

## Chapter 6 – Big Murray Butcher: 'We Still Doin' It'

### *Ethnography as Partial and Positioned*

These final chapters focus on two particular Barkindji men for whom art has played a role in facilitating a certain cultural identity and self-authoring, within the Wilcannian community and (to different extents) within the context of white art worlds. Both individuals (in terms of 'cultural authority' and 'cultural knowledge') are recognized by non-Aboriginal people as cultural brokers. There are however, differences which serve to show how individual persona, cultural understanding and social circumstance influence and affect how culture and its meanings are interpreted, thought about, accepted and transferred. I offer the production, form and content of both men's work as a means of highlighting inter and intra-cultural differences regarding the role that art plays in producing, performing and mediating what is taken to be 'culture'.

I have chosen to focus on individuals for several reasons, not least because most anthropologists find that their research has benefited from close associations with particular informants, yet the extent to which this positions the ethnographic work is often not adequately addressed.

Anthropologists such as Stanner (1979) and Turner (1967) alert us to the benefits of personalising data by each spending a chapter discussing key informants (Durmugam and Muchona the Hornet, respectively). These were 'informants' who by 'standing out' or being more accessible in some way directed the course of fieldwork as well as the theoretical analysis to a greater or lesser extent. In drawing so extensively on the views of single informants, both Stanner and Turner demonstrate the richness and depth that this approach can provide, as well as highlighting the ways in which the ethnographic method results in data which is partial and positioned. Nevertheless, aside from some notable exceptions (e.g. Beckett 1958a, 1978; Burnett Horne & McBeth 1998; McCarthy Brown 1991; Shostak 1990), this approach remains reasonably uncommon, and in most instances the debt to individuals remains "...largely unacknowledged and under-theorised" (Deger 2003:53). Yet as Deger (2003:54) points out, "despite the detached authority and de-personalised tone of analysis, most ethnographic explanations of...culture are derived from highly individualised portraits of society authorised and authored by local cultural activists".

Whilst recognising the criticisms this individualised approach is said to involve, such as questions of reliability, accuracy of memory and personal bias (McBeth 1999:pxx), it nevertheless offers (in my view) an ethnographic richness and ‘thickness’ of description as well as a more open acknowledgement of the collaborative positioning of the anthropologist. Whilst still being subject to the anthropologist’s editing and selection of data, a concentration on the individual offers something of the intra-cultural diversity frequently sacrificed in the pursuit of shared understandings. Moreover, in contrasting the different cultural ‘takes’ of these two individuals, alternative interpretations of what constitutes Barkindji culture are hinted at.

For some people in Wilcannia, the production of art has become a vehicle for a new way of being Aboriginal. Aboriginal people have arguably produced ‘art’ for thousands of years in the forms of rock, body, cave, sand and ground paintings as well as on material culture; however, for the people of Wilcannia many recent ‘art forms’ have no continuance with these earlier *practices*. Certainly, the production of material culture such as boomerangs and spears etc., has continued to varying levels across time. Yet incorporation into the white art world categories and concepts of ‘Aboriginal art’ and ‘Aboriginal *artists*’ has created a new social dynamic: a new mode of expressing culture for the *artists* and communities concerned.

Because this cultural field has no precedent for Aboriginal people in Wilcannia, the production and interpretation of art work in relation to societal norms means that there are also new possibilities for the construction of identities not offered in other areas of life. Importantly, art appears to offer a permissible way for the *artist* to successfully negotiate those previously defined social sanctions and pressures to conform and which make it difficult for individuals to stand out. Given the ways Aboriginality has previously been defined, the *artist* is a recent identity that Aboriginal people are beginning to incorporate, and which can allow a degree of latitude within the complex social minefield of demonstrating difference or achieving success. Equally importantly and as I argue, individual persona plays a role in negotiating the extent and direction of this success.

According to Marcus and Myers (1995:1) “in contemporary cultural life, art has come to occupy a space long associated with anthropology, becoming one of the main sites for tracking, representing, and performing the effects of difference”. Art is one way that not only the ‘me’ of identity but also the ‘we’ of identity can be expressed. As MacClancy (1997:2) notes, “Many peoples, bent on self-determination and unhappy with the way they are represented by others, wish to represent themselves to others and art is one of the most

powerful media by which to do so. I would also argue that for Murray and for other *artists* in Wilcannia, creating art works not only provides a means to represent and express themselves, it also provides a space for ‘contemplation’, ‘resolve’ and ‘catharsis’ on matters and questions to do with culture and identity.

Murray Butcher is a Wilcannian Barkindji man and an *artist*. He is active in *teaching* culture and expresses the importance of this, particularly at the local level, with Aboriginal people being the priority. In this chapter I discuss how the practice of Murray’s art making, art works, designs on art work and ‘art talk’ intersect with ‘culture’. I am interested in the tacit and explicit social affects of art and art making and their relationship to culture and cultural identity. What is ‘culture’ for Murray and how does art and its making relate to it? How do Murray’s notions of culture and art and their practice compare?

Not long after arriving in Wilcannia, Murray’s mother, Janet, and many other Aboriginal people suggested that if I wanted to learn about ‘culture’, I should talk to Murray. People said he knew the “lingo” and had been reared by his Nan, Elsie Rose Jones. Elsie was a Barkindji woman who came to Wilcannia from Albermarle station near Menindee in 1925 (Hercus 1993:26), and lived in Wilcannia until her death in 1996. Although now deceased, Elsie Jones continues to be highly respected amongst people in Wilcannia (both black and white) and is spoken of fondly. According to the linguist Luise Hercus (1993:2), it was Elsie’s “brilliant knowledge of vocabulary” that assisted her in formulating the ‘Paakantyi [Barkindji] Dictionary’. Indeed, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Wilcannia emphasise Murray’s apparent language proficiency (he credits his Nan for this skill) as evidence of his cultural credentials.

I had been in Wilcannia several weeks when Murray’s mother gave me his phone number suggesting I call him. However, when I phoned Murray it was clear that he was slightly ‘charged up’ (had a few drinks). I tried to explain my project and we agreed to meet at Baker Park a few days hence where a community “fun weekend” with a band and sausage sizzle was to be held. I asked him how I would recognise him. He said, “I’m fair, six feet tall, robust, broad shouldered and I’ve got big foots”. I was standing with his mum at the park a few days later when he came along and she introduced us. I said that I had spoken to him but that he might not remember as he was “celebrating” at the time. He clearly didn’t

remember and I reminded him of his self-description.<sup>113</sup> He gave an embarrassed giggle and his mate Michael joked, “didn’t he say ‘handsome’?” I responded, “No. He missed that one” (Image 35). We talked about my project and Murray said, “I’ll be into that”. We arranged to meet and talk the following week at the Central School where he works part-time as an Aboriginal Education Worker.



**Image 35. Murray Butcher standing in amongst the ‘poached egg daisies’ at ‘one mile sandhill’ east of the Darling River at Wilcannia.**

Murray was born in 1974 to his Barkindji mother, Janet Jones, and his white father, Michael Butcher. Many of the Aboriginal people I worked with consider Murray to “know about culture”. I was struck on meeting him that someone of his age (he was twenty-eight at the time) was treated with such credibility as someone of cultural knowledge and authority.

Culture in these explicitly articulated contexts is variously considered to include knowledge of Barkindji language, myths, stories and sites; some knowledge of and ability to talk about past ceremonies and practices, what “our people” used to do, used to live like; and what Barkindji people should or should not do in terms of being true to ‘culture’. As previously discussed, culture also increasingly refers to tangible material artifacts; therefore, to know

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<sup>113</sup> Murray’s self-description is a fairly accurate one. He is certainly quite fair, tall, robust and broad shouldered. He did not however reference his easy going nature, calm disposition and attributed role as something of a peacemaker and arbiter when things get a bit out of hand at parties and the like. Expressions such as ‘I never heard anyone say a bad word about him’ and ‘everybody liked him’ are often considered to be fanciful sentimentality. However, I can honestly say that everyone I met seemed to like Murray.

about culture is also to have some 'knowledge' (of an unspecified level) about the use and designs of Barkindji material culture.

Murray is one of the few locals regularly asked to give 'cultural' advice to archaeologists and the like, in relation to Barkindji land, sites, clearances and proposed work such as the placement and laying of telecommunication cables. As one of the few people in Wilcannia with some fluency in Barkindji, Murray is often asked to speak at local events. Indeed, Murray teaches the Language Other Than English (LOTE) programme at Wilcannia Central School. I asked him how long he had been doing this for during a taped conversation we were having about Wilcannia art centres and Barkindji culture.

Ahm, I've been workin' with schools since I probably left school on and off. I used to work over there on the Mission school for a while. Helping out with the language an' just helping out in the classroom. Ahm, I really got into the schools in 1996 after my granny [Elsie Jones] passed away, cos she used to teach language, an' it was one of her dreams gonna see her language bein' taught in the school. An' after she passed away I didn't want her dream to be finished.

There are clearly political and well as cultural implications related to the teaching and speaking of language which local Aboriginal people link to cultural authority, status, identity and credibility.

Murray speaks the dialect of his Nan, southern Barkindji, whilst the subject of the next chapter Badger Bates, speaks Kurnu, the dialect of his granny (Annie Moisey) (Hercus 1993:11-12). I prefigure this now to highlight that there is at times some disagreement regarding Barkindji terms and pronunciations which link to Barkindji status, authority and recognition in community. Although both southern Barkindji and Gurnu are Barkindji dialects different people and families make veiled and not so veiled comments about dialect, referencing these to descent, place of origin and at times making inferences about the 'authenticity' of the language used. This in turn is linked to status, identity and the two matriarchs: Granny Moisey and Elsie Jones. It is clear that language bears importance as a cultural 'authenticator': disagreements regarding semantics signal broader disagreement and contestation about 'who really is' and what really is Barkindji.

Murray's local success as an *artist* must therefore be linked to his status as someone seen to possess a high level of 'cultural knowledge'. These two factors as they both intertwine and mediate one another have been critical to his 'success' in a community where 'success' is treated with a great deal of suspicion.

## ***'We Still Doin' the Same Designs on Our Art Work'***

As discussed previously, what has come to be known as 'culture' has increasingly included not just art works themselves, but the designs on art works and artifacts (Morphy 2002; Munn 1973; Watson 1997; Dubinskas and Traweek 1984). For Murray and others, the designs are "part of our culture". The content of art works, consideration of content and the art talk between *artists* their friends and family serve as catalysts for negotiations of and about culture and identity, as well as affirming and consolidating identity.

The title of this chapter comes from something that Murray said to me. We had just been to the Australian Museum in Sydney where we had arranged to go 'behind the scenes' to see some artifacts made by Aboriginal people from the Darling River.<sup>114</sup> Murray said he was "amazed" at the carved and incised designs on some of the wooden shields and *bundis* [clubs]. He said, "we still doin' it", "we still doin' the same designs on our art work".

This suggests that for Murray these artifacts are a tangible and visual affirmation of the continuity of his culture. There is a sense that his experience of 'being Barkindji' and of being Aboriginal is connected to a kind of *distilled* epistemology *instilled* through experience and discourse with his Nan and other old people in relation to designs. I asked Murray, "When you're painting, what, sort of, what do you paint about? What sort of subjects do you use? Do you tend to do the same things?" Murray stated:

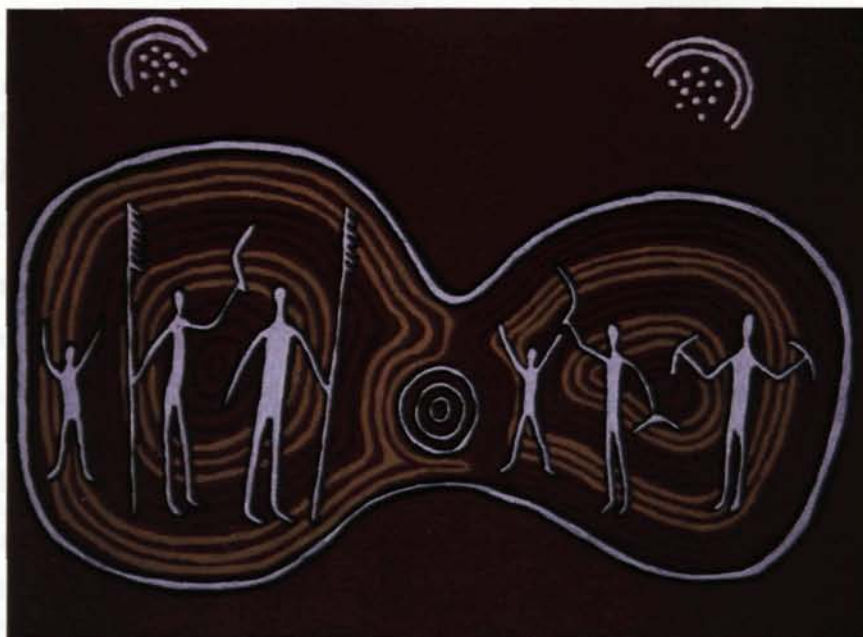
I try to put a theme – something of a story – or think of a story about something growin' up. Mainly thing around the river an' fish an' stuff like that there...

[W]e do Aboriginal style story an' that there. Cos we was told we wasn't dot people, that's not our tribe. An' I remember sittin an' askin' Nan: what sorta art we do, ya know? An' she said we do sort of stick art like little stick figures, an' do tracks an' stuff. We do lines an' sometimes we do little spots an' that y'know? Ahmm, we don't do dots like out on, like them desert fullas do their paintins. So I try to stick to lines (Image 36).

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114 The artifacts were dated from the late 1800's. Some had explicit provenance from the Wilcannia region. These artifacts were mostly, "*nulla nullas*" and "*bundis*" [clubs], boomerangs, spears and shields.





**Image 36.** Acrylic painting on canvas of '*Makwara and Kilpara*' (the two Barkindji Moieties) by Murray Butcher.

Murray seems to indicate that paintings, artifacts and their designs are tangible signifiers of the presence of Barkindji culture and re-producers of culture. For a people who are constantly denied Aboriginal culture of any 'worth' or 'value', who are often called upon to justify their culture and who (partly and arguably as a result) are self-consciously considering culture, art objects stand as concrete visual 'evidence' of 'culture'. This does not, however (at least in Murray's case), mean that justification of culture to Others is the main motivation of production.

I asked Murray, "What do you hope for when you do a painting or carving? I mean, do you do it hoping that it'll have a particular destination or do you care who buys it? Does it matter?" Murray responded, "Well, first an' foremost why I do the paintin' is to get some sort of contact with our culture – whether it just be animals what we eat or our relations with the land or sometime try an' do a story. Try to, ah, put a message across about our dreamtime stories".

Putting a message across "about our dreamtime stories" is directed at Barkindji, other Aboriginal people as well as Others, and has a strong pedagogic dimension. But as Murray explains, his first motivation is to get some contact with culture. Murray alludes to culture and contact with culture as something which one 'meets', which 'comes about' through the 'practice' of painting. 'Culture' here can be the animals that are eaten and by implication

those which are “not ours” and are not eaten as well as their relationship to the land. The painting of the animals is both a source and a sign of ‘culture’. The painted kangaroo, emu and “porcupine” become in their visual objectification materially concrete referents of culture. Painting animals we eat and the relation to the land suggest not only a ‘pointing to’ culture, but a ‘standing for’ evidence of the presence of culture. Thus, the content of paintings declares aspects of culture and also refers to unspoken aspects of culture. Indeed, the practice of painting itself has become a recognisably Aboriginal cultural activity (Myers 1994; 1995; 2002). Aborigines and painting now have a ubiquity which Aboriginal people have taken up and run with.

According to Murray, contact with culture is made through ‘painting about’ relations with the land. Whereas the actual practice of hunting and fishing might be seen as contact with ‘culture in action’, stories which are ‘expressed’ in paint can also be understood in this way. A painted story is thought of as part of culture and, as such, the making of the painting can be considered as culture in action which in turn re-produces culture.

The production of art has *among* its many objectives that of responding to Others’ denial of culture. However, for Murray this aspect is not his explicitly stated objective. Like other *artists* I spoke with, Murray is only prepared to reveal stories connected with his paintings to a certain degree.

What I prefer – like the paintins with our stories – is to stay with us, our people an’ that, an’ all them in my family. I do some paintins for the general public, but what I’m careful about is not to, ehm, like give them a general outlay of the story but not the whole detail of the stories. So I reckon we be still be empowered by our own stories and traditions. Also give outsiders insight into our culture where, ehm, they can see we have stories an’ art an’ stuff. And whether it’s whatever influence it come from its still us. An’ how we, ahm, I don’t know, try to bring our culture alive in a, in a medium what’s available to us.

Culture and art are here intertwined; certain works are invested with private and special moments and messages. This is intimated in Murray’s emphasis on the importance of ‘keeping’ culture, and in his valuing of culture as something which is not a free for all, but as ‘empowering’ and precious.

Murray emphasises the importance of:

keep[ing] things for ourself an’ stuff and that there, so that we can still have, still be, still have the power and the knowledge an’ that there. An’ I believe, like, if we give our stories away, it’s might be, ah, like it’s given the general public a chance to learn about us but I believe it empowers people other than ourselves.



Restricting knowledge of stories and therefore certain aspects of culture to the right people is a way of being empowered. However, although the justification of culture to others is not a primary priority for Murray, he indicates that it is still important and there is tension here between keeping stories private and needing to make them public to confirm Aboriginal culture to those who deny its presence and legitimacy. Special stories, special moments and special people are linked to the creation of the works as well as to the works themselves. In this way art works as they are being created can also become biographical objects for future group memory and recall.

Reflecting on the past and past relationships appears to be integral to the notion of 'keeping culture alive'. I was talking one day to an older man in Wilcannia and he was reminiscing about certain things such as hunting, dustpan dances, and sharing as one people, which no longer happened. I asked him why he thought this was and he said,

People haven't been lookin' in the past (sigh). When, when you need a future that is something you should always do, is dig in your past and make a future. Now, you, you gotta have a past. To have a past digging steps that you take is towards your future and the future of your children, an' everybody. But dese are some of the things that we would 'ave to do: look at our past. If you don't look at your past – what are you looking at in the future?

Looking into your past is a means not only of remembering, but also of making a future; it has prospective as well as retrospective elements. Holland and Lave (2002:27) suggest, "it may be useful to consider day-to-day struggles over community identities as in part staking claims into the future". This is a comment on the importance and connection between versions of history and the future. Futures, "like histories, are constrained and shaped by lived experience... Discourses of the past and discourses of the future feed off each other; indeed they are often only different chapters of the same narrative story" (Malkki 2001:328). The importance of art in constructing these narratives becomes all the more cogent when identities are contested in the face of competing narratives.

### ***Art as Performance and Renewal***

I argue that in *thinking* about the content of the art and in *making* the art, past and present matters of interest, of difficulty, of pleasure are considered, resolved and mediated. Culture is also made anew; it 'comes about' through the practice of art making, through the forethought of content and in displaying and talking about the art work. 'Culture' as an objectified, tangible entity is writ large and made visible through art. Given that a number of activities are currently limited in their enactment such as hunting (and indeed some may

never have been undertaken by those living), ‘culture’ is increasingly represented in discursive acts and made present in visual art objects.

Murray and many others speak regularly about the fear that “our culture” will be “lost”, as the “kids” are not interested in learning about ‘it’. Children are constantly invoked as being “our future”; “our children, our future” is a slogan bandied about and replicated on banners and posters at community events. Indeed, it has become something of a pan-Aboriginal trope. The importance of passing culture onto children for the future – and a requisite to having a recognisable and desired Barkindji future is explicit. Just as ‘culture’ is seen to flow from and between the ‘old people’ and those living now, this flow must not be ‘cut off’ if culture is to live on.

Murray showed me the following drawing which he called ‘Nan and Pop coming to Wilcannia’, and then told me about when they had come, and, the circumstances of their arrival. (Image 37.)



**Image 37. Pen on paper drawing, ‘Nan and Pop coming to Wilcannia’ by Murray Butcher. This drawing hangs on a wall in Murray’s house.**

When Murray paints about growing up (the people, the places, the events and the stories) this ‘remembering or ‘looking back’ can be understood as creating a sense of cultural continuity as well as offering a way of moving forward. He can thus be seen to affirm his links to his culture as well as responding to those who might deny its presence. When Murray paints about what he remembers of the past and then tells it to the “kids” he is also painting a future. This shared dialogue about the painting becomes ‘shared culture’. Moreover, as Murray paints his memories, both recent and distant, he can be seen to be expressing ‘culture’, ‘his way’, in visual form. He is ‘drawing on’ a network of thoughts linked to a

network of people and places and in so doing he ‘individualises’ his culture as he ‘sees’ it and as he ‘remembers’ it.

Napachie, the Inuit *artist* says, “Back in the early days, I used to draw what I had heard from my mother, the things she used to talk about from long ago. I didn’t ask my mother’s opinion of what I was going to draw, but when I heard stories from my mother, I drew them the way I pictured them” (Berlo 1999:192). Berlo comments that when Napachie “...represents the kind of tent her grandmother used fifty years earlier, based on the oral reminiscences of her mother, Pitseolak, both the mother’s reminiscences and the daughter’s art are autobiographical acts” (1992:192). Similarly, when Murray draws his Nan and Pop his representations are similarly autobiographical in that they are his visual rendering of what his Nan told him. Although Murray was not present when his Nan and Pop came to Wilcannia or at the ‘Making of the Darling’, nevertheless a self-authoring can be envisaged as taking place through depiction (Image 38).



**Image 38.** Pen drawing on paper, ‘The making of the Darling’ by Murray Butcher.

The place of art as a living performance of culture becomes clear in the following. One particular work of Murray’s has been in progress for about three years. Murray brings this painting out and works on it at various times and then puts it away in another room for a while until he says he feels like doing more on it. One day, Murray and one of his closest friends were having an argument. Murray ‘king hit’ his friend who is quite slightly built, and



'downed im' knocking him out. On coming round Murray's friend was bleeding from his mouth and he spat the blood from his mouth onto the painting. Murray told me about this incident while his friend was there and I asked his friend why he had spat on the painting. He said that he knew how much Murray's art meant to him and being unable to 'king hit' him back, retaliated by taking it out on the painting. After spitting the blood onto the painting he then put his hand on it, making a bloody handprint. Amongst those privy to this event, the painting is now known as 'A's painting' after his friend. Murray says that when the painting is finished he will give it to "my little mate" (Image 39).



Image 39. 'A's painting, acrylic on board by Murray Butcher.

Each time the painting is displayed those who were present at the event remember and talk about it. The story was also relayed to me, as it was to others not present at the initial event but who now also look at the painting and talk about the 'king hit' and the bloody handprint. In his 'remembering' and re-telling, Murray expresses his regret and sadness at hitting his friend but there is also much laughter as the story is told and re-told. The painting is a visual reminder and an existential mnemonic for those in the know. It also serves as a cathartic release as tensions are re-worked and resolved in the re-telling and talking about the work (cf. MacDonald 1988). This example shows how art *is* culture as well as its reflexive connection with culture at the individual and group level.

The strong pedagogic role of art in 'keeping culture alive', and the practice of art making as a catalyst for identity construction and production can be considered as a continuation of Aboriginal social practice. Langton (1993:9) reminds us of how "Visual and oral expressions have been very elaborate in Aboriginal societies in the social sense". Whilst these expressions were arguably less personalised and less explicitly temporally located, the

performativity of art making and the social discourse around art talk can nonetheless be viewed as an extension of Aboriginal sociality and practice.

This integration of art and life is not generally the case for art in dominant culture Australia where Brokensha and Tonks state that the arts "...are seen as an activity quite separate from mainstream social, economic and religious pursuits and [where]...the relatively high levels of professional interest and involvement in the arts...are not as widely translated into the sorts of deeper group and personal experiences suggested by our Aboriginal paradigm" (in Fourmile 1994:79).

I want here to personalise Murray's experience of art production to demonstrate how art is integrated in the social, economic and cultural life of Aboriginal people in Wilcannia. I asked Murray one day, "when did you sorta start drawin' an' painting an that?" He responded,

I was always interested in drawin' and stuff [but] it's not until I went away down to Sydney.<sup>115</sup> We went to a hostel there an' seen some other Aboriginal lads doin' paintin' an', eh, they was from all over the State like Bourke, Engonia, Walgett an' all that there – Western towns. An' it was down there an' I used to sit down and I used to like 'em how they used to paint and draw. An' so I started doin' it. So that's when I really started getting interested in it.

This was in the late 1980's when government policy was promoting Aboriginal art and its production as a way of both expressing and maintaining culture and as a means of gaining some economic independence (DAA 1989:122-128). Murray remembers selling his first painting to Maxie Helmer at Helmer's store.<sup>116</sup> He notes, "...when I seen I could get money an' that I got a bit more interested in it, an' I've been doin' art since I suppose". I asked Murray what he thought motivated most Aboriginal people who paint in Wilcannia, and he responded, "because some people like art, some people know they're good at it. But I think one of the primary reasons is, is ah economic – for money, for cash".

Painting offers an opportunity to generate some kind of income in a situation where there is little or no other 'work' to be had. But economic concerns are not divorced from other reasons. Murray considers that when people sell their paintings,

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115 Murray said he was eleven years old when he first went to school in Sydney.

116 Max Helmer and his wife owned the old 'Knox and Downs' store on the corner of Reid St and Myers Street in Wilcannia. This heritage listed property built in 1899 was destroyed by fire in 2002 with only the façade remaining.

it gives them a good feelin' inside that they achieve something, that they've done something that somebody else likes, I suppose. Because, well I know with myself, when I do a paintin' an' that there, I'm proud of it, an' eh when they buyin' paintins an' I see on their face that they liked it, y'know, an' it gives me a good feelin'. It lifts my spirits up to know that I've made someone happy for something that I've done. An' I think a few other people get that same sort of feelin', you know. I mean feelin' of empowerment within themselves that they can do things, an' achieve things.

Although economic factors are an important aspect motivating art production, Murray's statement makes clear that this is *an* aspect of motivation only. Moreover, a number of Aboriginal people in Wilcannia do not consider art made for sale to be a negation of culture or to be detrimental to culture or culture's value.

Only on one occasion did an older woman in her sixties suggest that the sale of works would be somehow 'against culture'. I was visiting one day at an older woman's house and mentioned an exhibition in which a Wilcannian *artist* had some works displayed. Someone asked me if the works were for sale, but before I could answer this older woman stated quite emphatically that, "No, X wouldn't sell them". I understood this to mean that this woman saw X's work as having some kind of value that rendered it inalienable. Yet, I knew close relations of this woman sold their art work with her knowledge and without explicit disapproval.

Nevertheless, the woman's reaction would suggest that certain *artists* and their works are culturally differentiated in some way – that for some people, and in some cases, it is perhaps desired or expected that art works should culturally inalienable in market terms. Most *artists*, however, do not seem to place any such proscription on themselves or others. On the contrary, just as Marusak Svasek (1997:43) found that for the "informally trained *artists* [in Ghiana], commercialism is not a taboo, but rather a positive sign of success", so too is the sale of work an indicator of 'success' for many Barkindji *artists*.

However, as Murray makes clear, certain stories which are implicit in particular art works are neither made known, nor sold as part of the art works. That is to say, although the symbols, mythical and non-mythical characters and other required aspects of a story may be implicitly present at some level, this will only be evident to those who are 'in the know'. In general terms then, certain aspects of culture are not seen to be prostituted at the altar of the market by virtue of being sold or being made explicit as part of the sale.



## ***Museums and Cylcons – Refle(x)ion and Motivation***

Not everyone in Wilcannia makes art works, nor might everyone in Wilcannia perhaps be interested enough in Barkindji artifacts and designs to make a trip to the Australian Museum to see them. I knew Murray was interested in his art work and his ‘culture’ and that he is one of a few people in Wilcannia who is recognised as “knowing” about culture and as being “a very cultural person”. This was certainly a motivation for my asking him if he wanted to take a trip to the Sydney Museum. Murray was up for this and our trip was eventful for both of us.<sup>117</sup> Prior to going to the museum I taped a conversation with Murray and asked him if he had seen any of the artifacts there. He told me that this would not be his first trip (although it would be his and my first time behind the scenes). When Murray was a child, he and some other children from Wilcannia were taken to the Australian Museum in Sydney. Murray remembers seeing,

...the *bundis* [clubs] and stuff, an’ the Darlin’ River area an’ all that there. An’ seein’ all of them designs on the clubs made me feel so proud and sad. It was at that time when I seen them art works, there was a big movement for the Central Australian art, for the dot painting, an’ we were all school age stuff an’ I thought, “what about our art?” Cos I knew dots wasn’t ours, an’ all that was written in books an’ that was about Central Australia art or Top End art or stuff like that – nuthin’ about the art around our region.

Murray went on to say that he thought that this lack of interest in and recognition of the art of his region was, “maybe because our people was hit first with invasion an’ that, an’ like things they was lost. That made me think, y’know, well our art has to be recognised too. Because our art is our art”. Murray expressed that the Barkindji art “is only starting to be recognised lately, I suppose. An’ contemporary and traditional art mixed together”.

But art styles and their cultural recognition are just one dimension of the ‘role’ of art. Whilst Murray indicates that he paints primarily to get in touch with culture, the lack of recognition of Barkindji culture is clearly also something that motivates Murray’s art and its content. Before Murray’s first trip to the museum in Sydney at about eight years of age, he “was always interested in drawin’ an’ stuff. An’ with what Nan told us we should be drawin’ an’ that, you know”. The kinds of things Murray’s Nan thought he should be drawing were things from “everyday life”: “fish and waterholes and stuff”. The “style” he used for his drawings prior to painting was also that taught to him by his Nan (Image 40 and Image 41).

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117. I am grateful to AIATSIS for the provision of a research grant which facilitated this trip.



**Image 40. Pen drawing on paper by Murray Butcher.**



**Image 41. Pen drawing on paper by Murray Butcher.**

I argue that for Murray and for some other *artists*, the practice of *making* the art provides moments of catharsis, mediation and resolve in relation to self-identity as this intersects with white discourses of what constitutes indigenous identity and culture. I also consider art making to be a form of productive ritual. Art making moments, the actual physical materiality and visual content of the art work, serve to consolidate and affirm notions of individual and group culture. Myers (1994:679) talks of the “intercultural transaction” between the non-Aboriginal gallery goers (the audience) and the Aboriginal performers at events such the making of a sand painting as part of an art exhibition. He discusses the “ironies and fabrications” of such events, during which what is happening in a cultural sense is ‘worked out’ by both the performers and the audience. He, however, emphasises their

signification as emerging constructs of Aboriginality that should not be dismissed (1994:680). “They may be new demonstrations of spirituality and authenticity, that is, redefinitions and rediscoveries of identity worked out in the face of challenging interrogations from an ‘other’. They are, however, no less sincere or genuine as cultural expression in this response to history” (Myer 1994:680).

In a similar vein, Deger (2004:20) talks of how “indigenous media – might in the name of Tradition and Culture – actually produce new, ‘non-traditional’ meaning for its subjects”. Although Deger is referring here to film and radio, cultural production through art making similarly demonstrates the role that this practice has in mediating and re-figuring the connections and continuities of culture as well as generating new meanings. Whilst Murray does not often produce his paintings in front of a cross-cultural audience, the ways in which Murray can be said to re-define and re-discover cultural identity and cultural forms through reflecting on more general cross-cultural dialogue and discourse are no less of a creative performing of Aboriginality.

Our visit to the Sydney Museum helped to highlight the mutual reflexivity of cross-cultural interaction in relation to the re-working of ideas about Aboriginal cultural production and identity. Shortly after Murray and I had left the Museum he told me that when he was inside the Museum he had “wanted to talk in the lingo to the old people”. He discussed how special it felt for him to hold objects that had been made by people who had passed away, and he commented that perhaps some of his own relations had made these artifacts.

According to Murray, this visit spurred him on to ‘re-produce’ culture for the future. On his return to Wilcannia Murray kept telling me that he was going to introduce some of the designs he had seen on the boomerangs and clubs at the Museum labelled from the “Darling River area” and “Wilcannia area” to his art work. At the Museum I had taken photographs of the artifacts and gave him copies. He later said, “well them photographs what you gave me, we were lookin’ at some of them – see if I can incorporate those designs into this painting”.



Following our visit to the Museum I also gave Murray a paper by Lindsay Black (1942) on 'Cylindro-Conical and Cornute Stone Implements', some of which are incised with designs and others not (Image 42). Although Murray had not previously read the literature on cylcons he was familiar with them. Indeed, he has been in possession of several and claims to have *experienced* them as I go on to discuss.

**Image 42. Incised Cylindro Conical and Cornute stone from Lindsay Black (1942).**

There are many theories as to the meaning and uses of these stones, which a few Aboriginal people in Wilcannia know by the abridged term "cylcons" (Black:1942:2). Although referred to as "ceremonial" stones, as Black (1942:2) points out, "It has been found extremely difficult to obtain reliable information as to the use of these stones". Many theories of use were initially proposed under the categories of "utilitarian", such as "seed grinders", "tomb-stones" and "records of the dead", as well as "magical" uses, for example, stones for making rain, for tooth avulsion, snake increase, death-bone pointers and phallic emblems (1942:3). Apart from "phallic emblems" and to some extent "snake-producing fetishes" (1942:3), these uses have largely been discredited.

The distribution of these stones is centred in the "valley of the Darling [River] between a little above Bourke on the north, and the Murray Junction on the south" (Black 1942:37) and as far as the Paroo. This distribution takes in what is now known as the town of Wilcannia and traditional Barkindji land. Indeed, Black notes that the Barkindji "were the great exponents of the cylindro-conical stone culture..." (1942:40).

After obtaining the journal article, Murray started a painting depicting four blocked in cylcons (cylcon shapes painted in outline and filled or 'blocked in' with paint colour). He decided that each cylcon in the painting would represent a Barkindji "dialect".<sup>118</sup> The designs that he was going to incorporate into the paintings around the cylcons were those "from the boomerangs an' clubs [at the Museum]... I wanna show it to our kids, that this is one thing what's unique to the Darling River region is our cylcons". Holland and Lave (2001:20) point strongly to the "...creation and development of subjectivities, even those marginal to power [being] made possible, even likely, because cultural forms are not only tools for positioning the other but also tools for positioning the self. They are a means of re-identifying self.

Murray's desire to draw the cylcons as something unique to Barkindji and as 'belonging to' Barkindji can be read as a sign of consolidating identity as well as showing the 'difference' of Barkindji people. The cylcons are unique to the region and therefore by extrapolation so are the Barkindji. Bearing in mind Murray's explicit reason for painting is to 'get in contact' with his 'culture', I am particularly interested in *how* painting does this. I am also interested in the restrictions that Murray places upon himself in relation to certain representations: in this instance, the representation of the cylcons in paint. The incised designs on the cylcons figure strongly for Murray and because Murray does not know fully the properties of these stones, that is, what these designs mean, who they belong to, what they can do, or their purpose, he is reluctant to paint them. "I don't know what the meanings was or I don't have a problem paintin' them like this 'ere, but I do have a problem with 'em – putting those little meanings or those little designs".

Unlike the designs on the boomerangs and clubs in the museum which "amazed" Murray because of their continuity ("we still doin' it") and which he is happy to re-produce, the designs on the cylcons are seen to be particularly open to an abuse of power and misdirected use. According to Murray, "I believe we can paint them [the cylcons] and this here. Respect it to keep that memory alive of what was part of our culture. They have a lot of meaning to me but I think, I won't, well, suppose, abuse it or something".

Abusing culture in this context is linked to 'fully' copying the cylcons in terms of both the designs and the shape; abuse is re-producing 'meanings' unknown. The memories and meanings that are being kept alive here are not the memories and meanings of the cylcons

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118 The Barkindji dialects are listed in Hercus (1993).

owners/makers or the meanings of the stones themselves. What is being kept alive is a continuity and traceable connection to culture, to the old people who have passed on.

As the following exchange demonstrates, these are ritual objects with indeterminate power, which Murray claims to have experienced. It is in part because of this experience that he will not 'copy' the designs on the original cylcons.

*Lorraine:* You know how, that, eh, reading that we had on the cylcons ?

*Murray:* Yeah, mmm...

*Lorraine:* an' it showed some of the incised engravings. Would you ever reproduce some of them?

*Murray:* I don't think I would because, I don't know, really know, the true meanings of them. They could be things that they were women. I wouldn't put them sorta things on, onto a artwork because, well, I've had an experience when I was younger when with a cousin and me an Uncle X.

We was muckin' around with it [a cylcon] an' Nan was telling me to leave it alone: 'you don't know nuthin' about it', y'know? [Murray takes on Nan's character] 'Shouldn't even be lookin' at it, it's nuthin' to do with you'. An' I was about fourteen or fifteen I was very stubborn, an' ah it's only a piece of old stone an' that, y'know? It's only old stone with little markins on, an she said, 'Murray you don't know what those markins mean. It's got nuthin' to do with you. You shouldn't be touchin' them or lookin' at them'. An' I went to bed that night an' she said 'you watch, you. Something gonna happen with you'...

I went to bed that night an', eh, I was havin' trouble goin to sleep an' I started hearin' voices. An' these voices, they was of old women singing. They was singin' in language and I couldn't get to sleep. Those voices come louder an' louder and then it went on all night, until the sun came up and at the same time it just stopped.

Murray said he ran out of the room crying, "Nan, Nan something funny happened with me. I'm not campin' in there again". Murray's Nan apparently responded to this event by asking Uncle Badger to "smoke" him and "ever since then I've been very reluctant to, I suppose, look at cylcons". For Murray, what was a piece of old stone at fourteen years of age overnight became a meaningful symbol and the locus of a productive power.

### ***Objects and Personhood***

In the first century BC Titus Lucretius Carus, the Epicurean philosopher, wrote his most important work, 'On the Nature of Things' (*De Rerum Natura*). In this book Lucretius discussed the flying simulacra of things and the "the existence and nature of filmy images



emitted by objects” (Ferguson-Smith 2001:99). In his book ‘Art and Agency’, Gell (1998:105) takes on Lucretius’ idea to demonstrate the “convergence of images of things and parts of things”. According to Lucretius,

...pictures of things and thin shapes are emitted from things off their surface, to which an image serves as a kind of film...because such image bears an appearance and form like to the thing whatever it is from whose body it is shed and wanders forth. [Many visible objects]...emit bodies, some in a state of loose diffusion, like smoke which logs of oak, heat and fires emit; some of a closer and denser texture, like the gossamer coats which at times cicadas doff in summer...since these cases occur, a thin image likewise must be emitted from things off their surface (Lucretius cited in Gell 1998:105).

Gell extends Lucretius’ notion,

...that if ‘appearances’ of things are material parts of things, then the kind of leverage which one obtains over a person or things by having access to their image is comparable, or really identical, to the leverage which can be obtained by having access to some physical part of them; especially if we introduce the notion that persons may be ‘distributed’, i.e. all their ‘parts’ are not physically attached, but are distributed around the ambience, like the discarded ‘gossamer coats of cicadas...which are both images and parts of the living creature (1998:105-106; see also Taussig 1993:50).

Like Gell (1998:100), I am not positing or invoking a ‘mimetic faculty’, that is, a “primitive compulsion to imitate, and thus gain access to the world”.<sup>119</sup> I am interested in, “...this notion of the copy, in magical practice affecting the original to such a degree that the representation shares in or acquires the properties of the represented” (Taussig 1993:48).

The idea of painting cylcons as representing magical practice might unsettle some readers; however, according to Gell (1998:101), “...the truth is that “magic’ is what you have when you *do without* a physical theory on the grounds of its redundancy, relying upon the idea, which is perfectly practicable, that the explanation of any given event (especially if socially salient) is that it is caused intentionally”. He continues, “Magic registers and publicizes the strength of desire, increasing the (inductively supported) likelihood that the much desired, emphatically expressed, outcome will transpire, as frequently happens with respect to those outcomes we loudly clamour for” (Gell 1998:101). Murray’s continued reluctance to *look at* or to *handle* the ‘physical’ cylcons is interesting in light of Lucretius’ and Gell’s allusions to flying simulacra and the mimetic faculty, as well as Frazer’s (1980 [1932]) concepts of contagious and sympathetic magic.

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119 Huggin (1997/1998:93) refers to the “...ways in which mimesis operates strategically in colonial contexts, as a means both of relating the self to others and of usurping other’s power”. With reference to Murray, my use of the mimetic faculty is concerned more with the process of mimesis that is operating as opposed to the political strategies that might be made to explicitly operate through mimesis. Nor am I concerned with arguing for a scientific basis of ‘cause and affect’ in relation to the ‘efficacy’ of ‘sympathetic magic’.

Other Aboriginal people share this reluctance to make either *visual* or *physical* contact with the stones – a fact demonstrated to me prior to learning of Murray’s own concerns. Whilst I was in Broken Hill an Aboriginal man raised in Western NSW and of Torres Strait Islander descent gave me a cylcon which he told me had been “picked up” years ago by Murray’s white father and which had come to be in this man’s hands. He gave this cylcon to me as he said that being an anthropologist I would know what to do with it (Image 43). I disabused him of this notion but suggested that perhaps I could give it to Murray and he might know if there was some ‘right way’ to handle it or ‘right person’ to give it to. We agreed that I would offer the stone to Murray, since it was his father who had removed it “from the Darling River”.

**Image 43. Non-incised ‘Cylcon’ given to me by a Torres Strait Islander man in Broken Hill.**



I told Murray that I had the cylcon and asked him if he wanted it. He said that he did and that he would bury it at a certain spot along the Darling riverbank near other cylcons and ‘ritual objects’ that he had come across and/or which had come into his possession over the years.

I was telling a close Aboriginal friend about the cylcon and he said to make sure that I did not touch it. When I told him that I already had, he got quite panicky. He said to make sure that I did not touch it again, not to look at it and to wrap it up. As with Murray and Murray’s Nan, this man was mindful of the power of the cylcons and felt it could be dangerous to have close contact with it. The danger, according to this man, extended to me as a white woman. Ultimately, despite people saying that they are unclear of the ‘meanings’ and original use of the cylcons, they are seen to be associated with ritual and *strong* power is attributed to them.

Murray’s reluctance to *look* at or *handle* the *physical* cylcons does not, however, extend to looking at images of them in the journal article I gave him, which has photographs of incised cylcons. Murray therefore makes several distinctions in relation to the physical and visual

properties of these stones as well as how these properties come to bear on their *practical* and *visual* reproduction in art making.

At one level the uniqueness of the Barkindji can be emphasised and made known through representing the images of the cylcons in art. However, there is more to consider than this. I argue that when Murray reproduces ‘partial’ images of the cylcons in paint whilst restricting himself from copying the designs, there is a form of reflexive mimesis operating.

Gell, (1998:67-68) considers that we, “...cannot, in general, take up a point of view on the origination of an artifact which is the point of view of the artifact itself. Our natural point of vantage is that of the originating person...because we, also, are persons”. In offering a theory for an anthropology of art, Gell, (1998:66) argues that in such a theory, the art work itself would become an “index of agency”, “...whatever type of action a person may perform vis-a-vis another person, may be performed also by a work of art, in the realms of imagination if not in reality – not that we are always in the position to decide what is ‘real’ and what is not”.

For an object to be considered as an index of agency of the maker, and to stand for the maker in some instances, there must in the first instance be some desire to consider the object as an index of the maker’s agency. There must be an interest in *connecting* with the originator of the object. Otherwise, what is the value in considering objects as persons or ‘social agents’? If, as in the case of the cylcons, the originating person or persons are no longer present, nor have they ever been personally *known*, then *translation* of the artifact through the available knowledge and experience is required.

When Lindsay Black (1942) ‘translates’ cylcons he does so from a theoretical and analytical perspective. He seeks to know what the stones are, who used them and why. However, he does not necessarily wish to make any *personal* connection with the people who made the stones. The stones as an index of agency of the makers would seem superfluous to Black’s intentions. In contrast, for Murray and other Barkindji people, translation of the stones appears to be one of internal identification *with* the maker *through* the objects. Indeed, more than this, the objects are seen to hold the essence of the makers (Dubinskas and Traweek 1984; Munn 1973). For Murray, the stones index the agency of the “old people” and “those old womens”. Moreover, through the act of partial reproduction and Murray’s stated desire to show what is unique to Barkindji, the stones index the agency of himself and other Barkindji: those present contemporaneously and those who have passed on.

Gell (1998:66-68) does not consider that indexes possess personhood intrinsically, but rather that they mediate it. However, “the personhood of the *artist*, the prototype, or the recipient can fully invest the index in artifactual form, so that to all intents and purposes it becomes a person, or at least a partial person. It is a congealed residue of performance and agency in object-form, through which access to other persons can be attained, and via which their agency can be communicated” (Gell 1998:68). Hoskins (1998:7) evokes a similar person-object relationship: “I have to go out a bit further on a limb: I have to transgress the usual boundaries between persons and objects and show how far certain possessions can come to be seen as surrogate selves”. For Murray, looking at, touching and talking about the stones invoked the literal and physical personhood of “old womens” in his room. The stones did not *become* persons, but engagement with the object was seen to mediate the presence of those old women. This, and Murray’s refusal to copy the designs, suggests the belief in surrogacy to the degree that to make a full representation or even to talk disrespectfully of the stones can invoke uncontrollable and unknown events. Designs and life are mimetically and ontologically interconnected and awareness and intention are given here to stones.

What Murray is more broadly enacting in painting stories, painting designs and telling and sharing stories can be figured as a purposeful mimesis with purposeful restrictions. The slippage is at once both purposeful yet unaccountable: unaccountable in the sense that what will ‘become’ of the act of ‘tracing’ the cylcons in an art work is unknown. As discussed, art is a new way of representing culture (Myers 1994; 1995; 2002; 2004). It is clear that some Aboriginal people consider the mimetic faculty is powerful and can assume the power of the original. It is not the ‘otherness’ of the cylcons that are produced through mimesis, it is something of the sameness, but partial sameness. It is similitude as well as (by design) a restricted simulacrum.

Mimesis is active: it does things, makes things. It is “a vital, bi-directional and sensuous modality of becoming-in-relation...” (Deger 2004:133). In this case there is a becoming-in-relation to living culture through that which is understood to be in part lost, in part unknown and in part in the ‘past’. The stones become a painting which in turn produces and becomes ‘living culture’ in ways that traverse “the spaces between mind and body, doing and knowing, thinking and feeling, conscious and unconscious, nature and culture” (Deger 2004:133).

The propensity for storytelling and for ‘remembering’ and ‘talking about’ past events is an aspect of Aboriginal culture in Wilcannia which bind people, places and things together. As

Jackson says (1998:129), “Remembering is social. It entails concerted, concentrated, embodied interaction with kinsmen, affines, and countrymen to recreate modes of intersubjectivity that encompasses both the living and the dead”. Affects are verbally explained as the experience of cutting across time and space, connecting Aboriginal people of Wilcannia to each other and to their ancestors.

Murray’s reluctance to look at or handle the physical cylcons and his reluctance to ‘copy’ the designs are linked to his experience of ‘mucking’ with a power unknown, but importantly a recognised power which *does things*, which has *effects* and *affects*. In representing the images of the cylcons there is a danger that properties of the cylcons will come to bear upon Murray through the *practice* and *act* of painting as well as through a copying of the visual image. Murray’s desire to paint the cylcons cognitively reconciles this ‘danger’ by ‘limiting’ or ‘reducing’ the potential power properties of the stones by rendering a *partial* copy.

The difference between the cyclon designs and the boomerang and club designs, and the reluctance to paint one but not the other can also be considered in the following way. Although the meaning of many of the designs on the boomerang and clubs are also not known and those on the cylcons appear to be completely unknown, some of the club and boomerang designs are continuous. They are a ‘known quantity’ in terms of practice and repetition.

Indeed, Murray encourages others to copy *his* take on the boomerang and club designs he uses in his art, as well as his own ‘original’ takes on certain designs, motifs and symbols. A young Barkindji *artist* asked Murray if he could “copy” some of Murray’s designs from his art work. Murray said that he “felt proud” that he had been asked. He said that he does not mind sharing his designs with “my mob”, but he would not like people “outside” doing it. Murray said that it’s good if Barkindji people draw on one another’s art work and encourages and teaches Barkindji ‘styles’. Therefore, certain designs, both continuous and ‘new’, are encouraged for reproduction as long as it is by his ‘mob’, and they are seen as ‘safe’ designs. The cylcon designs are, however, unknown and have not been practiced. Moreover, boomerang and clubs are not primarily or overtly known for their ‘secret’ ritual and ceremonial use whereas the cylcons are.<sup>120</sup>

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120 There are ‘fighting’ clubs and boomerangs in the Museum, some of which are surmised to have been used for (unknown) rituals and ceremonies.

The fact that Murray can *safely look* at images of the cylcons complete with designs in a published journal might seem something of a paradox, but one which can perhaps be understood in the following way. In the case of the journal representation, Murray is *not responsible* for *producing* these. I have considered the fact that the journal article is produced by a whitefella and that this might in some way render the images *inert*. This may be the case, however, as mentioned previously, one man saw the power of the physical stones as extending to whites. From this premise it can be considered that when Murray *paints* and *draws* the cylcons, he is implicated in the *act of making*, as well as the *act of reproducing* properties of the stones. This can account for Murray's reluctance to draw the designs on the stones or to make them *visible* through his own *action*.

Jennifer Biddle (2001) discusses the Warlpiri practices of *yawalyu* and *kuruwarri*<sup>121</sup>: "In *yawalyu*, a flattened stick bound at one end with cotton thread, knitting wool or hair-string is used to apply ochre to skin. The stick (*watiya*) is literally dragged through the oil. So too in *kuruwarri* application to canvas, the paint mark follows behind the movement of the finger or paintbrush. In other words the *kuruwarri* sign is understood not only as an imprintational trace, but it is literally produced as one" (Biddle 2001:183). The trace *as* an act of marking does things, makes things, re-makes things. Dubinsakas and Traweek (1984:29) stress that *kuruwarri* designs are an active process which "...recalls the ancestors not just to memory, but to the ongoing present as a visible, sensible force of life maintenance". The making of these marks on canvas, on ground and on bodies is importantly not *medial*. That is, they exude, infuse, penetrate and permeate.

*Yawalyu* and *kuruwarri* marks and practices are associated with ongoing ceremonial practice. Whilst the marks and practices of the cylcons are no longer known, there is an active process seen to inhere within mark making which Murray and others recognise. In drawing the *outline* of the stones and in talking about this process, Murray limits the power of the stones whilst still drawing on their power to some extent. Unlike the physical stones, which have power by virtue of their physical presence and which mimetically make present the power and presence of the "old people", the power is *restrained* in an outline of the stones' image.

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121 Nancy Munn writes that "throughout Central Australia totemic Ancestors are represented by graphic designs that are of considerable importance in the visual symbol system focused on Ancestral belief" (Munn:1973:73). Munn explains *guruwari* as "...the major ancestral designs, which are controlled by men and in large part prohibited to women and children" (in Reay 1964:84). Unlike Munn who arguably sees these designs as medial and denotative, Dubinsaks and Traweek (1984:29) argue that the designs are not of a mediating nature, and do not *represent* the ancestors but are immediate and real.



According to Murray, the shape of the cylcons can be painted as long as the designs are not copied, to copy the incised designs would be to muck with their power, a power which for Murray is both experientially known and epistemologically cognised. Yet, this must be considered as recognisably different to the original power which is 'not known'. There can be understood to be a sharing of the 'power' of the cylcons by virtue of copying their shape in outline. It is at once a shadow of power as well as an actual power. The representation assumes power but not identical 'character' and identical 'power'. The copy draws on the power of the original in innovative and careful ways. Again, this is not a "siphoning off of power", or an appropriation of power" which is in opposition to colonial forces (Huggin 1997/98:97). Indeed, as I have tried to relay, in a more general sense opposition to Other, to whitefellas, although important in certain contexts and implicit at many levels, is not an explicit driver of self identity. The mimetic faculty Murray draws upon cannot be understood as a co-opting of colonial power, neither is it a "refusal to see itself as a second-order cultural product" (Huggin 1997/1998:102). It is perhaps better understood as a rejection (if unconscious) of "the imagined priority of cultures other than its own" (Huggin 1997/1998:102).

Murray's desire to 'copy' the cylcons can be read in several ways. He is aware that whitefellas claim that the meanings of the stones are lost.<sup>122</sup> He says,

Even though I might not know the full meanings of those cylcons, I know they belong to us. In us, ritual and in other things, y'know? And, ehm, those things were important to our ancestors an' we shouldn't let that die just because we no longer practice that part of our culture.

Culture is 'kept alive' and 'made contact' with through the practice and act of painting 'images' of 'culture'. Culture is *re-made* through not only the *making* of art, but through *talking about* and *telling* art to others, including whitefella Others, in limited ways. Just as Murray limits the 'knowledge' that whitefellas are permitted to have, so, too, he limits himself to what he will *draw* on from the cylcons.

The practices associated with the stones are no longer undertaken. Lindsay Black (1942:2) in his writing in 1943 commented that the apparent lack of knowledge about the cylcons and their purposes may have been, "In the words of Mr E Milne, a well-known collector of

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<sup>122</sup> One Aboriginal Barkindji man told me about one use of the cylcons which had been relayed to him by a much older relative. He was the only man I heard talk about the cylcons in terms of having any knowledge of them and their specific ceremonial use.

Aboriginal stone implements, [because of] 'reticence on the part of old blacks, ignorance on that of the later generation, and off-hand opinions of careless and often ignorant white observers...'. However, this did and does not mean that the *practices* themselves are unknown.<sup>123</sup>

What is 'emitted' from the outline of the cylcons which Murray draws and paints might be read in part as a palimpsest, a now re-textualised creation whereby part of the image and thence part of the power of the stones 'shines through', is 'emitted'. Murray claims that the night he felt the power of the cylcons, "[it] gave me an insight into the ritual life of cylcons." The 'trace' of the cylcons is all that he will permit himself, but that is enough to keep the cylcons "alive". Also kept alive is the relationship to his ancestors, the "old people" who have passed away, the "old womens" who were singing in his bedroom. In painting the outline of the cylcons, traces of ritual and traces of people past (including Murray's Nan) are brought into present being. The cylcons become important not only for the ancestors but for the living, *through* the practice of painting. In the physical practice of painting the cylcons, ritual is both remembered *and* practiced in new ways. Biddle, in aligning Warlpiri *kuruwarri* with print literacy, explains how this "...visual system is used not only to produce and reproduce more sacred knowledge, but also to communicate 'new' information and ideas" (Biddle 2001:178). It is yet to be seen how the painting of the trace of the cylcons will more broadly communicate new information and ideas, and if these will produce sacred knowledge. However, from the practice of restraining the trace, Murray understands and observes the notion of a literal production possible through trace.

Daniel Miller (paraphrasing Barths) writes, "...that an important function of material objects and other signifying practices is to provide 'artificial' resolutions to 'real contradictions in society', utilising 'the ambiguities and tendencies of the process of signification itself in order to effect its apparent closures'" (cited in Cohodas 1999:147).

Whether one agrees that painting the outline of the cylcons is an 'artificial' resolution to the clear struggles and contradictions of re-making and re-producing culture, the process of painting and the content of painting allows for a form of closure in which Murray reconciles what he can, what he will, and what he will not copy. It also opens a door into the new. "I

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123 An older Aboriginal Barkindji person offered me an explanation for one of the uses of the stones. However, this information was given to me in confidence and therefore I do not relate it here. I am not suggesting that telling me gives validity to the assertion of knowledge of practice. Neither do I say that because this is not 'public' knowledge that this knowledge does not exist currently. The Hindmarsh Island case exemplifies perhaps knowledge arguably present but not shared (Bell 1999:72-93).

think why I'm paintin' them, it could be, ehm, givin' ourself empowerment within our own art. We could be developin' our own art styles an' bringin' something that sort of belong to us but in a different medium". There is intentionality and purpose here in drawing on the styles and in *deflecting* them whilst enabling their continuity.

This chapter has gone some way to exploring how art intersects with culture as well as the different ways that one individual has drawn on art as a way of thinking about and producing culture and identity. As we have seen, the concepts of art, culture and *artists* are of a shifting nature for both Aboriginal *artists* local Aboriginal people and the wider society, in particular the dominant culture art world. The differing values attached to art, culture and *artists* and the differing motivations and evaluations made serve to illuminate the multiplicities at work in performing, producing, talking about and interpreting what art and culture is and what art and culture do, inter, as well as intra-culturally. Whether as with Murray, art and its evaluation and intersection with culture is of a more local concern, or whether as with Badger cultural evaluation, cultural values and culture identity is also bound up with a wider audience both demonstrate art and culture as mutually enforcing concepts and the 'traffic of art and culture'.

For Murray, art provides an important tool for teaching 'culture' as well as offering a direct link with the past – it actively reproduces and re-embodies culture in powerful ways. Given Murray's reputation as a man of 'knowledge', stress on the pedagogic functions of art and his emphasis on art as continuing culture, he has been able to successfully negotiate the potential problems which arise from standing out and being seen to 'get above oneself'. In the next chapter, I focus on an even more exceptional figure, Badger Bates, whose recognition as an *artist* both inside and outside of Wilcannia in inter and intra-cultural contexts demonstrates the ways in which individual personality, cultural understanding and social circumstance influence and affect cultural production and transformation.