

*Politics, pain and pleasure: the art of art-making for 'settled' Aboriginal  
Australians*

**Lorraine Gibson**

**Copyright©2011 Lorraine Gibson. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged.**

**Abstract:** Since the emergence of the 'acrylic art movement' which came out of Papunya in the Western Desert of Australia in the 1970s, Aboriginal art and cultures have become intertwined in public discourse, through government policy, and in visual art worlds. It is arguably through their artworks that Australian Aboriginal people have become increasingly known both within Australia and overseas (Merlan 2001; cf. Fourmille 1994).<sup>i</sup> Indeed, in many ways, Aboriginal art has come to represent Aboriginal people and their culture (Myers 2002). But what kind of art is acceptably deemed Aboriginal in mainstream art worlds, by Australian Aboriginal people, and why? What does this mean personally, socially and economically for those Aboriginal artists who are located in the south-eastern parts of Australia which were first colonised? For the most part these people are deemed by the mainstream population to have 'lost their culture'. More than this, they are spoken of by some other Aboriginal people from the more remote and later colonised parts of the continent in similar terms. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork with the Barkindji people of Wilcannia, a small country town in the south-east of Australia, this paper explores the role of art making and art talk and the ways in which these are implicated in the politics of culture, in cultural subjectivity, and in the consolidation and (re)creation of cultural identity.

**Keywords:** Aboriginal Australians; Aboriginal art; Wilcannia.

### **Wilcannia Is Found Wanting**

Within the Australian national imaginary, Aboriginal Australians are widely figured and represented. One overarching representation focuses on Aboriginal people's perceived spiritual connection and relationship to the land and its animals. Many non-Aboriginal

people express a longing for what they see to be these kinds of strong connections and some seek to vicariously enter into this perceived state and adopt it for their own (Lattas 2000; Nicholls 2000). Australian Aboriginal artworks and, to a lesser extent, the people who make them are most readily taken up as a kind of mediating vehicle to accessing a particular and often generically imagined 'spirituality' which modernity is seen to have lost (Myers 1991: 38; Lattas 2000). This can, and indeed has, encouraged the view that one can enter into, share in, or draw on spiritual meaning through owning or indeed viewing a painting which is thought to have been painted by a 'real' Aboriginal person. These points of possession and appropriation, and the discourses and practices they engender, as with other longed-for imaginaries, requires a clarification of mythologies. Here, Aboriginal culture is made over to 'one's own cultural truths' (Lattas: 2000: 267). In these imaginings, the romantic notion of 'authentic', 'real', 'traditional', 'tribal' Aboriginal people living a hunter-gatherer lifestyle is set against its opposite, that is, those Aboriginal people who are seen not to live in this way.

The ethnography on which this paper is based is located in the space of the conjured opposite in a small south-eastern Australian country town called Wilcannia in New South Wales. This is home to the Barkindji people, the traditional owners of the land on which Wilcannia stands. The Barkindji, together with a smaller number of other south-eastern Aboriginal groups who call Wilcannia home are not those who have been the focus of Australian and indeed international admiration.

The town of Wilcannia is best known in the public sphere as a place to avoid. When I travelled there to undertake fieldwork in 2002, friends, family and some colleagues were concerned for my safety. They had heard, read and repeated the media view of the town as a place of violence and disorder with drunkenness and physical abuse being presented as the order of the day. This view was again reinforced as I drove towards Wilcannia through Cobar, the nearest town to Wilcannia lying 280 kilometres eastward. There, accounts I had previously heard and read about travellers being warned by whites not to stop in Wilcannia, but to 'drive straight through' were voiced to me by Cobar residents as I gathered supplies for my onward journey (cf. Myers 1988).

A few days after arriving in Wilcannia and in response to questions from both 'black' and 'white' about what I was doing there, divergent views of what constituted Aboriginal cultures began to emerge. My assertions to whites that I was here to study Aboriginal culture were met with derision and mirth. 'What culture', they asked, a culture of drinking or of violence perhaps? I was told that I would not find Aboriginal culture here, that there were no 'real' Aboriginal people here as could be found in the northern, central, and more remote parts of the continent where the 'traditional people', 'full bloods' are seen to live as their ancestors had done. For the most part, I was told to expect a culture of loss and degradation. Yet, the Aboriginal people I spoke with saw nothing untoward in my asking if I could learn about their culture and happily directed me to people they felt could be of assistance. This differing approach to the presence or absence of culture raises many questions. If culture is a way of life then why was I being directed by Aboriginal people to other particular Aboriginal individuals who were said to 'know all about culture'? As to the white assertions that there was no Aboriginal culture to be found here, where, if not in a

town of 600 or so people of whom the overall majority were Aboriginal *was* Aboriginal culture to be found?

These are not straightforward questions with clear arguments and sides. Many Aboriginal people in Wilcannia also refer to Aboriginal people from the north and centre of the continent as 'tribal people', 'traditional people' and 'full bloods' and repeat the view that they are somehow more Aboriginal than others. This reinforces the view of settler society that what constitutes Aboriginality can be lost incrementally through time and white contact, but that it cannot be added to, and, that Aboriginality is something which can be had by degrees (Byrne 1996: 91 &100).

Issues such as native title and the legal requirements and measures to Aboriginal people gaining rights in this domain direct the need for Aboriginal people to demonstrate continuity of traditional culture. The forms that this should take in order to be found worthy of 'public sympathy and state resources' are also prescribed (Povinelli 2002: 33). Because of these requirements in these and other fields such as tourism, Aboriginal people are called upon to reflect on culture and bring this to a level of consciousness not required of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Here, Aboriginal culture in the sense of everyday life – as this is lived – bleeds into culture as a response to local and wider Australian (and indeed international) public demands of what Aboriginal culture is. This paper discusses how art, artists and art-making transform into decisions of authenticating (or not) Aboriginal artworks; and how people of Wilcannia who, at times, echo this view of loss and lack intend to change these implications (cf. Gibson 2008).

## **In the Beginning**

In 1971 a young Australian art teacher called Geoffrey Bardon moved to Papunya in the Western Desert of Australia to take up a teaching position at the community school. Papunya, a small Aboriginal settlement 250 kilometres to the west of Alice Springs was created as a government reserve in the 1950s for Aboriginal people who had been displaced from their traditional homelands. At the time of Bardon's arrival, Papunya comprised around 1000 people from the Pintupi, Warlpiri, Luritja and Anmatyerre language groups (Ryan 1991). Shortly after his arrival, and having observed something of the storied designs that children drew in the sand, Bardon encouraged the transfer of these into paint. Senior Aboriginal men seeing this interest began working with Bardon to paint their Dreaming or (*Jukurrpa*) in mural form on the school walls. The concept of the Dreaming resonates with stories of eternally present ancestral beings that travelled across the land leaving traces, making marks and creating and becoming topographical features. Beyond this, these ancestral beings defined the 'meaningful order of being', leaving behind the 'essence of all future beings' (Myers 2002:18). From these beginnings, the Aboriginal 'acrylic art movement', or 'western desert art movement' was born. From this point, designs and stories, some of which were sacred and had hitherto been shared within a strong tradition of rights to make, to trace, to know, to sing, to see and to hear, began to be sent into the world as commodities. The abstract imagery and iconography, much of which had previously

been ephemerally reproduced on bodies, in sand and performance as part of initiation ritual and other ceremony, was by the late 1980s exciting art worlds across Australia and internationally in Paris and New York.

The Dreamings exhibition held at the Asia Society Galleries in New York in 1988 is perhaps something of a watershed for the way in which its choice of Aboriginal art works as representations of Aboriginal culture were heavily biased towards those from the remote areas of Australia which are thought 'traditional'. The choice of works was influenced and indeed circumscribed by political struggles between those Aboriginal people thought to be either urban or traditional, the preference of funding bodies, interests of corporations and individuals, and the gallery director Andrew Pekarik's feeling that people did not want to see the accusations and pain which was perceived to be the hallmark of urban art (Myers 202: 242). Pekarik, as with others, sought the spiritual content of the 'traditionals' and their Dreaming. This sacred knowledge and way of being are qualities thought lost to contemporary western art and, indeed, to Wilcannia Aboriginal people and their art.

This notion of loss has had much impact on people in Wilcannia:

[They take on board] the insufficiency with which they are credited and articulate the notion of loss attributed to 'settled', 'south eastern' or 'urban' Aborigines'. This sense of loss – quite apart from its often keenly felt actuality – has shaped much of the public discourse about Aborigines among anthropologists as well as historians, despite some academic assertions and intended goodwill to the contrary (Morris 1989; Beckett 1994; MacDonald 2000; Cowlishaw 2004; in the visual arts see Sutton and Anderson 1988; Johnson 1990; Kleinert 1994; Morphy 2001). This sense of loss and idea of loss has been overlaid on the Aboriginal visual arts arena in ways which continue to intimate a hierarchy of Aboriginality (Gibson 2008: 297).

Murray Butcher is a Barkindji artist, and one of the individuals that people directed me to as someone who 'knows about culture'. Murray comments that painting about culture gives people a 'feelin' of empowerment within themselves that they can do things and achieve things'. He told me he saw art as a way to:

give outsiders insight into our culture, where they can see we have stories and art and stuff. And, whether it's... whatever influence it come from... it's still us and, I don't know, try to bring our culture alive in a medium what's available to us (pers comm., Wilcannia, 11 December 2003).

Art objects are seen by many Barkindji as a medium that will *perform* culture for other Barkindji and wider society. It is a form through which culture, as this is imagined by Murray and others, can be concretised, made solid, made visible, and which can be sold. The content, the styles used, and the care with which a painting is rendered are important aspects to those local Aboriginal people who have a keen interest in knowing about their cultural history and in, as many put it, keeping their culture 'alive'. These people, who are referred to as Elders, are for the most part over 40 years of age but some, like Murray who have learned from older relations the cultural designs that 'belong to us' are in their thirties.

Knowing what belongs to Barkindji refers to the designs, animals, food, important sites, travels and stories of ancestral beings; this is knowledge which has been handed down through family. The Darling River, which the Barkindji know as Barka and which flows through Wilcannia, is a primary source for much of the art content. Fresh-water turtles, cod, catfish and Ngatji the Rainbow Serpent (the ancestral being that created the Darling River) are features of the art-work produced.

Since the 1970s, when Aboriginal people in south-eastern Australia began to mobilise politically, they have increasingly gained access to archaeological and anthropological writings and other ancestral material held in museum collections. A great deal of Barkindji material and objects are held in the Australian Museum in Sydney. This primarily includes carved and incised wooden weapons such as boomerangs, spears and clubs which bear the distinctive geometric and linear design elements such as oblongs, squares, cross-hatching, zig-zags, herring-bone, diamonds, rhomboids, chevrons, together with figurative imagery; these designs are shared by much of the south-east (Morphy 2001; Kleinert 2000: 241). There are also several emu eggs that are carved with these designs. Some of these depict scenes from the pastoral era such as bucking broncos with others depicting native animals and Aboriginal figures. These artefacts have been accessed by several Barkindji men since the late 1970s and have provided additional source material to draw on. It would be incorrect however to suggest that the Barkindji did not know of these designs prior to this access. The rich painted, stencilled and incised rock art sites with their geometric designs are a hallmark of south-eastern Australia (Morphy 2001; Cooper 1994). They abound at Mutawintji National Park which sits 130 kilometres north-east of Broken Hill and 180 kilometres further west of Wilcannia in far western New South Wales. Barkindi people, as joint managers of Mutawintji, work as tourist guides and cultural site officers. There is, however, much debate as to the historical extent of cultural knowledge and continuous production of these designs (Kleinert 2000; Cooper 1994; Sutton and Anderson 1988; Morphy 2001). Some Barkindji people claim that there has been a continuous production of these designs on weapons, emu eggs and other artifacts within the changed context of 'black' and 'white' settler relations and economies. Others are happy to consider that these designs are being relearned and revitalised. Given the fraught social, cultural and economic nature of identity and recognition, and its consequences in many arenas, there is much at stake here; this is a matter I address elsewhere (Gibson 2008a).

The mantra 'ours is lines' is common parlance in Wilcannia and refers to the linear designs and elements shared by the south-east. It is used to assert a unique Barkindji identity to other Barkindji and to the wider public, as art-making has increased in production due to both demand and a more permissible and shared (at times appropriated) public pride in Aboriginal identity. It is a mantra also repeated by Barkindi people who do not paint. 'Ours is lines, unna [isn't it]?' is both statement and question. It is one repeated back by Barkindji to those Barkindji who are recognised as culturally knowledgeable and who have taught this mantra. It is a way of demonstrating knowledge and a shared identity and of respect for the teaching of Elders as it shows that one is listening

The sale of art is also one way in which people living in the welfare economy of Wilcannia can hope to increase their income. Some people, mostly younger, take up painting in order

to earn some money. Many seem either not concerned or unaware of the importance of design and content. However, in many ways, it is economically wise as well as more culturally acceptable to be willing to take instruction from someone viewed as having cultural knowledge and authority. Most of the buying public are non-Aboriginal and have clear ideas reaped from the media, other publications and an abundance of documentaries as to what constitutes a worthy, real authentic Aboriginal identity from that which does not. The painting of a Walt Disney cartoon irrespective of how well rendered (as done by one particular Barkindji man) is neither desired nor going to sell as Aboriginal art. Advice from Elders that dolphins or salt water turtles rendered in the dotting style of the Central and Western Desert are not suitable subjects for painting and that freshwater turtles rendered with 'lines' flowing around the figure are, is not only good economic advice but a way to ensure that 'what belong to us' is consolidated, made meaningful and carried forward.

What is painted and the way it is painted in terms of the care taken matters to those who are held to be cultural teachers. I asked Murray Butcher what he thought constituted a 'good' painting and whether he thought it was alright to rush a painting out for money. He said that a rushed painting showed up in the work but his main concern was that 'it doesn't sorta bring the quality out what the person's capable of, ya know?' He went on to say that some of the people are 'searchin' inside theirself for stories or meanings to their paintings'. He was pleased that some of the younger ones were 'progressing over time from when they first started... they didn't know what to paint':

An' then, I sat down an' I suppose I've influenced them in some ways in what to paint an' stuff. You know, think of the things around like the landscape of the animals the food the animals eat (Murray Butcher pers.comm).

A good painting for this artist is one with 'some kind of story put there. Some kind of their history or their people's history into their paintin' instead of just all the aesthetic value'. The stress on doing what you know in art is valued, as is doing what belongs to you. Art, for most Barkindji is best when it is a visual representation of one's life and its connection to important others and events. The importance of these aspects is echoed by other Barkindji authorities who garner community respect (cf. Gibson 2008: 307).

## **The Dreaming and Cultural Resilience**

Painting on canvas and board is a more recent and contemporary form, which is used to teach children. This aspect is emphasised by Phillip Bates, another Barkindji artist. He says he paints for the children,

so that they see that our culture not dyin' ya know? It's still alive. Cos it's drummed into everyone's head everyday that, ah, this mob losing their culture or whatever, you know"? But me out here in the west [western New South Wales] you know. Our people learning our culture again, you know? (pers. comm. 8 December 2003).

Murray and Phillip, as with many Aboriginal people, know that a history of colonisation has seen changes to the lives and cultural knowledge of his people. In making reference to an unspecified historical past he says that:

families would have had their own [Dreaming] stories an' everything. But because of the effects of colonisation and various other things through history, lot of the knowledges and that have been broken down and shattered all over the place. So, what we got is, we haven't got, I suppose we gotta strong culture but not a complete culture... like it's fragmented (pers. comm. Wilcannia, 11 December, 2003).

The fragmentation Murray speaks of, together with the demands of native title and the wider Australian public means that in order for 'Aboriginal culture' to be recognised it must be demonstrated according to mainstream understandings which are embedded in notions of tradition and continuity. Holding one's Dreaming, hunting and gathering of food, ceremony, language, these are the practices which demonstrate culture. In the absence of their everyday lived coherency in Wilcannia, people now talk in terms of taking children out to the bush to 'teach' them about culture. Culture of the kind which is valued by outsiders is, for Wilcannia people, more often something one talks about, or engages with through activities as opposed to life as lived. People such as Murray, fortunate enough to have been reared by grandparents or other members of older generations who retained language and practised activities of a more 'traditional' kind, have become the 'go to' people for those wanting to 'learn' about culture. This includes government agencies and so on but people like Murray are also, in essence, cultural brokers for their own people. Whilst Murray is proud that Barkindji people come to him seeking advice about what can and what cannot be represented in an art work, this responsibility sits heavily. There is tension in wanting to share what he knows of his culture and his expressed assertion that what he knows has been changed through history. Whilst Murray on the one hand, as with others, asserts the presence of his culture, on the other he compares this presence on a proportional sliding scale which is set against historical time and geographic proximity to white settlement. His culture as articulated is a fought-for and reduced presence which sits in contrast against that of the 'full bloods' up north and in the centre.

The notion that Aboriginal people from the south-east have seen a lack and loss of culture is one also expressed by Aboriginal people from the more remote parts of Australia. Fred Myers tells us that Michael Nelson Tjakamarra, a Pintupi man and artist from the centre of Australia, 'believes that people are really interested in his work and the work of traditional people because it derives from the Dreaming, the source of value from which most urban people have been separated' (1994: 690). Myers quotes Tjakamarra as saying that whites 'want to see [art] from the Center... Urban Aboriginal people ngurrpaya nyinanyi ('they are ignorant' [of Aboriginal Law])' (1994: 689-690). This is not an isolated view, but we might consider that Tjakamarra may himself in some way 'be responding to a specific parochialism itself driven by art-world demands' (Gibson 2008: 306).

An important measure of tradition is the practice of 'The Dreaming' or 'Aboriginal Law';<sup>ii</sup> indeed most 'traditional' Aboriginal art makes claims through 'traditional artists', curators, exhibitions, art dealers and many anthropological texts in terms of the artworks being

grounded in the ceremonies, stories and other elements of The Dreaming. The Dreaming is closely tied to required patterns of behaviour and the authority of the Elders as these pertain to land and ceremony (Meggitt 1962; Tonkinson 1974; Williams 1988). It is not surprising therefore that association with this concept was central to the valorisation of Aboriginal art and a key trope of Wilcannia assertions that they have not lost their culture and that, 'our Dreaming still alive'.

The centrality of the Dreaming as a settler culture authenticator of 'real', 'traditional' Aboriginal culture has been internalised by many Aboriginal people from the south-east. This emphasis is problematic on many fronts. Barkindji people argue that their Dreaming is 'still alive' whilst, at the same time, expressing sadness that they do not know and cannot or experience the Dreaming as their ancestors may have done. Young, mostly troubled men express that the spiritual aspects of the Dreaming are what is missing in their lives. If only they could get a hold of this Dreaming thing which they are seen to lack by settler society then there is a sense that everything would right itself; that there would be no problems with alcohol, or domestic abuse or the difficulties of an imposed lifestyle. People have internalised the myth of tradition and seek solace in asking those with cultural authority to 'tell us some stories bro' and ask to be cut in the ways of now unknown initiation rites in the hope that this will offer meaning. People long to possess the kind of Dreaming and life that resonates 'most closely with anthropological and popular portrayals of traditional Aboriginal society' (Morton in Charlesworth et al. 2005: 196).

When it comes to art, it is the perceived presence of the Dreaming that is most readily sought and understood to validate Aboriginal culture (Myers 2002). In talking of the difference between 'traditional' Aboriginal artists thought to be 'authentic and those of the south-east, Roberta Sykes asks '[w]hat uniquely Aboriginal theme, then, is left for urban Blacks whose Dreaming has largely been obliterated by the white people?' (1990:6). Whilst the Barkindji people are not 'urban', neither are they considered to be 'traditional'. They stand in something of a no-man's land between this dyad which categorises them and their art. Just as 'traditional' artists such as Tjakamarra assert the urban loss of culture, so too do many Barkindji. Barkindji say they would like to learn from the 'real tribal people' but they also assert that they, in turn, have much they could teach urban Aboriginal people about culture. Within art worlds Barkindji and their art are located ambiguously within structures and discourses which are not of their making.

## **Conclusion**

Barkindji people in Wilcannia assert that their art work reflects 'our tradition' and 'our culture'. However, they also, at times (paradoxically), repeat and internalise the settler discourse that they have lost their culture. Art making offers a space where these competing discourses can be worked through and re-considered. The act of thinking about, talking about and physically making a painting becomes an avenue through which group discussion can take place. The art work as such also plays a role as a tangible reminder of culture and a tool of cultural pedagogy. Because this cultural field has no precedent for



Aboriginal people in Wilcannia it offers a new mode of expressing culture for the artists and communities concerned. The roles of artists and art works provide new possibilities for mediating and creating individual and group identity which is not limited by pre-European or pre-acrylic art movement cultural practices and norms.

The non-Aboriginal cultural affirmation, offered to artists of the later-settled and more remote centres of the continent, is not available to Wilcannia Aboriginal people. Whilst this is limiting and problematic in the ways outlined in this paper, it also provides possibilities for avoiding constraining effects of, arguably, axiomatic Aboriginal traditions.

## Works Cited

- Beckett, J. 1994. 'Kinship, mobility and community in rural New South Wales'. *Being Black, Aboriginal Cultures in 'Settled' Australia* Edited by I. Keen. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press. pp. 98-117.
- Byrne, D. 1996. 'Deep Nation: Australia's Acquisition of an Indigenous Past'. *Aboriginal History* 20: 82-107.
- Cooper, C. 1994. 'Traditional visual culture in south-east Australia'. A. Sayers. (ed). *Aboriginal; Artists of the Nineteenth Century*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press. pp. 91-109.
- Cowlshaw, G. 2004. *blackfellas whitefellas and the hidden injuries of race*. Malden, Oxford, Victoria, Australia: Blackwell Publishing.
- Fourmille, H. 1994. 'Aboriginal arts in relation to multiculturalism'. *Culture Difference and the Arts*. S. Gunew and F. Rizvi (eds.). Australia: Allen and Unwin. pp. 69-85.
- Gibson, L. 2008. 'Art, Culture and Ambiguity in Wilcannia, New SouthWales'. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* Vol 19:3. pp. 294-313.
- Gibson, L. 2008a. 'We don't do dots – ours is lines': Asserting a Barkindji Style'. *Oceania* Vol 78:3. pp.280-298.
- Johnson, V. 1990. 'Into the urbane: Urban Aboriginal art in the Australian art context'. *Art Monthly Australia* (supplement), W. Caruana and J. Isaacs. (eds.). Canberra: Art Monthly Australia. pp. 20-23.
- Kleinert, S. 1994. 'Jacky Jacky Was a Smart Young Fella: A Study of Art and Aboriginality in South East Australia 1900 – 1980'. Unpublished PhD. The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Kleinert, S. 2000. 'Art and Aboriginality in the south-east'. *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*. S. Kleinert., and M. Neale. (eds.). Oxford: University Press. pp. 240-246.
- Lattas, A. 2000. 'Colonising the Other: Dreaming, Aboriginal Painting and White Man's Search for a Soul. Marcus'. J. (ed). *Picturing the Primitif, Images of Race in Daily Life*. LhR Press: Australia. pp. 240-265.
- MacDonald, G. 2000. 'Economies and Personhood: Demand Sharing among the Wiradjuri of New South Wales'. *The Social Economy of Sharing: Resource Allocation and Modern Hunter-Gatherers*. G. W. Wenzel., G. Hovelsrud-Broda and N. Kishigami (eds.). Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology. pp. 87-111.

- Meggitt, M. J. 1962. *Desert People: A Study of the Walbiri Aborigines of Central Australia*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- Merlan, F. 2001. 'Aboriginal Cultural Production into Art: The Complexity of Redress'. *Beyond Aesthetics, Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*. C. Pinney., and N. Thomas (eds.). Oxford, New York: Berg. pp.201-234.
- Morphy, H. 2001. *Aboriginal Art* London: Phaidon.
- Morris, B. 1989. *Domesticating Resistance: The Dhan-Gadi Aborigines and the Australian State*. Oxford, New York, Munich: Berg.
- Morton, J. 2005. 'Aboriginal Religion Today'. M. Charlesworth., F. Dussart and H. Morphy (eds.). *Aboriginal Religions in Australia: an Anthology of Recent Writings*, pp.195-203. Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 195-224.
- Myers, P. 1988. 'On 'Housing' Aborigines; The Case of Wilcannia, 1974'. *Island in the Stream, Myths of Place in Australian Culture*. P. Foss. (ed). New South Wales: Pluto Press. pp. 139-159.
- Myers, F. 1991. 'Representing Culture: The Production of Discourse(s) for Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings'. *Cultural Anthropology* 6: 26-62.
- Myers, F. 1994. 'Culture-Making: Performing Aboriginality at the Asia Society Gallery'. *American Ethnologist* 21: 679-699.
- Myers, F. 2002. *Painting Culture*. Duke University Press: Durham and London.
- Povinelli, E. 2002. *The Cunning of Recognition*. Duke University Press: Durham and London.
- Nicholls, C. 2000. *From Appreciation to Appropriation: Indigenous influences and images in Australian Visual Art*. Exhibition Art Catalogue, Flinders University Art Museum, Australia.
- Ryan, J. 1991. 'Foreword'. Bardon G. *Papunya Tula, Art of the Western Desert*. J. B. Books: Australia. pp. vii-xvii.
- Stanner, W. E. H. 1979. *White Man got no Dreaming: Essays 1938-1973*. Australian National University Press: Canberra.
- Sutton, P. 1988. *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*. Viking in association with the Asia Society Galleries: New York.
- Sutton, P., and C. Anderson. 1988. 'Introduction'. *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*. P. Sutton. (ed). New York: Viking in association with The Asia Society Galleries. pp. 1-12.
- Sykes, R. 1990. 'Non-citizens in our own country? The Social and cultural Back-ground of Rural and Urban Aboriginal Artists'. *The land, the city, The emergence of Aboriginal art*. (supplement). W. Caruana and J. Isaacs (eds.). Art Monthly Australia: Canberra. pp. 4-6.
- Tonkinson, R. 1974. *The Jigalong Mob: Aboriginal Victors of the Desert Crusade*. Menlo Park: Cummings Publishing.
- Williams, N. 1988. 'Studies in Australian Aboriginal Law 1961 – 1986'. *Social Anthropology and Australian Aboriginal Studies*. R. M. Berndt and R. Tonkinson (eds.). Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press. pp. 189-238.

## **Acknowledgements**

Ethnographic research such as this could not be undertaken without the assistance and interest of participants. As such, I would like to thank the Aboriginal people of Wilcannia

and Broken Hill for their contribution to this research. In particular, Badger Bates, Murray Butcher, Phillip Bates, Willie Don Hunter and Paul Brown. The Australian Museum also deserves special mention as my time there as a Postdoctoral Fellow and subsequent Research Associate has provided me the opportunity to study the ethnographic material from New South Wales which is held in their collections.

**Dr Lorraine Gibson** currently holds the position of Vice Chancellor's Innovation Fellow at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. As a social anthropologist her work is ethnographic and based on long-term, in-depth field research. Lorraine has worked with the Aboriginal people of Wilcannia for over eight years and with other New South Wales Aboriginal language groups since 2008. Her interests are around questions of Aboriginal identity, diversity and experience in the areas of the visual arts, race relations, work and employment, comparative economies, the emotions, and the cultural meanings of water. She has just completed a longitudinal study which explored comparative Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experiences and interpretations of work, employment and productivity across remote, rural and urban Australia.

---

<sup>i</sup> The terms Aboriginal and Indigenous are often used interchangeably and are politically fraught. While the term 'Indigenous' includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 'Aboriginal' refers to mainland first peoples and not those of the Torres Strait. I use the term Aboriginal as this is the term preferred and used by the majority of the Aboriginal people I work with on mainland Australia.

<sup>ii</sup> For international readers unfamiliar with the concept of the The Dreaming, the work of Stanner is instructive and I provide here a limited but nonetheless informative excerpt from this work: 'A central meaning of The Dreaming is that of a sacred, heroic time long ago when man and nature came to be as they are; but neither 'time' nor 'history' as we understand them is involved in this meaning ... We shall not understand The Dreaming fully except as a complex of meanings' (1979: 23).