

Introduction

*'I am real!' said Alice, and began to cry.
'You wo'n't make yourself a bit realler by crying,' Tweedledee
remarked: 'there's nothing to cry about.'
'If I wasn't real,' Alice said - half laughing through her tears,
it all seemed so ridiculous - 'I shouldn't be able to cry.'
'I hope you don't suppose those are real tears?' Tweedledum
interrupted in a tone of great contempt.
Lewis Carroll (1968:194 -195).*

This thesis is concerned with articulations of identity that have emerged from an urban Aboriginal community in western Sydney in the era and context of land rights and native title. It examines cultural forms of contemporary expression. It explores the ambiguous nature of these forms and the ways in which they are contested and negotiated in a world which is always already inhabited by more powerful cultural groups.

Defining what the thesis is about has proven challenging, but even more challenging has been the task of identifying, recognising and differentiating exactly *who* this thesis concerns. The people among whom I conducted my fieldwork have emerged only relatively recently as a cultural group. Their emergence came about as a result of genealogical research carried out by biologist, Dr. James Kohen, in the early 1980s. Kohen identified descendants of Aboriginal people who lived in what is now called Sydney before 1788 and prepared a number of native title claims on their behalf. He identified more than 5,000¹ living descendants over the years but only a

¹ Some details from Kohen's data-base of Darug descendants are published in 'The Darug and their Neighbours' (1993) and there are, in fact, more than 6,000 descendants listed in that publication. Kohen provides birth and marriage dates, but provides few dates of death, so it is impossible to calculate exactly how many of the Darug descendants he identifies are living. Based on an assumption that many people born after 1940 are probably still alive, I estimate that about 5,000 (about 85% of those identified by Kohen) are living.

tiny minority of these people identify themselves as traditional owners of Sydney and it is only a small proportion of that group who are the main focus of this thesis. I explain Kohen's role in facilitating the emergence of the people with whom I am concerned below. Here I need to say that they are so unconventionally bounded, sociologically multifaceted, and culturally fragile, that it is difficult - for themselves and others - to ascertain their ultimate difference. A primary argument of the thesis is that it is only through overt, intentional cultural expression, made in relation to those of the dominant society, that the community with whom I am concerned can make themselves manifest. It is only *in relation to others* that the community's identity can be apprehended.

This study concerns aspects of a collective identity which is so new that as yet, the people concerned do not formally name themselves. This has presented me with a problem from the outset. How do I make my meaning clear enough for the purposes of the thesis without naming the people among whom I have conducted the research and upon whom this thesis depends? I experimented in many early drafts, repeatedly using the name by which the community informally call themselves - 'The Community' - only to find that it gave rise to an unacceptable level of confusion and superfluous text.

The defining characteristic of this group of people, for the purposes of my research, is that they all engage in relationships with a particular group of Aboriginal people who claim to be traditional owners of the land inhabited by all community members. These Aboriginal people call themselves Darug descendants. As well as Darug descendants, however, the community I have studied is constituted by spouses and other relatives who are not Darug descendants and some are not even

Aboriginal. Some of these community members are White and others are Maori migrants to Australia. Others are Aboriginal people who have come from other parts of Australia to live in Sydney. It may be argued that all constituent members of the community could be described as Darug custodians. In fact, most adult community members who are not Darug descendants are associate members of the Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation (an Aboriginal organisation recognised by the Australian state). The term, 'Darug custodian', therefore, is not merely descriptive, but has been institutionalised as a name that members of the community recognise as referring to them, although they do not use it themselves.

I consulted a number of community members over my dilemma of not wanting to attribute a name to those who do not name themselves, yet needing to make it as clear as possible exactly who I am writing about. It was suggested by some senior Darug descendants that the name 'Darug Custodians' would be suitable for the thesis. However, I have not felt comfortable using this name because it is not used by the community. I have, therefore, compromised, making explicit that it is / who have named those to whom the thesis refers. I emphasise this by using lower case letters to mark the words 'darug' and 'custodian', indicating that these words do not constitute a proper name. As well, I always refer to 'darug custodians' within single inverted commas, to remind the reader that this identity is more a concept than a fact, and that it is I who attribute this name to them.

The Necessity for Complexity.

It will already be clear to the reader that this thesis is no ordinary ethnography. Before I begin an account of its specifics and its contribution to literature concerning the (re)emergence of ethnic identities and the cultural 'renaissance' of recently

(re)emerged groups, I need to explain that the reader will often need to consult the glossary of terms. Because of the difficulties associated with precisely differentiating 'darug custodians' from the various other groups of people with whom they are associated, it is necessary to use terms that may be both unfamiliar to most readers, and clumsy in form. The reader will need to regularly consult the glossary for definitions in order to follow parts of the thesis. I ask that the reader be patient with this important characteristic of the thesis. The differentiations represented by the terms are the many different ways in which separations between groups of people are actually made by 'darug custodians', regardless of attempts by the state to standardise categories of identity in its own official terms. A central argument of the thesis is that 'we' - academics, other 'experts' and the Australian state - tell Aboriginal people how to be Aboriginal and that this runs counter to how many Aboriginal people see themselves as being.

My thesis is partly about ways of understanding categories which are different from those formulated by 'us' (the dominant society). This crucial dimension of my work arises from the fact that 'darug custodians' do not fit into any of 'our' categories because they are a sociologically multifaceted group. Throughout the thesis, and especially in Chapters Two and Three, I depict and analyse the various sociological attributes of people who claim traditional Aboriginal ownership of Sydney, their White and Maori partners, and Aboriginal community members from other parts of Australia. This sociological dimension is of central importance to the thesis because many White spouses of Darug descendants, Maori and non-Darug Aboriginal community members not only support and affirm the claims of Darug members, but have become essential contributors to community development in various ways and have attracted

status within the group accordingly. White spouses, for example, almost invariably provide income which financially supports their partner's often unpaid service to the community. They morally and materially support the collective projects of the group. In return, these White partners of Aboriginal people, who generally have low status as members of the dominant society, are respected within the community to an extent which is unprecedented outside it. My thesis demonstrates how the 'darug custodian' community provides, not just reaffirmation of Darug descendant historical cultural and land claims, but more than this, a way of being for both Darug and non Darug members.

Although there is only one Maori spouse in the community at present there are about ten Maori associate members and some of these people's friends and relatives sometimes attend 'darug custodian' meetings and social events. There is a strong relationship between 'darug custodians' and some Maori groups living in the western suburbs of Sydney. Senior Darug descendants are often asked to attend Maori ceremonies and Maori often attend 'darug custodian' ceremonies and social gatherings. Maori community members have been a major source of inspiration, motivation and support for 'darug custodians'. Their experience of achieving at least some state recognition of their claims to land and resources in New Zealand through *Maoritanga* - a Maori word for the recent revival of Maori culture - also resulted in a new collective sense of pride and dignity (Sissons 2005:11). Maori community members have helped 'darug custodians' to understand that cultural 'revival' is not only politically expedient for Indigenous peoples, but provides a positive cultural identity for people who may have previously understood their heritage in terms of cultural lack or loss.

As well as Maori members, it is unlikely that the community could survive without the membership of non-Darug Aboriginal members because the total number of Darug descendants, their spouses and children is no more than one hundred and ten. The approximately eighty non Darug Aboriginal members, as I explain in Chapters Two and Three, provide support for the claims of Darug descendants and crucial numbers which make the on-going viability of the community possible.

Like Darug descendants, their spouses, and Maori, non-Darug Aboriginal members are from social backgrounds which, to various extents, are marginalised in relation to the dominant Australian society. I detail in Chapter Three the ways in which all 'darug custodians' experience various White racist humiliations², prejudice and discrimination at school, work, in the health and welfare systems, even in everyday activities like banking and supermarket shopping due to some people's skin colour, ways of speaking, dress, and/or some other indicator of their low status within or difference from the dominant society. I show throughout the thesis and particularly in Chapters Two and Three how being part of the 'darug custodian' community provides people who are otherwise powerless and marginalised members of the dominant society with the possibility of achieving status and self-worth as members of the 'darug custodian' community. Because this sociological dimension is of central importance I present three Tables at the beginning of the thesis showing quantitative measures of some aspects of it. Table One represents numbers of people in different 'categories' of 'darug custodian' community membership. Table Two quantifies patterns of occupations, educational levels and religious/church affiliations of community members. Table Three represents the different 'groups' or 'kinds' of

² These humiliations apply to White members of the community who are related in various ways to Aboriginal people as well as to Aboriginal and Maori members.

Darug descendants.

No less important than the sociological 'drivers' of 'darug custodian' projects, is the politico-socio-cultural activity of the community. In my thesis I have used ethnographic examples of painting, dancing, speech making and ceremony to depict 'darug custodian' collective practices. These practices, as I demonstrate in Chapter Three and throughout the thesis, are always performed in situations of competition and/or conflict with other groups (and often in the context of conflict within the group). If we are to define the political broadly in terms of struggle between groups, then there is nothing that 'darug custodians' do that does not have a political dimension. Yet, it is also an important argument of this thesis that there is not a contradiction between stressing the oppositional/ political nature of a cultural identity on the one hand, and the significance of that project in building convictions of human worth and strength in participants on the other. That is, the making of oppositional political statements in cultural forms does not, necessarily either reduce the cultural form to *only* a political statement, or necessarily always produce negative or self-destructive out-comes for the participants as the work of some authors³ including Bourgois (2002), van Deburg (2004) and Browning et. al. (2004) suggest.

My thesis is primarily concerned with the recent blossoming of Aboriginal cultural practices in a very small new community and the sociological forces which produce the conditions for that blossoming. This political/social/cultural phenomenon

³ Some of Cowlshaw's (2004, 2003, 1988) and Morris' (1988) work seems to suggest that such oppositional political behaviour in Aboriginal communities as rioting, theft, drunkenness and other forms of violence can be understood as oppositional cultural forms. Both authors, however, have also published works that show that Aboriginal oppositional culture can also take positive and benign forms. One benign form depicted by Cowlshaw (1999) is the habit of Rembarrnga women to wash their hair with laundry powder. Morris (1991) argues that camping in country can be both politically oppositional and culturally affirming for young Dhan-gatti men.

is, as I acknowledge further below, not unique to 'darug custodians'. They are only one of many new Indigenous communities to emerge globally in recent times due to such forces as the civil rights movement in the United States, high profile activists supporting Indigenous peoples' causes at a global level, global and national political activism of Indigenous peoples themselves, changes in government policies in relation to Indigenous peoples, and new media technologies allowing greater communication between Indigenous groups globally. There are many groups with some important similarities to and differences from 'darug custodians' especially in so-called post-colonial countries such as the United States, Canada and New Zealand. I relate some of these studies to mine throughout the thesis and especially in Chapters Three and Nine to demonstrate how global, national and local forces can produce similar and different effects on emerging Indigenous communities in different countries. Some of the similarities, as I argue in Chapter Nine, allow for some important generalisations to be drawn.

Before I begin my accounts of these central themes it is necessary to provide some contextual material. Where did 'darug custodians' come from? Who are they? What have they been doing?

In the Beginning were Land Rights, then Native Title.

The first federal land rights legislation, *Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act 1976* generated similar, if less effective copies in most states including the *Land Rights (New South Wales) Act 1986*. This gave Aboriginal communities and their supporters unprecedented access to funding and bureaucratic and institutional bases. This occurred in a global context where the plights of Indigenous peoples were being raised in public consciousness by activists including the Aboriginal rock band *Yothu*

Yindi, singer *Sting* and band *Midnight Oil*.

For Aboriginal people who claimed traditional ownership of a particular place the new hope and unprecedented access to resources which was provided by land rights legislation were further bolstered by the advent of native title⁴. The *Commonwealth Native Title Act* 1993 followed the *Eddie Mabo v. the State of Queensland* decision in the Australian High Court. This decision overturned the doctrine that Australia was *terra nullius* (land belonging to no-one) when British colonists first arrived in Australia. The ruling found that Aboriginal peoples had then, and retain now, native title rights to land in Australia. In response to this decision and public pressure the then federal Labor government passed the federal Native Title Act⁵. Arguably native title is perceived by Aboriginal peoples and the Australian state to be the ultimate recognition of 'authentic' Aboriginal traditional ownership.

To properly address legalities and relationships emanating from the differences between land rights and native title in the 'darug custodian' context, a thesis entirely different to this one would be required. I have glossed the complex legalities and relationships produced by these differences in Chapter Two when I refer to the fraught relationships between local Aboriginal Land Councils and Darug descendants⁶. I do this to indicate to the reader the extent of Darug descendants' under-representation, marginalisation and lack of support, rather than attempt to

⁴ See Francesca Merlan (1995) for a more detailed account of the differences between Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) 1976 and the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993. Merlan argues that the 1976 Act recognises a comparability between Aboriginal land rights and Australian property law, while the Commonwealth Native Title Act established the difference between Aboriginal traditional owners and Aboriginal people with different kinds of claims to land.

⁵ See Beth Povinelli (2002, 1993) for analysis of this political era in Australia.

⁶ The nature of this relationship and its effects can be gleaned from correspondence provided in the Appendix to this thesis.

discuss these difficult and complex relationships.

It was the aim of my research not to become involved in data collection for the purposes of making land claims, but to observe the making of culture. It is this which is the focus of my work, not an analysis of land rights and native title themselves.

'darug custodians' have arguably emerged in response to what might have been perceived to be the benefits of land rights and native title, including recent state recognition, celebrations of Aboriginal peoples, and inclusion in national narratives. As I mentioned earlier, Darug descendants have only been identified in the last twenty-five years or so as a result of research undertaken by biologist Dr. James Kohen. Kohen (1993, 2000) has prepared genealogies linking more than 5,000 living descendants to seven Aboriginal ancestors who inhabited what is now called western Sydney before 1788. Kohen (pers.com. 2001) collected data for the production of the genealogies from early colonial records kept in state archives, blanket lists⁷, church records, births, deaths and marriage records and from information given to him by living people who now claim Darug descent. Kohen used his genealogical data and the 'family trees', produced by such data, to prepare a number of native title land claims on behalf of the group of people who now call themselves Darug descendants.

My research shows, however, that although Darug descendants may owe their contemporary existence to Kohen's genealogical research, not all Darug descendants are now primarily concerned with native title and land claims. In Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight, I present ethnographic descriptions of particular cultural forms - speech making, dancing, painting and ceremony - to demonstrate that although land

⁷ Blankets and other staple supplies were distributed to Aboriginal recipients from 1814 by Governor Macquarie. Eventually blankets were distributed by magistrates or police annually on the Queen's Birthday, 1st May. The distributing bodies kept lists of the names of recipients providing a valuable, although by no means comprehensive, resource for tracing family histories.

rights and native title certainly contributed to the conditions which made the emergence of 'darug custodians' possible, they are not the only reason that 'darug custodians' continue to develop and value their cultural practices. Furthermore, although land rights, native title and state celebrations of multiculturalism may have provided the opportunity and encouragement for Darug descendants to emerge as 'a people', the impetus for this phenomenon has also come from social and cultural processes. These processes, as I show throughout the thesis and particularly in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, are energised and guided by the social conditions experienced by community members in the wider Australian society.

For the purposes of understanding how different 'kinds' of Darug descendants now identify themselves, I have conceptualised the Darug descendants identified by Kohen's genealogy into three main 'groups' (see Table Three). In fact, only two of these 'groups' identify themselves as groups. The largest 'group' of the five thousand descendants identified by Kohen is not really a group at all, but a concept. Many of the people constituting this 'group' are aware of their Darug descent because it has been Kohen's practice over the last twenty-five years to notify those he identifies by letter including an invitation to meet other Darug descendants through one of the Darug groups with which he is associated. Some of these people may attend some of the activities of the other groups for a time, some may have no interest in meeting other Darug at all, but they all ultimately choose not to identify with an established community of Darug descendants.

Thus, it must be emphasised that most Darug descendants identified by Kohen do not identify themselves as Darug, lead lives as members of non-Darug communities, and are not recognised as Darug for the purposes of land claims or

anything else. The scope of my research project has not allowed for an analysis of the social positions of these people or of the reasons that they have chosen not to identify as Darug. My thesis is concerned with the reasons people did become 'darug custodians', who those people are, and how their commitment is sustained, it is not concerned with how and why these things did not happen. Kohen, however, maintains a database of names and presumably contact details⁸ (if available) of Darug descendants he has identified. It would be a valuable future research project to trace these people and interview them with the aim of better understanding who they are and how they identify themselves.

A small group of about one hundred and fifty Darug descendants engage in certain kinds of research such as genealogical, linguistic, archaeological and historical research in order to further their claims to Darug descent (Kohen 2001 pers. comm). As I explain further in Chapter Two, this group restricts full membership to Darug descendants over the age of eighteen, but includes non-Darug spouses as associate members. I have been told by members of this organisation, called 'Darug Tribal Aboriginal Corporation', that its total current membership including Darug descendants and their spouses is about three hundred people (see Table Three).

An even smaller group of Darug descendants - about thirty people - are core members of an organisation called 'Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation'. This organisation, as I explain more fully in Chapter Two, also restricts full membership to Darug descendants over the age of eighteen years, but allows people other than the spouses of Darug descendants to be associate members (spouses are included as associate members under *The Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976*). The

⁸ I presume this because Kohen told me that he contacts people he identifies as Darug by letter. How accurate and/or current these details are I cannot say.

total number of members of the 'Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation' is about one hundred and fifty adults. It is this group of people and others who are associated with them but are not financial members of the Corporation such as their children and other participants in community life, who are the main concern of my thesis.

Unlike the activities of the group of Darug descendants ('Tribals') who focus on a research approach to establishing and asserting their land claims, 'darug custodian' practices do not always comply with the model of 'authenticity' that state recognition of native title demands. Rather than concentrate on identifying cultural practices which may contribute to providing evidence of on-going 'authentic' 'Darug Culture' for the purposes of claiming native title, 'darug custodians' have instead been engaged in processes of cultural revival and invention which cannot be proven to be continuous with 'traditional' (pre-contact) Darug culture as demanded by the rules for land rights and native title. My theoretical analyses and ethnographic descriptions show that although interest in the question of native title may have been important in encouraging the initial emergence of 'darug custodians', this is no longer the primary motivating factor determining the development of their cultural practices. In fact, as my study demonstrates, when there is conflict between what is considered to be 'darug custodian' cultural practice and practices demanded by the rules of native title, 'darug custodians' choose their own practices. They reject calls to change what they now consider to be their traditions. They put their native title claims at risk in favour of what they now claim to be their traditional cultural practices.

In a nutshell, the two most important differences between the two Darug descendant groups, at least for the purposes of my thesis are:

a) that 'Tribals' do not engage in dramatic spectacles of '(re)invented' traditional

cultural practices while 'darug custodians' do, and

b) that most Tribals are Darug descendants, while only a small minority of 'darug custodians' are Darug descendants.

Before I go any further, it is important that I explain what I mean by tradition as it is practised by 'darug custodians'. Manning Nash (1989:14) insists that although tradition is mostly concerned with the past and is hence fundamentally backward focussed, it does have a future dimension. This dimension involves the commitment of its carriers to preserve and continue traditional practices into the future. However, because of the sociologically multifaceted nature of their constitution, 'darug custodians' do not have one, common cultural tradition on which to draw, so they 'shelve' or 'sideline' all traditions other than their new Darug 'tradition'. Everyone in the community, Darug or not, is made part of the project of producing this 'new tradition' and commit themselves to preserving and continuing these traditional Darug cultural practices.

But how are 'we' members of the dominant society able to understand 'darug custodian' cultural practices as traditional? Many of 'us', especially Federal Court judges hearing Native Title claims, cannot. As I have already said, because successful native title claims are arguably the ultimate recognition of Indigenous 'authenticity' by the Australian state, many Indigenous Australians struggle to conform to its demands. According to the Native Title Act of 1994, claimants must prove that they are still 'attached' to a 'body of traditions, observances, customs and beliefs of Aboriginal people or of a community or group of Aboriginal people, including those traditions, observances, customs and beliefs as applied to particular persons, sites,

areas of land, things or relationships'⁹. These demands, as Beth Povinelli (2002: 39) argues, are very difficult to achieve for any Indigenous community, but are virtually impossible for people who live in long colonised areas like New South Wales. Not only have peoples' traditions changed to the point of being unrecognisable from the early records of colonists, but they have become 'mixed up' with the traditions of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. I say more about this below.

Francesca Merlan (1995:65) explains how the incomparability of Aboriginal land rights with other kinds of Australian property rights is legislatively managed in the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act of 1976. This is done by elaborate codification of what needs to be demonstrated to succeed as well as the creation of a new form of property title. The Native Title Act of 1993, however, leaves what 'counts' as 'custom' or 'tradition' for determination by the court. This is necessary because whereas land rights are a new form of land title in Australian law, native title is part of Australia's common law. From a legal point of view the basis for the existence of native title is the presentation of evidence that native title has *always* existed over a given place for specific people. Indigenous Australians can only demonstrate their continued relationship with a specific place by demonstrating their association with that place in terms of the court's understanding of tradition because it is on the very different traditions from those of other Australians that their distinctiveness is grounded. Indigenous peoples' claims to prior occupation of Australia are based on their difference, and their difference is demonstrated in their traditions (Merlan 2006:86). Courts, as Merlan demonstrates, have recognised sufficient evidence of on-going Aboriginal tradition for the purposes of native title using highly 'essentialised' notions

⁹ Native Title Act (Commonwealth) 1994.

of the term. That is, courts have used either an immutable, static model of 'tradition' and 'custom' to demonstrate that claimants have *always* had a 'connection' to the place they claim under common law, or one that recognises some change in the nature of cultural objects but constancy in the underlying social processes associated with those objects: guns instead of spears, acrylic paint instead of ochre for example (Merlan 2006:88). For native title to succeed, 'authentic' Aboriginal tradition needs to consist in static essences and an ontology of fixed and unchanging meanings so as to demonstrate the immutable character of traditional Aboriginal ownership. The trouble with this is that the character of tradition as lived by people in the here and now is not consistent with a model of tradition as fixed, immutable and situated in a primordial moment before White people came to Australia. Indigenous Australians are faced with an impossible double bind. On the one hand, the courts require evidence of Aboriginal tradition and custom as unchanging, on the other, forced and voluntary participation in modern Australian life has required drastic and virtually total change from traditional (pre-contact) life ways.

As Kalpana Ram (2000:259) insists, a metaphysics which understands all change as movement away from 'truth' gains calamitous potential when it is enforced by the same colonial regimes that concurrently inflict unprecedented change. On the one hand, the courts demand demonstration of fixed and unchanging traditions being performed by specific people in relation to a particular place to allow native title, yet on the other, it is the Australian state (represented by that same court) which is primarily responsible for the kinds of radical cleavages with tradition that are used as evidence of a group's alienation from their traditional lands. I agree with Ram's claim that 'authenticity' becomes virtually impossible to obtain in such circumstances. But

because on-going connection to land is a state-imposed criterion for demonstrating collective identity, questions of 'authenticity' become impossible to avoid. Indigenous Australians who want to be recognised as 'authentic' traditional owners must therefore demonstrate evidence of continuing reproduction of traditions associated with the claimed land even if this means that such traditions could only have survived as a result of being subversively performed during eras when traditional Aboriginal cultural practices were prohibited by Australian law. Such traditions must also be demonstrated even if current social conditions make them passe or otherwise irrelevant. Jeffrey Sissons proposes the term 'oppressive authenticity' for this kind of enforced 'tradition'. State regimes of 'oppressive authenticity' (Sissons 2005:35) only recognise the native title claims of a shrinking category of Indigenous peoples who are considered 'authentic' because they can demonstrate on-going traditional practices in relation to a place, and deny the claims of an ever growing group judged 'inauthentic' because they cannot.

As Povinelli (2002) insists, as well as enforcing 'oppressive authenticity', courts rely largely on 'our' (the dominant society's) documentation as the ultimate 'proof' of what constitutes a given people's tradition before 1788. That is, it is 'our' historical records, 'our' ethnographies, 'our' reports based on 'our' interpretations of what we are told and what we observe of Indigenous Australian's traditions and customs which mostly provide the evidence on which a claim is based. In the case of 'darug custodians' early colonists' records such as those of Phillip (1788/1982), Collins (1788/1975) and Tench (1788/1996) provide little, if any description of practices which is relevant to the current traditions performed by 'darug custodians'. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century work of authors including Howitt (1904),

Mathews (1898,1905) and Mathews and Everitt (1900) are equally unhelpful.

Although many currently practised 'darug custodian' traditions bear strong resemblance to practices described in the so-called traditional Aboriginal anthropological literature, these practices belong to groups other than Darug and are therefore unhelpful in demonstrating an 'authentic' origin for 'darug custodian' traditions. Traditions based on the memories and imaginings of older Darug descendants cannot be substantiated as 'on-going' from a time before White settlers came to Australia. As I discuss later in the Introduction, 'darug custodians' also practice some traditions which might have their origins in Indigenous cultures from other countries, reflecting a kind of global Indigeneity. The trouble is, according to dominant interpretations of the Native Title Act, none of these traditions count as 'authentic' Aboriginal traditions because they do not originate, or cannot be proved to have originated with Darug ancestors who lived in Sydney before 1788.

Merlan (2006:93) argues, however, that public and academic understandings of Indigenous tradition do recognise that change in the form of adaptations, discontinuities and reconfigurations are inevitable, especially in colonial regimes which inflict unprecedented change¹⁰. Clearly, 'we' (academics and general public) take a different view of the terms 'authenticity' and 'tradition' from that of the courts which allows us to understand 'darug custodian' tradition somewhat differently. But, as I argue below, 'we' still retain at the core of our understanding, a conceptualisation of tradition as a continuous link between past and present or the continuation of the

¹⁰ See Merlan (2006) for an argument that a more reflexive view of Indigenous tradition which recognises that Indigenous cultures and social positions are informed by historic and contemporary understandings of accommodation and relationships with people and institutions of White society can provide a better model of tradition than those currently employed by courts.

past in the present¹¹.

As Ram (2000: 258) reminds us, the relatively recent and pervasive postmodern critique of 'truth' still leads us to understand 'tradition' as a kind of 'essentialism', but an 'essentialism' which only allows us to see traditions and the 'authenticity' they claim to represent as political strategies. These postmodern critiques are rightly based on an argument that any version of 'authenticity' and 'truth' which sees reality as essence, fixed and persistent over time is illogical. But, 'we' (Western thinkers) are not free from this tradition of thought, we *must* engage with this tradition because we are part of the history of Western logic. Ram (2000:259) draws on Derrida to explain that although 'we' know that tradition is changing and negotiable, we still need to engage with a metaphysics which sees tradition as immutable because such an understanding is part of 'our' intellectual heritage. The tradition of thought which makes 'us' understand tradition as static and 'pure' is part of exactly the same social ground we aim to 'deconstruct', but we remain conscious of the fact that movement and change are equally fundamental features of tradition as continuity and 'purity'. In other words, postmodern tropes including hybridity, becomings, nomadisms, and rhizomes have not displaced formalistic, mentalistic, rule bound conceptualisations of tradition (ibid.). It is not, however, only 'us' who need to engage with this contradiction but also minority groups who are not necessarily heirs to this tradition of thought, but who are dominated by it. Such groups, Indigenous Australians being only one of them, need to politically manage such a questionable metaphysics by strategically engaging with it. That is, by recognising it as a contradiction and using that contradiction to their advantage. 'They' (the colonised)

¹¹ See Merlan (2006:86-88), Nash (1989), Williams (1977) and Shils (1971:123) for some useful definitions.

need to take 'our' (the coloniser's) ideas about 'their' traditions and use those ideas in ways which will benefit them politically and culturally. In other words, 'we' (the dominant society) might understand 'darug custodian' 'traditional Aboriginal practices' to be attempts to 'give us what we want': a reflection of our own ideas of Aboriginal traditional culture which assert 'darug custodian' 'authenticity' for political advantage, and a way of using those ideas to give themselves an 'authentic' identity to sustain and reproduce their own way of being in the world.

'darug custodians' certainly make strategic use of 'essentialism' as is evident throughout my thesis. Chapter Five describes how they use certain motifs which are familiar in central desert 'dot paintings' to represent their Aboriginality. The dance I describe in Chapter Six uses a number of different strategies, all drawing on 'essentialised' notions of Aboriginal tradition to tell stories. In Chapter Seven Darug descendants ritually use a version of a pre-contact 'language' which, even if it is criticised as 'inauthentic', *sounds* like an Aboriginal language as such languages are represented in films, radio and how 'we' might imagine a 'primitive' language to sound. This 'language' is used in public ceremonies, I argue, to make symbolic claims. Chapter Eight concerns a ceremony which certainly *looks* like an Aboriginal ceremony as 'we' might expect an Aboriginal ceremony to look from films, advertisements and photographs. This ceremony was used as an opportunity to make some overt assertions about the on-going presence of Darug people in Sydney.

But strategic essentialism is not *all* that is at the heart of what darug custodians do. Older, more socially senior 'darug custodians' teach younger people and new comers to the community how to perform traditional practices 'properly'- they need to be performed by an appropriate person in an appropriate setting and they

need to be performed to a standard. It is not enough to merely perform ceremonies, paint, make speeches or dance. These things need to be learnt and done with panache as I explain in more detail in Chapters Three and Seven. A successful performance of 'darug custodian' tradition produces a relationship between the performance and the knowledge and social conditions from which the performance is drawn. It is not a performance by a detached artist, but a relationship between performers and audience which, in the case of 'darug custodians', is usually¹² between 'darug custodians' and White people¹³. 'darug custodian' performances are aimed at representing sentiments, different versions of stories, experiences and traditions which are part of the relationship between 'darug custodians' and between 'darug custodians' and 'non-darug custodians'.

Clearly, 'darug custodians' define themselves differently from the ways in which they are defined by 'us' (the dominant society). This is more than resistance, more than opposition to state rules and regulations, although, it is certainly this in part. It is also a quest for a particular kind of Good Life in an Aristotelean sense; that is, 'darug custodians' are working towards a moral, just and dignified way of living well in the world. I do not find it surprising that the Australian ideal might be sought by urban Aboriginal peoples; that they might work towards the reinstatement of some aspects of traditional culture as they imagine this to be. Nor is it surprising that particular aesthetic, religious, social, and 'academic' forms, such as the preparation of genealogies and participation in archaeological research, should have special value

¹² But not always - there are some performances which are only for 'darug custodians' such as the 'Burial Tree' ceremony I describe in Chapter Eight.

¹³ I use 'White' with a capital to represent a taken for granted cultural group rather than a skin colour. 'Whites' throughout the thesis are to be read as those who identify as members of the dominant Australian culture.

for Aboriginal peoples; that it matters very much to Aboriginal people that forms of culture are executed with panache, and that such virtuosity is recognised and celebrated. What may prove surprising is that these emerging and proliferating cultural phenomena have until now, gone largely unrecognised. Anthropological, art, linguistic, historical and other scholarly discourses have largely ignored these practices of traditional culture in urban Aboriginal contexts because they have been judged 'inauthentic'.

My study is the first of its kind in the sense that it deals with the emergence of an Aboriginal culture in western Sydney. It is also one of the first accounts, along with those of Francesca Merlan (1995), Gaynor Macdonald (2004a, 2004b, 2001) and Helena Onnodottir (2001), of the cultural repercussions of land rights and native title rather than evidence supporting them. It is also one of the few accounts of recent state celebrations of Aboriginality as an expression of multiculturalism and the contribution of these forms of recognition to the emergence of new cultural identities in urban Aboriginal Australia. Anthropological attention previously directed toward urban and rural Aboriginal fringe dwellers has tended to focus on a perceived lack of traditional culture; on the problematic political struggles between Aboriginal peoples and the dominant society; on aspects of resistance and opposition¹⁴ to the dominant society; and on the social problems and self-destructive behaviours that often result (see Cowlishaw (1988, 1999, 2003, 2004), Morris (1985), Yarwood and Knowling (1982), Rowley (1972a, 1972 b), Reay (1945) and Beckett (1958, 1964)).

Kenneth Maddock (2001) has authored the one official anthropological reference that directly concerns those who identify as Darug descendants in his

¹⁴ See Chapter Three for analytical discussion of 'oppositional culture' in relation to 'darug custodians'.

report for a land claim made on behalf of 'The Darug People' against the state of New South Wales for a tract of land at Lower Portland on the Hawkesbury River (see map 1)¹⁵. Maddock incorporated available relevant literature in his report but did not conduct his own fieldwork¹⁶. He finds that the historical, linguistic and genealogical data of those who currently claim Darug descent do not qualify under the *Native Title Act (NSW) 1994* as land claimants. Those who now claim Darug descent based on genealogies and documents prepared by White supporters and the cultural practices described by those supporters have, according to Maddock's interpretation of the Act, been disconnected from continuous cultural practices for too long a time to enable them to claim native title. Maddock's report, quite rightly according to the law, denies the existence of on-going Darug culture under the rules of native title. Native title requires proof of on-going connection to customs and traditions which were practised before 1788¹⁷. As I have already said, for the purposes of native title, Aboriginal peoples must prove not only Aboriginal descent, but that they are still 'connected' to a 'body of traditions, observances, customs and beliefs of Aboriginal people or of a community or group of Aboriginal people, including those traditions, observances, customs and beliefs as applied to particular persons, sites, areas of land, things or relationships'.¹⁸ That is, continuing cultural practices and beliefs are as important as descent for the success of native title claims. In short, Maddock's interpretation of

¹⁵ This report was made available to me by senior 'darug custodians' and by Jim Kohen. I subsequently contacted the Crown Solicitor's office to confirm that it is permissible for me to refer to the document in this thesis.

¹⁶ Prior to my work no anthropological fieldwork has been conducted with those called Darug.

¹⁷ See Beth Povinelli's (2002) critique of Australian native title law.

¹⁸ *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*. (Canberra: Government Printer, 30th April 1992)

the Act and literature pertaining to Darug, found Darug 'not Aboriginal enough' to qualify for a claim.

Perhaps the main difference between my work and that of other students of urban Aboriginal culture is that my concern is not with defining Darug culture in terms of 'our' categories of 'authenticity'. That is, I do not always necessarily view contemporary Darug cultural forms as on-going 'traditions', but nor do I always necessarily consider them to be brand new 'inventions'. I do not wish to assume, as theorists including Rowley (1972a, 1972b), Hollinsworth (1992) and Keeffe (1988) do, that Aboriginal peoples who have sustained prolonged contact with White society no longer 'have' traditional Aboriginal culture. I am more concerned to add my voice to those of anthropologists including Beckett (1993, 1996), Macdonald (2001, 1998) Morris (1988a, 1988b, 1989, 2001), Cowlishaw (1988, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2004) and Onnodottir (2001) in attempting to understand traditional urban and rural Aboriginal culture in its current, highly political forms. Also, as I argue in more detail below, I do not understand Darug cultural 'renaissance' solely in terms of resistance or opposition to the dominant society, although my understanding is not necessarily at odds with, or impeded by, a focus on oppositional processes. Rather, my concern is to take seriously the claims of 'darug custodian' people themselves. For them, there is no contradiction in practising a 'new' tradition. 'darug custodian' Aboriginal tradition looks and sounds like what 'we' (the dominant society) expect and want it to be: primitive, primordial, and somehow 'natural', but its meanings and the relationships it produces are political, contemporary and productive of a new 'darug custodian' identity. It seems to me that while 'we' (academics, anthropologists, lawyers, White people generally) have been trying to define, determine and 'fix' 'Aboriginality',

Aboriginal peoples themselves have been developing processes of becoming their own identities¹⁹. 'darug custodians' are practising a tradition that produces 'newness'.

Theoretical Perspectives and Analytical Framework

In calling themselves 'The Community' and in making representations they claim as distinctly their own, 'darug custodians' have begun a process of consolidating and demarcating a discrete identity. These kinds of processes of social differentiation have been understood by various authors as 'ethnic' boundary marking (Barth 1969), the processual 'invention' of culture (Wagner 1981) and 'ethnogenesis' (Roosens 1989, Hill 1996, Hudson 1999). All of these approaches grasp certain aspects of the 'darug custodian' case. The concept of 'ethnogenesis', as defined by Hill (1996:1), is particularly apt in relation to 'darug custodians'. According to Hill (ibid.):

Ethnogenesis is not merely a label for the historical emergence of culturally distinct peoples but a concept encompassing peoples' simultaneously cultural and political struggles to create enduring identities in general contexts of radical change and discontinuity.

The 'ethnogenesis' literature provides some important comparisons, models and theory for helping to understand the conditions for the emergence of those who identify as Darug descendants *and* 'darug custodians' as well as the circumstances, contexts and specifications for the on-going survival and development of the two 'kinds' of people as I demonstrate in Chapter Nine. It captures much of what it means to be a formerly dispossessed, unrecognised and disseminated group which, due to changes in social and political conditions, have (re)emerged as 'new people' (Deleuze

¹⁹ See Macdonald's (1998, 2001) argument that more attention needs to be directed to the ways in which Aboriginal peoples have altered their own cultural practices.

and Guattari 1986).

But the concept of 'ethnogenesis' relies on theories of 'ethnicity' to analyse the formation and development of 'a people'. I remind the reader here of the distinction between Darug descendants and 'darug custodians'. Darug descendants are people identified by Kohen's genealogy to be the descendants of Aboriginal people who lived in what is now Sydney before 1788. However, only a small minority of people identified by Kohen identify themselves as Darug descendants and most of these people are members of the Darug Tribal community. They share common descent as the foundation of their collective identity as a distinct 'people' and may be understood as an 'ethnic group' in terms described by Barth (1969) and Roosens (1989). 'darug custodians', on the other hand, are constituted by a sociologically multifaceted group of people and although they can be understood as 'a people', only the small minority of Darug descendants can be termed an 'ethnic group', the rest of the community lack the non-negotiable pre-requisite necessary to qualify as an 'ethnic group' in a colonial context: common descent. I demonstrate in my comparisons between 'darug custodians', Lumbee, Huron and Darug Tribal in Chapter Nine, that although it is possible for people to be very creative in constructing their own versions of tradition, there are some minimum requirements - some incontestable and non-interpretable facts - which are necessary to make claims to ethnic identity stick (Roosens 1989:156). In post-colonial, post-Mabo Australia, common descent is one of these minimum requirements .

Not being an 'ethnic group' does not mean, however, that 'darug custodians' do not share a distinct culture. What I am particularly interested in here is the collective production and practice of an Indigenous culture by a sociologically multifaceted group

of people who not only do not share a common ancestry, but do not even make that claim. In the 'darug custodian' community, Darug descendants, non-Darug Aboriginal people, Whites and Maori join together as one community to not only celebrate Darug ethnic identity and the claims it supports, but to participate in *making* and identifying with the 'traditional' Aboriginal culture they collectively produce.

Indigenous cultures are more than political movements (although they cannot be separated from political struggles), and as Sissons (2005:15) insists, they are more than heritage (if we understand heritage, as Clifford (2004:7) suggests, as 'self-conscious tradition ... performed in old and new public contexts and asserted against historical experiences of loss'). They are on-going political-cultural processes of conservation and restoration, even when what is being preserved and renewed does not 'belong' to the people engaged in those practices. These cultural practices come at least partly, as Sissons (2005:7) has found in urban Indigenous contexts in New Zealand and North America, from academic literature, popular culture such as books, films and even advertisements. They may be 'borrowed' from or 'shared' by other Aboriginal groups in Australia and international Indigenous groups in what is now a global Indigenous exchange. Members of the 'darug custodian' community, for example, have attended conferences in the United States and New Zealand, have played soccer in an international Indigenous soccer competition in Canada, and have visited Zimbabwe as part of an Indigenous cultural exchange program. These cultural forms may also come from memories, dreams and imaginings for which there can be no accounting or tracing. But, no one could successfully argue that this is a brand new genesis, a made up identity, or a nostalgic post-modern 'simulacrum'. 'darug custodian' culture is the product of political strategising and manoeuvring, extensive

social relations involving anxiety, tension and antagonism as well as communication, negotiation, co-operation and commitment within the community and between the community and the dominant society's people and institutions. This is a political-cultural process of group identity formation and development.

The political, social and economic forces that have shaped colonised Indigenous cultures all over the world are strikingly similar. Most have survived a history of terror, trauma, historical decimation, on-going economic marginality, cultural losses and epidemics of introduced diseases. Many, if not most are struggling contemporarily with substance abuse, poverty, domestic violence and poor health, education and employment prospects. The (re)emergence of previously 'defunct' Indigenous groups has also been the result of similar global and national forces all over the world. These include the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States, high profile global activists raising awareness of the plight of particular Indigenous groups, and United Nations pressure on colonial governments to improve conditions for Indigenous peoples. These international pressures produced similar action from minority groups and their supporters and similar responses from colonial governments in different nations. At a national level in Australia, for example, the government was embarrassed in the 1960s and 70s by the political activity of Aboriginal civil rights campaigners and their supporters during, among other protests, the 'Freedom Rides' organised by the late Charles Perkins and the notorious 'Tent Embassy' in Canberra. This embarrassment was compounded by criticism and pressure from Asian trading partners to review the treatment of Indigenous peoples (see Povinelli 2002:45). These pressures and others like them, along with international insistence, eventually led to land rights, and ultimately to the 1992 Mabo decision admitting native title in

Australia.

Another example of change brought about through global and national pressure occurred in New Zealand when the first nationally organised and recognised Maori protest over the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi was conducted. The Treaty legalised the rule of European settlers over Maori but also promised and did not honour 'full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties which they [Maori] may collectively or individually possess' (Waitangi 317). The demonstration was held during the celebration of the Treaty of Waitangi Day on 6th February, 1971. Organisers proclaimed it a day of mourning for the loss of 63 million acres of Maori land, beginning an embarrassment to the government which ultimately resulted in the Treaty of Waitangi Amendment Act in 1984. The Amendment Act makes it possible for the Waitangi Tribunal to date claims for lost land and other property back to 1840 (Thorley 2001:24). Similar processes can be traced in North American, South American, Pacific and African contexts within similar time frames. Today, Indigenous Australians and other Indigenous peoples all over the world share their concerns, histories and experiences through new media technology and a global politics which recognises the similarities of experience which bind Indigenous groups.

The emergence of 'darug custodians' does, without doubt, concern resistance, opposition and politically strategic cultural forms. This aspect is given central analytical attention in the thesis and for this I draw on the work of authors including Cowlishaw, Morris, Clifford and Sissons, among others, who use theories of strategic politics to ground their work. Part of the oppositional process comes from the need for colonised peoples to make space for their expressions of identity to be seen and

heard. This is a political-cultural imperative. 'darug custodians', however, do not always exist as a group in geographic space. Unlike Lumbee as described by Blu (1989) and Sider (2003) they are not a large population of people inhabiting a specific geographic area. Nor are they similar to Roosens' (1989) Huron, who are a small group of people (approx. 1000), about half of which are dispersed over a wide geographic area for employment reasons, while the others live in a Huron Village or reserve in Quebec which is viewed by all Huron as a symbol of the integrity of the group in the way that a 'fatherland' is for many nations (Roosens 1989:97). 'darug custodians' do not live together in towns or villages or even in the same suburb. If 'darug custodians' do manage to create a 'darug custodian' space through some kind of collective practice such as ceremony, this is always momentary because the dominant culture has so completely colonised Sydney. Consequently, many aspects of 'darug custodian' cultural practice require a somewhat unconventional conceptualisation of space. I draw on the work of de Certeau (1984), Deleuze (1989), Deleuze and Guattari (1986), Feld and Basso (1996) and Gupta and Ferguson (1992a, 1992b) among others, to analyse the various ways that 'darug custodians' do make space for themselves in a world already 'taken up' by others.

But I also examine different aspects of the phenomenon of the (re)emergence and cultural 'renaissance' of 'darug custodians'. Closely related to and often used together with my conceptualisations of space and place making are theories concerning performance. I extend the approaches of authors including Ram (2000), Macgowan (2000) and Tamasari (2000) to dance as a politics of theatre or spectacle, to other kinds of performance including speech making and ceremony. I demonstrate how various performances create communicative space in which the sentiments,

perspectives and narratives of 'darug custodians' can be articulated. I analyse the ways in which their performances establish inter-subjective relations and empathetic space between performers and the audience.

Finally, like Merlan (2006), Clifford (2004:36), Ram (2000:363) and Lattas (1993) among others, I argue for a more complex approach to the politics of tradition. To label the cultural forms I describe and analyse in this work 'inauthentic' denigrates their status in the community as important expressions of values, ideas, philosophies and identity. It devalues their role in inter and intra Darug politics, it dismisses their public education agenda, their importance in encouraging Darug youth and new members' participation and education. It mocks what they most clearly are: celebratory expressions of cultural revival. These expressions represent a positive on-going history of Indigenous culture which ultimately prevails over the loss, degradation, sickness, humiliation, destitution and race prejudice which dominate not only earlier Indigenous histories, but recent and contemporary Indigenous experience. Stories of loss and destitution are incorporated into 'darug custodian' cultural forms as my ethnographic examples reveal, but the main themes of revival and public recognition of that revival are not dominated by themes of loss. In a Pacific context Stewart Firth (2003:139) insists that as well as grieving for what is lost, cultural revival programs in colonised Pacific countries like New Zealand and Hawai'i are also about restoring, retrieving and celebrating what can be regained. He argues that in such societies tradition becomes sacred because of its rarity. I demonstrate in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight that this seems to also be the case for 'darug custodians'.

I have already shown that due to the multifaceted nature of their composition, their lack of geographic and ethnic boundaries, and the sheer 'newness' of their

cultural forms, 'darug custodians' do not make conventionally ideal subjects for ethnography. Ethnographies, as they have been traditionally produced in social anthropology²⁰, are 'about' writing about how 'a' particular people live their lives in a specific time and place. But, as Wagner (in Clifford 1986) argues, ethnography is 'always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures'.

Ethnographies *cannot* simply describe cultural truths; indeed they sometimes may distort them for political reasons, as controversy surrounding the case of Margaret Mead's depiction of Samoan life demonstrates (c.f. Freeman 1983). Ethnographies, it is now generally accepted, cannot completely represent either the reality of others, or the single reality of the ethnographer.

Clifford (1986:6 -7) argues that ethnographies must be recognised as a specialised kind of literature. He characterises ethnographic writing in six ways, which, he argues, govern the inscription of coherent ethnographic fictions:

- (1) contextual (draws from and creates meaningful social milieux);
- (2) rhetorical (uses and is used by expressive conventions);
- (3) institutional (one writes within, and against, specific traditions, disciplines, audiences);
- (4) generic (an ethnography is usually distinguishable from a novel or a travel account);
- (5) political (the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested);
- (6) historical (all the above conventions and constraints are changing).

²⁰ Of course, as Marilyn Strathern (2004:11) and Lourdes Arizpe (1996:91) rightly point out, 'ethnography' no longer belongs exclusively to the anthropological domain. It is now an established method in a vast array of different contexts including, to name a but few, sociology, cultural studies, history, women's studies, human geography, education, market research and analysis, consumer research and analysis and psychology.

All of the above determinations apply to this thesis and thus, at least according to Clifford's definition, might be understood as a proper ethnography. But, in light of the particular conditions I face in this project the historical aspect perhaps outweighs all the others in importance. Because no previous anthropological fieldwork has been conducted with 'darug custodians', there is not, as yet, a scholarly literature, nor do Darug have a written history that I can refer to for comparative analysis²¹.

What complicates things even further is that there is more than one group of Darug people, and that there are hostile relations between them, largely due to 'inter-Darug' competition in respect to a number of current land claims. As I state in the Preface, the politics of this situation makes for certain things which cannot be said. 'Representational tact', in Clifford's (1986) terms, has been a crucial condition of my being able to conduct research at all. Thus, this ethnography must be recognised as a composition which brings together only those things which, for a multitude of political, social, historical and practical reasons, are able to be ethically and responsibly represented at this moment in time.

Some readers may wonder why I do not use theorisations of cultural hybridity in the thesis. There is no doubt that 'darug custodians' occupy an in-between space when it comes to categories of reality recognised by the Australian state. But what, exactly, 'darug custodian' *identity* might be 'between' is a problem. Can a multifaceted group of people be said to occupy a cultural space 'between' the various peoples who constitute the group? Or can they be understood to be 'between' 'Aboriginal' and 'non-Aboriginal', making a new 'kind' of 'Aboriginal', or 'non-Aboriginal'? I do not think 'darug custodians' think of themselves as a hybrid of two different cultures - or even

²¹ Genealogical, linguistic, archaeological and historic work has been conducted with those members of the community who identify as Darug descendants.

many different cultures. To do this would assume that their culture, and non-Aboriginal cultures, are rigidly bounded objects that have spaces between them into which those who cannot be classified can 'slip' into one or the other. As Pnina Werbner (1997:1) suggests, the term cultural hybridity appeals to those who understand it to mean interruptive and transgressive movements which subvert categorical oppositions. But this relies on a modernist conceptualisation of society as systematic, bounded and structured. It does not account for the ways in which people need to shift and change boundaries according to context. My ethnographic descriptions of 'darug custodian' community and collective practice reveal how they use their position as 'not us' to experiment with their own ideas of identity making. They also demonstrate, however, that this identity making is not always or only in the context of direct encounters with the dominant society, but often negotiated, 'fought out' and worked upon within the community itself. It is no simple slipping, blending or betweenness but rather, a fraught and difficult emergence.

Structure of the Thesis.

I preface each chapter with a quote from either Lewis Carroll's (1963) *Alice in Wonderland* or his *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. These quotations are poignant reflections of my experience of fieldwork. Much has been written about the underlying political, psychological and social commentary that might be attributed to Carroll's work.²² In the light of my experience of fieldwork, I am convinced that his nonsense in the 'Alice' books reflects some problematic aspects of the logic of so-called Western reason. This kind of reason produces the categories

²² See especially Phillips (ed) (1971) *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dream-child Seen Through The Critics' Looking Glasses 1865-1971*.

and discourses I critique in my study. Just as the quotes from the *Alice* books bring the logic of 'our' reason into question, so too do my ethnographic descriptions of 'darug custodian' collective practices.

Alice's approach to the inhabitants of the world she finds herself thrust into reflects her own taken-for-granted assumptions. She has to either reduce the identities of those she encounters to categories with which she is familiar, or attempt to subject their 'otherness' to her own logic by calling what she experiences ridiculous. Of course, Alice is as often on the receiving end of disciplinary strategies implemented by those who judge *her* appearance or behaviour to be unacceptably foreign, ludicrous, ridiculous.

I examine my own relations with 'darug custodians' in Chapter One. I do this through an account of my research methodology. My data have been largely generated by and interpreted through my inter-relationships with 'darug custodian' people, ideas and objects. These relationships, and the knowledge that they produce, have been the foundation of my research. I focus on the more unusual aspects of my project, especially the ways in which I have - to some extent - contributed to producing some of the cultural articulations that I analyse. My 'intervention' in this cultural world has, invariably, influenced the very nature of the things I interpret.

In Chapter Five I adopt an unusual approach to understanding space. I argue that one of the strategies employed by 'darug custodians' to make a space in which their own stories can be heard is to engage in art production.

Chapter Six analyses some political aspects of a dance performance featured in a pageant produced by the National Trust for the Centenary of Federation of the Australian states in 2001. The audience, and White performers in the pageant,

witnessed the 'darug custodian' struggle for representation when 'darug custodians' high-jacked a state narrative of progress and transformed it into a 'darug custodian' 'story' of colonial racist oppression.

Language may be viewed as the most important cultural indicator of a group. It reflects and imparts the world-view, philosophies and ideas of a people. In Chapter Seven, as well as describing the everyday Aboriginal English spoken by all 'darug custodians', I give an account of the politics surrounding ritual land claims called 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies. I offer an account of the effects of the speaking of a recently 'constructed' version of 'Darug Language' by Darug descendant 'darug custodians' during these ceremonies.

Chapter Eight concerns events which occurred at a 'Burial Tree' ceremony at Euroka Clearing in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney. 'darug custodians' need to claim their group identity sometimes in the full glare of both hostile and benevolent 'non-darug custodian' witnesses. I offer an account of 'witness' in the 'darug custodian' context and argue that both the faithful testimony of supporters, and the ridicule of detractors provide 'darug custodians' with space in which to make their own stories heard.

This thesis offers insights into important issues of identity, community, culture, 'authenticity', politics and relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. 'darug custodian' identity is produced in opposition to dominant power discourses as a matter of prideful autonomy and control which afford meaning, dignity and strength to a group of people who, in relation to the dominant culture, are otherwise powerless and marginalised. 'darug custodian' traditional cultural practices are celebrations of the survival of Indigenous people and the revival of Aboriginal

culture in modern Sydney. They require a different way of understanding Aboriginal tradition from that which is often taken for granted by the dominant society as an unbroken, or at least a 'dotted line' connecting the past to the present. These are 'new' traditions practised by 'new' people.

Chapter One

Between Ourselves.

*There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house,
and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it: a
Dormouse was sitting between them fast asleep, and the
other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows
on it, and talking over its head.*

Lewis Carroll (1968:73)

This chapter is technically a chapter on methodology. It is about my relations with 'darug custodians' and the rather unconventional ways that I went about conducting fieldwork. The only grounds on which it was possible for me to observe and participate in the community were the same as all community members. I needed to contribute to producing cultural practices for those practices to be made manifest. 'darug custodian' cultural practice demanded that I take an approach which allowed me to interpret and analyse my own inter-actions with 'darug custodians' while I simultaneously participated in various 'darug custodian' cultural practices. 'darug custodians' are bound together as a community only in so far as they practice a collective identity. This is a crucially important point, and as I explained in the thesis Introduction, the primary argument of the thesis. It is *only* through overt, intentional collective identity making processes that anything like a 'darug custodian' identity emerges. This is because 'darug custodian' identity needs to be constantly made and re-made in relation to and differentiating from the dominant White identities. There is nowhere for 'darug custodians' to make a world independently of 'ours'; no 'clear' or 'empty' space for them. I explain in Chapters Three and Four that 'darug custodian' practices are not easily isolated from the practices of the many and differing other

communities 'darug custodians' inhabit because 'darug custodians' live in many differing communities simultaneously. It is only by examining 'darug custodian' practices in relation to the practices of the dominant White community that their own differences become apparent.

Subtle But Profound Difference in A Tea Cup.

As is always the case between anthropologists and their subjects, my relationships with 'darug custodians' and often, the cultural mistakes that I have made as part of those relationships, have made this work possible. I had known Alma, my main informant and an important leader of the 'darug custodian' community, her husband, Kevin, and had considerable experience interacting with the wider 'darug custodian' community for four years prior to the commencement of my PhD. candidature. As a middle aged, middle class White woman, abundantly endowed with Western cultural assumptions, it took time for me to establish a relationship with Alma that was beyond the commercial relationship that we had, at first, established. I met Alma as a customer interested in buying her paintings as gifts for overseas friends. Why it was that we began to take an interest in each other's lives and why we persisted in friendship might be explained as a case of 'inter-subjective chemistry.' In straight forward terms, Alma and I like each other and have taken the time to get to know each other in particular ways. It seems to me that it is, in fact, the ways in which we identify with each other - as people, women, mothers, friends, art enthusiasts, and activists - as well as recognising and respecting our differences, that defines not only our friendship, but the ways in which this project has been conducted. What is also important about this, in the context of this work, is that if already existing relationships of mutual trust and respect were not established, it is highly doubtful that this work

would have been possible at all, let alone within the four year time-frame of my PhD. candidature.

PhD. candidature, however, has had some ambiguous effects on the ways in which my relationship with Alma²³ has developed. This is clearly demonstrated in the context of my experience of researching and writing Alma's 'life-history', which I began shortly after my candidature commenced. Although I say little in the thesis about the document resulting from this project (publication forthcoming), my experience with Alma in researching and writing it has informed many of the arguments in the thesis. In other words, the ways in which knowledge was generated through producing Alma's 'life history' narrative is repeated in the ways I engaged with the community more generally in producing knowledge for this thesis. It was by getting to understand the ways in which Alma and I relate to each other and Alma's accounts of the ways in which she relates to community members and various other people that I was able to understand how Alma 'fits in' to her own community and the various 'other' social worlds she inhabits. In turn, gaining some understanding of Alma's situation in the context of her own community gave me insight into how Alma is constituted as an important community leader. I explain further below.

When Alma first suggested that she would like me to write her 'life story', we jointly decided to conduct the interviews at her house. For the first few weeks I arrived with my tape-recorder, note book and long list of prepared questions in hand ready to conduct 'in-depth interviews' as I had been taught in my under-graduate sociology and anthropology methodology courses.

I look back on those days and cringe at how naive, inappropriate and even

²³ And all community members for that matter.

ridiculous these formal methods now seem. Still, these methods did produce something. Alma was readily compliant and provided an enormous amount of rather stilted data. She answered my questions as I asked them, but only elaborated on her answers in response to further questioning. Her responses to my formal, rather impersonal procedures were equally formal and impersonal and provided a sort of mirroring of what it was that I wanted said. That is, by directly answering my questions - almost in yes/no fashion - Alma reproduced *my* 'story' of what I already knew about her life.

I would return to my computer and labouriously transcribe the hours of tape ready for Alma to peruse the next week. I also provided her with enormous quantities of paperwork to sign, legally binding agreements that attest to Alma's understanding of the research process and the use to which the generated data will be put. Such consent forms required by Macquarie University's Ethics Committee are a formality which are always problematic for anthropologists. I had already explained to Alma that her signing of them was for her protection against misrepresentation by me, as well as for the protection of the University against possible future litigation. A few weeks into our interviews, however, I noticed that she had not returned many of the forms to me. I was beginning to think that the warm personal relationship that I had enjoyed with Alma before I began the PhD. research was being replaced with a cooling, calculating relationship (on both our parts) which Alma seemed to be resisting. I even feared that I was losing my friend. When I eventually asked Alma if there was a problem she assured me there was not, and that she would sign the requested forms immediately. Alma did sign the forms, but questioned the value of these 'Whitefulla' legal requirements in relation to the more important and more

binding moral obligations that she and I have between each other when she said:

I didn't think we needed to sign papers. I thought they was just for strangers. I know ya wouldn't do nothin' to hurt me Kristina. I know you'll tell the truth. I trust ya. We don't need papers between us.

AJFN 042001.

With that Alma put her arm around my waist and gave me a hug. I tearfully returned the embrace and explained to her that the papers were a bureaucratic requirement of the University that I, myself, found embarrassing, and that they did not reflect the relationship of trust and affection between us. I insisted that my research was less important than our relationship and that I was prepared to abandon the project. Alma would not hear of it:

This is your job. It was us what wanted ya to do it. This is somethink what you're doin' for us as well as yourself.

AJFN 042001.

These words have inspired my research. I have noticed that Alma has this inspirational effect on most community members. Although shy and diminutive, Alma makes her will known using various strategies. She either speaks out directly herself, or through other community representatives. Generally, she is treated with such respect that her words are the final say in any community negotiation. I have often witnessed groups of community members, after hours of intense but unproductive discussion, argument and negotiation become suddenly agreed on the issue in question with a word from Alma.

Looking back, I now realise that all of the most important features of 'darug custodian' sociality were missing from those first, formal, very 'non-darug custodian'

inter-actions between Alma and myself. I say more about 'darug custodian sociality' in Chapters Three and Four. When I became familiar with 'darug custodians' and especially after I began attending meetings of the Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation in 2000, I noticed a distinctive 'darug custodian' custom I became particularly interested in - the making and serving of tea. I was intrigued because it is different to the ways in which I make and serve tea. This is one example of the many subtle, yet profound ways in which a different 'darug custodian' cultural milieu emerges as distinctive from my own. 'Ordinary culture' is revealed as an ensemble of procedures (de Certeau 1988). It is through particular forms of collective practice that 'darug custodian' distinctiveness becomes visible.

When a welcome visitor arrives at my home, I greet them as guests and usually offer them a choice of foods and drinks, settle them in a comfortable seat, and, should my guest request tea, I make the tea myself and serve it to them. This kind of behaviour is symbolic of Western conventions of hospitality which privilege welcome guests in one's home by waiting on them and offering them one's resources.

'darug custodians', on the other hand, recognise each other as 'darug custodians', and greet each other with appropriate 'darug custodian' kinship terms. Should a 'non-darug custodian' visitor arrive, however, they are not addressed in kinship terms differentiating, in the first instance, between those who are and are not 'darug custodian'. After establishing 'darug custodian' social relations through greetings, tea is served. There is no offer of an alternative beverage.

Tea, of course, has significance as an 'English drink' symbolic of British imperialism. When I asked Alma why it is that it is always tea that is served she responded emphatically:

Tea's the bush drink. It's what we all drink. We always drunk it.
Me mum, grandpa, all them old people. Never 'ad no choice. It's
what the welfare²⁴ always give us, but we like it. We always give it
to visitors 'coz we like it.

FNAJ0904.

So, the drinking of tea might be seen as another example of a 'darug custodian' appropriation of a symbol of colonial power. Tea was among the supplies deemed to be essential by the state and regularly provided to those recognised as Aboriginal. Tea, sugar, flour, tobacco and blankets were not things that Aboriginal peoples would have 'traditionally' needed, relied on, or even known about as essential to survival prior to invasion. The practice of providing 'essentials' such as tea, sugar, flour, tobacco and blankets began at first contact possibly as initial signs of goodwill and then as crucial support to Aboriginal peoples as they were dispossessed of their economies. In the early 19th century, the then Governor Lachlan Macquarie convened annual social events where food, drinks and entertainment were provided for Aboriginal peoples who 'came in' to the settlement at Parramatta. Parcels of food including tea and blankets were also provided for Aboriginal peoples to take away with them. In doing this, Macquarie was able to record the names of Aboriginal peoples living in the vicinity of Parramatta and establish a way of keeping a kind of census of the local Aboriginal population. This practice was later taken up by the *Aborigines'*

²⁴ The *New South Wales Aborigines' Welfare Board* provided tea and other essential provisions to Alma's family as she was growing up. Each Australian state administered its own *Aborigines' Protection Board*, or *APB*. The first *APB* was established in Queensland in 1896 when a Royal Commission was convened to investigate what might be done to alleviate the suffering of Aboriginal peoples. It has been estimated that between 1824 and 1896 large numbers of Aboriginal people were killed in Queensland by private settlers. What began with all good intentions to literally save the lives of surviving Aboriginal peoples by placing them on protected reserves and missions became a licence for the state to submit Aboriginal peoples to intense institutionalisation. I say more about this in Chapter Four.

Protection Board and the *Welfare Board* who, until the 1960's, were keeping 'blanket lists' of Aboriginal peoples. As well as providing information about Aboriginal peoples for state use, however, these 'blanket lists' have proven to be important sources of information for Aboriginal peoples in tracing genealogies.

The 'essentials' provided in these 'care packages', were not arbitrary. They were all symbols of British civilisation. Yet, these things, which were saturated with significance as 'English' became more and more crucial to the survival of Aboriginal peoples as their 'traditional' sources of food and shelter were diminished. After generations of relying on these supplies, however, rather than signifying 'English civilisation', they signify a history which is particular to Aboriginal peoples. The brand of tea that 'darug custodians' drink is not English. It is not made with tea bags, but in a pot with loose tea leaves which are always the same *Australian* brand - *Bushell's*. *Bushell's* tea is sold at almost all supermarkets, grocery stores and corner shops. The kind of civilisation that drinking this kind of tea signifies is not that of middle class England, but of survival on the missions, reserves, fringes and margins of Australian society. 'darug custodians', as heirs to this history, take something that was 'ours', and means differently to 'us' and do something else with it. They change the meaning of tea from symbol of colonial power to 'something darug custodians' drink 'because we like it'.

What is particularly distinctive about 'darug custodian' tea service is *who* it is that makes and serves the brew. It is a person in an appropriate relation to the other 'darug custodians' present who serves the tea. That is, it is usually the most socially 'junior' person in a group (who is not a child). When I visit Alma, for example, I usually serve tea for her, Kevin and I. I also serve tea when Alma visits me because Alma is

my senior. Alma is not only older than I am, but within the 'darug custodian' community, as a senior Darug descendant, Alma is someone who commands respect and whose authority is respected. As a Darug descendant, it is on Alma's identity (and other Darug descendants) that all other 'darug custodians' identity depends and because of this her status is privileged in the community. That fact, combined with her long term membership of the community and her experience negotiating her identity as a 'darug custodian' over a long period of time make Alma one of *the* most eminent people in the community. Her authority as a Darug descendant with long experience of negotiating her identity as a community member is far more prestigious than my position as a White, middle aged woman who, compared with Alma, is a relatively recent addition to the group. In 'darug custodian' society, in relation to Alma, I am very much her social inferior.

This does not mean, however, that my status is at the bottom of the burgeoning 'darug custodian' social hierarchy, but my position in 'darug custodian' society and my community membership is attenuated. I am respected as a White person who is able and willing to contribute to the community, but I am not recognised as the bearer of any amount of 'traditional' Darug cultural knowledge. I am, however, afforded some status due to my age (I am forty-eight and senior to many 'darug custodians'), which, although not necessarily a requisite for or feature of high status, is often recognised when combined with long experience as a community member. My ten years of service to the community is recognised to the extent that there are some members of the community who are junior in status to me. These people are either much younger people with very little 'darug custodian' cultural knowledge, or new comers to the community of any age who do not have any 'darug custodian', or 'traditional'

Indigenous knowledge of their own. When I visit Alma and a 'darug custodian' who is my social junior is present, that person makes and serves tea for Alma, Kevin and me. An appropriate junior person for serving tea can be either male or female. That person generally serves tea to people in order of their status in the group of tea drinkers. So, for example, if I serve tea for Alma and Kevin, I pour Alma's tea first because she is both Kevin's and my social superior, Kevin's next, and my own last. After greeting people and establishing a 'darug custodian' social order through the use of appropriate kinship terms, these social relations are then affirmed through the ritual serving of tea by the appropriate people to those in order of their social status.

These practices are in contrast to the ways that I conduct myself when visiting or being visited by 'non-darug custodians'. I was raised to observe middle-class White social conventions concerning privacy, ownership, power and respect for 'other people's things' that do not generally allow for the entering of another person's space and using that person's things in ways which are common in 'darug custodian' society. Consequently, within my own Western cultural milieu, I would never enter a person's house, help myself to their tea making facilities and serve tea to all those present. Nor would I expect people visiting me, especially those I only vaguely know, or do not know at all, to rustle through my kitchen finding tea, milk, cups and sugar, boil my kettle, and serve me tea in my own home. My proprietorial power in controlling who enters my home, who touches my things, and who knows intimate details about my things, such as where I keep my tea caddy, is maintained in what may appear to be this most mundane, everyday ritual. de Certeau (1988) argues that it is these everyday, ordinary practices which serve to make and remake our cultural worlds.

'darug custodians', in contrast to my middle-class Western tea making

conventions, do not, among themselves, observe such rules of hospitality which override the 'darug custodian' status system. Values such as privacy, ownership of objects and control of personal space seem to be secondary to the playing out of social relationships. Higher status 'darug custodians' do not make and serve tea in their own homes or in other 'darug custodian's' homes. Making and serving a social superior tea by that person's inferior is a symbolic act recognising and affirming each person's status. It is not a gesture of hospitality in the same terms that I view tea making and serving. In other words, different social conventions for the appropriate serving of tea in 'darug custodian' social contexts are situated in relation to 'my' conventions for serving tea. 'darug custodian' difference is made visible in such productive relations²⁵.

Clearly, this is also the case for 'darug custodians' themselves. When I asked ten different 'darug custodians' how long these tea making and serving practices have been operating in the community no-one knew what I was talking about. It was not until I pointed out to people that their practices are different to 'non-darug custodian's' that they realised the difference themselves. Given that 'darug custodians' have only been gathering as a community for the last twenty-five years, it is remarkable how quickly different practices have become taken for granted. Although, of course, it is possible that these practises were existent already in smaller groups of kin and friends.

It was not until we renegotiated our relationship and began to relate to each other in a more 'darug custodian' manner that Alma's 'story' began to take form within the context of 'darug custodian' sociality. It was important, not only to the research,

²⁵ As well as in many more hostile and aggressive examples, as the thesis reveals.

but to my on-going relationship with Alma that I recognise and reconfirm Alma's position as my 'darug custodian' social superior. One way of doing this is by making and serving Alma tea. This was not something that I was overtly told by Alma or any other 'darug custodian'. It was not until I had enjoyed considerable experience interacting with 'darug custodians' that I realised that my relationship with Alma demanded that I be the one to make and serve tea not only at my own house, but at her house, and at the homes of other 'darug custodian's' who are my social superiors.

It was not until I had known Alma for more than four years that I felt able to over-come my own cultural sensibilities enough to make tea in her kitchen without being asked. After doing this for a number of years it still feels odd, however, to fumble about in Alma's kitchen cupboards looking through her neatly stored groceries, choosing mugs among her perfectly stacked crockery, and hunting through her immaculate refrigerator for milk.

Tea serving is not the only way in which 'darug custodian' relationships are established and maintained. Knowing the appropriate ways to comport oneself toward an Elder is another way as I outline in Chapter Three. Another way is knowing what is appropriate to speak of to whom as I demonstrate in Chapters Seven and Eight. Yet another way is knowing the manner in which one should behave in certain ceremonial contexts as I explain in Chapter Eight. Still, knowing how to appropriately serve tea is certainly one important signifier of 'darug custodian' identity. Certainly, the effect of my first tea service on Alma's and my relationship was immediate. After I had made and served the tea to her, we became engaged in an intense discussion concerning ownership of land and I had not had the presence of mind to ask Alma if I should turn

on the tape-recorder²⁶. As we conversed, Alma reached over and pressed the 'record' button herself saying:

We don't want to miss any of this do we?

AJFN0601.

This was the first time that Alma had taken the initiative of deciding what would be recorded and when the recording would begin. It was the first time that she had touched any of my equipment (which she and other community members now frequently borrow). The shift in our interactions was palpable. Through verbal communications and my tea serving behaviour I had formally indicated to Alma, in a 'darug custodian' way, that I recognise her as my social superior. A more collaborative relationship had been established which made it clear to all 'darug custodians', including Alma and myself, that regardless of my papers, notebooks, legal requirements and tape-recorder, our work together would, from now on, be subject to negotiations which take into account Alma's status as my 'darug custodian' social superior.

Alma asked that I continue to prepare some questions for each of our interviews so that we had topics about which to talk. She would read my list and would often find a question which sparked her interest. Usually only that one question from the list would be addressed as Alma's narratives 'took off' in different directions. My questions were, in this way, appropriated by Alma. She took them and made them

²⁶ As well as the consent forms that I am compelled to produce for all formal interviews with 'darug custodians', I have also always sought verbal consent from my interviewees each time I have recorded a conversation. I do this out of respect and to remind 'darug custodians' that they need to be aware (and perhaps beware) of my capacity as researcher.

vehicles for her own accounts of events as they were remembered and elaborated by her.

This highly negotiable participatory approach characterises my inter-actions and inter-relationships with 'darug custodians'²⁷.

Observing my own Practice.

A given fact of my fieldwork concerns my own role: I have skills that allow me to know where and how to access resources such as state funding and the use of public facilities such as space for art exhibitions at Universities, galleries and community centres. I am part of a network of Indigenous academics and their White colleagues and supporters which allows for a flow of knowledge concerning available funds, access to political and social events and other resources to which 'darug custodians' did not have access before my association with them. Using skills, resources and expertise that 'darug custodians' do not possess, I have been able to organise and curate eight art exhibitions, (one featuring more than two hundred works), make applications for state funding for an extended trip into the central desert and account then for its expenditure, help in the preparation of applications to the Indigenous Land Fund, organise monthly publication of the community newsletter, act as an agent for the sale of 'darug custodian' art works, and mediate between 'darug custodians' and state institutions so that certain 'darug custodians' could give lectures in under-graduate university courses. I was able to provide crucial help to make events happen.

My judgments, and agency in organising, constituting and exhibiting 'darug

²⁷ This approach is similar to 'action research' as it is described by human geography, education, business studies and various other social research disciplines (Boog, Coenen, Keune 2001, Reason and Bradbury 2001, Hood, Mayall and Oliver, 1999).

custodian' expressions of identity determine this work. These articulations are what 'darug custodians' themselves call culture. Although 'darug custodian' cultural distinctiveness is subtly evident in everyday rituals such as the appropriate making and serving of tea, 'darug custodians' themselves reify particular behaviours and representations as culture. It is more clearly through painting, dancing and ceremonies that 'we' (members of the dominant society) and 'darug custodians' can recognise their difference because 'we' do not do these things. My involvement in 'making culture happen' is both crucial and deeply problematic for this thesis. It has been crucial because 'darug custodians' are so fragile, disempowered and under-resourced that many of the articulations that I have helped them to produce in the time-frame of my field-work were unlikely to have occurred without my aid. It is also crucial because 'darug custodians' themselves actively seek White supporters to help them with their projects. As well as my involvement, other White gallery owners, art dealers, state employees and activists have helped 'darug custodians' over the years. Jim Kohen, whose work I discuss at length in Chapter Two, was an early supporter of Darug descendant 'darug custodians' in helping them prepare genealogies. Barbara, an art gallery owner at St. Albans on the Hawkesbury River, north-west of Sydney is a regular supporter and has curated a number of exhibitions of 'darug custodian' art. White employees of local government regularly help 'darug custodians' to represent their identity by inviting their participation in art exhibitions, pageants and projects such as the planning of native gardens and heritage trails. A group of White activists helped 'darug custodians' to organise protests against the building of a freeway over a culturally significant site.

My own profound implication in the representations that I make in this thesis is

deeply problematic, however, because the line between what actually are 'darug custodian' articulations and what are my own is constantly blurred. Yet, this work depended on my ability to bring into being the things that 'darug custodians' themselves wanted me to witness and record, but could not always bring into being themselves without my help. It may not be too much to say that I brought into being the things that I was (supposed to be) representing.

As I explain in Chapters Two and Three, I remain Public Officer of the Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation and editor of the community newsletter and I am still asked to curate exhibitions. As I explain further in Chapter Two, my position as Public Officer has included acting as a 'go-between' for 'darug custodians', the state and other stake-holders. It is my job to interpret correspondence and explain its meanings at meetings of the 'Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation' as required. Community members discuss the situation between themselves and ask me to prepare an appropriate response to the correspondent for them to either send or edit (see appendix for examples of the newsletter, some emails providing content for newsletters and some correspondence composed by me in my capacity as Public Officer). By doing these things I continue to help give expression to 'darug custodian' identity. In this way, I am part of the way in which 'darug custodian' expressions come into being at this moment in time, just as other White people currently help 'darug custodians' to produce their articulations (and hopefully will continue to do in the future).

However, I have learned some hard lessons about the possible difficult consequences of such productive affiliations. I have attracted ridicule and hostility from 'non-darug custodian' critics who judged my role in helping 'darug custodians' to

articulate their identity to be inappropriate. After one major art exhibition at Macquarie University, a White academic working in Indigenous Studies told me that I should be ashamed of myself for promoting 'inauthentic' Aboriginal art. Some 'non-darug custodians' - all of them White - claim that my own work is somehow improper and adds to the 'inauthenticity' of 'darug custodian' representations. It seems to be implied that my Whiteness and its ability to facilitate 'darug custodian' articulations somehow taints the 'authenticity' of the representations of 'darug custodians'. It is as if my contributions to the context of the presentation of 'darug custodian' articulations are mistaken for the representations themselves - as if my organisation of exhibitions, for example, changes the form of the paintings.

I attended some under-graduate classes of the White academic above who levelled such charges against me. It was a major premise of her courses that, in the era of 'self-determination', Aboriginal peoples should be left to control their own destinies. Aboriginal peoples, she claimed, had been 'done to' enough and should now be allowed to make their own decisions, experience their own successes and failures. Her 'hands off' approach to relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples failed to take account, however, of the fact that some Aboriginal peoples harbour ambitions that *require* the aid of White supporters. That due to systemic racism, many Aboriginal peoples are powerless to achieve their ambitions without the help of White people. It failed to understand that some Aboriginal people seek the help, advice and support of appropriate White people.

In contrast to the criticism I have received from White people, no Aboriginal person, not even a Darug Tribal member, has ever accused me of inappropriately

'helping' 'darug custodians'²⁸. 'darug custodian' Elders have told me that my help, support, skills and resources are valued as community resources. After I had been upset by the attack on my integrity by the White academic an old Darug descendant man explained to me;

Ya never notice that them professorfullas what gives ya a hard time never does it when ya own people ['darug custodians'] is 'round? That's coz they knows what we sez. They knows that ya helpin' us. They knows we want ya. What did themfullas [the academics in question] ever do for us? They jest writes 'bout us in their letters [journals] in words what we don't know [can't understand]. They don't live wif us like what you 'n' 'disco kangaroo' [a nick-name for my husband, Ian]. They don't drive us 'round the place. They don't give us a few bob [small amounts of money] for smokes. They don't know 'bout us so we don't want *them* helpin' us with our art 'n' that. They's jest jealous 'coz we want ya 'n' we don't want 'em. We love ya. We don't never want ya ta go 'way.

WMFN0802.

These sentiments were repeated a few months later after I had conducted a guided tour of a multi-media exhibition reflecting some moments from my field work. The photographs, paintings, artifacts and text were exhibited in the library foyer at Macquarie University in 2002. The visitors were Indigenous students from all over Australia enrolled in the Diploma of Community Management through Macquarie's Indigenous Unit, Warawara. A senior man from Far North Queensland pulled me aside and spoke to me in a joking, teasing manner that I have come to understand is a way many Aboriginal people are able to say things that, if said seriously, may be construed as inappropriate:

²⁸ None of which I am aware at any rate.

Sister, when ya git sick 'o this mob down 'ere, ya make sure
ya come up an' stay with us. Aboriginal people need whitefullas
like you. I want ya ta make a show like this 'bout my mob up 'ome.
FN1002.

Doing things with and for 'darug custodians', however difficult, stressful and controversial, has been only part of the practice of this project. My visibility as a White woman doing what some people judge to be the 'business' of Aboriginal people has provoked both hostility and support. Another aspect of my research is my role of observer, which is no less ambiguous than my role as participant. The subjectivity of the observer, as Devereaux (in Behar1996:193) insists, always :

influences the course of the observed event as radically as
'inspection' influences ('disturbs') the behavior of an electron.
'The observer' never observes the behavioural event which 'would
have taken place' in his absence, nor hears an account identical
with that which the same narrator would give to another person.

Devereaux (ibid.) goes on to argue that there is never any clear or easy way to approach the self who observes, so the professional observer develops defences - methods - to 'reduce anxiety and enable us to function efficiently'. That is, in order to 'protect' ourselves from our own emotional responses to the experience of observation, professional observers create operational frameworks which create barriers between the observer's subjectivity and the objectivity of their representations. Anthropologists, for example, rather than conceptualise the observational aspects of research as surveillance, scrutiny or voyeurism, label the practice fieldwork. By saying 'this is fieldwork' anthropologists are (sometimes) able to alleviate stress from situations where they feel complicitous with hegemonic power structures, helpless to relieve the anguish, suffering and hopelessness of others, and

unable or unwilling to choose whether to act or to witness (Behar 1996:6).

In my case, however, the anxiety of observation is exacerbated by the anxiety of participation. The main support, encouragement and comfort that I draw on to keep going in my efforts as a participant come from the community. It is being told that I am accepted and valued as a cultural 'insider' that inspires my work. These articulations of approval, however, are conditional on my behaving in ways which are culturally appropriate according to 'darug custodian' rules of sociality. That is, whereas my participation in a 'darug custodian' social world may attract the criticism of 'others', it is accepted and encouraged by 'darug custodians' themselves. My role of observer, however, is recognised as important to 'darug custodians', but it is not the way that 'darug custodians' do things. It is a constant reminder to them and to me that I am, in fact, an 'outsider'. It is being an observer that prevents me from identifying so closely with 'darug custodians' that I would not have been able to write this account. My role as observer allows this work to get to a place that it otherwise could not. By exposing my self to the challenges faced as the observer of events, even those I, myself, 'set up', I lead the reader, as Ruth Behar (1996:14) explains:

not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of serious social issues.

Learning to Recognise the Obvious

My value as a community resource was only part of the reason that 'darug custodians' encouraged me to conduct this work. My ability to write this account was a primary reason for undertaking the research because community leaders wanted me to write their story. They wanted me to participate in the making of the Darug story, to

witness its forms, and represent it as writing. But when 'darug custodians' proposal was first put to me I had serious reservations about its level of difficulty and my ability to rise to its challenges. I decided to explore a number of options before making a decision. I tried to connect with some contacts in the Northern Territory. When I told Aunty Janice, a Darug descendant Elder, that I had gone north to speak to some Aboriginal people she challenged my assumptions:

What, aren't we Aboriginal enough for ya? Why don't ya wanna work with us? We need our story told more 'n' 'em fullas. Everybody knows 'bout 'em. No-one even knows we is 'ere.
FNPJ022001.

Aunty Janice had given voice to my own anthropological biases. That is, she challenged my then cultural assumptions that 'real' Aboriginal people, 'real Aboriginal culture' could only be found in the north, the desert - somewhere other than the city. It was possibly at that moment I committed myself to this project. Here I was in the midst of an Aboriginal community in Sydney who asked for and wanted to participate in my research. I abandoned my project of seeking another Aboriginal community in a 'remote area' who do not know me and who may or may not be interested in participating in a research relationship with me.

Would the events I describe in the thesis have occurred without my intervention? Possibly, but certainly not in the form or within the time-frame that my involvement produced. If my subjectivity as a middle aged, middle class White activist has so fundamentally influenced the forms of many of the articulations that I analyse, then what kind of a work is this? As I said in the thesis Introduction, this is an unusual kind of ethnography.

The thesis is about 'darug custodians' and it is about my responses -

emotional, physical and intellectual - to them. It is thus also necessarily about my inability to appropriately separate myself from 'darug custodian' cultural expressions because I have been so involved with facilitating these very same 'darug custodian' expressions of identity.

I have been vigilant in only taking on projects which are supported by and collaborate with 'darug custodians' themselves. But where, strictly speaking, does collaboration begin and end? I have attempted to separate those aspects which are mine and those which are 'darug custodian'. This has meant that when I have been involved in a project with 'darug custodians' I have needed to make decisions about when and how to 'butt out', even when 'darug custodians' do not want me to.

Conclusion

As my engagement with Alma in helping her to write her 'life history' demonstrates, it was only in relation to my initial, inappropriate, 'non-darug custodian' interview style and social behaviour that appropriate 'darug custodian' social behaviour became evident. It is only by examining 'darug custodian' practices in relation to the practices of others that differences become apparent, as my tea serving example in this chapter demonstrates, and as painting in Chapter Five, dancing in Chapter Six, speech making in Chapter Seven and ceremony in Chapter Eight will demonstrate. More important than this for my project, however, is that my relationships with 'darug custodians' depend on my ability to change and learn from participating in such practices, and the on-going relationships they produce. Alma, for example, could speak to me while we were engaged in the classic social science interview technique. She could and would answer my questions. But our relationship suffered. By setting Alma up as my 'interviewee' I was also setting her up as 'other' to

my self in a way that was more radical than in our earlier, already established friendship. Alma responded to this by re-establishing the terms of our friendship to be more in 'darug custodian' terms than 'non-darug custodian' terms. This meant that I needed to observe 'darug custodian' social conventions if our relationship was to thrive. I needed to privilege Edna's status as a Darug descendant so that I could participate, to some extent, in a relationship with all Darug descendants and Darug land. These are the terms of non Darug descendant's membership of the community.

But my relationship with 'darug custodians' is atypical of their usual relations with members of the dominant society. Rarely is 'darug custodian' identity perceived at all, let alone negotiated and accommodated. More often 'darug custodians' need to overtly and intentionally attract the attention of White audiences if their presence is not to be marginalised, ignored or misrecognised.