

## Chapter 7 – Granny Moisey’s Baby: The Art of Badger Bates

*It is, however, naïve to look for a pristine, authentic indigenous voice; it makes better sense to recognize that any text is to a greater or lesser degree an artifact of collaboration... The difficulty starts as soon as the talking begins...and the current and previous relationship between interlocutor and subject is bound to affect the way matters are discussed and stories told (Beckett 2000:3).*

### **One Man’s Art and Culture**

This chapter seeks to give an account of Badger Bates<sup>124</sup>, his ‘art and culture talk’ and ‘art and culture practices’, their context and motivations. I seek to explore what art ‘does’: specifically, how art affirms, practices, produces and teaches ‘Aboriginal culture’. The chapter attempts to personalise what “culture” *means* for Badger, and the relationship of ‘culture’ to his art. As Berlo (1999:184) states, “...in the details of one *artist’s* vision and practice we can see choices articulated and decisions being made – decisions that may be harder to discern on a more generalized level of group practice”. The following three photographs indicate and foreshadow Badger’s acute awareness of the lived cultural differences – of being black or white in Wilcannia. His ‘performance’ which he says was an idea he “came up with”...” just for somethin to do” was enacted with his cousin Christopher Payne and for the camera and shows an understanding and insight unusual for his sixteen years (Image 44, Image 45 and Image 46).



**Image 44. Badger at left supposedly ‘stealing’ a chicken with Christopher in the role of white boss. Image provided by and reproduced with the permission of Badger Bates.**

124 When Badger was a small boy of about eight years old, his teacher at the ‘Mission’ school read Kenneth Graham’s ‘Wind in the Willows’ to the class. His cousin, Brucie Harris, started to call him “Badger” and Badger, “got wild and bashed him up”. However, the name stuck and he has been known as Badger since that time.



**Image 45. Badger and Christopher acting out their respective roles. Image provided by and reproduced with kind permission of Badger Bates.**



**Image 46. Badger with a pig tusk tied on string round his neck and a small towel as a 'lap-lap'. Image provided by and reproduced with kind permission of Badger Bates.**

I first met Badger in the winter of 2002 when he came to where I was staying at Broken Hill to talk about my project. Badger is a youthful looking fifty-five year old with closely cropped greying black hair and a droopy moustache (Image 47). He speaks slowly in a measured way and has the deep, throaty voice of a thirty-a-day man. Tall and lean, he brings to mind a black Clint Eastwood – down to the semi-closed squinting eyes, half smile and slow easy walk.



Image 47. Badger Bates in his shed in 2002.



Like Clint Eastwood's most recognisable character 'Dirty Harry', Badger's stare can become steely and intimidating if he is displeased.<sup>125</sup>

Something of a charmer, he can come across as shy and even self

deprecating. Described as "tall composed and shy" in a newspaper article (National Indigenous Times 2002), my own first impressions also record that "he looked a bit shy at first". This impression of shyness is one he makes on many whites; however, it is not one that those who get to know him well would ascribe and I came to see this initial shyness (particularly with whites) as more of a cultivated characteristic which, certainly adds to the "charisma" he is often said to possess. Currently living with his non-Aboriginal partner, Sarah Martin, he is the father of three boys: two from his first marriage and one now eighteen years of age from the present relationship.

Prior to meeting Badger, an anthropologist described him to me as a "leading light for his people". His reputation through various television segments and my own 'google' search which discussed him as someone with a 'knowledge of culture' meant that I was more than a little nervous at our first meeting, as it was clear that without his support my project would have difficulty getting off the ground. Nevertheless, we 'hit it off' immediately and thus began a collaborative association and friendship that continues (I should add at this point that Badger seems to 'hit it off' with most people that he meets).

Adroit at engaging people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds, he wields his charm and makes people feel important in that he observes and listens closely to those who talk to and with him. It is undoubtedly this quality that has helped him to obtain success both inside *and* outside the Aboriginal community, and he is often called upon to meet with

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125 I only witnessed Badger as being anything less than pleasant on a couple of occasions, yet he told me that he had something of a temper. Several Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people relayed stories and events which appeared to demonstrate this. Badger himself relayed several incidents where his temper got the better of him, one in particular which took place as a much younger man and which he admits to being extremely regretful of but of which other people "will not let me forget". The constant repetition and re-visiting of stories about past events (as outlined in chapter two) makes 'forgetting' more difficult if not nigh impossible.

politicians and bureaucrats to explain and mediate issues that members of the 'Aboriginal community' have raised. Indeed, when he wishes to raise an issue for discussion, one example being his questioning of the recruitment and selection process undertaken for an Aboriginal – identified position, he is one of only two Aboriginal people that I know who is able to get certain government ministers to either immediately take their phone-calls or to promptly return their calls. Over time I would discover Badger's ability to conceptualise the ideologies and philosophies of both white and black cultures and to render each intelligible through metaphor and analogy.

Badger's atypicality is a strong element in *what* his art 'does' and *how* it does this, intentionally and unintentionally. Nevertheless, although Badger can be considered atypical in ways that will be outlined, this atypicality does not equal cultural marginalisation – quite the reverse. He is in terms of 'culture' quite clearly 'in the thick of it'. I refer to Badger as an *artist* because this is how he is referred to in dominant culture art worlds and because he refers to his "art" and "art work"; however, as the previous chapter demonstrates, the title of *artist* is problematic. Badger is mostly consistent in calling himself an *artist* in art contexts, but he is much more than this – he has many hats.

Sometimes Badger chooses to inhabit the hat of the *artist* but he crosscuts many roles. He often alluded to the demands placed on him in his role as a cultural ambassador and much in demand advisor for 'his people' saying, "I'm an *artist*, an archaeologist, an anthropologist, a politician, a marriage guidance counsellor", "I'm everythin', me". He also said at times, "I'm not an *artist*, I'm a bullshit *artist*" and other times, "I don't want to be a good *artist*, I want to be a great *artist*", "I want to be the best *artist*", "I want people to buy my work and love it".

Because both the content and form of the art work bespeak aspects of personal identity, as well as 'culture' in a broader sense, Badger indicates that being the "best *artist*" is closely linked to being the *best* Barkindji man he can be. Offering and making the best art can be seen to reflect not only the best of Badger's personal identity, but can be figured as a contribution to Barkindji cultural identity. In turn, he links being the best Barkindji man with being "faithful to my culture". Badger expresses part of being faithful to his culture as the obligation to share and teach his culture to others and considers art as one way to do this. Not all Aboriginal people accept Badger's claim to cultural knowledge, especially given the contested notion within Barkindji circles as to who is and who is not considered to be Barkindji. However, this does not detract from Badger's ambition to be the *best artist*,

indeed, it partly fuels the desire. Importantly, however, being the best *artist* is not *the* defining aspect of identity, it is one aspect of identity.

Badger said that a whitefella, Jim Patterson, once told him “you’re a good *artist*”. Badger said he told Jim that he was going to “be the best *artist*” and “take my people with me”, to which Jim apparently replied, “Well, get off your fucken arse”. Badger’s desire for people to *love* his art work is connected, I believe, to his desire for people – his own ‘people’ as well as white people – to *love* Aboriginal culture, or at least respect and value it. I do not consider that this can be easily separated from the desire for people to also value Badger, whether as a man or specifically a Barkindji man. The art work itself appears to consolidate as well as express his identity, and its reception and evaluation seem to stand both as measure and driver of how both whites and blacks perceive him.

Badger’s apparent ambivalence about calling himself an *artist* whilst wanting to be a “great *artist*” – the “best” *artist* – might appear contradictory. However, as previously indicated, the whole idea of what an *artist* is and what an *artist* does is quite different in Wilcannia to the dominant culture definition. People who create art works in Wilcannia *are* thought about, as is their art, but this is not principally because it is art that has been made. It is more closely linked to *who* an *artist* might be and how Aboriginal kin and the broader community in Wilcannia relate to them. For the most part, who the person making the art is, their relationships within community, their potential to signify authority, garner respect and their perceived ‘knowledge about culture’ are tied together in ways which affect what art ‘does’ and the way in which local Aboriginal people in Wilcannia talk about the art work. In other words, the art is talked about in relation to the particular *artist* as part of a relational intersubjectivity. Importantly, art is simultaneously generating a new domain and laying the groundwork for cultural transformation.

When Badger talks about culture this can mean many things. In the context of an art work, “teachin’ culture” can indicate talking about or painting, drawing or carving Barkindji art styles and discussing what forms of representation and content are culturally appropriate, i.e., “what belong to us” (Image 48). “Teachin’ culture” also refers to taking children or adults out to places such as Mutawintji and telling them how to look out for and protect exposed burials and artifacts. It also involves talking about rock art and engravings or telling stories of a particular site – maybe a Dreaming story about the journeys and qualities of some ancestral being or a story about an event that happened to relations within living memory.



Culture is also “our way” of doing things and seeing things and “our traditions”. “Our culture” is also what is held by museums and what is represented through and by art works.

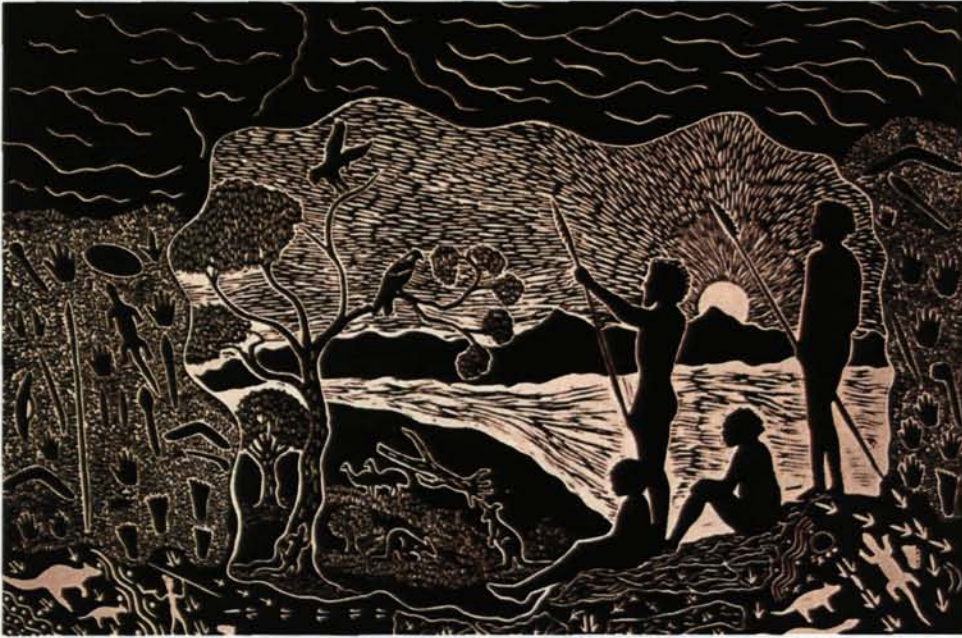


Image 48. Lino print ‘Teaching and Hunting’ by Badger Bates.

Although the separation of the art from the *artist* and its evaluation occurs to some extent in white art worlds, in Wilcannia the conflation of art and the person producing it make this separation less likely, and less desirable. Given the ways in which Badger talks about his art work, it would seem that art is one vehicle through which he expresses his cultural knowledge, cultural identity, and also his cultural authority in art world and more local contexts. Indeed, art produces and indexes these same attributes in a more objectified fashion. This is not to say that all Aboriginal people are in agreement with what Badger might set out to index. Views, interpretations and understandings of Badger’s art as well as his artistic motivations vary depending on the relationship to Badger. To paraphrase Bourdieu (1990), the interpretation of Badger’s work and the way in which it is considered depend on where one is located in the cultural field of art and the social field of culture(s). Other factors contributing to the reception of the work, its efficacy and how it is understood include the context of the viewing and Badger’s presence or absence when the work is talked about or viewed.

Holland and Lave (2001:4) propose that, “the political-economic, social and cultural structuring of social existence is constituted in the daily practices and lived activities of subjects who both participate in and produce cultural forms that mediate it”. In relation to

Badger and his art, the daily practices and lived activities of those who are mediating, producing and participating in the social formation and existence of art is diverse. Curators, tourists (overseas and Australian), gallery managers, other *artists* (black and white), Wilcannia locals (both black and white) and those from further a field all at various times and to varying degrees structure and are structured by Badger's interaction with them and their interaction with him and his art.

It is clear that the *content* of Badger's art (as well as that of other Aboriginal *artists*) is referentially differentiated on the basis of his relationships, on context, and (to a lesser extent for whites) the degree to which the *artist's* cultural knowledge is accepted and understood to be *authorised*. This is not to discount the importance of 'outside' non-Aboriginal recognition but to emphasise the importance of Aboriginal recognition – most particularly Barkindji recognition and cultural acceptance – in order to, in Badger's terms, fully qualify for the title of "great *artist*". Paradoxically, recognition by whites and the white art world is germane to the creation of this avenue of identity: that is, recognition by the wider public facilitates this new way of being Aboriginal. The confluence of art and culture by white art worlds and popular culture more generally can be argued to have influenced and facilitated art as a way of expressing identity for Aboriginal people. As such, the production of art is a way of expressing identity that has credibility in both Aboriginal and white communities if in different ways and to different extents.

### ***Compelling Art***

Over and over again during the time I spent with Badger he would say "I'm Granny Moisey's baby", "I'm the last baby Granny reared up", "I do it for Granny". Granny Moisey (Annie) was rumoured to be 106 when she died in 1976 (Martin 1996:12) and she remains a dominant figure in the memories of local Aboriginal people, especially given that many of her descendents continue to live in Wilcannia (Beckett 1965 [1994]; Memmott 1991). A Gurnu-speaking Barkindji woman, Granny was reputedly born on the banks of the Warrego at Ford's Bridge near Bourke. Granny was a renowned "clever woman" (cf. Beckett 1958b:56), and is said to have spent much of her life travelling up and down the Warrego, Paroo and Darling Rivers in earlier times (cf. Hardy:1976:162) by means of a dugout canoe.

However, some local Aboriginal people insist that Granny is *not* Barkindji. Several people in Wilcannia believe that Granny is not Barkindji but Maori. Some people told me this directly and explicitly whilst others were a little less direct – asking whether I knew that "a

lot of people say she's from New Zealand". Two people also told me directly that "Badger is not Barkindji", one of them adding that "there are a lot of lies going on about culture".<sup>126</sup>

Nevertheless, Badger links much of his identity in terms of being a Barkindji man to his relationship with his Granny. Travelling in a red "wagonette" with a "yella cat" called "Tom", "my dog Spring", and horses "Snip", "Ranger" (a Clydesdale) and "Larrikin", Badger talked about the journeys he and Granny took all around the Western region. On these journeys as they passed though country, Badger talked of how Granny would tell him dreamtime stories, teach him language<sup>127</sup>, and describe the ways of "my people" past and present. Besides learning about how Granny and his "people" *used* to live, he experienced the *now* of culture – "I learned all about my culture" from Granny. His sense of obligation to pass on his knowledge of culture as learned from his Granny and the "old people" is palpable and he sees art as one vehicle for this. "What I'm tryin' to do is teach what Granny taught me an the only way I know to do that, I reckon, is by art work".<sup>128</sup>

According to Badger, Granny is the person who "saved me from bein' stolen generation", always "keepin' ahead of the welfare" – a risk accentuated by the fact that Badger had "fair skin". Badger's father, Michael Joseph Hornal (a white man known locally as "Stinger"), lived in Wilcannia until his death in 2003. Although not denying Badger as his son, Stinger took no active interest in Badger's upbringing. Badger said his "poor mother", Emily, was a heavy drinker, and could not always be relied upon to care for him. It was Granny, he claims, who was the stable influence in his life and to whom he gives most credit for "rearing" him up.

Badger strongly emphasises the influence that his Granny continues to have on his life. "I'd walk away from anyone, Elder, government anyone who discriminate against granny. She got me to where I is today. She guides me. Anything I do, she guides me". Badger attributes much of his self-authoring and identification to his *ongoing* relationship with his

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126 As previously discussed, native title, kin network politics, the 'value' of cultural 'knowledge', personal grievances, jealousies and plain dislike all play their role in the propensity to question the right to assert Barkindji identity and, by extension, cultural knowledge. In the arena of art the enduring inter as well as intra-cultural struggles that "forge identities" have particular import (Holland and Lave 2001:3).

127 Badger is one of only three people I met in Wilcannia who can converse at some level in Barkindji language. Many others however can understand and use certain phrases and words. Two of those with greater language proficiency spoke different dialects to Badger, and although each could mostly understand one another, language at the level of philosophical or fluent discourse appears to be absent.

128 Art in these explicit terms can be understood to materialise culture as part of a discourse on life. Aboriginal art's recognition as a 'material' expression and objectification of 'culture' facilitates this. What is interesting here is that Aboriginal people have begun to echo the white idea of art as culture.



granny. He does not explain this as dialogic in the sense of a two-way discourse, but states that Granny continues to talk to him, and to give advice and sometimes warnings to which he listens and actively responds. When Badger is doing his art work he states that “Granny guides my hand”, Granny is “lookin’ after me”, “lookin’ out for me”, “she here”. At times he told me that he knew she had been present in the rustle of the trees or in a gust of wind.

Badger’s stress on Granny’s ongoing influence is demonstrated in the following anecdote. Whilst I was with Badger at Mutawintji four tourists each ordered an emu egg to be carved by Badger for which he would be paid \$1600 on completion. Despite having finished numerous other art works, these eggs have not been completed to date. I asked him why he hadn’t finished them and got paid and he told me, “the wind not talkin’ to me, granny not talking to me. I get them out an’ look at them, it’s not the right time, something wrong. I know I’m failin’ them customers, but I just can’t do it. It’s not the right time”. In this case the lack of dialogue with his granny has seemingly prevented the completion of the work.

In view of the intrinsic influence on his life that Badger attributes to Granny, it is clear that those who question Granny’s identity question not only her cultural ‘credentials’ but her very being, and by association Badger’s also. Moreover, it is not only his Granny’s heritage that has come under attack. As a “little fulla” Badger says he suffered for being fair skinned (Image 49). Despite his Granny covering his body in emu oil to try to darken him up, he has memories of being taunted by some of his darker Aboriginal peers who called him “white liver”. Being called white liver is an insult related to his status as “a pie-bald Aborigine” with a white father. “I wasn’t good enough”, “wasn’t black enough”.



**Image 49.** Badger far left with his mate Cyril Hunter on his immediate left and other ‘classmates’ in 1954.

Although many of the people who called him white liver are kin related, and he talks to them as well as about them in terms of being close “brothers”, he explains that the taunts of the past still resonate deeply. Anger continues to surface through these recollections: “they all called me white liver, but since I joined National Parks everybody want a piece of white liver now”. There is further ambivalence in this statement. Badger recognises that many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in and out of Wilcannia now see “little white liver” as a man who “knows his culture”; however, he also recognises that he is (at times) used for the influence and contacts he has in certain areas (often by the same people who used to taunt him).

When Badger says, “I want to be the best *artist*”, he makes it clear that part of this aim involves a desire to ‘sock it to’ the people who put him and his Granny down.<sup>129</sup> The expressed and often enacted cultural sanction which decries a person being held up as individually special and Badger’s desire to be the best *artist* sit here in something of an uneasy alliance. Badger therefore constantly precedes statements about his art with the phrase, “I’m not praisin myself, but...”: the “but” being followed by a reason, or reasons, why what he might have to say or what he might have done are, in effect, both culturally valid and important. He validates his sanction to speak authoritatively by referencing the context, event, or statement in question back to the datum point of Granny’s or other “old people’s” knowledge. Here Granny Moisey becomes a source of legitimacy which Badger has been able to transfer to his role as an *artist* and which has enabled him to stand out from other members of the community without invoking the sanctions that ‘success’ can generate.

The authority that Badger ascribes to the old people and his granny is not a given for all Aboriginal people in Wilcannia. While many of the younger people (from teens to early twenties) superficially recognise the authority of Badger and other ‘elders’ (those both living and dead), they treat this authority with degrees of irreverence and ambivalence, although it should be said that their ‘smart mouthing’ is rarely openly directed towards the elders concerned. Other young folk, although far fewer, appear to reckon the kinds of cultural dialogue they have with influential old people (including lessons passed on from those who have died) as a kind of “inner speech”. That is, they talk of drawing on this dialogue as a

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129 Badger’s art is priced from about \$400-\$800 for unframed lino prints, his sculptures are upwards of \$2000, and during my fieldwork he was given a public art commission for \$12000. When his work sells well or when he sells a more ‘expensive’ piece he will say, “not bad for a mission school kid”. Although telling wider kin about the sales can invoke ‘borrowing’, the telling seems to offer a public demonstration of his prowess and a source of pride vicariously applied to Granny.

form of self-authoring the lessons of which (in principle if not always in practice) “...are never played with or inspected”, but are “treated with reverence verbatim” (Holland and Lave 2001:14).

### ***Art From Early Days Till Now – Context and Circumstance***

The form and content of Badger’s art work has changed over time, as has the naming of his work as *art* by himself, other Aboriginal people in Wilcannia and white art world institutions. But it is clear that ‘culture’ in its sense of particular and explicit beliefs, values and experience underpins the art work. This cultural referencing does not negate the desire to be singularly creative or innovative in his art work. Individual creativity is important to Badger and he sometimes complains, “I don’t wanna do fucken borin’ snakes an’ goannas all the time”. This statement talks back in part to what he perceives as rigid art world expectations regarding what is seen to constitute ‘suitable’, ‘authentic’, ‘real Aboriginal content’, which in turn is seen to equate to real Aboriginal culture. This also highlights the complexity of the road that is being negotiated in the production and reception of art. Art is being used by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in ways that are both similar and different. In both cases art references culture, but whereas whites valorise the culture of the past Aboriginal people are using art to show their contemporary manifestations of culture.

Although Badger has carved wood<sup>130</sup> and emu eggs since he was eight years of age,<sup>131</sup> in talking about his “art work” he says that, “Really, it started in the 1980’s with a machete that my nephew stole off a pig-shooter and sold it to me for \$10.00”. Badger still has the machete which he used to carve wooden sculptures and artifacts and claims it as “my pride and joy”. He says that it was in the 1980’s when “I really got into it” [the art], although “I knew about it before”. Before this time “carvin’ eggs and boomerangs, that was our survival”.

Badger went to Mutawintji National Park in his role as Cultural Sites Officer with NPWS for the first time in 1983. This was a place that his Granny had told him much about I asked him how he had felt when he first went to Mutawintji.

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130 Badger has carved boomerangs, clubs spears and other artifacts beginning from the same early age.

131 When Badger was about eight years of age his Granny taught him to “carve little snakes” and “emu eggs”. He talks about sitting down with an “old timer knife”, bits of shaved glass and old shearing blades to make this work.



I was never at Mute [Mutawintji] until 83', I just felt, 'yes, I'm here', you know? I'm at this special place an that's why I was sad, I was happy, I had tears in my eyes but it was full of, I was frightened but I was happy. An' I was glad I was there. An' I just had sort of a, I don't know what you call it, mixed emotion, but it was good. You know? An' that night, I didn't camp in a tent I camped outside near the fire because I wanted to be with those old people that was there. An' I think they<sup>132</sup> accepted me – from how my feelins was. An' then from there on I jus' never looked back.

His role as Cultural Sites Officer also provided the opportunity for his first visit to the Australian Museum in Sydney and he talked of seeing the wooden artifacts of his ancestors which bore some of the same designs he had been taught to carve on emu eggs and wood by his Granny. "I just felt proud because in my mind I knew it through what Granny taught me. But also I felt proud because the old people that carved those things would've passed on, but their work was still there..." This suggests a physical as well as visual affirmation and confirmation of his identity. These influences of seeing Mutawintji and getting to the museum show some of the ways in which culture has come to be consolidated, produced and re-produced.

## Art Media

In the early 1990's Badger began to experiment with lino prints. He said that his partner, Sarah, and Karen Donaldson, a white artist living in Wilcannia, had both talked to him about trying his hand at lino printing. But "Bill Hudson inspired me when I saw what he could



do".<sup>133</sup> Badger said of his first lino print, 'Mutawintji' (Image 50) "I took it up an showed it to Bill and said, what do you reckon?" When Bill said nothing Badger asked, 'what's wrong, don't you like it?' Bill said "fuck you brother, like it. I fucken love it! Here's me three years<sup>134</sup> to do my work".

**Image 50.** Lino print 'Mutawintji' by Badger Bates.

<sup>132</sup> I asked Badger if the old people were living old people and he said no, that they were "the old spirits, the old people's spirits" and "I don't know, they just done somethin' to me".

<sup>133</sup> Two other non-Aboriginal people claimed individually to me that they encouraged and taught Badger to do lino carving. Badger denied this.

<sup>134</sup> Bill Hudson was an Aboriginal man and "brother" from Moree who spent three years at TAFE learning about 'art'.

According to Badger, this encouragement spurred him on – “he was telling me I was good”. Around this time (1993) Bill had arranged an exhibition, ‘The Backyard Boys’, at the Tin Sheds gallery at Sydney University. Badger said Bill asked him, “do you wanna come in with me?” When Bill passed away before the exhibition date Badger asked Bill’s wife Mavis if the exhibition should still go on “an’ she said ‘yeah’”. “It was Bill that got me into the National Gallery, really<sup>135</sup>. That’s when they came and bought my work”. “I knew I could carve but after the National Gallery I never looked back, I knew I could make things”. Having his work exhibited in the National Gallery speaks to the legitimising role that Badger ascribes to the white art world in marking the beginning of his artistic standing: a status that Badger has begun to cement among some of his people.



Image 51. Lino print *Thina Yapa* (foot tracks) by Badger Bates.

For Badger, lino as a medium lends itself to the designs he was taught to carve on emu eggs and “traditional style wooden artifacts” (Martin 1996:12). The artifacts in the museum, however, had “more intricate incised motifs and designs” (Martin 1996:12),

than those which Badger and some others had been producing for sale. According to Martin (1996:12), lino as a medium has facilitated the development of Badger’s own style which she describes as encompassing “an amalgam of influences: the rock engravings, stencils and paintings; traditional designs on wooden artifacts and a strong tradition of oral history...” (Martin 1996:12) (Image 51 and Image 52).

135 The National Gallery in Canberra purchased and holds three of Badger’s lino prints from this exhibition.





**Image 52. Lino print *Bilyara* (Eaglehawk) by Badger Bates.** Badger says that this print was called after his youngest son Bilyara which is also Badger's "totem".

The actual cutting into and incising of the lino is evocative of familiar territory for an *artist* who likes to 'feel' his work. "I can't draw properly but when I touch it I can get it". This 'cutting into', intaglio and sculptural quality of mark making is repeated in Badger's wooden carving, emu eggs, metal work and his work in stone (Image 53 and Image 54). Regardless of the media, the tactile aspects of his work are necessary qualities of the creative and expressive. They are, moreover, qualities that he considers are "natural"<sup>136</sup> which inhere within Aboriginal people; and he relates this to a continuity with the incising practices of Mutawintji and other rock art sites.



**Image 53. 'Dragon Fly' sculpture made with recycled metals by Badger Bates.**

<sup>136</sup> See Kapferer (1988:174-178), for discussion of the ways 'natural' talent and skills in for example sports are valued more readily by dominant society than those seemed to be 'artificial'.



Badger alludes to the inseparability of the physical and the visual for his art work.

See that lino. Because I carve emu eggs I could see my work on lino and I could picture how it was gonna come out when the print was there. An' I don't know, it might just be stupid, but I can reverse my mind to it. Even when I do my lino I can see how its gonna come out on the paper. An' why I won't paint is, I like to, my work I like to touch it.



**Image 54.** Stone sculpture outside the Broken Hill Entertainment Centre and Art Gallery by Badger Bates.

Badger gives the need to “feel” his work as the reason for not taking up painting. According to Badger, painting does not offer the tactile quality of outline, or the raised and incised surfaces which are of paramount importance. “To me, my lino prints, my stone work, my steel work, to me, and the wood, it’s all just the one thing”. “To me, why I don’t like paintin’ cos I can’t touch it. I can’t feel the grooves an’ the lines. If I can’t feel the marks I don’t like it.”

Many times he talked of being “like a blind man” and being able to “see through my fingers”. Badger describes how it is not possible for him to look at a drawing on a blackboard or other flat surface and be able to replicate it.

Aboriginal people are carvers... White teachers can bring in other people’s prints and pictures in books...but you can’t draw on a blackboard and say carve it. An Aboriginal person has to have the picture in their mind and heart. If you tell them to copy a drawing their mind will go blank (in Martin 1996:15).

However, Badger carves simple figurative and more complex figures (including the human figure) into his lino prints, having *drawn* the outline in pencil *before* cutting the lino. In Badger’s case then, his stated inability to ‘copy’ a drawing from a flat surface cannot be considered indicative of any inability to draw per se. It can perhaps best be considered as being more indicative of an ideological preference for feeling both the concept and the motif, together with the perceived need to have a picture ‘in his mind and in his heart’.

Whilst Badger emphasises that ‘copying’ from a one-dimensional flat surface is not feasible or desirable, this is not the case for other Aboriginal people, including Barkindji *artists* in Wilcannia. Many, indeed most, *artists* in Wilcannia paint with acrylics on flat surfaces and copy (animals and fish mostly), directly from books. Therefore, although Badger’s statement that all Aboriginal people are carvers may be the case, it is not the case that all Aboriginal people or even Barkindji people choose this particular medium over others for artistic and cultural expression. One of Badger’s sons, Phillip, carves wood as well as painting in acrylics on canvas, board and wood; however, he most commonly sticks to the latter medium.

### **Art Talk**

What should be made clear is that Badger’s discourse about art and culture often strays far from that of the non-Aboriginal mainstream. It intersects with mainstream discourse in the context of art exhibitions and other art-related contexts such as art catalogue ‘blurbs’, and other art related matters for which he is interviewed, and, in his view that art manifests culture. When Badger talks about art as part of culture, as a way of expressing culture, his use of these two terms appear axiomatic; however, as previous chapters show, the terms ‘art’ and ‘culture’ in their various cultural and contextual uses are not so self-evident.

There are of course multiple Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal discourses about art, but these remain heavily prescribed and proscribed by western art world jargon. At the close of one exhibition, Badger expressed the distance between himself and the mainly white visitors as in the following way. “You know how they [whitefellas] go on, ”where do you get your inspiration? – What do they think we is? Fucken animals or something? We is livin’ in the twenty-first century”. In an amusing take on art world ‘dilettantes’ and ‘cognoscenti’ he then mimicked a polite and high pitched voice and proceeded to emote and wave his arms and hands about, describing “this flow ‘ere” and “this movement ‘ere”. He said to me, “watch my arms, am I getting it right?”

When whitefellas talk with Badger at exhibitions and places of ‘cultural tourism’, he is careful and gracious in his comments. That is, he appears to moderate his views in ways which do not contentiously ‘challenge’ white ‘authority’. He does not assert opposing views at exhibitions and the like, but does so later, *after the fact*, in other more familiar contexts and surroundings. In art-related ‘fields’ and contexts, Badger has gained a certain a feel for the white art world game and can ‘play the game’ (Bourdieu 1990) quite mercilessly.

There are, however, many ‘games’ to learn in art world contexts. Part of learning the game seems to involve meeting the expectations of gallery goers of all types, including the general public, curators, critics and the like. From my experience with Badger and others, the presence of the *artist* and the way the *artist* speaks about their work is an important part of the gallery experience for most gallery goers. In this respect Badger has a real feel for the game; he woos and ‘bungs it on’ to good effect. However, sometimes he would recount situations and exchanges in which he felt that he was ‘getting the game’ or even ‘putting one over’ on certain white people, where it seemed to me that he was ‘missing the game’ on white terms, if playing it well on his own. At other times the reverse was true and whites who were feeling ‘part of the game’ entirely missed the point from Badger’s perspective. There are multiple agendas and perspectives in the game of cross-cultural arts, as well as a constant battle for epistemological supremacy and much slippage in between.

According to Badger, it is not only whitefellas who ‘don’t get it right’. Many Aboriginal people trained in the Western art canon are, according to him, “different to us, they talk different – they just different”. They “don’t talk about it [art] like me”. Badger claims his ‘art talk’ is no different to ‘other talk’, in that he says it is about his life, what he *did*, what he *does*, what he *was taught*, what he *teaches*, what others *did*, what others *do*, what *was* and *is* done together and, importantly, what he sees for his and other people’s future.

Badger talks of the Aboriginal “Sydney-type people” going to the “centre” or the “top end”. “To a lot of artists they just do it for where they wanna be with the old people. They use the old people to get what they want. They come back and use it as their own power”. Badger makes it clear that he differentiates ‘city’ Aboriginal artists from himself.

It’s like me, I can go to the flashest restaurant, wearing the flashest suit an’ then come out an’ take it all off and sit down and throw some meat on the coals. They [city born Aboriginal *artists*], wouldn’t be able to do that. They might have a taste of it [the food]. Even though I’m pie-bald I’m still Aboriginal.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to say that Badger does not like and or admire some Aboriginal Sydney types. He cites a couple of them as close friends. Moreover, he does not suggest that all Sydney types use the “old people”. I draw on this exchange to demonstrate the ways in which the often used, seemingly blanket categories of ‘Aboriginal artist’, ‘urban’ artist and ‘Koori artist’ are intra-culturally contested categories. In Badger’s words, “if anyone call me a Koori I say don’t swear at me, I’m a *Wiimpatja*” [Barkindji blackfella].



Categories such as ‘urban’ often appear to effortlessly cover and ‘lump together’ all those who are *not* from those specific and geographically differentiated places such as “the top end”, “the western desert” or “the centre”. Despite attempts to ‘include’ art and artists from ‘outside’ of these specific geographic locations, the practice of culturally homogenising people from Wilcannia, Sydney, Adelaide, etc., as ‘urban’ in both literature and gallery contexts excludes what are important differences to the artists concerned.

Badger rejects the term ‘urban’ artist as a meaningless and incorrect label: he also rejects the term ‘contemporary’ artist being applied to him. When I was with Badger at an exhibition in Broken Hill featuring his work, one of his Aboriginal friends said to him, “You not an Aboriginal, you contemporary”. Badger replied, “Me, I don’t care...I can sit on the fence, sit both sides of the fence – doesn’t worry me. I’m black when they want me to be an’ white when they want me to be”. The ‘they’ in question (in this context) are for the most part white, and Badger’s assertion that he is who people want him to be can be considered an ironic twist on the (invariably white) view that black people are only black when there is something to be gained.

Some months prior to this I had been asking him what he thought about the term ‘contemporary’ artist and he had bemoaned the title. “What am I, am I a contemporary blackfella or what? If we walk down the street with a lap-lap<sup>137</sup> and spear we’d be jailed for indecent exposure and having a deadly weapon. We who people want us to be”. Contemporary appears to imply *not* really black, *not* really Aboriginal because it is seen to refer to that which is *not* traditional – a *now* with no continuity with the past. This appellation antagonises Badger and quite a few other Barkindji people in Wilcannia, who expressly state that the content and the form of their art work is “our tradition”, “our culture”.

Whilst planning was underway for the Asia Society Exhibition of Aboriginal works in Adelaide, urban Aboriginal people “were reportedly very angry with Peter Sutton the curator because their work was not in the show” (Myers 1994:689). One of the exhibiting *artists* apparently came to Sutton’s defence (1994:689). Myers (1994:689-690) in relaying this tells us that Michael Nelson Tjakamarra “believes that people are really interested in his work and the work of traditional people because it derives from the Dreaming, the source of value from which most urban people have been separated” (Myers 1994:690). In quoting

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137 Badger and other Aboriginal people in Wilcannia often refer to a lap-lap as a “cock rag”.

Tjakamarra, Myers (1994:689-690) writes, “They [whites] want to see [art] from the Center...Urban Aboriginal people *ngurrpaya nyinanyi* (‘they are ignorant’ [of Aboriginal Law])”. According to Myers (1994:690), Tjakamarra “feels sorry” for these urban Aboriginal people. Yet many of the Aboriginal people Tjakamarra would feel sorry for and who he (and the contemporary art world) labels ‘urban’ Aborigines, do not see themselves as such.

The art of Wilcannia is exhibited and discussed as ‘contemporary’ and/or ‘urban’, although these labels are occasionally moderated by terms such as ‘rural’ or ‘regional’ art. According to Badger these categories are a nonsense, although this is not to suggest that Badger and others do not recognise differences between people like Tjakamarra and themselves. Badger sometimes says that he would like to go back<sup>138</sup> to the Centre and spend some time with the old people just sitting down with them and listening to “find out” and “to learn” from them.

There is recognition of difference and of some ‘loss’ of knowledge about the Law and the Dreaming; this is in part conceived of in terms of levels and amounts of ‘knowledge’ and, to some extent, levels or amounts of authenticity. Aboriginal people in Wilcannia also reference “the real tribal people” and the “full bloods” as being somehow more Aboriginal. The influence of the previously discussed anthropological, historical and legislative constitution of the category ‘traditional’ Aborigine is evident here. That Aboriginal people like Badger and others take on board and sometimes grapple with these dominant culture created categories and definitions emphasises their influence for Aboriginal self-authoring.

Badger also speaks of difference between himself and what in his categorisation are ‘urban’ Aboriginal people: those who have been reared and live in cities like Sydney and Adelaide and who cannot go “huntin’” and “get out in the bush”. I asked Badger what he thought of Tjakamarra’s statement,

I think in some ways, yes, some urban people ignorant of culture. Sydney, Adelaide, they urban. Wilcannia is a city, so is Broken Hill but our food is outside. We won’t eat rabbits, bog eyes [shingleback lizards] in the street because of all the rubbish they eat. Come to Sydney – all those white ants,<sup>139</sup> they got all the colours on but they know fuck-all about our culture.

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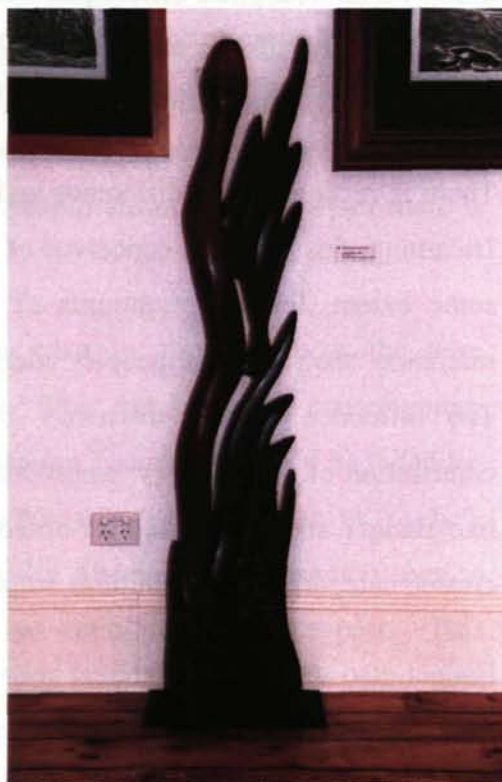
138 Badger visited Alice Springs and Uluru with National Parks in the nineties. He said to me that the “old people” there told him he can go back there anytime he likes. “I’ve got country there”.

139 “Uptown Blacks” and “show ponies” are other terms Badger uses to describe “white ants”.

This would suggest that what differentiates the urban for Badger is not only what he sees as his community's ability to go hunting and to eat wild meat, but to hunt and eat meat that is not spoiled by city life. Food, people and culture are all in this statement to some extent 'spoiled' by city life.

### ***For 'My White Way' and 'My Black Way'***

Differences around 'art talk' and 'art practices' have deep effects and affects and are also a reason why, I argue, there needs to be engagement with not only the art, but contextually with the life of the *artist*. This allows for fuller expression of an *artist's* individual motivations and personal explanation of what their art is 'saying' and is trying to 'say' as well as what they consider art 'does'. Artists such as Tracey Moffat and Trevor Nickolls have reputedly expressed that "they wanted to be known as artists in their own right rather than be stereotyped as Aboriginal artists" (Mundine 1990:9). Indeed, as Mundine (1990:9) points out, "they [artists such as Moffat] are certainly approaching this broader artistic credibility now". For Badger and others the emphasis is on the art as demonstrative of Aboriginal culture, for Moffat, the art and the role of artist is primary. By concentrating on the individual, in this way difference and diversity become clearer.



**Image 55. Red gum carving of Ngatji in the weeds by Badger Bates.**

The following is an example of the individual *artist* in action and dialogue. In 2004, Badger had a solo exhibition at the gallery in Broken Hill titled, 'The Wilcannia Mission School Kid' (Image 55).

At the exhibition a white woman asked, "why is your work all black and white?" Badger told me,

What I wanted to say was, I went to the Mission School in Wilcannia and they learned me to write on a grey/black slate and I used to use a slate pencil made out of stone and when you put a



mark on it, it goes white. Black and white work, it's me, because of my mum and Dad. But I just said, [to the woman] 'can't paint'.

Badger's propensity to talk about "bein' black an' white", being "a pie-bald Aboriginal", having "a white way an' a black way", not "bein' black enough", not "bein' white enough", are constant evocations. This is underscored in Badger's discourse about certain art works. The print 'Bush Tucker on the Paroo' (Image 56) is an example of where this particular aspect is highlighted.

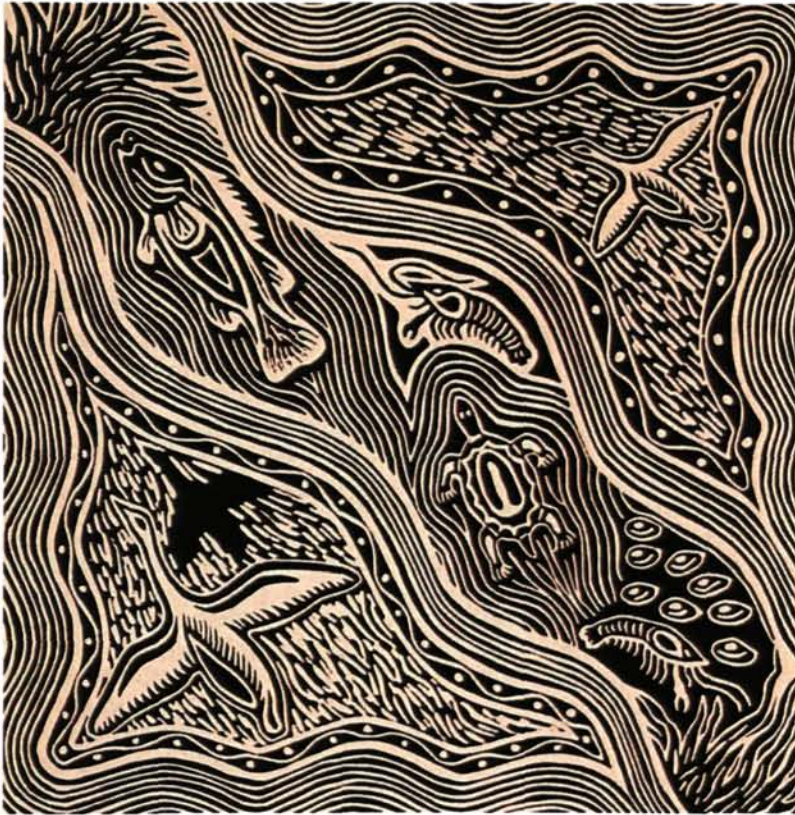


Image 56. Lino print, 'Bush tucker on the Paroo' by Badger Bates.

What the print does not directly express, what we cannot understand by viewing this or any art work, is what the *artist* tells us of the print:

With my art work what I try and do is, I always say, I've got two cultures, I've got two laws. An' I can see things from like the white man's eye cos my dad was white. But I can also see from a blackfella...black person, cos my mum, she was black. I'm black but I know when we eat those animals, I look at their bone and I try an' put them back in there, in my artwork. So you can look at see the swan an' its like all the outline on the outside, it's like a white person drew it. But then when you look at the inside you got the black person, like so. What I try an' do, I do it so because of my white way I put it there, and also because I'm black. I put everything, bones into the one thing when I do it.

Showing the internal organs and skeletal structure is the way Badger says he *sees* animals and is indicative, he claims, of a hunter's way of seeing: highlighting as it does the edible



and non-edible organs and medicinal parts. Badger asserts that his way of seeing spans two cultures and that he has “two laws” and “two cultures”. Although referring to his “white way”, he clearly identifies himself as black. Given Badger’s use, “my white way” seems to refer more to an ability to understand whites.

Howard Creamer (1988:47), in his paper concerning Aboriginal people of New South Wales, refers to mid-twentieth century accounts of,

Aboriginal people without Aboriginality, of lost traditions with nothing to replace them. Thus begins the image of cultureless outcasts, in a kind of cultural vacuum, neither ready for, nor accepting, the assimilation offered by white society. This is the ‘between two worlds’ model which contributes little to cultural theory, because it says little about the actual construct that has emerged; the ideas, beliefs and values of the Aboriginal people who remain; their rules for living; their symbols and their view of the world.

I agree with Creamer that a ‘between two worlds’ model is neither helpful nor informative. Nevertheless, nor is it helpful to ignore that certain people conceive of themselves as having two laws and two cultures. The difference I want to specify here is one of living ‘with’ as opposed to being ‘caught’ or living ‘between’. Badger lives *with* two cultures and two laws, he *sees* things two ways in that he can assimilate both forms of knowledge; but he has one culture – one ontology. This difference is important. The ‘*living between*’ model is linked to a ‘lack’ of identity, whereas Badger’s assertions express a plenitude of identity. In one sense his assertions can be considered synergistic, ‘I have this plus that’. He does not refer to himself as being *between* black and white. His expressions speak more to being able to ‘see’ things and ‘understand’ things from a blackfella way and a whitefella way. This might best be understood as living *with* and knowing *about* two laws and two cultures, but not as living *between* them.

To live *between* two worlds is suggestive of ‘splitting’, of anxiety, and “anxiety is a disorganiser”<sup>140</sup> (Ferrell 2003). Nevertheless, I am not suggesting that living *with* two cultures and two laws does not involve elements of personal dissonance. The fact is, Aboriginal people, especially people like Badger, are involved in negotiating and mediating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations and are constantly called upon to ‘justify’ what constitutes Aboriginal culture and identity and, in turn, themselves. This speaks of the constant and cogent mediation required between two laws and two cultures: of *inter-cultural* mediation *between* black people and white people. However, in my view, when Badger is

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140 This statement was made by Dr Robyn Ferrell, an academic and philosopher at the ‘Art and Affect: a Workshop’, June 2003, Macquarie University, organised by Dr Jennifer Biddle and Dr Jill Bennett.

explaining Aboriginal culture and ways to whites it is from the point of view of being Aboriginal. Similarly, when he explains to Aboriginal people about white cultural motivations and ways it is as an Aboriginal man with a knowledge of white ways.

The 'between two worlds model' is one often afforded non-western *artists* from other countries. Sengalese *artist* Moustaphe Dime says, "I am not between two worlds; I am no a hybrid – I am Moustaphe Dime and I represent only me. I will not let anyone (in the west) imprison me in a little ghetto" (McClancy 1997:15). When Badger talks about the past taunts from black and white, about not being black enough or white enough he does not indicate that these criteria require mediation between a black self and a white self, but between himself and black and white others: as he often says when his identity as an Aboriginal man or Barkindji man is question, "I'm me".

### ***Personal Influence and Culture***

Badger's atypicality is an important part of his ability to influence both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Given that in Wilcannia 'authority' and 'knowledge' of 'culture' are subject to struggle, dispute and variation as Aboriginal culture undergoes change and contestation, it is important to understand why, how, and the ways in which certain individuals influence others. That is, we must understand the shaping of what comes to stand for 'culture' and 'cultural knowledge'. In short, I want to consider how diverse views are processed and 'taken up' by others, and how they become taken up as part of some loosely defined tacit body of shared understanding.

Drawing on Schwartz's (1978:423) model of 'personality as a distributive locus of culture', we are led to understand that,

The distribution of a culture among the members of a society transcends the limitations of the individual in the storage, creation, and use of the cultural mass. A distributive model of culture must take into account both diversity and commonality. It is diversity that increases the cultural inventory, but it is commonality that answers a degree of communicability and coordination.

I find the process through which ideas and practices come to be held in common of particular interest. In the case of Badger, how does his 'teaching' about 'culture' through art content, art practices and discourse, come to be taken up by another person or persons and *become* culture as this is understood, expressed and acted upon?

Creamer (1988:49) considers that Schwartz's model is "...particularly appropriate for description and analysis of a culture undergoing rapid change, where there is considerable variation in knowledge depending on individual experience – who people are, how old, where they have lived and so on". This has particular salience not only as a general tool for cultural understanding but in relation to art and culture. Individual experience and variations in knowledge cannot be divorced from personality and therefore personal influence. The following demonstrates how Badger's experience, cultural knowledge and individual personality intertwine to increase cultural authority and credibility.

Whilst I was in Wilcannia, Badger was described as an "ambassador for the region" (BDT 2003). I too use the term "ambassador" as this is one that Badger will consent to. Badger does not like the term 'Elder' and prefers not to be referred to in this way. Indeed, he often says, "I'm not an Elder" and "I don't wanna be an Elder". Badger asserts that Elders today are arbitrarily named, often lack integrity and do not compare favourably with the Elders he has known and who have now passed away. Badger's refusal to be so named does not however prevent the use of the term Elder being used in relation to him by the media, the many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations with whom he has contact, as well as the majority of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people I met both in and out of Wilcannia. For white politicians, bureaucrats, art curators as well as other agencies (both government and non-government), a kind of Elder hierarchy has been created. People speak of Badger as "a leading Elder", "one of the top Elders": a hierarchical distinction that I did not discern among his Aboriginal networks, although he is clearly one of the more popular community leaders – especially with younger people.

There can be no doubt that Badger has a certain cultural 'credibility' and a well-travelled 'reputation' as someone of cultural knowledge. This credibility both accounts for and creates the level of attention he is afforded and the degree to which his advice, his direction, and his art works influence and are 'taken up' by both whites and his own people. The degree to which Badger has managed to cultivate this kind of credibility in matters seen to be "cultural" among both whites and his people creates, I believe, a kind of inter-cultural synergy: a synergy that becomes all the more fertile when it is combined with an imputed "power" and "charisma".

Although charisma is "one of the most useful and the most tortured" (Geertz 1983:13) of concepts, I draw upon it here because this is a term that whites often use in relation to Badger, and although Aboriginal people do not directly speak of Badger in such terms, the

concept is evocative of certain traits that Aboriginal people attribute to Badger. Non-Aboriginal tour operators at Mutawintji and tourists often refer to him as “very charismatic”, as well as “very spiritual”. Certainly, the whites I spoke with do not seem to be using charisma in its original theological sense of attributing Badger with the “extraordinary power given to Christians by the Holy Spirit” (Csordas 1997:276-277), neither do they seem to be using the term *absolutely* in the sense made sociologically popular by Weber, who defines charisma as “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber 1968:48). However, there is certainly a sense in which exceptional powers and qualities of a kind *are* being attributed, although these seem to speak of a ‘generalised spirituality’ attributed to much Aboriginal art and Aboriginal people as opposed to a specific attribution of powers or to specific events.

It is my impression that many whites who attribute Badger with charisma bring together a generalised notion of ‘Aboriginal spirituality’ with Geertz’s description of charisma. Here charisma has been taken up and transformed into “...an up-market synonym for celebrity, popularity, glamour or sex appeal” (Geertz 1983:13). Part of this charismatic appeal can be connected to the process which has located Aboriginal people as embodiments of some desired spirituality now configured as lost to the West (see Root 1996; Lattas 1989).

Once, at an art gallery opening in Broken Hill, I was sitting outside on the gallery steps with Badger as he was having a smoke. Before long a steady stream of people (mostly whites) came over and sat around him on the lower steps. Mostly it was Badger doing the talking with the people listening; they seemed to be hanging on his words. I teased him about this popularity later, saying, “you don’t have conversations, Badger, you hold court with your coterie of subjects”. He asked what I meant and I said he was like a guru with his followers all hanging on his words. He laughed, yet other conversations with him evidence that he knows this to be the case.

Badger’s white ‘following’ in relation to art gallery contexts cannot be discounted as it is a cogent aspect of Badger’s self identity and helps to affirm his status as a ‘great *artist*’ and valued Barkindji man. As Myers (1994:681) notes, when the “other is invited to represent himself/herself/themselves...most frequently it is the *artist* who is invited to speak”. This is unsurprising on several fronts. Art is a domain that has come to reference the identity of the Other, moreover it is a ‘safe’ form of culture. Although art may at times ‘challenge’ dominant society’s ideologies, norms and values, the ‘taking up’ of any perceived challenge



is of a more voluntary nature. There is more at stake in the challenges presented to dominant society by, for example, native title, and these overt challenges are altogether more likely to be contested.

Another time I saw Badger 'in operation' at Mutawintji with some older white Australian tourists. He was not officially taking a tour that day but was there with me doing some work. We tagged along on the tour and before long he started to explain about one of the sites to some of the tourists. At one point he went off and collected some quandong seeds from a tree. He then approached the tourists with the seeds: on seeing that *there was not enough to go around*, he broke the seeds in half saying "I'm not Jesus or anything...". I said to him later that he couldn't help himself in taking control of the tour, showing his expertise, and playing the crowd. I joked with him that he was a "tourist slut", alluding to how he excels at having a 'feel for the game'. He got a kick out of this and repeated it to his mates, at the same time acknowledging to me that that he often has people "eating out of his hand" – "I'm just a likeable lad", "a loveable rogue".

However, although I never heard an Aboriginal person referring to Badger as being charismatic or as having charisma, I did hear many people speak of his "power" and of him being "special". Phrases like, "he a special one that one", and "aye gee that Badger, he is a spiritual boy" were common. Many of the older Aboriginal people in Wilcannia say that Badger has the powers of his Granny; known to have been a "clever woman" Granny is said to have been accompanied at all times by two "*Mukutya*" (Hercus 1993:44)<sup>141</sup> which she "kept under her armpit".

On one occasion a few of us were having drinks and a young Aboriginal woman touched Badger's arm with her hand and pulled back saying, "I feel power, Unc". She claimed she could not touch him again because of his "power" and kept repeating this. It seems that although Aboriginal people do not specifically attribute the term 'charisma' to Badger, many do appear to attribute him with some of the qualities of charisma as defined by Weber.<sup>142</sup>

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141 The linguist Luise Hercus (1993) states that *Mukutya* means short, small and *Makutya* means malicious mythical being, 'devil' living on rocky hills. I have opted to use *Mukutya* because of the pronunciation, and because *Mukutya* were described as being two "short" spirit men of about three feet six inches in height. Both are said to have beards, one has a beard to his chest and the other a beard past his chest. They are said to have supernatural powers and are "both good and bad". They "look out" for Barkindji and "rouse on trouble-makers as well". I was told by several people that granny "gave them to Badger" when she died. Two people claimed to have seen the *Mukutya* in Wilcannia while I was there.

142 I have no wish to argue in this thesis as to whether charisma "is a quality *imputed* to an individual, rather than a quality *of* an individual" (Bell 2005). Nevertheless, Bell's case study of what she terms "failed charisma" would suggest that charisma is relational as opposed to an inherently personal quality (Bell 2005:1-16).

What I wish to get across is that Badger is attributed certain characteristics and qualities which see him named “special” and “spiritual”. Although many Aboriginal people attribute special powers to him, some do not. Nevertheless, because of a strong belief in spirits and *gunki*<sup>143</sup> (ghosts), even amongst the more ambivalent one can sense a certain hesitancy to reject outright the presence of any special powers in Badger.

Badger’s gregarious ‘personality’, his ‘charm’, his ‘charisma’, his perceived cultural knowledge and authority, cross paths and intersect at various times and in various contexts. These aspects of his character and authority are instrumental facilitating the acceptance of ‘cultural’ information and its transfer and transmission through his art work to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Badger’s strong influence on the art making, art interpretation, art content and form produced by Aboriginal *artists* in Wilcannia by virtue of his perceived cultural knowledge results in ‘change’ within the cultural and artistic milieux of the community. Art can then, among many other things, be drawn upon as a tool for understanding cultural production, change and mediation. The process of making, seeing and talking about art gives rise to cultural flux.

For example, the Wilcannia CDEP has a group of about eight people who choose to ‘create’ art (two to three days a week), as part of this scheme. On one occasion Badger came to see how the group was doing. There were three people at work that day from a usual core group of about six. One of the *artists* (a woman) was painting a turtle. She had drawn the turtle with fins and Badger said to her, “our turtles have claws”, explaining that fins are for “top end” saltwater turtles. He then drew the claws of a “freshwater” Darling River turtle for her. Whether this *artist*, a Barkindji woman in her mid-twenties, has seen or experienced a freshwater turtle in the River I do not know, perhaps she had not as the river at Wilcannia no longer sees an abundance of freshwater turtles. Perhaps she had seen a turtle and had not observed claws. Perhaps she did not consider this difference important to her work. She now, however, paints her turtles with claws and passes this information on to others, “Uncle Badger says....”.

A similar incident concerned the painting of a goanna. One of the younger *artists* in Wilcannia had painted a goanna with four claws equally spaced and straight. Badger

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143 I can find no linguistic reference to *gunki*.

explained to him that goannas have five claws and they are not straight. He held his wrists almost at right angles to one another and then crossed his forearms. He said this is how the claws look and then proceeded to mimic how the goanna climbs a tree. The *artist* has taken this on board and tells people of how Uncle Badger showed him how to draw goannas properly. The extent to which this young *artist* would have had access to observing goannas is again not clear. It is certainly clear that the opportunity and activity of hunting is much reduced for this boy compared to Badger's past and indeed current experience. Goannas are rarely seen in Wilcannia and walking and camping trips out of town are also rare for many.

Both of these examples might elicit a "so what?" response. What does it matter if goannas have the right number of claws in the right direction, and whether turtles are of the fresh or saltwater variety when depicted in art? Isn't stylistic artistic license part of being an *artist*? It matters because it matters to the person 'teaching' and to the willing 'pupils' to the extent that this knowledge is valued and drawn upon. When I asked Badger why these kinds of representations were important he said, "If you from that river and you rely on that river you got to give the animals in that river your respect. When you hungry you eat them. You respect your country, animals, old people, young people".

It matters to the extent that Badger sees a certain level of realism as an important form of respect for the animals and country being depicted in art. It matters at the level of the changes that will be made to art works, and in the perceptions that might arise for those making art works and viewing art works. All in all, it matters very much in considering how individuals and the characteristics attributed to them can affect cultural change in microcosm.

Although I am specifically drawing on Badger here, what I am also trying to say (albeit clumsily) is that art, its content, form, its making and interpretation *can* be extrapolated out as a means of gaining insight into not only individual viewpoints as they are explicitly expressed, but as a means of demonstrating and examining the process of cultural 'change', cultural 'teaching', and the sharing of culture. However, the extent to which art does this is relative. It is tied up with *who* is behind the art, the art talk and the art practices. In short, art and culture cannot be separated and in this instance, neither can art and culture be separated from the individual.

The self-authored identity that Badger seeks, expresses and claims through his art work and art discourse adds to the overall cultural milieu. It also creates for others a graspable and



identifiable range of 'cultural forms' from which to select: graspable forms which can be absorbed into living through discursive and creative mimesis by repeating motifs *in* and or making statements *about* the art. Because art in the case of certain *artists* and in certain contexts is not so much about proclaiming 'difference' as proclaiming and claiming some coherent sense of cultural identity, what is grasped and what is rejected becomes important. Although people are struggling for 'recognition' of culture and 'recognition' of being Barkindji, "people struggling in the name of one identity are doing so in ways that at the same time involve other kinds of identities....people also fight over the different perspectives on what they are struggling about" (Holland and Lave 2001:27). Choice is important!

This is not to dismiss art as a tool to 'proclaim difference'. Indeed to proclaim a coherent sense of cultural identity and 'sameness' is at once to proclaim difference from that which is 'not us'. It is to point to the importance of individual influence in the process of cultural distribution and validation, and also to show how this in turn links to common cultural coherence.

As Schwartz's (1978:423) distributive locus of culture posits, any externalised event or readable message or artifact has the possibility of being internalised within a continuous process which individuals may store. In this way what might be considered externalised minutiae become part of the whole in a synergetic way. The whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. This is another reason why art is of interest; art and its practice is in dialogue with the community and more widely – art produces culture. The ways in which art does this cannot be separated from a recognition of the role of dominant society in conflating these two concepts. It is clear that Aboriginal people are making use of these confluences in ways that serve to reaffirm their identity. Whilst self-authoring is often overridden by dominant culture interpretations, the intersections between art and culture have also allowed people like Badger the possibility to improvise and carve out a niche for themselves as individuals in ways which they can feel comfortable and that do not controvert established local Aboriginal values.

## Epilogue

### *Culture: the Holy Grail*

The overarching concern of this thesis has been a desire to unpack what it means to be black in Wilcannia. The thesis is primarily about the competing values and points of view within and between cultures, the ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people tacitly and reflexively express and interpret difference, and the ambivalence and ambiguity that come to bear in these interactions and experiences.

This thesis demonstrates how ideas and actions pertaining to ‘race’ and ‘culture’ operate in tandem through an exploration of values and practices relating to ‘work’, ‘productivity’, ‘success’, ‘opportunity’ and the domain of ‘art’. In so doing, the dialectical relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are more readily seen. I make no pretence that this thesis is not in its own way contributing to this dialectic. As Cowlshaw (1993:184) notes, “one cannot represent Aborigines without representing the dialectical relations of domination. Further, the way academic work impacts on, to either challenge or to authorise and entrench certain elements of public knowledge and racial practice, is a political as well as an intellectual matter”.

According to Joel Kahn, in common usage the term ‘culture’ refers to “... a group of persons who share common ideational features and form a discrete and separate population unit” (1989:21). As he points out, this definition of culture shares the basic features of the concept of race. Indeed, it appears that the conflation between race and culture – an erroneous spill over from previous scholarly and scientific discourse – has become a powerful if taken-for-granted axiom (c.f. Kahn 1989:21). Yet anthropology has given little consideration to “...racial discrimination as an important factor in cultural accounts of Aboriginal life” (Jones and Hill-Burnett 1982:235).<sup>144</sup>

Racial tensions are a basic ‘fact’ of life in Wilcannia and it is fair to say that, at one level, clear binaries are called into action at the slightest hint of division or disagreement involving black and white. Nevertheless, despite quite explicit appearances and discourse to the contrary, black and white relations in Wilcannia are not clear cut and crisply divided; they

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144 There are of course exceptions as intimated in the introduction.

are riddled with ambiguity and ambivalence in terms of some 'on the ground' relationships. Being black in Wilcannia for an Aboriginal person is a complex field requiring negotiation with local whites, close and more distant kin and dominant culture bureaucratic pressures and requirements. Culture and identity become 'work': one works with, for and against 'culture' in implicit and more objectified ways whether one wants to or not.

The work of this thesis describes and analyses the ways in which Aboriginal people deploy 'culture' to both assert individual and group identity and to subvert dominant culture ideas and ideals. Moreover, the projection of culture may or may not be consciously active given that 'Aboriginality' is projected onto Others simply by virtue of living in a different way to whites. Indeed, Aboriginal difference is made more blatant through the white perception that Aborigines reject and/or ignore dominant culture ways of living and being.

Many whites in Wilcannia feel that Aboriginal people are either incapable of grasping the 'realities' of a western and capitalist 'culture' or defiantly and arrogantly reluctant to do so. There is an omnipresent racial awareness operating which many whites express in terms of an Aboriginal lack: a lack of culture and a lack of civility. The inter-cultural animosity regarding different values, desires and expectations in relation to 'work', as well as what this means and how this should be *practiced*, is cause for much misunderstanding and resentment between black and white. Moreover, work and the ways in which Aboriginal people figure and value it is not a 'one size fits all', and there is also much intra-cultural dissent and fracturing of relationships as some see the values of 'caring and sharing' to be subverted by the practices of those labelled 'coconuts'.

Snead states that "[i]n certain cases, culture, in projecting an image *for others*, claims a radical difference *from others*, further defined qualitatively as *superiority*" (1991:215). Snead is referring here to European projections of European culture (Snead 1991:215). As this thesis shows, in Australian country towns such as Wilcannia and Broken Hill whites clearly figure difference from Others as a superior difference. While this difference is at times explicitly racialised, it is not actively 'worked' at. That is, whites do not necessarily actively project a sense of superiority, they assume their superior nature by default: it is implicitly a given. Neither is this difference necessarily expressed as superior 'culture'; 'culture' in these terms is what Other people have. Whites certainly see themselves as having 'Culture' (as in High Culture); however, apart from this they have a 'way of life' – they 'simply are'.



High Culture is therefore something both intrinsic to whiteness as well as something that whites can acquire (although it is not usually explicitly objectified in these terms). Culture is also seen to be intrinsic to certain Aboriginal people; but 'culture' cannot be acquired in this model, it can only be 'had' or 'lost'. Indeed, as Kahn points out, for some whites of a romantic bent, Aboriginal people were seen to have *more* culture (Kahn 1989:11). The people of Wilcannia, however, are not accorded 'culture' of this kind. Anthropological literature together with land rights and native title legislation have concatenated to some degree to ingrain attitudes about 'traditional' Aborigines in public discourse.

It is clear that Aboriginal people in general have been turned into an "object of knowledge" with state institutions, the media and other experts and authorities being the primary producers of what is seen to constitute 'authentic' Aboriginal identity (Morris 1988:64). This is a politics of identity that is not often visited upon whites. White 'culture' in Wilcannia needs little articulation, it is assumed in the tenor of every day living and social intercourse with Others. Its more explicit and reflexive projection takes place in response to the *perceived* as well as intentional oppositional challenges which are daily offered up by Aboriginal people, often as they simply go about their business (cf. Cowlshaw 1993:186).

Aboriginal people also assert and project difference; and whilst this may take the form of exclusivist, racialised and oppositional discourse and practice, the extent to which Aboriginal people *do not* consider others' opinions of them or 'work' at projecting difference is something given little recognition in the literature. Moreover, opposition and resistance are not, as Cowlshaw (1993:186) shows, necessarily intentionally defiant. There is a kind of circular and ongoing opposition between black and white manifested and enlarged as a result of much inter-cultural misunderstanding.

However, even in a racialised environment, Aboriginal people do not live their lives "in a cleft stick between dissent and assent" (Cowlshaw 1993:184). As Cowlshaw goes on to say, "Crises of loyalty or identity...are rarely specified as having the political meaning they may accrue in hindsight or on reflection" (1993:184). Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that Aboriginal people continually and consciously dwell on their identity, either in relation to the perceptions of Others or in terms of self-authoring. Indeed, assertions of a distinctive identity and the need to express and defend it often occur in response to its denial by whites. Even the most stable forms of identity can become subject to assertive indignation when faced with the denial of their existence.

Aboriginal people are forced to live subaltern lives in the face of dominant culture legislation, welfare dependency and in the Australian imagination (Cowlshaw 1988, 1993, 2004a; Lattas 1990, 1993, 2000; Povinelli 2002; Morris 1997, 1990). This is particularly true for those Aboriginal people in urban and country town areas who are often not viewed as being 'real' Aborigines but pretenders out to milk the economy by wily subterfuge and/or self-deception. Therefore, whilst most Aboriginal people at times go about their business not 'giving a fig' for how dominant culture views them, the required level of engagement with dominant culture and the contexts in which this interface takes place makes forgetting one's cultural identity and 'location' well nigh impossible. The need to assert one's identity is a consciousness increasingly forced upon Aboriginal people, one that (ironically perhaps) strengthens the resolve and creates a greater desire to affirm and articulate 'culture'.

Aboriginal people in Wilcannia increasingly express their identity in reflexive terms by talking about "our culture", "our way", "our traditions" and a "blackfella way". Part of this expression of culture involves holding up 'caring and sharing' as a value which differentiates Aboriginal people in a positive way from whites. Whilst caring and sharing have long been advanced by Aboriginal people as important and practiced values, the extent to which they are repeatedly and reflexively stated may have something to do with the increasing need to objectify culture in discourse. This is not to deny that caring and sharing are practiced; although sanctions operate to maintain these values (which at times appear to be flagrantly ignored), sharing with one another and therefore caring for one another are clear and general practices that do (in the main) indeed seem to differentiate Aboriginal people from whites.

Culture and Aboriginal culture are now embedded in everyday popular discourse. In Aboriginal communities 'culture' has become objectified to the extent that those not following the required 'recipe' of Aboriginal culture (read 'traditional') become subject to the white denial of culture's presence. One must prove 'culture', it seems, by meeting certain requirements which Aboriginal people in Wilcannia are perceived to 'lack' (never mind that the trope of the 'traditional' Aborigine has always been more imagined than 'real'). Those who do not demonstrate 'Aboriginal culture' to the satisfaction of wider society through the modes that dominant culture has devised and constructed are seen to be without Aboriginal culture.

There is an unwritten yet almost implicit idea of what constitutes real Aboriginal culture against which all Aboriginal people are compared. A continuum of Aboriginality that whites accept and readily agree upon is reflected in the kind of comments heard in towns such as

Wilcannia. Degree of physical blackness, speaking an Aboriginal language, going out bush, hunting, 'jacky jacky' affability and compliance, taking white advice and direction (especially in matters of an administrative or development-oriented nature) can all be awarded points on the 'good' or more 'real' Aborigine continuum.

Although trying to question the perception of Wilcannia as a disordered town, advertorials such as the following by the *Sydney Morning Herald* in fact further embed yet another stereotypical image. In talking of Wilcannia the article states,

Sadly very few travellers get out of their cars, have a look around this historic town and talk to the local Aborigines, who are, almost without exception, very friendly and only too happy to talk about this delightful township on the banks of the Darling River. After all many of them are Barkindji people who have been living in this region for 40 000 years (SMH 2004).

The trope of the forty thousand year heritage and all that this is made to mean does not meet with the 'in your face' distinctive difference of "vocabulary, family form, pattern of interpersonal interaction" and a distinct economy (Cowlshaw 1988:99) which is the experience of whites in town. These differences are constant reminders for whites of the ways Aboriginal people do not meet the constructed white standards and mores of imagined 'traditional' Aborigines.

Whites have a lot to say about Aboriginal culture and so (arguably as a consequence) do Aborigines. As Aboriginal demands and their implications have become more politicised and overt, whites have become "less accommodating" (Bennett 1999:137) of them. Whites permit and accommodate Aboriginal culture when it 'adds to' white national identity and rail against it when it is seen to conflict with white personal and group social, economic and political interests and values. But the constant white evocation of a mythical Aboriginal community who live in harmony and all care about and share with one another means that they read intra-cultural disagreement as yet another sign that Aborigines in Wilcannia have no culture. "They can't even agree with one another".

As Jones and Hill-Burnett state, for European Australians there remains a "largely undisturbed and thus unconscious attitude of superiority towards Aboriginals", together with inclinations towards a "...romantic appreciation of [an] Aboriginal past, walkabout, and Dreamtime traditions" (Hill and Jones-Burnett 1989:228). Demands for recognition of Aboriginal racial and cultural heritage are more readily accommodated than those demands or issues that whites view as being of a more political nature (Jones and Hill-Burnett 1982:235). Here 'culture' as "artefacts and fixed types of social reproduction" (Merlan

1989:105) becomes distinct from political action or ideology. As Merlan points out “[t]here is developing a particular emphasis on ‘culture’ objectified as goods, products and performances, and upon these things as a distinctive repertoire which differentiates Aborigines in generals from Europeans” (Merlan 1989:106).

### ***Art: a New Way of Being Aboriginal***

This is where art, particularly ‘Aboriginal art’, takes on an interesting and special role in relation to and for Aboriginal people. “More recently, 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 in contemporary life” (Marcus and Myers 1995:1). When Fred Myers (2002) went to work with the Pintupi people he did not anticipate that much of his work would involve interaction with art dealers, critics and museum curators; art was not what he went to study. Nevertheless, as he now says, the paintings of the Pintupi people “are probably the most enduring medium by which the people...have made their presence known” (2002:1).

This thesis also offers art and *artists* as a lens into ‘Aboriginal culture’ and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations, experiences and interactions in Wilcannia. Although the ‘Aboriginal arts’ are structured and characterised by a form of internal colonialism (Fourmille 1994), and problematic distinctions between ‘urban’, ‘rural/country town’ and ‘traditional’ Aboriginal art continue, *artists* in Wilcannia are actively reclaiming the authoring of their artistic discourse and practice in ways that feed back to an authoritative agency of culture and identity. The work of Murray, Badger and others demonstrates a recognition of the intertwining of the two concepts of ‘art’ and ‘culture’, as well as the ways in which this recognition has been taken up and used for local, personal and inter-cultural means and meanings.

Art is one way that Aboriginal people in Wilcannia have chosen to publicly and privately perform, assert and create a distinctive identity for themselves and for Others. Art is a means through which some people in Wilcannia are regaining a degree of control over their identity (Morris 1988:75). Although this kind of expression is difficult to control in view of the intersections with dominant society art worlds and values, there is nevertheless in the choice of content and representations an asserted autonomy despite or in the face of market demand. Restrictions and sanctions to the expression of identity are certainly present within the Aboriginal community itself; however, as has been demonstrated, art offers an as yet



undefined arena which provides the potential to escape some of these sanctions. At the same time, art offers a way to consider and mediate intra-cultural meanings and difference. Agency is gained through the partial, voluntary and public inter and intra-cultural sharing of knowledge about paintings and the retention of private meanings.

Some view the conflation of art and culture as reducing Aboriginal people and their culture to their artefacts (Fourmile 1994:77), and others see 'Aboriginal art' as an area that is too controlled by dominant culture to offer any real challenge to it (Fry and Willis 1989; Williams 1976:278). Yet, the former claim does not give enough credence to the fact that for many Aboriginal people art and culture as intertwining aspects meets the Aboriginal view that art is part of life, not an "autonomous pursuit distinct from other aspects of life" (Fourmile 1994:76). Moreover, the latter claim insinuates that proving oneself to whites is the goal of Aboriginal art.

It is interesting that the art of 'urban' or 'contemporary' Aboriginal people (read rural and urban in many cases) – 'Koori art' as it is often labelled – is generally cast in a resistance role and described as highly political, uncomfortable to whites, ironic, art in adversity (Sykes 1990; Morphy 2001). For example, Ryan labels the Koori art of urban Aborigine as "angry, humorous, ironical, whimsical" (Ryan 1993:60-62). It is not my experience that the majority of the art being created in Wilcannia draws on whimsy, anger, humour or irony as either a motivation for the work or as unintentional result. I draw this comparison because it is often into the category of 'urban' artist that Wilcannia's *artists* are placed. Whilst I agree to some extent with Ryan's (1993:60-2) assertion that 'urban' art's aim is to proclaim 'Tyerabarrbowaryardu' ('I shall never become a white man'), I do not agree with the level of opposition and even aggression that this viewpoint seems to connote for *artists* in Wilcannia. As Murray's art discourse shows, challenging whites is not a priority in art making, power in this arena is more an intra-cultural creation.

At one level it may seem problematic that art and culture are being conflated to a degree that valorises the products of certain Aboriginal people and reduces the people to their products. However, whilst this is certainly more problematic for some groups than others, the fact that art is not something done to Aborigines but something done by them, and in very different ways, locates art practice at the interface of some interesting possibilities. Indeed, because Wilcannia has not suffered or gained (depending on one's point of view) from a resident art adviser or a stream of interested museum curators, critics or coordinators such as Papunya, Balgo, Yirrkala and others have done, the art is not directed to the degree that it has been

elsewhere. Whilst economic viability is certainly a priority and the owner of the Wilcannia Motel will offer his advice on buyer feedback and whilst clearly my fieldwork as demonstrated also involves some influence, there is a sense that the art being produced is strongly subject to Indigenous intersubjectivity as opposed to non-Indigenous discussion and interest.

As the thesis has shown, art and the *artist* are not fundamentally set apart from the local society, and although Aboriginal 'art' and 'culture' are objectified in ways somewhat parallel to western 'culture', the conflation of art and culture seems to (at least for now) offer Aboriginal people in Wilcannia some inter-cultural mutually reinforcing aspects of value. Moreover, art is one area that is allowing a degree of intersubjective freedom from intra-cultural social sanctions in Wilcannia and is clearly part of the emergence and the shaping of one's "attitude towards oneself" and one's encounters with O/others (Honneth 1995:xii). As Murray, Badger and other *artists* demonstrate, the practice, discourse and sale of art offer recognition of what Honneth considers to be the three crucial aspects of identity formation: those of "self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem" (1995:xi). Moreover, because art is a recognised measure of value for dominant culture, a mutual recognition is (at some level) established. Art, its recognition and practice, presently allows for the emergence, contestation and contingent creation of identity and culture.

Since Kant, art's value for dominant culture lies in its capacity to overcome "our ordinary relations to the world" (Podro 1982:xxi) and does so by virtue of its consideration as a separate domain: the 'disinterested contemplation of...art objects removed from instrumental associations" (Marcus and Myers 1995:3). Ironically or perhaps paradoxically, what is valued in 'traditional' Aboriginal art is precisely the perception that the 'natural' world is embedded in an Aboriginal way of life. It is the ordinary relation to the world that has become so unfulfilling and passé for many whites; the 'traditional' way of life is seen to be a panacea for this. Meanwhile, Aboriginal people in places like Wilcannia continue to be ambivalently and ambiguously located as they too struggle to situate themselves within and apart from dominant culture's categories and their affects.

Anthropologists as well as others continue to distinguish between 'traditional', 'traditional-oriented' and 'urban', 'non-tribal' Aborigines whilst more recently arguing for their mutual value. It is not difference per se that is problematic so much as what attaches to this, because difference always attaches value. "Culture' is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power"

(Clifford 1986:15). Because art has already accrued a positive value in dominant society, this is both its blessing and its curse. Yet, it still offers an avenue to re-inscribe and re-make the communicative processes between Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, to, in short, allow for other versions of 'culture' in Wilcannian terms.

## **Appendices**

### ***Appendix 1.***

In 2004 the Central Darling Shire Council (CDSC) General Manager gave a verbal estimate of 750 to 800 people living in Wilcannia, stating that about 90% were Aboriginal. In the 2001 to 2003 CDSC Social Plan, Council drew its demographics from a variety of sources. This included the Far West Area Health Service (FWAHS) statistics collected in 1999 which stated that 74.9% of the population of Wilcannia was Aboriginal. Although the Shire in their 2001-2003 report stated there is “some doubt over the validity of [ABS] figures”, they nevertheless drew on the 1996 ABS figures, and the FWAHS figures in order to extrapolate data. The 2001-2003 report stated that in 1996 25% of the entire “Shire’s” population of 2644 people were Aboriginal. This equates to 661 Aboriginal people. Attempts to arrive at fairly accurate data are stymied by ambiguities of source and comparisons and where data are compared across years. Agencies circulate reports which draw upon one another for information. Since most agencies reject the ABS data as a datum there is often no fixed datum of comparison. My point, however, that Wilcannia has grown from a mainly white town of few or no Aborigines to a town mainly of Aborigines with few whites is not compromised by these inconsistencies. I point out these inconsistencies as a means of highlighting that it is a feature of Wilcannia that population demographics are never quite clear. What is clear is that by far the majority of town residents are Aboriginal, and that the Aboriginal population is increasing as the non-Aboriginal population (at least that of child bearing age or proclivity) is in decline.

### ***Appendix 2.***

Sexual Jealousy was an ongoing and ever-present consideration for me during fieldwork. Beckett (1958b:2005:94) described this as “another potent source of conflict between man and wife: something to which both men and women are prone”. Women over a certain age in large Australian cities are used to being (for the most part) sexually invisible. Women as they creep close to fifty are certainly not the public focus of sexual desire, this being given over to younger women. I was struck immediately on arriving in Wilcannia at the lack of ageism in relation to sexuality. Women and men of all ages retain their sexual attraction to



the opposite sex, and this is quite openly apparent. It is not uncommon for quite young men to have sexual relations with much older women and vice-versa. In my case, men as young as twenty-one and through all ages openly expressed that I was 'Numpi' ("good-looking", "rootable") and that they would 'like to cut a rug with me'<sup>145</sup>. This was both surprising and at times quite flattering. It was also however, quite a problem at times.

Sexual jealousy is a potent force in Aboriginal Wilcannia. I was present at quite a few punch ups and heated exchanges (generally when people have had a lot to drink). Men argued with men over women, women argued with women over men, and men and women argued and fought all sparked by jealousy. My awareness of sexual jealousy was immediate, but the extent of it and the 'triggers' were not. I naively thought that because I was engaging with men on a professional basis and talking about art that this was not going to provoke jealousy. I was wrong. It also, albeit slowly dawned on me that most of the *artists* in town were men and that I spent quite a lot of my time with them.

One night I was in the golf-club sitting with two Aboriginal men having a drink. On the table next to us was a married couple. The husband stood up and said to the woman "you're just a jealous cunt" and then punched her in the mouth. Usually the bouncers were on this kind of behaviour quickly but this time they missed it. The couple continued to hurl abuse at one another and then the man walked off. I glanced over at the table and the woman looked at me and said "what you lookin at ya white cunt"? I looked away and one of the men with me said "don't worry about it". I wondered why I should be worried about it. As far as I knew this had nothing to do with me. He said again "don't worry, it's ok, we'll look after you. I asked, "why should I worry about it, what's it got to do with me"? He replied "she's just jealous".

I had spoken to this woman once before in a group and she had been quite sullen with me. At that time another woman I was with told me the 'jealous' woman had told her not to talk to her if she was "with that white cunt" (me). She told me not to worry about it, that I was her friend and if the woman came near me she would "lift the cunt".

The husband of the 'jealous' woman was an *artist* and I had been planning to talk to him at some stage. However, because of the situation with this particular woman, I felt I could not approach her husband and therefore could not ask him directly about his artwork. Sexual

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<sup>145</sup> The songs of Dougie Young encapsulate the meaning of cutting a rug in the 1950's (Beckett 1958 [2005:127-128]). This expression used to refer to having a bit of a party with friends which involved getting into the drink and maybe involving a bit of roughhouse fighting. Today, when someone says they want to 'cut a rug' or have 'cut a rug' with someone it generally means to have sex.

jealousy was so extreme that I had to quite radically monitor and alter my interaction with men. Normally very gregarious I had to modify my behaviour. As a person who often touches people on the arm or hand when talking I had to learn to keep my hands to myself.

Whilst 'sexual jealousy' is not a key topic of my research, those who have worked in Aboriginal country towns will no doubt be familiar with the issues I raise. Because I worked with men a great deal, not to mention this aspect at all may be seen as an omission.

### **Appendix 3.**

Gell regards art objects as "devices for securing the acquiescence of individuals in the network of internationalities in which they are enmeshed" (1992:43). Put another way, art for Gell is not about meaning and communication but about doing (Thomas in Gell:1998:ix). Doing can be defined as the mediation of human agency through art objects which in turn, "motivate inferences, responses or interpretations" (Thomas in Gell 1998:ix). Despite Gell's strong rejection to visual art as being like language, or of "forms of semiosis" being language like, Gell nevertheless recognises that there is "something irreducibly semiotic about art" (1998:14). To this end he utilises the term abduction when referring to inferences that are made about, and in relation to art objects. Abduction, a term common to logic and semiotics covers,

the grey area where semiotic inference ( of meaning from signs) merges with hypothetical inferences of a non-semiotic (or not conventionally semiotic) kind, such as Kepler's inference from the apparent motion of Mars in the night sky, that the planet traveled in an elliptical path" (1998:14).

Gell is not suggesting that art objects do things by themselves, but that they vicariously acquire a "secondary agency" through social relationships with people (1998:17). "Relations between social agents...obtain between four 'terms' (entities that can be in relation). These are:

1. Indexes: material entities which motivate abductive inferences, cognitive interpretations, etc;
2. Artists (or other originators): to whom are ascribed, by abduction, casual responsibility for the existence and characteristics of the index;
3. Recipients: those in relation to whom, by abduction, indexes are considered to exert agency, or who exert agency via the index;
4. Prototypes: entities held, by abduction, to be represented in the index, often by virtue of visual resemblance, but not necessarily" (1998:27).

### ***Other matters for consideration.***

I have been asked by some Barkindji people in Wilcannia to use the spelling of Barkindji as opposed to the more readily used Paakantji. One man expressed that the prefix 'P' was confusing for children as although pronounced as a kind of 'p/b', the emphasis is on the 'B'. One man said "for years it was spelt with a 'B' right? Then, I'm not gonna name any linguists but one of them got up, linguist, archaeologist and says Paakantji right? And they spell it with a 'P', an that caused a lot of conflict with the kids an everyone".

When quoting transcripts of interviews and conversations the English used reflects as closely as possible what I heard and recorded. As Stephen Muecke (1983:vi) states "[j]ust as it would be unjustifiable to rewrite a poet's work into 'correct' English (in other words to take away the poet's license), so it would be unjustifiable to rewrite the words of [someone's] stories. Although I recognise that text cannot replicate the sensual aspects of the body language of live conversations, in chapters six and seven which are semi-biographical, I have tried to evoke pauses and hesitancies of speech by the use of a series of dots (.....)

All photographic images used in the thesis are my own unless otherwise specified.

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