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'Too Many Meanings': an analysis of the artistic system of the Yolngu of Northeast Arnhem Land.

Howard Morphy

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University in December 1977.
I certify that all parts of this thesis describe my own original work.

Howard Morphy

[Signature]
PREFACE

The data on which this thesis is based was obtained during the course of a total of 15 months fieldwork in Yirrkala and its outstations between June 1974 and March 1975 and June and October 1976. I had originally intended to focus my analysis on the changing forms of Yolngu art in the context of the development of a craft industry, and to examine the effects of the sale of art on its use in traditional cultural contexts. In particular I intended to compare the morphological differences between paintings produced around the time of European contact and paintings produced today and to seek an explanation for those changes. As a preliminary to this I recorded in detail paintings in collections in Australian museums with three main aims in mind. The first was to establish a baseline as close to European contact as possible. The second was to document the formal changes that had occurred subsequently. The third was to obtain from the Yolngu their commentary on the changes that had taken place. I was not even sure before arriving at Yirrkala that I would find paintings being produced for anything but sale. For years, some anthropologists (e.g. Barnes, 1967:1) have been saying that it is too late to study the Murngin, and I thought that I might have to use photographs to jolt the memories of a people who had 'lost their culture'.

On my first night at Yirrkala I showed some photographs of the earliest paintings to Narritjin, a Manggalili man, who instantly saw through my project. He said, 'You want to show us that our art has changed. We will show you that it has not'. The change in the direction of my research began from that moment on. Not that I ceased to be interested in the process of social change; rather, I became conscious
that I was studying a living artistic system in which the process of social change could not be understood in terms of two synchronous slices of time, pre-European contact and post-European contact, but in terms of a multi-dimensional time framework in which the past is a part of the dynamic of the socio-cultural system as it is now. My focus became that of the study of art as a system of meaning that is not strictly bounded by time.

For these reasons I start my acknowledgements with the Yolngu. Because of space I must be selective, although the majority of names omitted will be found in the subsequent chapters. However, I must mention separately the debts I owe to Mäw', Djewiny, Liyawulumu, Dula, Mithili, Banapana and Bokarra. In particular Narritjin and Welwi answered my continual questions with great patience and insight and were not averse to telling me to be patient when necessary.

My fieldwork was funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. The staff of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies and in particular its Principal Dr. P.J. Ucko, helped in every way to make our fieldwork a success by sensitively and promptly responding to mundane requests and unforeseen problems.

A number of museums made their collections available to me for study. In particular I must thank Alan West of the National Museum of Victoria, David Moore and Jim Specht of the Australian Museum in Sydney, Michael Quinnel of the Queensland Museum and Mrs. Keith of the Institute of Anatomy in Canberra, for the assistance they gave me. I am also most grateful to Judith Wiseman cataloguer of the Donald Thomson collection, held in the National Museum of Victoria, for the many hours she spent guiding me through Thomson's fieldnotes, photographs and collection.
While in the field we were helped by innumerable people, in particular Leon White of Yirrkala School, the linguist Bernard Schebeck and my fellow anthropologists Nancy Williams and Jan Reid. I have had many invaluable discussions with all four and am grateful for the knowledge they shared with me.

In writing the thesis I have been greatly assisted by the insightful criticisms of members of the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology, School of General Studies, and the Departments of Anthropology and of Prehistory in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University. In particular, I thank my supervisors John Mulvaney and Anthony Forge for their continual prompting and many helpful suggestions. My discussions with Ian Keen and Frances Morphy have helped in the formulation of many of the ideas presented here. Richard Davis and Nicholas Peterson have both assisted greatly by reading and critically examining the later drafts of this thesis. Any errors of fact or analysis are needless to say my own responsibility.

Finally I must thank Anne Clugston for typing the manuscript, Joan Goodrum for skillfully drawing the bulk of the figures, Doug Jervis for his many hours in the darkroom, Graziella Wurmli for typing the figure and plate captions, Jim Urry for his help with the bibliography and Frances Morphy for assisting with all stages in the production of this thesis. I would also like to thank Ian Dunlop of Film Australia for the considerable assistance that he has given me, both in making available transcripts of sound tracks and in making it possible for me to see again on film events that I had recorded.
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the structure and operation of the artistic system of the Yolngu people who live in the Yirrkala region of North-east Arnhem Land, Australia. The analysis is approached from a semiological perspective examining Yolngu art as a system of encoded meaning.

The thesis is divided into three main sections. In the first section I examine in detail the social context of art, focusing on the distribution of rights in paintings, the operation of the artistic system in the context of Yolngu politics, the instrumental functions of art objects in ceremonial contexts and their integration within the thematic structure of ceremonies as a whole.

The second section consists of an analysis of the structure of the artistic system. I identify and define the components of the artistic system, considering them from a semantic perspective. I consider in particular the properties of the two main systems of representation employed in Yolngu art, one figurative, the other geometric, demonstrating the different ways in which they encode meanings. I then show the way in which the components are combined to produce different categories of paintings with different semantic properties. I show how the paintings are appropriate to the different contexts in which they occur. I consider the functioning of the artistic system in the context of a system of restricted knowledge. Throughout the section I consider the appropriateness of the concept of iconicity as a basis for understanding the relationships between signifier and signified within the system.
The third section examines in detail the iconography of the paintings of a single clan, the Manggalili. I show the relationship between different levels of interpretations of paintings. I show the way in which different levels of meaning are encoded in the same painting and how the same meaning is encoded in different paintings.

In conclusion I consider the sense in which paintings have power such that they are believed to be able to communicate between the human and the ancestral world and also the ways in which paintings enhance the believability of ancestral beings. I show that rather than there being a single source of power Yolngu art has a multiplicity of power sources. The power is derived from the different ways in which the artistic system is integrated with other aspects of the Yolngu socio-cultural system as well as from the potentialities of the artistic system itself.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Art objects have a major role in the social, political and ceremonial life of the Yolngu (Murngin) people of North-east Arnhem Land. Paintings are produced on a variety of objects in all major ceremonies, including a person's body at times when he undergoes a major change of status (e.g. circumcision) and on the lid of his coffin shortly after his death. Control over the production of paintings and control of access to information about their form and significance are among the major indices of the power that adult initiated men exercise over the other members of society. Paintings moreover are among the major items owned by a clan as a corporate group and are central both to its definition and to the identification of its members with it.

Despite the importance of paintings and the visual arts in general as elements of Yolngu culture, they are hardly referred to in the major monograph on the Yolngu, Lloyd Warner's, *A Black Civilization*. This omission is even more surprising in view of the fact that Warner's main emphasis is on an analysis of the religious and ceremonial life of the Murngin. Warner is considered by Spiro (1969:20a) to be one of the major figures in the development of symbolic anthropology; yet in neglecting the artistic system he ignores one of the richest sources of data on Yolngu symbolism. Warner (e.g. 1958:25, 266, 505) refers frequently to the use of art objects in ceremonies but does not as a rule refer to their form or the significance of elements of their design. His most detailed reference to art objects is in an appendix on material culture, which is excised from the 1964 edition of the
book as being 'intended for specialists' only (Warner, 1969:ix). In this appendix he restricts himself to describing the techniques of manufacture of different types of objects and brief reference to the 'favorite' themes of paintings (Warner, 1958:505).

Warner's neglect of art (or rather visual arts, for he considers in some detail song, dance and other aspects of the drama of ceremonial performance) is an index of the degree to which he and contemporary anthropologists neglected the study of material culture (see e.g. Ucko, 1970:27ff., Clarke, 1968:13 and Heider, 1969:379). In the Australian context this represented a marked change in direction from earlier work on religious and cultural symbolism. As Munn (1973:1) notes, the pioneering work of Spencer and Gillen (1938) on central Australian sacred objects and designs provided much of the basic data for Durkheim's analysis of Aboriginal religious systems. Warner, although expressing general agreement with Durkheim's approach and conclusions, failed to examine an equivalent body of data in the Murngin case. His neglect of Murngin art in particular resulted in his failure to show convincingly the relationship between religious ideology and social organisation at the level of clan. Design differentiation provides one of the best sources of data on relationships between groups at this level.

Subsequent authors, notably Elkin, Berndt and Berndt (1950), Berndt and Berndt (1948, 1949), Thomson (1939a and b) Kupka (1965), Mountford (1958) and Groger-Wurm (1973), have gone a long way towards rectifying Warner's omission. Yet with the exception of Thomson's all too brief contributions there has been little attempt to integrate the analysis of the artistic system within the framework of the socio-cultural system as a whole. Berndt (1958:249) went so far as to
comment 'What indeed do we know in social anthropological terms of the function and significance of Aboriginal art? The answer must be precious little'. One of the main aims of this thesis is to draw the connections between Yolngu art, culture and society.

My broad aim is to present an analysis of the structure and operation of the artistic system of North-east Arnhem Land. By structure I mean the way in which elements of the artistic system are organised in relationship to one another. By operation I mean the way in which art is used: how, why and by whom art is produced. I see both problems as being centrally concerned with the question of meaning, or producing a productive grammar which includes semantic references, rather than being purely descriptive (Forge, 1975:xvi). Unless the semantic component is included, it is impossible to answer the question why a particular painting has the form it has, or to understand the process by which elements of the formal system are selected and organised to produce meaningful representations.

Analyses of Nevada cattle brands by Watt (1967) and of Nubian body painting by Farris (1972) have failed to produce insights into the operation of the respective systems precisely because they excluded the semantic component. Employing methods borrowed from the theory of transformational grammar, Watt and Farris devise rules to show how the designs should take the form that they do. Farris himself states (1972:115) that he does not mean to imply that the rules devised relate to rules employed in the Nubian system of design production, and as his analysis poses no questions as to the significance of the relationship between designs, it appears to be little more than an academic exercise. A priori, the similarity between an artistic system and a linguistic one is that they are both fundamentally concerned with
communication. The central questions to be posed in both cases must be how meanings are encoded and how they are communicated. While borrowing methods from linguistics, Farris in particular, and to a lesser extent Watt, fail to treat the systems they are analysing as communication systems which encode meanings.

Analyses of Arnhem Land art have suffered from the opposite failure to that exemplified in the work of Farris and Watt, in that they tend to be concerned with the meaning of art without showing the relationship between meaning and form. Related to this has been a tendency to treat art as a system of communication subordinate to some second system, in particular song, myth and language.

Forge (1973:xviii) has criticised Mountford's (1956) analysis of Arnhem Land art for failing to recognise the independence of the visual system, and making it subordinate to language. Mountford fails to find a 'secure iconography [because there is not] a complete and one to one correspondence between the visual system and words'. Mountford's analysis largely consists of illustrating a series of paintings, each with an accompanying myth, without attempting to analyse the systematic relationship between the myths or between the paintings. He fails to consider at any stage the problem of the way in which the mythological and artistic systems are related to one another beyond noting, as Berndt (1958:253) states, 'that one illustrates certain features of the other'.

Mountford however is not alone in adopting this approach. Works by Elkin, Berndt and Berndt (1950), Groger-Wurm (1973), and Allen (1976), all consist primarily of lists of paintings and their mythological interpretations. Allen (1976) does not attempt to relate the myths to details of the form of paintings, and indeed reconstructs and modifies
the myths presumably to make them more appealing to the European reader (see for example *ibid*:176). Elkin, Berndt and Berndt, and Groger-Wurm on the other hand go beyond Mountford and Allen in the detail with which they record interpretations. In addition, the interpretations are recorded in such a way that it is possible to construct an iconography from them. Thus Groger-Wurm (1973) and Berndt and Berndt (1948, 1949) in particular consistently attribute paintings to artists and clans, specify which elements of painting are related to which items of the content of myths and recognise to a certain extent the existence of different categories of painting within the body of Yolngu art. These are basic prerequisites for the analysis of Yolngu art as a system of meaning.

However, in much of the literature referred to above the impression is given that myths are the meaning of art. The authors fail to consider what else, if anything, is encoded in paintings or to consider the significance to the nature of the myths themselves of the way in which they are encoded in paintings.

Art objects do refer partly to mythological events. However, the way in which these events are encoded is part of the content of they mythology: the paintings are ancestral designs. Moreover, different aspects of myth are encoded in different media; any study of the dynamics of myth involves an analysis of the way in which myth is encoded in art, ritual and everyday language.

Elkin, Berndt and Berndt (1950) on several occasions assert the priority of verbal communication, in the form of song, over paintings. They do so in two senses: One is that songs give meaning to paintings, the other is that songs are in some unspecified way the
more important medium. Elkin\(^1\) states explicitly the priority of verbal communication when he writes: 'the shape of a symbol, never mind how realistic, is not enough in itself .... it must be chanted' (Elkin, Berndt and Berndt, 1950:11), and he sees the chants as being necessary in order to focus on the meaning of the objects.

Although an artistic system as a system of communication can be said to be 'like a language', it cannot be understood solely by analysing verbal interpretations of its meaning; the problem is not that of 'translating' art into language.\(^2\) The relationship between the formal structure and the semantics of a system is different in the case of an artistic system from that of language. Indeed the relationship varies across all communicative codes. Analysis must therefore be focussed on the way in which meanings are encoded, not on the meanings themselves. While I disagree with Bateson (1973:236) that the message is less important than the code, I recognise that understanding the way in which meanings are encoded is integral to understanding the message.

Artistic and linguistic systems can both make statements about the same set of things, and in that sense are both components of a wider cultural system. As Bateson (1973:237) writes: 'it is...of prime

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1 This section of the book is written by Elkin rather than the Berndts and I do not assume that it expresses the latters' views.

2 Clearly language must play an important role in the study of visual arts. Verbal interpretations are a necessary part of the analysis of art, and the results of analysis must be presented in verbal language. However, such verbal interpretations and exegeses are part of the meta-language of communication (between an anthropologist and an informant about art), and the analyses themselves will be presented in the form of one of the meta-languages of anthropology.
importance to have a conceptual system which will force us to see the 'message' (i.e. the art object) as both itself internally patterned and itself part of a larger patterned universe: the culture or some part of it.' A holistic approach to culture entails the assumption that art has the status of a subsystem in relation to the cultural system as a whole. However it has not a status of subordination, but one of interaction with other subsystems. Yolngu art encodes meanings which relate to the system of land ownership, to the hierarchical structure of knowledge associated with male initiation, to beliefs about the destiny of the soul and the nature of mystical power, and so on. However, the way in which it encodes meanings affects its relationship to other systems, the way in which it interacts with them and the way in which they are conceptualised.

For example, one of the themes that will recur throughout this thesis is the relationship between individuals, groups and land. Yolngu art is one of several media for conceiving and expressing this relationship. The relationship between man and land is also encoded in the song cycles and totemic geography and can be expressed in language.

Thus the artistic system does not uniquely express this relationship, but encodes it in a particular way. The artistic code is clearly more general than the particular message. The information content of the artistic code, although it overlaps with that of other codes, is not co-extensive with them. The important questions then become: what does the artistic system encode about man-land relations that is different from the information encoded by other communication systems, and how does the way in which it encodes meanings effect its function as a communication system in the context of Yolngu society.
Berndt (1958:252) has severely criticised Mountford for failing to show the relationship between art and society, and on several occasions he has stressed the importance of analysing art as a system of communication (e.g. 1964:3 and 1973:36). However, he has nowhere considered in detail the question of what art communicates in particular contexts and why art objects are a suitable medium for expressing particular concepts. For example, Berndt (1973:36) refers to the need to see Yolngu art operating in the context of social differentiation: 'some art is designed to speak to all of its members and to be understood by all of them; some is more esoteric, and is only for certain sections of the community - the same art forms can be interpreted in different symbolic ways according to age, sex or knowledge'. However, Berndt does not demonstrate how art means different things to different people, what the distribution of knowledge is, what the relationship between the different levels of meaning is or how the formal structure of the artistic system functions in the context of a system of knowledge in which certain meanings are restricted to certain categories of people.

Although I see questions of function as relevant to elucidating the structure of an artistic system, I do not think that the system can be simply explained in terms of the use of art objects in particular functional contexts. For example, the paintings that are made on the lid of a dead person's coffin are said to be done in order to guide his spirit back to the clan well from which he came. Thus the purpose of funeral paintings could be said to be to guide a person's spirit back to his clan well. However, to what extent does this explain the variety of paintings produced on coffin lids, and the reason for using a particular painting? If the spirit is being guided
back to the person's clan well, why is painting usually of a different well, a well belonging to another clan?

The explanation of the use of paintings on coffin lids suggested above and the explanation of the details of the form of the paintings could be treated as two separate questions: the former concerning the instrumental function or meaning of Yolngu art, the latter concerning the symbolic function or meaning. Such a separation is undesirable for two main reasons. Firstly, unless instrumental function is related to differences and similarities of form between paintings used in the same or different functional contexts, the explanation is too general to provide insights into the operation of the artistic system. Secondly, it is necessary to know not only what a painting does or is said to do but how it does it or how it is believed to be effective. Clearly, the question should be phrased in wider terms, since the same painting can occur in a number of different contexts: on the chest of a boy about to be circumcised, on an initiate who has had a sacred object revealed to him for the first time, or on the coffin of a dead man (or woman). The functional meaning of an art object cannot be simply cumulative, that is, the sum total of the uses of the painting in each of the contexts in which it occurs. Rather, it is the communicative function of the artistic system or code which enables it to be used in each of these contexts.

There is no one-to-one relationship between the meaning encoded in a painting and the reason for using it in a particular context. A painting differs from a sentence in ordinary language partly because its meaning is not intended to be exhausted by a single interpretation. Whereas the reason for selecting a sentence may coincide fairly closely with its meaning, the reason for selecting a painting may relate to only one aspect of its meaning. For example, it may be significant
in a particular context that a painting belongs to clan X and represents place Y. The inside meanings of certain motifs, however, may be irrelevant in this particular case. This does not mean that its other meanings are not relevant to its use and need not therefore be considered. The function of redundancy is different in the case of Yolngu art from the case of language. In language it could be argued that redundancy is only strictly necessary when it contributes to the efficient communication of a message. In the case of Yolngu art, redundancy is partly what gives power to the object. Although the inside meanings of a painting may be irrelevant to its selection for use on a coffin lid, the fact that art objects encode them is part of the reason why they are believed to work, why they can communicate with spirits and transport the souls of people.

The appropriate perspective to adopt for the analysis of Yolngu art is set neither at the level of the abstract relationship between a set of signifiers and a set of signifieds nor at the level of the function of art in particular cultural contexts. Our focus should be on art as a system for encoding and expressing meaning in the context of its relationship with the Yolngu socio-cultural system as a whole.

Although my analysis will be focussed primarily on understanding the structure and operation of the system at one point in time, dynamic aspects of the system will also be considered. A productive grammar must attempt to be explanatory in the sense that it must be able to explain why particular representations are used in particular contexts. It is desirable to state not only how paintings are used in existing contexts, but why they are used, in such a way that their use in new contexts is already partially explained or predicted.
Because of differences between artistic systems and language, it is not always possible to see how an artistic system creates new forms in new situations, whereas it is an easy matter to demonstrate that language has the capacity to produce new sentences. Moreover there has been a tendency in the past to underestimate the dynamic component of non-European artistic systems, through the neglect of works produced in post-European contact situations, or works thought to be 'contaminated' by contact.

Yolngu art today provides an ideal context for examining some of the dynamic aspects of an artistic system, through analysing the responses of Yolngu clans to European contact. For example the development of a commercial art industry at Yirrkala (see Morphy, 1975; Williams, 1976) has created a new context for the production of art which has affected use of art in traditional cultural contexts. In this case non semantic aspects of the systems are equally as important as semantic ones in understanding its new use and the kind of designs used.

The art produced commercially is sold partly on the basis of its aesthetic appeal to members of another culture, to people who are largely uninterested in what the art means to the Yolngu. In other words, the purchasers are most interested in the formal aspects of the code than in the encoded meanings. However, this does not mean that from the Yolngu point of view the demand for art does not pose a problem at the level of semantics. The semantic problem that the Yolngu face is to decide which forms may be made available to Europeans without adversely affecting the way that the system is used in the context of the traditional culture. If the problem were simply one of
generating a 'pretty picture', then the issue would not arise. However, the problem is to produce a 'pretty picture that looks like Yolngu art', and as Yolngu art is a cultural code, the semantic problem has to be considered, at least by the Yolngu.

Before going on to consider in detail the theoretical approach adopted in this thesis, I will summarise the order in which I approach the analysis of Yolngu art in subsequent sections. The thesis is divided into three main sections: The social context of the art, the structure of the artistic system, and the iconography of sets of paintings. This order is adopted to show the relationship between three main aspects of the system: the social context of communication, the way in which meanings are encoded and the meanings themselves. These aspects of the system are interrelated and will be continually cross-referred to.

I initially establish the social context for the operation of the artistic system, focussing on two main aspects: the distribution of rights in paintings and the ceremonial context of the art. I regard both of these as prerequisites to an understanding of the operation of the system, because they concern the principles whereby individuals have the right to use paintings and the major context in which those rights are exercised. They have both semantic and grammatical correlates. Rights in paintings establish the relationship between sets of people and sets of paintings which in turn are formally encoded in certain components of the Yolngu artistic system, notably clan designs (see Chapter 7). The distribution of rights in paintings can also be seen as part of the grammatical structure of the system, as the division of paintings on the basis of clan is one of the main principles which underly the relationship between paintings.
Ceremonial contexts are important because they provide the arena in which the majority of communicative acts concerning paintings take place. They are the main contexts in which paintings are displayed and made. They are also one of the main contexts in which meanings encoded in the paintings are internalised and in which the sociological relationship between people and paintings, with its connotations of relationship to land and the ancestral world is demonstrated.

The final two sections focus more directly on formal properties of the artistic system itself, the meanings encoded and their symbolic significance. These will in turn be related to features of the social context of art, the structure of Yolngu society and its ideological basis. My primary method of analysis is semiological in the sense employed by de Saussure (1966:16). De Saussure defines the objectives of semiology, 'a science that studies the life of signs within society', to be the discovery of 'what constitutes signs, what governs them'. Sperber, one of the main critics of the semiological approach in anthropology, argues (1975:51) that because of the way de Saussure conceptualised semiology, the fundamental question concerns not 'what do symbols mean', but 'how do they mean'. Forgetting for the moment Sperber's apparent identification of sign with symbol in this context, he appears to overlook one of the main features of de Saussure's formulation of the concept of sign. De Saussure defines a sign as the relationship between two things: a signifier and a signified. The linguistic sign, which de Saussure considers most fully, is defined as the relationship between a sound image and a concept. The two aspects of a sign interact with one another, the meaning or concept not being seen as a discretely separable part of the sign: 'the two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other'
(de Saussure 1966:16). In effect, de Saussure's sign is an encoded meaning. 'What do signs mean?' is clearly a valid question when rephrased as 'what is the signified component of the sign?' The rephrasing simply emphasises the point that meaning is encoded within a system.

At the same time that they are interacting components of a sign, de Saussure sees the signifier and the signified as being themselves components of separate systems of similarity and difference. The signifiers of language are words which differ from one another according to their phonological composition. Words in a language, taken as a whole, thus form a set of contrasting forms to which different signifieds (concepts) can be attached. The signifieds themselves belong to a different system of contrast. The sign is formed at points of coincidence between the two systems of similarity and difference. De Saussure's model, at least as far as the signifieds are concerned, is not fully worked out and in fact presents a gross over-simplification. While the sound images of words can legitimately be said to be the product of a highly structured system of phonologically contrasting elements which exist at the same level, the same cannot be said of the concepts they signify. Only at the most general level could all concepts signified by a language be said to belong to the same system of similarity and difference.

In terms of information theory, meaning can be said to exist through the selection of certain relationships between things, and the encoding of those as information exists partly through the exclusion of other relationships (see for example Bateson and Reusch, 1965; Bateson, 1973). Only a certain number of relationships between things are thus encoded as signifieds within a sign system. The concept of
a cow, for instance, is only encoded within a language in as much as its relationship to other things is encoded within it. An infinite number of additional relationships exist which are not encoded. Although ordinary language appears to be the most comprehensive coding of the relationships between things, it is not the only code, and it is not a fixed code. The possibility exists for languages to encode further sets of relationships involving a particular item, and many more such relationships can be thought of and encoded in other communication systems. Therefore although it is true to say that a sign consists of two components - a signifier and a signified - that interact to produce meaning, the relationships encoded within the system are only subsets of wider systems (Leach, 1976:19ff makes a similar point).

De Saussure sees the signs themselves as related to each other in a variety of ways. He defines two kinds of relationships: syntagmatic and associational.¹ Syntagmatic relations are ones based on the fact that words occur together in connected chains, for example the phrase 'to take the bull by the horns' (de Saussure ibid:24). Associational relations consist of groups of signs whose signifieds have something in common, for example bull, cow, calf. The same sign can belong to a large number of associational sets. 'Bull' could also be in the set bull, boar, ram.

De Saussure's concept of a sign is useful because it is one of the clearest formulations of the relationship between the formal and the semantic aspects of a communication system. De Saussure intended his method to have a much wider application than simply the study of

¹ The term 'paradigmatic' has replaced 'associational' in current semiological terminology. The connotations of the two words are similar in current usage.
language, and in recent years there have been a number of attempts to employ his methods in the analysis of non-linguistic systems (for example, Barthes, 1972; Bertin, 1967). Lévi-Strauss' structuralism is also clearly related to de Saussure's theory of language, by way of Jakobson, particularly his use of the concepts of syntagmatic and paradigmatic chains (see for example Mounin, 1970:199 ff).

In comparing Lévi-Strauss with Turner, Sperber (1975:51 ff) sees Lévi-Strauss as the semiologist in the Saussurean sense: 'the study of symbolism under the heading Saussurean...developed...especially in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss.' Turner is not seen as a semiologist at all, since he neglects to analyse the relationship between signifier and signified. 'The symbolic signifier, freed from the signified, is no longer a real signifier' (Sperber, 1975:52). Turner's approach is characterised by the question 'what do symbols mean' rather than 'how do symbols mean'. I have previously suggested that Sperber's distinction is spurious. 'What' and 'how' are clearly both central questions, and neither contradicts the principle that the sign is composed of two equal components: a signifier and a signified. What I would question at this stage is not whether the criticism leveled at Turner is valid, but whether Lévi-Strauss' semiology fits the same criterion: does Lévi-Strauss adequately establish the relationship between signifier and signified.

Lévi-Strauss' Mythologiques focus primarily on the analysis of myths in the form of language - not in the language of the original, but in translated language; not myths as they are recorded, but paraphrases of myth. Presumably because he is dealing with myth in language form, the status of the words themselves as signs is taken to be understood. The problem he examines is rather the use of words
in combination as signifiers in a second order system, mythology. Thus the signs that Lévi-Strauss analyses are sentences and paragraphs (which are themselves paraphrases). This is quite consistent with de Saussure's concept of sign. However, although de Saussure asserts that sentences, paragraphs, and so on are signs, he never fully defines what he understands to be the distinctive features of sentences as signifiers that differentiate them from one another. Lévi-Strauss similarly never defines precisely his signifiers, so even if we assume that he does know how words operate we are left uncertain as to what the signs actually are. Even if we gain insights from Lévi-Strauss as to 'how signs mean', we are left uncertain as to the nature of the signs themselves. Sperber reaches similar conclusions with regard to Lévi-Strauss' structuralism. However, instead of applying to his analysis the same semeiological test that he applies to Turner's, he concludes that Lévi-Strauss is right to find no signifiers. Lévi-Strauss' error, according to Sperber, was in asserting the mere existence of signifiers, because there is no such thing as a symbol, only symbolism. If we apply Sperber's criteria to Lévi-Strauss, the inescapable conclusion is, to rephrase his words, that: 'the signified, freed from the signifier, is no longer the real signified'.

Although I see structural analysis as a central component of the analysis of the meaning of signs, in that it analyses the relationship between things encoded in a sign system, the initial focus must be on the isolation and definition of the signs themselves. Furthermore, since we initially receive the information encoded in sign systems through our senses, analysis must first be focused on the morphological relationships between signs and secondly on the semantic relationships. This does not mean that signifier has priority over signified in the study of encoded meaning, merely that methodological
pragmatics require that the forms be isolated first, although the precise definition of their status in relation to other signs requires that they be analysed with reference to their meanings.

Perhaps surprisingly, the anthropology of art is one of the last topics to which anthropologists have applied semiological methods (see Forge 1973:xviii). The majority of studies of non-European art have been either formal analyses (for example Boas, 1927; Farris, 1972; Holm, 1965), functional analyses (for example, Lewis, 1961; Sieber, 1962; Firth, 1956), or art-historical analyses (for example Fagg, 1955; Frazer, 1962). The comparative lack of semiological analyses is a function of the neglect of the study of meaning in art, of the failure to treat art as a system of communication. Studies of meaning and semiology are not synonymous, and there have been a number of non-semiological attempts to study meaning (see for example Berndt, 1958; Fischer, 1961). However non-semiological studies have tended to ignore detailed aspects of the structure of the artistic system. They have tended to remain at the level of correlation between artistic systems and other cultural variables rather than demonstrating the relationship between formal components and meaning.

Two major analyses of ethnographic artistic systems have been produced within essentially semiological frameworks; Munn's analysis of the Walbiri graphic system and Forge's analysis of Abelam art. Munn's methods are explicitly semiological although she seldom refers to linguistic sources. She uses a Saussurean concept of sign in her earlier articles (1962, 1966) to delineate some aspects of the structure of the Walbiri graphic system. These early articles do not take the problem much beyond the stage of defining sign types and providing a lexicon of their meanings. Her subsequent papers (1973, 1973a) take the analysis several stages further. Through a structural analysis of the
sign system operating in various contexts she shows the way in which the system encodes fundamental principles of Walbiri cosmology. Most importantly, she feeds back the results of her structural analysis into the sign system itself, thus locating meanings concretely within a system of communication. This enables Munn to begin to grapple with the problem of the effectiveness of symbols from the perspective of their communicative functions.

Humphrey's (1973) analysis of Buryat ongons (magical icons) also from a semiological perspective, is less successful than Munn's precisely because she does not give priority to the analysis of the ongon as an independent system of communication. Ongon are magical objects used by the Buryat that are thought to have the power for example to bring success in hunting and protection from small pox (Ibid:271). Although in her introduction (Ibid:271) she draws the analogy between ongons and language she does not consistently follow this perspective throughout. She concludes that 'the language of the ongon system is not enough in itself to be the means whereby new ongon are created', because it is the myth that makes the ongon into a sign rather than a meaningless object (Ibid:287). In adopting this approach she has disregarded the Saussurean imperative that a sign consists of the relationship between signifier and signified, by giving priority to the signified. Yet in fact the ongon system, as she herself shows, is a way in which myths can be related one to another and in turn to other things like success in hunting and social status (Ibid: 272), and is a way by which different elements of the same myth can be selected out and encoded in a particular way. The making of a new ongon is not determined by the myth but by the principles of signification employed in the ongon system itself in relation to the myths, concepts of spiritual beings and the various functions of the objects.
The objectives of Forge's analysis of Abelam art are similar to those of Munn's analysis of Walbiri art. Forge's graphic element (1973: 189) is in its essential characteristics similar to the Saussurean sign: 'graphic elements...carry the meaning', meaning which concerns the relationship between things. Basic themes of Abelam culture are seen as being encoded in the Abelam artistic system, and analysis of the system elucidates the themes. In particular, Forge demonstrates the independence of Abelam art as a system of communication capable of making statements that cannot be made in any other way (1966:27). Forge's own analysis fits into what he terms 'the symbolic systems approach [to art]' (Forge, 1973:xviii): 'A coherent body of art from a single culture in analysed into its basic elements of form, with the aim of discovering rules of combination...meaning is recorded at every level' (Ibid:xix).

I prefer to label this approach to artistic systems a 'semiological' or 'communication system' approach, for a number of reasons. Artistic systems in the sense that they are discussed by Forge (1966, 1973), Munn (1962, 1966, 1973) and Bateson (1973) among others are systems of encoded meaning analogous in many ways to language. Language and art both encode symbolic meanings. However, although some artistic systems may deal primarily in symbolic discourse, others do not. A complete analysis of an artistic system must be concerned with the analysis of symbols, but it must also be concerned with the analysis of things which are not. I am not concerned at this stage as to whether symbols belong to a system that is more general than any one communication system, simply with the fact that most communication systems concern more than symbols.
Rather than providing a precise definition of a symbol at this juncture, I will summarize what I consider to be some of the major characteristics of symbols that differentiate them from signs. Both symbols and signs are signs in the Saussurean sense in that they must be understood in terms of the relationship between signifier and signified. Signs are elements which in combination with other elements of the same system communicate unambiguous messages to an interpreter familiar with the system. The meaning of signs can be modified or specified by their relationship with other signs. Their meaning in particular contexts can only be understood by those familiar with the syntactic rules of combination, the semantics of the sign and at a different level the nature of the discourse in which they occur. In context signs are univalent and can be paraphrased without loss of meaning. A symbol on the other hand is polysemous or multivalent in that in no context of its occurrence does only a single meaning apply. Symbols are 'semantic primitives' in the sense that they cannot be decomposed into simpler components, and cannot be paraphrased without loss of meaning.

The same system can be used to make symbolic and non-symbolic statements, and many of the same principles of organisation may operate in both cases. This is brought out very clearly in Munn's (1973) analysis of the Walbiri graphic sign system, which can be used to make descriptive statements in mundane contexts (Chapter 3) and which contains at the same time a number of general symbols when used in other contexts (Chapter 5). Certainly the two uses of the system have an effect on one another. The graphic system, when used in mundane contexts, may make the symbols more believable and more able to be articulated. The system is so all-pervading that it encodes in its many contexts much of the diversity of Walbiri life (see Munn, 1973:
Similarly, symbolic configurations can occur in mundane contexts and may at times affect the level of discourse of secular sand drawings. However, none of these factors mean that the Walbiri graphic tradition as a whole is a symbolic system. Rather, it is an important medium for the expression of Walbiri symbolism.

I do not see the distinction between symbol and sign as being absolute in all cases, especially in the context of systems in which the same material signifier can be in different contexts either a sign or a symbol. Again this comes out clearly in the case of Walbiri iconography. A particular graphic sign in the context of a woman's sand drawing has a specific referent. The referent of the element may vary according to the context in which it occurs and the part of the story it illustrates; nevertheless, in a given context it is intended to have a single referent. However, as Munn (1973) shows, the experience of the meaning of signs in the context of women's sand drawings carries over to their use on other occasions, for example as elements of man's restricted Guruwari designs (Ibid:119 ff). The signs, through their use in women's sand drawings, 'become redolent of the content and rhythm of the daily life experiences that they denote' (Ibid:88). The meanings associated with the graphic elements as signs become part of the meaning of the same graphic elements when they occur elsewhere as symbols.

The approach adopted in this thesis is intended to enable consideration of Yolngu art as a system of communication; to facilitate the interpretation of the similarities and differences between different categories of painting and different paintings belonging to the same category within the context of the system as a whole. Previous authors have tended to look at the artistic system at the level of individual
paintings rather than in terms of general features of the system. Thus Groger-Wurm (1973:208) writes that 'the whole area of the bark sheet is covered with complex patterns of cross-hatchings, diamonds, chevrons, lozenges, bands, clusters of dots etc., all of which have symbolic meanings based on mythology'. However, in common with other authors, she nowhere attempts to define the structure of the system by analysing the relationship between different paintings, or by isolating the components of the system.

Yolngu art will be shown to employ two major systems of representation (Chapter 6). One operates on principles of iconicity or formal resemblance; the other is basically non-iconic. While several authors have noted the existence of these two systems of representation either explicitly (e.g. Berndt, 1958:29) or implicitly (e.g. Groger-Wurm, 1973:24) they have not posed any questions concerning the difference between them and how that difference is exploited in the system. Indeed Berndt (1958:29) denies that the difference is significant, by concluding that 'both the representational and the 'abstract' are intended to be understood and indeed are understood. There is no reason why one should be more difficult to comprehend than the other when both concern the local 'style'; both are part of the traditional pattern'. However, any systematic analysis of the relationship between signifier and signified within the two would demonstrate that they have different properties as systems of encoding and expressing meaning. Although both systems can encode some of the same set of meanings they do so in different ways and require different conditions for interpretation. They are not both intended to be 'understood' in the same way nor could they be.
Groger-Wurm, Berndt and Berndt and Mountford, although they list meanings associated with different elements of the same painting, do not as a rule analyse the meanings associated with the same element in different paintings and the way in which its meaning is affected by its syntactic context. By failing to do this they fail to provide the basic raw materials for establishing the relationship between signifiers and signifieds within the system as a whole. Until this has been done the component sign systems cannot be meaningfully isolated.
CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

People living today in the region of Yirrkala in North-east Arnhem Land speak one of a series of dialects of the Yolngu language (Schebeck n.d.). The word Yolngu means 'Aboriginal person' in all dialects of Yolngu. In this thesis the word Yolngu will be used as a shorthand to refer to the Yolngu-speaking people.

The Yolngu people are variously termed in the anthropological literature of the area as the Murngin (Warner), the Wulamba (Berndt) and the Miwuyt (Shapiro). Each author recognizes that the term he has chosen is unsatisfactory, and in as much as it is used by the people themselves has localised and specific application (see for example Shapiro, 1969a:17). The main problem however has been caused not so much by the proliferation of names for the 'same people', but by the generalisation of the terms to apply to all of the people living in North-east Arnhem Land, rather than the use of the local term to differentiate between subsets of people living in different parts of the region. Thus although the Berndts and Shapiro frequently refer in their works to regional differences within the North-east Arnhem Land culture area (see for example C. Berndt, 1970, and Shapiro, 1969), with equal frequency they tend to generalise their conclusions as if they applied throughout the region (see for example Shapiro, 1968). While many of these generalisations may be valid, they must be shown to be valid in the context of regional cultural variation and not be based solely on data from one settlement. In short, although from Warner on anthropologists have stressed the absence of 'tribal organisation' in North-east Arnhem Land, the
impression gained from the literature is that Murngin, Wulamba and Miwuyt are alternative names for a single socio-political entity. In this thesis, unless it is otherwise stated, the conclusions drawn apply only to the Yolngu people living in the region of Yirrkala (see Map 1).

There are three large settlements where Yolngu people predominate: Milingimbi founded in 1922, Yirrkala founded in 1935 and Elcho Island founded in 1942. Although all these settlements were sited on traditional camping grounds, the places themselves were in no sense the nodal points of interaction between Yolngu clans that they subsequently became. Prior to the establishment of the mission stations Yolngu clans were dispersed widely throughout North-east Arnhem Land. Although the size and structure of communities varied seasonally, for much of the year the population lived in bands of in the region of 30 to 40 individuals (Peterson, 1972:26). The majority of the population was concentrated along the coastline, which provided one of the major routes for communication and interaction between separate groups. There were, however, major inland routes connecting the people of the Milingimbi/Cape Stewart region with the Yolngu clans living in the northern area of Blue Mud Bay in the Gulf of Carpentaria (Thomson, 1949:70). By the end of the Second World War the majority of Yolngu had moved to reside permanently in one of the three North-east Arnhem Land mission stations, and since that time the population of the settlements as far as clan composition is concerned has remained the same. Two major factors determined to which mission station particular groups moved: one was geographical proximity to the settlements and the other was the state of political alliance between groups in the years immediately prior to their establishment.
I will consider here only those factors relevant to understanding the present day clan composition of the population of Yirrkala.

Prior to 1935 the population of the Yirrkala region appears to have been located at three main centres: Caledon Bay-Trial Bay, the Koolatong River at the north-west of Blue Mud Bay, and the vicinity of Yirrkala itself. The Koolatong River and the Caledon Bay area had always been major centres of population during the wet season when adverse conditions encouraged the concentration of the population of the region into a few main camps. These camps would have broken up with the onset of the dry season in March to April (Thomson, 1949:24). The decision as to which place to camp during the wet season is unlikely to have been arbitrary, and it is possible that the groups choosing to camp at the Koolatong would have had a greater level of interaction with each other than they would have done with groups centered on Caledon Bay. However, there is no reason to suppose that the groups living at the Koolatong represented an alliance of clans that was permanent over time. The clans intermarried with those centered at Caledon Bay, and indeed many clans, for example, the Madarrpa, the Munyuku and the Marrakulu, had male representatives living at both centres.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that in 1935, when Thomson visited the campsite of Matarauwaitj (his orthography) on the Koolatong River, a state of warfare existed between the Koolatong River people and the groups living at Caledon Bay. Thomson (1949) records the name Dai'i (Dha'yi) for the Koolatong River people and was given the term Balamomo (Balamumu) for the people living at Caledon Bay. Balamumu is a name used by a set of clans from the Caledon Bay area, the largest of which is the Djapu clan, when they are allied for an
avenging expedition (maringu). Thomson (1949:17) states that at Matarauwaitj he found about 200 people camped at a time of year when they would usually dispersed into smaller groups of 'two or more families'. The people there stated that they were enemies of those at Caledon Bay, and Thomson in describing his journey with Dha'yi guides to meet up with Wonggu, a senior Balamumu man, stresses the fact that they were continually on their guard against possible attack (Thomson, 1948:409). This picture of hostility between the two groups is confirmed by Yolngu people today. Because of trouble over women, the Munyuku, Madarrpa, Bottom Djamu and most of the Marrakulu clan had left the area of Caledon Bay to join up with the clans on the Koolatong River, leaving behind the Top Djamu clan, the Manggalili, and individuals of two other clans together with their wives.

Shortly after the establishment of Yirrkala mission in 1935 the Top Djamu moved there to join the northern clans: the Gumatj, Rirratjingu, and some members of the Gälpu clan whose members had shortly before been driven north from Caledon Bay by the Balamumu (Chaseling, 1956:77). A few individuals from the clans camped at the Koolatong River in 1935 also moved to Yirrkala. The majority, including all those who had previously lived in the Caledon Bay region, went to live at the Rose River or Roper River missions, only moving to Yirrkala in the 1960's and early 1970's.

When Elcho Island mission was re-established in 1942, the Gälpu and some members of the Gurrumuru Dhalwangu clan moved there. Only two Gälpu families resided at Yirrkala in 1976. When I asked why these two families had remained at Yirrkala, I was told that before the war they had remained with the Balamumu: that is, they had not
been part of the group of Gälpu attacked by the Top Djapu and allied clans in the mid 1930's.

The territory of the Gurrumuru Dhałwangu clan is almost equidistant from Yirrkala and Elcho Island. However as far as marriage is concerned they are closely linked with clans now living at Yirrkala (Shapiro, 1969:14). Some members of the Gurrumuru Dhałwangu have never resided permanently in either mission station, but have lived for the most part in an outstation, Gurrumuru, to the south of Arnhem Bay. Until recent years their visits to Yirrkala have been infrequent, and the main reason given for this is that in the early thirties they stole a number of women from the Djapu and Marrakulu at Caledon Bay.

The clans living at Yirrkala maintained their spiritual links with and rights over their own clan territories and indeed continued to visit them occasionally despite their distance from the mission station. In the 1970's members of clans residing at Yirrkala began to return again to live permanently on their own clan territories, where they established small 'outstation' communities. The process of centralisation begun by the establishment of the mission in the 1930's had to a large extent been reversed by the time of my first field trip in 1974.

Moiety organisation

The population of Yirrkala is divided into two exogamous patrilineal moieties: Dhuwa and Yirritja. One of the main characteristics of Yolngu social organisation is the independence of the moieties from one another, and their priority as an ordering system over other systems of classification.
An individual belongs to the moiety of his father and marries a woman of his mother's moiety. No cases of marriage between members of the same moiety have been recorded in the Yirrkala or Elcho Island regions of North-east Arnhem Land. Shapiro (1967:461) reports one case of moiety incest at Elcho Island, but I heard of no similar case at Yirrkala. Indeed peoples' reaction to the question was that moiety incest was impossible.¹ In the case that Shapiro reports, the child of this intra-moietv relationship was allocated to the opposite moiety to that of its parents. This case causes Shapiro to argue that the principle of recruitment to a moiety is by what he terms 'relational affiliation' and the rule that applies is that 'an individual belongs to the moiety opposite to that of the mother'. This enables Shapiro to come to the conclusion that 'the dual division constitutes an order of social classification which is distinct from that of the patrilineal groups' (Shapiro, 1969:20). While this statement corresponds in many respects to my own view (as will be shown later), Shapiro's rule for moiety affiliation is unsatisfactory. The ideology unambiguously stated by the Yolngu is that an individual belongs to his father's moiety, which is by definition the opposite to that of his mother's (by ideology). If in the case of intra-moietv incest the individual was affiliated with his mother's moiety, and assuming that he was brought up by his mother, he would be in a totally anomalous position, unable to marry, as all the relationship terms he applied to other members of Yolngu society would be to members of the opposite moiety from that to which the terms usually applied. The only solution is to 'forget the father' and allocate the child's moiety affiliation

¹ Although note Berndt (1976:26, 1951:47-51) with reference to moiety incest in the Gunapipi.
according to the exogamous norm. The fact that relationship terms are matri-determined is quite consistent with patrilineal recruitment to groups as Maddock (1970:80) has shown.

Although the moiety as a whole is not the land owning unit, land belongs in perpetuity to a clan of one or other moiety and is never jointly owned by groups of different moieties. Thus Dhuwa land will always be owned by Dhuwa moiety clans and Yirritja land by Yirritja groups. Should a land owning group become extinct, then ownership of the land will be transferred to another group of the same moiety. Thus to the Yolngu, neither land nor clan should change moiety, theoretically. There is no evidence to show whether in the immediate past Yolngu clans or individuals have changed moiety or whether the ownership of land has crossed moiety boundaries. Demographic factors suggest that both possibilities could have occurred. There are documented cases of individuals and groups changing moiety affiliation in the region immediately to the south and to the west of the Yolngu area (Hiatt, 1965:131; Turner, 1974:73). Some people at Yirrkala are aware of the Groote Eylandt case discussed by Turner. I was told that today people could not marry Groote Eylandters as they had mixed up their moieties and did not know if they were marrying Dhuwa or Yirritja women. In a similar case with reference to the Nunggubuyu I was told that they married 'just like animals' as their moieties were the wrong way round. The fact that moiety changes do occur on the fringes of the Yolngu area suggests that similar adjustments would have taken place previously within the region. The response to this kind of change by the present day Yolngu confirms their ideology of immutability and independence of the moieties over time.
The independence of the moieties is strongly emphasised in the mythological system and in the system of totemic classification associated with the mythology. Everything is classified as belonging to either the Dhuwa or the Yirritja moiety. As Warner states: 'there is nothing in the whole universe...that has not a place in one of the two categories' (1958:30). Each ancestral being is referred to almost exclusively in the mythology of one of the moieties only and in that sense can be said to belong to that moiety, although such beings have significance to members of the opposite moiety. Their creative land-transforming acts took place almost entirely in the land belonging to the one moiety, and their tracks avoid land belonging to the opposite moiety. When confronted with adjoining areas of the opposite moiety's land, the ancestral beings either avoided it by taking a circuitous route around it, or crossed it by diving underground, or by flying over it. Thus the shark *mâna*, moving from one Dhuwa moiety area to another, bypassed territory belonging to the Yirritja clan Makalganalmirri by diving under it, and the *guwak* (koel cuckoo) flew from Djarrakpi to the Wessel Islands, passing over Dhuwa land. There are a few exceptions to this. For example Wuyal, a mythic sugar-bag hunter, crossed into Yirritja territory at Cape Shield (Djarrakpi). He tasted the wild honey there, but finding it salty, quickly retreated into Dhuwa land to the north. Such excursions into the territory of the opposite moiety are rare, and interaction between Dhuwa and Yirritja mythical beings still rarer. Although Dhuwa and Yirritja myths rarely join together, and Dhuwa and Yirritja ancestral beings meet if at all, only in passing, it is still possible, conceptually at least, to establish contemporaneity between certain sequences of events which took place in the separate mythologies. A nexus of cross
references exists which establishes temporal sequences transcending the moiety division. For example the phrase 'Wuyal time' can be used to locate events in the mythology of Yirritja moiety clans, although Wuyal is a Dhuwa moiety ancestral figure. 'Wuyal time' in this sense refers to a time of constant change when individuals were breaking the established law. Länydjung, a Yirritja moiety ancestral being, is said to be contemporaneous with Wuyal. Länydjung was sent out to show various Yirritja moiety clans a set of sacred dances and designs which would form the basis of the men's ceremonies. However, he sometimes showed the dances to the women and as a consequence of this was killed. His actions are seen to symbolise disorder and change: change that was occurring at the same time in Dhuwa moiety land at the instigation of Wuyal. However, it would be quite wrong to see this as a means of establishing an invariant, chronologically based sequence of mythic events. Because of the cyclical nature of the Yolngu concept of time, mythological events are not simply located in the distant past but are also in some senses seen to be part of a continuous present. They can therefore be used to describe present and future states as well as the past.  

The fact that cross-references can be made between the mythologies of the Dhuwa and Yirritja moieties does not affect their essential separateness. Shapiro (1969:20) goes so far as to state: 'Dhuwa myths do not so much as assume the existence of Yirritja myths and vice versa.'

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1 Thus 'Wuyal time' can be applied to the present day to describe the chaos caused by European colonisation. Moreover, as correspondences depend partly on reference (in this case a 'time of chaos and disorder'), the correspondences of events within the mythological systems will vary according to the reference point adopted.
While at one level it is correct to speak of 'Dhuwa mythology' as opposed to 'Yirritja mythology', the myths and the sacred songs, dances and objects associated with them are owned by individual clans and sets of clans of the respective moieties, not by the moieties themselves. Every clan at Yirrkala is connected with every other clan of the same moiety through mythologically traceable links, but the particular configuration of, and spatial referents of, a clan's mythology is unique.

The 'sacred law' (madayin) of each clan: the sacred objects (rangga), the songs (manikay), the dances/ceremonies (bunggul), the paintings (miny'tji) and the 'power names' (likan) associated with them, were given to the clans by one or more of the major ancestral beings of their moiety. Thus Lanydjung was sent by Barrama to give 'the law' to a set of Yirritja clans, one of which was the Munyuku, or Makalganalmirri. Lanydjung wore on his chest miny'tji, and when he came to Munyuku territory he named each place, gave to the Yolngu living there the songs and dances associated with it, and showed them how to manufacture their rangga. Having given the Munyuku their law, Lanydjung moved on to the Madurrpa territory and instructed the people living there. They became the 'foundation ancestors' (that is, the eponymous patrilineal ancestors) of the present Madurrpa clan. The Djang'kawu allocated a similar set of rights in madayin to clans of the Dhuwa moiety (see Berndt, R. 1952).

The identity of each clan exists in terms of the actions of ancestral beings: they create the particular shape and boundaries of its territory, and endow it with its sacred law and a distinctive cultural pattern. The sharing of 'sacred law' connects or separates clans of the same moiety.
Although the majority of ceremonies necessitate the participation of members of both moieties, they usually involve the sacred law of the clans of one moiety only. With one exception this was the case for every ceremony witnessed at Yirrkala during the time I was there. The identification of a particular ceremony with only one of the moieties appears to be consistent throughout the Yolngu-speaking area. The Yirritja and Dhuwa moiety each own a ngärra ceremony and a series of mortuary ceremonies. Four other ceremonies, the gunapipi, the ngulmarrk, the djungguwan and the mandiyala, are owned by the Dhuwa moiety.

The ngärra ceremony involves the manufacture and display of a clan's sacred objects. A ngärra ceremony may be held primarily by the members of a single clan and involve only their rangga or it may involve the co-operation and joint participation of a number of clans of the same moiety (see Berndt, 1974, fascicle 3:2 ff; Warner, 1958: 335 ff, and Thomson, 1939c). Dhuwa and Yirritja ngärra ceremonies may be performed at the same time, however they are always performed on separate ceremonial grounds and are never combined in the same ceremony.

Mortuary ceremonies too are primarily concerned with the madayin of one moiety only, the moiety of the deceased person concerned. The ceremonies are organised by members of clans of the deceased person's moiety and participation by people belonging to the opposite moiety is restricted to assisting with some aspects of the performance and sometimes singing songs associated with the deceased person's mother's clan (see forward). Primary burial ceremonies will be discussed further in Chapter 3 (see also Warner, 1958:412 ff, and Peterson, 1976).
Of the other four ceremonies referred to above, only the **djungguwan** is performed regularly in the Yirrkala area. Although it mainly concerns the **madayin** of clans of the Dhuwa moiety it has many of the characteristics of a supra-moiety ceremony. In certain contexts dances and sometimes paintings belonging to the Yirritja moiety can be used in the performance. Boys who are circumcised at a **djungguwan** ceremony have paintings belonging to a clan of their own moiety painted on their chest (see e.g. Berndt, R.M. 1974, fascicle 2, plate 26). Yirritja moiety men have an important role as 'managers' (**djungga yarr**) of the ceremony and the ceremony cannot be performed without the cooperative efforts of members of both moieties (see forward). 'Managers' in fact have a role to play in all ceremonies, however the role of the Yirritja moiety 'managers' in the **djungguwan** ceremony is dramatised and both moieties are represented in the iconography of the ceremony (see also Warner, 1958:255 ff). A version of the **djungguwan** ceremony will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The nature of the relationship between moiety organisation and the ceremonial structure of North-east Arnhem Land is a highly complex issue. The majority of anthropologists working in the area have concluded simply that the 'Dhuwa moiety is ritually superior to the Yirritja' (Shapiro, 1966:21. See also Warner, 1958:32 and Berndt, 1962:64). Berndt (1952:xviii), writing specifically on Yirrkala in the early 1940's states that: 'even those of the opposite moiety, people who looked to Laintjung (Lánydjung) and Banaitja (Banatja), admitted the primary importance of the Dhuwa Djianggawul (Djang'kawu).'</br>Today at Yirrkala the situation is not as simple as this.

Berndt's statement that the Djang'kawu is acknowledged by members of both moieties to be the most important ancestral being does
not apply today. Narritjin (a senior member of the Yirritja moiety),
for example, was aware that Europeans believed that Djang'kawu was the
major Yolngu ancestral being, and expressed a common feeling held by
Yirritja people that certain Dhuwa moiety clans had gained considerable
advantage in relations with Europeans by revealing Djang'kawu's
existence to them. Narritjin commented that had Birrikitji (a very
senior Yirritja man) decided earlier to release Barrama to Europeans
then it was possible that Yirritja moiety clans could have gained a
similar advantage. However, Birrikitji refused to reveal Barrama to
outsiders until the early 1960's (Wells, 1971; Wurm, 1973:74). Today
Barrama is clearly seen as the equivalent of Djang'kawu, and Lanydjung
and Banatja, who Berndt states are the major Yirritja ancestral beings,
are seen as the equivalent of the Wawilak sisters and Wuyal, who
Berndt sees as being of lesser importance than Djang'kawu. Dula and
Djewiny both told me that Djang'kawu was to the Dhuwa moiety what
Barrama was to the Yirritja. While I consider that the simple ranking
procedure employed by Berndt to be inappropriate, there is no doubt
that at one level Barrama is considered by all Yirritja clans at
Yirrkala to be the pre-eminent ancestral being of their moiety.

To summarise this section: Yolngu society is divided into two
named patrilineal moieties which extend throughout the Yolngu-speaking
area and beyond. I have argued that the mythological and ceremonial
systems of each moiety, although structurally similar, are distinct and
are seen by the Yolngu to be to a considerable extent independent of
one another. Each moiety taken as a whole has separate sets of songs,
paintings, dances, and ritual objects. Although the moiety is neither
a political unit nor a corporate group, ceremonial groups or alliances
are formed at the level of expressed ideology on the basis of
mythological ties between clans of the same moiety. I will show later the way in which this is reflected in the relationship between artistic designs of clans of the same moiety. I hope to show further (in the next section) the way in which alliances between clans formed on an intra-moiety basis are at least as important as inter-moiety alliances in relation to marriage and politics. This fact has been, to a considerable extent, neglected in the literature.

Clan organisation

The clans represented at Yirrkala vary in size from one to two hundred members. I will consider only those clans which have male members living at Yirrkala, as these are the clans which participate most fully in the artistic and ceremonial life. The majority of people affiliated to the larger clans represented at Yirrkala (that is, those with more than twenty members) live at Yirrkala. However, a few individuals from the larger clans are to be found living at other Yolngu settlements. Most people marry someone who was either born at Yirrkala or who is a long term resident, although there is some inter-marriage between settlements, especially between Yirrkala and Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) people (Shapiro, 1969).

The ideology of the clan system is based on patrilineal descent, with men and women belonging to the clan of their father, which is a clan of the opposite moiety to that of their mother. The clans have many of the characteristics of shallow patrilineages, a point emphasised by Berndt (1955:94). Each clan as a rule traces its descent back to a single ancestor, usually about five generations back from the present, although in several cases this seems to be the product of genealogical fiction.
There is no single term in the Yolngu language which is precisely equivalent to my use of the word 'clan'. Shapiro (1966:19) regards the word bāpurru as the generic term for 'sib'(the equivalent of my 'clan'). Berndt uses the term mala-mada (mala-matha) pair' to represent clan/dialect group and uses the word baparu (bāpurru) in a more restricted sense (Berndt, 1976:25). Neither is correct in his usage. Schebeck (n.d.) has taken Berndt to task for using the terms mala and matha in a misleading way. Schebeck makes two main criticisms: the first is that the terms used have a more general application than Berndt allows and can be applied at different levels; the second is that, following from this, the groups to which Berndt applies the terms are frequently groups at different levels of organisation or of contrast within the system.

Mala is a pluraliser: as a suffix it converts a singular noun into a plural. Used as a free-standing word it has many of the connotations of the mathematical usage of the word 'set'. Thus a mala is one set (of people) as opposed to other sets which can be identified at the same level of contrast. Thus Daymbalipu Mununggurr, a Djaru man, can be referred to as a member of the 'Djaru mala', the 'Balamumu mala', the 'Yirrkala mala' or the 'Institute mala'. The first refers to him as a member of a clan, the second as a member of a set of clans of both moieties living in the area of Caledon Bay, the third as a resident of Yirrkala and the last as a 'worker' for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. These represent four of an infinite number of sets to which an individual may belong, some of which may have largely overlapping membership, others of which he may be the only link between. The crucial fact is that the question 'what mala do you belong to?' will produce a variety of responses depending on the reference point adopted.
Matha is similarly ambiguous, meaning something like 'set with respect to language' (the word dhäruk is used today in preference to matha, due to the recent death of a man with a similar-sounding name). Thus Daymbalipu can be referred to as a speaker of dhuwal matha, Djapu matha or Yolngu matha. Bunbatjiwuy a man of a different clan could also be referred to as a speaker of dhuwal matha and Yolngu matha. He does not, however, speak Djapu matha but Djambarrpuynu matha, which is another 'language' existing at the same level of contrast. Djambarrpuynu is also Bunbatjiwuy's mala at one level of contrast. By selecting the level of matha represented by dhuwal matha and the mala level of Djapu versus Djambarrpuynu, and, by applying the specific terms as labels for the two individual's clans, one produces the dhuwal-Djapu clan and the dhuwal-Djambarrpuynu clan. As long as one is certain that the differentiating terms are selected at the same level of contrast, and that one knows something of the significance of the contrast, then this is clearly a valid analytic procedure to adopt, even though it is clearly inappropriate to translate mala-matha as 'clan'.

Shapiro also distinguishes between clan (sib) and dialect group, for which he uses the same term as Berndt. Interestingly enough, Shapiro selects terms at different levels to those selected by Berndt. This is demonstrated by the fact that my clan names are the equivalent of Shapiro's 'clans' and Berndt's linguistic groups. (Berndt's 'clan' names are the same as Warner's 'phratries', which Warner defines as sets of allied clans.) None of this is surprising when it is understood that the Yolngu terms mala and matha can be applied to the same group. As I have shown, Djapu is both a linguistic group and a social group (that is, a clan). The 'clan' cannot be defined by the use of either Yolngu term, although both can be applied to it.
The groups to which I apply the term 'clan' are named patrilineal descent groups which acknowledge common ancestry, hold in common rights over land, and have the same madayin. Clan names are the ones most frequently given when an individual is asked what group/clan/tribe/people he belongs to. The surnames recently adopted by Yolngu for bureaucratic purposes correspond to the individual's clan, although they are not the names of the clans. Thus all Top Djapu people use the surname Mununggurr. When a clan has more than one name, then the name that I use is the one most frequently employed by the Yolngu. The names are used in contrast to one another, and can be considered to represent groups at the same level of segmentation. These clans are shown in Figure 1.

What kinds of group do these clans represent? I will argue that Yolngu clans are not fixed elements of the social structure in the way in which corporate lineages have been defined in West Africa (see for example Fortes, 1953), but that they represent notional categories, which reflect rather than structure social relations.

Although everybody at Yirrkala did in fact claim membership of and were acknowledged to be members of their father's clan, the statement that clan membership is patrilineal must be qualified in a number of ways. Firstly, individuals may be affiliated to clans other than their father's (although this is always in addition to membership of their father's clan); secondly, links traced through women unite sets of people across clan boundaries, correspond with points of fission within clans, and have the potential to create new clan groupings either by fission along matrilineal lines or by fusion or absorption on the basis of matrifiliation.
Affiliation to clan other than father's

A person may be affiliated to another clan through spirit conception. Peterson (1972:17) argues that this is frequently because in the first few years of marriage an individual lives with his wife's people who may live some distance from his own country. In such cases a man other than the child's father may dream of the spirit conception of the child. It is always a man of a clan of the same moiety as the father. Berndt (1976:23) cites one example of a Yirrkala man who was affiliated to two clans, Warramirri and Gumatj, on this basis. However, I was unable to record examples of claims being made on this basis.

A man may also be affiliated to the clan of a man who brings him up in cases where the clan is different from his own father's. This occurs most frequently when a person's father died or was killed when he was still an infant, and his mother was taken over by a member of another clan. The following two cases illustrate this principle.

Case 1.

Welwi's father belonged to the Marrakulu-Dhurrurrunga clan. When he was a baby his father was killed by a man belonging to a different Marrakulu clan on the instructions of a senior Djaru man. His mother was then taken as a wife by a Djaru man by whom she had a number of children. Welwi was brought up by the Djaru man 'as his son'. He was referred to at Yirrkala primarily as either a Djaru man or a Marrakulu-Dhurrurrunga man. He was considered to be a man of knowledge holding much of the ritual law (madayin) for both clans.

Welwi's case is complicated by the fact that he also was holding ritual knowledge for the Djarrawak clan, and was sometimes referred to by people as a Djarrawak man. I will return to this point later.
Case 2.

Batjung and Djerra are affiliated both to the Gumatj and to the Manggalili (Fig. 2). Their Gumatj father died when they were young and their mother died shortly afterwards. They were brought up by Narritjin (Manggalili) their father's half brother (same mother different father) and his wife Bangara, their mother's full sister. Although of different clans by patrification to Narritjin's own sons, Batjung and Djerra share a similar social universe, having the same mother's clan and mother's mother's clan. In consequence they have rights to the same set of potential spouses. They live with Narritjin, help with his paintings and have strong attachments to Manggalili clan territory.

The above cases illustrate the importance of matrilineally traced ties to clan affiliation. A further case illustrates the same point but with reference to a very different set of circumstances:-

Case 3.

Dula is a Munyuku man. Dula's mother was a Marrangu woman, Manhdhulpa (Fig. 3). Manhdhulpa's mother Mapungu was a Dhalwangu I woman, whose daughters had been promised to Watjung, a Gumatj 2 man. Mapungu married twice, once to a Ngayimil man and the second time to a Marrangu. Manhdhulpa, her daughter by the second marriage, although promised to Watjung, was taken by Dula's father Djimbarryun; her two Ngayimil sisters married Watjung. Dula told me that because his mother really belonged to Gumatj, he was himself half Gumatj and had to look after Watjung as a son should. He cited as an instance of this the fact that when he was paid a lot of money for a painting he would give some to Watjung. Dula also claimed the right to talk about Bottom Gumatj paintings. In this case then Dula, although brought up by his own father, considers himself to have rights and obligations traced through his mother to a clan into which she should have married—a form of indirect patrification through the mother.

Warner (1958:68) stresses that as a person reaches maturity he usually identifies with his genitor's clan, though retaining close links with the other clan(s) to which he is affiliated. Peterson (1972:17) states that rights in and membership of a clan other than one's father's cannot be passed on to one's own children. Non-heritable clan affiliation of this type will be termed 'secondary clan membership'. However, while it is true that in the majority of cases secondary clan membership cannot be inherited, there are certain circumstances where it can be a major factor in determining primary
clan membership, in which a man becomes fully incorporated into a clan other than his own father's. An example of this will be considered later on in this section. It is necessary first to consider the topic of intra-clan divisions.

Intra-clan divisions

Many clans are subdivided internally into a number of separate patrilines or sub-lineages. Matrilineally traced ties are also of crucial importance to understanding the development and structure of subdivisions which exist within a clan. The existence of these subdivisions is manifested in a number of ways; by patrilines having different rights of access to women to other subgroups; having a different set of ritual responsibilities; and being more closely linked with one section of the clan's territory and the associated madayin ('sacred' law) than with other sections. Subdivisions of a clan are also reflected in residence patterns and daily interaction: members of subgroups tend to live together and they interact with one another more than they do with other clan relatives.

The Manggalili clan (fig. 4) consists of two main patrilines with no traceable genealogical links between them. In this case members of both lines affirm common ancestry. In other cases separate patrilines are said to have different founding ancestors with no postulated genealogical link. In such cases the union of the patrilines within a single clan is sanctioned by myth. The Munyuku clan represents one example of this and will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.
Members of Manggalili patriline 1 and 2 predominantly marry women from different clans:
line 1 marry women from the Djapu and Djambarpuyngu clans, whereas line 2 marry women from the Djarrawak and Marrakulu clans.

As well as marrying women from different clans the two subdivisions have different mother's mother's (brother's) clans. The MMB clan is the clan involved in the bestowal of women to the members of a patriline. As will be shown later this is structurally the most significant relationship as far as marriage cycles are concerned. The main MMB clans for line 1 are Gumatj 2 and Maḏarrpa, and Dhaḷwangu 2 and Munyuku. The MMB clan for line 2 is Dhaḷwangu 1 (fig. 5).

Members of line 1 and 2 live at different outstations. Members of line 1 live at Djarrakpi in Manggalili clan territory, while members of line 2 live at Gurka'wuy on Trial Bay with their mother's clanspeople (see map 1).

It is possible to suggest a potential subdivision within patriline 1, separating the children of Narritjin (fig. 4:4b-f) from those of his deceased brother Nänyin (fig. 4:4h-l). The division is based on different MMB clan links. The actual MMB clan for the majority of Nänyin's children is Munyuku and for Narritjin's sons it is Gumatj 2. Narritjin thus refers to his brother's sons as being 'on the Munyuku side' and his own being 'on the Gumatj side'. Each one of a set of brothers provides a potential point of segmentation within a patriline. While the patriline continues to exist as a unit, members of it have rights to DDs belonging to any of the MMB clans associated with the patriline as a whole. If the patriline segments to form two new groups at the same level of organisation then each group will become associated with different effective MMB-ZDC linkages.
and will have rights in separate sets of women. This has not as yet happened in the case of Manggalili.

On the other hand, the Djapu clan has in recent years subdivided into a number of separate patriline. All living Djapu are descendants of one man, Wonggu, who died in 1958. In this sense the Djapu clan are a patrilineal clan par excellence. The clan however is one of the largest at Yirrkala, consisting of nearly 200 individuals, and effectively operates as a set of separate but unnamed patriline. The patriline are defined in the way set out above, each having different MMB-ZDC patriline associated with it. The point of segmentation coincides with the clan affiliations of different sets of Wonggu's wives and represents different MMB-ZDC links operating at that level. Māri (MMB)-gutharra(ZDC) links exist within the clan, operating at the level of patriline. Thus patriline A marries women who are ZDC of patriline B. Each patriline can have more than one MMB patriline associated with it, but there is no overlap in the MMB-ZDC relationships between patriline themselves standing in a MMB-ZDC relationship; that is, each patriline receives women from and bestows women to different patriline from the others. Figure 6 shows the system operating as far as the relationships between Djapu patriline A and B are concerned.

MMB-ZDC relationships are only activated within very large clans. In the Manggalili, for example, Bokarra potentially stands in the relationship of MMB to Narritjin's sons. In fact the correct matri-determined relationship reciprocals would be māri(MMB)-gutharra(ZDC). However, although Bokarra and Narritjin's sons belong to different patriline, as the clan is small it is considered inappropriate for them to stand in a wife bestowing-wife receiving relationship.
They therefore employ patri-determined relationship terms, Bokarra calling Narritjin's children 'sons'. Relationship terms within a clan are patri-determined whenever possible. In the case of the Djapu clan this is no longer possible because the size of the clan makes inevitable, because of demographic factors, the existence of wife bestowing-wife receiving relationships within the clan, relationships which as we shall see are matri-determined.

Over time the factors that led to the segmentation of the Djapu clan into a number of patrilineal sections of the clan standing in a MMB-ZDC relationship to one another deciding to form separate clans. Such a process has in fact occurred in the case of Gumatj 1 and 2. The two clans both have the same apical ancestors, two generations above the present eldest living members. Today they are separately named, clan 1 being the Gupa Gumatj, the other being the Ma'tama'ta Gumatj. The two clans employ the surnames Mununggiritj and Yunupingu respectively. The third Gumatj clan (fig. 7) has no genealogical links with the other two clans. All three clans own different named territories, although the division between Gumatj 1 and 2 is not fully formalised and they produce distinct but overlapping sets of paintings.

The property of clans: land and madayin

Membership of a clan gives an individual sets of rights and obligations with respect to the ownership of land and madayin, which according to Yolngu ideology are jointly owned by the members of a clan as a whole. Madayin refers to things that are restricted. It is translated by Yolngu as 'history law' or simply 'law'. The madayin centres around the songs, dances, paintings and sacred objects which
relate to the actions of *wangarr* (ancestral) beings. *Madayin* can be used to refer to restricted things or 'history law' as a category but is usually employed at a more specific level to signify the *madayin* associated with a particular *wangarr* being or set of *wangarr* beings who interacted along the length of an ancestral track. This definition will be amplified and exemplified in subsequent chapters.

Rights in *madayin* and rights in land are two sides of the same coin. Yolngu trace land ownership to the actions of mythological beings who in the past gave to ancestral members of the clan ownership of areas of land through which they passed. These beings also showed to the Yolngu living in each area the *madayin* belonging to the land. The performance of sacred dances, the making of paintings and the singing of songs relating to these *madayin* are used as a charter to justify and assert land ownership. Significant features of the landscape associated with the actions of the ancestral beings are taken to be the focal points of the clan's territory and provide the reference points for determining territorial boundaries.

The issue of the ownership of *madayin* is complex. Although a clan owns a unique set of *madayin*, a single *madayin* can be jointly owned by two or more clans and indeed is rarely the property of a single clan. For example, the Munyuku share the *birrkuda* (or *djarr*, the Yirritja wild honey) *madayin* with Dhâlwangu and Gumatj, the snake *mikarran* with Mangalili and Macarrpa, and the whale *wuymirri* with Warramirri and Gumatj.\(^1\) In the Munyuku case, the *madayin* will be grounded firmly in Munyuku territories, the songs will refer to Munyuku

\(^1\) Only the main *wangarr* ancestor associated with the *madayin* is referred to here. Other *wangarr* beings also belong to the *madayin* and will be discussed in detail in later chapters.
places, and the Munyuku paintings and rangga will show some variation from those of other clans sharing the madayin. On the other hand, the song cycles may be the same (with place names having different reference according to clan) and the performance of a ceremony will involve the agreement and participation of a number of clans sharing the madayin.

The members of each clan thus possess rights to a unique set of madayin which overlap to some extent with the sets of madayin belonging to other clans of the same moiety.

The Yolngu word bąpurru is used in two different senses. Shapiro, as was stated previously, sees the term as referring to a group equivalent to his 'sib' or clan. Certainly the word can be used to refer to a group at this level, but like mala and matha, bąpurru is a relational term that can be applied to groups at a number of different levels.¹ The word bąpurru may also be used with reference to dead people. The ceremonies for a dead person and the dead body itself can be referred to as a bąpurru. I was told that in this context it meant 'dead spirit people'. It is in this sense that the word is most frequently used at Yirrkala. The same informant, Welwi, told me that when the word was used to refer to groups of living people, it meant 'people belonging to the same rangga'. As the spirits of the

¹ Failure to grasp this point has led some anthropologists to attribute inconsistency to the Yolngu use of these terms. Berndt (1976:23) for example states: 'the term [bąpurru]is often used ambiguously, especially these days, but was formerly said to refer to a group smaller than the total span of a mala-mada [matha] pair, specifically pointing to person's immediate forebears in the male line'. In the same paragraph Berndt uses it to refer to a mala-matha pair, and on the following page he uses the term as equivalent to his 'clan', which in an earlier work he defines as being 'several linguistic groups' (1955:96). Berndt's use of bąpurru is correct in that the Yolngu could apply the term to groups at each of these levels, yet it is inconsistent by his own criteria.
dead are believed to return to one of the rangga belonging to the person's clan, I suggest that two uses of the word bāpurru can be combined in a single definition: 'people living and dead who are linked to the same rangga or set of rangga'.¹ The usage of the word bāpurru thus parallels the distribution of rights in rangga, and an individual belongs to a number of bāpurru according to the reference point chosen.

The two most common reference points used are:
1. The members of a clan acknowledging joint ownership of a set of madayin.
2. A set of clans linked by the same madayin. This unit will be termed a clan set.

Warner records that the term may be used to refer to a moiety. Although I have not heard the term applied at this level such an application would be perfectly consistent with my definition, as it could be argued that the members of one moiety are linked with a discrete set of madayin in opposition to all members of the opposite moiety.

Differential rights to madayin within a clan.

Although the ideology is strongly asserted that all members of a clan exercise joint rights in the clan's madayin, on a number of occasions I obtained data which suggested that differential rights to madayin existed within the membership of a clan. For example, certain members of a clan would produce bark paintings predominantly associated

¹ Thomson (1949:26) provides a similar definition of bāpurru to this: 'a clan or set of clans linked by the possession of common totemic ancestors'.
with one madayin or one part of the clan's territory, whereas other members produced predominantly another set. When I questioned members of the clan about this apparent contradiction, they tended to confirm my observations, but denied the conclusions I had drawn. They asserted that although 'x' did produce that painting exclusively, other members of the clan could produce it and it belonged to all members: 'we are all one people' or 'we are all one bāpurru'.

Bokarra of Manggalili patriline 2 and Narritjin of patriline 1 produce different but overlapping sets of paintings for sale. Narritjin primarily produces paintings from the country of Djarrakpi on Cape Shield, referring to the wangarr guwak (koel). Narritjin rarely produces paintings relating to the other main Manggalili madayin, the nguykal (kingfish); when he does, he produces paintings related to the salt water section of the kingfish's journey which links it to the guwak. Bokarra on the other hand paints mainly kingfish designs, in particular ones associated with the inland section of the wangarr's journey. The division of the paintings reflects the different links each patriline has with the patrilines of other clans. The wangarr kingfish traveled from Dhalwangu country (MMB to line 2), passing by Marrakulu country (Bokarra's mother's country) before reaching Manggalili clan territory. The guwak on the other hand connects Manggalili clan territory to Gumatj 3 territory; Gumatj 3 being MMB to Manggalili 1, Narritjin's patriline.

Similar factors operate in the case of the Munyuku clan, which is also divided into two patrilines. Each patriline is said to belong to different parts of Munyuku territory, each of which has a different

1 There was also a third Munyuku patriline which today is extinct.
set of paintings associated with it. However, despite the fact that in the case of the Munyuku and Manggalili certain patrilineal clans are more closely associated with one area of the clan's territory and one madayin than they are with the others held by the clan, members of the clan still assert that all of the land and madayin are jointly owned by the clan as a whole. Joint ownership of the clan's land and madayin is thus a crucial component of the definition of a clan.

Following from the above, one of the main signs of clan fusion is the fact that groups which previously asserted separate ownership of paintings and land acknowledge joint ownership of land and madayin (often uniting to form a single clan). The three Gumatj clans discussed above temporarily united to form a single clan in the late 1960's. Prior to this Gumatj 3 owned a unique set of paintings characterised by a different clan design to that employed by Gumatj 1 and 2. In 1974 I frequently saw Gumatj 3 paintings being produced by Gumatj 1 men. I was told that at the time of the Gove Land Rights case in the late 1960's the Gumatj clans had been told that it would complicate their case if there was more than one Gumatj clan laying claim to different areas of land. Bunungu and Munggurrawuy, the senior men of Gumatj 1 held a meeting with the leaders of Gumatj 2 and 3 and decided to become one group jointly owning their land and madayin. Since that time senior men of all three groups have been able to produce each others' paintings without asking for permission. Prior to this the clans were in any case linked mythologically, sharing many madayin in common, they were a bâpurru in the second sense defined above. This may have made the process of temporary fusion much easier.

Whether or not the explanation I was given is the correct one, the important point to emphasise is the fact that the fusion of clans
in this case involved the decision to exercise joint rights in madyin and acknowledge joint ownership of land. There is evidence that today the situation has reverted to what it was before the Land Rights case, the groups concerned stressing their separate rights to land and madyin. This is consistent with the explanation which I was given: people believe that they have now obtained land rights and the situation has shifted to a different plane in which the groups are effectively asserting their individual claims to land.

One further example of an attempt to create a single clan by the fusion of two previously separate groups will be referred to briefly. Welwi, a Marrakulu-Dhurrurrunga man, and his son were the last two members of their clan. Welwi had been taught the madyin of a second clan, the Djarrawak, by senior members of that clan and was 'holding' it on their behalf. In 1974 the Djarrawak clan was also close to extinction, consisting of one middle-aged man and his young children. The Marrakulu-Dhurrurrunga clan was closely linked by madyin with the other Marrakulu clan at Yirrkala, and belonged to the same clan set. The Djarrawak clan belonged to a different clan set. However Welwi continually stressed the fact that his clan owned a different set of paintings to the other Marrakulu and owned a different area of land. He refused to live at the Marrakulu outstation at Gurka'wuy on Trial Bay and instead was trying to establish an outstation of his own at Balmawuy on the Baykurrtji (Koolatong) River (see Map 1). He intended to establish the settlement jointly with the Djarrawak man. His idea was that the two groups would become a single clan, named Dhurrurrunga-Kuyuwundu, names belonging to his clan and the Djarrawak clan respectively. He taught his own clan's paintings and the Djarrawak paintings to the surviving Djarrawak man, but failed in his
larger ambition through lack of support from other groups. Welwi died in late 1975, and his son has subsequently been incorporated into the other Marrakulu clan (see Chapter 5).

These last two examples illustrate the complex and time-based nature of Yolngu clans. Although the ideology is that clans exist in perpetuity, their members sharing the same wangarr (ancestral) inheritance which they pass on patrilinearly, the reality is somewhat different. A clan is rather a group which acknowledges joint ownership of madayin and adheres to a patrilineal ideology, but which contains within its structure the raw materials of fission and fusion: through internal segmentation, through its mythological links with neighbouring groups and ultimately as we shall see later, through the differential control over the system of knowledge exercised by its members.

The relationship between clans

Marriage

Considerable controversy has existed over the precise genealogical reference point to adopt in describing the Yolngu marriage rule. Warner (1958:56) and Berndt (1976:26) both state that a man marries his MBD. Shapiro (1969:629) and Maddock (1970:85), on the other hand, use the MMB as the reference point and argue that, as is the case with the neighbouring Gidjingali (Hiatt, 1965:38), a man's licit marriage partner is an actual or classificatory MMBDD. I accept the latter view, as it both reflects the way in which rights in women are distributed and accords with Yolngu perception of marriage relationships.
When discussing marriage relationships and the flow of women between groups, Yolngu focus on the passage of women between groups of the same moiety. For example, a Manggalili man stated with reference to wives of clan members: 'We marry Gumatj women', and when asked who Manggalili gave women to, replied: 'We give women to the Dhalwangu'. Manggalili, Dhalwangu and Gumatj are all Yirritja moiety clans. As moieties are exogamous, the replies are in need of some explanation. In each case the person concerned was clearly referring, not to the actual clan affiliation of the respective spouses, but to the process of bestowal. Rights to bestow a woman in marriage are vested in her matrikin. According to Shapiro, a woman is bestowed today primarily by her M and MB which accords with the situation reported by Hiatt for the Gidjingali, and Maddock for the Dalabon. A woman's MF also exercises rights of bestowal, as Maddock (1969a:20) suggests. A wife's mother's group is the same as a man's MMB group and it is to his MMB's patriline that a man looks for the promise of a wife. A man has little say in whom his daughters should marry, but a considerable say in whom his daughters' daughters and sisters' daughters should marry. Figure 8 illustrates the system of bestowal. I have included only WM and WMB in the bestowing set, as generally the WMF will have died before she is of marriageable age. As WMB, however, he may have been active in the bestowal of ego's father's wife in the preceding generation. Ego's group and his MMB group can thus be seen to stand in a wife receiving/wife bestowing relationship.

However, contrary to what Maddock and Shapiro state, the relationship does not operate at the level of clan, but at that of patriline. Indeed different patrilines of the same clan may stand in a MMB-ZDC (wife bestowing-wife) receiving relationship to one another.
Such relationships are only activated in the case of large clans, where they become the nodal points of fission within the clan (see for example the case of the Djapu clan discussed previously). I cannot discuss here, in detail, the nature (and stability over time) of the relationship between a MMB and ZDC group. However, two points must be made. One is that the relationship is seen as the result of an agreement between groups which should be lasting; if the agreement is broken, then this indicates that the alliance between the groups has broken down. The other is that the MMB group can bestow women to members of the ZDC group other than those who are genealogical ZDSs to its members. Thus, it is very much a relationship between groups rather than individuals. The clan into which a man's daughters' daughters marry (his ZDC clan) is usually different from the clan of his wife's mother (his MMB clan). If the same clans have both a MMB and a ZDC relationship to one another, then they do with respect to different patriline. Figure 12 for example, shows Dhañwangu receiving women from one Manggalili patriline and bestowing them to a second.

From the above discussion, it follows that a man's ngandji (M) and waku (Z S ) must also belong to different patriline, as they stand in a relationship of MM and DC to one another. In fact they will nearly always belong to different clans.

The essential features of the Yolngu marriage system are illustrated in figures 8-10. The system consists of a series of independent lines of bestowal, alternatively Dhuwa and Yirritja. The Dhuwa and Yirritja lines are logically independent of one another. The lines of the same moiety may be connected, if the same pattern of alliance is repeated over time. As I have drawn them, the Figures contain this assumption, for example, representing a constant relation
over time between patrilines 1, 3 and 5. However, should patiline 5 become extinct, or the agreement with line 3 be broken, then the women of line 4 will go elsewhere. This will have no effect on the relationship between patrilines 4 and 6, as a man has rights in ZD bestowal irrespective of the clan into which his sister married. We can see from this that the asymmetric nature of the relationship between wife givers and wife receivers (e.g. lines 1 and 2, 2 and 3, etc.) is an epiphenomenon of the relationship between MMB and ZDC clans, wife bestowers and wife receivers. A clan does not have rights to bestow its own women. The nature of exchange depends on the nature of property rights. As all recent writers on the Murngin agree (a) that patrilineal relative have few property rights in women of their own clan; and

(b) that the matrilineal relatives with the strongest rights in women are those of the opposite moiety to a female ego; the most appropriate focus for discussing exchange in North-east Arnhem Land should be intra-moiety rather than inter-moiety exchange.

One possible exception to this must be noted. Members of patrilines of opposite moieties can exchange women in one way, that is by exchanging ZDDs. The existence of ZDD exchange among the Yolngu was first noted by Shapiro (1968:349). It is a structural possibility of the system as long as the two intra-moiety lines, Dhuwa and Yirritja, are co-ordinated. It enables a cycle to be formed, consisting of the passage of women between six patrilines, the minimum number possible according to the system as I have outlined it. ZDD exchange can be illustrated with reference to Figure 9. A man at Y2a could give a woman at Y3c to a man at D3a, and the man at D3a could, in turn, give a woman at D1c to the man at Y2a. This would of
necessity only work if the intra-moiety lines 1, 3 and 5 and 2, 4 and
6 were co-ordinated and if individuals involved in each move agreed.
One of the ways in which such co-ordination of the two moiety lines
may have been effected in the past was through the involvement of the
WMM's patriline in her bestowal, as well as her mother's patriline.
Thus Shapiro (1970:62) records that a WMM's group was sometimes involved
in her bestowal. The WMM's group is the group involved in bestowing
ego's MBW (WM). The consequence of this is that it enables the intra-
moiety lines of ego and ego's MB to be co-ordinated and makes for
greater mutual dependence (see also Maddock, 1972:54).

The asymmetry of the system

The intra-moiety lines at Yirrkala appear, on the surface at
least, to be asymmetric and to set up a fundamentally unequal relation-
ship between wife bestowers and wife receivers. Because the same
patriline cannot be both märi (MMB) and gutharra (ZDC) to a second
group, women must pass through a cycle of at least 6 patrilines before
they can return to the patriline of origin¹ (fig. 11).

At the clan level, women certainly can be returned to the clan
of origin in four moves. Figure 12 represents such a case. Manggalili
1 and Manggalili 2 negotiate separate agreements with the Dhaḻwangu
clan. The return of a woman to Manggalili 2 is not seen as compen-
sation for the women bestowed to the Dhaḻwangu.

Six patriline cycles do indeed occur. Figure 13 illustrates
such a cycle operating over six generations. Thus it is possible for

¹ The cycle may be and usually is longer than this and can be
expressed in terms of arithmetic progression \(4 + 2n\) - where \(n = 1,2,3,4\) etc.
a man's ZDC clan to bestow a woman to his MMB's MMB clan. However, I do not think that the system operates in terms of six line cycles. I have never heard any one refer to such cycles as being formal features of the marriage agreements (except in the case of ZDD exchange, which does capitalise on this structural property of the system), nor have I heard of long term formal agreements between three groups of the same moiety (such as Y1, Y2 + Y3, diagram 3), which the existence of such a system would require. People refer only to agreements made separately with MMB and ZDC patrilines. The cycles are rather a consequence of the fact that a group in making an agreement with a MMB group undertakes not to take women bestowed by their own ZDC (see fig. 9) groups, or to compete with the MMB group for wives. Thus the DDs of a group's ZDC patriline are available to other patrilines including the group's MMB patriline. Seen in this light, the agreement between a wife bestowing and a wife receiving group is an agreement not to compete for women. Although there is no direct exchange involved, clearly it is in the interests of the ZDC's patriline that the MMB's patriline continues to receive women and produce daughters who will become potential mothers-in-law for members of the patriline. One way of ensuring that this does happen is not to compete with the MMB's patriline for women. The corollary of this is that should the MMB's group fail to produce daughters, the advantages gained from not competing with it for women are lost. At this point then it is likely that the agreement between the patrilines will be broken and that the ZDC group may then of necessity be forced to compete with the MMB group for women. The Munyuku clan for example had no female offspring in the generation before the present. This has made it extremely difficult for the present generation of Munyuku to obtain wives. Two of the men stole wives and fled with them to live at Roper and
Rose Rivers. One made an irregular but sanctioned marriage and the other remains unmarried. Members of other Yirritja clans cite the fact that the Munyuku clan itself has no daughters' daughters to bestow as the reason for not bestowing daughters' daughters to them.

Clan relations

Two main kinds of relationship operate at the level of clan, which directly reflect kinship relations between individuals and marriage agreements between patrines. These relationships are: (1) the relationship between a set of wakus (ZC) and their ngándi (M) clan, and (2) the relationship between māri (MMB) and gutharra (ZDC) clans. Figure 14 shows the ego centred kin relationships on which the sociocentric relationships are based. I will discuss ZC-M and ZDC-MMB clan relations before considering further relationships between clans which employ the idiom of kinship.

Ngándi: waku clan relations

Different M clan affiliations are dispersed throughout the membership of a clan. An individual's actual M clan may be different from his paternal half-brother's, from his father's and from his son's. It is likely that members of the same patriline will have as M clans which belong to the same M clan set, although this is not always the case. Clan members belonging to different patrines will probably have M clans belonging to different sets. People will only refer to a clan as ngándi if it is their actual mother's clan or, by extension, one belonging to the same M clan set. This is an important factor as

1 A ngándi clan set refers to sets of clans related in a particular way through myth and ceremony to your own mother's clan.
it means that members of the clan do not act as a whole in relation to
clans they individually classify as M. The M-ZC relationship is not
strictly speaking a relationship between clans, despite Shapiro's

People sharing the same M clan rights form a group which cross-
cuts the clan organisation of their own moiety. In the context of
ceremonial performance all people whose mothers belonged to clans
owning the ceremony are termed djunggayarr. 'All the wakus (ZS) go
back to their mother's ground for ceremonies, they are djunggayarr
and come close to their mother's people' (Djewiny). Djunggayarr are
ranked indirectly in an analogous way to ranking within a clan. The
senior djunggayarr is ideally the eldest living son of the eldest
woman of the eldest generation represented in the ceremony. Bokarra,
a Manggalili man, is recognised as senior djunggayarr for the
Marrakulu clan.

'Bokarra's mother is the eldest sister of the Marrakulu - she
is boss over all our mothers as they were young sisters to her'.

Bokarra is Manggalili, the second senior man is Dhalwangu clan,
the third Madarrpa. All the ZS of women belonging to a particular
clan form the ZC set of that clan, and (as we shall see in later
Chapters) have important ritual obligations in relation to that clan's
affairs. Clans into which daughters of the clan marry are hereafter
referred to as ZC clans. However, it is only actual ZS who have
ritual obligations to their mothers' clans.
Märi-gutharra clan relations

The situation with märi (MMB)-gutharra (ZDC) clan relations differs in one important respect from M-ZC relations: in particular contexts members of a clan call certain other clans of the same moiety 'märi' (MMB), irrespective of whether or not their genealogical MMB belongs to the clan concerned. The situation is complicated by the fact that some members of a clan may be genealogically MMB to members of a classificatory MMB clan. It is probably this fact that caused Shapiro (1969) to assert that at the level of clan märi is a self-reciprocal term (i.e. if you call a clan märi, members of that clan call your clan märi too).

A MMB-ZDC clan relationship does depend partly on focus. However, at a sociocentric level a clan will be classified as either MMB or ZDC to a second clan, never both.

For example in the case of the Manggalili clan, members of one patriline, Manggalili 1, are genealogically MMB to Dhalwangu. Members of the other patriline, Manggalili 2, are genealogically ZDC. In the context of ceremonies requiring Manggalili to act as MMB for the Dhalwangu, then the clan as a whole acts in the capacity of MMB. The explanation for this is not hard to find. The role of MMB necessitates the use of a clan's madayin - its paintings, and sometimes its rangga - items which are the corporate property of a clan's members and not of the patriline. Their use requires the agreement and co-operation of clan members as a whole. This applies equally from the perspective of the ZDC line, as the rights it has in the MMB clan's madayin indirectly entail residual claims to its land which operate at the level of clan, not patriline.
From this evidence it would seem that whether or not Manggalili are MMB to Dhalwangu would be a matter of focus, and that the question 'what do Manggalili call Dhalwangu?' would be ambiguous. However, the universal response to such a question is that Manggalili are MMB to Dhalwangu, unless individual members of Manggalili 2 are specified. This represents the socio-centric level of relationship between clans. The term 'socio-centric relationship' is also employed by Shapiro (1969). He, however, states that as far as MMB is concerned, the term is self-reciprocal at this level; that is, both Manggalili and Dhalwangu should call each other MMB (Shapiro, 1969:630). I must emphasise that this is not the case at Yirrkala. Manggalili is MMB clan to Dhalwangu, and Dhalwangu are a ZDC clan to Manggalili. Only if Bokarra, the man in Manggalili 2 whose actual MMB is Dhalwangu, is specifically referred to, will Manggalili be referred to as ZDC, and in this case it refers only to his patriline.

The socio-centric term reflects the predominant balance of relationships between Manggalili and Dhalwangu as clans: Bokarra and his two young sons are the only Manggalili to stand in a ZDC relationship with Dhalwangu, and all other members of the clan are MMB to Dhalwangu. The MMB-ZDC relationship is interesting, because it shows clearly the sense in which a clan is simultaneously a corporate group and a polythetic set consisting of a nexus of individual ties.

Other clan relations

One further clan relationship exists which reflects actual genealogical relationships between people: the relationship between a set of ZDDC and their MMB clan. A MMB clan is termed waku, but it is usually a different clan to the ZS's clan also termed waku.
The MMMB always belongs to a different patriline to the ZS for reasons presented in the last section. This relationship does not entail any major ritual objects and indeed is seldom referred to. Its significance lies partly in the right of access to a MMMB's clan's territory and partly in terms of rights to women. The MMMB patriline in the case of six patriline cycles is the line of the opposite moiety involved in the passage of women from ego's ZDC patriline to his MMMB patriline.

A more frequently mentioned relationship is that between yapa (Z) clans. Clans not standing in a MMMB-ZDC relationship but which are linked by sharing the same madayin are sometimes referred to as being Z to each other. The term wawa (B) is sometimes employed with the same sense. Basically it refers to clans in the same ritual set with reference to a particular madayin. The term 'yapa clan', however, is more frequently employed.
SECTION I: The Social Context of Art
CHAPTER 3

RIGHTS IN PAINTINGS

The context for discussing rights held by people in paintings has been provided by the discussion of the relationship between clans in the preceding chapter. Rights in paintings are patterned along the same lines as the relationship between clans. Both depend on a set of factors some of which are ego-centered, others socio-centred, and still others related to mythology. By rights in paintings I mean: the right of an individual in certain contexts to produce a particular painting, and/or to divulge the meanings of the painting and/or to control its use.

Rights in paintings must be distinguished from the problem of the ownership of paintings. As I stated in the previous chapter, paintings almost without exception are owned by individual clans, although clans on the same mythological track may own paintings which are formally very similar (see for example plates 1 and 2). In such cases the paintings belonging to two or more clans may be said in certain contexts to be 'the same'. It may even be said that a formally similar painting belonging to another clan is 'our painting'. In other contexts the different ownership of the respective paintings will be unambiguously acknowledged, and the paintings will be located firmly as the property of a particular clan. Clan ownership will be discussed in more detail in the context of clan designs in Chapter 7.

It is necessary to distinguish between the possession of rights in paintings and the exercising of those rights. A person may assert
his right to discuss a particular painting or exercise control over its production without ever having produced the painting himself.

Case 1.

Daymbalipu, a Djapu (Dhuwa moiety) man, at one stage asked me to obtain permission from him before commissioning any more Bottom Gumatj (Yirritja moiety) paintings. As a senior member of a waku (ZS) clan he had a strong say in the production of Bottom Gumatj paintings, although he was acknowledged never to have painted one. Thus Daymbalipu may have held the right to produce Bottom Gumatj paintings, but he never exercised it, whereas he both possessed and exercised the right to control their commercial production.

Young people frequently have the right to produce paintings which they are not allowed to discuss. This is irrespective of any knowledge that they have of the meaning of the painting. A younger man will always defer to an older one when discussing a painting if the older man has equal rights in the painting. When I bought paintings from young men (that is, men in their mid-thirties and below) they would usually refer me to a senior member of the owning clan for its interpretation. The extent to which an individual will exercise the right to interpret a particular painting will depend upon his status within the owning clan, or in relation to it, and on who else is present at the time of the interpretation.

Case 2.

At Gängan I purchased a painting from Yanggarriny, a senior Dhalwangu 1 (Yirritja) man in his forties. On many previous occasions I had discussed paintings with him. However, on this occasion many senior Dhalwangu 1 men were present, and Yanggarriny insisted that he could not interpret the painting for me, and that Birrikitji, the oldest Dhalwangu man, would have to tell me about it.

The exercising of rights in paintings is part of the more general issue of the exercising of rights over anything connected with the clan's madayin. In such cases there is a general rule that nothing can be
done without the assent of the eldest non-senile individuals who have rights in the madayin concerned.

It is also necessary to emphasise the distinction between rights in paintings and knowledge of paintings, although the two are closely connected. Rights in paintings include rights to knowledge of paintings and their meanings. Such knowledge, once gained, can be converted into rights at other levels, for example rights to divulge the meanings of paintings to others. However, knowledge of the meaning of paintings does not of itself imply the right to disseminate that information to others.

Knowledge of paintings may be gained in a number of ways: through being taught paintings by a senior clan member, through individual exchange of paintings and by seeing the production of paintings in ceremonial contexts. Access to a ceremony implies the right to gain certain knowledge of the currency of meaning associated with it. The more times an individual participates in a ceremony, the more knowledge he acquires about it. A recognised way of gaining knowledge about a ceremony is to travel widely and see related ceremonial performances organised by distant groups. Such journeys are built into the structure of male initiation (Warner, 1958:262).

Ceremonies generally have more and less restricted phases. For example, as will be seen in the next section, most ceremonies have stages that are performed publicly in the main camp, and stages of more restricted access. The final revelation of the most sacred objects of a clan and discussion of their significance is said to involve only the most senior owners of a madayin and selected middle-aged men who are being introduced to this, the ultimate in closed
ceremonial contexts, for the first time. Sometimes the objects of
a number of clans of the same moiety may be revealed at the same time.
An area where the elders of a group of clans display and jointly bury
sacred objects belonging to their respective clans is termed a
ringgitj area. Knowledge obtained in the context of a ringgitj ground
is considered the most definitive, as the ringgitj is the context of
agreement between members of different clans sharing the same, and
even on some occasions different madayin (Peterson, 1972:229).

When interpreting paintings for me, men would often refer to
these various contexts in which their knowledge was acquired:

'What I tell you I learnt standing in the ringgitj ground.'

'Old Mundukul (his MMB) told me everything when they held the
ceremony.'

'The old people they wanted me for the ceremony. Old Wonggu,
old Mundukul, Watjung, Yäma, dead fellow my uncle and Wandjuk's father,
they called me from Blue Mud Bay where I was living right up to here
[Yirrkala].'

People construct in this way the genealogical credentials of
their knowledge, proving its authenticity. This is clearly consistent
with the Yolngu ideology that paintings and the madayin are basically
unchanged over time from their ancestral form. Access to knowledge
can therefore be seen as access to the conservation and perpetuation
of knowledge. As Djewiny graphically put it:

'We are just rushing up to Länytjung and Barrama, and
trying to catch up with what they have been doing before,
because they remind us to look to our history. That's
why we have sacred paintings and dilly bags and sacred
objects, so that we can learn back from our history.'
Although people gain knowledge of this history in a number of ways, they do not acquire the right to use this knowledge without the permission of the owning group. Thomson (1939a:2) and Warner (1958:160) give many examples of the consequences of infringing the rights of owning groups, by using their paintings without permission or by divulging information about the clan's madayin (see also Elkin, Berndt and Berndt 1950:62). Such infringements frequently led to conflict between clans and to the death of the guilty person or another member of his clan. However, should the owning group become extinct, or should senior members of the group die out without passing on their knowledge to younger members of the clan, then the status of non-clan members who hold this knowledge changes. It becomes their responsibility to pass on their knowledge of the clan's paintings to the younger members of the owning clan when they are of the right age. In order to do this a man must produce the paintings. It will be seen later that one of the motives for releasing knowledge to non-clan members is precisely this: to ensure that if senior members of the clan should die, then knowledge of the clan's madayin will not die with them, but will ultimately remain with the clan's members. Even if the clan becomes extinct, the madayin will still be conserved and taken over by other groups.

Rights in the paintings of other clans are usually acquired with respect to clans standing in a relationship of ngândi (M) or märi (MMB) to a man's own clan. A man may also obtain rights in the paintings of certain clans of his own moiety which are related to his clan mythologically, but which do not stand in a relationship of MMB to it (see also Elkin, Berndt, and Berndt, 1950:61).
Rights in own clan's paintings

An individual first obtains rights to produce his own clan's paintings. He generally learns by watching his father paint, and subsequently assists his father in infilling sections of half finished paintings. The ideology is that young boys are taught painting only after they have been circumcised, an event which takes place between the ages of nine and thirteen. The teaching of paintings is seen as part of the ongoing process of initiation, and takes place in conjunction with the learning of songs and of some of the meanings of paintings. Old men stress that willingness to learn the songs and some success in learning them is a precondition of teaching young men paintings. Songs are considered to be the most public medium for expressing the madayin, and should be the first thing learnt. Consistent with this is the fact that the first paintings that a young man is encouraged to produce are 'outside', or public, ones. Observation suggests that this norm is consistently adhered to. Thus Narritjin's son Mowandi was producing only outside paintings in 1976. At this time he was 13, and it was three years after his circumcision. In 1974, Lumaluma 2, then in his early twenties, produced his first 'inside' clan painting. Prior to that he had become an accomplished bark painter, but had produced only outside paintings of his own invention depicting clan mokuy (ancestral spirits). At the same time that they begin to produce outside paintings by themselves young men

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1 'Inside' and 'outside' are terms used in English by the Yolngu. they refer to a continuum of more restricted to less restricted knowledge. 'Inside' and 'outside' can be translated by the Yolngu words madayin and garma, although the latter have additional connotations. Unless otherwise specified, I use 'outside' to refer to knowledge and objects which are public and open to all, and 'inside' to refer to restricted objects and knowledge.
start assisting their fathers in the production of sacred paintings, but do not, as yet, paint them on their own.

Young men are generally taught a painting before they are given any deep explanation of its meaning. In the case of an inside painting they are first taught an outside story associated with it. Once a young man has produced his first sacred painting, he fairly rapidly acquires the right to produce a number of other paintings belonging to his clan. Thus Lumaluma learnt three further paintings in the weeks following the occasion on which he produced his first sacred painting. However, paintings that represent the designs on rangga (sacred objects) or which are closely associated with the most restricted sacred objects remain restricted to the senior members of a clan. Although Narritjin allows his eldest son to assist him in painting representations of rangga (see for example plate 65), and consequently is prepared to teach him details of the form of the painting, he will not allow him to set the design and produce the entire painting by himself.

One of the main contexts in which men learn their clan's most restricted paintings is shortly before or soon after their father's death. Thus I was told that Mawalan, a senior Rirratjingu man, taught paintings to each of his children in the months before he died. Although ideally a man should be taught his clan's paintings by his father, frequently a man dies before he has been able to pass on his knowledge to all his children. Before his death in 1973, Bununggu told his eldest son Liyawulumi to begin teaching Lumaluma 2, the eldest son of his second wife, paintings that he had previously taught to Liyawulumi. Liyawulumi began to teach Lumaluma the paintings in 1975.

1 This case is unusual in that Mawalan taught a painting to both of his daughters as well as to his sons Wandjuk and Dhurryurrayngu. This aspect of the case will be discussed in a later section.
If a man dies when all his children are too young to be taught the paintings, the responsibility must be passed on to someone else. In explaining the reason why they taught the children of a dead man the paintings belonging to the dead man's clan, people often alluded to death-bed conversations in which the dying man entrusted them with the responsibility of teaching his children the clan's madayin at the appropriate time. Indeed one of the signs of a natural death as opposed to death at the hands of a sorcerer is that the dying man has had sufficient time to explain his wishes to the living. Welwi, for example, was taught the set of paintings belonging to the Djarrawak clan in the 1940's, shortly before the last senior man died. Yangalka, the son of that man, was a child of about ten at the time. In the year and a half before his own death in 1976, Welwi lived for most of the time at Gāngan with Yangalka and taught him for the first time many of the paintings that he had learnt from Yangalka's father.

Rights in a clan's paintings are distributed among its male members on three bases: generation, primogeniture, and sub-group affiliation. In the previous chapter it was indicated that the ideology of the clan is that all members of equivalent status have equal rights in the clan's paintings, but that in reality members of different subgroups tend to produce different sets of paintings.

Members of the most senior generation exercise maximum rights, and members of junior generations exercise correspondingly fewer. Rights to paintings pass from father to son, and while the father remains alive he is ultimately responsible for the paintings. Ideally, a man should ask his father's permission to do paintings that he has been taught, and in the context of commercial production he should
give his father money obtained from selling a painting for his father to redistribute. In practice, a son will only tell his father what painting he intends to do if he is present, and will rarely give his father the money obtained from selling a painting. This can cause considerable conflict between father and son. Mändjilnga, for example, refused to give Narritjin any of the money earned from paintings he produced. He moved away from Narritjin's house, and set up camp with his wives elsewhere. Narritjin's response was to cease all communication with his son, with the threat of not teaching him any further paintings. This threat of withholding knowledge of the clan's madayin is the main one employed by a father against his children. Mäw', for example, refused to teach his two eldest sons the clan's paintings unless they stopped drinking: 'if I tell them about the paintings, then they will tell everyone in the pub, and soon people in Darwin and Alice Springs will hear.'

The eldest son should be taught first, and the eldest son of an eldest son is acknowledged to have priority over other members of his generation with regard to rights in paintings. The principles of primogeniture and generation may occasionally be in conflict. An eldest son usually has more authority over a clan's paintings than members of the senior generation who are younger than him. When the only members of his father's generation who are still living are younger than he is, then conflict may develop between the eldest son and his father's younger brothers.
Rights in Ngändi clan paintings

The second set of paintings in which an individual may acquire rights are paintings belonging to his mother's clan (ngändi). Rights in M clan paintings must be understood in two senses:

a) rights and obligations with respect to an individual's actual mother's clan,

b) rights and obligations towards sets of clans related in a particular way through myth and ceremony to an individual's own mother's clan.

The first sense may be termed rights in the M clan, the second may be termed rights in the M clan set. In both these cases the rights involved can include the right to produce M paintings for sale, and the right to be consulted by M clan members before they can use the paintings in ceremonial contexts. Among the obligations entailed are the responsibility of acting as 'workers' for the M clan in the production of ritual paintings, and of participating in the organisation of the M clan's ceremonies.

As was demonstrated in the last chapter; different M clan affiliations are dispersed throughout the membership of a clan. An individual's actual M clan may be different from his paternal half-brother's, from his father's and from his son's. It is likely, although not certain, that members of the same patriline will have M clans which belong to the same ritual set, that is they will belong to the same M clan set. Narritjin, for example, has Djambarrpuynu as his M clan. This Djambarrpuynu clan is nearly extinct and has no female members. Narritjin's wife is Djabu. Therefore his sons' M
clan is Djapu. Two of his sons have married Djapu women, and one is married wrongly to a Gälpu woman. At this stage then, Narritjin's sons' sons have either Djapu or Gälpu as their M clan. According to Narritjin, Djapu and Djaambarrpuyangu belong to the same set, and hence he has rights and obligations to both. He claims no such rights in Gälpu paintings. Narritjin's 'clan' brother Bokarra's mother is Marrakulu, which is associated with a different set of clans from either Djapu or Djaambarrpuyangu.

Marriage out of the M clan does not affect an individual's status in relation to that clan in any way at all. Narritjin's case exemplifies this, as does that of Mutitjupuy, who is senior waku (ZS) to the Mađarrpa clan although his own wives are Gumatj.

M clan set rights and obligations operate mainly in the context of ceremonial performance. When producing commercial bark paintings, men usually only use designs belonging to their actual mother's clan. Narritjin only produces Djaambarrpuyangu M paintings, and never produces paintings belonging to Djapu, his wife's clan.

People sharing the same M clan form a group that cross-cuts the clan organisation of their own moiety. In the context of ceremonial performances, all the people whose mothers belong to the clans which own the ceremony are termed djunggayarr. As Djewiny stated: 'All the wakus (ZS) go back to their mothers' ground for ceremonies, they are the djunggayarr and come close to their mothers' people.'

Djunggayarr are ranked in a way analogous to ranking within a clan. The senior djunggayarr is ideally the eldest living son of the
eldest woman of the most senior generation represented in the ceremony. Thus Bokarra is recognised as the senior djunggayarr for the Marrakulu. "Bokarra's mother is the eldest sister of the Marrakulu. She is boss over all our mothers, as they were younger sister to her" (Djewiny). Bokarra is of the Manggalili clan, the second senior man, Yanggarriny, is Dhalwangu, and the third, Watjinbuy, is Madarrpa. The Marrangu clan belongs to the same M clan set as the Marrakulu. There are no longer any Marrangu men living at Yirrkala, and the responsibility for Marrangu ceremonies held there have been taken on by the Marrakulu. Dula, a Munyuku man whose M clan is Marrangu takes second place to Bokarra, ahead of Yanggarriny, with respect to Marrangu-Marrakulu ceremonies.

Two or more men may work together in producing a M clan painting. Berndt (1950:68, p.l. 12b) illustrates a painting by Mäw', a Djapu man, and Wandjuk, a Rirratjingu man. The painting belongs to the Warramirri clan. Wandjuk has the right to do the painting because Warramirri is his actual mother's clan. Mäw' holds the rights to the painting because Munyuku, his M clan, and Warramirri form a ritual set, being connected by the same madayin.

Young men begin to learn their mother's paintings after they have begun learning paintings belonging to their own clan. They may be requested to learn the paintings by their ngapipi (MB), and must obtain permission from him and other senior members of their M clan before beginning to produce the designs. If a man has the same M clan as his father, then his father may with permission teach his son his mother's paintings. Wandjuk's eldest son, for example, also has Warramirri as M. Wandjuk was requested by his wife's brother to begin
teaching his eldest son Warramirri clan paintings. More often a man is taught by his own MB, or by a classificatory MB belonging to his M clan. Although the son of the 'eldest mother' should be taught first, for various reasons this may not happen. For example, a clan may have no ZS, or the people in the appropriate structural position may be considered unsatisfactory. One case will illustrate both these points.

Case 3.

Māw' is the son of the senior Munyuku woman of her generation. The next generation of Munyuku had only sons. In this case, Māw's eldest sons by his senior wife should have been taught Munyuku paintings in addition to their own mother's paintings (Gupapuyngu). However, Māw's eldest sons were considered irresponsible. Dula, a senior Munyuku man, explained: "Māw's sons are always drinking, they don't learn very much, so maybe Daymbalipu will have to take over responsibility for the Munyuku side too." Daymbalipu is the eldest ZS for Gumatj, his actual mother's clan, and has a considerable role in their ritual affairs. Gumatj and Munyuku share many of the same madayin, and belong to the same ritual set.

This example illustrates two principles. The first is that when a clan has no ZS to carry on the role of djunggayarr for their ceremonies they can select an individual who obtains his rights in that clan through his father. The second is that if a particular individual proves unsatisfactory, then his structural position is overridden and the rights and obligations that he should have inherited are taken over by another man. In this case they will be taken on by a man who is senior ZS to a different clan which, however, belongs to the same ritual set.

An individual may thus obtain rights to the paintings of a number of different M clans if he is considered to be both responsible and able to learn. Māw' is the main painter for both Munyuku and
Warramirri at Yirrkala, while his sons may fail to play a significant role in any M clan's affairs. Daymbalipu, on the other hand, may obtain a significant role in both Munyuku and Gumatj affairs.

People can obtain permission to make their mother's clan paintings for sale. However this right in practice only seems to be exercised by the senior ZS's of a clan. Thus Māw' does Munyuku and Warramirri paintings, Mutitjupuy does Mādarrpa ones, Bokarra does Marrakulu ones and Narritjin, Djambarrpuynu ones. In each case the artist is the son of the 'oldest sister'. Other people in the correct relationship do not produce the paintings for sale, although they may produce them on their mother's clan's behalf in ritual contexts. Banđaka, Māw's younger brother, told me that he is only allowed to do one Munyuku painting for sale, whereas Māw' produces a number of Munyuku paintings.

If requested, people should give some of the money made from selling a M clan painting to senior members of that clan. Generally, people do not ask, and the artist keeps the money himself. On occasions when his MB Dhima was present, Māw' asked me to hand money for a painting to him, which Dhima then handed to Māw'. On the other hand, Māw' was on several occasions asked by members of his mother's clan to produce paintings for sale on their behalf. He did this, and was not paid.

The analysis of the system of bestowal presented in the last chapter and its consequence as to the relationship between individuals and their mother's clan enables us to explain both the way in which rights in M clan paintings are distributed, and why they take the form they do. A man has no rights in the women of his M clan except the rights he obtains through the marriage of a M.M.B.D. into that
clan. He would have rights to the daughters of that M.M.B.D., irrespective of the clan into which she (the M.M.B.D.) married. There is no agreement between his clan and his mother's clan, or any section of those clans as to the passage of women from one to the other. It is clearly consistent with this that M clan rights are vested in a group of ZS which cross-cuts patrilineal clan organisation; its members are those individuals whose actual mothers came from the clans concerned.

M clan rights primarily consist of the right, or perhaps better obligation to act as 'workers' for the M clan in the context of certain ceremonies, and as custodians or managers of the M clan's madayin. I suggest the following explanation for these two roles:

1) ZS are obligated to work for their mother's clan to compensate their mother's clan for producing their father's wives. This is a continuation of their father's obligation, manifested in bride service, and the continuous payment of gifts to his MB and WB throughout his life (cf. Warner, 1958:42).

2) As ZS they are children of clan members, yet they belong to a clan of the opposite moiety. As a group they are not affiliated to any other single clan. They are thus in the ideal structural position to be caretakers of the clan's paintings, and to arbitrate in any internal disputes within the M clan, as they are neither competitors for land, nor for women.¹

¹ Maddock (1969a:20) comes to a similar conclusion regarding Dalabon, though he implies that the M-ZS relationship operates at the level of clans, rather than between a mother's clan and a set of ZS's which cross-cuts clan affiliation.
Rights in māri clan paintings.

The crucial difference between an individual's relationship with clans which he terms māri (MMB) and those which he terms ngāndi (M) was discussed in detail in the last chapter. The relevant issue in this context is that whereas the māri-gutharra (MMB-ZDC) clan relationship is a relationship between clans, the M-ZS clan relationship is between individual members of different clans and their mother's clan. Ego's clan's members act as a group in relation to the MMB clan and vice-versa, whereas ZS from different clans form a group in relation to the M clan that they share.

Rights in own clan and M clan paintings involve centrally the right to produce the paintings. The case with MMB clan paintings is different. A man is usually the recipient of his MMB clan painting rather than its producer: he has it painted on his behalf by a member of his MMB clan rather than painting it himself. Conversely, a man is often called upon in his capacity as MMB to paint one of his own designs for a member of his ZDC clan. MMB and own clan designs are used in similar contexts: a man may have either design painted on his body at circumcision and either or both painted on his body or coffin after death.

MMB clan paintings are rarely produced for sale. The right most frequently exercised with respect to them is the right to discuss them and interpret them. Thus although men rarely do their MMB clan paintings, they are taught their significance and have the knowledge to make them should this be required. There are certain circumstances in which it is legitimate for an individual to produce his MMB clan
paintings, for example on an occasion when the MMB clan painting is required and there are no members of the MMB clan present. This happened at a burial ceremony at Gurrumuru in 1976. In this case, the coffin of a boy was painted with his MMB clan design, Wan.guri, by members of his own clan, Gurrumuru Dhaļwangu.

People may also use their MMB clan's paintings if the clan is extinct or has no living male members, or if it consists only of young men or men who have not learnt their clan's paintings. Thus Djapu 1 produce the paintings of their MMB clan Djapu 2 both in ceremonial contexts and commercially. Djapu 2 have no living senior initiated men. The oldest members of Djapu 2, now in their mid-twenties, are beginning to learn their clan's paintings.

Two clans, Maŋatja and Lamamirri, became extinct in the Yirrkala area at about the time of European contact. The paintings of these clans are now held by groups which stood in a ZDC relation to them. The Lamamirri paintings are held by members of the Gumatj clan, but I have never seen them used in any context. Maŋatja paintings are used by members of both Dhaļwangu clans. Dhaļwangu 1 live at Gàŋgan, a place which used to belong to the Maŋatja clan, and the paintings concerned refer to the mythology of that country. The paintings are generally referred to as Dhaļwangu, as is Gàŋgan itself. I was told, however, that the country and some of the designs once belonged to Maŋatja. A second group, Munyuku, also produce designs which once belonged to Maŋatja. The diamond pattern in Dula's painting (pl. 39) is said by Dula to signify honey bee in Maŋatja country, although he stated that Maŋatja were an extinct Munyuku sub-group. He also told me that the diamond pattern showed the connection between Munyuku and their MMB clan Dhaļwangu. A similar design illustrated in Berndt
(1948:318) is attributed to the Mañatja clan and signifies honey bee.

The above examples are consistent in some respects with the Yolngu ideology that a clan should take over responsibility for the madayin and land of MMB groups that become extinct. They also fit Warner's description of the process of succession:

'the writer recorded statements from some younger men that certain territories belonged to people now living upon it, while a few old men said this land really belonged to an older group that had died out. Once these old men are dead, it is likely that all memory of ownership by the former clan will be gone' (1959:28).

'In the passage of time the group using it would absorb it into their own territory, and the myth would unconsciously change to express this' (ibid:29).

In conclusion, it can be seen that in many respects rights in MMB clan paintings are similar to the rights that a person holds in his own clan's paintings. Not only are the paintings used in similar contexts, but both are associated with land ownership. Paintings are seen explicitly as charters for land, and rights in MMB clan paintings imply residual rights of ownership over that group's land. Such rights would only come into operation if and when the MMB clan becomes extinct. Even when this happens there is no immediate transfer of ownership.

There is, however, a recognised right and obligation to take over responsibility for the clan's paintings and madayin, and to look after their land. With the passage of time it is easy to see how such rights could be converted into rights of ownership, as has happened in the case of the Mañatja.

These connotations of rights in land go a long way to explain why MMB clan paintings are so rarely produced for sale except in cases where the MMB clan is weak or extinct. The production of such paintings could imply competition for land ownership. Such is not
the case with M clan paintings, since land cannot change moiety. A man has right of access to his mother's land, but neither he nor his clan can ever own it.

We can at this stage ask the question why an individual receives rights in the paintings of his MMB clan, and in particular why MMB and ZDC rights in paintings are not reciprocal. The main explanation provided by Yolngu is so that someone will look after the paintings and the land should the MMB clan become extinct or should the senior members of the clan die out before passing their knowledge on to younger clan members. The extinction of knowledge is seen as a real possibility by the Yolngu as the following case illustrates:

Case 4.

The Gurrumuru Dhalwangu (Dhalwangu 2) are a large clan. They operate the most successful of the Yirrkala outstations, and never lived permanently at a mission station. Nepaynga, the clan leader, is a man in his sixties, and the clan includes a number of men in their late middle age. The Gurrumuru Dhalwangu are said to have 'lost their paintings'. The paintings that they produce are those of the Bottom Dhalwangu (Dhalwangu 1). This has caused considerable tension between the groups. One explanation for the death of a Gurrumuru Dhalwangu boy in 1976 was that he had been killed by Dhalwangu 1 because his clan was always doing their paintings. I was told that they lost their paintings because the old men of the clan had died before passing them on, and that there were no wakus who knew them either. In this case, the system for maintaining knowledge had broken down.

Members of a ZDC have strong emotional ties to their MMB's clan and may be thought to 'look after' the ceremonies and paintings of the land properly. The members of a ZDC patriline members represent the closest genealogical descendants of ego's clan who are of the same moiety. In some respects a ZDC can be seen as spiritually belonging to his MMB clan. A person's conception spirit may come from his MMB clan's territory and on his death part of his spirit may be reincorporated in the sacred objects and paintings of his MMB clan. A
person's spirit can certainly be guided by the actions of members of the MMB clan and by the spiritual forces imminent in their paintings (see Chapter 5). The spiritual link of people to their MMB clan territory and the interest that they have in the clan's paintings widens the power base of people with emotional attachment to the MMB clan's madayin. The ideology of descent thus is an important factor in determining the release of paintings by a MMB clan to a ZDC clan and the use of those paintings on behalf of that clan by the MMB clan. It would be both ideologically inconsistent and structurally inappropriate for a clan to give rights in paintings to a MMB clan, that is, for the system of the distribution of rights to be reversed. Rights in paintings entail rights in land. Should the MMB clan cease to bestow women to ego's clan, it would still maintain rights in ego's clan's paintings, although ego's clan has lost access to its DD's. Assuming that rights in a clan's paintings have to be distributed more widely than through its own members, then it is logical that these rights should go to a ZDC's clan, a clan that depends on ego's clan for women, and with respect to which ego's clan can exercise some control through the threat of withholding women.

Clearly part of the function of maintaining knowledge can be and is achieved by releasing paintings to members of the ZS set. The ZS however, being of the opposite moiety cannot perform the ceremonies necessary to maintain the M clan's land nor can they take over the land if the clan becomes extinct.

The release of paintings to a ZDC clan is in some respects a double edged sword, because of the residual rights in paintings it entails. However, for these rights to become effective, the MMB clan
must itself be weak or on the point of extinction. In this context it may be suggested that a clan prefers to be succeeded in their estate by the closest living blood relatives of their own moiety, should direct patrilineal succession be impossible. ZDC succession can be seen as enabling a clan to continue in its relationship with the land beyond its own extinction.

The case of the Lamamirri clan, referred to earlier, is again relevant here. I stated earlier that Lamamirri paintings had been taken over by the Gumatj clan, their ZDC clan. Munggurrawuy, a senior Gumatj man, explained the take-over as follows in his evidence to Justice Blackburn in the Gove Land Rights case:

'Before, or after he died the Lamamirri, boss of that country Bululunga; when he died, first he said to Munggurrawuy, this I will - now die: I'll leave this place without any people because we have all died. This country, hold it, look after it after me, when I die. The ceremonies, the songs and the people'. (397) (cited in Peterson, Keen & Samson, 1977).

Other rights in paintings

The three categories of paintings discussed above together represent the major set of paintings to which an individual can acquire rights, but there are also other ways in which rights can be acquired. Individuals can obtain the right to produce paintings of clans which share the same madayin. These clans are termed yapa (Z) clans. Such rights are only exercised by the most senior men of a clan, and apply only to paintings of the other clan which represent the same madayin. In other words, such rights apply exclusively to paintings connected with the madayin held in common, and do not apply to any other paintings owned by the respective clans.
Māw' (A Dhuwa man), for example, sometimes does paintings belonging to the Djambarrpuyngu clans living at Galiwin'ku and Milingimbi which are connected with the journey of māna the shark. In wangarr (ancestral) times māna travelled across North-east Arnhem Land from Buckingham Bay to Blue Mud Bay, connecting the Djapu and Djambarrpuyngu clans, which today share this same madayin.

Narritjin (a Yirritjaman) occasionally does Wan.guri paintings connected with the gadawark (mangrove tree) madayin, which is shared with Manggalili and a number of other Yirritja clans. It is probably significant that Djambarrpuyngu and Wan.guri are only represented at Yirrkala by a few individuals, the majority of clan members living at other settlements.

The rights considered so far all concern the use of and knowledge of the form and meaning of designs owned by another group. They do not concern the transfer or extension of ownership over the design.\textsuperscript{1} There are certain circumstances in which ownership of a design can be extended to members of other groups. One example of this is Welwi's painting (pl. 3) of waterholes at Balmawuy on the north of Blue Mud Bay. The painting originally belonged to a Djambarrpuyngu group, and represents for them the waterhole of Marrapay in Buckingham Bay. The painting is still owned by the Djambarrpuyngu clan, but is today also owned by the Marrakulu-Dhurrurrurunga clan. Extension of ownership of the design does not in this case signify any change in ownership of the respective waterholes, since the design in each case is associated with different places.

\textsuperscript{1} In the case of MMB clan paintings, ownership of designs is never explicitly transferred. Rather, rights in the paintings are converted over time into ownership after the MMB clan has become extinct.
Welwi obtained the right to use the design from Gunung, a senior Djambarrpuynu man. According to Welwi, the gift of the design signified the close mythological relationship between the two places. Both Marrapay and Balmawuy are associated with witi the 'quiet' snake and the Djang'kawu sisters. The Djang'kawu first visited Balmawuy and created a number of waterholes there, then later on in their journey went to Marrapay. Welwi stated: 'Djambarrpuynu gave that law for me, they are giving it back to Balma. They gave me that design, and I am painting it for my place.' He also confirmed that he could pass the painting on to his own children.

Elkin (1961:10 ff.) provides an interesting account of a Maraiian (madayin) ceremony held at Mainoru in 1949, during which four members of the Rirratjingu clan of Yirrkala obtained rights in the madayin of the Djauan (Djuwany) people. The senior Djuwany man painted designs associated with the mosquito madayin on the Rirratjingu men after they had had the rangga revealed to them. The Djuwany man explained that in the past the Rirratjingu and Djuwany had shared the same madayin, and that he was showing them the rangga so that they would be able to look after it when he was dead, and maintain the ceremonial performances linked with it. The case is analogous to that recorded above concerning Welwi, with the difference that the Djuwany people are not Yolngu speakers. Their country is several hundred miles away from the Rirratjingu's, and it is doubtful whether members of the two groups had ever met prior to this occasion. Discussion between the Rirratjingu and Djuwany men took place through a third party, a Djinba man who could speak both Djuwany and Djambarrpuynu, a Yolngu dialect. The case demonstrates the way in which ties can be created over great distances between groups sharing a 'totemic'
species in common, with the transfer of paintings affirming the reality of the ancestral track. It is also significant that the transaction should be phrased in terms of returning to a previous state of affairs and hence one that is closer to the ancestrally pre-determined relationship between groups. The known extension of an ancestral track beyond the limits of one's own immediate area is clearly always a human artifact, but one which with the passage of generations feeds back into the local situation, providing external confirmation of the track's reality and contributing to the believability of the system. Although knowledge of the madayin of distant groups may provide material which can be used in the context of political relationships between interacting clans, it also provides a politically neutral reference point outside the system of regular interaction which elevates the madayin beyond the pragmatics of everyday politics.

Conclusion: the Distribution of Rights

Although it is acknowledged that a man has rights in paintings of his own clan, his M clan and his MM clan, control of the way in which those rights are distributed is restricted to a very few individuals, and the majority of people exercise relatively few rights in paintings. In this concluding section I shall review the major factors contributing to this situation.

I have suggested that through the operation of primogeniture, and through deference to the oldest members of the clan, control of a clan's paintings is vested in one or two senior members of the clan. It is these clan leaders, together with the senior ZS group members, who control the clan's paintings by determining the distribution of knowledge about them among the members of the clan and of related
clans. Thus Narritjin decides the order in which his sons and brother's sons should learn Manggalili clan paintings, which of them they can produce commercially, and which of his ZS should be taught the paintings. His younger brother Bokarra, although an important ritual leader and the second most senior member of the clan, always asked me to consult Narritjin for interpretations of Manggalili paintings. When Narritjin was away on one occasion, his eldest son Banapana consulted Mithili, the senior ZS who was married to Narritjin's eldest daughter, before interpreting a painting for me.

A second example of differential control of rights can be seen in the control exercised by senior members of the Djapu clan over the commercial use of their paintings. On the death of the previous head of the clan, Wonggu, senior members of the clan decided that only a restricted number of designs should be used for commercial bark paintings. Mäw' and Daymbalipu on separate occasions told me that Djeriny had made the decision with them. Djeriny and Mäw' are the eldest living sons of Wonggu, and Daymbalipu is his eldest male grandchild.

Through the operation of the principles of seniority and primogeniture an individual in a structurally favourable position can gain a major say in the control of his own, his MMB and his M clans' paintings. Thus Daymbalipu as the eldest Djapu of his generation already has considerable influence in the case of his own clan's paintings, over his M clan's paintings (Gumatj), and by extension, through the principle of the M clan set, he has rights over Munyuku paintings. Although he never produces paintings himself, he exercises control over their production. Because the Djapu clan is the largest Dhuwa moiety clan at Yirrkala, he exercises rights that affect a large sector of the population.
An individual's structural position is not the only determinant of his rights in paintings and madayin however, since men in structurally weak positions can and do control the paintings of a number of clans, whereas senior members of large clans may exercise little control over their own clan's paintings. If young men are unwilling to learn or are considered untrustworthy and likely to reveal restricted information, they are not taught paintings. If a man is senile, then he is no longer consulted. Rights are thus conditional on competence.

Overall the decision to release paintings to those who potentially have rights of access to them depends on an assessment of a number of factors.

First, a clan must strike a balance between losing control of their paintings and madayin through spreading knowledge of them too widely and losing knowledge of their paintings through the failure to pass it on to succeeding generations.

Secondly, a balance must be struck between maintaining control of its own paintings and madayin, the unique inheritance of its members from the ancestral past so central to its own identity, and releasing paintings to other clans as part of the process of recognising and perpetuating social and spiritual links with them.

Finally, from the perspective of male initiation, the senior generations of a clan must strike a balance between releasing knowledge of paintings and authority over them to succeeding generations of initiates and maintaining the restrictedness of the knowledge as a means of exercising control over the system.
These factors can be seen as operating in terms of three dimensions; control versus release of knowledge, the independence versus the dependence of clans and the passage of knowledge from one generation to the next. These are dimensions that can be applied to all aspects of Yolngu art.
CHAPTER 4

THE ANCESTRAL NATURE OF PAINTINGS: MYTHS OF INHERITANCE
AND MYTHS OF CREATION

The only word used primarily in the context of painting is miny'tji.\(^1\) Miny'tji can be roughly glossed as 'a painting', though as we shall see it is semantically much more complex than this. The act of painting can be described using either the phrase 'miny'tji djäma' (painting work) or the compound verb 'miny'tji-yarpuma' (jabbing paint). An artist can be described as 'a person having painting work', (miny'tji-djäمامirri yolngu) or 'a person who jabs paint' (miny'tji-yarpunhara yolngu). These phrases illustrate the two main components of the meaning of the word miny'tji: design, and colour. Thus miny'tji can be used adjectively to describe anything that appears colourful, like the wings of a butterfly or a lump of yellow ochre used as pigment. Miny'tji can also be used to refer to any regularly occurring pattern or design whether it is natural or cultural in origin. The pattern made by the interlocking section of a turtleshell, the thin spirals engraved by insects on the bark of certain eucalypts and the checkerboard pattern in black and white on a coneshell, are all alike miny'tji, as are blazons on a car door and designs on a can of baked beans. The distinction between natural and cultural designs must not be too rigidly conceived, as things which are called miny'tji are all believed to be the result of consequential action; miny'tji are meaningful designs. The design on the back of a turtle is seen as 'its

\(^1\) At Yirrkala another word, rrarrk, is occasionally employed instead of miny'tji. It has the same sense. In the Western Yolngu area, rrarrk, is employed specifically to refer to the cross hatched infilling of a painting (see Clunies-Ross and Hiatt, in press fig.2).
design' in the same sense that the design painted on a human body is seen as belonging to and representing a clan. A myth, for example, explains the origin of the pattern on a turtle's shell, how it was put there and why it takes the form it does. Myths explaining the origins of natural designs are analogous to those relating to cultural designs; indeed natural and cultural designs are frequently seen as two dimensions of the same thing. The patterns on the shell of a long-necked fresh-water tortoise (minhala), for example, are believed to have resulted from waterweed clinging to the shell of an ancestral tortoise as it moved along the bottom of the river at Gångan. Gångan was also the place where Barrama, one of the major ancestral beings of the Yirritja moiety emerged from the ground. He too came out of the water with waterweed clinging to his body and falling from his arms in streamers (plate 4). The pattern of the weed on his body became the clan design of the Dhalwangu (plate 5). It is the same as the shell design on representations of the minhala. The majority of ancestral designs are believed to have originated in a similar way, being 'naturally' occurring designs isolated by their connection with the ancestral being concerned. Moreover, when it is realised that many ancestral beings were transformed from animals into men and from animate to inanimate form and that natural designs bear witness to the reality of these transformations, then the distinction between natural and cultural designs is irrelevant, at least as far as the Yolngu are concerned.

Thus the act of painting is seen both as the production of meaningful designs, and more prosaically as jabbing paint (colour)
onto a surface.¹

Miny'tji stands in apposition to two other words bunggul and manikay. Bunggul is used to refer to ceremonial dancing or, perhaps more correctly, to the dramatic component of ceremonial performances. Translating the word into English, people use the phrases 'ceremony acting', 'ceremony dancing' or occasionally 'corroboree'. As well as dancing the word refers to such things as ceremonial processions, and the shouting of sacred names; however it does not refer primarily to singing and music. The word for song is manikay, singing is 'manikay djäma'. Manikay describes all songs and music, both Yolngu music and Western European pop music; however its primary reference is to clan songs relating to the actions of ancestral beings.

Miny'tji as ancestral designs, bunggul as ancestral dances and manikay as ancestral songs are the three major media for expressing the sacred law or madayin of a clan. The clan's sacred objects (rangga) exist at a different level to these three as manifestations of the ancestral world. The rangga are, as a category of things, the most sacred in that they are the most restricted and the least frequently revealed. Rangga can be applied as a modifier to discriminate between different categories of miny'tji, bunggul and manikay. Thus ranggapuy miny'tji is used to refer to the most sacred designs: the ones most directly associated with the rangga. The rangga are themselves believed to be part of and to contain the spiritual power of the ancestral being they represent.

¹ It is significant that the word bokman 'to create' is not used to describe the act of painting, for example by the phrase 'miny'tji bokmana'. This confirms my suggestion that the designs (miny'tji) are things which have already been created by ancestral beings; they pre-exist their production. What the artist does is produce these designs using an ancestral template. Bokman will be used when someone introduces a dance for the first time, which for example, he has learnt through a dream. I don't know whether the same applies to 'new paintings'. 
Paintings to which the word *rangga* can be applied as a modifier are also believed to contain ancestral power and to be *mali* (shades or projections) of the *wangarr* beings concerned. Paintings of this type are the most important as far as clan ownership is concerned, and it is with this category of paintings that I will be concerned in the remainder of this chapter.

**Wangarr Miny'tji: Ancestral Designs**

*Wangarr miny'tji* are ancestral designs in two senses. One is that they are believed to have been passed on from the ancestral past to the present day in direct succession from the *wangarr* beings to the Yolngu, and the other is that they originated in *wangarr* times. This distinction is important as it means that ancestral designs are not only designs which memorialise *wangarr* events and are part of those events, but further, they are designs which certain *wangarr* beings decreed should be used to memorialise those events.

Myths referring to paintings can be divided into two types on the above basis. First, there are myths which sanction the ownership of a set of paintings by a particular clan, which can be termed *myths of inheritance*. Secondly, there are myths which explain the form that a particular design takes and link it to the creative and land transforming acts of the *wangarr* being represented by the design. These will be termed *myths of creation*. The same myth can sometimes perform both of these functions.

The first myth which I discuss is primarily a myth of inheritance. The myth refers to the origin of the Munyuku clan as it exists today and the way in which the clan members as a whole came to share a particular set of *madayin*: songs, paintings and sacred objects
associated with different places. It is not concerned with details of
the origin of the sacred objects as transformations of particular
wangarr beings, or with the origin of the form of designs.

Myth 1.

Barrama, a wangarr being of the Yirritja moiety, emerged from
the ground at Gânggän in Dhaḻwangu country. Barrama sent three
emissaries from Gânggän, Lânytjung, Banatja and Galbarimin, to give
madayin to all other Yirritja clans. Galbarimin went to the southern
clans, Banatja to the North and Lânytjung to the East. Lânytjung went
through a number of places before coming to Mandjawuy, a Munyuku place.

Lânytjung came to Mandjawuy where he met Manala a Yolngu and
one of the founding ancestors of the top Munyuku clan. Lânytjung had
been travelling from place to place to tell people their ceremony, to
show them what to do and what to keep in each place. He brought with
him some paintings - he also painted himself on his body and was wearing
arm bands. He looked back behind him to the fresh water and he saw
sugar bag1 - sugar bag named birrkuda - sugar bag that lives in paper-
bark trees called by a special name maykarr. 'I am going to make this
a rangga for the Munyuku people at Mandjawuy.' And Lânytjung thought,
'I will make for them a special miny'tji called marrkula, bulumarrmarr.'
Next Lânytjung made a ground, a ceremony ground, a rule for people to
come to go into that ceremony ground. Then he made a sacred silly bag
for Munyuku people to use when they have a bunggul or when they are
fighting. Lânytjung gave us everything we use in that land.' (Djewiny)

After completing his work at Mandjawuy, Lânytjung established
the madayin for three other Munyuku places: Nuparrwuy, Mayawunyjdk
and Yarrinya, the madayin being associated with garranungun (hammerhead
shark), mikaran (yellow snake) and crayfish respectively. I was first
told by Djewiny that Lânytjung went himself to each of these places
in turn and taught the leaders of the Yolngu living there their
sacred ceremonies, designs and songs. However Dula, Djewiny's elder
brother, said that this was not in fact the case. Lânytjung only
visited the leaders at Mandjawuy. He then instructed Manala to go to
each of the other places and tell them the ceremonial law that he,
Lânytjung had been given by Barrama. Manala went first to Mayawunyjdk
where he gave the law to Bungarray the leader of the Yolngu group
living there. Manala and Bungarray decided that the people living at
the two places would become one clan Makalganalmirri (Munyuku).
Bungarray and Manala then went together on Lânytjung's instruction to
Yarrinya where they met Murryilnga the leader in that land. They passed
on the messages that they had received from Lânytjung. Then Manala and
Bungarray asked Murryilnga to join them in a single clan sharing the
same rangga and sacred paintings. Murryilnga agreed and all became one
clan, Makalganalmirri, because 'we have all received the same story from
Lânytjung' (Djewiny). The three groups then held a ngarrra ceremony at
Mayawunyjdk to celebrate the fact that they were one clan.

1 'Sugar bag' is an Aboriginal English term meaning 'bee-hive', but
also the honey and larvae found within it. Since the Yolngu term
which it translates has the same range of meaning, I shall hence-
forward use the term 'sugar bag' rather than a Standard English term
such as 'bee-hive', which does not cover the same range of meanings.
This myth is essentially concerned with the origin of the Munyuku clan as a social group. It was provided in the context of interpreting four Munyuku paintings (Plates 39, 40, 41, 42a) each associated with one of the four main places referred to in the myth: Mandjawuy, Nuparrwuy, Mayawunydji and Yarrinya. The myth refers to the fact that the paintings, as part of the madayin of the clan as a whole, were determined by Barrama, a wangarr being who never visited Munyuku territory but instead sent one of his messengers. It also provides a model of the transfer of authority from wangarr beings to Yolngu. Only Manala actually received paintings from Läntjung. Manala then went to visit other Yolngu and taught them in the same way Läntjung had taught him, by dancing and singing and producing paintings. The present day Yolngu learn in direct succession from the original clan ancestors, and in ceremonies they enact the law of Barrama in the same way Läntjung did before.

All other Yirritja moiety clans at Yirrkala have a similar myth in which they acknowledge that the sacred law comes from Barrama. Barrama never ventured from his place of origin, Gängan in Dhalwangu territory, but sent emissaries to different places. Each myth includes as part of its structure the order in which other clans learnt the law from Barrama. The myth thus not only links the different areas of a clan's territory but it also links the clan with all other clans of the same moiety in the surrounding area.

The Barrama myth does not explain the form of the paintings associated with each area of the clan's territory, nor does it refer to any land transforming events. The sacred designs and the sacred objects are explained only in the sense that they were allocated in a
particular way on the instructions of Barrama. Neither Länytjung nor Barrama are incarnate in the sacred objects referred to. Indeed the objects themselves pre-existed their formal allocation by Barrama.

Myths of this type are myth as fictionalised history. The Yolngu referred to in the myth, Mañala, Bungarray and Murryilnga, the founding ancestors at each place, are said to be the actual founders of present day lineages, although one of the lineages, that headed by Mañala, is today extinct. The myth represents an explanation of why the group called Munyuku is constituted as it is, why they own particular tracts of land, and why they hold particular ceremonies, in terms of interaction between wangarr beings and ancestral Yolngu.

The myth also encodes the normative pattern of Yolngu behaviour as it is expressed today. Thus Länytjung was described by Djewiny as the first djirrikay, a ritual specialist who determines the correctness of the form of designs. Länytjung taught Manala, a tribal elder, who in turn became a djirrikay and taught other senior men. On deciding to become one clan, the elders agreed to share sacred objects and paintings just as clan members today acknowledge equal rights in the clan's paintings. They held a ngärra ceremony to celebrate group unity and through it they taught succeeding generations the law they received from Barramá. The whole myth presents a picture of systematic order. As far as the clan's paintings are concerned, however, the myth seems to state little more than 'we have the paintings we do because Barrama allocated them to the founding ancestors of our clan, who decided to share them'. 
This interpretation is implicitly acknowledged in myth 1. The wangarr beings represented by the paintings (plates 39-42) pre-existed Länytjung's journey from Gängan'. Länytjung saw the wangarr sugar bag (birrkuda) behind him when he arrived at Mandjawuy; when he looked ahead to Nuparrwuy he saw the ancestral shark in the river; and beyond that he saw the fish trap made from the bones of the snake mikarran at Mayawunydji. When I questioned Djewiny on the sugar bag design (Plate 39) and asked him how Länytjung decided to give that design to the people living at Mandjawuy, he stressed that the design was not Länytjung's, Barrama did not create it; it was the design of the wangarr sugar bag itself. Indeed when they were discussing whether or not to become one clan, Bungarray the founding clan leader at Mayawunyndji is said to have stated, 'we have many things in our land, many sacred names, but we will follow Länytjung so that we don't get mixed up, we will have one story'. Thus Länytjung is seen to have provided a story which is superimposed on an intricate complex of other myths, a story that links the groups together as belonging to the Munyuku clan. The myths associated with the sacred objects at each place do not generate links that connect the wangarr beings with each other. Mikarran the snake never went to Mandjawuy or Yarrinya, nor birrkuda to Mayawunyndji. These wangarr beings are associated with one part of the clan's territory only, a part which is crossed by their track; if anything they separate one part of Munyuku territory from the rest. However, the myths of each place link those places with the madayin of countries belonging to other clans on the same wangarr track. This point is elaborated later in the chapter. I will first examine a myth of the second type, one which refers to the origin of the form of a design.
An example that refers to the wangarr's creation of a design was given earlier in this chapter: the myth explaining the origin of the Dhalwangu clan design at Gängaŋ. A second example concerns the origin of a Mađarrpa clan design, a myth recorded as an interpretation of a painting by Watjinbuy (plate 6). The interpretation also includes references to the Länytjung-Barrama myth, which have been retained for comparison but are enclosed in square brackets.

Myth 2

'This painting is of a place Gumnurrutjpi. Bärů is one of the creators of that land and made himself the culture of the Mađarrpa clan. A long time ago bärů (the crocodile) was a man and he had a wife called dhambilugu (blue-tongued lizard). The crocodile made a house for himself to live in. Bärů's wife went out and collected fresh water snails (mindung). She collected a full dilly bag and returned to her camp and began cooking them on the fire. Bärů was asleep in his bark hut. His wife wanted to talk to him and tried to wake him up. But bärů kept sleeping. She wanted him to move over so that they could sleep together. But still bärů slept. So his wife made a huge fire and cooked more snails. She took them out of the fire and cracked them with a stone. She threw the scalding pieces on bärů's body. But still bärů slept. Finally he awoke and feeling the pain asked his wife why she kept throwing pieces of snail at him. Dhambilugu took no notice and kept throwing the shellfish.'

Finally bärů became extremely angry, he got up from his sleep and rushed furiously at his wife, carrying the bark sheets from the house on his back. He began to act like a crocodile. He seized his wife and threw her into the blazing fire, shouting 'I am the bärů, I am the fire, I am the crocodile, I am the Mađarrpa'. After bärů and dhambilugu had finished fighting, she went to live in the fresh water and he went to live in the sea. Dhambilugu turned into the blue-tongued lizard, a lizard with short legs, because her husband bärů had thrown her into the fire and burnt them off.

'Bärů went down to the river and said 'I will live in the river, but I will be leadership for the Mađarrpa. I will be the leader belonging to this land and owner of it. The Yolŋu can copy this ceremony from me.' That's what bärů said. [But bärů had an order from Länytjung to say these same things. Bärů didn't make himself owner for this land, but had orders from this man Länytjung.]

And bärů went into the sea and he carried the fire with him. He dived deep under the water and created a special rock of fire, and said, 'this will be madayin for the Mađarrpa.' The crocodile didn't live there but he went into the water there with the house on his back bursting into flames, to try and put the fire out. And you see those
marks on the back of the crocodile (the serrated tail) that's the house stuck to his back. And you see those white marks on his back (dots) that's the pieces of snail sticking to his back. See those marks you can see on his body (the diamond pattern in the painting) that belongs to the bâru, that's the painting he does on his own body. When Yolngu are going to see the ranga for bâru that's the design they must paint on their bodies. That bundle of fire around his body that's gudaday, djarrdjundjû. And the fire is still burning in all the places he has been.

After this another bâru carried the fire from Gumurrutjpi to Caledon Bay to the Gumatj people at Ngalarrwuy. Really though the ownership is with the Madarrpa people, all people on the Gumatj side and on the top side got their ownership from Gumurrutjpi. That's where the crocodile was before he went from place to place, making the madayin, making the dreaming, making the land. In the dry season he stayed in the sea, in the wet season he made rain come so that he could go back to the land and make his nest and lay his eggs.

Bâru is the ownership of this land, and what I do is the ceremony that I am acting: when I make the nest, when I make the place, when I make the fire, when I make young crocodiles, when I make Yolngu themselves, Madarrpa themselves. Yolngu people will do the same things that I do.' [Because this bâru had the ownership, the right from Läntjung. Läntjung had talked to him, had told him what to do, which sacred objects to make, which sacred dilly bag, which paintings, - and bâru did exactly like that, because Läntjung told him to.]

The myth of bâru and the myth of Läntjung clearly function in different ways in the context of this interpretation. The myth of bâru explains in a direct way aspects of the form of the Mađarrpa painting, relating it to specific mythological events which caused the crocodile to take the form it did. The painting encodes many elements of the myth of bâru, the bark hut, the hot snails and the fire, each of which is embedded in an elaborate sequence of mythological action. The painting and the myth also refer to features of the landscape at Gumurrutjpi, which are transformations of events that took place there, such as the stretch of beach where the crocodile lived and the rock offshore where he threw the fire. (Both these places are avoided today and it is said that people entering them will be destroyed by fire.)
The diamond shaped clan design is the main component of the painting that is iconically motivated as far as the myth is concerned. The design is not said to be derived from pre-existing markings on the crocodile's back, but is the product of the mythological events leading to the creation of the form of the wangarr crocodile, and it signifies this transformation. Clan designs, including this example, are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

The bäru myth also connects Gunmurrutjpi with other wangarr beings who directly or indirectly interact with the crocodile. Painting (plate 7) represents a Maçaarrpa place offshore from the mouth of the Gunmurrutjpi River, called Yatikpa. The painting shows the wangarr dugong being hunted by mokuy ancestral spirits. The dugong dived down, pulling the boat and hunters with it, to the rock of fire left by bäru, and all were incinerated beneath the waves. The dugong is always represented with the diamond design on it, signifying the event and its connection with the crocodile.

The crocodile myth and the associated paintings signify connections between the Maçaarrpa clan and other clans of the same moiety which are also associated with crocodile and fire. The link with the Gumatj clan was specifically referred to. The Bottom Gumatj share a similar design to the Maçaarrpa, and, as is discussed in a later chapter similar clan designs signify a relationship between the madayin held by the respective clans. Their presence on a painting signifies that the places referred to are on the same wangarr track.1

1 As the painting of the dugong shows, a wangarr track does not necessarily refer to the route taken by a single ancestral being, rather it may reflect the existence of an interconnected chain of land transforming events involving the interaction between members of the same set of wangarr beings along its length.
Länytjung's role in the interpretation is quite different from that of the crocodile, he is nowhere signified in the painting and does not explain the form the design takes. In the performance of ceremonies relating to Gunmurrutjpi neither Länytjung nor Barrama play a major role, though songs referring to their actions in designating certain madayin as belonging to the Mađarrpa clan will be part of the accompanying manikay performed at intervals throughout the ceremony. The dances however, enact the events involving the wangarr crocodile, and the power names called are those of bāru. The power (mārr) of the painting is the mārr of bāru and not of Länytjung. In a sense what Länytjung does is authorise the design and to a certain extent direct events; he does not create the design.

The significance of the two types of myth

The existence of these two types of myth discussed above can partly be explained in terms of certain features of Yolngu social organisation. They reflect an inherent contradiction in the ideological basis for the structure of Yolngu clans, in particular as far as the application of the word bāpurruru is concerned. As I showed, bāpurruru is applied to groups at a number of different levels. It can refer to a set of clans linked by the same madayin. Clans linked to the Munyuku by virtue of the fact that they shared the crayfish madayin is one example, and clans linked to Mađarrpa by the fire madayin is a second. Bāpurruru can also be applied to the members of a clan defined as a group acknowledging joint ownership of a set of madayin. Thus in myth 1, we saw that the crayfish madayin was associated mainly with one area of Munyuku clan territory Yarrinya. The crayfish did not travel to Mayawunyndji or to Mandjawuy. Before the journey of Länytjung
the crayfish madayin belonged to Murryilnga and other members of that patriline living at Yarrinya. However, one of the conditions of becoming a clan is the sharing of joint rights in madayin. After the leaders of the three groups referred to in the myth made their decision to become one clan, the rights in the crayfish madayin were extended to the people living at Mandjawuy and Mayawunyndji.

In the first sense above, bąpurru unites a group of clans along a particular wangarr track with respect to shared spiritual affiliation to a particular set of wangarr ancestors. In the second sense bąpurru membership cross cuts wangarr tracks linking the different madayin by virtue of the fact that a particular social group agrees to hold them in common. This can be represented by the following diagram.

Diagram 1 Two senses of bąpurru

In this diagram the horizontal lines represent wangarr ancestral tracks and the circles represent places associated with the madayin of the respective wangarr in the territories of different clans. Clans linked by places on the same track potentially belong to a bąpurru in the first sense defined above, thus each line (a-g) represents a potential basis of bąpurru affiliation at this level.
The black ovals which cross cut the horizontal lines represent clans. The members of the clan form a bapurru in the second sense defined above by virtue of the fact that they have common rights in the madayin of each of the places enclosed within the oval. Thus clan 1 has rights to madayin of places on tracks a, b and c, clan 2 has rights in c, d and e and clan 3 has rights in c, f and g. Thus all three clans form a bapurru in the first sense with respect to track c which they all share in common. However, the shared rights and interests only operate with reference to the track they share in common. Members of clan 1 do not obtain rights to track d by virtue of their connection to clan 2.

The surrounding line signifies the moiety to which all the clans belong.

We can now consider the way in which the two kinds of myth, the myths which concern the inheritance of a clan's paintings and their designation as the property of a clan, and the myths concerning the creation of the designs themselves, reflect this pattern. The myths of inheritance cross cut other wangarr tracks; they do not create groupings along the line of an ancestral track but rather they designate the particular set of madayin associated with each clan. They therefore correspond to circles 1, 2 and 3. The Barrama myth also corresponds with the moiety level in that every Yirritja moiety clan is believed to have a section of the Barrama-Länýtjung mythology that designates the set of places and objects uniquely owned by the clan. The myths of creation on the other hand, for example the bâru and fire mythology correspond with lines a-g.

Although the two types of myth at first seem to be complementary, each concerned with different levels of organisation, they can
in certain contexts be used in opposition to one another. This is partly a function of the fact that the different levels of organisation, moiety, ritual alliance and clan are, from a long term perspective, best seen as principles of group formation, though in the short term they appear to correspond to different levels of groups on the ground. In order to illustrate how the two myth types can be used in opposition to one another I will return again to the Munyuku clan.

The crayfish **wangarr**, represented in the painting (plate 42b) belonging to Yarrinya, connects three clans, Munyuku, Warramirri and Gumatj. The crayfish **wangarr** originated at Matjangba, the most northern of the Wessel Islands. In **wangarr** time three crayfish entered the sea off Matjangba; they stretched out to the mainland still gripping the island with their last pair of legs. They extended their bodies across the sea and touched the mainland at three places: Gākanga in Top Gumatj clan country; Maṭamaṭa, a Warramirri clan place; and Yarrinya, the Munyuku place in the north of Blue Mud Bay. Djewiny drew me a map to show the relationship between these places connected by the crayfish (fig.15). The tail of the crayfish on Dula's painting (plate 42b) represents a similar structure of relationship between places. The body represents Matjangba and the three ovoid extensions represent (1) Maṭamaṭa (2) Yarrinya and (3) Gākanga (fig. 16). The feelers and the extended legs of the crayfish, as well as signifying the crayfish clinging to the rocks, are said to represent the connection between the three clans. All three groups share the manikay (songs) associated with the crayfish **madayin**.

Matjangba was once owned by an extinct Wessel Island clan. It was subsequently taken over by the Golpa another Wessel Island clan,
represented in 1975 by two men, one of whom has subsequently died. The Warramirri clan, however, claimed joint ownership of it together with the Golpa and in effect have taken it over from this virtually extinct clan. Indeed one Warramirri man told me that they were simply reclaiming land which had once belonged to them. The remaining Golpa man no longer speaks his own dialect but speaks Warramirri and he has apparently been incorporated within that clan.

The painting thus refers to a complex series of connections between a set of clans on the same ancestral track, a group which potentially forms a ritual alliance. When I pressed Djewiny further about these connections he retracted his interpretation or rather he suppressed it. He stated that Yolngu today did not really know about the connections between the places: 'we know these three places but we know them separately - Läntyjung in Yolngu time established that Yarrinya was Munyuku and that's all I know'. At a later stage I was told: 'the crayfish came straight to our land and Yolngu people began to copy it. Then Läntyjung came to Yarrinya and made in Munyuku and said 'you make the crayfish rangga because he cares for this place'. From then on the Yolngu made this painting for Yarrinya.'

Djewiny's reinterpretation in effect involves switching from a myth of creation, the crayfish myth, to a myth of inheritance, the Barrama-Läntyjung myth. The two offer substantially different interpretations of the same fact, that is of the existence of the crayfish madayin at Yarrinya. The former focuses attention on the crayfish ancestor and creative forces independent of any one social group; it emphasises relationships between groups. The latter focuses attention on the ownership of a particular place by a particular clan.
In this particular case it is possible to explain why the myth of inheritance was favoured over the myth of creation. In the majority of cases Munyuku were quite happy to expand on the inter-clan connections reflected in the tracks of *wangarr* beings that cross cut clan territories. The yellow snake *mikarran*, for example, connects Munyuku with Madarrpa and Manggalili, though in each case a different manifestation of *mikarran* was involved. 'The snakes are friends.' I was told 'They are all one company like we are one company for ceremonies today'. The connections can be viewed positively. In the Warramirri case this is not so. Warramirri, I was told, had given away their land. They had revealed their sacred objects publicly at the Elcho Island memorial, in the context of a syncretic religious movement (see Berndt, 1962), and had also given some of their sacred objects to another clan, the Ritharrngu. In neither case had they received anything in return. They could thus be seen to have ceded control over their own paintings and sacra and as a consequence they were thought liable to make claims over other people's clan territories by activating mythological links. In this situation Djewiny thought it undesirable to stress connections with Warramirri through acknowledging shared *madayin*: 'if I show too much knowledge about their land then they will come and take over mine'.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I have been concerned with two aspects of the relationship between myths and paintings. The first of these concerns the inheritance of paintings by a particular clan, the designation of its *madayin* and sanctioning of its ownership of land. The myths of inheritance, or aspects of myths that contain programmatic statements
about inheritance, represent public declarations of a clan's rights and relationships. The second aspect concerns the transformational and creative powers of wangarr beings manifest in the clan's paintings and sacred objects. Knowledge and control of these kinds of meanings of objects and paintings are also central to a clan's identity with the land and to its sense of corporateness as a group, as they are concerned with the power of the wangarr ancestors over which the clan's members exercise the greatest degree of control. As far as the creative aspects of wangarr beings are concerned, however, control is exercised by restriction on knowledge.

In the Munyuku clan's case we can see clearly the relationship between the two aspects of myth that have been isolated, in particular as far as the dimension of paintings that relates to the integrity and independence of clans is concerned. We can see the relationship operating in terms of a dialectic between the control of wangarr powers by clans and the fact that the power itself, through the journeys of the wangarr beings, transcends group boundaries. The myths of creation concern the power of the designs and the land transforming acts of the wangarr. Though they refer specifically to places owned by a particular clan, the wangarr being is not specific to that clan but cross cuts clan ownership. The external links refer to and contribute to the power of the designs, but they also provide a basis upon which other clans can make claims in the political sphere. The Munyuku as a small and weak clan are particularly conscious of this potential threat to their territorial integrity; hence they play down the significance of links between clans, or rather they emphasise the uniqueness of their own inheritance: 'we know these three places but we know them separately'. The Warramirri clan on the other hand is numerically large. Its members stress the connection between its
territory and that of the Munyuku clan, emphasising that they share the same madayin with respect to the crayfish-whale ancestral complex and stressing the similarity of the paintings belonging to the respective places.

It is ironic that the Länytjung-Barrama myth of the Munyuku refers to events in the past that led to the creation of a new clan through the union of a number of small groups. The existence of the Munyuku clan is said to be the result of a conscious, though wangarr-directed decision to unite. Implicit in the creation of a new clan is the possibility of a clan's extinction and of the incorporation of the members of one clan by another, possibilities which dramatise the threat to a clan's existence from outside groups. I am not suggesting that the Munyuku clan myth refers to an actual historical event, but it does show the way in which such events could be given mythological sanction by projecting the restructured relationships back into the world of interaction with the wangarr ancestors.
CHAPTER 5

THE CEREMONIAL CONTEXT OF YOLNGU ART

The ceremonial system of North-east Arnhem Land is extremely complex, both in terms of the number of different types of ceremony and in terms of variations in their structure. Warner (1958) and Berndt (1974 and 1951) have provided detailed descriptions of the major ceremonies. However, Warner in particular pays little attention to the role and significance of art objects used in the context of these ceremonies. In this chapter, rather than providing a general description of the relationship between art and ceremony, I intend to examine in some detail the manner in which art objects are used in the context of two types of ceremonies. From this examination of the use of art in these specific contexts, I intend to draw more general conclusions as to the role of art in Yolngu ceremony.

This chapter consists of two sections. In the first section I focus on primary burial ceremonies and in the second section on the djungguwan-molk ceremony. I follow the same approach in both sections, initially providing a descriptive account of the ceremonies, followed by a discussion of the iconography of the ceremony and an elucidation of its major themes. Finally I consider the function and significance of the art objects used in relation to the major themes of the ceremonies, the integration of the paintings within the structure of the ceremonies as a whole and sociological aspects of the relationship between the paintings and the groups participating in the ceremonies. I do not consider in detail iconographic aspects of the paintings in this chapter. Rather I set the scene for a subsequent discussion of these aspects of the artistic system.
1. Primary Burial

Ideally preparations for a burial ceremony should begin before the death of an individual. In the case of old people or people known to be suffering from a terminal illness, death is frequently anticipated by the person concerned and by his relatives. A person is expected to announce that he is near death, to absolve people from blame and, in the case of a senior man, to leave instructions as to how rights he holds in madayin should be passed on to living members of his clan. If a person fails to do this, for example, if he dies suddenly without advance warning (if he has been involved in a fight or an accident), then an inquest will be held and the cause of his death sought in an outside agent. Sorcerers (galka) were frequently blamed for deaths that occurred while we were at Yirrkala.\(^1\) Usually the death was said to be caused by a member of a distant group living elsewhere than Yirrkala, though on one occasion blame was laid on members of a MMB clan closely related to the dead person.

If a person is thought to be about to die, members of his own clan and his MMB clan will gather around the place where he is lying and sing clan songs throughout the night. Such performances may go on for several weeks until the person concerned either recovers health or dies (see Warner, 1958:413). Warner (Ibid:414) records that 'as the song cycle reaches each totemic element in sequence, a dying man is supposed to make motions in imitation of the totemic animal'. For example, when relatives sing 'whale', he kicks to simulate the movement of a whale's body in the sea.

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1 For a detailed account of Yolngu beliefs in magic and sorcery see Warner (1958, Chapters VII and VIII).
Warner records three levels of explanation as to why clan songs and dances are performed prior to a person's actual death. These were confirmed by our fieldwork at Yirrkala. The first is that the songs are communicating with spirits of dead ancestors of his own and his MMB clan. It is believed that a man's spirit is guided to his clan well by these dead ancestral spirits who come to collect his spirit after he has died. The second explanation is that the dying person is preparing himself for his incorporation within the body of the sacred objects (rangga) of the clan. 'He is becoming like his totem' (Warner, Ibid:414).

I was told by one man that in contrast to Europeans who have no control over or knowledge of their own death, Yolngu are able to talk directly to the wangarr ancestors when they are ready to die. By knowing the inside words and dances and paintings, they are able to find out from the wangarr when they are going to die and can prepare themselves for joining the ancestral world. As evidence of this difference he cited to me the fact that when an Aboriginal was about to die it was he who told his relatives, whereas with Europeans the only people who knew were the doctor and the minister. It was they who told the relatives but nobody ever told the dying person.

The final interpretation given by Warner (Ibid.) of the pre-death performance of songs is that 'we sing them to make that soul a good one, so he won't hurt any of us'. At this stage it is appropriate to note that Yolngu believe in the existence of two souls: mokuy and birrimbirr (see also Berndt, R. 1974, fascicle 2:24). The mokuy soul is believed to be anthropomorphic in form. After the mokuy soul has left the body it goes to a part of the clan territory where mokuy spirits live and becomes associated with the mokuy spirit beings.
However, the mokuy soul is believed to be able to come back to the place of death and cause trouble for or even kill Yolngu against whom the man bore a grudge when he was alive. This is particularly likely to happen if the dead person is believed to have been the victim of sorcery.

The second soul, the birrimbIRR, is connected with the animating spirit involved in the person's conception. It is associated with and part of a particular wangarr being manifested in the clan's sacred objects and associated with a particular part of the clan's territory (see also Peterson, 1972:17). On a person's death, the birrimbIRR soul is believed to return to the clan well of the dead man and to become incorporated in the sacred objects and paintings of the clan. In some cases one dimension of the birrimbIRR soul is believed to return to the Dhuwa or Yirritja moiety lands of the dead, where parts of the souls of the dead members of clans belonging to the same moiety reside (see also Warner, 1958:280). Thus in burial ceremonies, the concern of the participants is not with a single soul but with a multidimensional soul, and songs and dances must be seen as being directed towards both the mokuy and birrimbIRR souls each of which has a different destiny and different properties.

1 In fact the birrimbIRR soul is a complex concept referring basically to that aspect of a person's spiritual existence that comes from the wangarr beings. On a person's death different refractions of the birrimbIRR soul become associated with manifestations of different wangarr beings just as during his life an individual accumulates power through his participation in ceremonies associated with different wangarr. However, a major component of the birrimbIRR can be said to be the animating spirit effective in a person's conception, and this component of the spirit is believed to return to the clan well from where it came. The conception well is frequently in a person's own clan's territory, although it is sometimes in the territory of another clan of the same moiety.
By joining together and singing their clan's songs at the side of the dead or dying person, people are declaring that they bear no ill feelings towards him and are in no way responsible for his death. In such ways people attempt to deflect the attention of the mokuy spirit away from themselves and their families, to ensure that the mokuy leaves them alone.

Death and painting the coffin

'After the first wailing at the news of...death..., a stillness comes over the camp.' (Warner, 1958:415)

Shortly after a death has been announced close relatives of the dead paint themselves all over in white pipe clay. The person's mother (ngändi) is forbidden to eat until she is freed from the tabu by having a band of yellow ochre (in the case of a Yirritja moiety death) or red ochre (in the case of a Dhuwa moiety death) painted above her breasts. This usually occurs late on the day of the death. The area where the body lies and the possessions of the dead are at once avoided. Areas of land associated with the dead person's madayin become 'closed': no one can enter them (see Peterson, 1976:101).

In the past the body of the dead person was painted with a clan painting (miny'tji). The painting was done in seclusion, away from women. All food consumed by those preparing the body for burial was cooked in a hearth in the centre of a sand sculpture (wanydjur or munhata). Those painting the body lived apart from the rest of the community for the duration of ceremony and food cooked in the wanydjur was reserved only for them. Any food left over would be buried in the sand sculpture. One such sculpture, a yingapungapu, has been described
in detail in Morphy (in press, c)\(^1\). This sculpture, represented in Banapana's painting (plate 25) is distinguished from sand sculptures which represent the totemic wells of the clan of the dead person. The latter are associated with **wängarr** ancestral beings, they are said to be **madayin** or sacred and are connected with the **rängga** or sacred objects of a clan. **Yingapungapu** is a word used generally to mean 'tabu' or 'containing polution', and though a **yngapungapu** ground is also associated with the actions of **wängarr** ancestors it is not considered to be directly connected with the **rängga** of a clan. The **yngapungapu** sculpture is used exclusively in the context of burial ceremonies.

Today the body itself is no longer painted. Instead the painting that would once have been done on the dead person's chest is produced on the lid of the coffin. Until the coffin lid has been painted, the body is either kept in the hospital mortuary (if the person died in Yirrkala) or in a hut specially constructed for the purpose (see plate 8). In the past the completed body painting was never seen by women or uninitiated men. Today the same applies to the coffin lid. The coffin lid is painted in a shelter constructed near the place where the person died and next to the hut where the body lies (plate 9). Women must never enter the place where the painting is being done and all food is left outside the shelter to be collected by the artists.\(^2\)

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1 The **yngapungapu** sand sculpture will also be discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.

2 No prohibitions are imposed on the coffin painters, their food is not prepared separately nor do they take any ritual precautions. This is in direct contrast to what was the case with painters of the dead body, who were separated from the rest of the community, refrained from sexual intercourse for the duration of the ceremony, did not go near water and painted their hands and arms in red ochre (Peterson, 1976:97). The explanation for this is quite simple. The coffin painters are not exposed to the dangers of pollution from the dead body. The imposition of tabus is associated not with the act (continued next page)
The structure and themes of burial ceremonies

In order to understand the principles by which a particular painting is selected one must look at the painting in the context of a burial ceremony as a whole. The burial ceremony consists of a sequence of events that follow on logically one after the other. The main events are: the death itself, the painting of the coffin, the 'opening' of the coffin and the placing of the body, the transfer of the body and coffin to the grave and the burial of the body. Each of these events characterises a distinct phase of a Yolngu burial ceremony. Together they can be seen as phases in the journey of the body from the place of death to the place of burial. The ceremony, however, is fundamentally concerned with a journey of a different order, the symbolically effected journey of the soul (birrimbirr) of the dead person from the place of death to its spiritual resting place in the clan well, a journey that may well connect places 200 miles apart. The phases of the ceremony provide the scenario within which the journey taken by the spirit is enacted: each phase is characterised by a ritual episode which relates to a stage on the journey. The ceremony as a whole thus consists of a sequence of ritual episodes which encode features of the journey of the spirit and which are at the same time appropriate to the events which characterise each phase (see fig. 17). The journey of the birrimbirr soul is only one of many themes associated with the Yolngu burial ceremony, albeit structurally the most important one in that it provides the thematic continuity from one phase to the next, as will be demonstrated shortly. Other important themes associated with particular phases include the driving

Footnote 2 continued from previous page.

of painting but with contact with the corpse. It is however, still the responsibility of the dead person's immediate family to feed and provide tobacco for the coffin painters.
away of the mokuy soul, the expression of grief and anger at the death, and the desire for vengeance.

These general observations are best illustrated with reference to a particular case: the burial ceremony for a small child at Gurka'wuy. The main phases into which the ceremony can be divided are illustrated in figure 17. These will be referred to in the text. The final column, location, refers to the country associated with the respective ritual episodes, the country to which the madayin belongs.

Case 1

A Madarrpa (Yirritja moiety) child of four months died unexpectedly during the night at Gurka'wuy. The child's actual mother's mother (märi) belonged to the Gurrumuru Dhalwangu clan. Before the painting of the coffin could commence members of the child's MMB clan had to be present. Within an hour of the death being confirmed Narritjin (Manggalili) and Dundiwuy (Marrakulu) radioed Gurrumuru and announced the death. Late the following evening a truck arrived from Gurrumuru bringing with it members of the MMB clan. Meanwhile the only Yirritja clans represented at Gurka'wuy were Madarrpa and Manggalili. The Madarrpa men were prohibited from touching the body, painting the coffin or initiating the singing, as they were 'too close' relatives to the dead child. In addition to this the Madarrpa people were a considerable distance from their clan territory. Gurka'wuy is on Marrakulu (Dhuwa) land. The nearest Yirritja land belonged to the Yagawidi Gumatj. Narritjin and the other Manggalili men present had to 'take over responsibility for the body'. The tent in which the child's body was to be kept was made by the Marrakulu clan (M clan). Once it was completed the Manggalili performed a ceremony associated with the guwak (koel cuckoo) to move the body from where it lay to a platform within the tent. The participants first painted their hands in yellow ochre. The Manggalili from the moment the death was confirmed took charge of the singing, performing songs belonging to their own clan, the Yagawidi Gumatj and the Madarrpa. They sung songs belonging to both the fresh water and the salt water cycles of the respective clans, and continued until the Gurrumuru Dhalwangu arrived. Narritjin at this stage announced he was handing over the body to the Gurrumuru Dhalwangu for them to paint the coffin. This ended phase I of the ceremony.

The coffin was painted (pl. 9) by two Gurrumurru Dhalwangu men, classificatory MMB to the dead boy's clan. The painting represented the freshwater crayfish and long-necked freshwater tortoise wangarr beings at Gängan. The painting commenced to the singing of songs referring to the ochre deposits upstream from Gängan, then songs were sung belonging to each Yirritja clan at Yirrkala, concerning freshwater fish in tributaries flowing into the Gängan River. This was
said to signify all clans working together for the body. The songs
continued with Dhalwangu songs referring to ngurrutj (water weed) at
Gāŋgan. Ngurrutj and fresh water is one of the meanings of the
diamond based background of the coffin painting. This led on
to songs about dead wood, water weed and leaves being carried down-
stream from Gāŋgan towards Wayawpuy by the wet season flood waters.
The coffin in this context was conceptualised as the debris being tossed
downstream by the rushing water. The waters flowed on following the
route taken by the yellow snake leading finally to the crocodile at
Gunmurrutjpi.

Phase III consisted of three stages, the yellow ochre dance
(pl. 10), the moving of the coffin to the body and the laying of the
body in the coffin. The function of the yellow ochre dance was said
to be 'to open up the body' to enable it to be placed in the coffin.
The actual laying of the body in the coffin was not accompanied by
song or ritual performance.

In the yellow ochre dance the dancers were led by Yāma and
Watjung the two senior Yadawidi Gumatj men (the owning clan). They
were painted all over with yellow ochre as were Narritjin, Djimbun
(Gurrumuru Dhalwangu and the dead person's actual MMB) and Bindi a
Warramirri man. Warramirri share the madayin with Yadawidi Gumatj.
All other male dancers were painted in white pipe clay. The leading
dancers were members of the Yadawidi Gumatj, Manggalili (ZDC to the
Gumatj) and Djaru (ZS to the Gumatj) clans. Members of the other clans
present, Dhuwa and Yirritja, followed behind the leading dancers.

The leading dancers held fighting dilly bags tightly in their
mouths. The dance consisted of a forward movement, followed by the
spearing of the ground with sticks held in the hand. After spearing
the ground the leading dancers picked up handfuls of sand and rubbed
their bodies, in particular under their arms, with the sand. The
dance was repeated a number of times as the group progressed towards
the tent where the body lay, the spearing of the ground becoming more
violent the closer to the tent they came. The dance concluded with
the tent itself being speared.

The sticks held in the dancers' hands represented digging
sticks used by the wangarr goanna (biyay) to dig up yellow ochre from
the ochre mine at Gurrurrunga on Caledon Bay (Fig. 18). They also
represent sticks used by Gumatj mokuy ancestors at the same place.
Spearing the ground represented digging for yellow ochre. At another
level however, yellow ochre signifies the blood of the Yirritja moiety
and in rubbing sand (as yellow ochre) over their bodies the leading
dancers were symbolically covering themselves with blood. As well as
digging yellow ochre, the spearing signified an attack at two levels:
an attack on the mokuy spirit of the dead and an attack on those
believed to have caused the death. Fighting dilly bags are gripped in
the mouth by participants in an avenging expedition.

The yellow body paintings signified the yellow ochre at
Gurrurrunga, and Yirritja blood. The white body paintings signified
paper bark trees (on the fresh water side) and the white tops of
waves (on the salt water side).
Phase IV consisted of carrying the coffin from the beach at Gurka'wuy (Trial Bay) to the place where it was to be buried half a mile inland. The dancers circled the coffin as it was carried towards the grave, this represented the yellow snake wangarr (burrultja) swallowing the coffin. The power names of the snake were sung over the coffin at different stages of the journey. As the coffin neared the grave it was handed over to Madarrpa men acting crocodile dances (pl. 11 and fig. 17). The coffin was said at this stage to represent crocodile eggs, the grave was its nest. The coffin (as egg) was placed in the grave (as nest) and the crocodile dancers filled in the grave by kicking in the earth with their legs and arms. This final sequence constituted phase V.

Before considering the instrumental functions of paintings in burial ceremonies and the reason for the selection of particular paintings I will briefly summarise the main themes of Yolngu burial ceremonies using the case cited above to illustrate my argument. The themes can be discussed in terms of positive and negative attitudes towards a dead person and his spirit as expressed in the ceremony. The negative aspects concern the pollution caused by the death, anger and hostility towards the corpse and aggression towards those considered responsible for the death. These aspects are all concerned primarily with a person's mokuy soul. The positive aspects are focussed on the person's birrimbirr soul and its return to the clan well. They concern the immortality of the person's birrimbirr spirit and its reincorporation in the world of the wangarr beings and the affirmation of the relationship between the clan members and the wangarr beings associated with them. I will consider first the treatment of the mokuy soul and secondly that of the birrimbirr soul.

The mokuy soul is believed to be dangerous and liable to exact vengeance on those who have been responsible for the person's death. All places and objects closely associated with the dead person are
believed to be potential locations for his mokuy soul. Much of the action of burial ceremonies is directed towards the mokuy spirit. For example in the yellow ochre dance the dancers in spearing the ground were spearing the body of the mokuy spirit and trying to drive it away into the forest. On every occasion that the body of the dead or his possessions are moved people take up an aggressive stance against his mokuy spirit, shouting at it and throwing things at it. The same applies to places closely associated with the death or with the dead person, fires being lit to send the spirit away ahead of the advancing smoke and flames (see Morphy in press c for further description).

Driving away the mokuy spirit was said to be the 'outside' or public meaning of the aggressive dimension of the spearing. The 'inside' meaning is that the aggression is being focused on those who caused the person's death. Biting the dilly bag in this second context has a dual significance. Narritjin explained it as follows:

'Before the body has been laid to rest in the coffin, you are very angry. You feel wild, you break down, you are against the songs against the body everything. If you just use your feelings then you are against the box or against the people - you must bite the dilly bag, hold yourself, make yourself still and you'll be settled down.

But if you suspect someone has caused the deaths - then everybody bites that dilly bag, that's your connection your power (däl\textsuperscript{2}) up from that dilly bag. You put into your mind all of your thoughts, and you connect everything to your power, and then you fight another man.'

1 The mokuy soul is not the only dangerous thing associated with these contexts. A full account of Yolngu pollution and contagion beliefs cannot however be given here. Some aspects of these beliefs will be referred to again in chapter 10.

2 It is significant that Narritjin in this context used the word däl which has the connotation of physical hardness, strength and determination. It is quite distinct from märr, wangarr ancestral power, though märr can endow objects with däl. Märr however as I shall show below, cannot be harnessed in the interests of human aggression (see Thomson, 1975:6).
Thus biting on the dilly bag at one level enables aggression felt by those mourning the death to be controlled. At another level the very process of controlling the aggression concentrates and focuses it, giving the participants in the ceremony the strength and power to go out and exact vengeance. The aggression is controlled in the context of a dance that enacts the spearing of the ground and the draining of blood. The aggression generated in the context of burial ceremonies, though it may not lead to an actual death, is still an effective symbolic component which reflects the hostilities generated between groups occasioned by sudden deaths (see also Warner, 1958:415).

Groups likely to be accused of causing deaths avoid the area where a burial ceremony is taking place and lock themselves in their homes at night. It may be many months before the groups involved become reconciled through the joint performance of a ceremony.

The other main theme of the ceremony is the guidance of the birrimbirr soul from the place of death to the clan well to which it belongs, the well from whence it came. The selection of the ritual episodes that characterise each phase of the ceremony is directed towards this end, as is the order in which song topics are sung and power names are incanted. In the case of the ceremony described above, the child died at Gurka'wuy on Trial Bay, but its spiritual home was Gunmurrutji 100 kilometres away in the north of Blue Mud Bay. A route had to be chosen connecting those two places. Only songs belonging to the dead person's moiety are sung, the spirit in this case being directed from the country of one Yirritja moiety clan to the next. The route chosen is shown in figure 18.
The journey of the birrimbirr spirit is thought to take many months and certainly it is not completed during the course of the ritual. What the participants intend through this enactment, through the songs they sing and the power names they incant, is the announcement of the death to the wangarr ancestors and to deceased relatives of the dead person. They are called upon to assist in guiding the birrimbirr soul back to its clan well.

The coffin painting

Following from the above discussion it should be apparent that the selection of a coffin painting depends on a number of factors including the clan affiliation of the dead person, the route chosen for the spirit, the place where the person died and a set of political factors connected with the relationship between the groups involved in the ceremony.

Warner (1958:416) provides the following interpretation of the purpose of body (coffin) paintings:

'The painting, according to native thought, is so done that the old ancestors can see which totem well the dead belonged to and carry the soul immediately to its proper resting place. The old dead marikmo [FF] is supposed to announce loudly 'Oh, that is my young maraitcha'...the design upon the dead man definitely places him in the hands of his proper ancestors...and takes him back to his totem well.'

Though the overt aim of the coffin paintings today is also to help guide the birrimbirr soul back to the clan well, Warner's account oversimplifies the situation. As well as communicating with actual dead relatives the painting is believed to communicate in a more direct way with wangarr ancestors in the clan well. The paintings themselves are believed to be endowed with the power (märr) of the wangarr
ancestors. Thomson (1975:8) provides an excellent description of this dimension of ancestral miny'tji (paintings).

'Miny'tji are derived directly from the totemic ancestor...the designs used today are the mali (shade, spiritual manifestation) of the miny'tji that exist on the wangarr.'

The painting is itself a manifestation of the wangarr ancestors, and thus provides a way of mediating directly between the birrimbirr soul and the wangarr ancestors of the clan. By placing the ancestral painting on the coffin, the mali of the wangarr ancestor becomes directly associated with the birrimbirr soul. The painting is the ideal mechanism for transferring the soul from the human to the ancestral plane.

These two levels of communication, firstly with the actual deceased ancestors of the person's clan and MMB clan and secondly directly with the wangarr ancestors, are structured in an 'outside' and 'inside' relationship to one another in Yolngu thought. The 'outside' explanation for the incantation of power names (likan) that occurs at various stages throughout the ceremony, is that the djirrikay (singer of names) is calling out the names of dead ancestors connected with the madayin associated with the ritual episode. The inside meaning of the incantation is that the djirrikay is shouting out the power names of the rangga. In both cases the intention is the same, to guide the soul (birrimbirr) of the dead: 'we call out the name of the rangga, the underground one, to give power to the dead person's soul.' Or as Thomson (1939:3) records (with reference to paintings on a dead body) 'his skin has miny'tji and therefore his ghost will have miny'tji too'. Apart from the rangga itself the clan's sacred paintings are the most powerful humanly produced manifestation of the wangarr ancestors. They are also one of the most durable in
that they can last beyond the ceremony, unlike the actual performances of the dances and incantations. The use of the painting is thus a central element in the process of reincorporating the birrimbirr soul within the body of the rangga.

The main instrumental function of coffin paintings is thus to play a part in reincorporating a person's birrimbirr spirit into the realm of the wangarr ancestors, to guide it on its journey to the clan well of the wangarr with which it is associated. It is important to note that it is not believed to have any direct effect on the mokuy spirit of the deceased. The mokuy spirit is not driven away by the painting nor is it incorporated in the world of the wangarr ancestors. The fact that paintings are believed only to be effective as far as the birrimbirr soul is concerned is a function of a more general belief in the nature of wangarr ancestral power and its relationship to human action and behaviour. Thomson's (1975:5) analysis of the nature of ancestral power (märr) is relevant here: 'Märr is power, the power which gives influence and prestige in the sense that it has religious, totemic or supernatural implications, quite distinct from visible force...' He goes on to quote one of his informants at length contrasting ancestral power which is located in the sacred objects and paintings of the clan, with power that can be used in an aggressive context: 'When a man is warlike and kills many people - that is not märr, it is anger, i.e. aggressiveness... A man does not fight by märr. Märr belongs to sacred things... My märr is really part of the spirit life of my clan.' The power of the wangarr is certainly beneficial, can bring success in hunting and is believed to be necessary to the well being and fertility of man and land, but it is not able to be directed by human action to cause death or harm to other human beings. Märr, for example cannot be used for sorcery (Thomson, 1961:
Ancestral power can be dangerous to those who infringe prohibitions surrounding sacred objects and other manifestations of the *wangarr* beings, especially to uninitiated men and women or people who are physically weak through illness; however its action is believed to be automatic and not controlled by man.

This neutrality of ancestral power as far as human agency is concerned helps to explain why paintings are concerned with the *birrimibirr* soul rather than with the *mokuy*. Action concerning the *mokuy* soul provides the context for expressing aggression against the living and the dead. It is not the appropriate context for the intervention of the *wangarr* beings whose power is imminent in the clan's paintings.

The selection of a coffin painting

The selection of a coffin painting depends on two main factors, the dead person's relationship with members of other clans, and the route along which his *birrimibirr* soul is to be guided. These two factors are in some ways interrelated.

I have already given one example which showed the way in which a coffin painting is integrated within a burial ceremony as a whole in terms of the route along which the *birrimibirr* soul is to be directed. The painting used in the ceremony at Gurka'wuy represented a place at Gâŋgaŋ, a mid point between the place where the person died and the clan well of his spirit. This route was one of the two main alternatives that existed (though a large number of minor variations were possible). The other route that could have been chosen was along the coast around Cape Shield and into Blue Mud Bay (see fig. 18). The decision as to which route to choose had to be made by the deceased's
MMB group, the Gurrumuru Dhaḻwangu, in consultation with his own clan. Until members of the Gurrumuru Dhaḻwangu clan arrived, Narritjin (Manggalili clan) kept the options open by singing songs appropriate to both routes. This example illustrates the importance of the MMB group in determining which painting is produced on a coffin. This conflicts in some respects with Warner's account (1958).

According to Warner (1958:415) a person after his death always had a painting representing his own clan well, the destination of his birrimbirr soul, painted on his chest. Thomson (cited in Peterson, 1976:97) also recorded that the painting on the dead body should belong to the person's own clan but in the absence of the 'right people' the clan design of his actual MMB is used instead. Neither of these statements apply to Yirrkala today, although Thomson's statement fits the data most closely. Of the five coffins I saw painted, four were painted with the person's MMB design and one with both the person's MMB's and own clan's painting. In all cases members of the person's own clan were present.

In the case where the person's own clan's painting was used, it represented the place that was to be the final destination of the birrimbirr soul. In the cases where a MMB clan painting was the one used, the totemic well represented was not the final place to which the soul was being directed.

In some ways what Warner reports is what one would expect. If the intention is to direct the birrimbirr spirit back to a person's own clan well it would seem logical to have a painting representing that place on the coffin. However, the relationship between a person's birrimbirr spirit, his clan affiliation and the wangarr ancestors is not a straight forward one. That the MMB painting should be used is
clearly consistent with Yolngu ideology. As I have shown in Chapter 3, during his life time an individual obtains rights in his MMB clan's paintings and becomes close to his MMB clan's madayin through gaining knowledge of it. Knowledge of the clan's madayin enables an individual to gain some control over the clan's sacred objects as expressions of ancestral power. This access to the power of his MMB clan is quite compatible with the Yolngu ideology of descent: as I have shown a person may be affiliated to his MMB madayin through his spirit conception, and may take over the MMB land should the clan become extinct. I was told on several occasions that in deciding on the structure of a burial ceremony people follow the line from which a person was born, that is, his matriline: 'the spirit goes through the mother to the mother's mother and back to his own clan'. As far as a person's own moiety is concerned he is seen to be a product of his own clan and his MMB patriline. It is therefore quite appropriate that his MMB clan painting should be used to reincorporate his spirit within the body of spirits associated with the wangarr ancestors to whom he is closest by descent. It signifies that a person's wangarr ancestral inheritance is wider than that associated with the madayin of his own patrilineal group. At a sociological level, the role of the MMB clan reaffirms the close relationship between a MMB group and a ZDC group which is of central importance as far as rights in women and rights in land are concerned.

One further explanation as to why the MMB painting is used most frequently is one that is provided by Yolngu themselves. I was told that the MMB clan painting is produced when a person is buried a long way from his own clan well, whereas if he was buried in his own country then his own clan painting would be used. As the majority of people
today die a considerable distance from their clan territory one would expect MMB paintings to be produced most frequently. However, I was told by other people that the MMB clan painting is always used, even when a person is buried in his own clan territory near his clan well. This statement is clearly in conflict with the first and neither statement is fully borne out by the evidence at hand. On the two occasions at which I was present when a person was buried in his own clan country his MMB painting was done on his coffin. However in one of these cases the man's own clan's painting was also produced on the coffin lid, and in the other, although the man was buried in his own clan territory, he had died over one hundred kilometres away. On all occasions of burial away from the clan territory, the MMB painting only was used. The evidence thus tends to confirm the first explanation with the qualification that when a person dies on his own clan territory his own or his MMB clan painting can be used.

2. The Djungguwan-Molk

The ceremony discussed in this section is a shortened form of the djungguwan ceremony. It is termed either djungguwan or molk by people at Yirrkala (see C.H. Berndt, 1970:1309). I will refer to the ceremony as the djungguwan-molk in order to distinguish it from the djungguwan-proper. A principal difference between the djungguwan-molk and the djungguwan-proper as described by Warner (1958:25) and Berndt (1974 fascicle 2:12) is that the former does not provide the context for circumcision. Circumcision is today usually performed as a separate ceremony, the dhāpi, which occurs the year after a djungguwan-
molk has been held. The two ceremonies combined are in a sense equivalent to a full length djungguwan-proper.¹

The following is a brief account of one of the djungguwan-molk that I recorded, focussing in particular on the art produced. The ceremony took place at Gurka'wuy in October 1976.

The djungguwan-molk began with the cutting and preparation of the djuwany posts (plate 12). The posts were prepared in a clearing made in the bush about a hundred yards from the main camp. This became the men's ceremonial ground, from which women and uninitiated men were excluded. The posts consisted of five-foot lengths of stringybark tree, with a narrow fringe of bark left one foot from the top. The whole post was painted with clan designs (plate 12). The posts took five days to paint, although on a previous occasion that I saw djuwany posts being made the whole process stretched over a period of several months.² The design on one of the posts (plate 13) was drawn by Mithili of the Marrakulu (Dhuwa moiety) clan, the senior man of the clan owning the design. The infilling was done by members of the Madarrpa clan (Yirritja moiety, ZS to the Marrakulu). The other two posts were drawn by Bokarra a Manggalili (Yirritja moiety) man, and senior ZS for the ceremony.³

The painting took place in seclusion from women and uninitiated men, to the accompaniment of singing. On the day following the arrival of the main body of participants from Yirrkala the focus of the ceremony moved to the main camp. A boy of nine, belonging to the Rirratjingu clan, who was participating in the ceremony for the first time had his face painted by Bokarra (plate 14). The painting took place under a shade in the centre of the camp, separated from the women but in full view of them. That evening the boy was joined by two others of the same age and taken up to the clearing where the posts were being made. The journey from the main camp took the form of a ceremonial dance in which the separation of the boys from their mothers and of the men from the women was dramatised. The boys were taken by senior men of their ZS set and M clan set, who carried spears and dilly bags and marched ahead of the other initiated men towards the men's ground. The women followed behind a short distance before

¹ The regular performance of shortened versions of major ceremonies is almost certainly a response to the circumstances of mission life and the five day working week introduced by the mission. However shortened versions of circumcision ceremonies were performed in the past (see Warner, 1958:329), when little time was available.

² At Gurka'wuy the posts had to be made quickly as the ceremony was being filmed by Film Australia. Other parts of the ceremony however took a similar length of time to that observed by me at Yirrkala.

³ In a previous ceremony at Yirrkala, Bokarra and Dula, a Munyuku man and also a ZS for the ceremony, produced the paintings entirely themselves.
the men turned and guided them back to the main camp. The boys were then taken to the men's ground where the posts had been carefully hidden away. Once they were there each was given a dilly bag, red ochre was rubbed over their chests and feather breast girdles were put over their shoulders and across their chests (see plate 15). They were then lifted up onto the shoulders of the men who had brought them up and carried back to the main camp. Another man carried with him the wangatja (fig. 19), an object made of tall thin leafy branches bound together (see Warner, 1958:263). The wangatja was placed in the centre of the main camp and became the focal point of the evening dances.

The following day two men were painted with body paintings (plates 16-18). One painting (plate 17) of a single goanna was done on the chest of a Djambarrpuynu (Dhuwa moiety) clan man from Elcho Island. The other, a painting of two goannas and a cylindrical object (plate 18), was painted on a Marrakulu-Dhurrurrunga (Dhuwa moiety) clan man.

While the paintings were being produced, the dhumarra trumpet was blown over the bodies of the men (plate 17). The dhumarra is one of two yidak (drone pipes) associated with the djungguwan ceremony the other being the yulunggurr. The yulunggurr trumpet represents the snake yulunggurr that swallowed the Wawilak sisters at Mirrarmina at a later stage of their journey. The dhumarra is linked with the Dhuwa moiety sugarbag (see also Groger-Wurm, 1973:33). In the evening a group of young men aged 16-18 had their faces painted on the men's ground. A number of dances were then taught the young men in the main camp in a ceremony in which women participated fully. The dancing continued late into the night until people went to sleep. Several hours later in the early hours of the morning a restricted dance was performed during which the ceremonial ground was constructed close to where the wangatja had stood (plate 19). The ground was marked out by Bokarra who supervised its construction throughout. Women and uninitiated men remained 'asleep' beneath blankets while this was going on.

The following day the painting of the posts continued. In the main camp a pit was dug in the centre of the ceremonial ground. Women painted each other's faces in a design of red white and yellow dots. In the evening after the posts had been completed, a group of young men aged 20-25 were taken up to the men's ground and taught a number of dances belonging to both moiety's. In particular they were taught dances associated with the rock wallaby (dulaku), hawk and fire (see also Warner, 1958:272). Later on in the evening a ceremony was performed during which the possessions of two people who had died the previous year at Yirrkala were placed in the pit that had been dug in the centre of the ground, and buried. After midnight the men went back to the men's ground to collect the posts, having first made sure that all the women and young men had their heads covered. The posts were then danced down from the clearing into the main camp and erected within the ceremonial ground, one at either end and the other in the centre (plate 19). Feather string was then attached to the posts connecting them with each other. The dhumarra trumpet was then blown over the posts, along the feather string and over the assembled company.

The following day the concluding dance was performed by women. The women dancers carried dilly bags, spears and spear throwers,
re-enacting the ancestral Wawilak women as they travelled across Arnhem Land. The women ended their dance at the ceremonial ground (molk) and suspended their bags on a forked stick beside one of the posts.

The iconography of the Djingguwan-molk

The ceremony as a whole re-enacts a section of the journey of two female ancestral beings, the Wawilak sisters, through North-east Arnhem Land. The mythology of the Wawilak women provides the basic mythological theme for three of the major Dhuwa moiety ceremonies: the ngulmarrk, djingguwan, and gunapipi (see Warner, 1958:244 ff., and Berndt, 1951).

The songs (manikay) performed concerned a number of ancestral beings in addition to the Wawilak sisters, the main ones being Djaypin, Wuyal, Wurray and Ganydjalala. The main events enacted were the journeys of these ancestral beings between Trial Bay (Gurka'wuy) and the country of the Wawilak clan, which lives inland from the Baykurrtji River in the north of Blue Mud Bay. These ancestral beings interacted with the Wawilak sisters on the first part of the latter's journey to Mirrarrmina.¹ Ganydjalala is sometimes said to be one of the Wawilak women. The direction of movement is important, since it differentiates the mythology of this ceremony and of the owning clan, the Marrakulu, from the myths recorded by Warner and Berndt.² The Marrakulu emphasise

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¹ A core element of the myth recorded by Berndt and Warner is the swallowing of the women by the snake yulunggurrt at Mirrarrmina waterhole in Liyagalawumirr country on the upper Woolen River. The swallowing was consequent on the women polluting the snake's waterhole with their menstrual blood. This element was not a feature of the ceremony recorded at Trial Bay, which focused on an earlier part of their journey, before they had reached Mirrarrmina.

² Warner (1958:250 ff. and Berndt, R. (1951:250 ff.), record myths which state that the Wawilak sisters entered North-east Arnhem Land from the South. According to Warner the women originated in the country of the Wawilak people. Berndt discusses a number of alternative origins, referring in particular to the Roper River.
the journeys from their own country in Trial Bay to the Wawilak country. This journey is associated with a major theme of the Wawilak myth as recorded by Warner (1958:321): *yarrpany* (honey). All of the major ancestral beings concerned are hunting for long-nosed\(^1\) sugar bag (Dhuwa moiety honey) in stringy-bark trees. The songs record how they cut down the trees with stone axes, or in the case of the Wawilak sisters with hooked boomerangs. The trees crashed to the ground, clearing areas of forest and sending beeswax, honey and splinters of wood flying through the surrounding forest. The Wawilak sisters and Ganydjalala also hunted *dulaku* (rock wallaby) in the stone country inland. They hunted as men do today, using fire to drive the wallaby and spear and spear-thrower to kill it. This episode provides the linking theme with the myths recorded by Warner for Mirrirrmina. In Warner's version, the women early on in their journey named the kangaroo, and 'tried to catch these kangaroos, but they ran away' (Warner, 1958:313).

The *wangatja* (fig. 19) which is carried down from the men's ground represents the stringy-bark trees that the Wawilak sisters cut down in their search for honey, and also the sisters themselves. Warner (1958:263) states that the number of component sticks in the *wangatja* represents the number of initiates in the ceremony.

The *djuwany* posts, which are not referred to by Warner, and which are not today a feature of the ceremony as it is performed at Milingimbi,\(^2\) have the same set of meanings as the *wangatja*: stringy-bark tree, the Wawilak sisters, and the initiates. The fringe of stringy-bark around the top of the post represents the hair of the

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1 'long-nosed refers to the fact that the hive of this particular species of bee has an entrance which projects out from the tree.

2 Ian Keen, Department of Anthropology, R.S. Pac. S., A.N.U., pers. comm.
ancestral women, and also their pubic aprons. The designs on the main body of each post represent different places on the journey of the women, the dashed design above the bark fringe signifying both honey bee (through the meanings 'wax', 'larvae', 'stringy-bark flower' and 'honey') and menstrual blood. The paintings on the posts can occur in other contexts as body or coffin paintings.

The ceremonial ground is called molk (see plates 19, 20 and fig. 20). It is triangular, and is the same ground as that used in the djungguwan-proper ceremony and other ceremonies associated with the Wawilak mythology (see for example Warner, 1958:265, fig. 3). On this occasion it represents the molk at Manbalala, where the Wawilak sisters performed the same ceremony in ancestral times. The women then owned all the sacred ceremonies and kept them secret from men. The ground also represents stringy-bark tree and the watercourse at Manbalala which was formed by the tree when it was cut down there by the sisters in their search for honey. The end section of the ground represents the hut which the sisters built at various places on their journey. In the closed performance of a djungguwan-proper ceremony, a shelter would be built at that end of the ground to contain the sacred objects used in the ceremony (see Warner, 1958:265). The hut is associated with menstrual and afterbirth blood, and this is one of the meanings associated with the ground in the molk ceremony.

The dhumarratrappeet signifies the body of the bee fly (Bombyliidae) which hovers at the entrance to the hive of the 'long-nosed sugar bag' bee. The trumpet is decorated with feather string and painted at one end with red and white dots. It is similar in form to the yunggurr trumpet which is used to represent the snake at Mirrarmina in the djungguwan-proper ceremony, and may also be used in the djungguwan-molk.
It is used in similar contexts, being blown over the body paintings and posts as they are being produced, over the feather string and over the assembled company. It is seen as containing the spiritual power of the sugar bag madayin. The dots on the end have the same set of meanings as those on the djuwany posts.

The white feather string suspended over the ground between the posts has a set of meanings which overlap with those of djuwany and dhumarra: 'bees', 'larvae' and 'honey', which themselves in turn signify 'sugar bag'. The string also represents the journey of the Wawilak sisters. It is knotted at intervals along its length, and each knot represents an important site on the route of the journey. At the Gurka'wuy ceremony, the knots (see plate 19) signified places between Trial Bay and Wawilak country. The precise places signified depends on which section of the sisters' journey is being enacted in a particular ceremony, and also on the location of the ceremony.

Paintings and the Themes of the Djungguwan-Molk

In discussing the role of paintings in the djungguwan-molk ceremony I will follow the procedure adopted in the previous section on burial ceremonies: that is, I will examine the paintings in the context of the main themes enacted in the ceremony. I then consider sociological aspects of the use of paintings in the ceremony focusing in particular on the topic of group identity.

There are three main themes in the djungguwan-molk ceremony that I consider here: fertility and renewal, the generational transfer of ancestral power, and the inclusion and exclusion of members of
society on the basis of age and sex. These themes, although interrelated, can be separated for heuristic purposes.

Fertility and renewal

The ceremony as a whole was said by informants to give strength to the participants in the ceremony, both male and female. It was said also to free the people from tabus associated with deaths that had occurred in previous years and to free areas of land and make them good for hunting. The ceremony is also associated with fertility in a more literal sense, that is, the procreation of children. The term **djuwany** is said to mean spirit children, and the **djungguwan** ceremony provides one of the contexts in which the spirit conception of children is formalised.\(^1\) Two main symbolic themes which express fertility were enacted throughout the ceremony. One was the Dhuwa moiety sugar bag, and the other was the re-enactment of the journey of the **wangarr** Wawilak sisters.

As previously outlined, at one level the ceremonial ground represents the structure of a beehive. The white feather string suspended over the ground represents the white larvae in the hive, and the trumpet blown over the hive the abdomen of the bee fly. The white dots painted on the trumpet and included as an element in all of the paintings produced for the ceremony signify the white flower of the stringy-bark tree, the source of nectar for the bees. Connection between these symbols and human fertility is explicitly made; since

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\(^1\) Warner, 1958:280 for example records that women who believe themselves to be pregnant inform their husbands prior to or during the **djungguwan** ceremony. The husband then recalls an incident which suggests to him the spirit conception of the child. The power names associated with the **wangarr** ancestor involved in the spirit conception are subsequently called out during the blood letting phase of the ceremony, reinforcing the spiritual component of the child in the womb.
one of the other meanings given to the white dots and the feather
down is that they are or that they represent spirit children.

It is tempting to interpret the action of blowing the trumpet
over the feather string while the initiates lie interlocked in the
ceremonial ground beneath it, as a symbol of sexual intercourse. The
bee fly which the dhumarra trumpet represents is said by the Yolngu to
hover in front of the entrance of a hive and is one of the means by
which the presence of a hive can be detected. Little is known about
the life cycle of the bee fly, however McKeown's (1945) description
provides information that is relevant in this context. He writes that
the larvae of the bee fly are parasites in the nests of bees and
wasps: 'I have seen the flies hovering about the entrance to these
nests and have seen the fly bend its abdomen forwards beneath its body
and apparently shoot its eggs into the burrow'. The action of the bee
fly in squirting eggs into the hive suggests the ejaculation of sperms
from a penis. The Yolngu do not however, interpret the bee fly in this
context, rather they focus on the bee fly as a restorer of life to
the bees. The bee fly is said to lick dead or dying bees and make
them recover health. In either case the blowing of the trumpet can be
interpreted as a symbol of fertility or renewal.

The second symbolic theme is concerned with female fertility
and creativity. The ceremony re-enacts a stage in the journey of the
Wawilik sisters, particularly focusing on their actions in creating a
major water course at Manbalala to the north of Cape Shield, by
chopping down a giant stringy-bark tree. The chopping down of the
tree connects the Wawilik sisters with the sugar bag. A long-nosed
sugar bag was in the top of the tree when they chopped it down. On
hitting the ground the tree split into many pieces, the honey and the
bees were spread all over the country and splinters of wood (djuwany posts) fell in the land of a number of different Dhuwa moiety clans. The Wawilak sisters in this context can thus be seen to be involved in the spread of Dhuwa moiety sugar bag. The white dots in the paintings and the feather string represent specifically spirit children left behind at Manbabala by the Wawilak sisters. The two themes are thus interconnected and reinforce one another, meanings associated with both being encoded in the same elements of paintings and in the shape and features of the ceremonial ground.

During the course of the ceremony the youngest initiates are identified with the Wawilak sisters. The wangatja and djuwany posts represent both the Wawilak sisters and the initiates. The feather string breast girdles placed over their shoulders represent the breast girdles worn by women in general and the Wawilak sisters in particular. The girdle is explicitly stated to make the boys like women, and men make jokes about their 'breasts' and how pretty they look. The identification of the initiates takes on an additional significance in the context of circumcision ceremonies, where the blood lost during the operation is seen as like menstrual/afterbirth blood. In particular it is like the blood that polluted the well at Mirrarrrmina which led to the snake yulunggurr swallowing the women (see Warner, 1958:372). In the djunguwan-molk, the red ochre painted on the chests of the boys has this meaning, signifying the menstrual/afterbirth blood of the two Wawilak women.

Menstrual blood has both positive and negative connotations: it is dangerous and polluting when uncontrolled but in ritual contexts it is a powerful symbol which is believed to give people strength and endow them with wangarr power. I would suggest that in entering the
**djungguwan-mort** ceremony, the initiates are taking the first steps towards gaining the ritual knowledge that enables them to gain control of the symbols of female fertility. The placing of the breast girdles over the young men, rather than signifying their status as being close to that of women, signals the beginning of this aspect of the process of male initiation.

The generational transfer of spiritual power

The **djungguwan-mort** ceremony has many of the aspects of an ancestor cult. A central theme of the ceremony is the transfer of spiritual components of dead clan ancestors to living members of the clan and to people of related clans. This is done through the mediation of the clan's **madayin**, manifested in the sacred objects and paintings used in the ceremony and in the ritual performances that take place. The transfer takes place both at the level of transferring the power of the **wangarr** ancestors to the participants in the ceremony as a whole, and at a more specific level between recently deceased members of the clan and initiates. In this latter respect the theme of the **djungguwan-mort** ceremony is closely linked to one of the main themes of the burial ceremony discussed in the previous section of this chapter. In the context of burial ceremonies we saw how one of the main objectives was to reincorporate the **birrimbirr** spirit of the deceased person within the body of spirits associated with the clan's **madayin**. In the **djungguwan** ceremony the process is reversed. The objective here is to transfer spiritual powers from the **wangarr** ancestors to living members of the clan. The successful return of the deceased's **birrimbirr** spirit is a necessary preliminary to the performance of a **djungguwan** ceremony. This is the way in which the Yolngu discuss the process, stating that a **djungguwan** ceremony must
be performed a year or so after the death of a member of the clan. Although the return of a birrimbirr soul is a prerequisite of the performance of a djungguwan ceremony, I argue below that the transfer of spiritual power is best seen as a renewal of the relationship between the wangarr ancestors and living members of the clan rather than the reincarnation of a specific individual's spirit.

The djuwany posts represent the Wawilak sisters, although other wangarr beings may be associated with them as well. A relationship is established between one of the initiates and one of the posts, and also between the post and a recently deceased member of the clan. The painting on the post represents a place to which the deceased's birrimbirr soul has been directed and is not necessarily the painting that was produced on the person's coffin lid. During the ceremony the spirit associated with the deceased is said to be transferred to the initiate associated with the same post.

Plate 13 illustrates one of the djuwany posts erected at the Gurka'wuy ceremony. The post was said to contain the spirit of a Marrakulu woman who died at Yirrkala. The painting represents the deceased woman's country at Trial Bay, the designs signifying fresh water mixed with honey flowing along the course of the river created by the Wawilak sisters. The post represents the deceased woman in two senses. It is acknowledged to be a memorial for her: 'when her children see this post they will be reminded of her', and the painting on it contains aspects of her birrimbirr spirit. The post is linked with the Rirratjingu boy whose face was painted by Bokarra (pl. 14). The boy and the woman stood in a classificatory DC-MM relationship, there was however no actual genealogical link between the two.
I was told by Dundiwuy, a senior Marrakulu man, 'old Marrakulu woman who died - she gave her spirit to that djuwany post - the spirit goes to Dadaynga's boy. That's why they put the painting on, the spirit goes from the dead person into the post where it is joined with the wangarr and then it is passed on to the boy.'

This case shows that at least at one level a close identification is made between actual known deceased people and spirits incarnate in the sacred objects and paintings of a clan. In the context of discussing burial ceremonies I suggested that the relationship is in fact more abstract and diffuse than this, because the power names (likan) shouted out over the coffin signify both deceased people and the names of the wangarr ancestors. Although at one level the names were said to be summoning spirit relatives of the deceased to accompany his soul on its journey, at another level they were said to be communicating directly with the wangarr ancestors. The same applies in the case of paintings on the djuwany posts. When I questioned Dundiwuy further about the relationship between the spirits and the initiate he stated that the spirit was not really the spirit of the woman 'really the spirit comes from that post from the Wawilak women'.

This second statement is compatible with the first, but suggests that the emphasis should be on the wangarr ancestral origin of power, rather than on spiritual succession from one Yolngu generation to the next. The primary source of power is the rangga (i.e. the wangarr being) not the deceased person. The deceased person's power itself derived from the rangga. Throughout a person's life he or she continually accumulates märr (ancestral power) through the performance of ceremonies, the transfer of power to the initiates in the djungguwan ceremony being one such example. This power, in the form of a person's
birrimbirr spirit, returns on a person's death to the wangarr realm, to the clan's sacred objects, paintings and land, to be released subsequently to initiates and people in general in the context of ceremonial performances. The overall effect is one of the recycling of ritual power. The use of actual named individuals is a way of modelling a process which is conceptualised at a more general level.

Exclusion and inclusion

In the djungguwan-molk, exclusion-inclusion operates on two dimensions, male:female and uninitiated males:initiated males. The exclusion of women from certain contexts and from the observation of certain events is absolute. Women are denied access to the men's ceremonial ground where the paintings and preparations for the ceremony are carried out and where certain dances are performed. They are also prevented from observing certain events that took place in the main camp through being hidden beneath blankets. The women are not allowed to see the ceremonial ground being marked out nor are they allowed to witness the djuwany posts being erected. Similarly in the case of burial ceremonies we noted that women are excluded from the place where the coffin is being painted. However in this case their exclusion is not dramatised nor is it a major theme of the ceremony.

In the djungguwan-molk the exclusion of women from restricted contexts was dramatically enacted on a number of occasions, notably when the young initiates were led up to the men's ceremonial ground. The women followed behind the men along the path to the men's ground, but halfway up it they were driven back by the men. As well as dramatising the women's exclusion from the men's ground this episode
also emphasises the loss of control by the women over the young boys and the separation of the initiates from the sphere of the women.

The exclusion of women must be viewed partly in terms of their lack of the power to control events that take place in the ritual sphere. The dramatisation of their lack of control operates at both a general and a specific level. Generally speaking the exclusion of women or rather the fact that they can be excluded by the adult men is in itself evidence of their lack of control over events. At this level it could be argued that their exclusion adds to the power of the initiated men by creating secrecy and enabling the secrecy of the events that go on at the men's ground to be maintained. Certainly secrecy and the exclusiveness of knowledge do contribute to the power of men by creating an unknown that is firmly in their control. However it would be wrong to over-emphasise the degree of women's ignorance of men's secrets. Women know many of the things that they are excluded from, and this knowledge dramatises and accentuates their lack of control. Women know for example that men produce paintings on the djuwany posts and on the bodies of initiates, as they see both of these things once they are completed (though in the case of body paintings they are often partly obscured when the initiate re-enters the main camp). There is certainly an element of mystification in the production and revelation of djuwany posts; the posts are erected at night and the first women see of them is in the light of dawn the following day. Women are not supposed to know that the posts have been made by the men and every effort is made to conceal evidence of their manufacture from them. However, women do know that the posts are manufactured in the men's camp, and today see the same paintings being produced on commercial bark paintings in public contexts. What is dramatised above all else is the lack of control
women have over the production of paintings in ritual and over the
direction of ritual performance. This lack of control has added force
and poignancy in that women know that once it was they who controlled
the ceremony and that the men are acting out dances that they learnt
from the ancestral Wawilak women (see Warner 1958:258). Indeed the
final dance consists of the women themselves enacting the journey of
the Wawilak sisters advancing on the ceremonial ground and hanging
their dilly bags on the djuwany posts which are themselves culturally
produced representations of the Wawilak women. In the dances women
carry spears and spearthrowers and perform versions of the sacred
dances that the Wawilak sisters performed in wangarr times and that the
men perform today. The dance highlights the oppositions and reversals
involved in the triadic relationship between men, women and the
wangarr Wawilak sisters. Women today do not have the social attributes
of men that the Wawilak sisters possessed (i.e. control of ceremonial
performances and the technology of hunting), men on the other hand in
the ceremony enact the female attributes of the Wawilak sisters and
manipulate symbols of female fertility manifest in the sexual and
procreative powers of human females. The episode demonstrates women's
lack of control over the culturally produced manifestations of
ancestral power, yet at the same time it demonstrates the relationship
between that power and female fertility.¹

¹ Warner (1958:387) argues that women and initiates enact the role of
the Wawilak sisters in ceremonies because they are perceived as
basically polluting - he focuses on a dialectic between the women
(as unclean) and the snake (as purifying), the latter being male.
In this context the impurity of women can be interpreted to provide
a socio-mythological explanation of their subjugation to men in the
ritual sphere (Munn 1969:194,200 produces a similar argument to
this). My interpretation is complementary to this, focussing on
the fact that female blood, a central element in male symbolism,
is viewed both positively (as creative) and negatively (as polluting).
The positive and negative aspects of menstrual blood are projected
back into the mythical time and separated out, the positive

(Cont'd next page)
Although secrecy is important in the creation of men's power, it is equally important that women and uninitiated men know something of what men are controlling. It is in this context that paintings are so important. Paintings are known to be produced by men and to be a central element in their control of ancestral power, but women's control over the paintings is minimal and their knowledge of their meanings restricted. Women see the djuwany posts as evidence of the creative powers controlled by men, although they are not told of their significance; they glimpse paintings on the chests of initiated men smeared out and covered beneath their shirts, and they know that in burial ceremonies men are painting a coffin lid but they never see the painting. Women know the complexity and variety of paintings, they know there is something to be controlled. These brief glimpses of the products of the knowledge that men control are clearly important in emotionally binding women to the male controlled cults, and enabling the cults to be effective at a societal level.¹

The second dimension of exclusion-inclusion that operates is that between uninitiated males: initiated males. In contrast to the male:female dichotomy this dimension as a whole is relatively

(Footnote cont'd from previous page)

aspects being reconstituted through manipulation of symbols by men in the context of closed ceremonies, the negative aspects being dramatised in the publicly performed phases of ceremonies as a demonstration of the reason for women's subjugation. This symbolic process does not alter the fact that menstrual blood and afterbirth blood are perceived positively by both men and women as well as being polluting, indeed the power of blood as a symbol comes partly from the fact that men associate it directly with female procreative powers. What the control of the symbolic process does enable men to do, is to come to terms with the apparent inconsistency between men's controlling the cosmic and social symbols of procreation and the location of procreative powers in the female members of society (a similar argument has been put forward by J. van Baal (1975:116ff.)).

¹ Elkin (1948:18) expresses this well when he states that designs left on the bodies of initiates when they move from the closed men's ground to the open camp are 'a visible breakthrough of the secret and sacred'.
exclusive and is in a sense best seen as consisting of different stages in the process of the incorporation of young men into the exclusive arena of the men's ceremonial ground and the achievement of the status of adult initiated men. Four stages of inclusion can be identified in the djungguwan-molk. These stages correspond to 'levels of involvement' in the activities of the men's ground and I prefer this phrase to 'grades of initiation' as the latter has too formal connotations. The four stages are:

1) young boys taken to the ground for the first time;
2) 16-18 year olds whose faces are painted on the men's ground;
3) 18-25 year olds taught sacred dances on the men's ground;
4) adult men over the age of 25 who have freedom of access to the men's ground.

Only the first stage is accompanied by dramatic ritual events in the public arena that signal their change of status. The young boys who first had their faces painted are taken by senior men from the main camp to the protestations of women and led up to the men's ground where they are presented with their sacred dilly bags. The boys' visit is exceedingly brief, all sacred objects are carefully concealed before their arrival and they are given no instruction. In the djungguwan-proper the boys are circumcised at this stage. In the case of the djungguwan-molk they will be circumcised the following year.

The boys going through the second stage spent a longer time on the men's ground while they had their faces painted. In this case there was no attempt to conceal the djuwan posts from them though they were given no instruction as to their meaning.
The third stage involved young men spending a longer time on the men's ground while they were instructed how to perform certain restricted dances, and taught sacred words associated with the ceremony, as well as receiving moral instruction. After learning the dances they performed some of them in the ritual that followed in the main camp while the women were hidden beneath blankets.

The fourth group consisted of adult men who had been through the previous stages. These men spent most of their time on the men's ground for the duration of the ceremony, singing clan songs and assisting with the manufacture of the sacred objects. Younger and less knowledgeable members of this group did receive instruction from other men present, in particular as regards the correct way to produce elements of the paintings.

The main distinction between the fourth stage and the first two stages is the distinction between doing and having things done to one. The third stage is intermediary between the two in that the initiates are taught dances which they subsequently perform. From an early age men gain limited access to the exclusive context of the men's ground. As they pass from one stage to the next they become increasingly involved in the activities that go on there and their visits are of longer duration, culminating in freedom of access to the closed sphere.

Sociological Factors: Group Involvement in the Ceremony

We saw in the case of burial ceremonies that although the primary focus of the ceremony was set at the level of an individual's own clan and the clan of his actual MMB, the ceremony also involved the participation of a number of other clans of the deceased's own
moiety as well. At one level the participation of the other clans was necessary to ensure that the dead person's birrimbirr soul returned to its own clan's wangarr and at a second level it signified that the participating clans bore no ill-will towards the deceased person or his clan. The participants were seen to be sharing out responsibilities to act on behalf of the dead man and his clan.¹ Burial ceremonies as a rule involve little participation by members of clans of the opposite moiety to the deceased, though ZS are involved in some of the preparations. The focus is on participation on behalf of the deceased's birrimbirr soul and on behalf of his clan.

In the djungguwan-molk ceremony the emphasis is reversed. Although the ceremony is owned by one particular Dhuwa moiety clan set, the ceremony is performed on behalf of all the clans present and involves the participation of clans of both moieties on a regional basis.² However the ceremony does also provide a scenario within which individual and clan based rights in particular madayin are demonstrated and reinforced.

The ceremony is owned by clans associated with the Wawilak sisters mythology, which in Yirrkala consists primarily of two clans,

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¹ This emphasis on shared responsibilities is well demonstrated by the following summary of a statement by Narritjin to the Gurrumuru Dhajwangu when they arrived at the burial ceremony at Trial Bay. 'You two Gurrumuru Dhajwangu men have got to take the coffin. I had to take the body. If this child had died with you at Gangan, [in Dhajwangu territory] and you had called out for me, well that would mean I would do the painting. But this child died near my hands, that means I take the body and you do the painting.'

² Similar considerations apply to all of the ceremonies associated with the Wawilak sisters mythological complex: the djungguwan, gunapipi, ngulmarrk and madiyala, all of which operate at a regional level and involve the participation of members of both moieties.
the Marrakulu and the Rirratjingu. Other clans which owned the
 ceremony, notably the Marrangu have recently become extinct in the
 male line, though their madayin are used in the ceremony. Although
 the majority of the paintings used in the ceremony belong to the
 Marrakulu and Marrangu clans, other clans' madayin may be involved
 in the ceremony in a number of ways. Some of the dances performed
 are owned by the Yirritja moiety and in the djungguwan-proper
 paintings belonging to clans of both moieties will be produced on the
 boys who are to be circumcised. The boys' chests are always painted
 with a design of their own moiety, usually belonging to their actual
 MMB's clan. Wangarr spirits belonging to both moieties are believed
 to be present at the ceremony and can enter people of the same moiety
 to which they belong.

 The emphasis in the ceremony is on sharing the power of the
 wangarr ancestors amongst all the people present and to free the
 community from pollution. The action of blowing the drone pipe over
 the assembled company is to be interpreted in this context; so too is
 the use of blood for painting in the djungguwan-proper (see Warner,
 1958:274 ff.). The blood is released from the elbow of initiated men
 and collected in a paper-bark basket over which the yulunggurr trumpet
 is blown, endowing it with the power of the afterbirth blood of the
 wangarr women. The blood is then used to paint men of both moieties.

 Although the 'power' of the ceremony is effective at a communal
 level members of the two moieties have very different roles in the
 ceremony. The major distinction that operates at the level of moiety
 is that between owners and managers. The owners are members of the

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1 The Rirratjingu have gained rights to perform the ceremony recently
from a distant MMB clan.
Dhuwa moiety clan set linked by the Wawilak sisters and the managers are members of the opposite moiety who are ZS to the owners. The ZS role is primarily that of worker for their mother's group, though senior ZS also have a decision-making role and are consulted before the commencement of each phase of the ceremony. Bokarra is the senior ZS, and he oversaw the production of every painting, initiating most of them himself, and marking out the shape of the ceremonial ground. Indeed, the ceremony can take place only with the agreement of senior ZS, and in their presence. Thus the success of the ceremony depends on the co-operation of members of both moieties. The structure of the relationship between the set of ZS and the M clan set in fact emphasises the communal as opposed to the clan based aspect of the ceremony. As I have shown, the ZS form a group that cross-cuts the clan organisation of their own moiety, and the ZS set is formed in relation to a set of clans of the opposite moiety linked by the same mythological track. The owner:manager relationship also de-emphasises clan organisation in another way by emphasising differences that operate at a moiety level; focusing attention on the relationship between moieties rather than clans.¹

The ceremony does also operate at a clan level. The paintings used in it are owned by clans and the primary right in the use of those paintings is vested in the senior members of those clans. The display of the paintings provides a context for instructing initiates in the clan ownership of paintings and in their responsibilities as members of a clan. Thus in a previous djungguwan-molk ceremony that I saw performed at Yirrkala the young men in the final stages of

¹ The emphasis on the moiety level of organisation is shown clearly in Warner's (1958:263) description of the djungguwan.
initiation into that ceremony were told which clans held rights in which paintings on the djuwany posts, including rights in the paintings of extinct clans. The ceremony at Trial Bay provided the context for the incorporation of one of the people painted into the membership of the Marrakulu clan.

One of the men whose body was painted was Mutunngambi the son of Welwi, a Marraku-Dhurrurrunga man who had died the previous year. I showed in Chapter 1 how Welwi had attempted unsuccessfully to form a new clan grouping through the amalgamation of two clans nearing extinction. The painting of Mutunngambi represented the nadir of Welwi's failure to achieve this ambition. Mutunngambi had a Marrakulu painting (pl. 18) painted on his chest by Dunjiwuy, a senior Marrakulu man, in the seclusion of the men's ceremonial ground. While the painting was being produced, leaders of other Dhuwa moiety clans present told him that it was his painting and that he belonged to the Marrakulu clan. They said that he should forget what his father had told him and that his father had been too concerned with the paintings of other clans to teach him his own paintings (i.e. Marrakulu clan ones). In a sense the ceremony provided the context for tying up loose ends in the system, a context in which the senior members of the Dhuwa moiety present agreed to incorporate Welwi's son within a second clan.
Conclusion

Paintings function in ceremonies to provide a locus of wangarr (ancestral) power. They have the advantage of flexibility and durability; they can be painted directly onto an individual's body and so bring the person into direct contact with the mali (shade) of the wangarr beings, or they may be painted on objects and in this form last beyond the duration of the ceremony. The fact that they encode the relationship between place and the actions of wangarr beings enables them to be integrated within the structure of ceremonies as a whole and to act as a suitable medium for symbolically transmitting wangarr power through space and time. However, the relationship between paintings and wangarr power (märr) is a complex one. It must be seen in terms of the existence of different refractions or conceptualisations of wangarr power and also of different means of objectifying or directing that power.

The source of märr is in all cases the same, the wangarr beings. The shades (mali) of the wangarr, spirit children, the birrimbirr soul and the strengthening power of wangarr blood represent different conceptualisations of märr operating at different levels of specificity. Ceremonial performances are articulated around several different objectifications of wangarr power: paintings, sacred objects, power names and natural symbols such as blood and landforms. In the context of different ceremonies different conceptualisations are focused on, although the relationship between these conceptualisations is always recognised. In burial ceremonies for example, the main emphasis is on the birrimbirr soul, the refraction of ancestral power most closely
associated with actual human beings. The songs, paintings and power
names are all organised with the objective of guiding the birrimbirr
soul back to its clan territory. The djungguwan-molk on the other
hand is primarily concerned with a more generalised conceptualisation
of mäṛr although the memorialising aspects are concerned with a
similar refraction of ancestral power to the birrimbirr soul.

The different material manifestations of ancestral power, which
are objectifications of the wangarr beings, have different physical
properties, act on different senses, and can be used separately or
in combination with one another to transfer mäṛr and to endow objects
and people with it. In djungguwan ceremonies a number of different
manifestations of the wangarr beings are produced, all of which are
endowed with mäṛr: the paintings, the djuwany posts, the trumpet and
the sound it makes, the power names called out at various stages,
the dances on the men's ground and the blood of the initiated men.
The different manifestations can be combined in a number of ways in
sequences of concentrated action. In the djungguwan-proper the power
names are called over the blood as it pours from the men's elbows
endowing it with mäṛr, which is thus transferred to the bodies of
initiates who are painted with it.

In the djungguwan-molk the trumpet is blown over the paintings
and the power names are incanted above them, reinforcing the spiritual
power of the paintings. The paintings, the power names and the trumpet
have different potentialities as means of contacting the wangarr
beings. The paintings have the advantage of direct contact with the
surface of the object on which they are produced. They are also

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1 In the context of a ceremony in which people are trying to cope with
the emotional loss caused by a person's death, this focus on the
most human dimension of wangarr power is clearly appropriate.
lasting. The trumpet too, is durable, but it transmits mär through sound rather than through bodily contact. Its sound is imminent yet transient. The trumpet however has the advantage of great flexibility, it can be directed towards and blown over all the objects in the ceremony, it can be focused on individuals or blown over the assembled company. The power names are of short duration and their impact must be immediate. However, they have very specific connotations: they recall the names of the dead, and they relate the abstract power to known individuals who are the human dimension of the wangarr (see also Warner, 1958:280). Yet the power names also relate to a more general refraction of the wangarr ancestors, as names of the wangarr beings incarnate in the rangga (sacred objects).

The manifestations of the wangarr operate at three main levels: the level of the individual, the clan, and the society. The power names have the most individual connotations and the sound of the trumpet the most general, but used in combination in the performance of ceremonies, the focus of each can be generalised or specified according to context. The trumpet, for example, can be blown over the painting being produced on a person's body thereby individualising its reference. On the other hand, the power names when shouted out over the rangga, are oriented towards the generalised power of the wangarr being concerned. Paintings are intermediary between the individual and the society, operating primarily at the level of clan. However, in operating at the level of clan they function to bind an individual to his clan and to designate the relationship between the clan members and the wangarr beings whose power extends beyond the membership of the clan.
Blowing the trumpet over the paintings and incanting the power names are a means of concentrating and directing wangarr power. As a whole these actions provide a variety of sense experience which at one level all have the same significance. At other levels this experience provides tangible expression of the different refractions of ancestral power.
SECTION II: The Structure of the Artistic System
CHAPTER 6

COMPONENTS OF YOLNGU ART

In this chapter I will isolate and describe a set of components present in North-east Arnhem Land art on the basis of which differences in the formal structure of paintings produced for use in different contexts can be defined. In the majority of cases differences in the proportion and combination of these components or simply their presence or absence is sufficient to define the morphological difference between paintings in the various categories (for a discussion of the categories, see Chapter 8).

The importance of distinguishing components extends beyond classification however, because the particular componential structure of a painting affects the kind of message it can communicate. The components interact together to produce the communicative code of Yolngu art, the different ways in which they can be combined produces an additional level of signification. Though I shall initially examine each of the components separately to determine their respective signifying potential, it must be borne in mind that in reality they are all part of an integrated system. The components I identify are set out in figure 21 and are illustrated in figure 22 and plate 21.

There is no word in Yolngu that applies specifically to any of these components, yet I believe that they are both cognitively significant and culturally recognised. Briefly the grounds for this are:

- that when using English, the distinction between them is recognised by the application of different labels
- that they correspond to different stages in the production
of a painting - that is, one component is prior to the others in that it is usually completed before going on to the next; and in some cases, for example, the painting of the ground colour, the component represents a stage that has to be completed before the painting can be continued

- that the production of the components represent activities which in relation to the training of artists and the division of labour are separated out by time, status and sex

- that in some cases the components represent different semiotic systems which are recognised as functionally distinct by the Yolngu.

Ground and boundary components contrast with the other features of paintings in that no meanings are given for them by the Yolngu. In a sense they prepare the surface for painting and define the frame in terms of which the painting will be produced. Ground is a feature of all Yolngu paintings, border is a component of all bark paintings and the majority of other paintings, and in the majority of cases where paintings are subdivided into feature blocks, dividing lines are a component.

1. **Ground**

Ground is the base colour painted over the entire surface of a painting. The paintings with the simplest formal structure are those which consist only of ground colour, that is the painted surface is covered uniformly in a single colour. Single colour paintings form the majority of miny'tji produced at Yirrkala. Their most frequent occurrence is as body paintings, though virtually any object from plastic bags to Toyotas to trees can be painted with red ochre in certain circumstances. White and red are the most frequent colours used
for single colour paintings, yellow is used occasionally but black is never used.

Ground is the only component to occur singly as a completed painting. All other Yolngu paintings consist of combinations of two or more components, and in all cases I have recorded one of those components is invariably ground. In the case of these compound paintings the ground colour is usually red. Thomson photographed a number of body paintings which appear to have white as the ground colour with single colour designs in red painted on them. These were all paintings which occurred in public contexts. I will refer to them briefly in the next section. The only paintings I saw on a white ground were yellow V-shaped designs on the chest of people in mourning who had previously been painted in white.

The initial component in the production of virtually all Yolngu composite paintings on any surface is the uniform red ground colour. I was never able to elicit any specific meanings for red as ground colour. When asked people would simply say that it prepared the surface for painting, although some artists also provided a technico-aesthetic explanation: to make the painting stand out.

An explanation of why red is used as the base of all ceremonial painting would require a detailed analysis of Yolngu colour symbolism. Although I will refer briefly to this aspect of Yolngu culture in the context of discussing red, white and yellow body paintings, a full analysis of the problem is outside the scope of this thesis. I will at this stage however, consider briefly some of the senses in which ground colour can be considered from a semantic viewpoint as a separate component of the artistic system and not simply as a preparatory stage in the production of a painting.
In the context of a ceremony the initial painting in red is a ritual act that signals the transformation of the object from an unpainted surface to a painted surface with ancestral reference. Painting as I showed in the last section, occurs in the context of singing and is introduced by songs which refer either to some aspect of the process of painting or to the significance of the painting itself. For example the painting of the coffin of a Mādarrpa child who died at Gurka'wuy (described previously) was begun with the singing of songs about the ochre quarries at Gānąñ, in Dhañlwangu country. The contextual reference of the red ochre was integrated with one of the major themes of the ceremony, the guiding of the spirit from the place of death to its place of origin in the clan well. In this context the base colour signifies in its own right irrespective of the other components of the painting.

It is thus possible to distinguish between the structural significance of the base, that is the fact that it represents the first stage of a painting and that it initiates songs which embed the painting in the context of a ceremony, and its specific reference which depends on the particular ceremonial context in which it is embedded.

The painting of the base component may be separated by some time from the production of the remainder of a painting. In the case of the djuwany posts referred to in Chapter 5, the base of two of the posts was completed a week before the next stage of the painting was begun. Analogous to this, as again it demonstrates the way in which the base can be separated out from the rest of the painting, is the fact that in the weeks prior to circumcision a boy's body is painted on three occasions: the first time his face and chest are
painted in red ochre, the second his face is painted with an elaborate painting and his chest red ochred and on the final occasion immediately before he is circumcised his face and chest are painted with composite designs over a red ochre base. Again the explanation given for this procedure was a pragmatic one 'it gets the boys used to the idea of being painted'. The base colour does not interact with other components of the painting, in that it is never referred to in the context of their interpretations. In the completed painting the red base is usually largely obscured by the components that overlie it, though clearly the fact that the base colour is red considerably affects the visual impact of the painting. Red is left as the colour between the cross hatched infill. Logically it must affect the order of cross hatching. Red cross hatching can never be applied first as in order to show it must cut across lines of another colour. A simple point, but one that affects the formal appearance of the painting. In a sense variation in the ground colour of a painting is a potential signifying feature that is not utilised in Yolngu art.

The only occasion when red ground is given specific meanings is when it forms the base ground colour of a superimposed component like a clan design. In this case the red is almost invariably repainted and in any case its signifying function only operates in the context of the particular design.

2. **Border**

By border I simply mean an outline which encloses the area within which other components are located. As a general rule, at the time of contact only paintings which had clan designs as a component had an outline border. Today virtually every painting has a border. The border is the first component painted after the ground; it defines the
area of the subsequent painting. The border is usually rectangular. In the case of a bark painting it outlines the bark, with painted posts it is painted top and bottom, and with the majority of body paintings the border defines an area from the shoulders to the waist. The only variation from the basic rectangle is in the case of paintings done on the body of an initiate who has had a rangga revealed to him for the first time. In this case Thomson records in his field notes that the painting is extended below the waist to just above the knees as follows\(^1\). Thomson records that an individual was painted on three or four occasions after seeing the rangga, though there was some regional variation. In the Western Yolngu area the first painting went down to his knees, the subsequent two paintings covered less of the body and the final painting was simply red ochre, in the East the order of the first three stages was reversed though the final stage remains the same. On the subsequent occasions that the rangga was revealed, the painting was never extended beyond the waist.

The border is always yellow and is never attributed any meaning. It is frequently repainted several times during the completion of a painting. Border as a component is really dependent on the overall shape of the painting, it is a formal feature that does not signify separately. The same considerations apply to dividing lines, component 3, which will therefore be considered in the context of component 4, feature blocks, of which they are a dependent component.

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\(^1\) See e.g. the body painting within a painting in plate 4.
3. **Feature Blocks**

Feature blocks are segments of a painting which have a unity in terms of content which are not shaped with other segments of a painting or which are in some sense discrete vis-a-vis other segments. Feature blocks are usually differentiated from one another morphologically in addition to being separated by a dividing line, though this is not always the case. In Yanggarriny's painting (pl. 22) for example, feature blocks (1) and (3) are morphologically similar but have a different though connected referent, the top section referring to the river upstream from the fish trap, represented by feature block (2), the bottom section representing the river on the downstream side.

A feature block as a whole may represent a particular content at a substantive level, for example a fish trap as above, a river (pl. 22) or a ceremonial ground (pl. 25), or it may operate at a conceptual level to demarcate areas in a painting within which a particular episode of a myth is represented. A set of feature blocks together may represent separate episodes of the 'same' myth, different topographical areas, or both. In Welwi's painting (pl. 23) for example, each feature block represents a separate locality linked with the wangarr ancestor Ganydjalala. In Narritjin's painting (pl. 24) each feature block represents a separate episode of the myth of Bamabama. I will return to these examples shortly.

The major feature blocks of a painting are usually delineated immediately after the border has been painted, thus setting the structure of the completed painting. The exact number of feature blocks may vary each time the painting is produced, although in the case of some paintings the number is constant. However, in the majority
of cases certain key feature blocks have to be included and the structural relationship between feature blocks will be similar on each occasion the painting is made even if their number varies.

For example in the case of the Manggalili painting of the yingapungapu ground at Djarrakpi (pl. 25) the central feature block (1) always consists of the elliptical shape of the ground itself. The elliptical ground is drawn first and other feature blocks are marked by lines joining the edge of the central feature with the border of the painting. The number of feature blocks thus created depends on the size of the surface painted and the individual choice of the artist. Similar considerations apply to all paintings which include as a central feature a representation of a ceremonial ground.

In the case of the above Manggalili painting the content of the external feature blocks explicates the themes of the ceremonial ground as well as referring to the surrounding topography. Thus Banapana's painting (pl. 25) feature block (5), includes spears with which the ancestral emu made the four holes in the yingapungapu (3) while drilling in the ground for water, and sections (9) and (10) include representations of clouds signifying among other things the spirit of the dead person for whom the yingapungapu was constructed. The designs in section (12) signify the marks of a turtle as it pulls itself up the beach from the sea to lay eggs. The latter feature thus orients the yingapungapu in relation to the landscape at Djarrakpi, the right side of the painting representing the beach side and the left hand side inland features. The content of each section is optional and no feature apart from the yingapungapu ground itself will occur in every painting. However the distribution of content is not arbitrary, the turtle marks if included should always occur in a central section to the right side of the painting if the yingapungapu is
represented from the South, on the left hand side if it is represented
from the North. The clouds should be included in a section above
or below the central section.

Narritjin's painting of the Bamabama story illustrates a
different principle for organising feature blocks. In this case each
section signifies one or more episodes in the overall myth, some
sections being interpreted differently at different stages in the
telling of the story (see pl. 24). Again with this painting the
number of sections varies from painting to painting as does the content
of each section. A small bark painting may only focus on one or two
of the episodes.2

Feature blocks are usually demarcated by a dividing line which
separates one feature block from the next. The dividing line frequently
has no referential function and is said literally to divide the
painting. A figurative representation may operate to divide one
feature block or set of feature blocks from the rest, as is the case
with the dog in Narritjin's painting (pl. 24). Feature blocks may also

1 Unless the painting represents only the salt water side, in which
case both sides of the yingapungapu can represent the beach, and can
thence be characterised by salt water features.

2 Elaborated episodic paintings, in which the content of different
sections of the myth is represented explicitly in different feature
blocks of the painting, appear to have developed subsequent to
European contact. According to Margaret Tuckson, Scougal on his
visit to Yirrkala in 1959 to purchase paintings for the Art Gallery
of New South Wales specifically requested artists to paint large
bark paintings representing in detail episodes of a myth over its
known geographical extent (see for example Mountford's descriptions
of one of Scougal's paintings in Berndt, 1964:23, 82). According
to Narritjin his Bamabama painting was innovated at this time.
However, Berndt a decade earlier collected many paintings similar
in concept though smaller in scale to those obtained by Scougal.
Thus several paintings illustrated by Berndt (1952: pl. 13, 24 and
25) show events from the Djang'kawu mythology which took place at
different places on route from Yirrkala to Milingimbi. I will
return to this question later on in the section on categories of
paintings.
be differentiated by the presence of a geometric pattern within a feature block which differs from the pattern characterising the area outside it.

**Representational Systems**

The next types of component to be discussed are the representational systems themselves. Two main representational systems are employed in Yolngu art which I will term figurative and geometric respectively. For reasons that I will go into later the geometric system can be divided into two subsystems - geometric designs which are clan designs and those which are not. By a representation I mean simply a signifying element which represents or stands for a particular signified. All representations are signs in the Saussurean sense discussed in the introductory section. I do not agree with Munn (1973: 216) that the elements of representational systems are necessarily iconic.

The three representational systems I identify all have different properties in that they signify meanings in different ways and in that the systems have different signifying potentials. Moreover each system can be considered in certain respects discrete vis-a-vis the others. The basic elements of each system must initially be seen in terms of the ways in which they are contrasted and interact among themselves before the way in which they (the representational systems) interact with one another as component subsystems of a single artistic code can be appreciated.

The system of figurative representation consists of a set of iconically motivated signs. I use iconically motivated in the same sense it is employed by Humphries (1973) and Munn (1973:87), that is
there is a degree of formal similarity between the signifier and
signified. In this case it is assumed that the figurative represen-
tation is the result of the selection and organisation of graphic
elements with reference to the shape of the object represented.
Figurative representations also fit Munn's (1966:937) definition of
a continuous meaning system at least in some respects. Munn defines
a continuous meaning system as one in which there is continuous
variation between a set of signifiers and a set of signifieds such
that each signifier represents only one meaning and each new meaning
necessitates the innovation, at least as far as the particular system
is concerned, of a signifying form which differentiates it from other
signifiers within the system (Morphy in press a). Munn (1966) uses
Yolngu figurative representations as her main example of such a system
and it is certainly the case that in a given context an artist intends
the representation to signify unambiguously a single meaning. However,
I will argue that in many cases the schema of Yolngu art are ambiguous
in that morphologically the same signifier encodes more than one
meaning. At this stage I will discuss both geometric systems
together, in contrast to the figurative system. The elements of the
system are basically geometric shapes: △'s, □'s, ○'s, —'s etc.
There is an essentially arbitrary relationship between signifier and
signified within the system. I will argue later that it is inappropriate
to describe the geometric component in Yolngu art as iconically
motivated in the way Walbiri graphic signs appear to be from Munn's
analysis.

Formal resemblance is not the main basis for association between
signifier and signified in the geometric art, whereas it clearly is the
case with the figurative representations. Even in Munn's own analysis
it seems that one of the major differences between the systems she compares is in the degree of iconicity of the elements. One of the main weaknesses of Munn's analysis is that she does not distinguish between degrees of 'likeness' or iconicity. By focusing on discontinuous versus continuous meaning systems she analyses primarily one aspect of the relationship between signifier and signified rather than the way the relationships are encoded differentially in the two systems. In comparing the two systems the degree of iconicity is an important fact to be considered.

Although for analytic purposes the component systems can be isolated, they are all parts of the same communicative code, Yolngu art. I mean this in two senses. First, in the majority of paintings elements of all three systems of representation occur together and interact. The meaning of elements of any one system may be affected by their relationship with elements of any other system with which they are combined.

Secondly, even in cases where a painting consists exclusively of elements of a single representational system (i.e. it is all figurative or all geometric), then the significance of that painting can only be understood in terms of its relationship with paintings which exhibit a different componential structure. The Yolngu recognise the different signifying potentials of the various systems and utilise these differences as components of the code as a whole to construct paintings which encode meanings in different ways in different contexts.

The representational systems from different perspectives can be seen as operating independent from one another, or interacting with one another or in contrast one to the other.
Cross hatching, the final component, will be discussed in the context of each representational system as well as subsequently in its own right. Cross hatching is employed as a distinctive feature of the geometric systems and occasionally occurs in the content of figurative representations. When it occurs in the content of other systems of representation then it is a dependent feature of them.

5. **Figurative representations**

Figurative representations are iconically motivated representations of objects of the human and natural environments. The representation is intended to 'look like' the object represented, and to be interpreted as such by those familiar with the iconographic code. Munn's (1973:216) definition of a representation is thus appropriate to the figurative component of Yolngu art.¹

In all cases I recorded, the intention of the artist was to produce a representation of a single object and there was no deliberate attempt to produce ambiguous forms. Occasionally artists represent objects for which there are no naturally occurring models for example mythical beings half human and half animal in shape (see e.g. fig. 23 and also Kupka, 1965:95), or the spirit familiars of marrngitj 'native doctors' (see Thomson, 1961: plate I). In this case the 'look like' criteria must be read as 'is an acceptable representation of'.

¹ 'By representation I mean a communication with referential meaning in which the sign vehicle is a 'structural equivalent' for its referent. Put in another way: there is an element of likeness between the form of the vehicle and its referent; the relationship between them is thus iconic rather than arbitrary.' Munn, 1973:216 ftnt. 1.(my underlining). I see no necessary connection between the two definitions she presents above: something can be a 'structural equivalent' for its referent without there being an element of likeness involved. However, in the case of figurative representations both components of the definition do in fact apply.
In the majority of cases figurative representations signify at one level familiar things, and at this level their referential meaning is intended to be available to all interpreters. Indeed it will be argued later that figurative representations are used in public art with the explicit purpose of reducing ambiguity and fixing the interpretation of a painting in a particular way. This does not mean that a figurative representation is fully explained in terms of its most accessible and immediate referential meaning, rather that recognition and knowledge of that meaning is an implicit part of any further connotations it may have; it is a first stage in interpreting it and a stage that is open to all. For example, plate 26 illustrates two water goanna \textit{(wan'kawu)} to either side of a cylindrical figure. The figures are intended to be interpreted as water goannas and this level of knowledge of the meaning of the painting is public. Knowledge of the significance of the relationships of the goannas to the central figure of the contexts in which the overall design occurs and its contextual meanings are restricted. However, in the context of these additional interpretations recognition of the figurative representations as water goannas is still a necessary initial stage.

Artists will criticise other people's figures on the basis of whether or not they look like the intended object. Thus Duŋgıwuy commented favourably on Welwi's catfish (fig. 24), 'that really looks just like a catfish' and Marrkarakara adversely on Mithinarri's human figures (pl. 27), 'they look like ants or some kind of insect'. Marrkarakara indeed, at times adopted a Gombrich-like stance to the problems of representing reality. He drew me the outline of a boat in the sand; the boat was drawn in profile and in order to represent the
seats he drew them vertically down the side (see fig. 25).

This in fact is the normal schema employed by Yolngu artists for representing dug-out canoes and clearly combines two perspectives: plan and profile. Marrkarakara apologised for drawing it 'wrong' but explained that one couldn't draw top and bottom views at the same time without one looking wrong. Interestingly enough it was only the front seat he saw as being distorted as 'it really looks like this:

Yolngu use different criteria to criticise figurative representations to those that they employ to criticise the way in which other components of a painting have been produced. Indeed people rarely criticise publicly other aspects of a painting. When they do make critical comments the painting is criticised in terms of its deviation from an established ancestral pattern. The painting is said to be wrong because it is not as the old people used to do it; or because it is not the way the person was taught to do it. In such cases, especially if the critic is a senior man, the criticism is not a subject for debate, but a dictum to be followed. Examples of this will be given in the section on clan designs; suffice to say at this stage, the object of such criticism is to assert that a particular established way of doing that part of the painting is correct and the way it has been done is incorrect. In this context to state that some aspect of a painting is 'new' implies criticism of it.

The case of figurative representations is somewhat different. The figurative component of a painting can be criticised for not following an established pattern if, for example, certain figures are included which should not have been and vice-versa. However, I have
never heard the form of figurative representation criticised because it was not the way it was done in the past. The main tenor of criticism is always that the representation does not look like its object. Furthermore, young people will claim to draw figures better than members of the senior generation: 'I draw better than my father because I learnt at school' (Warrwpandiya), 'this is my mokuy (spirit figure) I did it first at school' (Luma\luma). Consistent with this is the fact that figurative representations are one of the first components after the base and cross hatched infill that young people are encouraged to draw. Mutitjupuy and Liyawulumu both allow their daughters to paint some of the figurative representations in their paintings.

However it would be wrong to overemphasise innovation and variation as far as figurative representations are concerned. The examples cited in the preceding paragraph all concern paintings produced for sale to Europeans. Even in this context the majority of artists paint their own figures and encourage their children to paint them in a similar way. Moreover, there are likely to be strict constraints on variation in the form of figurative representations which occur in paintings produced primarily in closed ceremonial contexts, as in this case details of the form of the figures are perceived as fixed components of ancestral designs. The goannas referred to earlier (pl. 26) are examples of such figurative representations in a painting which occurs primarily in the context of closed sequences of the djungguwan ceremony. In this case the angles of the tails, the shell fish in their mouths and the dotted pattern on the backs of the goannas are all fixed components of the representation, and signify a series of mythological and topographic referents. Initiates are instructed as to the correct way to produce this schema while the
painting is being produced in the seclusion of the men's ceremonial ground. The schema is quite different from that normally employed for water goanna in the context of other paintings. When I saw this body painting being done at the djungguwan-molk ceremony Trial Bay, the artist Marrirra was receiving continual instruction and guidance from senior Marrakulu (the owning clan) members present. In the end Marrirra gave up, having made several attempts to satisfy the onlookers' requirements and failed. However, there are relatively few schema of this type in Yolngu sacred art, mainly because the figurative component of the sacred art is greatly reduced, as I show in Chapter 8.

In the majority of cases however, an artist employs a set schema for representing a particular content, and he uses the same schema on every occasion he represents the same thing. I cannot here discuss in detail morphological aspects of the system of figurative representation, and will not attempt to outline the overall set of schema employed by Yolngu artists. I will, however, in conclusion to this section consider briefly the extent to which figurative representations convey meaning independent of other components of a painting. This is a necessary preliminary to understanding the communicative functions of the figurative representations in the artistic code as a whole.

In the context of completed paintings the intended object represented by a figurative representation can be readily identified by a number of people other than the artist. Although people are reluctant to proffer detailed interpretations of paintings unless they have the right to do so, they willingly give the moiety, clan and the identity of the figurative representations of any painting with which they are familiar. In the majority of cases senior artists
correctly identify the clan ownership of a painting belonging to their
own moiety, and less frequently in the case of a painting of a clan
belonging to the opposite moiety. Almost without exception artists
correctly identify the moiety to which a painting belongs (forgetting
for the moment paintings innovated specifically for the tourist
market, which may have no clan or moiety markers). As natural species
are allocated on a moiety basis, and as Dhuwa and Yirritja paintings
only include animals belonging to the respective moieties, the correct
identification of the moiety of a painting should greatly increase
the chances of correctly identifying the meaning of the figurative
representations. Similar considerations apply to the identification
of the clan of a painting, as representations of species of the moiety
are differentially distributed among the member clan's paintings.

In order to discover the extent to which figurative representa-
tions could be interpreted independent of the context of a painting as
a whole I selected a series of 31 figures from photographs of bark
paintings I had previously collected and drew them on separate cards.
The meaning of the figures had previously been recorded from the
artists. I then obtained interpretations of the figures on each
card from five people belonging to different clans, asking for the
name of each species identified. A summary of the results of this test
is set out in figure 26. In the left hand column the species intended
by the artist and the moiety to which it belongs are given.

The results overall were that in only 48% of cases were the
figurative representations interpreted in the way the artist had
intended them to be in the context of the painting. This figure shows
clearly that out of context a given set of figurative representations
was 'correctly' identified in less than 50% of cases. Incorrect
identifications, however, were not spread evenly throughout the set of items; some were interpreted correctly by all five respondents others incorrectly by all five.

Three drawings of possums were included in the test (see fig. 27) two from paintings by Bokarra and one from a painting by Narritjin. In all but one case the possums were identified as such. There is in fact a distinctive schema for a possum, which is characteristically represented with its tail curved upwards and over its back (see pl. 60). The curved tail is not a feature of any other figurative representation and as there is only one possum species in North-east Arnhem Land, it should be sufficient to enable its identification.

In other cases, however, schema are clearly ambiguous. One reason for this is that two animals which are separately named and belong to different moieties may be represented in the artistic system by a single schema. In these cases had the representations used in the test been marked by a moiety indicator (e.g. a clan design) then the correct interpretation would have been given in more cases. Thus Welwi's drawings of a duck (fig. 28) intended to be a Dhuwa moiety species, was always identified as a Yirritja duck (muthali), and Liyawulumu's Yirritja sand goanna (fig. 29b) was likewise identified as a Dhuwa goanna (fig. 29a) (djarrka or wan'kawu: water goanna). In the context of paintings with clan designs, these species were always correctly identified.¹

The examples of the duck and the goannas suggests that the schema concerned are best seen as homonyms representing two species,

¹ The schema for blanket lizard (fig. 26: items 6 & 7) is unlikely to be mistaken for a representation of a water goanna or a sand goanna as it includes a bulge on either side of the neck, to represent the frilled neck characteristic of the animal.
one Dhuwa and one Yirritja, which are ambiguous unless interpreted in conjunction with other components of the painting.

This is demonstrated most convincingly in the case of other representations used in the test. Two representations of turtles were included, one Dhuwa (dhalwatpu) the other a Yirritja (guwarrtji). In four cases the Dhuwa turtle was correctly identified, but in four out of five cases the Yirritja turtle was also interpreted as dhalwatpu. In the latter case the artist Mäw' himself interpreted the representation wrongly. Plate 28 shows the turtle included in the test. The painting belongs to his mother's clan (Munyuku) and in the context of the painting which includes characteristically Yirritja moiety clan designs (△△), the turtle is unambiguously Yirritja (guwarrtji) and was never given any other interpretation. Plate 29 is a Dhuwa moiety painting by the same artist which also includes representations of turtles, this time dhalwatpu. Comparison of the representations of turtle in the two cases clearly shows that the artist employs the same basic schema for representing the two species. The only major difference in the two cases is the two lines at the tail of the Yirritja turtle. These are optional features of the representation, which are given no meaning. In the majority of cases they will also be included in representations of guwarrtji (see e.g. Groger-Wurm, 1973:plates 89, 90 and 91). They cannot be distinctive features of a Yirritja as opposed to a Dhuwa schema for turtle. Mäw' is both a senior member of his own clan, and the senior 'manager' of his mother's clan (Munyuku). It is Mäw' who is called upon most frequently to produce Munyuku paintings in ceremonial contexts and who has a major responsibility in instructing younger Munyuku artists in their clan paintings. The fact that he
does not employ separate schema in the Dhuwa and Yirritja cases therefore has added significance.¹

The level of ambiguity of a schema depends on a number of obvious factors at different levels: the number of 'like' things extant in the environment, the distinctiveness of the features which it encodes, and its familiarity as a representation. Thus there are far more representations of fish in Yolngu art than there are representations of any other single thing. Interpretations of the cards with fish on them are indeed the most varied, in several cases each interpreter specified a different species. However in two cases all five people gave the same 'correct' interpretation, catfish² (djularrpil) (fig. 24) and gar fish (warrukay)(fig. 30a) respectively. In these cases the representations encoded characteristics of the fish which do not overlap with the distinguishing features of any other fish schema: in the case of the catfish parallel lines at the mouth representing whiskers (see fig. 24) and in the case of the warrukay a long narrow jaw barbed with teeth.³

¹ It remains to be explained why in these three cases, mis-identification was consistently wrong in the same direction - i.e. the results were not what one would have expected from chance though the sample is too small to rule out this possibility. One possible explanation is that in each case the meaning given was of the most frequently represented and most important species in each case - thus goannas occur on many Dhuwa paintings, rarely on Yirritja. Muthali is a major totem for a number of clans at Yirrkala and dhalwatpu is a major feature of public paintings belonging to every Dhuwa moiety clan.

² In fact I suspect that the schema for Dhuwa and Yirritja catfish overlap, however no Yirritja catfish representations were included in the test, and no paintings of Yirritja catfish were seen by me in the field. Catfish however, is a major wangarr of the Yirritja moiety Gupapuyngu clan and Dhuwa and Yirritja catfish produced at Milingimbi look similar (see pl. 48).

³ The latter case is somewhat exceptional as the Djarrawak and Ngayimil clan hollow log coffin is based on the warrukay, and the figurative representation in fact included features of the fish as they are encoded in the shape of the coffin (fig. 30b).
When a particular schema encodes distinctive features which are intended to be characteristic of a particular species, it is inappropriate to include them in a representation of a different species. The best example of this that I recorded occurred at Gadjii, an outstation ten miles inland from Milingimbi in the Western part of the Yolngu-speaking area. Magan a Mildjingi man in his seventies began to do a painting belonging to his mother's clan (Djinang-Marrangu) (plate 30). The theme of the painting is the two water goannas and the yulungurr rangga. Mangani's outline of the goanna was rejected by the three Djinang men present. The reason for this rejection was quite explicit; the figure looked too much like a crocodile, a Yirritja moiety species. I was told that Magani shouldn't have drawn the transverse lines across the body of the figure as this was the way one showed the markings on the back of a crocodile. In the case of a goanna only the backbone should be represented by a line through the centre. When the goanna was redrawn by Djarrabili, one of the Marrangu men, it was drawn without the transverse lines (pl. 31).

I will not consider here in detail the extent to which particular schema are general to Yolngu art or whether schematic similarities are a function of the operation of broad principles of representation or represent specifically learned schema. The answer probably lies in a combination of the two. Certainly all paintings of catfish, for example, will encode the features referred to above, though there is considerable variation in the way it is encoded. Thus Welwi employs two distinct schema for catfish, one incorporating the whiskers within the overall outline of the fish, the other extending

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1 One general feature of the system is that all artists adopt the same perspective when representing a particular content: for example, long necked fresh water tortoises (minhala), goannas, crocodiles, catfish, stingrays and turtles are always represented from above. All marsupials, emus, sharks and so on are always represented in profile.
them beyond the mouth (see fig. 24). He sometimes includes both schema in the same painting, both being given the same interpretation. Yangalka, a Djarrawa man, employs a slightly different schema again from those used by Welwi, although he is acknowledged to have been taught the painting by him.

In summary: although some schema encode features that make them easily identifiable at a specific level as representations of a particular content, on the whole this is not the case. In a sense this places the phrase 'look alike', in its proper perspective, which in terms of the Yolngu representational code means 'is an acceptable representation of its content which does not cross cut the schema for representing other things'. Clearly the system allows considerable room for individual variation, and equally clearly the representations are not intended to signify specific meanings in all cases independent of the context of paintings as a whole. To a certain extent this analysis calls into question Munn's (1966) description of the Yolngu system of figurative representation as a continuous meaning system, at least in as strong a sense as she implies. Although there are far more schema than is the case with geometric art and the signifying potential of each schema is more restricted and more constrained by its iconic motivation, many schema are still ambiguous out of context. There certainly is not a schema for each thing represented by the system. Moreover, there is considerable variation in the level of signification of elements within the system: whereas some schema signify a particular species unambiguously others signify at a more general level (e.g. Mäw's turtle). However Munn's distinction is essentially valid, since relative to the geometric system the figurative system is one in which distinctions at the level of signifier correspond more closely with distinctions at the level of signified.
Infill and figurative representations

Figurative representations are usually painted all over in a single colour, with the exception of certain specifically delineated features such as eyes, nose and mouth which if included are outlined in another colour. Figures are usually black or yellow, seldom red and even less frequently white. No meaning is ever given for the base colour of figurative representations (except in the occasional use of white, where it is said to signify a dead animal or the spirit of the thing represented). Colour is certainly not used as a distinctive feature to differentiate one schema from another. At Yirrkala cross hatching is not used within figurative representations, except where it occurs as a distinctive feature of clan designs included on the body of a figure, or where the figurative representation is separated from other cross hatched components.¹

Only a limited number of representations can have clan designs painted within them and they belong primarily to the Yirritja moiety.

¹ In paintings collected by Chaseling and Thomson in the late 1930's and 1940's and to a lesser extent in those collected by Berndt, cross hatching was a feature of the majority of figurative representations. A tentative hypothesis for the absence of cross hatching in figurative representations produced at Yirrkala since the mid 1950's was suggested by Morphy (in press b). In this article it was suggested that lack of cross hatching in figures was primarily motivated by aesthetic considerations and in the interests of visual clarity. If cross hatching completely surrounded the outlines of figurative representations and was also an internal feature of them, it would mean that the figures themselves would not stand out from the rest of the painting. This hypothesis received some confirmatory data in the field. Wangamarru, a Djambarrpuynu visitor to Yirrkala and not a regular bark painter in the Yirrkala style, produced a painting for me which had a series of figurative representations of turtles in it. One of these turtles was completely covered with cross hatching, the others were not. I asked Wangamarru the significance of the cross hatched turtle. He replied by saying that it had no significance but was just the way he did it. In this case he had filled in the background of the painting first with overall cross hatching. After he painted the cross hatching in the turtle he found that you could not see the turtle clearly enough so he left the ground colour of the figure uncross-hatched in the remaining cases (pl. 32). (continued next page)
Crocodiles and dugong frequently have clan designs connecting them with various myths of the origin and distribution of fire (see pl. 1, 2). In this case the association between the animal and the clan design exists as an internal representation, within the painting, of the myth of origin of the design and the painting as a whole. Humanoid ancestral beings are also frequently represented with clan designs (see pl. 4). In this case the function of the clan design is similar, as it refers to the origin of the design as an ancestral form and simultaneously designates the figurative representation as the representation of an ancestral being. Further reference to this topic will be made when I later discuss divisions on the basis of content between the various figurative components of sets of clan paintings.

Infill is used as a distinctive feature differentiating between figurative representations in one case, though the infill is not cross hatching but lines of yellow, white and red dots. Djaykung, the Gälpu snake at Garrimala (pl. 33) is always painted with this dotted infill whereas yulunggurr (or wititj) the snake associated with the swallowing of the Wawilak sisters, is never painted with infill, though its coiled body occasionally incorporates a pattern of linked ovoids signifying the eggs of the snake (pl. 27).

6. Geometric signs

The geometric representational system consists of a set of basic elements 0's, ☐'s, △'s, ⃗'s, ⃑'s, )'s, etc. which occur in paintings either singly or in combination with one another in a variety of different ways. The elements will be referred to as minimal pattern units.

1 (continued from previous page)

This example is certainly suggestive, but unfortunately final proof of the hypothesis is beyond reach as it lies in the history of the development of Yirrkala art in the 1940's and 1950's.
When they occur separately as geometric signs they are the smallest meaningful units in the system (and analogous to morphemes in language). When they occur as components of clan designs they are the minimal formal elements which differentiate one clan design from another (and in a sense are analogous to phonemes). This distinction will be considered in more detail later on.

The geometric elements are components of what Munn (1966:937) defines as a discontinuous meaning system. Each element can represent a range of different meanings: for example, a circle can represent a waterhole, a campsite, a mat, a campfire, eggs, holes left by maggots, nuts and so on. On the whole, the range of meanings associated with each element seems to be less than is the case with similar elements among the Walbiri, but the range is still quite considerable.

In Morphy (in press a) I term the range of meanings associated with each morphological element in a discontinuous meaning system the signifying potential of a sign. The signifying potential of a sign represents all the meanings that can be associated with a particular graphic element independent of its context. The signifying potential of a sign does not represent the extent to which it is ambiguous. In a given syntactic context only a part of the signifying potential of a sign may be operational, certain meanings only being attached to the sign in the context of particular relationships with other signs in a painting. Unless this distinction is made then the results of analysis may be misleading. It is vital to distinguish between the signifying potential of a sign, and its actual multivalency or ambiguity in a given context of occurrence. Thus we have shown that in the case of figurative representations, out of context they have a wider signifying potential than they do in any one context of
occurrence. Out of context at least some of the figurative schema are elements in a discontinuous meaning system. In context their multivalency at this level is never utilised. In the case of the geometric representations, their multivalency is an essential part of this meaning; they are not, however, multivalent in context to the full extent of their signifying potential. For example one very general constraint that operates is that in context geometric elements can only signify meanings appropriate to the moiety or clan to which the paintings belong. Thus although a circle can signify a waterhole or clan well in Dhuwa and Yirritja paintings, in Dhuwa moiety paintings it is always a Dhuwa moiety well that is signified and vice versa in the case of the Yirritja moiety. Or to take a more specific example, the signifying potential of a circle includes the connical woven pandanus mats (*nganymarra*) used in ceremonial contexts to cover women and initiates. The mat belongs to the Dhuwa moiety, a circle can therefore signify *nganymarra* only in the context of Dhuwa moiety paintings. Again, as with figurative representation though to a lesser extent, knowledge of the ownership of the painting narrows down the range of possible meanings of a sign.

The semantics of geometric signs will be considered in more detail in later chapters. In conclusion to this section I will briefly outline my reasons for subdividing the geometric component into two subsystems: geometric signs and clan designs.

Geometric signs rarely occur in paintings except as components of clan designs. When they do occur separately they can be defined as geometric signs which are not of themselves associated with any one clan or set of clans; that is they are best defined in contrast to clan designs. The main minimal pattern units which occur separately
as geometric signs are illustrated in figure 31, together with some of the things they signify. Of these signs only circles and squares occur also as components of clan designs.

7. **Clan designs**

Clan designs are geometric patterns which are owned by individual clans or sets of clans within the same moiety. Morphologically the majority of clan designs consist of repeated sequences of the same geometric element or combinations of elements. Frequently the individual minimal pattern units have no significance when isolated from their context as components of clan designs. Thus a typical Yirritja moiety pattern consists of a set of linked diamonds (fig. 32); a single diamond has no meaning as a clan design and never occurs in paintings. However, the properties which differentiate one diamond pattern from another clearly exist at the level of individual diamond. One diamond pattern may consist of a set of small equalateral diamonds whereas another belonging to a different clan consists of a set of elongated diamonds.

Figure 33 illustrates a Dhuwa moiety clan design which consists of repeated sequences of the same combination of two minimal pattern units: a square and a set of opposed curved lines \( \square \square \). The square is a component of Djapu clan designs, the curved lines of Rirratjingu clan designs and the combination of Marrakulu clan designs. Unlike the Yirritja diamond the Marrakulu \( \square \square \) can occur separately on a painting, though it usually occurs in repeated sequences. It can, however, only occur separately on Marrakulu paintings.

Infill and clan designs

Unlike the case with figurative representations, infill is used as a distinctive feature of clan designs. In relation to signification cross hatching has a differentiating function: presence, absence and
variation of cross hatching enables contrasts to be made within a clan design which otherwise consists of a sequence of morphologically identical minimal pattern units. The 'fire pattern' of a set of Yirritja moiety clans consists of a set of diamonds which are alternately red, black, cross hatched white and cross hatched red. The red diamonds are said to signify flames, the black diamonds charred wood, the red cross hatched diamonds sparks and the white cross hatched diamonds smoke (see pl. 43). Clan designs are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

8. Infill

The final stage in the production of the majority of Yolngu paintings is infilling. As a stage of painting infilling includes the final definition of the shape of infilled components; it involves the final repainting of components that are not infilled and the outlining after infilling of geometric and figurative representations. Cross hatching is the predominant type of infill employed. Other forms used include hatching, dashed infill and the covering of the surface with dots.

The technique of cross hatching

Whereas other components of a painting are produced nowadays by using European paint brushes of different thicknesses or occasionally brushes made of frayed stringy bark, cross hatching requires the manufacture and use of a specialised brush (marwat).¹ Lines are

¹ The marwat is made by tying a length of human hair to a short stick tapered at one end, leaving a length of hair 1-1½ inches long for use as the brush (fig. 34). The hair is bound firmly to lower part of the stick by winding a length of string around it. The brush is tested several times, and the hair thinned out until the brush produces consistently thin lines. Frequently dotted infill is produced by using the reverse end of the marwat.
produced by coating the brush in pigment, laying the hair on the surface
to be painted and drawing it along the intended length of the line.
The first layer of cross hatching is always done in white. The lines
should be parallel with one another across the entire surface of a
particular component. In order to achieve this over large areas the
majority of artists employ guide lines, marked out in advance of the
area being immediately painted, to keep the lines consistent across the
surface (fig. 35). The white cross hatching is said by some artists
'to make the colours stand out' (the same explanation given by one man
for the base). The second layer of cross hatching is produced by sets
of parallel lines crossing the first layer at an angle. A component
may have a single colour only painted on the initial white, or it
may be covered in bands of different coloured cross hatching. In the
latter case white usually alternates with any other colours used.
Sometimes the second layer consists of alternating lines of a different
colour (see fig. 36).

As well as the geometric components being cross hatched, any
areas left between components are also covered in cross hatching.
This means that in the case of some paintings produced specifically
for the tourist market and consisting largely of figurative representa-
tions the entire surface of the painting between the figures is
covered uniformly with cross hatching (e.g. pl. 34).

Cross hatching and the concept of painting

Cross hatching is the final component of a painting and yet in
many ways it is the most important. When people talk in abstract about
the act of painting and the ability to paint, they usually do so with
reference to cross hatching. Thus a senior person who does not paint
is always said to be unable to hold or use the marwat:

'My father tried to teach him but he could never hold the brush still - but he is a good singer.' (Wandjuk)

'My father taught us all one painting before he died, brothers and sisters, but my brother x could never hold the brush.' (Wandjuk)

3. 'X never learnt how to hold the brush, but he is still boss for our paintings.' (Liyanulumu)

The initial production of other components of a painting is played down relative to cross hatching. Thus artists assert that it doesn't matter if you draw figurative representations roughly, or the clan design outlines quickly (as long as correctly) - 'you draw them roughly because you are going to cover them up'. In fact the initial 'drawing' of a painting will usually be completed within an hour with up to a further three days being spent in cross hatching. Indeed, as the painting process continues the painting undergoes a considerable transformation (pl. 35-37). Because cross hatching always overlaps the outlines of figurative representations, the size is gradually reduced and outline changed through the course of painting (compare the bird in plates 35 and 37 for example). Thus the figures are initially drawn larger than they will finally appear. Before cross hatching the painting looks dull, consisting of yellow and black ochre on red and it is often difficult to discern its structure. After cross hatching the painting attains a shimmering brilliance and in addition its separate components become clearly defined.

The transformation of a painting from a 'rough' 'dull' state to a 'clearly defined' and 'bright' state through the process of cross hatching is clearly recognised by the Yolngu. The two main criteria
employed in judging a painting, apart from the matter of its 'correctness', are its brightness and the firmness of the cross hatched lines. If the cross hatched lines are too thick or if they run into each other then the painting will be criticised as being 'too rough'; if there is a preponderance of black in the painting then it may be 'not bright enough'.

Cross hatching is thus not only semantically significant; it also transforms a painting physically and adds a new dimension of brightness to it. Furthermore the process of cross hatching necessitates repainting the entire surface of the painting, requiring the redefinition of outlines of the figurative and geometric components and the repainting of the border and dividing lines to cover up the encroaching cross hatching. The importance of the stage is reflected in the fact that the ability to do cross hatching is used as the main criteria for artistic skill. It is also reflected in the importance attached to the brush (marwat) used for cross hatching in discussing the creative aspects of the art of painting. For example: 'I use my marwat to think with' and 'my marwat is clever'.
CHAPTER 7

CLAN DESIGNS

In the previous chapter clan designs were defined in purely formal terms as: 'repeated sequences of the same geometric element or combination of elements'. These designs are the property of clans and sets of clans. Mountford (1956:405) employs the term clan designs in the same sense that it is used here. Elkin, Berndt and Berndt (1950:61 ff.) use the term to apply to paintings as a whole. Interestingly, the Yolngu word likan can also be applied both to clan designs as here defined and to the whole painting; however it is most frequently used to refer to the former. It is only applied at the level of the whole painting to paintings belonging to the most restricted category of Yolngu art, a category characterised by the presence of elaborated clan designs which form the dominant component of the paintings (see following chapter).

In this chapter I will show how the formal properties of clan designs are related to their functions in differentiating one clan's paintings from those of another, and in encoding relationships between people, places and wangarr beings. It is useful to begin by discussing the concepts that the Yolngu use in talking about clan designs, in particular the meanings of the words likan and ngaraka.

Likan and Ngaraka

Likan has a number of meanings, some of which refer to sacred or ceremonial things, and others to mundane things. In the secular sphere likan means 'elbow', 'branch of a tree joined to its trunk' and 'bay between two promentaries'. All these meanings have something
in common: they refer to objects which are discrete and enclosed, yet at the same time link other objects in relation to which they are defined. Thus the elbow connects the forearm to the upper arm, the branch is connected to the tree trunk and the bay connects the two promementaries.

In the sacred sphere, as well as referring to clan designs and sacred (restricted) paintings, ḟikan is the word used for the 'power' names of the clan's sacred objects shouted out at various stages in the performance of ceremonies (see Chapter 5). According to Shapiro (1969) it is also used to refer to the songs chanted by men on occasions when the sacred objects are being displayed. All of these may also be termed ranggapuy (relating to the rangga (sacred object)) or madayinbuy (relating to the sacred or restricted).

I would suggest that ḟikan as it is applied to clan designs carries with it the connotation of connectedness which is associated with its secular usages. Clan designs are one of the manifestations of wangarr beings: they can be referred to as the mali (spirit or shade) of the wangarr. Similarly, the power names are verbal manifestations of the wangarr beings and are endowed with mārr (power). The relationship between clan designs and power names is demonstrated by the fact that the latter are frequently listed as meanings for the former. Both are external signs or objectifications of the wangarr beings. In this sense they are like rangga, and indeed they are components of the rangga, since clan designs are represented on the rangga itself, and the power names are referents of the rangga. But as well as being components of the rangga, they exist independent of it. The rangga is the most restricted manifestation of the ancestral
being, being revealed only in closed contexts. Clan designs and power names on the other hand appear in a wide variety of contexts, some open, some closed. They can also be used to establish the relationships between individuals and the wangarr beings in a way that sacred objects cannot be: clan designs can be painted directly on an individual's body, and power names can be sung over the painting. Initiates are familiar with the clan designs long before the rangga associated with the same wangarr beings are revealed to them. Relative to the rangga, the clan designs are part of everyday discourse with the wangarr beings, and when the rangga are revealed to initiates the clan designs on them will be a known component of an unknown object. Thus the clan designs are both manifestations of a wangarr being and extensions of the rangga, which is in turn a manifestation of the same wangarr being. The use of the term likan to describe clan designs thus emphasises their role as manifestations of wangarr beings which, at the same time, provide a link between the wangarr and the wider society.

Likan has a number of other connotations apart from the idea of connectedness. Blood used in the djungguwan ceremony (see Chapter 5) is taken from the elbows of initiated men. The shouting of power names (likan) over the blood is believed to endow it with spiritual (wangarr) power. The blood is used to paint a design (likan) on the bodies of initiates. Thus in this case the term likan is the common denominator linking stages in the process of transforming human blood into wangarr blood. Blood itself becomes an extension of wangarr power, although the process is the reverse of the one which occurs in the case of paintings. Whereas paintings endow the human body with wangarr power, blood leaving the body is endowed with this power. The blood is then
used to produce paintings which are themselves manifestations of wangarr, adding to the significance and power of the paintings. This may be seen as a process which increases the effective power of symbols, through the combination of natural (blood) and cultural (designs) symbolic forms. Likan, as elbow, thus refers to the culturally designated source of one of the major natural symbols of Yolngu culture: blood.

Clan designs are also referred to as ngaraka (bones), ngaraka wangarr (bones of the wangarr), ngaraka ngilimurru (our bones) and ngaraka bąpurru (bones of the clan). The design as a whole is said to refer to bones in a general sense, that is, as a manifestation of the bones of a wangarr being, but it may also refer to bones at a more specific level. Thus the design in the centre of the snakes in plate 41 signifies the backbone of a wangarr snake. The pointed oval design in plate 38 refers to the same snake, mikarran. In this case the design signifies the snake's ribs transformed into the stakes of a wangarr fish trap at Mayawunyndji.

The wooden core of a sacred object is referred to as the 'bones of the rangga'. The rangga are buried in the mud of one of a clan's sacred waterholes after they have been used in a ceremony. A person's birrimbirr spirit is directed to the rangga and the waterholes of his clan territory after his death to become re-incorporated in the realm of ancestral power (see Chapter 5). The animating spirits of the clan, and the murr of the clan's ancestors, are seen to be located in the sacred objects, paintings, songs and dances of the clan. In this sense the designs are the bones of the clan. They are expressions of its continuity with wangarr time and of its continuity into the future.
Bones are also a metaphor for the inside nature of Wangarr power. Bones are the concealed and inside part of a person's body, and Ngaraka is used to refer to the core, or concealed part, of the sacred objects, and to clan designs which are the most restricted components of paintings. Likan may also have the further connotation of bone in this context, since it is the inner component of the elbow. Certainly Thomson (1939a:2) records that Likan was used to refer to the 'bones' of the Wangarr.

The Sociological Meaning of Clan Designs

So far I have been concerned with properties that are common to all clan designs as manifestations of Wangarr beings. However, clan designs also serve to differentiate one clan's paintings from another. This was one of the main reasons given by Yolngu for including clan designs in a painting:

Narritjin: 'It shows it's a Manggalili painting.'
Djewiny: 'It means Marrakulu clan.'
Marrkarakara: 'If I painted only pictures [figurative representations] then someone could say I was stealing the painting. If I paint the clan designs then it shows the painting belongs to me.'

This level of meaning encoded in clan designs can be termed its sociological meaning. Clan designs as a component of paintings encode the relationship between a particular painting and a social group. However, this relationship must be viewed as dynamic rather than static, for reasons that I will now discuss.
According to Yolngu ideology, a clan's paintings are jointly owned by the members of the clan, and the ownership of designs on the surface at least reflects this pattern. However, I will show that designs have the potential to distinguish between groups at a lower level than that of the clan. Designs are not associated with the clan's territory as a whole, but rather each design is associated with a particular part of the clan's territory. This means that the system has the potential to reflect changing social and demographic realities by encoding new relationships between people, places and wangarr beings.

Furthermore, clan designs do not signify particular social groups in isolation, but in the context of a network of relationships of similarity and difference with other groups at the same level of organisation. The designs always have dual reference: they refer to a particular wangarr being or group of such beings, and to a social group which is associated with that being. Clan designs show similarities with other designs belonging to the same wangarr track, and with designs deriving from the actions of the same wangarr being. At this level, then, designs refer to the system of mythologically defined relationships between groups.

Similar designs belonging to a number of different groups linked by the same mythological track will be termed design sets. Similarity does not imply identity: each clan's design differs by at least one feature from those of other clans who own a design belonging to the same set. There is no overlap in the design sets of clans belonging to opposite moieties, since the wangarr beings are moiety specific. Figure 37 illustrates a number of clan designs belonging to
clans of the two moieties. Although the designs within each moiety show considerable variation, it is possible to suggest ways in which Yirratja moiety designs, as a set, differ from Dhuwa moiety designs. Thus Yirritja moiety designs can be divided into two main types: diamond designs and open diamonds (fig.37). A further design type, pointed ovals (fig. 37), is used by three of the southern Yirritja clans. It differs from the other designs in that it does not always occur in linked chains. The final Yirritja design type consists of sets of linked triangles. Diamond designs are always drawn as a series of separate strings of diamonds linked top to bottom. They may or may not touch the chains at either side, depending upon which clan the design belongs to. Within a section of a painting, Yirritja clan designs are not broken up by changing the orientation of the geometric element employed: strings of elements all follow the same orientation.

Dhuwa moiety clan designs consist in the majority of cases of combinations of squares, curved and straight parallel lines, and circles. In several cases, differences between clan designs are due to variations in the orientation of the elements employed (see fig. 38).

Yirritja Moiety Clan Designs

I will examine in detail only those designs which belong to the clans of the Yirritja moiety. The analysis and conclusions drawn apply equally to Dhuwa moiety clan designs, since the system operates in the same way for both moieties.
Design sets

Figure 39 lists the basic series of design sets that I have identified for Yirritja moiety clans, and the clans that own them. The designs owned by each clan are variants on the basic design type illustrated. In all cases clans sharing a design of the same set are believed to be connected by the journeys of wangarr beings. In some cases the designs belonging to a set are primarily associated with a single wangarr being (although other wangarr beings will also be associated with the design in the territories of particular clans). For example the triangle pattern is always associated with the whale wuymirri. In other cases, designs are linked to a constellation of wangarr beings, the particular ones emphasised varying from clan to clan.

The basic diamond pattern is associated with at least three major Yirritja moiety wangarr: sugar bag (birrkuda), fire (gurtha) and yellow ochre (see also Berndt and Berndt, 1949:320). In the case of the Munyuku and Dhalwangu clans the primary referent for it is sugar bag, and in the case of the Maďarrpa and Gumatj clans it is fire. However, fire also travelled through Dhalwangu and Munyuku country, and sugar bag through Gumatj¹ (1, 2 and 3) country. Fire and sugar bag are best seen as a constellation of wangarr that share an overlapping route, with different clans whose territories lie on those routes emphasising one or the other. The yellow ochre wangarr is centered on the ochre quarry at Gurrurrunga which is primarily owned by the Yadawidi Gumatj clan.²

¹ I do not know if sugar bag is also shared by the Maďarrpa.
² The other Yirritja moiety clans have rights of access to the quarry, and each clan is said to have obtained ochre from different parts of it.
Although clans sharing members of the same design set are all linked by the journey of one or more wangarr beings, each clan has one or more distinct myths which refer to the origin of its own clan designs. As was shown in Chapter 4 these myths are of two types. The first kind explains the origin of the form of the design in terms of wangarr events, the second states that the design was given to the clan as part of its ancestral endowment. I will consider here only myths of the former type. Myths referring to the origin of the diamond pattern of different clans are summarised in figure 40. Myth 2 is shared in some form by all the clans owning the sugar bag wangarr. The myths at one level confirm the distinctiveness of the events that took place in each locality. Thus although there are basic similarities between the designs, they belong to different clans and are associated with different wangarr events. This distinctiveness is contradicted at other levels, however. Myths 3 and 5 refer to the origin of the diamond design with respect to the fire wangarr. The same fire is acknowledged to be involved in both cases. It is also believed to have travelled in a particular direction from Bāniyala in Maḍarrpa country to Yaḏawidi Gumatj country in Caledon Bay. Myth 3 was discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Although the main events of the myth took place at Bāniyala, the fire was carried from there to Caledon Bay by the crocodile. Thus the design belongs both to Maḍarrpa and Yaḏawidi Gumatj, and provides a link between these two clans which is not shared with other clans at Yirrkala which own diamond designs. In order to perform the crocodile dance described in Chapter 5, permission must be obtained from both clans, and in the case described the dance was performed jointly. A further myth describes how fire was carried from where the clapstick was burnt (myth 5), in Gupa Gumatj country in Caledon Bay, to other more northern Yirritja clans by the quail (djirrikitj). This myth
concerns events that took place in Gupa Gumatj country, and is not connected with the Madarrpa crocodile except through being an event at a later stage in the journey of the fire. Along their length, mythological tracks are typically characterised by such discontinuous but overlapping sequences of events, which provide a series of potential links between the groups that they connect.

Connections between different mythological tracks may be stated in terms of paintings: elements of different myths may be encoded in the same painting. Plate 21 illustrates a painting by Liyawulumu of the yellow ochre quarry at Gurrurrunga. The painting encodes elements associated with the fire myth and the ochre quarry. The yellow diamonds signify the ochre dug away by the wangarr goanna, and the red diamonds signify the flames of the fire as it passed through the area. Plate 39 illustrates a similar phenomenon in a Munyuku painting. At one level the barred diamond design represents sugar bag, the outline representing the honey comb, the bar representing sticks inside the hive and the cross hatching representing bees. The pattern is also said to represent fire, in this case the fire caused by Lénydjung, a wangarr being, who threw paperbark brands around the country as he tried to drive the bees from their hive. In this case the cross hatching represents smoke, and the design as a whole represents paper-bark brands rolled around a wooden core.

Like the closed diamond, the open diamond pattern is also linked with a number of wangarr, and can occur on paintings referring to several wangarr beings. The set of wangarr linked with it does not overlap with the wangarr associated with closed diamond patterns, although individual clans may possess the right to produce designs belonging to both sets. The open design is shared by all the clans
belonging to what Warner (1958:34) terms the Mandjikay phratry. The clans sharing variants of this design are listed in figure 39:2. These clans are linked by one of two major wangarr: gadawark (mangrove tree) or dukurrurru (giant boulder), the majority of the clans having rights in both. In the case of the mangrove tree, one meaning for the design that is shared by all the clans is related to the mangrove worm (tereda sp.). The mangrove tree travelled through salt-water and fresh-water places. Some clans own sacred objects representing it in its freshwater aspect (for example the Wan.guri) and others own objects representing it in its salt-water aspect (for example Manggalili). The mangrove worms are said to be alive when the mangrove tree is in salt-water places and dead when it is in fresh-water places. In paintings referring to fresh-water places, the open diamond design signifies the calcareous tube of the worm. In the case of paintings associated with the boulder wangarr the design is said to represent a species of fresh-water plant, the species varying according to the clan and the place represented. In Manggalili paintings it represents the leaves of the yoku, a fresh-water lily (fig. 41). The yoku occurs in rivers that were made by the dukurrurru boulder as it came downstream from Burrwanydji in RITHERGNGU country. Yoku leaves are carried downstream by by the wet season flood waters and taken far out to sea. This is given as a reason why 'yoku' is a meaning for the open diamond design in both fresh and salt-water places.

The fact that a number of clans share common designs belonging to the same set does not necessarily mean that they form a ceremonial group which comes together as a unit to perform ceremonies associated with the particular wangarr being. Such a set of clans simply represents the maximum extension at any one point in time of clans
acknowledged to have an interest in a particular wangarr or set of wangarr. The sharing of designs represents a potential ideological basis for the joint performance of ceremonies, but it does not entail such a relationship.

Design differentiation

Figure 42 illustrates the diamond patterns owned by the Yirritja moiety clans at Yirrkala. They are drawn according to peoples' specifications of significant features which distinguish their clan designs from those of other clans. Every informant agreed on where these differences lay. The differences are essentially relational: a Munyuku diamond should be larger than a Dhaḻwangu diamond, and a Gumatj one should be elongated relative to both. Open diamond patterns are differentiated from one another in a similar way. In this case the main parameters along which designs vary are length and width of each diamond, and whether the basic pattern is outlined by a single line or multiple lines.

Differences and similarities between diamond patterns reflect differences in the mythological and social relationships between groups. The elongated diamonds are shared by groups who emphasise the fire wangarr, whereas the more square-shaped diamonds are owned by the groups which emphasise the sugar bag wangarr. Munyuku clan members also stated that their design is similar to that of the Dhaḻwangu because the clans stand in a māri-gutharra (MMB-ZDC) relationship.

Designs vary from one another in ways other than in their shape. Two other features may serve to differentiate them: the details of
the infill design and, in the context of whole paintings, the way in which they are combined with other geometric elements including other clan designs. Munyuku and Dhalwangu diamonds, for example, sometimes have a bar drawn down their centre (see pl. 39). Manggalili open diamonds are often outlined with a dotted line in two or more colours. Dotted line infill is a general characteristic of Manggalili paintings which differentiates them from all others (for example, see pl. 60).

Dhalwangu diamonds are not only smaller than Munyuku ones, but also can combine with other elements in a different way. Plate 4 illustrates a Dhalwangu painting in which the chain of diamonds is broken up by the inclusion of a pointed oval, and the design is bordered by a multiple zig-zag pattern (see fig. 43). This particular combination of elements occurs only in Dhalwangu paintings. The open diamond design in plate 41, a Munyuku painting, also occurs with variations in Manggalili paintings. In Munyuku paintings it can only occur as a single chain enclosed within another component, whereas in Manggalili paintings the design may be repeated any number of times (see fig. 44).

Particular variants of a clan design, and variation in the way in which it is combined with other elements in a painting, can signify different parts of a clan's territory associated with the same wangarr complex, or different events that took place along the same mythological track. The Dhalwangu design discussed in the previous paragraph is associated with inland parts of the clan's territory around Gäŋgan. The pointed ovals signify waterholes, and the zig-zag designs represent streamers of water weed (see Chapter 4). The presence of dots representing air bubbles in the water indicates
that the painting represents fresh-water country around the river (fig. 43). Absence of dots signifies that the painting represents dry country at a distance from the river.

Differences in the colour of infill may also signify different topographical referents of the design. The main difference between the Dhuwa moiety Rirratjingu clan designs for Nhulunbuy and Bremmer Island is that the former include black cross hatching as infill for elements of the design, whereas the latter do not (see fig. 45).

The set of paintings owned by a clan

As was shown in Chapter 4, clans hold rights in a number of madayin, each of which relates to a different sector of the clan's territory. Consistent with this is the fact that the set of designs held by a clan will cross-cut mythological tracks. Thus whereas design sets link a number of clans along the same mythological track, each clan owns a unique constellation of designs, the majority of which relate to different tracks. Thus clan designs, rather than being associated with a clan's territory as a whole, refer to parts of it only.

Figure 46 illustrates the clan designs owned by the Munyuku clan, and shows the main wangarr beings and the area of the clan's territory with which each design is associated (see pl. 39-42). The places referred to are shown on Map 1. Each design set is more closely associated with one particular Munyuku sub-group that it is with the others. However, the clan members publicly acknowledge joint ownership of all the designs and the associated areas of land.
Figure 47 shows the way in which Munyuku clan designs are linked to the designs of other clans at Yirrkala. The zig-zag design is linked with two places, Yarrinya and Mayawunydji, which are on separate ancestral tracks. A variant of the design is also owned by the Manggalili clan (see for example pl. 57). In the Manggalili case, the design is said to be an outside one (that is, one used in publicly displayed paintings) for paintings connected with salt water places. In the Munyuku cases it is also a design representing salt water. Yarrinya is on the coast, and Mayawunydji is on estuarine swamplands which are partly inundated by the high tides.

The Munyuku diamond pattern is linked with the Gupapuyngu, Dhalwangu, Mađarrpa, and the three Gumatj clans: that is, the clans which share the birrkuda (sugar bag) and gurtha (fire) wangarr. The linked triangles are shared with the Gumatj clans and with the Warramirri and Golpa. In all cases they are associated with the whale wangarr, and in three cases (Gumatj 2, Warramirri and Golpa) with the crayfish. The pointed oval is shared with the Mađarrpa and the Dhalwangu. In all cases it is linked with mikarran the yellow snake. Mikarran is a wangarr for all the Yirritja moiety clans. The oval design refers to the connection between Mađarrpa, Dhalwangu and Munyuku with respect to a wangarr fish trap created by the snake at the north of Blue Mud Bay. The open diamond pattern links the Munyuku to the Manggalili and Wan.guri clans. However, as was stated previously, the Munyuku right to the design is restricted to its use in the centre of the snake's body, whereas in the case of the other clans it is the major design employed in a large number of paintings.
Meanings Encoded in Clan Designs

The meanings of clan designs that have been considered so far have been at a generalised level. Clan designs signify particular social groups, wangarr beings associated with areas of a clan's territory, and the territory itself. It would be wrong to give priority to any one of these levels of signification, since land, clan and wangarr beings are inextricably bound together. Although land can change ownership, and clan designs can pass on to another group with the extinction of a clan, the result is a new association between a clan, a tract of land, and a set of wangarr beings.

One further general meaning can be applied to the majority of clan designs: they may in certain contexts signify water (gapu). The design in plate 39, as well as signifying the Munyuku clan and the sugar bag wangarr represents water. Similarly, the Madarrpa fire design also signifies water. In all cases it is not water in general that is denoted, but the water of that clan in that country. Water is seen as a medium of connection: it connects the territories of different clans, links stages of the journeys of the wangarr beings, and connects people (in particular their spiritual component) to the sacred objects of the clan and to other transformations of the bodies of the wangarr beings.

Wangarr beings by their actions created a number of wells in the land over which they journeyed, and many of the routes that they took were transformed into rivers. The wells so created are considered to be major sources of wangarr power (mārr). The clan's sacred objects are buried in the mud at the bottom of the clan well, and the spirits of deceased clan members are directed towards the sacred objects and
to the rocks surrounding the well by the mortuary ceremonies. Subsequently the spirits enter the bodies of women washing in waters connected to the well, and thus become the animating spirits of new generations of clanspeople. Waters carry with them traces of the *wangarr* beings associated with their source or with particular parts of their course. The colour of rivers and the characteristic debris that they carry are signs of the *wangarr* beings upstream. Thus leaves of *yoku*, a plant of inland waters associated with Yirritja moiety *wangarr* beings (in particular the *nguykal* (kingfish)), are carried downstream along the Wayawpuy River out into Blue Mud Bay. The waters of the bay beyond the mouth of the river are said to be black with the colour of rotten *yoku* leaves swept out by the current. The waters to the east of this are characterised by white-topped breakers associated with the Dhuwa moiety. These two bodies of water join at the south of Cape Shield, the boundary between them out at sea being that between the Dhuwa and Yirritja clans of the area. Thus the significant characteristics of bodies of water are interpreted as signs of *wangarr* activity.

Water is viewed as existing under the ground and in the atmosphere as well as on the surface of the earth. Many *wangarr* beings, through their actions, created underground connections between surface water sources, or released water from beneath the ground. The Djang'kawu sisters created wells and springs with their digging sticks in Dhuwa moiety territory (see Berndt, 1952:5, Warner, 1958: 335 ff.). Figure 48 illustrates a Dhuwa moiety design belonging to the Marrakulu-Dhurrurrunga clan. The circles represent waterholes created by the Djang'kawu sisters as they walked inland from Balmawuy, a place to the south of the Baykurrtji River. They held a walking
stick in each hand and placed them in the ground to either side, parallel with each other. The lines connecting the circles represent water underground connecting the waterholes: it was this underground water that the Djang'kawu released to the surface by their actions. The central line in the painting represents a track associated with another wangarr being: wititj, a python. Wititj travelled under the ground creating watercourses which are separate from those of the Djang'kawu, and which are manifested on the surface in different places.

Clouds and rain are also a means of transferring water from one place to another, and thus of carrying wangarr power across clan boundaries. Some clan designs signify clouds rather than surface or underground water. Figure 49 gives examples of some Yirritja moiety clan designs which signify clouds. The varying designs are owned by different sets of clans. The connected triangle design signifies clouds associated with the whale wuymirri: they are clouds created by the whale's spouting or by the spray from the diamond stingray.

Water as a symbolic medium is therefore not constrained by its distribution on the surface of the earth in rivers and streams. Through its subterranean and atmospheric transformations it provides a rich source for symbols of connectedness between people and places. The interpretations of four Munyuku paintings (pl. 39-42) will serve to show the way in which a clan's waters may be connected and also differentiated from one another and from the waters belonging to other clans. The paintings represent different named places belonging to the Munyuku clan. Plate 39, the first painting, represents Mandjawuy, with the diamond pattern signifying fresh water. The water flows from Gängan in Dhalwangu territory along the Wayawpuy River. The diamond
design also represents the birrkuda (sugar bag) and fire, and at a more specific level, paper bark and sticks in the honey comb. The second painting (pl. 40) represents Nuparrwuy, a place further down-stream. This place is associated with garrangunung (the hammer-headed shark), who is also associated with salt water places. The shark was pushed downstream by the flow of water from Mandjawuy and Gängan. The diamond design again represents sugar bag, sticks and paperbark, but this time the sticks and pieces of bark are among the debris carried in the water from upstream. The water is still fresh, and is linked with the sugar bag, although the sugar bag wangu never itself came to Nuparrwuy. The diamond pattern thus demonstrates a connection between Dhalwangu and Munyuku places along the upper part of the Wayawpuy River, all of which are associated in some way with the sugar bag wangu.

The zigzag design in the same painting signifies the change to salt water. The rangga (sacred objects) associated with this design do not overlap with those linked with the diamond design. The next painting (pl. 41) is of Mayawunydji, which is at the mouth of the river. The zigzag salt water design connects it with the previous painting. Mayawunydji is a tidal area, and contains both salt water and fresh water places: some of the clan wells are salt and others fresh. The main sacred objects for the area are connected with mikaran, the yellow snake. The snake swallows water in the salt water places, and spits it into the fresh water parts of Mayawunydji and vice versa. This is said to explain why the area is characterised by both kinds of places. The snake also spits water into the sky and flicks its tongue in order to communicate with snakes in other places. The spitting creates rain clouds, and the flicking of the tongue, lightning.
The fourth painting (pl. 42a and b) represents Yarrinya, a salt water place at the tip of Garraparra. The salt water flowing from the mouth of the Wayawpuy River connects Mayawunyddji to Yarrinya, the connection being signified by the zigzag salt water design. In this case it is the only thing that connects them: the two places are not on the same mythological track.

The two clan designs, diamond and zigzag, signify different characteristics of the river's waters along its length: one is fresh and the other is salt. One is linked with the sugar bag wangarr, the other is not. The two designs also connect Munyuku to two different sets of clans. In other ways the four places on and near the river are connected: they are all owned by the Munyuku clan, and they are all linked by the flow of water from inland to the sea. The juxtaposition of the two clan designs in the one Munyuku painting signifies this connection, and demonstrates what the Munyuku clan members hold in common: they exercise joint rights in the madayin of a number of places. The snake mikaran provides an additional mechanism for linking the two different types of water found in Munyuku places by spitting freshwater into salt water places and vice versa, thus inter-mingling them.

Parts of Mayawunyddji are owned by a number of other clans, in particular the Manggalili. The Manggalili water takes a different route to and from the place, along watercourses connected with a different set of wangarr beings. The design used in Manggalili paintings for the place is the open diamond, and the waters flow south to Cape Shield (Djarrakpi) rather than south-west to Yarrinya.
The infill of clan designs

In relation to signification cross hatching and other types of infill have a differentiating function. Presence, absence and variety of infilling enable contrasts to be made within a clan design, which otherwise consists of a sequence of morphologically identical geometric elements. Differences in infill correspond to differences in the meanings attached to the basic geometric elements.

Several examples have been given already of the semantic significance of infill. Here I will consider in detail only one set of designs: closed diamonds. The clan designs of Maäarrpa and Gumatj 1, 2 and 3 have a similar set of meanings associated with infilled designs. The meanings are shown in figure 50. The design as a whole across the face of the painting encodes different attributes of the fire (smoke, sparks, flames), and different stages of the fire (the fire at its height and the charred landscape that it leaves behind), as part of a uniform pattern. In different feature blocks of the same painting different attributes of a fire encoded in one of the diamonds only may be focused on as the primary meaning of the clan design in that section. One section of the painting may be associated with the fire at its height, while another may be associated with the charred remains on the ground when it has passed by. Plate 43, a Gumatj 1 painting by Liyawulumu, illustrates this point. The painting took several days to complete, which enabled me to record the meanings attributed to elements at different stages in the production of the painting.

Before any cross hatching was done, the diamonds were outlined in yellow. I was told that the surface of the painting signified a
grassy plain. Then some of the infilling was begun in the left hand section of the painting, and I was told that the grass was burning. When the infilling had been totally completed, some of the diamonds were outlined in black and others outlined again in yellow. Areas outlined in black showed where the fire had finished, and areas outlined in yellow showed where it was still burning. The areas of white cross hatching and the white dots signified ashes blown in the wind.

The interaction between clan designs and figurative representations

As signifiers of group ownership, clan designs are far more specific than other components of a painting. In chapter 6 it was shown how the majority of artists employ a single figurative schema for representing a particular content, and use the same schema irrespective of which clan the painting belongs to. The same or at least an overlapping set of figurative representations may be included in paintings belonging to two or more clans of the same moiety which are linked by an ancestral track, and share the same madayin with respect to that track. For example Djapu, Djamarrpuynugu and Rirratjingu (all Dhuwa clans) all own paintings representing ancestral turtle hunters. Plates 44 and 45 illustrate Djapu and Rirratjingu versions of this painting by different artists. In the absence of clan designs it would be impossible to determine which clan the respective paintings belonged to. Furthermore, a similar set of figurative representations may even occur in paintings belonging to clans of opposite moieties.

Mis-identification of the clan design will lead to a wrong interpretation of other elements of the painting. Such cases are extremely rare, but they do occur. Plate 46 is a painting by Yilkari
of the Liyagalawumirri clan (Dhuwa moiety) which was collected by Thomson in 1937. The painting represents Mirramina, a sacred well on the Woolen River, and the snake is the python yulunggurr. The design of small squares is a clan design belonging to the Liyagalawumirri. When I showed the painting to a senior member of the Djapu clan, he first interpreted it for me as a Dhuwa moiety painting of yulunggurr. However he then spotted the triangle pattern, which he identified as a Yirritja moiety design of the type illustrated in figure 49, and revised his interpretation, stating that the snake was the Yirritja snake mikarran, and that the painting belonged to the Munyuku. 1

Paintings without clan designs were often considered to be uninterpretable at the moiety level: Plate 34 represents a woman's painting produced for sale to Europeans. It does not belong to a particular clan, and although the artist intended the figures to represent species characteristic of her own moiety, Yirritja, they could represent species belonging to either moiety, and were interpreted as such by different informants.

The same clan design may be associated with a number of different places in a clan's territory. In such cases figurative representations can operate to narrow down the reference of the painting by signifying events that are associated primarily with one place only. Plate 6 illustrates a Madarrpa painting of Gunmurrutjpi, where the crocodile first jumped into the river with fire burning on its back. Plate 7 represents Yatikpa, where the crocodile threw some of the fire into

1 The mistake was probably caused by two factors. Firstly, the photograph that I showed to him was much smaller than the original painting, and therefore made the triangle design, which represents stone spears carried by the Wawilak sisters, look more like the Yirritja moiety design than it in fact is. Secondly, the painting belonged to a clan residing at a considerable distance from Yirrkala, and the Djapu man was not familiar with its paintings. The point that I am making remains valid: clan designs modify the meanings of figurative representations.
the sea, where it was transformed into a rock which causes the waters surrounding it to bubble and steam. Yatikpa is also associated with the wangaŋ dugong, and ancestral dugong hunters. Representations of the dugong, harpoon and hunters in combination with the Madarrpa fire design localise the painting at Yatikpa.

Although the diamond design refers to fire on both the paintings discussed above, and can be interpreted in both cases in the way shown in figure 50, at another level the designs have different referents. At Gunmurrutjpi the pattern signifies the marks on the crocodile's back, while at Yatikpa it signifies water weed, which is the food of the dugong. Plate 47 also refers to Yatikpa. It contains a complex of figurative representations associated with the dugong hunters: a harpoon, rope, paddles, and so on. The diamond design is of interest because it shows a particular figurative transformation of the design which makes it appropriate to Yatikpa, but not to Gunmurrutjpi. Three of the strings of diamonds are modified by a bulbous representation which signifies parts of the water weed.

Similar points can be made with respect to the Gumatj diamond pattern. Fire brought to Caledon Bay by the crocodile spread northwards and swept through a ceremonial ground, burning the shade and engraving a diamond pattern on one of the ceremonial clapsticks that was being used there. The fire then spread inland, burning the nest of a wangaŋ bandicoot, and forcing it to hide in a hollow log. From there onwards the fire was spread by a quail (djirrikitiŋ), who seized burning twigs from the fire and flew off, lighting the bush as it travelled. Thus crocodile, clapstick, bandicoot and quail are all associated with different named places and different stages in the spread of the fire. Their presence or absence as figurative
representations in different paintings, and in different feature blocks of the same painting, shows that different parts of the clan's territory and different stages on the ancestral track are being signified.

The examples discussed above are interesting because they show a different level of interaction between the figurative and geometric components of a painting to that considered so far. Although at one level clan designs can be seen to reduce the ambiguity of figurative representations by locating them as totemic species belonging to particular clans and associated with a particular ancestral track, the figurative representations so defined can themselves operate to signify particular locations within the clan's territory and can differentiate between paintings sharing the same clan design.

Conclusion: the Iconicity of Clan Designs

In conclusion to this section I will consider the problem of whether clan designs are an iconic or an arbitrary system of representation. There are two aspects to this question. One concerns the problem of formal resemblance between a signifier and a signified within the system. The other is whether or not formal resemblance at this level is the basis upon which designs belonging to one clan are differentiated from those of another, in particular as regards designs belonging to the same design set.

The system does indeed show a degree of iconicity at certain levels. Two levels of iconic relationship between signifier and signified have been referred to earlier in the chapter: one at the level of the design as a whole, the other at the level of infilling.
Certain designs are believed to have originated as a consequence of the action of wangarr beings. In many cases the designs produced are also said to have the characteristics of certain natural forms. The same design type may have a number of different myths of origin, each of which refers to an iconic relationship between the design and a particular object, such as the skin of a crocodile, the shell of a tortoise, the cells of a honeycomb and the fold marks in sheets of paper bark. These are all said to show a formal resemblance to the Yirritja moiety diamond pattern.

The relationship between signifier and signified in the case of infilling can also in some cases be seen to be patterned by factors of iconicity. The fire pattern (fig. 50) is a good example of a case in which the appropriateness of the form or colour of the infill affects the relationship between signifiers and signifieds.

Iconicity can only be postulated in the case of some of the relationships between signifiers and signifieds associated with a particular clan design. The designs are multivalent. Folded paper bark, or the marks on a crocodile's back are not the meaning of a design. In each case they are one of a set of meanings associated with the same design in the context of particular paintings. Diamond patterns also signify water and various different kinds of water weed. There seems to be no good reason why such meanings could not be equally appropriately signified by other clan designs, as indeed they are.

Even in cases where the Yolngu assert that there is an iconic relationship between signifier and signified, it is only one of a number of possible and in many cases equally appropriate associations that could be made between a particular signified and a number of different signifiers. Thus there is no intrinsic reason why paperbark
should be signified by a diamond pattern, since a number of other patterns could be produced by folding paperbark. The marks on a crocodile's back would perhaps be even better represented by a square pattern. I would suggest that, rather than the designs being iconically motivated, the possibility of formal resemblances between signifier and signified is exploited in the case of certain meanings attached to a design type.

In many cases the iconic relationship is itself a cultural artefact. This is shown particularly clearly in the case of folded paperbark. The paperbark, by being folded in a particular way in wangarr times to form a diamond pattern, creates the iconicity between signifier and signified. It could equally well have been folded into squares. The relationship between diamond pattern and paperbark is reinforced in a number of other ways. For example, sacred objects made of paperbark have diamond patterns sewn across the surface bindings.

As far as the second aspect of the question is concerned, the difference between the designs of different clans cannot be explained on a purely iconic basis. At a moiety level Dhuwa moiety designs, irrespective of any overlap in the meanings signified by them, must differ morphologically from Yirritja moiety designs. Indeed, they must consist of different types of geometric elements. Both moieties have sugar bag designs (refering to different species of bee). The Yirritja moiety one consists of diamonds, while the Dhuwa moiety one consists of straight lines at angles to one another. Within a moiety, designs of the same set belonging to different clans are differentiated on a non-iconic basis. Although each clan may have a different myth of origin for the versions of its design, myths do not refer to formal
features that differentiate one design from the next. Certainly each clan may have a separate myth which explains the origin of its version of the design in iconic terms (for example, diamond refers to crocodile, or tortoise, or paperbark, or sugar bag). These myths do not, however, refer to formal features that differentiate one clan's design from another belonging to the same set.

Each clan's diamond design does differ from the diamond design of every other clan, but the system of reference for these differences, rather than being iconic, is the relationship between the groups themselves. In this respect, the clan designs correspond to a Durkheimian model of co-variance between design and social group. At this level, the differences between the designs could be said to be sociologically motivated.

It is worthwhile at this point to contrast Yolngu clan designs with Walbiri Guruwari men's designs, as the differences between the two systems is quite striking. As far as design differentiation in Guruwari designs is concerned, Munn writes:

'...the marked visual similarities between the designs for different species do not necessarily signify specific cosmological or other association of the ancestors involved.' (1973:176)

Yolngu clan designs on the other hand do operate to signify precisely this kind of connection, as paintings with similar designs on them are linked at the level of madayin (ancestral complex).

A second feature of the Walbiri men's design system is that design differentiation does not correspond with segmentation at the societal level. Walbiri clan designs are primarily iconically motivated, and: 'there is no systematic subordination of the iconic element to a second abstract ordering system' (Munn, 1973:177). Thus
ancestral designs belonging to unrelated groups and which have different mythological referents can be visually similar because of the iconic nature of the design generation system. As far as Yolngu clan designs are concerned, this cannot be the case. For example, the designs belonging to clans of different moieties cannot overlap.

It could be argued that I have been comparing things at different levels, since clan designs are only one component of Yolngu paintings (albeit the major component of men's sacred paintings). I have shown earlier that as far as the figurative content of a painting is concerned, clans of opposite moieties can have similar paintings. However, the point that I am making remains a valid one. In clan designs, Yolngu art has a component which functions at one level to differentiate the paintings of one social group from those of another, and which at a second level provides a network of interconnectedness between groups on the basis of the mythological relationships between clans. There is no analogous component in Walbiri art.
CHAPTER 8

CATEGORIES OF PAINTING

I will approach the analysis and definition of different categories of Yolngu art from a diachronic perspective. There are two main reasons for treating the topic in this way. The first is to show aspects of the dynamic of the relationship between Yolngu and European society as far as the artistic system is concerned. The second is to examine the significance of the changes that have taken place over time as far as the functions of different categories of art in Yolngu society are concerned, especially in relation to the system of maintaining differential access to knowledge by people of different status. Since European contact in the 1930's the categories of art have changed somewhat. Certain types of painting are no longer produced, and the relationship between the categories has altered. Donald Thomson recorded indigenous categories of art in detail as they existed in the 1930's, and I use his material as a basis for comparing the immediate post-contact situation with the situation existing today.

Categories of Art in the 1930's

Thomson's\(^1\) categories were derived basically from subdivisions made by informants within the body of Gupapuyangu clan paintings that

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\(^{1}\) Thomson never published a detailed list of the categories of art which he identified, though he referred to some of them in a number of publications (e.g. Thomson, 1939a, 1939b and 1947:46, 47). The material I use is spread throughout his field notes and the annotations of the objects he collected. Major summaries of his analysis however occur in his notes of the 13/7/37 and 4/8/37.
he collected.\(^1\) He generalised these distinctions himself to apply to all the Yolngu speaking clans.\(^2\) Six main categories can be abstracted from Thomson's field notes. These are listed in figure 51, together with the main characteristics he used to define them.

The first category, wakinngu, can be loosely termed decorative art. Wakinngu means ordinary, mundane and non-sacred. It is used in opposition to madayinbuy (belonging to the sacred). When applied to animal species it conveys the sense 'not in its capacity as a totemic species'. As applied to paintings it refers to paintings that are non-ancestral, which are not part of the clan's body of inherited sacred law and which are produced simply to make an object look more attractive. Everyday objects with wakinngu paintings on them do not differ in use from unpainted objects of the same type - i.e. the fact that they are painted does not in any way prescribe or constrain the way in which they are used or who can use them (see Thomson, 1939:8,9).

The second category of paintings were termed garma paintings by Thomson. The simplest gloss for garma is 'public aspects of the sacred law'; it is often translated by Yolngu as 'outside' (c.f. Warner, 1958:20). Garma paintings are ones that can be produced and displayed in public places. They are not associated with the restricted phases of any ceremony and can be seen by women and young men. The main contexts for these paintings are on grave posts, hollow log coffins

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1 The paintings are part of the Donald Thomson collection housed in the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne.

2 The Gupapuyngu clan now live in the area of Milingimbi. Thomson however, spent much time in the Caledon Bay-Trial Bay area working with clans which subsequently moved to Yirrkala (see e.g. Thomson, 1949).
and objects used in ceremonies held in the main camp to which women have full access.

The third category is bulgu paintings. These occur either on objects or as body paintings. The majority of objects on which bulgu designs occur are connected with the men's ceremonial life, in particular they are painted on bathi (sacred dilly bags). Sacred dilly bags are kept and occasionally displayed in the main camp although behaviour in relation to them is subject to constraints: they are individually owned by members of clans and may be handled and used only by prescribed categories of people in defined contexts.

As body paintings, bulgu miny'tji can be painted on women and uninitiated men when a major stage of a particular ceremony is being performed on the men's ceremonial ground. They are also painted on the bodies of men as they move from the seclusion of the closed ceremonial ground towards the end of a major ceremony, in particular a ngärra, to join the women in communal washing (c.f. Warner, 1958:353). The paintings are clan owned and according to Thomson were 'the only maḏayinbuy miny'tji that may be painted on women and children'.

The next category of paintings are termed ngärrapuy miny'tji. This literally means paintings belonging to the ngärra ceremony. However Thomson used it to refer to a particular class of body paintings produced in the context of closed phases of major ceremonies, including the djungguwan, ngulmarrk and gunapipi as well as the ngärra. The paintings are figurative representations of totemic species and occur

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1 Field notes for the 13/7/35.
on the bodies of actors performing dances connected with them. Women should not see these paintings unless they have been partially rubbed out.

This also applies to Thomson's category likanbuy or ranggapuy miny'tji. The meaning of likan was discussed in Chapter 7. In this context both likanbuy and ranggapuy refer to the fact that the paintings are done on the rangga itself. They are also used at circumcision, on the bodies of initiates to whom the sacred object has been revealed for the first time, and on a dead person's body (Thomson, 1939a:1). Such paintings may also be painted on the body of a person who has recovered from a severe illness or in some other way narrowly escaped death. A likanbuy miny'tji in Thomson's time was always done in seclusion away from women and children, by men who were fully initiated into the ceremony concerned.

There is a further category of paintings identified by Thomson that I will not be discussing in detail here, that is uniform single colour white, red and yellow body paintings. These occur in similar contexts today as they did in Thomson's time (for examples, see Chapter 5).

The above categories cover the majority of paintings produced by the Yolngu at the time of Thomson's field work. The categories themselves can be classified in a number of different ways to show different aspects of the relationship between them. Firstly they can be divided into three types on the basis of their relationship with the ancestral world (fig. 52). Decorative art can be separated from all other categories as it does not have any reference to the ancestral world and is not produced as part of any ceremony. Garma paintings can
be distinguished from bulgu, ngärrapuy and likanbuy paintings in that they do not refer to the clan's rangga, nor to the major wangarr ancestors connected with the rangga, whereas the other three do. Garma paintings relate to myths that are expressed in the publicly performed phases of mortuary ceremonies and to myths concerning the transformation of humans into animal form. Bulgu miny'tji and likanbuy miny'tji are both designs represented on the rangga, forms of the wangarr designs discussed in Chapter 4. Ngärrapuy designs represent wangarr ancestors closely connected with the rangga although not actually embodied in it.

The design categories can be classified on a second basis: the degree to which access to the paintings is restricted and the exclusiveness of the contexts in which they are displayed (fig. 52). The first type can be termed open art. This includes paintings which can be displayed in the main camp and which are not subject to special restrictions. It includes the first three categories of painting: decorative art, plain single colour paintings and garma paintings.

Closed art, the second type, includes paintings which certain categories of people are excluded from viewing. Ngärrapuy and likanbuy paintings belong to the closed category of art. As a general rule such paintings are restricted from women and young men. In the case of women, their exclusion is, at the level of overt ideology, permanent and on the basis of sex, in the case of men it is temporary and based on their level of initiation.

People are prevented from viewing paintings in a number of ways. Closed paintings are frequently produced on the men's ceremonial ground, from which women are excluded. However, spatial separation is
only one of the ways in which exclusion is achieved. The object may be obscured by placing a physical barrier between it and the potential viewer, a screen of bushes or the walls of a hut. The object may also be wrapped to hide the designs. Referring to designs on pipes Thomson (1939b:89) writes:

'Once these designs have been made...they must not be exposed to the eyes of the uninitiated, but are kept sheathed with a covering of paper bark,...bound with a strip of calico to cover the sacred miny'tji'.

Women may also be prevented from seeing closed designs (and other restricted parts of a ceremony) by being covered (c.f. Berndt, 1951:55; Warner, 1958:344). In these ways the boundaries between the closed and open are defined by the simultaneous achievement of proximity and distance.

A second way in which exclusion is achieved is by avoidance behaviour, that is women may either avert their gaze from an object (or person) or deliberately sit in a place from where the event is obscured.

A final method is to alter in some way the design on passage from a closed to an open context, for example by smearing the design or by painting over it, or a part of it. The most exclusive aspect of the closed art (apart from the meaning of the design) is the process of painting. Thus, although in a modified form the design may be seen by the uninitiated, the painting itself is done in seclusion. Restricted art is thus associated with closed contexts and occurs on objects (rangga) that are totally restricted, yet in a modified form the paintings are seen by all. The fact that the restricted art is glimpsed by those to whom it is prohibited dramatises the separation
between the closed and open contexts and in particular dramatises the control exercised by men in the former sphere.

The remaining category of paintings, bulgu miny'tji, fits into an intermediary type between open and restricted paintings. They are painted on the bodies of men and women prior to the performance of major joint phases of certain ceremonies. In particular such designs are painted on men and women prior to the ceremonial washing (liya-lupthun) that occurs towards the end of a ngārra ceremony (see Warner, 1958:352). The designs are also painted on sacred dilly bags, objects which are generally kept covered and hidden away between ceremonies but which are displayed publicly during the performance of certain phases of all major ceremonies (see e.g. pl. 8 and 10). Thus though the paintings in an unmodified form are seen by all categories of people, as body paintings, they occur in specific ceremonial contexts away from the main camp and the objects on which they are painted are generally kept hidden.

The componential structure of Thomson's categories

In this section I discuss the formal composition of Thomson's categories in terms of the components isolated in chapter 6. Figure 53 illustrates examples of each category.

Of the two categories of public art, the decorative art cannot be meaningfully discussed in terms of the components. It consists simply of broad bands of colours. In Thomson's collection there is a complete absence of the figurative and geometric components in art of this category, nor is any form of cross hatching employed as infill.
The *garma* art has a high proportion of figurative representations. The painting may in the case of a hollow log coffin be divided up into a number of feature blocks representing different mythological episodes. The majority of *garma* paintings in Thomson's collection do not include clan designs (see for example a Gupapuyngu hollow log coffin (*dupun*) painting illustrated in pl. 48). Only certain clan designs can be included in *garma* paintings: those which are not primarily associated with the clan's sacred objects. The diamond design (pl. 50) associated with the main Gupapuyngu *rangga,birrkuda* (sugar bag), does not occur in *garma* paintings. Cross hatched infill occurs within the body of some of the figurative representations, but does not cover the area between the figures.¹

The *bulgu* paintings consist simply of outlined clan designs. The majority of paintings in this category are characterised by an absence of cross hatching. In the case of body paintings the designs are outlined in white, red or yellow on a red or white background. In the case of *bathî* (dilly bags) the outline designs are either painted on or defined by raised lines of string interwoven into the surface structure of the bag. The individual elements may be painted in different colours to form repeated sequences of alternating colour sets e.g. red-white-yellow; red-white-yellow.

¹ Although Thomson did not collect paintings of this type from the vicinity of Yirrkala there is no doubt that an analagous category of paintings existed in that area. The paintings collected by Chaseling in the late 1930's fit into this category. The paintings consist primarily of figurative representations and are characterised by an absence of clan designs (see Morphy in press b). Although the paintings were not documented by Chaseling, Yolngu today describe them as *garma* or outside paintings.
Of the restricted art ngärapuy paintings are almost indistinguishable on formal criteria from some garma paintings. They consist solely of figurative representations which may or may not be infilled with cross hatching. They differ from garma paintings mainly at the level of content and in the context in which they occur. They usually consist of single figure body paintings of totemic species linked to the clan's wangarr ancestors and to the clan's rangga. The majority of ngärapuy paintings recorded by Thomson are of species of fish. Paintings of goannas on the bodies of men in the djungguwan ceremony also fall into this category. The goannas are associated with the yulunggurr rangga, a restricted drone pipe which is the main sacred object used in the ceremony (see Chapter 5).

Likankanbuy paintings have the most complex componental structure, and frequently consist of all the components identified in Chapter 6. The figurative component however may be absent from a likankanbuy painting (e.g. pl. 50 and 55) and relative to garma paintings is greatly reduced. The major components of likankanbuy paintings are clan designs and geometric representations. The entire painting is infilled with cross hatching with the exception of certain elements of the clan design. The figurative representations that do occur refer to meanings encoded in the rangga, for example if the rangga is a transformation of an ancestral goanna species then the painting may include a figurative representation of that species.

Commentary on the componental structure of Thomson's categories

In attempting to explain why the paintings in each of Thomson's categories differ in the ways they do, I focus this discussion on the likankanbuy category, relating other categories of paintings to them. Likankanbuy paintings represent the most highly valued and restricted
category, the ones whose form derives from the wangarr ancestors manifest in the clan's sacred objects.

There are a number of reasons why the morphological structure of likanbuy paintings is appropriate to their status as the most highly valued and restricted category of Yolngu art. The first reason concerns the semantic properties of the paintings and the second concerns their 'aesthetic' properties. I discuss the semantic aspects first, considering general properties of the component sign systems employed.

Likanbuy miny'tji are the major ancestrally derived and endowed paintings. They represent a charter for the land held by a clan and (related to this) are one of the main components of the definition of a clan (see Chapter 2). Clan designs are the component of Yolngu art that refers most directly both to the wangarr ancestors and to the socio-political relationship between clans and clan territories. It is therefore appropriate that they should be major components of likanbuy paintings. Clan designs signify the relationship between social groups and the ancestral domain, they are the components of paintings that are referred to in the myths of design generation and can be said to be iconically motivated in relation to ancestral events (Chapter 4). The presence of clan designs on an object refer it directly to the rangga of the wangarr being (and of the clan) whose design it is. The likanbuy miny'tji occur on the rangga and are in a sense a component of the clan's sacred objects.

Clan designs also occur as bulgu miny'tji (see for example pl. 49). Bulgu miny'tji too have direct reference to the clan's major wangarr beings and occur in contexts or on objects associated with the rangga.
As body paintings they are produced at ceremonies in which the rangga associated with the design has been revealed. They also occur on sacred dilly bags which represent the bags carried by the wangarr beings. The use of clan designs in intermediate contexts, albeit with minimal elaboration of form, can be interpreted as a means of transferring the power associated with the rangga from the secluded and exclusive context of its revelation to the members of society as a whole.

It is significant however that the fully elaborated clan designs are reserved for the likanbuy miny'tji (pl. 50, 51). The more elaborated a clan design then the more specific its reference. The simple outline clan designs of the bulgu category signify a general relationship between people and ancestral beings; they do not of themselves refer to particular parts of a clan's territory or to specific ancestral events. The elaborated clan designs in combination with other elements of a painting refer to particular relationships between clans, ancestral events and specific localities. At this level clan designs concern the political relationships between groups, the ownership and transfer of ownership of land, the fission and fusion of clans and so on. They relate to the point of intersection between the given and constant world of the ancestors and the dynamic and changing world of groups on the ground. As such they are part of the restricted body of knowledge held by initiated men.

This introduces a second aspect of the form of likanbuy paintings that makes them appropriate for their position in Yolngu culture; the form of likanbuy paintings is in itself a means of maintaining secrecy. Likanbuy paintings are central objects in the system of controlling the distribution of knowledge. Likanbuy
paintings are part of the system of restricted knowledge in two ways: knowledge both of the details of their form of their meanings is restricted.

One way Yolngu control the distribution of knowledge of paintings has been discussed in detail already: that is, access to paintings themselves is restricted. After a painting has been revealed to an individual, knowledge restrictions shift dimension from control of knowledge of its form to control of knowledge of its meaning. Indeed viewing a painting is only an initial stage in the process of male initiation. Further revelation of restricted knowledge takes place as an individual is taught more about the significance of its form. In likanbuy paintings meanings are encoded in such a way that the paintings are not readily interpretable by those lacking knowledge of how they should be interpreted. In this way control can be maintained by those already possessing this information.

The predominance of the geometric in likanbuy paintings functions to obscure their interpretation. Clan designs and geometric representations have broad signifying potentials. The elements themselves are basically non-iconic, though some elements of iconicity exist at certain levels of the system. In chapter 7 I showed how minor variations between similar clan designs affect the reference of the design and how the same design could have a multiplicity of meanings associated with it in different contexts. The designs themselves are multivalent signifying clan, place, ancestral event and so on. The same design may encode a number of different ancestral events and the specified meanings of the geometric elements may vary according to the particular interpretation focused on. In order to interpret the geometric components of a painting one has to know not
simply what the signifying potential of the elements are, but which
signifieds apply in the context of the particular painting. This
functions to restrict the amount of information obtained through the
mere revelation of the painting and enables the secrecy of its meanings
to be maintained. (The way in which these operate with reference to
different levels of interpretation of a particular set of paintings
will be discussed in detail in a later section.)

In contrast to the geometric art, the figurative representations
(which are iconically motivated) are readily interpretable in context
to refer to particular objects and are intended to be interpreted as
such (see Chapter 6). The limited number of figurative representations
in \textit{likanbuy} paintings reduces the number of readily interpretable signs
in them.

The properties of the geometric art in maintaining secrecy are
explicitly acknowledged by the Yolngu:

'If people look at this they think it means nothing' - Mithili
discussing a purely geometric painting.

'It doesn't look as if it has many meanings but it has more
than the other ones' - Welwi with reference to plate 55.

I am not suggesting here that the objective of maintaining
secrecy is the major explanation for the predominance of geometric
motifs in the \textit{likanbuy} paintings. The geometric art, because of its
multivalency and potential ambiguity, encodes meanings in such a way
that it can be used to make complex statements about the relationships
between things that cannot be made in other ways. This has already
been shown to be the case with clan designs and will be discussed
further in later sections. The point that I wish to make here is simply that one of the functions of the geometric component of likanbuy paintings is to restrict the number of people who can interpret them.

So far I have considered only the semantic aspects of likanbuy paintings that differentiate them from paintings in other categories. According to Thomson likanbuy paintings have a property of a different order, bir'yun, that they do not share with paintings in other categories. Bir'yun can be termed an aesthetic property as it operates independent of the specific meanings encoded in a painting, though as we shall see it interacts with them. Bir'yun is a particular visual effect resulting from aspects of the form of likanbuy paintings. Thomson (field notes 5.8.37) writes that the mundane or secular meaning of bir'yun refers to intense sources and refractions of light: to the sun's rays and to light sparkling in bubbling fresh water.

gong ngayi walu bir'yu-bir'yun marrtji
fingers his sun scintillate go

The sun's rays scintillate.

As applied to paintings 'bir'yun is the flash of light - the sensation of light that one gets and carries away in ones mind's eye, from a glance at the likanbuy miny'tji' (field notes 4.8.37). The bir'yun of a painting is the visual effect of the fine cross hatched lines that cover the surface of a sacred painting, 'it is the sensation of light, the uplift of looking at this carefully carried out work. They see in it a likeness to the wangarr'.
Thus *bir'yun* is the shimmering effect of finely cross hatched paintings which project a brightness that is seen as emanating from the *wangarr* being itself - this brightness is one of the things that endows the painting with ancestral power. Thomson states that this is one of the reasons why a *likanbuy* painting is either wholly or partly obscured when a person painted with one goes into the main camp. The painting is obscured by smearing the cross hatched infill, by reducing the fineness and separateness of the cross hatched lines to a smudge of pigment. Thus although some aspects of the form of the painting are discernable it has lost its brilliance (*bir'yun*) and through losing this has lost some of its ancestral power, 'its likeness to the *wangarr*'.

The concept of *bir'yun* also helps to explain one of the main differences between *likanbuy* paintings (for example, pl. 50) and *bulgu* paintings (for example, pl. 49) both of which consist largely of clan designs. *Bulgu* paintings which occur in open contexts are not *bir'yun,* whereas *likanbuy* paintings are. It is interesting in this respect that one of Thomson's informants described *bulgu* paintings as being 'mali nhanngu *likanbuy* miny'tji' - shades of *likanbuy* paintings, whereas *likanbuy* paintings can be described as 'mali *wangarr*' - shades of the *wangarr.* *Bulgu* paintings are a subordinate category of paintings to *likanbuy,* one stage further removed from the *wangarr* ancestors, reinforcing the distinction between closed contexts which are closest to the source of ancestral power and open contexts that are furthest away.

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1 Mali is translated by Thomson as 'shade' and Yolngu today sometimes state that it literally means shadow. However it is used to refer to the shadow of a *wangarr* ancestor or of a human spirit - and conveys the idea of 'a projection of the spiritual power of...'.

All clan paintings, Dhuwa moiety and Yirritja, are said to possess bir'yun (Thomson's field notes 4.8.37). However depending on the clan and wangarr ancestor concerned, the bir'yun itself may have different connotations. For example, Thomson records that the bir'yun of a Gupapuyngu birrkuda (sugar bag) design (pl. 50) expressed the light of fresh water (gapu ripayny) and the light of eucalypts in flower - 'the light makes the heart go happy, makes it smile' (ngoy ngamathirri, ngoy kitkitthun). The wangarr birrkuda is associated with fresh water and eucalypts in flower (the source of pollen for the bees) and both the meanings are encoded in the design. The visual effect of the painting, its bir'yun, is thus integrated with the semantic aspects of the painting, enabling it to express characteristic properties of the wangarr being that it represents.

In the majority of cases, as above, bir'yun is described as expressing positive emotions: joyfulness (wakul), happiness (ngamathirri) etc. However Thomson gives one detailed example in which it expresses negative emotions. Plate 51 illustrates a Djambarrpuyngu painting collected by Thomson in 1937. The painting represents the shark (bul'manydji). In this case Thomson records that the bir'yun of the painting is also referred to by a more specific term djawarul. Djawarul is the proper name of a sacred well (mangutjj) created by the wangarr shark, at the place where the shark was speared by Murrayanara. Djawarul refers to the 'flash of anger in the shark's eye - the blaze of the eye of the shark killed by stealth'. The spirit of the wangarr shark is dangerous (madakarriritj) and was described as miringu märr, 'power of vengeance'.
Categories of Painting 1974-1976

A simple comparison between 'Thomson's' categories of Yolngu art and the categories of art produced by the Yolngu today is not possible. During the intervening period of some forty years major changes have taken place in the artistic system as a result of European contact, in particular through the development of a major art and craft industry at Yirrkala.¹ Not only has this led to the creation of a new, functionally defined, category of art - art produced for sale to Europeans - but it has also resulted in a changed relationship between the componential structure of paintings produced in public and restricted contexts. Commercial art is primarily produced in public contexts and displayed in public contexts (the craft store).² However, on morphological criteria alone much commercial art is indistinguishable from the paintings of Thomson's ḩikanbuy category, paintings which in an unmodified form were restricted from all but initiated men. Moreover on purely formal criteria commercial paintings cross cut other categories of art as well as including innovated designs that were not previously produced. In order to compare Thomson's categories with art produced today it is necessary to make an initial distinction between commercial art and 'traditional' art, i.e. art produced in 'traditional' cultural contexts and not for sale.

Figure 54 shows a list of types of Yolngu art defined in relation to the contextual typology that was applied to Thomson's

¹ See Williams, 1976 and Morphy, 1975 for discussion of the development of the craft industry at Yirrkala.

² In some cases paintings made for sale are produced in restricted contexts, e.g. inside a home, or separated from women, but such cases are rare.
categories (fig. 51), with the additional distinction between commercial and 'traditional' art being incorporated. In parenthesis after each type I list the Thomson category with which the paintings correspond as far as their componential structure is concerned. The important thing to note is that paintings which are structurally similar to those in Thomson's likanbuy category and which in the past were displayed only in restricted contexts today occur in a variety of different contexts. I shall now briefly discuss each type.

Decorative art as an indigenous category hardly exists today. The reason for this is simple: few of the objects previously decorated are still produced for their own use by the Yolngu. Some old ladies still use decorated net bags and spearthrowers are occasionally decorated, but on the whole the artefacts that were decorated have been replaced by European equivalents, net bags by baskets, mats by towels and blankets and so on.

Thomson's garma category no longer exists at Yirrkala except on commercial bark paintings. Garma paintings were associated mainly with hollow log coffins and publicly performed phases of mortuary ceremonies. Hollow log coffins are no longer produced, in that the bones of the dead are no longer deposited in them for secondary reburial, however memorial posts are still erected especially in the context of the djungguwan ceremony (see chapter 5).

The paintings on memorial posts however fit Thomson's category of likanbuy paintings, that is the paintings include elaborately infilled clan designs and were previously restricted. The same consideration applies to body paintings at circumcision. While in the past these would have been covered or modified before the boys
returned to their mothers today this is not the case. I have placed both these types of paintings in the intermediate type as the production of the paintings is still surrounded by constraints. Djuwany (memorial) posts are produced entirely in seclusion away from women and uninitiated men. They are erected in secrecy at night and women only see them once they are completed (see Chapter 5). Similarly the bodies of initiates at circumcision are painted away from women and while the painting is going on the majority of women avoid the area. Certain old women communicate between the painting group and the remaining people, bringing food to the men, dressing the initiate prior to painting and continuing to dance around the periphery. There is evidence to suggest that this was the traditional pattern,¹ the innovation is that no attempt is made to modify the painting after the ceremony.

The opening out of a previously restricted type of painting in this context is explicitly recognised by the Yolngu. I was told on several occasions that in the past paintings on initiates would have been obscured before they were allowed to return to the main camp where the paintings might be seen by women and uninitiated men. One of the reasons that was given for this change will be referred to shortly.

Sacred dilly bags are produced and used in similar contexts with similar constraints today as in Thomson's time. The designs on them are likewise minimally elaborated clan designs consisting of a

¹ Thus Thomson records in his fieldnotes that one of his informants Raywala, with whom he travelled throughout Arnhem Land, was shocked by the fact that very old women in the Yirrkala area participated in final stages of a circumcision ceremony and saw the painted bodies of the youths. This is suggestive of regional differences as far as women's access to sacred paintings were concerned between the Eastern and Western Yolngu speaking area.
basic outline.

Certain paintings are still produced in completely restricted contexts. Coffin paintings are always produced in seclusion away from women. The lid of the coffin is usually painted inside a shade specially built for the purpose. Women largely avoid the area of the shade while painting is going on and food is left outside the shade to be collected by the men. As soon as the painting is completed it is covered with a cloth prior to the body being placed in the coffin. The lid is then hammered onto the coffin and the whole thing is completely covered before being taken out of the shade. Coffin paintings are the equivalent to the paintings on the body of a deceased described by Thomson (Peterson, 1976:97). They fit into Thomson's jikanbuy category on formal grounds.

Single figure body paintings are still produced in the context of the men's ceremonial ground. Plate 17 illustrates a painting produced on the body of a leading dancer at a djungguwan ceremony at Trial Bay. The painting is similar to ones on the body of goanna dancers accompanying the yulunggurr rangga, that Warner (1958: pl. Va and b) illustrates, and was used in a similar context. Plate 18 illustrates a jikanbuy painting produced at the same ceremony. Both these paintings were covered up before the dancers returned to the public arena.

Although paintings which are of the same componential structure as Thomson's jikanbuy category are produced today in open contexts, the above examples show that there are still contexts in which paintings are restricted; paintings are still produced that uninitiated men and in particular women are not allowed to see. The difference
lies in the fact that in the past this restricted category corresponded to a particular morphological type whereas today it does not. The same painting in fact may be produced in open and restricted contexts.

Plate 26 illustrates a bark painting produced for sale by Duṇḍiwyuy. The painting was produced openly and not subject to any restrictions. Plate 52 illustrates the same painting done by a different artist Bokarra. This painting was also produced for sale. Not only was it produced in an open context, but Bokarra's wife did most of the cross hatching on the painting. Previously Bokarra had produced the painting on a djuwany post for a djungguwan-molk ceremony. In this case the work was done in seclusion. Bokarra did most of the work himself with some assistance from Dula the second most senior manager for the ceremony. Women and young men were prohibited from entering the house where the painting was being done. After completion the posts were displayed publicly in the main camp (plate 20).

The same painting was produced in yet another context, as a body painting in the djungguwan-molk ceremony held at Trial Bay that was referred to earlier in this chapter. In this case the painting was produced by Duṇḍiwyuy in the closed context of the men's ceremonial ground, the painting was covered on completion (by a shirt) and was never seen in its pristine form by women.

The fact that in particular contexts a painting is restricted is significant even though the painting itself is also produced in public contexts. The restrictions enable a boundary to be maintained between different individuals' knowledge of what was known to have been produced in a particular context. Thus although everybody is familiar with the form of a particular painting, some of the contexts
of its use are restricted knowledge. Such constraints operate to restrict individuals' knowledge of the meaning of a painting at a number of levels. The central figure in the painting discussed above for example, represents at one level the yulunggurr rangga(a sacred dronepipe). This meaning is a restricted one. In the context of the men's ceremonial ground the rangga itself is blown over the painting to establish a connection between the two, contributing to individuals' knowledge of the meaning of the symbol. At a sociological level the production of the painting on a particular individual's body signifies something about the relationship of the man to the painting and to the groups owning the painting. By denying people access to the painting in this context, knowledge of the relationship between the individual and the painting is kept restricted.

The above example shows how even when the same painting occurs in different contexts its significance in each case will vary according to the degree to which it is restricted. However not all paintings occur in open contexts, many paintings still exist that are restricted from the uninitiated. What has changed is that the difference between the restricted category and the public one can no longer be characterised in terms of the componential structure of the paintings. This was always the case with Thomson's ngärrapuy paintings, today it is true for the jikanbuy paintings also.

In order to consider the composition of the restricted category as it exists today I will first examine in detail the commercial category of art. The reason for proceeding in this way is that commercially-produced paintings as a rule can be made in open contexts whereas paintings that cannot be produced for sale are generally not painted in public.
Commercial Art

A detailed examination of the art produced for sale today at Yirrkala, and an explanation as to why certain categories of art that were previously displayed only in restricted contexts have now been opened out to a wider public, is outside the scope of this thesis. The factors involved concern not only decisions made by the Yolnu themselves in the context of their own culture, but decisions made in relation to the European demand for Yolngu art, a demand mediated through craftstore managers, art dealers, anthropologists and various government bodies (see Morphy 1975 and 1977, Layton and Morphy n.d.).

The craft industry has developed over a period of forty years, though it is only since the late 1950's that it has begun to be of major economic significance to the Yirrkala community (see Williams, 1976). During the time Yolngu have become increasingly aware of the consequences of selling art to outsiders, in particular of the impossibility of maintaining control over the secrecy of restricted paintings sold to Europeans (see Layton and Morphy n.d.). Thus although until the mid 1960's any restricted paintings done for sale were produced in seclusion away from women and wrapped in cloth before being taken to the craftstore, this did not prevent the paintings from returning to the community in printed form through various publications. Awareness of the consequences of selling restricted paintings to Europeans took place over a number of years during which time many paintings had already been sold to outsiders. This meant that many paintings were already committed to a public arena before Yolngu were able to reimpose restrictions (Layton and Morphy, n.d.).

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1 According to the art collectors D. Bennett, S. Scougal, and to the Rev. E. Wells.
The sale of art to Europeans is cited as one of the factors that led to the opening out of certain paintings in traditional contexts. The craft industry however, was only one of the contexts in which previously restricted paintings were released publicly. In 1959 a number of sacred paintings and objects were incorporated in a permanent memorial in the centre of Elcho Island settlement as part of what Berndt (1962) terms the Elcho Island adjustment movement. A number of Yirrkala clans participated in the movement. Two years later the Rev. Edgar Wells commissioned a series of painted panels to be placed beside the altar in the Yirrkala church (Wells, 1971). Many of these paintings too had previously been restricted. In both these cases Yolngu who participated were clearly aware of some of the consequences of their decision to produce the paintings, certainly of the fact that uninitiated men and women would see the paintings. The paintings in the Yirrkala church were said by the informants to be the reason why the paintings done on boys prior to their circumcision no longer had to be concealed.

The relationship between the commercial production of art and the opening out of paintings is a complex one, set in the framework of a dialectic between the traditional values of Yolngu culture and changed circumstances consequent on European contact. This dialectic manifests itself in terms of the different responses of different Yolngu clans. Today members of certain clans are deliberately continuing to remove restrictions on paintings at least at the level of form, as well as opening out other areas of the clan's ceremonial life to women and uninitiated men through the public performance of previously restricted phases of a ceremony. Other clans however, have consciously attempted to preserve the integrity of their restricted
category of art, though in all cases there has been some lessening of the boundaries between categories.

Figure 55 lists a number of categories into which I have divided commercial paintings. It must be borne in mind with reference to these categories that a clan's paintings are controlled not by individuals but by owning clans and managers (see Chapter 3). The decision as to which paintings to produce for commercial sale is largely made at this level and the members of different clans make different clan based decisions. The categories of commercial art must be understood to operate in the context of clan-based decision-making: the different categories and the different paintings included within each category represent different clans' responses to the problems posed by commercial art.

Categories of commercial art

The first category of commercial painting can be discussed briefly. It consists of paintings that were once restricted and which are today produced in an unmodified form for sale. On the basis of their morphological structure these will be termed likanbuy-type paintings. Dundiwuy's and Bokarra's paintings referred to earlier are two such examples. The majority of clans produce one or two paintings belonging to this category, the basis for selection varying according to clan. The Dja'pu clan for example have restricted all paintings

1 Williams (1976:282) following Graburn's (1969:13) typology of art produced by non-Western peoples in response to the demands of European contact, terms this type of bark painting 'functional (fine) art'. This refers to paintings unmodified in form from ones used in traditional cultural contexts which are classified by the European purchaser, or rather the 'primitive art' market as 'fine' art. Morphy (1975) provides an analysis of the commercial and socio-economic significance of this category of commercial paintings.
referring to the Djang'kawu (c.f. Warner, 1958:335; Berndt, 1952) mythology and released paintings referring to shark mana. Paintings connected with the Djang'kawu mythology are produced in restricted contexts, for example one was used on the coffin of a Djapu child. The Munyuku clan have released one painting from each of four major areas of land owned by the clan. In this case the explanation given was that the paintings would show Europeans which areas of land were owned by the clan.

The second category of paintings is clearly derived from Thomson's garma category and indeed this word was sometimes used to refer to them. The paintings consist of figurative representations of animals that were previously painted on hollow log coffins. Some of the first paintings from Yirrkala sold to Europeans fell into this category, the paintings sent by the Reverend Chaseling to Australian Museum in the late 1930's. The majority of Chaseling's paintings are said by Yolngu to be either garma paintings or wakinngu (ordinary, non-ancestral). One in fact (plate 53) is the same as a painting on a hollow log coffin illustrated by Chaseling (1957). Today paintings of this type often have as a central feature a representation of the coffin, with the figurative representations that would have been on the coffin painted around it (plate 54). The main difference between these paintings and the garma paintings recorded by Thomson (and represented in Chaseling's collections1) is that the space between the figures is infilled with cross hatching. Clan designs are not represented on the paintings however, and in this way they are like Thomson's garma category.

1 Chaseling's paintings are located in three museums, the Australian Museum, the National Museum of Victoria and the Queensland Museum.
The next category, modified restricted paintings, refers to paintings that derive from paintings in the restricted category but which differ from them in a number of significant ways. Morphologically the main difference consists of an increase in the proportion of figurative representations and a corresponding decrease in the geometric component, in particular the clan designs. There are two main reasons for this modification of the restricted paintings: it makes them a more marketable commodity and it enables the restricted category to be maintained intact. As far as the first factor is concerned paintings that are largely geometric are harder to sell than ones with a large number of figurative representations and as a consequence a lower price is paid for them. The second factor is more significant as far as the present discussion is concerned.

On several occasions Narritjin explained to me that it was because he was producing commercial paintings for sale in open contexts that he painted so many figurative representations of animals in his work: 'if I was away from women the painting would be just the same but this possum, this bird they wouldn't be here, I would put just a number for them'. In other words instead of painting a possum he would paint a geometric motif that could signify among other things a possum. I will consider in detail the significance of such modifications of paintings as far as the Manggalili clan is concerned in a later section. Here I focus on the general implications of the replacement of geometric components by figurative ones.

There are many reasons why the increased figurative content should make a painting more suitable for public display. One is obviously that it makes the painting look less like the closed art at a formal level. Plates 55 and 56 illustrate two paintings by Welwi
of the Marrakulu-Dhurrurrunga clan, the one with figurative representations being a public version of the other. All of the meanings signified in the public painting are encoded in the restricted painting, as can be seen from the caption.

A second reason is that by converting the geometric motifs into figurative representations the multivalency of the geometric forms is lost. Thus in Welwi's painting certain of the meanings encoded in the restricted painting are selected out for representation in figurative form whereas others are not. The consequence of this is that the meaning of the painting is fixed at a certain level. The particular combination of figurative representation suggests a particular interpretation for the painting as a whole. In Welwi's case the painting represents a person hunting a kangaroo through a forest. Nothing in the figurative content of the painting suggests a specific mythological contact or geographical location. The presence of the clan design (Ⅳ) in this case does specify the clan to which the painting belongs and acts as a modifier of the meaning of the figurative representations locating them in a specific mythological context. However the figurative representations orient the interpretation of the clan design in the direction of its public meaning: rocks in the country through which the kangaroo hops.

The increase in the number of figurative representations as a means of making a painting more public is a logical corollary of the significance of the geometric component in the restricted category: it reduces its multivalence and focuses attention on one set of relationships rather than another. The absence of clan designs in many paintings of this category removes the paintings from the political arena and at the same time makes them less part of the category of ancestral design.
Modified restricted paintings are termed by Narritjin 'travelling paintings'. The word travelling has an intended double meaning. At one level it refers to the fact that the meaning of the painting is fixed at a certain level to represent the journeys of ancestral beings across North-east Arnhem Land, but not in such a way that it refers to specific land transforming events that occurred in particular places. At a second level it refers to the fact that the paintings themselves are designed to travel; they are suitable for sale to Europeans and to be widely disseminated. The clan design that I refer to in Chapter 7 as being classified as a public design is also referred to as a 'travelling' design and is used in this category of painting by members of the Manggalili clan. It is the only design that female clan members are allowed to do in their paintings. This latter point shows another way in which sociological distinctions expressed in the artistic system can be maintained in spite of changes that have occurred in recent years. Thus whereas in the past women would have been forbidden to paint clan designs, today Manggalili women are allowed to paint only a designated outside clan design, the right to produce the main clan designs being restricted to initiated men. Control of the system is still exercised by senior men, but this control is signified by new distinctions.

Category four consists of paintings that have been innovated in response to the demand for commercial art, and which although they are based on myths are not derived directly from traditional paintings. One example of a painting in this category is the Bamapama painting (plate 24). The painting represents one of a series of public myths concerning Bamapama, which are told to children as moral fables illustrating the consequences of breaching cultural norms. According to Narritjin, the artist, he invented the form of
the painting some twenty years ago. Although it is a recent invention and is not one used in restricted cultural contexts, the painting is regarded as belonging to the Manggalili clan and subject to the same rights of ownership as other paintings he produces. Members of the two other Yirritja moiety clans who own the story also have the right to produce the painting, but according to Narritjin they should be taught the correct way to do it by him.

The final category of paintings consists of innovated paintings with no mythological reference. These paintings are produced for sale by women and uninitiated men. I have never heard people claim rights over the designs, though people do sometimes complain that other people are copying 'their' design. The paintings consist of representations of animals and plants, frequently arranged to form symmetrical patterns (plate 34). The paintings are covered with uniform cross hatching but never include clan designs. They are referred to as wakinngu (ordinary) (the same term was applied to Thomson's category of decorative art), 'anyhow' or 'rubbish' paintings. The terms applied refer to the non-ancestral non-clan-based nature of the paintings.

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter I examine the significance of the differences between Thomson's likanbuy category of paintings and the paintings that belong to or are derived from that class of paintings today. In particular I consider two problems: the extent to which distinctions that operated in Thomson's time exist today and are manifest in the operation of the artistic system, and the consequences of the shift that has occurred in the dimensions of categorial distinction within the system.
Figure 56 shows the relationship between Thomson's *likanbuy* paintings and *likanbuy*-related paintings today, according to the level of distinction at which restriction can be seen to operate. Restriction is defined in relation to the opposition between initiated men on the one hand and uninitiated men and women on the other.

In the immediate post contact period *likanbuy* paintings were restricted at the level of form class (fig. 56; level 1). Access to paintings of the componential structure that characterises *likanbuy* paintings was restricted to initiated men or men undergoing initiation into the *madyin* with which it was associated. As far as the initiated male:uninitiated men and women dichotomy is concerned all other levels of distinction are redundant. If the form class is restricted so too are members of that class in all contexts and so is knowledge of the meanings encoded in the paintings. In other words restrictedness at other levels is a co-implication of restrictions imposed at the level of form class. The other levels at which restrictions could be imposed were relevant to the process of male initiation and to the control of the system by the senior initiated men. As I suggested earlier in the chapter revelation of the form of paintings was only a preliminary stage as far as gaining access to knowledge of their meaning was concerned. The rights to produce and determine the contexts of use of a particular painting were vested in the hands of a few senior men holding rights in them.

*Likankanbuy*-type paintings today are not restricted at the level of form class. However, many members of the class are restricted in that they are not produced or displayed in public contexts. The unrestricted members can be divided into two types, unmodified *likanbuy*-type (2c) paintings and modified paintings (2d) on the basis
of criteria set out earlier. Unmodified paintings (2c) can be restricted in some contexts, for example when produced as coffin paintings, whereas modified ones (2d) are never produced for restricted contexts. This corresponds to the distinction between paintings which although they can be produced commercially are still used in traditional cultural contexts and commercial paintings of a type that are not used in such contexts.¹

Although unrestricted paintings can be seen by women and uninitiated men, constraints are imposed on their role in producing the paintings. The extent to which they are constrained varies from clan to clan. In the majority of cases women play a subsidiary role in the production of likanbuy-type paintings (2c) and cannot initiate the painting themselves. The one major exception to this is the Rirratjingu clan, in which two senior women were given the right to produce a certain number of likanbuy paintings themselves. In nearly every case however, women help with the cross hatched infilling of the paintings and in some cases are encouraged to do the figurative component. Women do not draw the major clan designs nor do they determine the structure of the painting. This is significant as it helps confirm the basic relationship between geometric component of the system and the figurative component - the latter being less restricted than the former. Similar constraints apply to modified likanbuy paintings which include clan designs as a component.

¹ The distinction is not an absolute one but it does apply in the majority of cases. Modified likanbuy paintings do have a didactic function (see Williams, 1976:282). Moreover in Morphy (in press c) I give an example of a painting innovated for the commercial art industry which did have a use value in a traditional context. I have however never seen such paintings used on coffin lids or as body paintings.
The final distinction operates at the level of the meanings encoded in a painting. In this case the distinction is absolute, at least as far as publicly expressed ideology is concerned: women and children are denied access to restricted levels of meaning of a painting. What this means in practice is discussed in a later chapter.

Overall we can see that the changes that have taken place still enable restrictions to operate within the system, though the level at which those restrictions are imposed varies from clan to clan and painting to painting. All clans maintain certain paintings in the wholly restricted category. The Dja'pu clan maintains the majority of its paintings in that category and produces four modified jikanbuy-type paintings. The Manggalili produce mainly modified clan paintings which similarly enables them to keep the majority of their jikanbuy paintings restricted. The Rirratjingu clan on the other hand are acknowledged to have opened up the majority of their paintings and place their main emphasis on the restrictedness of meanings.

One of the main consequences of the changes that have taken place is that one major level of distinction has been eliminated - that of jikanbuy paintings as a restricted form class. From this it follows that bir'yun is no longer a distinctive feature of restricted paintings. Paintings with elaborated clan designs and fine cross hatching now appear in the public sphere. The changes have also

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1 Fine cross hatching covering most of the surface of a painting which in the past was an attribute of the restricted category of paintings has become the distinguishing characteristic of Yirrkala art as far as the commercial art market is concerned. The evaluative criteria applied by European purchasers include the fineness and density of cross hatching, and the prices paid for the art varies accordingly (see also Williams, 1976:277). Cross hatching is the most labour intensive part of producing a commercial bark painting and women have been encouraged to take over this part of the work. In the past women were denied access to the finest

(Cont’d next page)
brought painting into the sphere of discourse between men and women in a way that they were not before. Thus men instruct women in the techniques of painting and in the public aspects of the meaning of paintings. Women are also in a position to see for themselves the relationships between paintings belonging to different clans and to make deductions as to further meanings on the basis of the limited information they are acknowledged to have been taught. (Again this point will be expanded in a later section.) Overall the effect is that although older initiated men still exercise control over the system and although restrictions on women's knowledge are still imposed, the parameters are shifting in the direction of a gradual opening out of many aspects of the artistic system.

(Footnote 1 cont'd from previous page)
cross hatched paintings, whereas today they are instructed to produce the finest cross hatching they can. The frequency with which individuals are exposed to fine cross hatching and the fact that it is no longer confined to the most restricted category of paintings, suggests that its aesthetic impact may have been reduced. However cross hatching is still said to make a painting 'bright' or 'shiny' and to endow it with ancestral power (märr).
SECTION III: The Iconography of Manggalili Paintings
CHAPTER 9

THE MARRAWILI PAINTINGS

By iconography I mean the relationship between the form of paintings and their meanings: what they denote. Meaning arises not only through the meaning of the elements employed in the artistic system, but through the relationship between the elements in paintings and the relationships between the paintings themselves. The iconography I present, although a descriptive one, cannot consist simply of a list of the possible signifieds of formal elements in Manggalili art, nor of separate interpretations of a set of paintings; it must also be concerned with the relationship between the interpretations of the paintings and variations in their form and componential structure. Moreover in many cases it is necessary to consider not only what meanings a painting communicates but also what meanings it obscures. This apparent contradiction can be resolved only when it is realised that Yolngu art, as a communicative code, encodes meanings in the context of a revelatory system of knowledge, in which knowledge of certain levels of meaning is restricted to a few individuals. Knowledge of the meaning of paintings varies according to an individual's status; it is therefore necessary to state not only 'what it means' but 'to whom it means'. Indeed certain knowledge of the meaning of the painting may be restricted to a single individual.

It could be asked at this stage whether it is possible to talk about the meaning of a painting at all at a semiological level, and that rather than there being a Manggalili iconography there are a number of Manggalili iconographies. Against this I would argue that
Manggalili iconography as a whole is a coherent system; the logical relationship between the various levels of meaning and the fact that they are interdependent makes any attempt to divide them up into components of separate iconographies an arbitrary exercise. Although certain knowledge is restricted to a few people, there are constraints on what that knowledge should be: what is known most widely and what is logically possible in terms of the semiological system both act as constraints on the content of the category of restricted information. A corollary of this is that it should be possible for those who gain knowledge of the system at one level to deduce and understand meanings at other levels; that given a certain level of knowledge further knowledge is acquired from the system itself. Although at one level one gains knowledge by being taught more about the significance of a painting, at another level one is always in advance of one's teachers. It is thus possible to use the system to gain more information about it than one is told, at any one point in time, it contains. The extent to which that information is encoded within the system represents the communicative capacity of the code, its ability to generate messages.

It is difficult to test the above proposition against individual experience. Partly because of the short duration of anthropological fieldwork, it is difficult to determine the relationship between what an individual is taught and what he learns beyond what he is taught. More fundamentally Yolngu ideology operates against finding the answers to such questions. The ideology is that all knowledge of the meaning of paintings is taught and that knowledge itself is finite, consisting of a set corpus of ancestral law. One of the conditions of learning the meaning of paintings is that a person will acknowledge only what he has been taught. A second condition is that he will not repeat even that information unless he has the authority to do so.
As I show in Chapter 3, the authority to release restricted information is limited to one or two senior members of each clan. In this case it is difficult to separate what has been taught from interpretations that have arisen from introspections about the meaning of signs and symbols. We cannot always isolate learnt knowledge from individual life experiences, or individual insights from collectively held knowledge. Clearly the two are related. Insights that are the result of individual introspection by senior men about the meaning of symbols can clearly become part of the formal body of knowledge that subsequent generations are taught (as ancestral law). When constructing an iconography ideally one should be concerned not only with what is known and said about the meaning of paintings but also with meanings that are encoded in the paintings but which are not articulated at a particular point in time. Contrary to Yolngu ideology the meanings are not a finite set. I aim to discuss Manggalili iconography in a way in which the potential productivity of the symbols will be demonstrated.

The iconography will be presented through interpretations of specific paintings. I first consider the outside or public level of interpretation and subsequently the more restricted interpretations. By interpretation I mean simply what informants state a painting means at a particular level. Different paintings can be interpreted in the same way, that is, they can be said to have the same meaning. Thus, rather than discussing each painting individually, indicating how each signifying component has a number of signifieds at different levels, I show how the same meanings are encoded in different ways in the context of different paintings. This enables me to focus on the relationship between the paintings and their meanings as a whole, placing multivalency in the context of the overall system of meaning. This also
enables me to approximate more closely the revelatory nature of knowledge of the meaning of paintings. Yolngu do not learn first one painting and its meanings at different levels before progressing to another (though some paintings indeed are more restricted than others); rather they learn the meaning of a set of paintings and subsequently further levels of meaning that apply to the same set.

Levels of Meaning: The Sociological Context

'Inside' and 'outside' as concepts refer to a continuum of more restricted to less restricted knowledge in relation to a particular system, in this case Manggalili art. What is inside and what is outside is relative. A particular interpretation is inside only until one has been told a further interpretation that is said to be more inside; consequently, relative to the second interpretation, it becomes outside. However, the original interpretation remains inside relative to interpretations that are less restricted than itself. The most inside level of information is that which is held by the most restricted set of people, the senior members of the clans who hold rights in the paintings. Thus the inside-outside relationship between meanings reflects the distribution of knowledge (defined as what people are acknowledged to have been taught) within the group, though it is not equivalent to it. It represents a system of controlling the distribution of knowledge, by providing boundaries between what should and should not be known by particular categories of people and individuals. Yet it does not operate in terms of a formally structured system of grades and statuses based on age and sex (as for example, Barth (1976) shows to be the case for the Baktaman). Individuals do acquire rights to knowledge by passing through certain ceremonies, and by being of a
particular sex and in a particular structural position within a clan (see Chapter 3); but the actual knowledge is gained in a far less formal way, by being taught by senior members of the clan, through participating in the same ceremonies a number of times, by showing willingness and the capacity to learn and through being trusted.

The one absolute distinction, in Yolngu ideology at least, is between knowledge that is available only to initiated men and knowledge that is available to uninitiated men and women as well. The former knowledge is always 'inside' relative to the latter. This represents a break in the inside-outside continuum of knowledge. However, the place where the boundary is drawn can clearly shift over time. As I have shown, knowledge of the form of many paintings was in itself restricted in the past to initiated men. Today that distinction has largely broken down and the parameters have shifted to knowledge of the meanings encoded in the paintings.

Interpretations of paintings were obtained from male and female members of the Manggalili clan (fig. 58) as well as from non-clan members. The latter interpretations were always set at the most outside level, the one that is open to women and uninitiated men. They usually consisted simply of identifying the clan ownership of the painting, the place represented and the referential meaning of the figurative representations. This does not necessarily represent the level of knowledge held by the interpreter. It represents the minimal degree to which non-clan members have the rights to divulge information about clan paintings other than their own without the consent of senior members of the owning clan. Mithili, a Marrakulu man and senior waku (Z S ) to the Manggalili, was present on several occasions
when Narritjin discussed inside meanings of paintings with me. He clearly had access to this knowledge but would never discuss Manggalili paintings with me in detail. The only occasion he used this knowledge was in Narritjin's absence, when he advised Narritjin's son to tell me only the 'outside story' for a particular painting and that Narritjin would decide what else to tell me on his return. This also illustrates the constraints imposed on members of the clan itself that prevents them from divulging information without the permission of senior men. Bokarra, the second most senior Manggalili man, always deferred to Narritjin even when it came to interpreting paintings he had produced himself, only giving me the acknowledged public level of meaning.

The lack of authority of the majority of people to pass on information about the meaning of paintings makes it difficult to define levels of interpretation beyond stating what is public knowledge and what is in some ways restricted. Information about levels that exist within the restricted category comes largely from Narritjin's interpretations of the paintings in his progressive revelation of knowledge to me. In addition to this there were consistent differences in the level of interpretation adopted by other clan members which provide confirmatory data. Comparison of the interpretation made by different individuals also enables me to show that, contrary to stated ideology, the distribution of knowledge of public and restricted meanings does not correspond precisely with the categorical distinction between 'uninitiated men and women' and 'initiated men'.

In the remainder of this chapter I discuss iconographic aspects of one set of paintings from Djarrakpi on Cape Shield (fig. 57, pl. 57, 59-64). Other paintings will be referred to only in relation to this
set. Furthermore I will limit myself to analysing two sets of interpretations of these paintings, both of which are known to the majority of Manggalili men but one of which is inside relative to the others. In the two following chapters I will consider further details and interpretations of the paintings.

The Iconography

Two perspectives: a journey and a map.

Plate 57 illustrates a painting by Banapana. From different perspectives the painting can be interpreted as referring to the journey of a number of mythological beings across Arnhem Land, and as a map of a part of Manggalili clan territory at Cape Shield on the North of Blue Mud Bay (fig. 57, pl. 58).

The first perspective can be said to be outside relative to the second, because it does not lead into the sphere of inside meanings. Certainly events took place on the journey which are the subject of restricted interpretations; those events are encoded in paintings specifically associated with the respective places and the property of groups owning the places. In the painting events that took place at Djarrakpi (Cape Shield) are encoded, but only at the most outside level. The interpretation of the painting as a record of events on a mythical track is as follows. (Numbers refer to plate 57. The same numbering system will be used for each of the paintings discussed.)

The journey

Two guwak, two possums, two emus and a number of other wangarr ancestors set out on a journey from Burrwayndji, a place in Ritharrngu
clan country near Donydji outstation. Each night they camped, and the guwak (4) would sit on the top of a native cashew tree (ganyawu) (4) and eat its fruit. The possum would climb the tree (4) spinning its fur into lengths of string (9). When he had spun a certain length, which differed from place to place, the guwak would tell him to stop. That length of string was given to the clan in whose country they were, and that subsequently became the length of the possum fur string used by that clan. The emus (7) travelled with them, drilling with their feet for water as they went and creating water holes.

(The above interpretation is known by all adult Manggalili. The next section was told to me only by Narritjin. It was however told by him to his sons as an outside interpretation, and is contained in the public songs of the clan.)

The guwak and the possum visited Gāngan in Dhalwangu country on their journey. There they talked to Barrama, a mythical being (see Chapter 4). They told him they were looking for a land to settle in. Barrama told them to keep walking South-east until they came to a country by the sea, where the sand was white hot and there was plenty of sea food. When they got there they would find a marrawili1 tree (1), and under it they should make their camp. When they got there they found that it was as Barrama had said; the marrawili tree was there, but otherwise the landscape was featureless.

The journey of the guwak continued beyond Djarrakpi, northwards along the coast of Arnhem Land to the Wessel Islands and on to Cape

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1 Marrawili refers both to the casuarine tree and ganyawu the native cashew tree. Its outside reference is to cashew nut tree. It is used to refer to the wangarr cashew nut ancestor; it is the public word used to refer to the rangga that is derived from that ancestral being.
Stewart to the west of Milingimbi. This stage of the journey is seldom referred to when interpreting paintings from Djarrakpi, though it was told us by Wuyarrin (fig. 58), Banapana and Narritjin in the context of this painting (pl. 57).

Not all features of the journey are encoded in the painting. I include them because they were part of the interpretation given for the painting. Myths of journeys are one of the main ways Yolngu extend interpretations of paintings beyond the boundaries of what is encoded in a particular painting; together with the signs and symbols on the paintings they form the basis of exegesis and can be used to refer to the connection between different paintings. In Banapana's painting the actors in the journey are encoded in the figurative representations - the organisation of the guwak, possum and ganyawu tree signifies the manufacture of the burrkun (possum-fur string) by the ancestral beings. These elements are sufficient to place the events in the context of a mythological journey, a context in which they have additional connotations. Thus Burrwandji is nowhere signified on the painting; it is, however, the place where the journey began.

The painting as a map.

When they arrived at Djarrakpi, the ancestral beings found a featureless landscape, apart from a few trees, and by their actions they transformed it into the shape it has today. Plate 61 shows the guwak on the marrawili tree. The white background pattern was interpreted by Narritjin to signify an otherwise featureless landscape. Narritjin's eldest living daughter Bumiti, who did the painting, said that apart from the bird being a guwak she did not know the meaning of it.
Narritjin originally interpreted Banapana's painting (pl. 57) for me employing the first perspective, as a record of the journey. When he returned from a visit to Djarrakpi several months later, he provided a second interpretation as follows:

When the guwak arrived at Djarrakpi he first landed in a grove of cashew trees (6). There he ate, while the possum spun its string. This place became the 'homeland' for the Ritharrngu clan people at Djarrakpi. The first Manggalili ngārra ceremony was performed by the ancestral beings after they had prepared all the burrkun. The guwak then flew with the end of the burrkun in his mouth to a grove of munyudjuti (plum trees) where the possum rested and ate (5). This place is linked with the Dhalwangu clan and Gamal-Gupapuyngu clan. The guwak used the distance between the two places (5 and 6) to measure out lengths of fur, which he later gave out to the various other clans who gathered at Djarrakpi (the clans who share with Manggalili the burrkun and guwak madayin). The lengths of fur string became gullies in the sand hills to the North of the lake (fig. 57), each of which is associated with a different clan (1). After the possum had eaten, the wangarr ancestors danced with the burrkun to the marrawili tree rangga (4) and measured out more string. The longest length was made for the Manggalili clan. This was transformed into the low sandbank that marks the edge of the lake at Djarrakpi on the far side from the sea (see pl. 58). It is represented by the body of the right hand guwak.

A mokuy ancestral woman Nyapililngu was already at Djarrakpi. She lived in the trees on the other side of the lake (2 and 3). She learnt how to make string from observing the possum. She travelled up and down the side of the lake making possum-fur string, which was
subsequently transformed into the coastal dunes that enclose the lake to the seaward side.

The emus (7) meanwhile drilled in the lake bed looking for fresh water, but they found only salt water. In frustration they threw their spears into the sea, and from where they fell fresh water bubbled up, which is exposed as springs at low tide (10).

Plate 58 is a photograph of Djarrakpi illustrating topographical features encoded in the paintings. The painting (pl. 57) precisely encodes the relationship between the major topographical features at Djarrakpi: the lake in a bowl of surrounding sand hills. On his return from Djarrakpi, Narritjin used the painting as a topographical map to show me the final stages of his own journey there and the work that had been done in building the Manggalili settlement:

'We arrived here [lb] in the landrover and drove along the sand hills to the clump of trees [6] where we camped for two nights. We sang songs to let the guwak and possum know that we were coming. We then drove along to the next clump of trees [5] where we waited for Bangara [Narritjin's wife] to arrive. I then went off to where the marrawili tree [4] was and prayed. We then built our houses underneath the sand hill at the end of the burrkun possum string. We started building our airstrip here [to the right of the right hand bird's head], and so on.

Several months earlier and shortly after they had arrived there, Ian Dunlop filmed Narritjin teaching his sons the meaning of a similar painting at Djarrakpi itself. It was the first time any of his sons had seen the place. Narritjin located his interpretation in terms of the individuals' life experiences and the lives of the ancestral beings who created the land. Narritjin's translation of part of what he said is as follows:-
'We came from Yirrkala and we came slow, slow, slow, slow as we
got nearer to the marrawili. This is where I am leading you to, and I
will give you the same story, the way they [the ancestral beings] did
it, and until today we have been doing the same. When we came here the
first time we sat down for a week and waited, we were working the same
as the old people. I told you for the first time about the burrkun,
and I said let the ancestors know what you are doing'.

Banapana's painting (pl. 57) thus encodes messages about
ancestral events and also features of the topography of the landscape.
Both can be related to present day events, as the above examples showed,
by using the painting as a map or to demonstrate a code of behaviour.
The second also shows how new meanings can get encoded within the
system and the significance of existing meanings reinforced. Djarrakpi
settlement has become one of the meanings of the sign used for marrawili
in Manggalili paintings of this structure, as Narritjin often refers to
it when interpreting the painting. As the location of the settlement
was chosen with reference to the mythical journey of the guwak to the
marrawili tree, the meanings mutually reinforce one another's signifi-
cance.

Men's and Women's Knowledge of the Interpretations so far

All Narritjin's sons and his brother's sons over the age of
fifteen were present at Djarrakpi when he provided the above interpre-
tations of paintings for them. He told them he was only giving them an
outside interpretation, because women and children were close by.
Banapana, however, when interpreting his painting (pl. 57) for me, did
not refer to the topographical references of the painting in any detail
(though he knew them by this stage). He did locate the painting at
Djarrakpi and stated that the emus were looking for water in the lake.
Ganyul, Narritjin's eldest daughter, would not interpret any Manggalili paintings, saying that she knew nothing about paintings because she couldn't paint.¹ Bumiti, Narritjin's second daughter, gave only referential meanings for the figurative representation on the painting. Wuyarrin (see fig. 58) provided a detailed interpretation of Bumiti's painting (pl. 61) and said that Banapana's painting had the same meaning. Her interpretation was at the same level as Banapana's, locating the painting at Djarrakpi but not giving detailed topographical referents. She identified the animals, which she said were performing a ceremony around a sacred object. She referred to the guwak eating his food on the cashew nut tree, and outlined the journey from Donydji to Djarrakpi.

A comparison of the interpretations suggests that although Wuyarrin and Bumiti may know the topographical significance of the painting, women clearly do not have the authority to discuss it. Similar considerations apply with reference to Banapana's interpretation of the painting. This suggests that although Narritjin stated that both interpretations are outside they differ in the degree to which they can be expressed publicly.

It is appropriate to consider how other Manggalili paintings encode the interpretations considered so far. Plates 59 and 60 illustrate two paintings by Narritjin which are structurally similar to Banapana's. The main differences between the two paintings and Banapana's painting are in terms of a considerable elaboration of the geometric component and a reduction in the figurative. In Plate 60 the cashew tree

¹ Interpretations from Manggalili women were obtained by Frances Morphy.
(marrawili) is represented by a painting of the rangga (sacred object) itself (4). Its interpretation as a cashew tree is indicated by the bunches of nuts hanging from the top (10). In plate 59 the tree is represented by the transverse lines below the right hand guwak's neck (4). The bodies of the guwaks in both cases represent the burrkun (possum string). The prongs at the base of the burrkun represent the wings and feet of the guwak. They also represent the length of the burrkun distributed to other clans by the guwak, which are today seen in the form of gullies running through the sand hills at Djarrakpi.

The body of the marrawili rangga (pl. 60) represents the lake, signified in Banapana's painting (pl. 57) by the presence of emus between the two guwaks. The clan design at this level is said to signify the water in the lake. The lake is also signified by the clan design in sections (7a) and (b) of painting 59. The white of the lake signifies areas of freshwater in the lake and the red signifies salt water. 'One day you drink the water and it is fresh the next time you come to drink there it will be salty.' Section (8) (plate 59) signifies a dry part of the lake bed, which became the camping ground for the possum and the rat.

The figures representing the burrkun and the guwak are in fact a representation of the guwak rangga (sacred object). The rangga consists of a hardwood stick carved at one end into the shape of a guwak's head and pointed at the base. Before it is displayed the guwak rangga is bound from top to bottom in possum-fur string taken from the burrkun. Two pendants are tied to either side of the rangga to represent at one level the wings of the bird, shown in the paintings by the outer prongs (e.g. pl. 59, 60). Designs are incised on the wooden core of the rangga. I have only seen the guwak 'messenger' rangga, a sacred object restricted from women, which is carried by mediators in disputes that
arise between groups during burial ceremonies. It differs from the main rangga in three main ways: it is smaller, it has a representation of the head and body of the guwak carved on the top, and it has no designs incised on the body. However, Narritjin did carve for me in soft wood a model of the guwak rangga, which he interpreted for me (fig. 59). Narritjin stated that he included the figurative representations only because he was doing the carving in public – otherwise he would have included only geometric motifs. The possums in particular would have been replaced by the cross which is included within their bodies. I will return to this topic later.

The carving encodes both of the interpretations of Banapan'a painting considered so far. I focus discussion on the motif, as it is most relevant to the subsequent analysis. The signifying potential of the relevant to the interpretations so far considered is listed in figure 60.

The body of the carving represents the cashew tree with the guwak on top. The possums are shown climbing up and down the tree spinning their fur into string. The body of the carving also represents the ceremonial string, the burrkun. The body can also be interpreted to represent the guwak carrying the burrkun from place to place. From the latter perspective, the body of the carving signifies the sand hills at Djarrakpi surrounding the lake: that is, the ancestral transformation of the burrkun.

The signifies a social group in the following way. The distance between 's represents the length of string spun by the possum for each clan. Each indicates the place where the guwak appeared on the tree and told the possum to stop working, as he had
spun a sufficient length for the clan concerned. The ( ) is therefore said to represent the clans connected to the burrkun. At Djarrakpi this measuring is believed to have taken place alongside the lake. From this perspective the ( ) represents the three places on the lakeside where the guwak and other ancestral beings camped, each of which is associated with a particular clan. The ( ) itself signifies burrkun in a different way, linking it in a paradigmatic chain with a St. Andrew's Cross spider, shuttle and cloud. The possum learnt to spin its fur by watching a St. Andrew's Cross spider spinning its web in the high branches of a cashew tree. He saw the spider at dawn when the web was thick with dew which made it resemble a low misty cloud (pl. 62). The shape of the shuttle used by women to make string is said to be based on the shape of the spider. The message-stick rangga used to summon people to ceremonies linked with the marrawili madayin is shaped like a shuttle. In public it is covered with possum fur string and its outside meaning is spider and spider's web. The meaning 'cloud' connects the ( ) back to the marrawili rangga itself, as the shape of the rangga represents at one level a cloud standing high (pl. 62).

The ( ) also means a woman's breast girdle. The ancestral woman Nyapililngu wore such a breast girdle which consisted of crossed over straps of possum fur string. The ( ) therefore signifies the places where Nyapililngu camped on the other side of the lake from the guwak at Djarrakpi and spun string that was later transformed into the sand hills that run parallel to the beach. Figure 60 summarises the signifying potential of ( ).

The representation of the emu in the carving signifies the dry bed of the lake where they drilled for water. The eye of the guwak
signifies the place where the emus threw their spears in frustration and the waterhole that was created there.

The carving thus encodes, through its signs and their relationships, all the meanings of the paintings considered so far, and has similar references according to the interpretative perspective adopted.

The interpretation of the carving makes clear the structure of the paintings (pl. 57, 59, 60). The paintings consist of three basic feature blocks (A), (B) and (C), signifying the lake (B) and the sandhills on either side (A and C) (see fig. 62). The feature block to the left of the lake signifies the seaward side and the one on the right the inland side. This division corresponds to the division of the Djarrakpi song cycles into fresh water and salt water songs. In the paintings, feature blocks (A) and (C) include as their central figure a representation of the guwak rangga, representing in one case (C) the burrkun made by the possum and its associated set of meanings and in the other case (A) the burrkun made by Nyapililngu and its set of meanings; plate 63 illustrates a painting of the beach side only (i.e. feature block (A) of the other paintings). This is shown by the representation of the two female figures to the side of the rangga, denoting Nyapililngu who hid in the sandhills (plate 63) spinning string. Note the (X) drawn across her body.

The central feature block shows a different content in each of the paintings (pl. 57, 59, 60). In one the lake is represented by the emus looking for water, in another by the marrawili rangga and in the third, clan designs signifying water. The fact that the marrawili rangga signifies water amongst its many meanings is only one of the reasons for its central position in feature block (B). The marrawili itself
signifies the place where the burrkun spun by Nyapililangu and the burrkun spun by the possum and guwak meet. It is located at the place where the low sand bank around the far side of the lake, the topographical manifestation of the guwak's burrkun, joins the high sand dunes of the seaward side, Nyapililangu's burrkun. 'That's the home line for the man and that's for the woman, that's where they have been travelling. Both lines come together at the marrawili and make the male and female line joined together' (Narritjin to his sons). The position of the marrawili between the two burrkun (plate 60) symbolises both their separation by the lake along their length and the fact that they are joined at one end.

The figurative representation of the guwak's head has been largely redundant as far as the interpretation of the paintings from a topographical perspective is concerned. The guwak's head does orient the interpretation of the painting in the direction of the marrawili (as the final destination of the guwak). However, this should apply only to the guwak in feature block (C). In the case of feature block (A) the guwak's head (signifying guwak) is of negative value to the extent that it contains misinformation. Feature block (A) refers to the female ancestral being Nyapililangu spinning string independent of the guwak. The ancestral guwak did not travel to that side of the lake. The organisation of the elements, however, signifies the manufacture of the burrkun by the possum directed by the guwak. The question then arises whether it is necessary to signify Nyapililangu's burrkun in this way, given that it also encodes information that orients the interpretation in a different direction (towards the guwak burrkun). The answer is provided by plate 64.
Plate 64 is a painting by Bokarra. According to Bokarra it represents the ancestral woman Nyapililngu walking up and down the sand dunes at Djarrakpi, with a walking stick in either hand. On her head she carries a stringy bark basket which is filled with wild plums (munydjutj) that she has collected. However, Bokarra also stated that the two sticks represented the burrkun. The one on the left the burrkun spun by the possum the one on the right by Nyapililngu.

Although Bokarra located the painting in the sand hills on the beach side of the lake, the overall structure of the painting suggests that at another level it could have the same topographical reference as the paintings previously considered. Thus it too consists of three feature blocks. Feature block (A) signifying the guwak's burrkun and feature block (C) signifying Nyapililngu's are equivalent to feature blocks (C) and (A) respectively in paintings 59 and 60. This apparent reversal is insignificant, as the absence of the guwak's head and the marrawili tree means that it is the possum that orients the direction of the painting. The painting is thus oriented North-South from bottom to top, whereas the others are oriented South-North (see fig. 58). The way in which Nyapililngu and the stringy bark basket can be interpreted to represent the lake will be demonstrated in the next chapter, as this involves knowledge of inside meanings.

Interpreted as a representation of the topography of Djarrakpi, the significance of other elements of the structure of the painting (pl. 64) becomes apparent. The bands on the right hand digging stick (2), (3) and (4) become respectively the two places in which Nyapililngu spun possum fur and the marrawili tree, and on the left hand digging sticks (6), (5) and (4) signify the first grove of cashew trees, the ceremonial ground and the marrawili tree. As Bokarra stated that the
wavy lines down the centre of the digging sticks signified lengths of possum string, the actions of the guwak and possum in measuring out the lengths of string for the different clans is also encoded.

Figure 61 illustrates a painting of Djarrakpi by Narritjin, in which the structure is reduced even further. The digging sticks were said to signify at one level the sticks used by Nyapiliñgu. At a second level the sticks on either side signify the burr kun at Djarrakpi and the central figure the lake. I do not have a more detailed interpretation of the painting than this (at least not in as far as the painting refers to the lake). However, by comparing the painting with the other paintings considered so far, more specific meanings can be deduced. Orienting the painting from top to bottom (North-South), squares (6,5,4) represent respectively the first cashew nut grove, the site of the ceremonial ground and the marrawili tree; and (2-4) the places where Nyapiliñgu spun string and the marrawili tree. The central digging stick can represent the lake, either through representing Nyapiliñgu (as a digging stick), or the marrawili rangga (as a digging stick). These latter meanings will be explicated in the next chapter.

We can see that this painting (fig. 61) and painting (pl. 64) are less likely to be interpreted as the journey of the possum and the guwak from Donydji to Djarrakpi than the other paintings considered so far, and indeed they were not interpreted as such. In order to interpret the paintings at this level it would be necessary first to interpret the digging sticks as burr kun (possum-fur string). Though it might be possible to deduce the meaning burr kun from the presence of possums on

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1 The painting was purchased by Ian Dunlop, and I am grateful to him for providing me with Narritjin's interpretation of its significance.
the digging stick in plate 64, digging sticks were in fact only inter-
preted as burrkun by Bokarra and Narritjin. Women and young men never
provided this interpretation of a digging stick-shaped sign. A public
meaning 'burrkun' has thus been encoded in the paintings in an inside
way, that is, in a way that obscures its interpretation.

The outside meaning of Bokarra's painting, and almost certainly
of figure 61, is Nyapililngu and her digging sticks. Though the story
of the journey of the possum and the guwak is clearly appropriate to
the painting, if the meaning of the digging sticks as burrkun is known,
it is clearly not the appropriate outside story for these paintings. By
relating the paintings to the possums spinning their fur into string,
information would be given about the meaning of the symbols that the
painting is designed to obscure. This point will be further discussed
in the chapter following.

Figure 62 illustrates a template that incorporates the basic
structure of all the paintings discussed so far. The basic divisions
on the vertical axis represent the three feature blocks (A), (B) and
(C). Figure 63 lists the major referents of each feature block as a
whole. The numbers within each feature block represent loci of meaning;
they represent positions on a painting at which a set of related
meanings are focused. The numbered loci refer to the order and relative
position in which signs representing the set of meanings or members of
that set should occur in a particular painting. Not all loci are
represented in every painting discussed, but the order in which they
are represented remains constant. A brief list of the meanings
clustered around each position is given in figure 64. As I have shown
already, certain meanings are associated with more than one locus. Thus
each position on the *burrkun* is associated with the possum, as the *burrkun* is itself spun from possum fur. *Nyapililngu* however, is not associated with the bush side, and is not therefore a meaning at loci (5) and (6).

The meanings listed in figure 64 as being encoded at each locus are ones which refer to specific events associated with a part of Djarrakpi (e.g. the camps of the ancestral beings, the emus searching for water, etc.). Other meanings can also be signified in the paintings that are not associated with specific events linked with a particular place. Animals referred to in the content of the song cycles associated with Djarrakpi, but which are neither major elements in the myth nor represented by a Manggalili *rangga*, can be included in the paintings. The songs, as I stated previously, are divided into a salt water or beach series and a fresh water or bush series. According to Narritjin, animals referred to only in the salt water series should occur on that side of the painting only (i.e. feature block A), and those which are associated with the fresh water side only should occur on the bush side (C). The bird in plate 57 is a species of quail associated with the fresh water series and occurs in feature block (C) of the painting.

I have so far considered the way in which the meanings of the paintings can be said to be organised on a single template that corresponds with the semantic content of the paintings so far discussed. I will now consider how those meanings are encoded in actual paintings and in what sense the template itself or some similar internal model can be said to generate the paintings.

Narritjin's painting (fig. 61) represents the simplest example of the way in which the meanings can be encoded. In this case the
signs on the painting combine to represent little more than the loci of meaning themselves. The signifying potential of the signs is extremely broad and at each locus is appropriate to one of the meanings concerned. The wavy-lined background design that covers the painting is a non-specific clan design associated with a set of Yirritja moiety clans (see previous chapter). It signifies, among other things, water and sand hills. The dashed infill in the digging sticks is a specific Manggalili design element, the focal meanings of which centre around possum (possum-fur and possum claw marks in a tree). The square signs can signify campsites associated with ancestral beings and waterholes. However, in order to interpret the painting, at almost any level, one must either possess the information contained in the template, or be in a position to deduce it.

Similar considerations apply to Bokarra's painting (pl. 64), although in this case there is an obvious 'outside interpretation' for the painting: 'Nyapililngu with her digging sticks walking up and down the sand hills'. The outside interpretation of the painting thus places it as a representation of the content of loci (2) and (3) (fig. 62).

Banapan's painting, which we discussed originally, (pl. 57) encodes certain of the meanings in a highly specific way. Thus locus (4) (fig. 62) is represented by a figurative representation of a guwak's head and by a cashew nut tree. These are both meanings associated with the marrawili rangga: the marrawili rangga itself is a manifestation of the ancestral cashew tree, the guwak's food is the cashew tree and his final destination was the marrawili. However, although the meanings are appropriate to the locus, the way in which they are encoded orients
their interpretation in a particular direction - rather than being signs of the *marrawili rangga* they are two *guwak* eating nuts from the cashew tree. The possums similarly encode meanings at loci (2), (3) and (6) but again the interpretation suggested is possums climbing the tree and spinning their fur, the outside interpretation. The emus also are shown at the appropriate locus, scratching around for water. The association between the emus and the lake is public knowledge and again the interpretation is oriented in a particular direction.

Thus with Banapana's painting, as with Narritjin's painting (fig. 61) it is necessary to have knowledge of the template to be able to interpret the painting as a map of Djarrajkpi. However, on this occasion the template has been obscured by the encoding of certain of the meanings at each locus in an unambiguous sign, that is a figurative representation of a tree, a possum, an emu and so on. The signs chosen transform the template into a coherent set of meanings at quite another level: a description of the journey from Donydji to Djarrajkpi and of the *guwak* eating his food as the possum spins his fur and the emu searches for water.

The painting illustrated in plate 59 has a similar organisation to Banapana's painting (pl. 57). In this case possums are shown located at positions (3) and (5). Possums are also drawn at locus (1), the place where the lengths of *burrkun* given to each clan were transformed into gullies in the sandhills. The main length of the *burrkun* is represented by a *guwak rangga*. However, whereas with Banapana's painting the *guwak rangga* was modified in a number of ways to look less like the sacred object (in particular by showing the birds eating cashew nuts), in this case its reference is clear. To people not possessing
knowledge of the significance of the guwak rangga the interpretation of the painting could still be 'possums climbing up and down a tree spinning their fur, instructed by the guwak'. This was the outside interpretation given for the painting. In order to interpret the clan designs in position (7) and (8) as the lake, and dry lake bed, information encoded in the template is required. Similarly locus (4) is marked only by a hatched square (as also are 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) and the guwak's head. The marrawili rangga is not explicitly encoded in the painting (however, see forward).

The main way in which painting (pl. 60) differs from painting (pl. 69) is that the central sign in feature block (8) is a representation of the marrawili rangga. The marrawili rangga is one of the major sacred objects of the Manggalili clan. The painting was produced to show me the shape and designs of the object. It was painted away from women by Narritjin, with some assistance from his eldest living son Banapana. On its completion it was wrapped in cloth and before I carried it to my house I was instructed to keep it face to the wall and not allow anyone to look at it. The public meaning of marrawili is cashew nut tree, but the fact that it refers to the rangga is part of its inside or restricted meaning. The drawing of bunches of cashew nuts coming from the top of the rangga and of possums climbing up its trunk, while perhaps orienting interpretation in a particular direction (towards the outside meaning), does nothing to obscure its form. Further details of the significance of the marrawili will be discussed in the following chapters. In this context I simply wish to consider the relationship between the rangga itself and the template derived from the interpretations of the paintings.
The organisation of the designs on the *marrawili* corresponds closely to the structure of the template, although it includes an additional transverse line (10). Plate 65 shows the positions on the *marrawili rangga* that are equivalent to the loci in figure 62.

In a sense this similarity is not surprising. Feature blocks (A) and (C) in the template incorporate meanings associated with the lake shores, and the *marrawili rangga* represents the lake itself. The features of the shore can thus easily be encoded by marking their relative positions on the body of the *rangga*. With this hypothesis in mind, the *rangga* can be divided into three notional feature blocks: the left hand side, the right hand side, and the centre (pl. 65). The left hand side corresponds to the coastal dunes and the right hand side to the inland bank of the lake. The two *guwak rangga* represented in the painting (pl. 60) simply represent in a more explicit way meanings which are encoded in the *rangga* itself. They are elaborated projections of the respective sides of the *rangga*. The *rangga* encodes the meanings *guwak* and possum, as it was to the *marrawili rangga* that the ancestral *guwak* finally flew with the *burrkun*. When the *rangga* is first revealed it is covered with the *burrkun*.

It is possible to go one step further than this and suggest that the two *guwak rangga* are themselves incorporated within the *marrawili*. The only meanings I was given for the shape of the head of the *rangga* with its two projections, were the forked branches of a cashew tree and a high standing cumulus cloud. Cloud is associated with spider's web, and both of these can be associated with the same sign (_certificate). Spider's web, cloud and cashew tree are all associated with the *burrkun* (the possum learnt to spin *burrkun* by observing the spider in the branches of a cashew tree) and the *guwak* (who directed the possum's actions
while he perched on top of the cashew tree). This suggests that the two sides of the marrawili could be interpreted to refer to the line of the guwak's body (and burrkun) and that the curved projections signify the guwak's head. This interpretation is supported by a consideration of the structure of two of the other paintings. Painting (pl. 63) includes in position (4), two ( בעברית) signs (i.e. spider, cloud, etc.) and a figurative representation of a guwak. In painting 59, the contours defined by the two guwak rangga suggest in outline the shape of the marrawili rangga. If this interpretation is correct, the painting in effect incorporates a concealed representation of the rangga in which the two points on the head of the rangga are replaced by the heads of the guwak (pl. 66).

Conclusion

A person is first taught the outside meanings of paintings. The outside interpretation relates elements of a painting together in a particular way which apparently provides a satisfactory explanation of the perceived form (e.g. a guwak instructing a possum to spin fur into string, accompanied by emus on a journey etc.). He continues to acquire more knowledge as further meanings are given for elements on the painting. This relates the elements together in a way which is different from their relationship according to the outside interpretations. At each level the meanings of the elements can be located in concrete terms; in the context of myth or ritual, in the shape of the landscape and in terms of individual experiences. By the time an individual is taught the inside meaning of paintings (or rather each time he is taught a further inside level), he has already acquired considerable knowledge which enables the new information to take an intelligible form. He is gradually developing a template which encodes
the interrelationship between the meanings in the paintings. The \textit{marrawili rangga}, I suggest, represents in a concrete form a structure that is consistent with the template developed by individuals as they acquire increasing knowledge about the interrelationships between the meanings encoded in the artistic system. It is a Manggalili template.
CHAPTER 10

THE YINGAPUNGAPU PAINTINGS

The primary focus of this chapter is on a set of paintings which derive their basic form from the shape of a sand sculpture, the yingapungapu, used in the context of burial ceremonies. My chief concern is with interpretations of this set of paintings and the ways in which they are based on encoded meanings. However the iconography of Yolngu paintings is cumulative, since it is based on the continuous acquisition of knowledge through life and the application of that knowledge in new contexts. Interpretations that are initially associated with one set of paintings referring to a particular geographical area feed back into the meaning of other sets of paintings associated with different geographical areas. Some of the same signs occur throughout the entire body of Manggalili art (e.g. \[\text{\ding{218}}\] , \[\text{\ding{217}}\]) and their meaning in one set of paintings carries over to the same sign in other sets of paintings, although constraints are imposed by the syntactic contexts in which they occur. Thus each new set of paintings provides interpretations which add to the significance of previous sets.

Yingapungapu Ground Sculptures

A yingapungapu ground sculpture is used in the context of Yirritja moiety burial ceremonies. Relatives of the deceased who are involved in preparing the body for burial, are painting clan designs on the dead person's chest or are contaminated in other ways by contact with the dead body must spend the duration of the ceremony separated from other people present. This separation is focused on the yingapungapu
or an equivalent sculpture (see Peterson, 1976:97), within which those who have touched the body eat their food for the duration of the ceremony. Their food is prepared separately and anything that remains uneaten must be buried in the central section of the sand sculpture. The area surrounding the yingapungapu is avoided by other people and it is believed that if they enter within the boundaries of the sculpture they will contract leprosy. The ground remains polluted after the sand sculpture has been smoothed over. Wuyarrin once said of a yingapungapu made the previous year for her father: 'People don't go there. Last year dogs played there and they all died'.

Yingapungapu sand sculptures are owned by three clans living at Yirrkala: Manggalili, Dha'lwangu (Groger-Wurm, 1973:100) and Ma'darrpa. The main difference between the sand sculptures is said to be in the number of holes (fig. 65) dug within them. Manggalili yingapungapu have four central holes whereas Ma'darrpa have six (I am unaware of the number in the Dha'lwangu yingapungapu). Each clan's ground sculpture refers to a particular geographical location within the territory of that clan, where ancestral beings constructed similar ground sculptures. These ancestral sculptures are now manifested in the shape of the landscape. The Dha'lwangu yingapungapu refers to Garraparra in the North of Blue Mud Bay (see Wurm, 1973:100 and Peterson, 1976:102-3). The Ma'darrpa one refers to Bäniyala opposite Cape Shield and the Manggalili one to a place on Cape Shield, Djarrakpi.

The area of the yingapungapu at Djarrakpi is avoided today by Yolngu. The site is marked at either end by large boulders which indicate its extent, and they are said to act as a warning to those who approach it. The area is said to be a burial ground for members of the
Yirritja moiety, although it has not been used as such in recent years and probably not since before European contact. It is also said to be connected with a battle that took place between a number of Yirritja moiety clans including Manggalili, Maḍarrpa and Dhaḻwangu at Djarrakpi; the bodies of the dead were buried in the yingapungapu. The area is believed to be dangerous and people entering are thought likely to become covered with sores and subsequently to die. Wuyarrin, Narritjin's elder brother's daughter, gave the yingapungapu as her reason for not going to live at Djarrakpi - the place was much too dangerous. Referring specifically to the yingapungapu, Wuyarrin stated:

'Women are not allowed to go there. If they went they would get weak knees and wouldn't be able to walk. Men can't go there either. If Narritjin wanted to go there he would have to talk first. He would say to himself 'I want to see that place - don't make me sick' '.

When I visited Djarrakpi it was shortly after Narritjin's eldest son had died, and he was afraid that his mokuy spirit was in the area. I was therefore unable to visit the yingapungapu. Fortunately, Thomson provides a detailed description of a similar 'communal burial ground' in Marrakulu country (Peterson, 1976:99). In particular Thomson provides details of the nature of the contagion associated with a burial ground that will be of relevance later in this chapter to understanding some of the symbolism of the paintings. The smell of the burial ground is itself thought to be dangerous, Thomson and his companions approached the burial platform by a roundabout route to take them upwind. Fires were lit in between the burial ground and the camp to cut off the smell. Thomson was told to leave his water bottle behind, as the 'shade' of the maggot ancestor might
'go into it and make [him] sick' (ibid:100). Outcrops of stone in the area were carefully avoided. When they reached a burial platform a pipe of tobacco was smashed beneath it to placate the spirit. As soon as they had left the site they washed themselves in a salt pan because 'that maggot him bite you and me' (ibid:100).

Paintings Related to the Yingapungapu

Plates 67-72 illustrate six Manggalili paintings the form of which is directly related to the form and mythology of the Manggalili yingapungapu. The paintings themselves do not function in the same way as the sand sculpture. As paintings they represent a set of designs that as far as I am aware are produced only for sale to Europeans. However, paintings such as these, which are based on clan mythology have definite locational references and include design components that are the property of a particular clan or set of clans, are treated in many ways as being similar to traditional clan-owned paintings and are subject to many of the same constraints. Thus Manggalili yingapungapu paintings are owned by the Manggalili clan and can only be produced with the permission of senior members of the clan. They have a definite place within the sequence which determines the order in which Manggalili paintings are taught to individuals with rights in the paintings, and they will be classified as M paintings, ZC paintings, or MMB paintings by members of other clans on the same basis as other clan-owned property. Yingapungapu paintings, for example, are only produced by Narritjin, Bokarra and Banapana, other members of the clan not yet having been taught the paintings. They are not simply representations of an object, a yingapungapu. Rather, the design itself has significance to the producer.
Banapana's painting in particular (plate 67) provides an example of the way in which commercial bark paintings have become integrated within the fabric of Yolngu society, to the extent that they can be used to some traditional cultural ends at the same time as being objects produced for sale to Europeans. The context of Banapana's painting has been described in detail elsewhere (Morphy in press c), and I will only provide a brief summary here.

A young Gurrumuru Dha]wangu boy died in a car accident at Yirrkala. Narritjin was responsible for preparing the body for burial, for placing the body in the coffin in the hospital mortuary and for accompanying the body on the plane flight to Gurrumuru where it was to be buried. Narritjin was thus in a state of pollution for a considerable length of time (two weeks). Shortly after the death of the young man had been announced, Narritjin asked his eldest son Banapana to begin a bark painting of the yingapungapu. Narritjin explained that this would enable him to be immediately free of pollution restrictions on the completion of the ceremony, enabling him to lead a normal life and share food with other people. Elsewhere (Morphy in press c) I have suggested that the yingapungapu painting operated at a symbolic level in an analogous way to a yingapungapu sand sculpture, enabling the pollution associated with his handling of the dead body to be contained. The fact that the death and burial took place in widely separated localities meant that it was inappropriate for Narritjin to eat within the confines of a yingapungapu sculpture, even if the construction of one were thought desirable; thus the painting substituted for it. Although Banapana's painting (pl. 67) as a whole is unlikely to be produced in a traditional medium, for example as a body painting or on a coffin lid, the painting does contain at least two designs which
occur separately in burial ceremonies. One is the elliptical design of the yingapungapu itself, the other is the cloud design in sections (9) and (10) of the painting. The latter design is used in burial ceremonies as a body painting on the chests of men and women who are close relatives of the deceased (fig. 66). Hence again it is a design element appropriate to the state of pollution in which Narritjin was placed through physical contact with the dead body.

I will focus my discussion of the yingapungapu paintings on this painting by Banapana (pl. 67) as this was the painting for which I obtained the fullest interpretation. The central elliptical design represents the shape of the yingapungapu sand sculpture itself (pl. 67, fig. 65).

The yingapungapu at Djarrakpi is located in a ridge of sand hills in the South of Cape Shield just beyond Djarrakpi settlement (fig. 57). In topographical terms, the area of land represented by Banapana's painting and characterised by the ancestral yingapungapu adjoins the area surrounding the lake discussed in the previous chapter. The marrawili tree marks the boundary between the two areas and is associated with both. It is frequently represented in paintings of the yingapungapu (e.g. pl. 67:4).

The position of the marrawili tree in this painting (pl. 67) orients it top to bottom in a North-South direction: the marrawili tree occurs at the northern boundary of the area represented in the painting. In all other paintings in which the marrawili is represented, it is represented in the top section (see also pl. 68, 72). From a topographical perspective, in order to be consistent with the position of the marrawili tree the right hand section of the painting (pl. 67:A)
should signify things associated with the saltwater side and the left (C) with the bush or fresh water side.

The mapping aspect of a painting means that it can be oriented in a particular way in relation to features of the landscape. It does not mean that the topography itself determines which of these features should be encoded in the painting and the way in which they should be encoded. For the yingapungapu paintings a model can be constructed similar to the one suggested for the marrwili paintings. The model consists of a division of the painting (pl. 67) into three sections (A) (B) and (C) signifying a central feature (the yingapungapu) and lateral features (bush side and beach side). However, although this model can be applied to all paintings and is applied by Yolngu in some cases, it is not the dominant model employed for interpreting the relationship between the elements included in the paintings, nor does it account for why certain signs (e.g. turtle tracks in paintings 68, 69, 72) are included in apparently inappropriate positions.

The problem essentially concerns the status of the topographic elements encoded in the painting. The topography of the landscape is itself a component of a sign system encoding the relationship between mythologically significant events. It is part of a system for reinforcing and locating meaning in terms of concrete features of the landscape. What is important as far as the paintings are concerned is not the topography itself but what is signified by the topography. The paintings are thus not simply topographical maps or transformations of topographical maps, but rather they map the relationship between mythologically significant topographical features; the emphasis in the painting is on the meanings encoded rather than on the features themselves.
That is not to say that the topographical dimension of paintings is merely epiphenomenal. Paintings, as I have shown (Chapter 4), are used to demonstrate rights of ownership over land and as such are important factors as far as the political relationship between groups is concerned. At another level the shape of the landscape is believed to have resulted from the actions of ancestral beings and is seen as evidence of the existence of those beings. The fact that the paintings can be interpreted to refer to the relationship between myth and topography is clearly a significant level of meaning for both of these reasons. However, the structure of the painting is not determined by the topography of the landscape. Topography as it is encoded in the paintings is an abstraction of the mythologically significant elements of the actual physical topography.

In the case of the yingapungapu paintings the mythologically significant topographic features are the yingapungapu and the beach side of it. The mythological context of the painting concerns the death of the guwak far out to sea, the construction of the yingapungapu on his death and his ascent to the Milky Way via the marrawili rangga. The left section (C) in all the paintings notionally refers to the bush side (explicitly so in two cases). In fact they frequently encode meanings referring to the yingapungapu itself, the marrawili tree and the beach and sea.

I now turn to more detailed interpretations of the meaning of yingapungapu paintings. Following the procedure adopted in Chapter 9, I separate the public interpretation of the paintings from restricted interpretations.
Interpretations of the Yingapungapu Paintings

The yingapungapu paintings can be interpreted in the same way as the marrawili paintings discussed in the previous chapter, by placing them in the context of the journey of the ancestors from Burrwaydji to Djarrakpi. Narritjin initially interpreted the painting shown in plate 72 in this way. The interpretation was consistent with the outside interpretation recorded in the last chapter. However, he did not refer to the possum spinning the burrkun, which was a major theme of the marrawili paintings. According to Narritjin's interpretation of the painting the design (▲) was said to represent the lake at Djarrakpi, represented in section (B) in the marrawili paintings. In subsequent interpretations of the same painting the design was said to represent the yingapungapu.

With reference to a yingapungapu ground the paintings can all be interpreted in two ways: one with reference to a yingapungapu as used in a mortuary ceremony and secondly with reference to the wangarr (ancestral) yingapungapu ground at Djarrakpi. In the first case the focus is on current Yolngu practice, in the second on the events concerning the ancestral yingapungapu ground and the topography of Djarrakpi. These two perspectives of a yingapungapu ground are two dimensions of the same set of beliefs, since present day practices are related to ancestral events. The symbolism of the paintings transcends both planes, the ancestral and the present day. In interpreting the paintings people continually switched from one perspective to the other, and I will largely retain the order in which the interpretations were given to me.
Interpretation 1

The following interpretation by Wuyarrin was of Banapana's painting (pl. 68). It would apply equally to plate 68, which has substantially the same content, although the organisation of components differs.

'The long thin thing that goes down the middle is a ground called yingapungapu [1]. The circles inside are holes in the sand [3]. The shapes at the top and bottom are clouds, wululu.

Some Yolngu came in from hunting. The paddles in the painting are their paddles. The fish in the middle of the yingapungapu are yambirru that they had caught. Beside them the circles are turtles eggs which they found. The spears are of two kinds bati and makurr. They came in from hunting and sat in the shade of the tree and cooked fish [4]. When they had cooked it they took it to the yingapungapu ground. They ate the fish inside the ground and left it there when they had finished. They left all the fish bones and paddles on the sand. A bird called guluwiti [seabird-wader] and sand crabs came and ate up all the fish bones. The wavy lines in the picture are the foot marks of the bird and the sand crab. Nyapiliingu [the human figure], came from her house, gungun. She was crying because she saw two clouds and no one looking after the ground. She felt sorry for the yingapungapu ground. The birds saw her crying under the shade. She was thinking of the sacred things: of the spears and the paddles and the holes. The sand was getting old and smelly from the fish bones and skins that the hunters had left there. She then went up high into the sand hills and sat down. She turned her head and looked at the clouds above the yingapungapu, and she stayed to look after the yingapungapu, after the others had gone.

Yolngu don't go to that place today.'

Commentary

I will only comment briefly on Wuyarrin's interpretation at this stage. We shall see later that it differs from Narritjin's interpretation mainly at the level of detail and in what is left out or left unspecified. The main points to be emphasised are that no explicit reference is made to human death or to the function of yingapungapu ground sculptures in burial ceremonies, and secondly that Nyapiliingu is simply said to be mourning for the ground rather than for any particular individual.
Interpretation 2

The following is Narritjin's outside interpretation of the painting reproduced in plate 67.¹

'The name is yingapungapu - a ground for when you are dead [1]. You have finished your life and you go back underground for your body. Those are the men who made it, Yikuyanga and Munumiya [4]. You can see them sitting down under that tree. Those are their spears and spear throwers standing under the tree [5]. Over there [13-16] that's the sand crab and his foot marks and the foot marks of the people travelling to the yingapungapu ground. They come up travelling, the sandy crab, after you have been eating, they and the worm to eat all the fish remains that you have left behind. You can see the sand crabs carrying turtle eggs to their hole where they bury them [13]. You see those holes [3] that's where the close relatives of the dead sit, where they eat fish and where they light their fires. But the number one people, the people who are cleaning up your bones, collecting your body they must stay right in there where the fish lives [2], that's for the waku. The fish is a parrot fish because Yikuyanga used to catch parrot fish. The malwiya [emu's] they are the people who made the decisions for you in this area, the decisions you are following [6]. They are the wangarr [ancestors] who decided where people could sit. They marked the places for the fire place [3] with their spears. The guwak men Munumiya and Yikuyanga they sit and listen in the shade, they straighten out things for you and your family, they make sure you are peaceful with other clans. But the emu made the law for that place, and made the ceremony ground and told you how many marks [1,2,3] you have got to put in that ceremonial ground. Those foot marks [15] they show the men going to collect fish in the canoe [17 and 18] to feed the people at the ceremony, and also walking along the beach to collect turtle eggs [shown by turtle tracks in (14) and the circles in (13)].

When they had finished everything two clouds were there standing up [9,10]. The clouds tell what has happened. When you see two clouds you know that someone has died belonging to that area, and you can see the spirit belonging to the person passing away from the ground in the cloud. And you see the marks in the cloud [dashed infill in the cross bars] that's blood of the people mourning the death, and the ochre [blood] that they paint on their bodies. And the cross itself that's the woman Nyapililengu, and the possum fur string that she spun to go across her breasts.'

Commentary

Certain aspects of Narritjin's interpretation of the painting require further clarification. The interpretation refers briefly to

¹ Interpreted in front of Narritjin's sons Baluka, Yama, Warrpandiya, Mungurrapin, Banapana and Watjung.
the ancestral origin of the *yingapungapu*, stressing that the form of *yingapungapu* ground sculpture used today by the Manggalili was determined in the ancestral past by the *guwak* and emu ancestors. Note that the explanation is set at a programatic level of mythology (see Chapter 4), stating that the form was set in the ancestral past without revealing details of the ancestral events associated with the creation of the ground. The form of the *yingapungapu* is discussed in terms of its functions: a ground in which certain relatives of a dead person reside during preparations for a burial ceremony, where they prepare and eat their food. The other signs in the painting are interpreted in relation to this, that is they represent food consumed by the participants and people hunting to obtain food for the ceremony.

Three important symbolic themes are briefly referred to: clouds as a symbol of death, the letting of blood associated with mourning, and the sand crab burying food remains. High-standing cumulus clouds, especially when isolated from other cloud formations, are seen as a sign that a death has taken place in the country beneath the cloud. The symbol operates at two levels. At the first level a cloud is seen in a literal sense as an index of death. As I have shown, at various stages in a mortuary ceremony fires are lit to drive the *mokuy* spirit of the deceased away from the place of death (Chapter 5). Areas of land associated with the dead person and parts of his clan territory linked with one of his names must be burnt off before the land is opened for hunting. The clouds of smoke that result from these fires are believed to develop into cumulus clouds as they rise above the earth, and indeed the smoke does often appear to merge into the cumulus clouds that develop in the afternoon along the coastline. Clouds of smoke and clouds associated with smoke are thus naturally occurring symbols of death.
At a second level clouds are seen as a medium for the passage of spirits from one place to another. Spirits rise up from the ground in the form of clouds which drift across the Arnhem Land sky and come down to earth again in the form of rain. The spirits then enter the water-courses and rivers and finally become incorporated in the rocks that surround clan wells and in the sacred objects located in the bottom of the wells. From there, spirits can then enter women who wash in the wells or in waters connected with them, resulting in the conception of children. Thus clouds, as symbols of the passage of spirits linked with the idea of rebirth, are another of the ways in which the Yolngu model their belief in the reincarnation of spirits.

Clouds are signified in Banapana's painting (pl. 67) both by the anvil shaped outline (9 and 10) and by the (확) within it. In the previous chapter I showed how cloud was signified as part of a syntagmatic chain including possum, spider and guwak. In the case of yingapungapu paintings, the meaning (확) = cloud can be located in a different syntagmatic context associating it with Nyapililngu, possum-fur string and blood (see fig. 60). The association between Nyapililngu (as a woman) and cumulus clouds is explicit: cumulus clouds billowing out at the top are seen as being like a woman's breasts falling to either side of her breast girdle. The metaphor is expressed in the cloud designs where the (확) as breaststraps divides the two lateral extensions, representing the anvil of the clouds (fig. 67). The same idea is contained in the body painting design (fig. 66).

This enables the introduction of the second theme, the association between blood and mourning, which is encoded in the same symbolic configuration. The (확) signifies a possum-fur string breast girdle, and the dashed infill within the cross signifies the foot marks of possums
as they claw their way up the munydjutj tree (wild plum). The infill also signifies blood dripping from the heads of women in mourning, as they cut their foreheads with digging sticks and stones as an expression of grief. The top sections of plate 72 illustrate this. Women are shown around a yingapungapu beating their heads with digging sticks and against the ground. One of the main components of the public story of Nyapiliingu is the characteristic portrayal of her in mourning, using her digging stick to draw blood from her head. An implicit association is made between Nyapiliingu cutting her head and possum clawing the bark of the wild plum. The wild plum exudes a red sap which symbolises blood drawn from the tree by the possums' claw marks. One of the main women's dances at mortuary ceremonies is the possum dance, in which women run their fingers up and down their breasts in a scratching movement, signifying the possums scratching the tree. Although the analogy with women bleeding themselves in mourning is not explicitly made, the evidence strongly suggests that at one level the action symbolises precisely this aspect of mourning. Narritjin in his explanation of Banapanan's painting (interpretation 2, this chapter) generalises the reference of blood to include the painting of the bodies of the participants in red ochre, as well as the blood of women cutting their heads in mourning. This highlights the dual aspects of the significance of blood as a symbol in the context of burial ceremonies: as a symbol of loss in the case of women cutting their heads and as a symbol of renewal and strength in the case of the red ochreing of the participants' bodies (see Chapter 5). The symbolic connotations of blood as a meaning in Manggalili paintings will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

The final theme to explore at this stage concerns the sand crab cleaning the ground after the people have eaten. This theme is
elaborated in different ways in each of the three paintings illustrated in plates 67, 69, 72. After the people camped around the yingapungapu ground have finished their meal of fish and turtle eggs they bury the remains in the centre of the yingapungapu (pl. 67:2).

Maggots begin to eat the remains of the fish (maggots are signified by the white dashed infill on the paintings, and also by the white circles surrounding the yingapungapu in plate 72). The sand crabs then move over the ground and pick the flesh and maggots clean from the fish bones, uncovering the remains as they search for food. A seabird (gulwiritjpiti) (illustrated in plate 72) is attracted by the exposed bones of the fish and feeds on what is left. (According to one interpretation it also feeds off the sand crabs.) The sand crabs take some of the remains and bury them in their holes. They carry the food remains on their legs and spread particles of the fish, the blood and the maggots over the sand (again signified by the dashed infill, black, yellow, white and red). Finally the tide comes in and washes away the last of the food remains, leaving the sand clean.

At one level the above interpretation of the signs on the painting can be taken to be a simple descriptive statement of what happens to food remains that are left behind after a meal. It reflects Yolngu ideas of both cultural and natural order and the relationship between the two. It is at this level that Wuyarrin's interpretation (interpretation 1) is to be understood. Yolngu carefully bury their food remains in one place in order to keep the sand and their camps clean. This is what the fishermen did in Wuyarrin's story. After a while the remains begin to decay and smell as maggots feed on the flesh. Then a process of dispersal takes place, during which the bones are exposed and spread by the sand crabs, and seagulls. The sand crabs
pollute the sand by spreading the decayed material over the sand, but also help to create a new order by reburying some of the remains in their holes. Finally the tide comes in and washes the ground clean again. This interpretation is applicable both to the ancestral yingapungapu (to which Wuyarrin applies it) and to the yingapungapu ground sculpture. In a sense the latter is a specialised kind of midden, its main function in a ceremony being a place to bury food remains.

At another level, however, the sand crab complex operates as a complex metaphor of the process of human death and burial. It also dramatises certain aspects of pollution beliefs and refers to the reason why people involved in preparing the body for burial are separated from other people present. The inside meaning of this part of the painting provided by Narritjin is an exegetical statement of the nature of the metaphoric relations involved.

'That fish is really Yolngu, dead Yolngu. If a man has too much fish to eat and he is in a state of yingapungapu and if he can't find the right man to share it with, then he must bury the fish in the ground. This is like him burying the body in the ground. When it is buried in the ground the bones will be stripped clean of flesh by the maggots. Later on you go and collect the body, and collect the pieces of bone and put them in the bark coffin. This is like the sand crab and the rat running around collecting the dead fish and blood.'

The fish in the paintings can thus be seen to represent the body of a dead person, and what happens to the body of the fish is essentially what happens to the body of the dead. Thus in painting (pl. 72) the fish is shown respectively alive, dead (white), and in skeletal form stripped clean of flesh. The two small yingapungapu to the right of the painting represent the ancestral women's hearths. The women are shown mourning beside the yingapungapu, the blood from their foreheads
flowing into the sand sculpture. 'The blood goes to the place where the fish bones are. When you and I die then our bodies go to the same place.'

The sand crabs are like people stripping flesh off a corpse. They also represent people burying the body. In Banapana's painting (pl. 69) the metaphor is expressed in a more direct way, through sand crabs shown picking away at the flesh of human feet.

The foot prints (pl. 67, 69) also operate as a symbol of death at another level, as foot prints in the sand washed away by the incoming tide. The tide coming in over the sand is seen as a final cleansing agent, in that it washes away all traces of the activities that took place: the foot prints of the people, crabs and birds, the marks of the turtle and the rotten remains of food. At a second level they can be interpreted to signify the finality of death as far as a person's physical being is concerned, the fact that soon after his death all traces of his physical existence will be gone, washed away like foot prints in the sand. Later in this chapter it will be shown how the tide mark which today is a symbol of death is believed to have been an agent of death in ancestral times.

The action of the sand crabs in scavenging among the remains of dead fish is seen as polluting. In particular it is said to release maggots from the flesh so that they are blown away in the wind to cause disease and death. As Thomson's (Peterson, 1976) description shows the major source of contagion is thought to be the spirit of the ancestral maggot (barrpa), which is manifest in the actual maggots eating the corpse and the rotten smell coming from the decaying body. The sand crab complex dramatises the polluting aspects of death, expressing the
danger associated with the yingapungapu ground and the pollution of
those preparing the body for burial. The function of the yingapungapu
ground is to contain and restrict this pollution within defined
boundaries. The function of the people preparing the body is to reduce
the dangers of contagion for other members present, by disposing of the
body of the dead man and all the things associated with him and by
carefully burying or burning anything that may have been contaminated
by their own contact with the corpse.

The yingapungapu men, that is those handling the body, while they
are in a state of pollution are not thought to be in danger of contagion.
The people who perform this task should belong to a waku (ZC) or māri
(MMB) clan, though often an actual ZS will be said to be too close a
relative. This is not the place to provide a detailed sociological
explanation as to why these particular categories of relatives are
considered free from the dangers of contagion. Nevertheless it is
important to emphasise that the actual maggots and the rotten smell of
the corpse are not in themselves considered to be an automatic source
of disease. The agents of contagion are thought capable of being
directed against certain individuals rather than being of equal danger
to all people. In particular they are believed to be directed against
persons thought to be responsible either positively or negatively
(through, for example, neglect) for the death of the person concerned.
Members of MMB and ZC clans, because of their structural relationship
to the dead man, are, ideally at least, in a position of non-competition
with him and members of his group. They represent the category of
relatives thought least likely to have born ill will towards the
deceased or to have been effective in causing his death. As I showed
in Chapter 5 they comprise the category of people who are thought to be
in less danger from the mokuy soul of the deceased, for similar reasons.
Narritjin referred to the position of the yingapungapu men as follows:-

'Only certain people can look after the yingapungapu, can handle your body, your bones and your possessions. He must not be frightened, he must not care that the body is maggoty and rotten, that it is very smelly. Don't be frightened because if you are afraid, then they will get you. The worm will go after your body, go inside you and eat up your flesh. It will make you dry. You won't be long now, soon you will be dead'.

The inside meaning of the fish as dead human being makes explicit some of the symbolic connotations of the yingapungapu paintings that are implicit in the outside interpretations given by Narritjin and Wuyarrin. Although Wuyarrin did not refer in her interpretation of the painting to the function of the yingapungapu ground in the context of burial ceremonies, women are fully aware of its function in containing pollution and of the dangers of contagion from it. This suggests that the sand crab - fish bone complex will have the same underlying significance to both men and women even if its symbolic significance is not explicitly articulated except at the level of 'inside knowledge'.

The Ways in which the Interpretations Considered so far are Encoded in the Yingapungapu Paintings

The figurative representations in plates 67-69, 72 represent particular elaborations of meanings encoded in the geometric art, many of which are encoded in the yingapungapu design(Å) itself. The painting illustrated in plate 71 represents the yingapungapu paintings in a condensed form, though as we shall see in the next chapter it represents much more than this. This painting by Banapana (pl. 71) was said to represent the yingapungapu ground in the centre with two digging sticks belonging to Nyapililngu on either side. These were the
sticks that she used in mourning for the dead guwak. The dashed infill in the centre of the (Fig. 2) were said by Banapana to represent maggots and by Wuyarrin to represent the sea-bird gulujpitj and sand crab walking around on the sand looking for maggots. Clearly these represent only two of the possible signifieds associated with dashed infill which are appropriate to the meanings of the yingapungapu. An overall set of meanings for dashed infill in yingapungapu paintings can be constructed by listing the full range of meanings given for this element of the painting in the interpretations of the paintings as a whole. This meaning range is listed in figure 68. The same procedure can be adopted for each of the other elements in the painting and the results are also listed in figure 68. The dashed infill clearly has a different set of appropriate meanings attached to it according to the different syntactic contexts in which it occurs (i.e. according to its relationship with other components of the painting). Thus, possum claw marks are only given as a meaning in the context of sign ( ), which itself signifies possum-fur string. Maggots were only given as a meaning for dashed infill in the context of the yingapungapu itself (although crabs' claws were said to be contaminated with pieces of maggot and rotten fish, which they spread over the area of surrounding sand).

Clearly this painting of Banapana's encodes in a condensed form the majority of the meanings signified in a more elaborated form by the figurative representations in other paintings. In the case of Narritjin's painting (pl. 72), I was given the following meanings for the dashed infill: maggot, fish blood, foot marks, sand crab and bird. In this case, however, the majority of the meanings are explicitly represented by figurative representations in the yingapungapu: birds, sand crab and fish.
In figure 68 I have recorded two additional meanings for the yingapungapu which have not been discussed so far: boat and digging stick. Neither of these two meanings were given to me but they are recorded by other authors. Wurm (1973:101) records for a painting by Narritjin that the design 'is also the canoe which the spirit of a deceased person has to build to travel to the land of the dead'. The significance of this will become clear in the next section.

Thomson records in his field notes that a Gupapuyngu clan yingapungapu represents a long digging stick (watjurrara). Although I did not record this interpretation, a digging stick is indirectly signified through the blood of mourning women that collects in the yingapungapu. The blood flowed from the head of the mourning Nyapilingu as she cut her head with her digging stick. Even stronger evidence for the connection between the yingapungapu and a watjurrara is suggested by the painting illustrated in figure 61. In the last chapter I showed how this painting in a condensed form represented the lake at Djarrakpi and the sand hills on either side. The painting was also said to represent the yingapungapu in the centre and the two digging sticks on either side.

Further Inside Interpretations

The inside interpretations to be considered in this section are in many ways elaborations of the interpretations considered so far, which specify in more detail the mythological context of the yingapungapu at Djarrakpi. In particular they relate the paintings to the marrawili and to other sacred objects owned or shared by the Manggalili clan. Although the myths refer to events that took place over a wider geographical area than that represented by the paintings,
many of the elements of the myths are encoded in the signs on the paintings. It could be argued that the topographical reference of the paintings is extended by the broad signifying potential of certain of the signs included on them.

The following interpretation was given for Banapana's painting (pl. 67) by Narritjin. Variations of it were obtained on several other occasions in the form of myth.

Interpretation 3

'Garanyirnnyirr [a cicada] is a very strange animal. He yells out eeeeee, and then dies. Very hard he takes his own life. He sings out for the salt water to come in, and then he dies, for the tide to come in and when it comes in he dies. He is showing us what is going to happen, but he says nothing about the spirit land, nothing about what is going to happen to you after you die. He just dies.

[In ancestral times the guwak after arriving at Djarrakpi saw a cicada under the marrawili tree]. The cicada told the guwak 'I am climbing the marrawili tree and yelling out for the salt water to come in and as soon as it comes near the land, I will be finished'. And he says 'you two have got to do the same thing. You must get into the canoe and go far out to sea and there you will die'.

Two fishermen Yikuyanga and Munumiya [guwak ancestors in human form], good fishermen who know how to live by the sea, were sitting under a tree, the cicada beside them. The guwak [in bird form] was sitting on top of the marrawili tree yelling out to the salt water 'I have got to die on top of the tree, no one killed me, no one did anything against me - I just gave out my life to the marrawili rangga. Now you two under the tree you have got to give out your lives under the water. Your spirit will go to the Milky Way, milnguya, that's the living place for your spirit'.

The two men went out to sea in their boat, and far out to sea the boat was overturned by a tidal wave. One of the men swam most of the way to Baniyala (Madjarrpa country) where he died, and his body was turned into a stone. The other man's body was thrown up by the tide on the beach at Djarrakpi. His body was covered with designs made by the incoming tide (bandumul) as it washed over him. The designs became the clan design used by the Manggalili clan (\{\}). Nyapilingu, the ancestral woman, mourned the death of the guwak men, cutting her head with her digging stick. The spirits of the two guwak men went by way of the burrurkun from the marrawili tree up into the Milky Way (see also Wurm, 1973:101).
Commentary

There is an internal inconsistency in Narritjin's interpretation. Yikuyanga and Munumiya are said to be ancestral guwaks in human form, they drown at sea following the instructions of the guwak in the form of a bird. The guwak in the form of a bird dies on the marrawili tree. The ancestral guwak thus dies twice in two different places.

The inconsistency reflects the fact that Narritjin's interpretation of the painting combines two myths which in many respects are structurally opposed. Recognition of this enables the contradiction to be at least partially resolved. The real question is not so much how it is possible for the guwak ancestors to die twice, which would imply an over-literal interpretation of the mythology, but what is the significance of there being two different myths concerning the death of the ancestral guwak.

One myth is that the guwaks in human form took a boat out to sea, the boat was overwhelmed by the waves and the bodies of the men were tossed back onto the land by the incoming tide. This is the outside version of the myth that I was given by Banapana and Wuyarrin, with one difference: in the outside version the two men were said to be ordinary Yolngu and there was no reference made to guwak ancestors.

The second myth is the inside version which I only obtained from Narritjin. It is in some ways the reverse of the outside version. The guwak brought about his own death by staying on land and causing the tide to come in and engulf him. The relationship between the two myths can be analysed in the following terms. One of the main ideological beliefs expressed by the guwak's suicide is that death is controllable. Unlike the cicada, the guwak knows what is going to happen to him when
he dies and has devised a means whereby his spirit can rise up to the Milky Way (via the burrkun). He also refers to part of his spirit becoming incorporated in the marrawili rangga.

The guwak's death itself involves a reversal of reality. He dies by drowning on top of a tree by causing the sea to come in and inundate the land. However, this reversal involves events that merely emphasise natural forces which are a familiar part of Yolngu experience. The king tides that sweep many miles inland along unprotected stretches of coastline and the enormous power of the gale force winds that seem to drive them on are the destructive powers summoned by the guwak.

Clearly, actual human beings are not in complete command of their own destiny in the way the ancestral guwak was, and in the myth, Yikuyanga and Muñumiyu (human in form) act out the instructions of the guwak. Human beings depend on the guwak and other wangarr ancestors to ensure the destiny of their spirits (e.g. for their spirit to rise to the Milky Way or become incorporated in the marrawili rangga). Their spiritual destiny necessitates a belief in super-human beings and powers. Death by drowning (in the past a frequent cause of death) is an instance of the lack of control human beings have over their own death. Yet it involves the same forces that the guwak summoned to cause his own self-determined death. The juxtaposition (and existence) of the two stories can be viewed as a mechanism for endowing actual events with ancestral qualities. The guwak died in an impossible way. However, the manner of his death is on the borderline of actual human experience. The guwak's control over his own destiny is also beyond the power of living human beings, but given the existence of the guwak his destiny becomes their destiny.
At a sociological level the guwak's death exemplifies or provides a model for the Yolngu ideal of 'natural' human death (see Chapter 5). A man should announce his death in advance and absolve all living relations and members of other clans from any responsibility of involvement in it. This is what the guwak does. This aspect of the ancestral guwak is congruent with the fact that the guwak rangga (see previous chapter) is used in contexts where it is necessary to mediate between disputing parties in a burial ceremony.1 It is also one of the objects used to summon people to participate in a burial ceremony (see Peterson, 1976:104,105). It also explains at one level why the guwak dance is one of the dances that can be performed when it is necessary to move a person's body during a burial ceremony (see Chapter 5 and fig. 17). It is when the body is moved that the mokuy spirit of the deceased is thought to be particularly dangerous and liable to attack anyone it suspects of causing the death.

The guwak is a symbol of natural death, death which brings no repercussions on the living. Symbolically the guwak is used to neutralise the anger of the deceased's mokuy spirit, and of living members of his clan, by expressing belief in the naturalness of a particular death.

The inside meaning of the painting discussed above is clearly encoded in the paintings 67-69, 72 in a number of ways. The canoe and paddles (pl. 67 ) represent the journey out to sea undertaken by the

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1 This occurred during our stay at Yirrkala in the context of the burial ceremony for a Gurrumuru Dhalwangu boy referred to earlier (see also Morphy, in press c). The guwak rangga was taken by Narritjin to Gurrumuru to attempt to reconcile the Gurrumuru Dhalwangu with the Bottom Dhalwangu and Madarrpa clans who they accused of being responsible for the person's death.
two guwak men. The canoe was tossed up by the tide on the Blue Mud Bay side of Cape Shield (see fig. 57), where it was transformed into a number of rocks on the beach. The marrawili tree is shown in two of the paintings. In painting (pl. 67) the guwak is seen on top of it. In this case the central part of the tree has the form of a cylindrical hollow log coffin, suggesting the guwak's death. The (ף) on the paddles was said to represent the cloud that arose out to sea when the guwak men drowned, and also Nyapililingu who began mourning when she saw the clouds out at sea and knew that death had occurred.

The turtle marks (鹪) on the sand also indirectly signify the death of the guwak, in this case the death of the guwak on the marrawili tree. According to a connected myth, the tidal wave (bandumul) summoned by the guwak was caused by the ancestral turtle rushing towards the beach at Djarrkpi to lay its eggs in the sand. As well as pushing the tide before it, it caused a strong wind (lungurrma). This myth is illustrated in painting (pl. 73). The cloud (ף) signs in the painting show its connection with the death of the guwak.

The inside interpretation adds further to the significance of the shape of the marrawili rangga (pl. 65). The head of the rangga, as we have shown, represents a cumulus cloud (and is explicitly interpreted as such). The cloud is a symbol of death and of female mourning. The guwak sat on the marrawili tree as he summoned the tide to come in and drown him. The top part of the marrawili rangga can thus be seen to encode reference to the death of the guwak and to the fact that he gave himself up to the marrawili.

1 The top of the cylinder was also said to represent the nest of the guwak and the guwak's eggs (c.f. Mağarrpa crocodile in Chapter 5).
Conclusion: The Marrawili and Yingapungapu Paintings Compared

In the previous two chapters I have considered the meanings attached to two sets of Manggalili paintings: the marrawili set and the yingapungapu set. The paintings focus on two separate but adjoining geographical areas. They are concerned with separate mythological events but ones which involve the same ancestral beings: they represent adjoining places on the same mythological track. Though the paintings share in common many signifiers and signifieds, the connotations of the signs are different in the two cases. For example marrngu, the possum, is signified in both sets of paintings. In the marrawili set it is signified by (×) signs, by dashed infill and by figurative representations. Its reference is primarily to its role in manufacturing the burrkun (possum-fur string) on the journey of the guwak and his companions from Burrwanydji. The burrkun was subsequently transformed into topographical features of Djarrakpi which are represented in the paintings. As a sacred object the burrkun is a major cultural property of the Manggalili clan and an important component of the ceremonial relationship between Manggalili and other Yirritja moiety clans. The possum thus played a major role in the mythological events encoded in the paintings. In the yingapungapu paintings possum was only given as a meaning for the dashed infill in the sign (×). The primary reference of possum in this case is to the blood of mourning women, the possum-fur string breast girdle being a sign of woman and possum scratch marks being a sign of blood. The possum is not a major actor in the events that led to the creation of the yingapungapu ground.

Clouds likewise are signified in both sets of paintings. In both contexts there is a common element in their usage: clouds as a sign of distant places and events. In the marrawili paintings, clouds
above the marrawili tree are a sign of Djarrakpi, the guwak's destination. Clouds are also integrated with the theme of possum-fur string. In the yingapungapu paintings clouds signify the place of death of the guwak men, and the death of the guwak on the marrawili tree. They also encode more general beliefs and practices associated with death and burial.

The difference between the two sets of paintings is not so much that they represent different geographical areas and refer to different mythological events. Indeed, the fact that they both encode topographical features and mythological events is a level of meaning that they share in common. More importantly, they belong to different categories of ceremonial art which at some levels are functionally distinct. The marrawili rangga which, as was demonstrated in Chapter 9, underlies the structure of the marrawili paintings is categorically distinguished from the yingapungapu ground sculpture in Yolngu thought (here I am not referring simply to differences in medium). Thus, Narritjin stated that the yingapungapu ground sculpture is for people when they are dead and is not ranggapuy (of the clan's sacred objects). He distinguished it from the marrawili rangga (pl. 65) which is 'your power, under the ground for you when you are alive'. The two sets of paintings were divided on a similar basis into ranggapuy and yingapungapu. The categorical distinction between the two types of painting has a number of behavioural and ideational correlates. The yingapungapu ground sculpture is concerned with activities that take place in a public forum.

1 Although some of the marrawili set were modified to such an extent that they were no longer classified as sacred (ranggapuy) paintings, they still belong to a set which derives its form from the marrawili rangga and are therefore opposed at this level to the yingapungapu paintings.
Although the yingapungapu is surrounded by prohibitions and restrictions, those prohibitions are not based on age and sex but on relationship to a dead person and the performance of tasks in the context of burial. Many of the meanings of a yingapungapu sculpture (and of the paintings), including knowledge of its form, are unrestricted. Indeed, they refer at one level to the functions of the sculpture and to rules of behaviour that apply to men and women alike and that are associated with it. On the other hand, the marrawili rangga itself is restricted. Women and uninitiated men should not see it, nor should they have knowledge of its meanings.

At another level the marrawili rangga and the yingapungapu sand sculpture have a different relationship to different kinds (or perhaps dimensions) of spiritual power. The marrawili rangga as a sacred object of the Manggalili clan contains märr (ancestral power), power that is released on behalf of members of the clan through its revelation to initiates in ceremonies (see Chapter 5). It is also one of the sources of spirits of dead clan members which provides the conception spirits of new generations of clanspeople. The consequences of infringing the restrictions surrounding the marrawili rangga are believed to be automatic. In contrast, the yingapungapu sculpture functions to contain spiritual powers of contagion resulting from a person's death and contact with the dead person's body, to ensure that they are not released to harm other people. There is no idea that these powers can be positive or beneficial, nor is the contagion considered to be automatic or undirected. Only certain categories of people are in danger, and the yingapungapu sculpture functions to protect them. To summarise: the marrawili rangga releases ancestral power through being revealed in closed contexts, whereas the yingapungapu contains pollution by being produced in open contexts.
Both the marrawili rangga and the yingapungapu are concerned with the spirits of dead Yolngu. However, they are concerned with different dimensions of the souls of the dead: the marrawili with the birrimburr soul and the yingapungapu with the mokuy soul (see Chapter 5). The marrawili rangga is concerned with the creative aspects of death associated with the spiritual continuity of the clan. The guwak 'gave himself up to the marrawili' and the marrawili is one of the sacred objects towards which the birrimburr soul of dead Manggalili can be directed. While the designs incised on the marrawili rangga may be painted on the chest of dead clan members; the yingapungapu design may not. The yingapungapu is concerned mainly with the negative aspects of death, with the containment of pollution, and with sociological aspects of death that affect the living. The difference between the two sets of paintings reflects the separate treatment of the birrimburr and mokuy soul in burial ceremonies.
CHAPTER 11

NYAPILILNGU'S BLOOD

In the conclusion to the previous chapter I was concerned to stress the different focus of the two sets of paintings considered so far: the marrawili paintings focusing on the continuity of human life and the Manggalili clan through the creative power of the ancestors; the yingapungapu paintings on discontinuities and separation. Clearly such differences are matters of relative focus and many of the same themes are expressed in both sets of paintings. The next set of interpretations which I discuss refer primarily to the first set of paintings, although they also provide a significant input into the yingapungapu paintings. Some belong to the most inside level of knowledge and were told me only by Narritjin. Each of these interpretations was said to be the inside interpretation. I will present them in the order I was told them. They are all concerned with human procreation and with the ancestral woman Nyapililngu.

Nyapililngu is characteristically portrayed at Djarrakpi in two aspects: one as a woman in mourning, letting blood from her head, the other as a woman (or sometimes a number of women) in the sand hills at Djarrakpi, spinning possum-fur string, collecting wild plums and snails to eat and making playthings for her children. She is said to be extremely shy and to always hide from men: she hid from ancestral guwak and she hides from living Yolngu. For instance Liyawulumu, a Gumatj 1 man, interpreted a Manggalili painting as follows:
Interpretation 1

'That is Nyapililngu. Nyapililngu, Wurramukurr, Burulburul are all women at Djarrakpî. They carry digging sticks in their hands and baskets on their heads, and cloth around their waists and another around their breasts. Nyapililngu hides herself away from men, she won't touch men, boys, nothing. When she sees men in the distance, on the beach, she hides. Her children hide.'

The fact that Nyapililngu had children yet always hides from men suggests a fundamental contradiction in the outside story, or rather an unanswered question: where do her children come from? The first inside interpretation was given to me as an interpretation of Banapana's painting (pl. 71) discussed in the last chapter. The painting was first interpreted for me by Narritjin as a yingapungapu and two digging sticks. This same interpretation was given for the painting by Banapana and Wuyarrin. Wuyarrin's interpretation differed from the others in one significant way, she stated that the left-hand digging stick was male and the right-hand one female. As we shall see later, this additional interpretation is significant because it alludes to the inside interpretations. The first inside interpretation is as follows:

Interpretation 2

'The digging sticks they are really a man and a woman. We make them look like digging sticks. We make them look the same way - not different from one another.'

Question: 'how do you know which is which?'

'We don't know, but they know. Nyapililngu said to Barrama [an ancestral being at Gângan (see Chapter 4)] 'Barrama, I want a man. Where is a man?' Barrama replied, 'You don't want a man. You have got one already'. 'I haven't got a man,' she said, and the two of them had an argument. 'You go to the bush,' said Barrama, 'and you will find that you have got a man'. And she found that there was a man living there in a different part.

This man was called Munumiya\(^1\), and the woman Nyapililngu. You don't make them different otherwise people will know. You have got to make them look the same and then people will think that they mean the same thing.'

\(^1\) One of the names of the guwak ancestors in human form.
This, the first level of inside interpretation, clears up the problem of Nyapililngu's children in the simplest possible way: Nyapililngu had a husband all the time. Representing both of them by the same sign, a digging stick, is said to be merely a device for obscuring this fact from the uninitiated. Three problems are suggested by this interpretation. One is why the information that Nyapililngu had a husband should be considered inside. The second is why Nyapililngu did not know of the existence of the man. The third is that if this is the inside interpretation, why does Banapana's painting orient interpretation in this direction? The carrying basket on the top of the right hand digging stick is a sign associated with Nyapililngu and thus suggests femaleness. The phallic shape of the other digging stick suggests maleness. Indeed, as I stated, the digging sticks were interpreted as male and female by Wuyarrin. Since in other Manggalili paintings artists frequently painted facial characteristics (eyes, nose and mouth) on the digging stick (see pl. 74) the interpretation of male and female human figures as a meaning for digging sticks in Manggalili paintings must be common currency. The reason why digging sticks are an appropriate sign for male and female human figures remains unanswered as does the question of the relationship between the male and female humans represented.

Clearly one reason for signifying male and female by the same form is that it provides a means of representing the conversation between Barrama and Nyapililngu, the essential point of which is that Nyapililngu did not realise that she had a husband all along. I was told this story on several occasions. One variant was obtained when discussing a painting similar to figure 61. The painting consisted of three digging sticks (unmodified by the addition of other signs such as the carrying basket as in plate 71). Narritjin stated that
they represented three people on the sand hills at Djarrakpi talking to Barrama. Barrama this time told them to go into the woods and they would find that one of them was a man. On this occasion their ignorance is made quite explicit; it was not simply that the women had never seen the man, but that they did not know which of them was a man. The three digging sticks are a means of visually representing their lack of knowledge. According to this interpretation two of the digging sticks were female (the two Nyapililngu) and one was male.

The first level of inside meaning, as I have shown, involves the digging sticks being interpreted to represent human figures. The subsequent levels involve the reinterpretation of one of the digging sticks as a digging stick. The second inside interpretation was also given by Narritjin for the painting in plate 71:

Interpretation 3 (second inside interpretation)

'Nyapililngu made everything on the beach side of Djarrakpi. She made the waterholes, she made the stringy bark, she made the possum-fur string, she made the feather string and she made a man himself, her own husband. And nobody knows about this. There used to be only one digging stick but now there are two. That means she has got a husband. Everybody asked her where her husband was but they never know. They asked her if she had a husband with her. This one[0] that's her husband, that's his penis. This one [▼], that's female, and that's her vulva. Very very tricky: you and me we know something, other things we will never know.'

This interpretation differs in a number of important respects from the previous inside level. According to the first version men and women existed at the same time but were ignorant of the fact. The digging sticks represent Nyapililngu's confusion and lack of knowledge. In the second interpretation Nyapililngu pre-exists her husband and, more than that, creates him. The digging sticks represent the success with which she hid the fact from other people. According to both
interpretations (2 and 3), the digging sticks represent respectively a man and a woman. In the first case the (♀) is interpreted as a stringy bark carrying basket, which is an outside interpretation or public meaning. In the second case it is interpreted as a vulva, its inside meaning.

The final inside interpretation (below) modifies the previous ones in an important way: it eliminates men entirely. This interpretation was provided by Narritjin with reference to a painting by himself and Baluka (pl. 76). The outside interpretation is consistent with those discussed in Chapter 9. The central object represents the marrawili tree at Djarrakpi. Possums are shown climbing the tree and a white cockatoo (ngerrk) is perched on top. Emus are shown scratching for water in the lake bed. The cross-hatched clan designs represent the sand hills at Djarrakpi where the ancestral woman lived.

The inside interpretation is as follows:

Interpretation 4

'Those two women named Nyapililngu, Nayipungay, Baŋmarra, Mungalilinga. That's a digging stick [in the middle] but really that's her husband. Husband for those two women. The emus are drilling that waterhole, but that's only one meaning. Really that waterhole is a vagina, and the emus digging a hole is really a man digging a hole in those two women. It is really a penis.

The two women asked the guwak, 'we want a husband. What are you going to do about it?' And the guwak said, 'you have got a husband, that's all'. He says 'emu he gives you everything, possum he gives you everything. And you have got nothing to worry about. You take hold of the digging stick you are carrying with you and you put it up yourself. That will make you happy. You won't be sad anymore, you'll be happy. Men have nothing to make you happy.' Only the ancestral beings gave her the digging stick, and that will cause the blood and make you happy. (Very strange story, no man was living with them). 'You have got to push that stick inside your body sitting there. And when you have finished lots of blood will come down, and the blood will flow from your body into the lake.' And that's why there are lots of colours today in that lake, it is the blood that flowed from those two women. That is a good story, these are good words, kindly, friendly.'
This interpretation selectively combines features of the interpretations previously discussed (1-3) (see fig. 69). The man (or at least the whole man) is eliminated from the myth. In this way the interpretation corresponds with the public story in which Nyapililangu is portrayed living independent of men and concealed from them. A direct relationship is established between Nyapililangu and the wangarr ancestors as in interpretation 2, although in this case with the guwak rather than Barrama. Finally Nyapililangu creates her own man, or in this case penis. The result of this selection is the production of a myth which establishes the priority of a female in mediating between the wangarr ancestors of the Manggalili clan and living members of the clan. Nyapililangu's blood is believed to be a spiritual source of Manggalili children. It is instrumental in their spirit conception:

'If you are living with your wife then the spirit from Manggalili, the spirit from Nyapililangu comes to you and they give you children. They giving you Yirritja moiety children. A mother should be watching out and when she feels she has a baby then she knows Nyapililangu has given her a baby. Whether they give you a good baby or a bad baby is something you don't control - because the waters in the lake are still changing, sometimes they make you happy sometimes they make you sad, you don't know which one she has given you.'

On another occasion Narritjin told me that women conceived a Manggalili spirit child when they went down to the lake to wash.

Narritjin's interpretation of plate 76 can clearly be applied to plate 71 and figure 61 (in fact the interpretation was applied by Narritjin to paintings similar to these). The digging sticks (all or one) signify by this interpretation a digging stick or rather a digging stick as penis. Digging stick is the acknowledged outside meaning of the ( ) sign (and a phallus is clearly one of its most obvious connotations or possible interpretations, especially in the
case of plate 71). However, although the digging stick signifies penis, a meaning that is intuitively satisfying, it does so with a final ironic twist; it is a penis, without a man, controlled by a woman. The interpretation given above can be applied to other paintings.

The Marrawili Set

The lake was created by the blood of the ancestral woman Nyapililngu as it flowed from her vagina. The red cross hatching in the central sections of paintings plates 59 and 60 represent menstrual blood. Loci 2 and 3 which represent the places where Nyapililngu spun possum-fur string (burrrkun) also represent the places where she menstruated. The wavy lines across the marrawili rangga (pl. 65:2,3) represent her blood flowing down the sand hills and into the lake. The lake is said to be part fresh water and part salty ('bad tasting') water. It is the latter that is thought to be Nyapililngu's blood. In the more public versions of the story (Chapter 9) the emu ancestor is pictured searching for water in the lake bed. Although he dug a number of wells he was unable to find fresh water. The fact that the lake was created by the flow of blood from Nyapililngu is used as an explanation for his lack of success. The vertical strata of the lake are divided into two distinct layers which are said to correspond with the dual aspect of its waters, part salt - part fresh.

Narritjin and his sons once tried to dig a well in the lake bed close to the place where they had built their settlement. When they had dug through the top layer of white sand, they came to a layer of fine red sand, sand so fine that according to Narritjin it ran back into the hole as they dug it, just like water. This layer of red sand
was interpreted as a further confirmation of the truth of the mythological events.

The emu digging water holes in the lake bed is explicitly said to symbolise sexual intercourse. The emu's leg is analogous to the digging stick with which Nyapililngu cut herself. The emu's leg represents a pronged fish spear, and its neck and head a spear thrower (fig. 70). The ancestral emu is sometimes said to be digging in the lake with the fish spear. When he could find no water in the lake bed, it was his spear that he threw over the sand hills and into the beach. In dances spears can be represented by digging sticks. This suggests that the fish spear also signifies penis, though this meaning was never explicitly stated. I think that it is at this level that Narritjin's statement 'emu and possum they give you everything' has to be understood; they symbolise sexual intercourse. The emu in digging a hole from which water flows is like Nyapililngu digging a hole from which blood flows.

In paintings from Djarrakpi, any digging stick sign must have the connotation of penis, at least to those with knowledge of the inside story, but the actual digging stick rangga encodes both male and female sexual characteristics. The rangga, which represents Nyapililngu's digging stick, is illustrated in figure 71. It consists of a hard wooden core with holes bored in it top and bottom. It is decorated by possum-fur string wound around it to form two bands top and bottom. Possum-fur tassles are tied through the holes and hung on either side of the object (many rangga are decorated in a similar way, see Elkin, Berndt and Berndt, 1950:17,34-38). The surface of the possum-fur is said to signify female pubic hair. Wound around the stick, the possum-fur string forms a cylindrical cover which represents the
vagina. The digging stick itself is the penis. The hole bored through the base of the stick also represents the vagina. The possum-fur string tassles tied through the hole signify the penis, and the process of inserting them represents sexual intercourse itself. It is important here to stress the bivalency of the rangga: not only does the rangga as a whole represent both male and female sexual characteristics, so also in different contexts does the wooden core and the possum-fur string.

The meaning penis (or rather, digging-stick-as-penis) is also encoded in the marrawili rangga. In the case of the outside story for the painting shown in plate 76 the central figure was said to represent the marrawili tree. In the inside version (interpretation 4) it represents Nyapililngu's digging stick penis. The top half of the rangga (pl. 65) has female connotations, representing cumulus clouds shaped like breasts. The bottom half of the central figure in the painting in plate 76 is shown entering or inserted into a hole in the ground (signifying vagina) and clearly has phallic connotations. The central section of the marrawili rangga, as I stated earlier, represents the lake bed at Djarrakpi. The red cross hatched lines signify the blood of Nyapililngu and the layer of red sand, the white signifies fresh water and the colour of the sand hills, the yellow signifies blood mixed with mud at the bottom of the lake and the black feathers of the guwak floating in the water.

The marrawili rangga thus encodes meanings which have reference to all of the inside interpretations considered in the last three chapters. This is clearly consistent with the position of the marrawili rangga as the major Manggalili sacred object at Djarrakpi. Figure 72 represents a further elaboration of the marrawili template discussed
in Chapter 9, suggesting how it encodes key meanings referred to in the subsequent two chapters. The marrawili links the female (Nyapililngu's) burrkun with the male (guwak's) burrkun, and is associated with the origin of Manggalili clan territory (through the journey of the guwak). It refers to the guwak's death, to the death of subsequent generations of Manggalili, to the incorporation of their spirits within the body of the rangga and to the rise of their spirits to the Milky Way. Finally, it is associated with the myth of creation of Manggalili people and the spirit conception of new generations of clanspeople.

The Yingapungapu Set

The public story linking Nyapililngu, digging stick and blood portrays her cutting her head in mourning. According to this interpretation the basket(?) operates as a sign for Nyapililngu by signifying her collecting wild plums (munydjutj) (e.g. pl. 64, 75). The digging stick which she used to help her walk up and down the sand hills and to help knock down the wild plums is also the stick with which she cut her head. The primary topographical reference of the head cutting is to the area of the ancestral yingapungapu. However, it also applies to various places along the length of the sand dunes, the area surrounding the lake where Nyapililngu mourned.

According to the inside story Nyapililngu also cut herself, but in this case she cut her vagina from which menstrual blood flowed. In this context the basket signifies vulva. The two sets of meanings attached to the (?) are linked. According to the first interpretation the basket is filled with munydjutj, red plums which are tabu to menstruating women and in the second case the basket is filled with menstrual blood. The primary reference of the inside
story is to the lake and sand hills in the marrawili paintings, as it was there that Nyapililngu menstruated. However, the blood that flowed from the mourning Nyapililngu into the yingapungapu was also said to be menstrual blood. Similarly the red ochre painted on the body during mortuary ceremonies is said to be (or to signify) the menstrual blood of female clan ancestors. This suggests that the symbolic significance of women cutting their heads in mourning, and in particular of Nyapililngu cutting her head, lies partly in its analogy with menstrual blood and female menstruation.

The shape of the yingapungapu ground (e.g. pl. 71) itself suggests the shape of a vulva. Eliptical signs (e.g. the \(\forall\) digging stick in plate 71 and the \(\bigcirc\) on the head of Nyapililngu in plate 75) do encode the meaning vulva, and one of the meanings encoded in the dashed infill inside the yingapungapu (see fig. 68) is menstrual blood. Moreover, the yingapungapu shape can be used to signify the lake at Djarrekapil created by Nyapililngu's blood and where the emus 'drilled' for water (signifying penis entering vulva). However, I was never given 'vulva' as a meaning for a yingapungapu.

Blood of Life and Blood of Death

In the case of the marrawili paintings menstrual blood is associated primarily with health and fertility, and more specifically with the health and fertility of the Manggalili clan. The journey of the guwak and possum to Djararakpi to establish a homeland and the events that took place there after their arrival represent a myth of origin of the Manggalili clan territory. The myth is also concerned with the transfer of power from the wargarr ancestors of the clan to its human (Yolngu) members. The marrawili rangga, the most important
ranga at Djarrakpi, was already in the land. It acted as a reference point for the other wango ancestors, but it also encodes the events that happened after their arrival. The female ancestral being Nyapililngu was also at Djarrakpi when the guwak arrived. She learnt from the possum and guwak how to make feather string and how to spin possum fur, symbolic materials that were later controlled by Manggalili men. Before the arrival of the guwak, Nyapililngu lived without men and without sex. She did not menstruate. Following the arrival of the guwak, Nyapililngu learnt how to satisfy herself sexually with her digging stick penis. Her blood flowed into the lake and became the spiritual generator of subsequent generations of Manggalili clan members. Nyapililngu, herself half ancestral being and half Yolngu, mediated between the ancestral beings who established the Manggalili homeland and are incarnated in the shape of the landscape and the Manggalili clan members whose territory it is today.

As well as containing the spirit children (or spiritual essence) of members of the Manggalili clan, the lake's waters are considered to have health giving properties. Clan members claimed that their health remained good while they were at Djarrakpi because they swam and waded in the waters of the lake each day.

In the case of the yingapungapu paintings loss of blood is associated with death. Through his death, the guwak established the ideal pattern of death for the Manggalili. The myth is concerned with what happens to the spirit after death and ultimately with the question of reincarnation. The cutting of the head in mourning at one level is clearly an expression of grief at the loss through death of a relative. Evidently it is a powerful symbol or expression of grief independent of any connotations it may have which connects it with
ancestral menstrual blood. Equally clearly, if menstrual blood is an important element in the complex of symbols associated with death and burial, then it is possible that it could be encoded in the actions of women cutting their heads. The fact that the stringy bark basket carried by women on their heads is associated negatively with menstruation through containing a red fruit tabu to menstruating women and positively in the inside story, suggests that this is in fact the case.

The red ochre rubbed over the bodies of participants in the djungguwan ceremony was shown in Chapter 5 to be a symbol or a manifestation of the menstrual blood of clan ancestors. Its explicit purpose was to renew the strength of living clan members after the period of weakness and danger immediately following a death. Related to this is the belief that menstrual blood is one of the media for transferring spiritual powers both from the ancestral to the human plane (as we saw above) and from human generation to human generation by way of the clan's sacred objects (see Chapter 5). The death of a clan member as well as representing a physical and emotional loss, poses the problem of what is to happen to his birrimbirr soul and to the spiritual power that he has amassed during his life. As discussed earlier, one of the main themes of a burial ceremony is the return of the spirit of a dead person to his clan well and to the sacred objects buried within it. Clearly, burying the dead person's body in a place associated with the ancestral woman's menstrual blood represents a way of symbolically reincorporating the spirit of the dead person within the reservoir of clan spirits. The vulva-shaped yingapungapu ground suggests even more directly the return of a person's spirit to its ancestral womb. An analogous idea to this was expressed in the
Madarrpa ceremony discussed in Chapter 5 where the body, as egg, was laid to rest in the grave, as nest, of the ancestral crocodile (bāru).

Conclusion

In the previous three chapters I focused on interpretations of Manggalili paintings, showing the relationship between sets of interpretations at different levels and sets of paintings. In order to demonstrate it was necessary to examine the way in which the same meanings were encoded in different ways in different paintings. By this way of conclusion I examine the iconography of Manggalili paintings from a different perspective, focusing more on the relationship between the paintings themselves and linking my analysis to the discussion in Chapter 8 concerning the significance of the different categories of paintings. Finally I consider some of the implications of the system of encoding meanings to the Yolngu system of knowledge.

In the case of the marrawili set of paintings the most relevant categorical distinction is between likanbuy-type paintings and modified likanbuy-type paintings (see fig. 56). The central section of the painting reproduced in plate 60, the painting on the marrawili rangga, fits into the first category. All other paintings belonging to the set fit into the second category. The case of the yingapungapu paintings is a little more complicated, as the paintings are innovated forms based on the yingapungapu sand sculpture. The yingapungapu sand sculpture is not a restricted form, although it encodes restricted meanings. It is classified by the Yolngu as non-madayin and is not thought to contain the marr of the wangarr beings of the clan. However, although the yingapungapu sculpture is not strictly comparable to the marrawili rangga painting, as a design it
stands in the same relation to the set of paintings associated with it as the painting of the marrawili rangga stands to the marrawili set. The marrawili rangga painting and the yingapungapu sculpture will be termed basic design forms.

Figure 73 illustrates the relationship between the two basic design forms and the respective sets of paintings associated with them. The form and content of the paintings in the two right-hand columns can all be related to one or other of the basic design forms. Because many of the meanings encoded in the yingapungapu paintings are also encoded in the marrawili rangga, some of the modified paintings can be related to both underlying design forms (this is particularly true of the more restricted meanings associated with the death of the guwak and Nyapilingugu mourning the guwak's death).

The painting of the three digging sticks (fig. 61) and a similar painting (pl. 71) are related both to the yingapungapu and to the marrawili rangga. The structure of both paintings consists of three main feature blocks. Both places represented can be conceptualised in terms of a tripartite division of topographical features: beach side, central place and bush side. Both paintings also include representations of digging sticks, which are major symbols of the mythological events that took place at both places. The modification of the central digging stick in plate 71 orients interpretation towards the yingapungapu set. The modification of the digging sticks at either side orients interpretation towards the marrawili set. The modifications taken as a whole maintain the dual reference of the painting. Both paintings, in particular figure 61, show many of the characteristics of likanbuy-type paintings through their lack of figurative representations and the corresponding predominance of
geometric motifs. However, the geometric art in both cases consists of the public version of the Manggalili clan design (≡≡). The major clan design associated with the marrawili rangga (≈) is not represented.

The second-from-right column of figure 73 shows some of the main themes encoded in the marrawili rangga and yingapungapu paintings that are selected out and fixed in the modified clan paintings. The numbers refer to the plates which illustrate the paintings that focus on the respective themes. All of these themes are encoded either in the marrawili rangga painting and template (fig. 62) or the yingapungapu sand sculpture design. In the case of the modified likanbuy-type paintings certain themes are selected out and represented explicitly through particular combinations of figurative and geometric representations. Some of the modified paintings correspond closely to the structure of the basic design forms. Thus plates 57 and 59 (as well as figure 61 and plate 71) include elements that correspond to all the major loci of the marrawili template. However, the loci are represented in such a way that they orient interpretation of the painting in a particular direction, and at the same time conceal the form of the marrawili rangga and painting. The lake at Djarrakpi, for example, is represented by an emu in plate 57 which is one of the complex of meanings associated with locus 7 of the marrawili template (fig. 62). The meaning associated with this locus is thus fixed at the public level of an emu digging for water, and at this level the sign (that is, the figurative representations of emus) can be understood without further interpretation.

It is important to note at this stage a major difference between the modifications of the marrawili rangga as a basic design
form and the lack of modification of the yingapungapu basic design form. In the case of the yingapungapu paintings, the figurative representations occur as expositions of the basic themes encoded in the design without altering or obscuring the essential shape of the design. One example of this concerns the many variations on the theme of the sand crab cleaning the ground which elaborate on one of the meanings encoded within the sand sculpture design. The reason why the yingapungapu design is not obscured in the modified paintings, whereas the marrawili basic design form is, will be considered shortly.

In plate 57 referred to above, a number of meanings encoded in the basic design form were selected out for representation in the same modified likanbuy painting. The guwak-possum-fur string complex, the emu and the cashew nut tree are all represented, although interpretation of the painting is oriented towards a single overall theme: the journey of the various wangarr beings across Arnhem Land. Other paintings focus on a more restricted set of meanings. Plate 77, for example, shows the possums climbing up and down the tree. The same applies to some of the paintings in the yingapungapu set. Plate 78, for example, shows the sand crab cleaning the ground, and plate 73 shows the turtle swimming towards the beach. Although both of these paintings, in particular through the cloud designs and in the case of the crab painting the details of the cross hatching, allude to other of the meanings encoded in the yingapungapu design, they refer primarily to events that occurred at particular places. Neither reflects the structure of the basic design form as a whole.

Wuyarrin's painting of Nyapiliingu walking with her digging sticks (pl. 75), on the other hand, although it fixes the meaning of
the painting at the level of a single theme, does have a structure homologous with the marrawili template. However, this homologous structure can only be perceived by first establishing its relationship with other members of the set. The painting can be related through Bokarra's version of the same painting (pl. 64) to the digging stick painting (fig. 61), and from there back to the marrawili template. Bokarra's painting encodes the main loci represented on the marrawili template, as I demonstrated in Chapter 9. Bokarra's painting differs from the Wuyarrin's (pl. 75) in two main ways. First, the loci are marked on the digging sticks and secondly meanings associated with two of the loci are represented by figurative representations. The fact that the two loci in Bokarra's painting have been activated through the representation of possums makes the reference to the template explicit, whereas in the case of Wuyarrin's painting the relationship is further obscured.

The digging stick painting (fig. 61) and the painting by Wuyarrin (pl. 75) show relationships between paintings operating at a different level, that of the separation of and relationship between individual meanings encoded in the marrawili basic design form. The digging stick is encoded in the marrawili rangga painting (pl. 65) at loci 4 and 5. It is also part of the syntagmatic chain of meanings associated with locus 7, which includes reference to menstrual blood and the digging stick penis. It is also encoded in the overall shape of the rangga, particularly in its pointed base. In figure 61 (and also pl. 71) it is represented as a digging stick. In plate 71, the lateral digging sticks have been altered to give them male and female attributes respectively. These modifications orient the interpretation of the painting towards the inside meaning, associating digging stick with penis and vulva. In plate 74 the modification has gone a stage
further in orienting interpretation towards only one of the meanings of the syntagmatic chain associated with digging stick in the marrawili template: female human being. The representation is still ambiguous, as it alludes to the relationship between digging stick and human female without defining it. Finally, in Wuyarin's painting (pl. 75) the central digging stick has been replaced by a figurative representation that can be interpreted unambiguously as that of a human female (because of the representation of the breast girdle). Furthermore the composition of the painting orients the interpretation of the lateral digging sticks in a mundane direction and at a surface level at least disassociates the meanings Nyapililngu, digging stick penis and blood and associates Nyapililngu, digging stick as walking stick, wild plums as food and sandhills.

The right-hand column in figure 73 refers to the final process of disassociating elements from the contexts in which they occur in the men's sacred art. Paintings of this type consist solely of single or multiple figurative representations of animals and objects from the myths and song cycles associated with the clan's territory. Plate 79 illustrates one such painting by Narritjin of a possum. Paintings such as this cannot be related back to basic design forms in the way that other paintings can be. The selection of animal species for representation in the paintings is nevertheless constrained by the set of natural species associated with Manggalili madayin.

I will now review the relationships between the paintings considered so far. The painting on the marrawili rangga stands in relation to all other paintings in the marrawili set as a restricted form. Clearly the shape of the marrawili rangga (pl. 65) itself is also a restricted form. The painting shown in plate 60, as I stated
previously, was made for me personally by Narritjin. It was painted in effective seclusion, with Narritjin's eldest son Banapana being the only person present. Though Manggalili women and children remained close to the place where it was being painted, they stayed away from the painting. The design was painted as it should look on the rangga. The manggalili clan design in its elaborated form, with the (∞) design outline being duplicated a number of times in cross hatched bands (×××) and detailed cross hatched infill within, does not occur in any of the other paintings. The closest to it is the central section of the painting shown in plate 59, in which the concealed form of the marrawili rangga can be identified. According to Narritjin, the (∞) design, even in its unelaborated form as in plates 57 and 59, should not be used in paintings produced for sale through the craft store at Yirrkala where they will be openly displayed. In fact, Banapana was criticised by Narritjin for producing the design albeit in minimal form in the painting shown in plate 57. 'It shouldn't be in a public painting'. The design does not occur in any paintings belonging to the yingapungapu set which are by definition public paintings, having been developed for the commercial art market.

The marrawili set of paintings are both modifications of and elaborations on the marrawili rangga and its associated template and/or meanings encoded in it. In relation to the commercial art market the relationships between the marrawili set and the basic design form can be explained in two ways. Firstly, as I have suggested in Chapter 8, the modifications enable the restricted category of paintings to be maintained intact at the level of restrictedness of form. This does not apply in the case of the yingapungapu set, as the basic design form itself is not a restricted component of the
culture. Secondly, by modifying the basic design form and selecting some of the meanings encoded in it for representation and excluding others, it is possible to create a large number of morphologically different paintings for sale. These are new forms which are culturally meaningful but which do not adversely affect the value of art objects within the 'traditional' cultural system. The means whereby paintings are modified to obscure restricted components of the art can be seen at a different level to operate as principles of design generation which enable a large number of different forms to be produced from the same basic template.

From a different perspective, analysis of the relationship between paintings in the marrawili set enables us to gain insights into certain aspects of the system as it operates in traditional cultural contexts, in particular into the multivalent function of geometric art. The relationship between the basic design form (and the marrawili template) and the set of paintings derived from them is a result of converting the productivity of the system at the level of content to productivity of the level of form. The possibility of creating a large set of modified likanbuy-type paintings depends on the multivalency of the basic design forms.

The power of geometric art lies both in its multivalency and in the fact that it can express a different order of relationship between things than can the figurative representations. Thus at a general level the geometric paintings most closely related to the structure of the marrawili template (pl. 65 and fig. 61) encode the relationship between ancestral events and landforms. The loci in geometric paintings encode both places and the mythological events that led to the transformation of those places. Geometric art
encodes meanings in such a way that all the meanings are equally related to the painting. Such is not the case in the figurative representations in which the meaning most closely related to a figurative representation is its immediate signified - that is, the object it is intended to look like. Thus in the case of the painting on the marrawili rangga all the meanings encoded in it are equally related to the loci at which they occur. Locus 6 (fig. 62 and pl. 65), for example, encodes a set of meanings including cashew nut grove, ngärra ceremonial ground, the guwak-possum-burrkun complex and a particular place at Djarrakpi. If the locus is represented by a figurative representation instead of or in addition to being represented by a geometric form then its interpretation is biased in a particular direction. For example, in plate 57 it is represented by a possum which orients interpretation towards the meaning 'possum'.

Geometric art, through its multivalency and its encoding of relationships rather than things, enables relationships to be demonstrated between objects and events that at other levels appear unconnected. In particular, it can show relationships between things which are left unconnected in outside interpretations and in paintings modified for public consumption. For example, in the outside interpretation of marrawili paintings recorded in Chapter 9, no connection is made between the wangarr emu and the female wangarr Nyapililngu. The emu is associated with the lake at Djarrakpi (fig. 62: feature block B7), and Nyapililngu is associated with the sandhills (feature block A). The public paintings tend to reflect this lack of connection. Thus Nyapililngu walking up and down the sandhills and the emu looking for water are themes that occur separately on outside paintings. In the outside interpretations that
refer to Djarrakpi, the emu is said to be looking for water in the lake bed. Although the emu created waterholes in various places on his journey to Djarrakpi he was said to be unable to find fresh water there. The reason for his inability to find fresh water is not part of the body of public knowledge. It concerns the relationship between the emu and Nyapililngu. Nyapililngu is in fact associated with the lake at Djarrakpi. The lake was formed by the flow of her menstrual blood. The knowledge that the lake's waters were formed by her blood connects her to the emu, who could not find fresh water because the lake's waters were already mixed with her blood. Likewise, the emu did not create a waterhole there because the lake was there already.

The above is only one of several ways in which Nyapililngu can be connected with the emu. A second is the analogy between the emu scratching the land and Nyapililngu using her digging stick penis. The marrawili rangga painting does not give priority to any one of the meanings located at each locus, nor does it influence the way in which they are to be interpreted and related to one another, beyond ensuring that the interpretations do not contradict the logic of the relationship between the loci and the distribution of mythologically significant features of the topography at Djarrakpi.

The geometric art is multivalent, but its interpretation is initially obscured by the non-representational nature of its elements. In contrast, figurative representations obscure the multiplex relationship between things encoded in the artistic system by orienting interpretation in a particular direction. Nevertheless I have shown how it is possible for a Yolngu man of knowledge to extend interpretations of paintings which consist predominantly of figurative representations
beyond the boundaries of the themes explicitly encoded in the paintings. We have seen that once we have the key to a basically geometric painting it too becomes readily interpretable, although never to the full extent of its multivalency. Thus in the case of the marrawili design, the knowledge that each locus represents a position around the lake at Djarrakpi immediately establishes it as a grid onto which a series of external referents can be mapped, a grid to which knowledge gained from outside the artistic system can be immediately applied. Knowledge of the landscape at Djarrakpi, of some of the mythological events that took place there, knowledge of the taste of the lake's water and of the colour of the sand in the lake's bed are all part of the precoded knowledge an individual will have gained by the time the marrawili rangga and its meanings are revealed to him. Much of this knowledge can be related to elements of the form of the rangga. I suggest that much of the power of the geometric art lies in the fact that an object that was previously unknown to an individual through its restriction, and that eludes immediate interpretation, provides a framework for encoding and showing the relationship between so many things, learnt separately, in a wide variety of different contexts.
CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION

In the introduction I stressed that the anthropological study of art is the study of a system of communication which encodes and expresses meaning. In the ensuing chapters I examined the way in which art objects are used in a variety of cultural contexts. I outlined the structure of the Yolngu artistic system, considering both the formal structure of paintings and the distribution of rights in them; and I analysed iconographic and symbolic aspects of the system. In conclusion, I will demonstrate the relationships between the structural and semantic aspects of the artistic system, the use of art objects in specific functional contexts, and the structure of the society that produces them. In particular I am concerned with the answers to two questions. Firstly, in what sense do paintings have power? Secondly, how does the function of the artistic system as a system of communication contribute to the power of paintings?

Questions about the power of paintings are central to understanding the reasons for their use in ceremonies. The instrumental functions of paintings concern the summoning, release and direction of ancestral power, mär, to serve a variety of human ends. The selection of a painting depends partly on its instrumental function in the ceremony concerned, whether it is intended to direct the birrimbirr soul of a recently deceased person towards its reincorporation within the realm of the wangarr beings; or to renew the fertility of the land; or to release conception spirits. I showed in Chapter 5 how the selection of a coffin painting depended on two main factors: the
clan affiliations of the dead person and the route chosen to direct his spirit. The fact that the Yolngu artistic system encodes with considerable subtlety the relationships between people, social groups, places and wangarr beings means that a painting can be chosen that is appropriate to the particular death, to where the person died, to the clan he belonged to, and to the wangarr beings with which his spirit is thought to be most closely associated. Each burial ceremony is thus a unique performance, a creative event that directs ancestral power towards a specific objective.

However, although the Yolngu artistic system is structured in such a way that paintings can be selected to fulfill highly specific functions, this fact in itself does not explain how paintings are believed to be effective in reincorporating and transmitting a dead person's soul. The emic explanation of the power of paintings is straightforward. Paintings are ancestral designs. They are part of the clan's wangarr ancestral inheritance and, further, are a manifestation (mali) of the wangarr being concerned. This explanation presupposes the belief in wangarr beings themselves: wangarr designs have power because they are manifestations of wangarr beings. The questions that must be asked are: how do designs contribute to the belief in ancestral beings, and how are designs thought to contain the many refractions of the power of the wangarr?

These questions imply a Durkheimian perspective, although with some differences of emphasis. From this perspective wangarr ancestors do not exist and the problem then becomes one of demonstrating the real source of the power of the objects that refer to them. However, Durkheim over-simplifies matters by focusing on a single source of real power, the moral force of society mediated through the effervescence of ceremonial performances.
In answering the two questions posed above I incorporate aspects of the substantivists viewpoint of Spiro (1966). In particular, I see the different refractions of *wangarr* power as reflecting different substantive desires and emotions. The power of paintings must be understood partly in relation to the substantive desires that they satisfy and the instrumental functions that they are believed to be able to fulfill. However, unlike Spiro (1966:122), I do see the sociological functions of symbolic systems as contributing to the power of objects in such a way that this power is reflected onto super-human beings.

The sources of power of paintings lie in four main areas. Firstly, paintings gain power through their use in ceremonies. Secondly, paintings gain power through the way in which they represent *wangarr* beings. Thirdly, they have real power in a political context. Finally, the artistic system itself is powerful because of the ways in which it encodes meaning. The encoding function of paintings is clearly relevant to an understanding of their power in each of the other three senses. The encoding function of paintings also has separate status as a source of power because certain properties of the way in which the system of encoding meaning is structured exist independent of any of the particular ways in which paintings are integrated with other aspects of the Yolngu socio-cultural system.

Durkheim was correct in saying that belief in paintings as manifestations of ancestral beings is reinforced in ceremonies in the sense that they are endowed with power through being the focus of attention. The designs are set forms which exist separately from any one context of occurrence or any one medium. The fact that the designs last beyond a single generation, and occur in different contexts and
on different objects, enables the feelings of power and well-being generated in ceremonies to be imprinted on those designs in a way that transcends the particular event. The power of paintings is enhanced by the way in which they are integrated within the structure of ceremonial performances as a whole and by their flexibility as a medium for transferring power (Chapter 5). Although I have argued that the various instrumental functions that paintings are thought to fulfill all rest on the assumption that as a class of things they contain wangarr power, at the same time the fact that they are used for different purposes enables them to tap the power generated by a wide range of human emotions in different ceremonial performances.

I showed in Chapter 5 how paintings and other manifestations of wangarr beings could be used to mutually reinforce one another, to concentrate power in a particular object or diffuse it widely. Thus in the djungguwan-molk ceremony I showed how at a particular moment the attentions of the group could be focused on an individual through producing a painting on his chest, singing songs connected with the painting and blowing the sacred trumpet over the painting.

Each of these manifestations can be realised separately in a wide variety of different contexts. The songs can be performed in the open camp or at burial ceremonies, the painting can be produced on objects or on the body of a dead person, and the trumpet can be blown over blood as it is released from men's arms or can be blown over a circumcised youth. Different emotions are generated according to the situation: individual loss and grief in the case of a burial ceremony, or the well being of the groups involved and of the land in the case of the djungguwan-molk. As I argued in Chapter 5, the different emotions correspond with or are appropriate to different refractions of ancestral
power: spirit children, birrimburr souls or generalised wangarr power. Paintings are associated with all of these both through the occurrence of the same painting in different associational contexts and through the fact that they encode meanings that operate at different levels of specificity. For example, because people are named after wangarr beings that are manifest in the paintings, the paintings can refer to associations between individual people and wangarr power and also to wangarr power in a more general sense. Paintings are transferable and transportable and can be used to establish the relationship between one object and another or one situation and the next both through association and signification.

Although Durkheim recognises the linking function of paintings as fixed forms, he denies any significance to the different refractions of ancestral power or to the fact that paintings can be related to a number of differently articulated models of the relationship between the human and the ancestral world. Thus he writes, 'whether the efficacy of a sacred object is represented in an abstract form in the mind or is attributed to some personal agent does not really matter. The psychological roots of both beliefs are identical: an object is sacred because it inspires in one way or another, a collective sentiment of respect' (1961:301). In fact, however, the different conceptualisations of ancestral power reflect different emotions and substantive desires which are separated out by context. The appropriateness of different models and metaphors of ancestral power to different circumstances enhances both the utility and believability of the ancestral world and its forces. The fact that all these models can be related to the same set of objects means that the objects themselves can tap the power generated by a whole variety of human emotions, store it and
release it again to serve different ends.

For example, the use of paintings in burial ceremonies enables ancestral power to be associated with particular known individuals and with the emotions felt towards them. In this way affective impressions of actual human beings are associated with the paintings, and this aspect of the power of paintings is continually reinforced. Yet the paintings also enable the individual attributes of these people to be generalised over time and incorporated within the more abstract power associated with the objects. In this way art objects provide one of the main mechanisms whereby, to quote Maddock (1972:175), 'the spirit [becomes] a *tabula rasa* sometime in between incarnations' converting it into a 'spiritual essence from which personality has been erased.'

So far I have considered the way in which paintings are endowed with power though their use in ceremonies in which they are the focal point of cohesive action directed towards relating people to the *wangarr* beings. I will now consider further the sense in which paintings can be said to represent *wangarr* ancestors, and how their representation in paintings reinforces the believability of the system. Paintings are one of the main manifestations of *wangarr* beings and as such are among the main evidences for their existence. In this sense the form of the design is part of its meaning, since the same form is believed to be a component of the ancestral world (cf. Munn, 1973:118). For example, paintings are said to represent ancestral beings because they were painted on the bodies of ancestral beings.

Paintings as ancestral designs, however, do not simply refer to the *wangarr* being on whose body they were painted or who in other ways is associated with the form of the design. The designs may be iconically motivated with reference to the events that were believed to have
led to the origin of their form. As I showed in Chapter 7 this postulated iconicity is mediated through formal resemblances between the design and naturally occurring and culturally produced objects external to it. For example, the diamond design can be said to resemble the pattern on the back of a freshwater turtle or the impressions made on folded paperbark, both of which stand in a similar relationship to the wangarr being as the clan design does.

Paintings in fact are part of an elaborate system of cross-referencing which encompasses all of the other 'evidences' of the existence of wangarr beings. Thus as well as signifying events associated with the origin of the design form, they signify events that led to the transformation of the shape of the landscape into its present form. Topographical features are themselves manifestations of ancestral events, as are paintings, and as are dances performed in ceremonies. They can each be experienced separately, yet each refers to the other as well as to the wangarr beings. Thus individuals gain knowledge of topographical features through travelling over a particular area of land. Their behaviour in that land is modified by the mythological significance of the features. They camp in certain places and avoid others, or collect turtle eggs in one place but leave them in another. Paintings encode these significant features of the topography. The landscape thus provides an external and objective referrent for the painting. Yet the landscape is also a transformation of the same ancestral being referred to in the painting. The painting thus alludes to different objectifications of the ancestral being as well as providing a focus for different refractions of wangarr power. The belief in wangarr beings is reinforced by the fact that designs both encode information about the nature of ancestral beings that fits individual
experiences and by the fact that they provide additional confirmation of the reality of other evidences of ancestral transformation by cross-referring to them.

The third source of the power of paintings is the power gained through their use in the sphere of politics, where they can be seen to have power in two senses. In the first sense, they are significant counters in the competitive relations between clans. They are used to make and justify claims over land and, as symbols of agreement, they are involved in the creation of new clan groupings. In the second sense, they are one of the main mechanisms for reintegrating the changing socio-political relationships between clans with a stable cosmic and ancestrally endowed framework, thereby both maintaining the integrity of the ancestral world and recreating a particular ordering of the relationship between human groups, the land and the ancestral world. Sociological studies of Aboriginal symbolism have tended to focus on this second aspect, the integrative one, to the neglect of the first. For example Munn writes that Walbiri symbols function to 'bind together the segmentary, patrilineal groups and by this means maintain the cosmos as a whole' (ibid.:213). However, it is equally important to see the designs operating in the context of political process in which action and events run counter to ideology, in particular counter to the ideology of continuity with the ancestral past, as it is to see them functioning to heal breaches in the socio-cosmic order by recreating links between social groups and ancestral beings so that they accord with the ancestrally endowed template.

As I showed in Chapter 2, the Yolngu ideal model of a clan is of a unit that is the product of direct patrilineal succession from the founding ancestors of the clan, who obtained their charter from
the wangarr beings which are today incarnate in the clan's sacred objects. This ideal model of clanship fails to fit reality in a number of ways. Most importantly while some groups diminish in size and either become extinct or fuse with other groups, others increase in size and divide to form new groups. Related to this is the fact that although members of a clan publicly assert joint ownership of a clan's paintings and land, at an unacknowledged level different sections of clans (usually patrilines) exercise differential rights in the clan's property, one section of the clan being more closely identified with one madayan than it is with the others jointly owned by the clan.

Acknowledgement of joint ownership of the clan's madayan is one of the main defining characteristics of a clan, however this is best seen in active rather than passive terms. Joint ownership is the result of a mutual ceding of rights in land and madayan by a smaller unit to a wider collectivity, the clan. It is significant that the two instances of clan fusion I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 (the Gumatj case and Welwi's attempt to form a new clan) both involved a ceding of rights to paintings previously held separately. In the case of clan fusion the opposite process occurs. As soon as a clan's members cease to recognise joint ownership of paintings, the clan has reached the point where fusion is inevitable, and structural differentiation within the clan has reached the point where there are effectively two or more separately functioning sub-groups at the level of clan.

Paintings are also important as far as land ownership is concerned. There are a number of ways in which clans can make claims over the territory of extinct groups. The most common one is based on genealogical connections between groups, through activating residual rights of ownership over the territory of MMB clans (see Chapter 3).
The main way in which one justifies such a claim is through rights in and knowledge of a MMB clan's paintings.

Although from the perspective of the observer fission, fusion and the extinction of clans can be viewed as the inevitable product of demographic change, from the perspective of the individuals and groups involved they are political events. Much of the politics of Yolngu life is concerned with strategies of group formation in an environment where group extinction is an ever present possibility. Ancestral order is maintained in the face of competition and alliances between groups, which in many contexts are expressed in terms of control of the 'evidences' and 'transformations' of the ancestral world: paintings, songs, rituals and land. One of the main reasons given by Yolngu for maintaining control over the secrecy of a clan's paintings is to ensure that ownership of the clan's territory is not threatened. In this context paintings are not simply ideological mechanisms for maintaining the illusion of continuity over time but can be seen to have power in three ways: as the means whereby claims can be made over land, as a symbol of alliances between clans and as a symbol of the unity of the clan itself in the face of internal and external threats to its existence.

The source of power of paintings as ancestral designs and their power gained in a socio-political context are clearly mutually reinforcing. However, the relationship between the two kinds of power contains a contradiction, since people can vie for control of an ancestrally predetermined order of relationship between social groups and the land. The contradiction is resolved through the fact that the relationship between land and designs and between designs and human groups are separately established, thus enabling a new group to occupy an area of land while maintaining the previously existing relationship between
the land and the wangarr beings.

Paintings belong to an abstract system of interconnectedness whereby the tracks of different wangarr beings connect places in the territories of different clans across the Yolngu region. As one group becomes extinct another group moves in and takes over the paintings associated with the places. It does so without necessarily affecting the overall grid of relationships that reflects the journeys of wangarr beings.

The establishment of spiritual links between groups occupying the territory of an extinct clan and the extinct clan's madayin is facilitated in a number of ways. Firstly, the knowledge needed to maintain links is conserved beyond the extinction of a clan by the fact that a group releases knowledge not only to its own members but also to members of outside clans. Secondly, the ideology of spiritual continuity, although focussed within the clan, also transcends clan boundaries. An individual is believed to be spiritually linked to both his own clan and his MMB clan by descent; his conception spirit may come from a clan other than his own; and during his life he accumulates power through the performance of ceremonies jointly with members of other clans. Thus the system as a whole implicitly contains the mechanism for succession and transfer of rights in land, yet at the same time contains the mechanisms for the maintenance of links between social groups, ancestral beings and the land.

The unity of society is maintained at a cultural and ideological level through the fact that society is continually being reordered to correspond to an ancestral template. In each generation the fit between social groups and the ancestral world has to be readjusted to accommodate
demographic changes and shifts in political alliances. Such adjustments are made according to certain fixed principles: the principle that the abstract network of ancestral connections has to be maintained; the principle that designs along the same ancestral track should show similarities; the complementary principle that each clan's design should vary in minor ways from those of other clans on the same track; the principle that paintings are associated with particular places; and the principle that clans should acknowledge joint ownership of the set of paintings associated with the clan's territory as a whole. The application of such principles enables the shifting pattern of relationships between groups on the ground to be incorporated within an overall framework. The artistic system, by separately establishing the relationship between people and wangarr beings, and between land and wangarr beings, allows such readjustments to be made so that continuity is maintained across generations.

The adjustments are made high up in the political system by those with access to the men's ceremopial ground and to the more restricted levels of knowledge. It is in the context of ceremonies that such changes are sanctioned by the acceptance of these new relationships by members of other clans, as occurred in the case of Welwi's son Mutunngambi. It is relevant to note that fully elaborated clan designs, the component of Yolgnu art that most closely reflects the current state of political relationships between clans, were in the past restricted to closed contexts. This enabled changes concerning their allocation, form and distribution to be effected in secrecy. Any changes that occurred became part of the body of restricted knowledge. However, in this case it was knowledge that could be filtered out of the system rather than maintained by releasing it to initiates.
The more restricted the set of people involved in readjusting the relationship between people and the ancestral world, the easier it is to maintain the integrity and primacy of the ancestral past as a constitutive framework. Paradoxically, secrecy can function to mediate change and erase discontinuities.

The final source of power of art objects lies in the structure of the artistic system itself, its semantic productivity and its appropriateness to a revelatory and restricted system of knowledge. I considered in detail (in particular in Chapters 5, 8 and 11) how Yolngu art as a communicative code is structured in such a way that it is well suited to operating within a system of restricted knowledge. It employs two main systems of representation, one figurative and the other geometric, which encode meanings in different ways and at different levels of specificity. The properties and potentials of the two systems are exploited by the Yolngu in particular combinations with other components to produce categories of paintings which are appropriate to different contexts and which have a different semantic density. I showed how the componential structure of likanbuy-type paintings, which emphasise the geometric component and reduce the figurative component, was appropriate to their function as the most restricted category of painting because they were the hardest to interpret without knowledge, yet encoded meaning in a highly productive way. The continuum from public to restricted paintings is a continuum from ease of interpretation to difficulty of interpretation and from specificity to generality. This feature of the system means that in relation to public paintings restricted paintings are not only something to be revealed but are themselves capable of revealing something qualitatively different: a complexity of relationships between things that the more readily
interpretable system of figurative representations obscures by fixing meanings at a particular level.

The exploitation of this paradoxical property of the relationship between two representational systems lies at the heart of the Yolngu artistic system. Figurative representations are easily interpretable but obscure significant relationships between things. Geometric representations on the other hand are initially difficult to interpret and obscure specific meanings but encode significant relationships. In this respect Yolngu art is oriented to revelation because it encodes a multiplicity of meanings and condenses them into abstract forms which are semantically highly productive once the code has been revealed.
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Addendum
