time they use in their interpretations.
Endnotes

1. The complexities of Aboriginal concepts of linear and cyclical time are discussed in Williams & Mununggurr (1994).
2. Balanda is an Aboriginal term for European Australians.

Acknowledgements

The analysis leading to this paper was carried out while I held a research fellowship at the North Australia Research Unit of the Australian National University, Darwin. I would like to thank the staff of the unit, especially its director, Dr Christine Fletcher for hospitality and help and Colleen Pyne, Sally Bailey, Jenny Green, Nicki Hanssen and Janet Sincock for their cheerful assistance. Dr Deborah Rose organised the conference and encouraged me to write this paper. I also received a number of ideas from the other conference participants whose papers appear in this volume.
References


The essays in this book are focussed on the northern and central outback regions of Australia. They explore some of the systematic ways in which Australian people have organised, communicated, erased, and reinvented knowledge of these unique environments. Among the contributors are 'Settler' and Indigenous writers; the range of their academic disciplines includes anthropology, archaeology, biological science, and geography.

Landscapes are formed by the interactions between humans and other living and non-living things. The premise underlying this book is that people bring meaning to the landscapes of their lives, that their meaningful actions shape landscapes, and that their culture is shaped through the process of living in interaction with those landscapes. These essays challenge complacency as they explore the possibilities for sustainable habitation in these beautiful and threatened environments.