

Places and Stories:

MAPPING NGAANYATJARRA ART-MAKING PRACTICES

(NINTILU KULIRA PALYARATJAKU

NGAYUKU-LAMPATJU NGURRAWANALU)

VOLUME 1 – DISSERTATION AND LIST OF REFERENCES

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Volume 1: Dissertation and list of references

Please see **volume 2** for the images and appendix.

Declaration of ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999), the Joint NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), and the UTS policy and guidelines relating to the ethical conduct of research.

The proposed research received clearance from the University Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee UTS HREC REF NO: 2014000536.

The following points should also be noted in relation to the issue of permissions. I formally sought and was given permission to prepare and submit this thesis, by the traditional owners of the country, through the governing bodies of the Ngaanyatjarra Council who voted unanimously for the research to be undertaken. ■

Certificate of authorship and originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

In the past four decades Australian Aboriginal art has achieved national and international recognition, and has come to occupy a significant space in the Australian cultural environment. The success of Aboriginal art has found its counterpart in a wealth of studies, both by academics in diverse disciplines and museum professionals. This literature shows how art production is part of a specific cultural and social context and how it is connected to specific Aboriginal epistemologies. However, references to Aboriginal art's connections to everyday life are scant. This thesis aims to fill this gap, arguing that art-making needs to be located in the fine-grained relational complexities of everyday life, particularly in the material, social, cultural and epistemological specifics of daily life in remote Aboriginal communities. I develop this argument by providing a detailed record based on a rich ethnography of daily life at the Papulankutja Artists art centre.

Papulankutja is a community of approximately 160 residents who are predominantly from the Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara language groups, situated between the Western and Victorian Deserts in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands Western Australia. I spent several periods in Papulankutja between July 2011 and February 2016, working at the art centre and forming firm relationships with both artists and the art centre's manager. To illuminate the daily flow of life in the art centre and the associated sites connected to art-making practices, I use ethnographic vignettes that illustrate the social, emplaced and multisensory aspects of art production. I read the art centre through the organising principle of 'place', as a collection of trajectories and stories, through what I call a storied

environment. This thesis adds to our understanding of commercial art production and everyday life in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. My findings demonstrate that art production itself is shown to be fundamentally enmeshed in socio-cultural practices and storied environments. ■

Foreword

Respecting Aboriginal epistemology

Translation is the mechanism by which the social and natural worlds progressively take form. The result is a situation in which certain entities control others. (Callon (1986, p. 19)

Linda McDowell (1992, p. 409) has written that ‘we must recognise and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and write this into our research practice’. As a way of understanding multiple and entangled relationships developed throughout the course of this thesis, when beginning my research I reflected on how I might endorse both Indigenous epistemology and western theoretical discussions. I wished my research encounters with the Ngaanyatjarra artists to be empathetic while also allowing me to focus on both individual representations and collaborative group patterns in the production of empathetic research encounters. To do this I first situate my own experiences. Throughout the thesis I then adopt a reflexive approach (Davies 1999).

I am a white western woman and my values, beliefs, preconceptions and aspirations form a complex lens through which I understand particular social contexts and myself (Ryan 2008). My position infers an obligation to take responsibility for my actions and to consider mixed theoretical discourses as a way of understanding the relationships and dialogue between different ways of knowing. My outsider views and those of academia are merged in this thesis with the voices of the artist participants and Indigenous thinkers. I draw on these outsider views where I believe there is a space to contribute to research. At the same time, I acknowledge the ownership and leadership of Indigenous

colleagues (Quanchi 2004). The research findings were shaped and influenced by insights of both Yarnangu contributors and my own, based on our various experiences and encounters. These contributions were often expressed through the exchange of stories. However, recognition of my positionality or situatedness at Papulankutja and relations of power between us raise important questions as to how I will address this issue (McDowell 1992).

Writing against misinterpretations around Aboriginality, Indigenous scholar Marcia Langton advocates a kind of Aboriginality where there is 'actual dialogue' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In these exchanges, she writes: that 'both the Aboriginal subject and the non-Aboriginal subject are participating' (2012, p. 35). Against this positive discourse, conversely, art historian Terry Smith has stated that a 'superficial analysis' about remote Aboriginal art adversely exposes art writers as too often '[collapsing] into the telling of condescendingly simple 'stories' of the work, alongside a few lines of formalist description' (Smith 2002, p. 152). I question where is the 'actual dialogue' here? I reflected on how we might go about critiquing the art in a meaningful way where the 'politics of speaking positions', or 'translation' transfers the 'actual dialogue' so that art writers and the art's audience can critically engage with the art in a conceptually enriching and informative way. Such an understanding is based on translation.

In thinking this through, and in order to discourage the kind of analysis Smith alludes to, I suggest that the researcher needs to undertake considered and detailed research about the artist, their community, the places and contexts in which the works were generated, within which an account of the individual art pieces can be arrived at (see Johnson 2007; Smith 2002). However, to do this the researcher must draw on ethnographic practice and material and develop sustained relationships and dialogue *with* artists and communities. Thus, by

having conversations with the artists we enact the 'actual dialogue', and then act as translators to provide nuanced explanations of the art from the artists' perspectives.

However, as Laura Fisher notes, 'remote Aboriginal artists are reliant on others to articulate the motivations behind their aesthetic forms within civic discourse and debate' (Fisher 2012, p. 264). Hence, critically, the analytical emphasis is not only on the research subject, but also the researchers themselves. The role of the ethnographer/researcher is thus defined within enactment of a translation strategy.

Consistent with these cautions and in keeping with transcultural theory, I have established a transcultural research practice that brings together a body of theory on place, space and art history with Aboriginal epistemology as encountered at the Papulankutja art centre. To do this I have drawn on the process of *translation* as outlined by Michel Callon (1986). In a volume about new approaches to power, Callon refers to what has become known as the 'sociology of translation', arguing the need for a subtle approach to the messy practices of relationality, as explained by Law 2007 (p. 2). The sociology of translation introduced concepts of power and politics to characterise various network relations. Callon developed the concept of translation from the French philosopher Michel Serres.¹ In drawing on Callon's concept I understand that (1986, p. 19) 'translation is the mechanism by which the social and natural worlds progressively take form'. It can result in a situation in which certain

¹ See discussions on Michel Serres and translation in (Brown) and Michel Serres (Arbor

entities (myself) could be seen to control others. Translation in practice at Papulankutja involves being aware of these difficulties when translating 'local knowledge', and in translating continually between 'two ways of knowing' (Freeman 2009, p. 3). Moreover, in writing about Yarnangu and their art practices, I establish myself as 'spokesperson'. As Callon has argued, to translate is:

to express in one's own language what others say and want, why they act in the way they do and how they associate with each other: it is to establish oneself as a spokesman. (Callon 1986, p 223)

By this account, translation, not only constructs and communicates meaning but, in doing so, defines and redefines the relationships between parties to that communication (Freeman 2009).

With this in mind, my research position can be understood as a process of *translation*, where my viewpoints and stories of art production are based on the mobilisation of artist participants, paintings, knowledges, experiences and more. Through these relations in which I am located, I am performed *in, by* and *through* the relations (Law & Hassard 1999, my italics). This process of translation involves a complex series of negotiations mutually shaping each other, for which John Law coined the terms 'in-hereeness' and 'out-thereeness', (2004). However, translation is also a betrayal. John Law summarises this notion thus:

To translate is to make two words equivalent. But since no two words are equivalent, translation also implies betrayal: 'traduction, trahison'. So translation is both about making equivalent, and about shifting. (Law 2007, p. 5)

My own position is always shifting and changeable. It takes only one translation to fail and the whole web of reality unravels. This became clear to

me when my own situatedness changed from researcher to manager, due to exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, as described in chapter two. Or when my interviews just didn't follow the neat path that I had envisaged and were eventually scrapped in favour of group and personal conversational discussions. So my own stories weave further webs, enacting realities and versions of the better and the worse.

While this research project followed both human and non-human actors (including paintings, *tjukurrpa*² stories and ancestral realms, temporality and more), I do not claim to have a sample that constitutes a complete set of relevant subjects; rather, the actors represent part of a complex web of relations, some of which mediate art production. This web of relations is continually in a state of flux, enrolling new actors, removing others and providing new translations. By additionally taking account of translation I bring together bodies of theories for understanding art production and paintings at Papulankutja, in a reflexive and transcultural practice, and offer insights into the complexity of transcultural realities. I recognise that the interpretations and translations produced are the product of the researcher's (among other actors') positionality (Butler 2001; Haraway 1991; Rose 1997). As I am presenting the final production of a research

² The *tjukurrpa* is a subtle and impalpable Indigenous Australian concept or philosophy that is difficult to translate. Often referred to as 'The Dreaming', it plays a fundamental role in the life world, culture, land tenure system, relationship to country and ritual life of Aboriginal Peoples throughout Australia. It is the fundamental reality that ensures the continuity of the Ngaanyatjarra world. Story often parallels *tjukurrpa* and can mean dream, story, Dreaming, origin period of landscape customs and laws, and the creative period that continues in the present. It also relates to Yarnangu connectedness to land and sacred sites, and to a certain extent, one another. Throughout this thesis I use the term *tjukurrpa* as it is the term used by the local Yarnangu.

interaction between research subjects and researcher, there has not been solid agreement on what or how a particular research story is presented, thereby giving me (the researcher) a powerful position in the translation of the research particulars in question (Ruming 2009).

My research strategy accounts for different kinds of methods, enacting different realities in a complex world filled with ontological difference, in an enmeshed web of interrelations. It is, furthermore, I hope, 'capable of enacting an ontological multiplicity' around art production at Papulankutja, because 'everything is relatively specific, relatively 'local', enacted at particular places on particular occasions' (Law 2004, pp. 137-8), and involves specific groups of people. As Yarnangu being and knowing is different to my own I chart new paths in relation to and alongside Indigenous methodological knowledge systems and offer an alternative route to knowledge. I also understand that this thesis represents a translation. ■

Glossary

APY: APY stands for Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara. This is an Aboriginal local government area in north west South Australia. Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) is incorporated by the 1981 *Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act*, through which the South Australian Parliament gave Aboriginal people title to more than 103,000 square kilometres of arid land in the far northwest of South Australia. All Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra people who are traditional owners of any part of the Lands are members of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara.

business: a generic term for ritual. Known in English as ‘Law business’, or simply ‘business’, it is, like the tjukurpa (Dreaming) itself, a multi-dimensional phenomenon, but for the Ngaanyatjarra people its central purpose is bound up with the latent power of the Dreaming.

carpetbaggers: unscrupulous art buyers, agents and dealers

Country: Country is a term that describes a place to which an individual or group of people feel a custodial connection. This place of important cultural significance can be where people or their family have been born or raised. It may also be a place that has held significance within family lineage. Country in this context also refers to a place to which an individual feels a strong and deeply personal affinity. An understanding of one’s Country describes an intimate relationship between person and place.

doggers: used to describe a dingo hunter. Doggers often traded dingo scalps for food. In 1912, in an attempt to reduce depredation on livestock, and with the passage of the *Wild Dogs Act*, the government offered a bounty for dingo skins.

dry community: The community of Papulankutja is a dry community. Alcohol is totally banned in this restricted area and it is enforceable. Signage at the entrance of the community advises that the community is an alcohol-protected area.

goanna, also called perentie: refers to a range of carnivorous Australian lizards that have sharp teeth and claws. Two species are common in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands: the common goanna (*Varanus varius*) and the one known colloquially as the perentie lizard (*V. giganteus*). Yarnangu call the former *kurkati* and the latter *ngintaka*, and hunt both species.

humbugging: a term used to refer to making unreasonable demands (usually for money) of family and people and may include harassment

kunmanara: used as a euphemism to avoid addressing someone by a name that sounds like that of a recently deceased person

Indigenous: in this thesis, when capitalised the word Indigenous refers to all indigenous peoples throughout Australia and internationally, including Torres Strait Islander Australians. The term Aboriginal refers more generally to mainland Aboriginal Australians.

maku: bardie or witchetty grub

mamu: evil spirits or ghosts

manguri: a circular pad or carrying ring, usually made of hair string or emu feathers, and used by a woman to balance and cushion laden piti bowls on her head

marlu: red kangaroo

mimi: breast, breast milk

mingkulpa (*Nicotiana excelsior*): A variety of true tobacco that grows wild in the desert and is chewed as a mild narcotic by Yarnangu. Similar to pituri. Often shortened to 'minkle' or 'minkle bar'

money story: money, payment, working for wages

mountain devil lizard: *Moloch horridus*, a small thorny lizard with sharp spines and patches of bright colours covering its body. The lizard changes colour to blend in with its environment. It is harmless and is also called **ngiyari** by Yarnangu.

mulga: the term used to describe the scrub vegetation characterised by the presence of various forms of acacia. This vegetation is extensive throughout the Ngaanyatjarra region.

NPY: stands for Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara. The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands span the central desert region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, covering 350,000 square kilometres and encompassing 26 remote communities and homelands.

perentie: *see goanna*

piti: carrying dish or vessel.

pituri or **pitchuri:** *Duboisia hopwoodii*, also called 'native tobacco', is an important drug. Older Aboriginal men have used it as a stimulant and intoxicant, especially during long ceremonies. In some areas it was used in initiation ceremonies in the making of shamans, where it was used to make the initiate sensitive to the presence of spirits. It was traded over a large area of Australia.

sorry business: vernacular term used for mortuary ritual. Sorry business may last weeks with family and mourners attending sorry camp.

spinifex: *Triodia species*, a pale green spiky grass growing in clumps of varying density throughout the Central and Western Deserts of Australia. Some varieties yield edible seeds and another contains a resin which is used as a general purpose adhesive.

tingari: Ancestral Beings that have made their travels in the desert region and include the carpet snake, eagle, a mythical water snake, crow and others. They are often incorporated into stories and art.

tjanpi: word meaning grass. Tjanpi with a capital T refers to the business enterprise that oversees tjanpi weaving operations throughout both the APY and NPY Lands. It operates under the umbrella of the NPY Women's Council. In 2017 the Tjanpi Director Andrea Mason received the Australian Business Woman of the Year Award.

tjukurrpa: tjukurrpa is often translated in English as the Dreaming. In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands it refers generally to the ancestral period during which the world was shaped by Ancestral Beings, who assumed both human and non-human shapes. They are believed to be responsible for both the contemporary landscape and Ngaanyatjarra social and religious practices. Tjukurrpa is an all-embracing concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as rules for interacting with the natural environment. It provides for a total, integrated way of life. The tjukurrpa is not something that has been consigned to the past but is a lived daily reality. Tjukurrpa is expressed at many levels throughout this thesis.

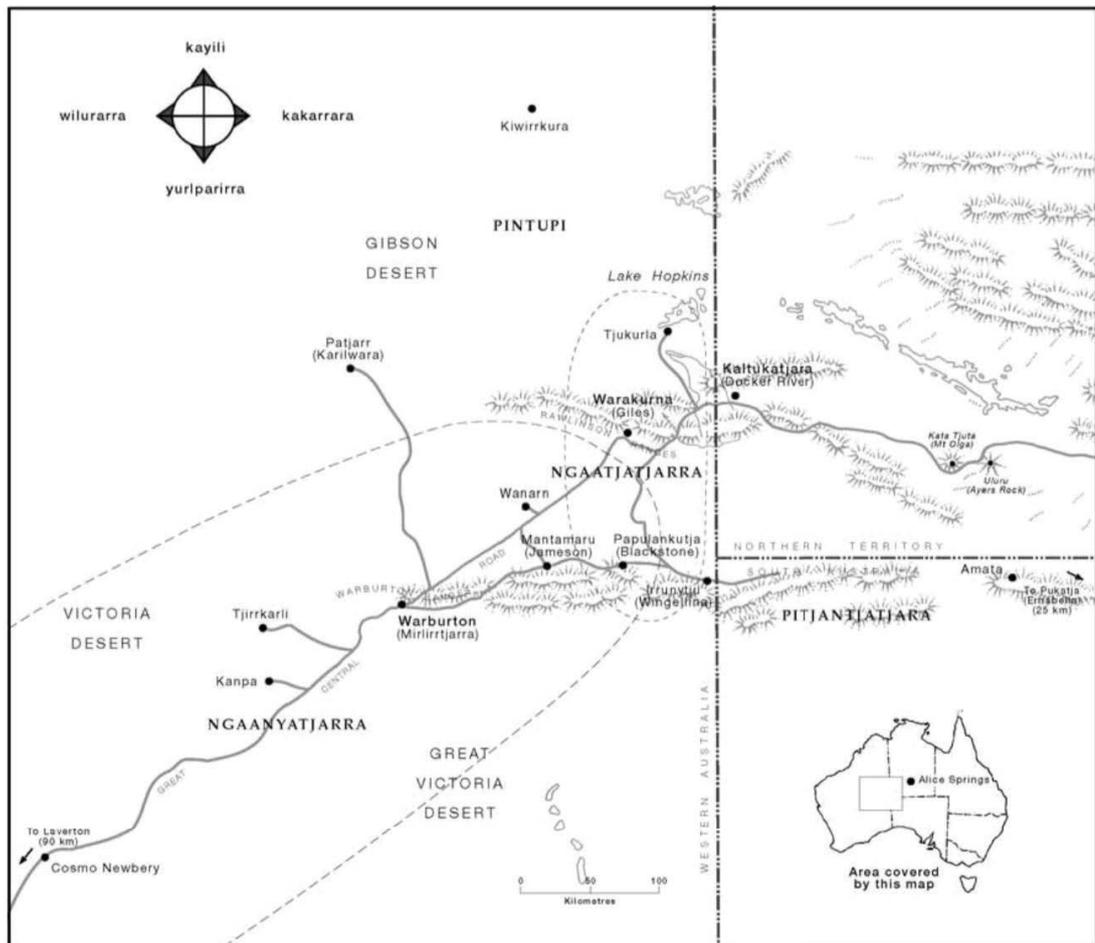
Western Desert: the term Western Desert refers to the contiguous series of deserts to the west of Alice Springs including the Gibson, the Little Sandy and the Great Sandy Deserts. It is now known as the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and covers close to 160,000 square kilometres. As Aboriginal owned land, it is home

to around 2,000 Aboriginal people across 11 communities, of which Papulankutja is one.

wiltja: shade or shelter often constructed of local shrubby branches and foliage

yarnangu (with lower case y): in Ngaanyatjarra language, yarnangu translates as 'person', 'body'.

Yarnangu (with upper case Y): this term has been used in this thesis as a people descriptor as this is what the artists and Papulankutja community call themselves. Other descriptors are western constructs and I wanted to use a term that the Ngaanyatjarra artists were comfortable with. I also note that some Aboriginal groups (NPY Women's Council) also use this term. For Aboriginal people living in the APY Lands the term is Anangu. ■



Map by Brenda Thornley, © The Institute for Aboriginal Development, 2006.

Map showing the Western Desert Region

Source: Brenda Thornley. Copyright: The Institute for Aboriginal Development, 2006

Vignette 1

Festival as place making

Diary entry, May 2015

I wandered down the three streets separating my house from the dusty football field. The noise around town had been incessant all morning, and the football match that should have started the day before was still delayed. Cars seemed to have appeared from everywhere and were cruising, filled to capacity with ardent spectators impatient for the game to start. From home I could hear football game coordinator Craig Morrison on his loud speaker—something about it being rude and disrespectful that the other teams hadn't arrived on the right day—or at the correct time.

The game is the culmination of the annual *Blackstone Festival*, which is organised by the art centre and is an example of an event that is interwoven throughout all aspects of this community in a sharply localised circumstance. My emplaced experience of the event allowed me to develop relationships and connections between, on the one hand, alternative representations of knowing and doing and, on the other, offers a way of thinking about the football in relation to the importance of particular cultural aspects within this community. My experiential descriptions of the event are brought about by a personal absorption in a range of sensorial ethnographic representations: my attention is drawn to the textures, smells, noise, and aura in which I find myself anchored. For photos showing scenes from the festival, see images 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6 in volume two.

I had asked Ngaanyatjarra man Yaroloise, who was visiting the art centre from a neighbouring community, if he knew what time the football game started. He looked at me thoughtfully. His English was quite good but his answer helped me to

understand some of the differences here, between a western knowledge system on one hand, and the Ngaanyatjarra ways of seeing, knowing and doing on the other. His answer was succinct and demonstrative: with customary hand gestures he concurred that when the sun was directly up in the sky above, and had then moved across a little in the other direction, that's when the game would begin. I suggested after lunch, to which he nodded in the affirmative.

Although not outwardly obvious in the first instance, there are many parallels and connections between sensory arts practices at Papulankutja and a festival-inspired football match. The rich mixture of dry desert smells, and the noisy elements that embody both practices situate the performative elements that make up a narrative of cultural life at Papulankutja. In her book *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, Sarah Pink suggests, that in seeking to represent the sensoriality and meanings of place, by conceptualising and communicating how aspects of particular place-events are experienced, we can 'create routes to and bring together selected sensations, emotions, meanings, reflexivity, descriptions, arguments and theory' (Pink 2015, p. 134). By alerting me to the importance of events like football games, Pink's ideas help me to contribute to and shift understandings customary to description and ethnographic scholarship.

Craig Morrison and his wife Janet Forbes regularly paint at the art centre. Like most Yarnangu, they have a passion for football. Many of the themes and creative ideas making up their arts practice are drawn from everyday events—social and cultural engagements *taking place in place*. Stories, art and festival are cultural signifiers at Papulankutja and critical facilitators of constructive and enriching development. There is generally a high level of agreement within the community about the aims of the event and its cultural content. In particular, the significance of place and establishing healthy lifestyles underpin Papulankutja identity and are seen as important. The star attraction for this year's festival is a four-day visit by Australian

Indigenous performer Mary G,³ who, between other political and activist involvements (mainly through comedy), is a strong advocate for healthy lifestyles and the promotion of high self-esteem among Indigenous people across Australia. Other planned events, also involving professionals from distant locations, include a fashion show, a hairdresser, glass bead making and storytelling workshops, a tjanpi⁴ workshop, healthy cooking classes, family photo portraits, an art market and disco and media events, altogether culminating in the significant community football game.⁵ Although various events are spread around the township, the art centre is the chief administrator and facilitates many of the activities.⁶

³ Mary G has become a cult figure across central and North to Australia, made popular through both radio and television and on the stage. The creator and man behind Mary G is Mark Bin Bakar, a comedian who advocates working through communications and media to better the position of Aboriginal people in contemporary society. Bakar is an Indigenous Australian musician, comedian and radio announcer, writer, director/producer and Indigenous rights campaigner based in Broome, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

⁴ Tjanpi weaving is a contemporary and performative form of creative practice. See chapter seven for extended discussion of this subject.

⁵ AFL football is revered in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Some players may travel hundreds of kilometres to play in or attend a 'local' game. The football game at the festival is the only activity fully arranged by a Ngaanyatjarra community member. However, there is community support from most Ngaanyatjarra people around the activities that were organised.

⁶ The festival has been operating at Papulankutja as The Blackstone Festival since 2004 and was established by the then arts coordinator Diana Isgar as a way to establish community esteem. A lengthy interview with Diana Isgar about the festival and other aspects of community life informed this research.

Entanglements and relationships of place

On my arrival at the field I looked around to see if I could find a familiar face. At first glance I didn't recognise anyone. I sat on the fence alone and watched young children playing football on the sidelines, and some younger ones playfully filling empty plastic coke bottles with dry, soft dusty red soil and tipping it over their naked bodies. It was May, and cooler. The weather was perfect—warm and sunny with a slight breeze. Before long, I was sharing a rug with Lynette Smith from Warburton.⁷ She has, on occasions, attended the art centre to paint, and this time had travelled across to visit family and watch the game. She told me she would stay for a few extra days and paint at the art centre where she enjoys the company and conviviality of congenial companions. Eventually, after about an hour, at around three o'clock, I was squashed in on the edge of the rug amongst a familiar group, many from the art centre, one of many clusters of supporter groups forming the audience and waiting for the much-anticipated game.

Lynette turned out to be a wealth of information and gave a running commentary throughout the afternoon. She pointed to Craig Morrison's son—training, in uniform, on the sidelines. He is also the son of artist Janet Forbes who had surreptitiously snuck in beside me, continually humbugging for 'ten dollar'. With 'minkleweed'⁸ in one corner of her mouth and a cigarette in and out of the other, I

⁷ Warburton is 200 kilometres (gravel road) from Papulankutja. It was the first community to be established on the Lands as a result of the activities of the United Aboriginal Missionaries. Warburton is the largest of the eleven communities that make up the Ngaanyatjarra Lands with 720 residents forming the community.

⁸ Pituri or Mingkulpa is a natural wild tobacco plant that is dried, mixed with ash, rolled into a small ball and placed in the corner of one's mouth. The scientific name of the family of Pituri plant is *Nicotiana spp.* Scientific names for the different types of Pituri that are most popular in Central Australia are *N. ingulba*, *N. excelsior* and *N. gossei*. The leaves and stems from the pituri bush are dried and then mixed with ash

wondered about the healthy lifestyle sponsors of the game, and about the detrimental effects to Janet's health. The uniforms provided for the game had 'Gunga Wanti'⁹ emblazoned across both sides of the smart white, black and red AFL style shirts, and there are posters around town titled 'Make Smoking History'. In a campaign by health workers, designed to promote healthier living, the festival becomes the vehicle to consolidate sound healthful values and promote active physical pastimes. The art centre reinforces these values and empathetic concerns by adjusting to economic family difficulties, often advancing painting money for the purchase of food, or serving breakfast to those who are hungry. In my capacity as volunteer, one of my first requirements of the day was to check who has had breakfast.

Various fragments of information passed on by Lynette included the identification of sons to mothers, particularly those mothers who had an association with the art centre, and husbands, and well-known visitors from the other communities involved in the football tournament and their relationship to someone I may know at the art centre. The visiting communities competing for the trophies (which also, unfortunately hadn't arrived) at Papulankutja (Blackstone) were Wanarn, Warakurna, Wingellina, Jameson and Warburton. Each of these communities is about 300 kilometres apart. Between Lynette's detailed commentary, the yelling and calling between audience groups, and the constant demonstrative and expressive hand gesturing by passing attendees, I was able to piece together the parts of this rich tapestry that make up the team, its audience, organisers and sundry children, dogs, roaming teenage girls and a dusty location. The atmosphere,

from specific trees. The mix is then chewed and held in the mouth for long periods of time. Pituri is shared among the group and traded widely.

⁹ *Wanti* is Ngaanyatjarra word for 'no'. *Gunga* is the name used for a narcotic marijuana weed whose flowers produce resins very high in tetrahydrocannabinol THC. The uptake and use of gunga in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands is widespread.

the sounds and the smell of the event were evocative and laden with meanings and another route to multisensory ways of knowing and understanding (Pink 2015, p. 144).

Sensory ways of knowing

An attempt to include smell as an experiential sensorial representation is difficult and yet highly evocative of the event. Moreover, it was the variety of familiar and unfamiliar smells that stirred my senses on arriving at the football game. The burning of wood for small fires, the tobacco smoke, minkleweed, body smells, children smells, dogs and their excrements, dry and irritating dust smells and the desert breeze—a smell of its own, interwoven, and making up the diversified mix of my olfactory experience. The ephemerality of smell, and often its intensity, creates responses that are quickly forgotten, yet memorised, and become instantly familiar when next exposed to them. By naming these smells, as I have, it helps as a reminder to what the smell ‘feels’ like. For example, the wood fires burning all around town each evening and on cold days have a special smell which, because of the particular trees and leaves burned, and the dry, arid atmosphere mixed with a little of the local grasses, foods and tobaccos, are different to other burning fires I have experienced. At Papulankutja I am becoming accustomed to many sensations and experiences that, at first, were totally unfamiliar and made me feel awkward.

Now, as I try to record these embodied memories, and reconstitute them as relevant to my recording of sensorial experience, I find that these sensory encounters are all interconnected and interrelated, and it becomes difficult to write smell as text. Nothing is more memorable than a smell, which conveys information and forms an immediate imprint on one’s memory. Here, I refer again to Pink’s work on the relationship of the senses to memory, where she contends, ‘our experiences of place—and its social, physical and intangible components—are inextricable from the invocation, creation and reinvestment of memories’ (Pink 2015, p. 38). Building on Pink’s work and applying the idea of perceptive analysis as central to my study, I also draw on the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold who understands perceptual systems of the body as overlapping in their functions; subsumed in a total system,

where smell may not be a separate activity, but embodied, not as separate activities that differentiate sight, touch, smell - but that of the whole organism in its environment (Ingold, 2000, 261). Following Pink and Ingold, my own perception, though difficult to articulate in text when referring to smell, is integral to this production of a descriptive environment that constitutes the cultural life of those living at Papulankutja.

Festival as sense of place

The *Blackstone Festival* situates Papulankutja as place—a slice of community life, offering a snapshot of a typical contemporary scene. In her doctoral thesis Roslyn Derrett examined community cultural festivals in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales (NSW). Her study revealed that there is a complex interplay between sense of place and community, and together with community identity and representation, relationships and the underlying nature and role of celebration are expressed (Derrett 2008). Derrett argues that a festival allows the local community ‘to reflect and determine a sense of community and place [...] through organising inclusive activities in specific safe environments’ (Derrett 2008, p. v). Festivals attempt to engage local populations and celebrate the cultural life of the region drawing on its local knowledge, traditions and aspirations. A festival’s purpose is to enrich community life and promote those positive aspects through community engagement, in the hope that it will continue to consolidate the cultural values inherent in the region. By immersing myself in the stories of *Blackstone Festival*, I weave together the fragments that help me to understand Yarnangu cultural life, much of which influences contemporary art making practices. My reflection here is guided not just by the way that the art centre and the festival are culturally entwined, but also by the way the art is inspired by the character of Papulankutja, influencing the way that it is produced—affected by place, as a vehicle for relating personal and local histories.

The festival becomes a *place* that is built from a collection of other stories connected and intersecting within a wider desert setting. The *Blackstone Festival* connects mechanisms for assuring the acceptance of a particular cultural discourse,

for example, as a means of generating local pride, identity and a small amount of income. Organisers have suggested that the positive and enriching cultural nature of the festival is in direct opposition to festivals that are promoted to increase commercial and financial interests. In this way the *Blackstone Festival* is situated as a unique, multi-purpose affair. The festival can therefore be understood in terms of a summary by Derrett: 'community-based festivals celebrate the community's social identity, its historical continuity and its cultural resilience' (2008, p. iii).

The social relations of 'festival' are vital to its success. Key components of all cultural relationships around the Papulankutja area can be understood in terms of sociality and experiential relationships. The entanglement between people, commerce and visual culture, mediated through institutional operators like the art centre, can be interpreted through the social interactions and everyday practices as ways of perceiving the wider environment. Once each year, the *Blackstone Festival* becomes a salient, peripheral arena of discourse, demonstrating an expression of wider cultural, social and political issues. This 'whole community' event connects the school, the art centre, the health workers and clinic, Ngaanyatjarra community members and other institutional agencies in activities that engage community in order to maintain and strengthen relationships and environments. In thinking through this place that is Papulankutja, it seems to me that the festival has developed into another segment of a unique web of links, intertwined with people and things that constitute theoretical concepts of place. I have become *part* of this place, in a transcultural learning process where the practices of art production cannot be separated from the social and the cultural setting. We are all in a process of moving on, and where in research, we focus on how people are moving in and through the world (Ingold 2011b). These practices, places and meanings become embedded in the art that makes up creative practice across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands today. Looking at the festival within the contexts for the production of social capital, I see that as a community project the festival has the potential to be developed further to 'provide a rare space for intercultural accommodations to be negotiated on Indigenous terrain, and hold great potential to strengthen

community and national ‘social and economic fabric’ (Phipps & Slater 2010, p. 15). Writing as advocates for further study of Indigenous cultural festivals, Phipps and Slater’s research found that Indigenous festival had the potential to follow a similar and sustainable path as the visual arts story; as a source for the emerging Indigenous tourist and events market. (Phipps & Slater 2010).

The *Blackstone Festival* football game was fast, seriously competitive and very exciting. The crowd had grown so the noise level was heightened. Some players wore football boots; some wore socks with no boots, and some played in bare feet. At one point in the game, when players were tussling for the ball, there was so much dust (and so many dogs) that I found it difficult to work out how the referee could make his judgments. The day ended with two women having a serious fight, hitting each other and wielding large sticks. It started at the softball game, which was being played concurrently beside the football field. One of the women spectators standing with me suggested we might stay a bit longer to watch. No-one appeared to be intervening. Most spectators watched for a while and then wandered off home as it was just on dark. ■

Chapter one

Introduction: art, culture and Papulankutja



Aboriginal truth and the social organization which provides access to cultural wisdom are created and recreated by a relationship to time and space quite unfamiliar to European philosophy.

(Michaels 1985, p. 508)

To travel between places is to move between collections of trajectories and to reinsert yourself in the ones to which you relate [...] I weave together the stories which make this 'here and now' for me.

(Massey 2005, p. 130)

Context

This thesis is situated in the context of art production in remote Aboriginal¹⁰ communities across Australia. During the past 40 years, dynamic and innovative art movements have developed and thrived in remote communities and have become a viable commercial endeavour, providing a small income for artists. The art has come to occupy a significant space in the Australian cultural landscape achieving national and international recognition. As it 'straddles competing worldviews' (Altman 2005, p. 16) and negotiates two very different value systems, art is perceived as aesthetically distinctive and transcultural. Art production in remote Aboriginal communities is important because it provides a means of earning income, and because, as this thesis argues, it is enmeshed with and structures everyday practices. This research results from ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2015-16 that captures the everyday continuous flows of art production in practice and in place at Papulankutja, an Aboriginal homeland community located 800 kilometres south-west of Alice Springs. The aim of this thesis is to improve understandings of art and its contemporary production by Yarnangu artists, whose artwork is at the intersection between the conditions and circumstances of fine art production and commerce in the region.

Art production in Aboriginal owned art centres is now well-ordered, grounded in customary ways and hybrid in nature. It offers Yarnangu a

¹⁰ I understand that the use of the term 'Aboriginal' is highly contested in nature and its use a colonial construct. It is, however, the term many Indigenous people from across the Australian mainland, and in this case Papulankutja, use to describe themselves and their community. Throughout this thesis I will use Aboriginal, Indigenous and Ngaanyatjarra specifically.

mediated passage into the market economy at the intersection of their own modernity and a Western commercial system. It is, however, divergent from Western art-making practices and is entangled in both contemporary and traditional circumstances. Few studies have taken an ethnographic approach that explores the artists' day-to-day social, cultural and art-making practices in place.

Contemporary Australian Aboriginal art is a complicated and contested concept (Altman 2005; Carty 2013). It continues to be a vexed issue for the discipline of art history in Australia and internationally.¹¹ Historically, Aboriginal art is a unique, 'categorically complex and emergent cross-cultural phenomenon' that is not easily translated into existing terminologies (Carty 2013). The concept itself is fraught with ideological and aesthetic art historical criticisms. Aboriginal art's development is still unfolding and being played out (Mundine 2016). Although this thesis is presented within the discourses of this problematic field, I approach the subject from a place-based ethnographic context, therefore limiting artworld specific discourse. However, it is important to point out that the use of terms relating to Aboriginal art, and the artworld's discourse around it, often conflating Indigenous art production from across the country, is problematic, particularly with relation to the differences surrounding urban and remote art. For this reason the term Western Desert contemporary art, of which Papulankutja artists are a part, will be used, with Aboriginal art used in the most general terms. The thesis also aims to make a contribution to enhancing the understanding of Papulankutja and its artists as a place for consideration of key ideas and influences that come directly from the

¹¹ See, for example *On the Reception of Aboriginal Art in the German Art Space* (Krishnabhakdi-Vasilakis 2009).

perspective of the artists in the unfolding discourse that is contemporary, shifting and changing. This thesis therefore emphasises the spatial, temporal and locally entangled webs of relationships.

Previous research

This thesis builds on and departs from existing directions in researching contemporary Western Desert art through the paradigms of anthropology, art history and textual studies. In researching art production through paradigms of place, I propose a shift towards understanding both everyday practices and art in terms of cultural practices and places. However, I situate the contribution of this thesis in relation to some key writers in the study of contemporary Aboriginal art who have contributed to the various layers of historical and contemporary scholarship in the field. While these writers have written on this topic in relation to Aboriginal art more generally, discussion of Ngaanyatjarra Lands contemporary art is limited to just a few scholars, namely John Carty (2012; Carty 2013), Tim Acker (Acker 2008; 2012), Darren Jorgensen (2013, 2014), Ian McLean (2011, 2014) and Margo Neale (Kleinert et al. 2000; Neale 2008). These writers have each argued for a more critical discussion and closer analysis of art and artists working across the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. Recent scholarship by John Carty and Darren Jorgensen has paid closer attention to individual artists, identifying their oeuvre; particular styles, meanings behind the art, artist's background and nuanced biography. However, such analyses are scant and no single study on the affective conditions of art in either a single Ngaanyatjarra community or at Papulankutja has been achieved to date.

As many others have posited,¹² the examination and structure of contemporary Australian Indigenous art is established through key concepts for understanding Aboriginal culture and requires new understandings of the profound differences between contemporary Aboriginal art and the contemporary non-Aboriginal genres, which form the focus of the larger proportion of the academic literature. More recently, Australian Indigenous scholars, artists and communities have been offering disparate Indigenous discourses (Bennett 2009; Croft 2007; Gilbert 1994; Langton 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2003; Mundine 2005; Perkins & Thornton 2010; Scott 2010). These writers argue for an increase in the voices of Aboriginal artists, curators and writers who are under-represented. I build on the major contributions that all of these scholars have made.

However, to date there has been very limited focus on the multisensory and aesthetic aspects of painting in place, and on the experiential qualities of *being* and *doing* by the artists, who are enmeshed in relationships, things and environments. Art is produced amid this network of shifting and changing complex webs that highlight the significant intersections between cultural embodied practices and other constituents that make up the processes of place. Thus, I attend more closely than previous studies to questions at the intersection between arts production and place, a focus that may bring new insights to disparate fields of scholarship.

¹² (Bardon & Bardon 2004; Caruana 2012; Hinkson 2013; Johnson 2007; Marcus & Myers 1995; McLean 2011; Morphy 1998, 2007, 2011; Myers 1986; 2002; Perkins 2003; Perkins, Fink & Art Gallery of New South Wales. 2000; Perkins & Thornton 2010; Ryan 2006; Ryan, Bardon & National Gallery of Victoria. 1989; Ryan, Batty & National Gallery of Victoria. 2011; Sutton et al. 1989)

As discourse around this field develops, a recent anthology edited and introduced by Ian McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art: Writings on Aboriginal contemporary art* (McLean, 2011), investigates the art world's reception of Australian Aboriginal art. This contribution to the Aboriginal art discourse charts a shift in the reception of Aboriginal art over the past thirty years, acknowledging the key contributing writers (many of whom are mentioned above) as having had a marked influence on the progression of the movement and the evolving discourses surrounding this complex field. However, although offering a comprehensive and detailed range of critiques, the anthology's concern is with the art world's reception rather than with the specific art objects themselves. There is no art and cultural discourse that is particular to Ngaanyatjarra in the literature, which indicates that there has been little formal study, whether by governments, consultants or academics. It is this gap in the literature that I attempt to bridge in this thesis.

In thinking this through I find it useful to make reference to Djon Mundine, an Indigenous man and a foundational figure in the contribution to criticism and exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal art. A Bandjalung man and curator, Mundine stated in an interview about Indigenous artists that it was important to ensure that individual artists were inter/re-viewed personally rather than indirectly:

'Historically we made a point of individualising the artists, to make evident that they existed as different personalities with individual styles and genres of art.' (Mundine 2016)

While publications in the broader field of Aboriginal art more generally have increased, there are still significant voices missing from this discourse.

Papulankutja artists have acquired considerable visibility in the art world by creating a new aesthetic that defines and inscribes cultural difference. And yet,

Papulankutja Artists biographies¹³ are remarkably under-recorded although their art has gained widespread success. In 2005, Papulankutja fibre artists won the 22nd National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award for their large, woven fibre Toyota (image 1.7). Again, in 2010, Papulankutja/Ninuku artist Jimmy Donegan¹⁴ won the same 27th award for his painting *Papa Tjukurpa and Pukara*¹⁵ (image 1.8).

Defining the gap

As I have made clear, there is minimal literature on Papulankutja, and what exists is limited to linguistics and anthropology. Two key writers, David Brooks (2011; 2015) and Inge Kral (2012a; 2007), have contributed anthropologically and linguistically respectively and I build on their contextual scholarship. John Carty and Tim Acker edited a book titled *Ngaanyatjarra Art of the Lands* (2012) in which they critically discussed and synthesised the creative work developing in

¹³ During the course of this research I have written detailed biographies of Papulankutja artists. See the appendix in volume 2.

¹⁴ Jimmy Donegan paints at two art centres. He also paints at Ninuku Arts at Kalka.

¹⁵ Mr Donegan's painting, *Papa Tjukurpa and Pukara*, tells two stories, the Papa Tjukurpa (Dingo Dreaming) and of Pukara, his grandfather's country in Western Australia. 'Ngayu mamaku ngura Dulu (my father's country rockhole is called Dulu). At this place there are lots of Dingoes living there, digging up the water and hunting at Pilantjara rockhole in the country area of Dulu. This is Papa Walka, Dog design. Pukara is [my] grandfather's country. It is a story about a sacred men's site in Western Australia, south of Wingellina. It is a Watersnake Dreaming story. This is where the Watersnake fell down and his elbow makes an indent in the landscape. This is the creation story for the Honey Grevillea. Birds are really scared of this water at Pukara. It is like a 'big boss', this water.'

the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. However, the book presented scant details about Papulankutja artists. Although anthropologists and art theorists stress the importance of country in any understanding of the shaping of contemporary Aboriginal art, there is little literature that considers the importance of place in art production. This is an analysis that I aim to contribute in this thesis.

To date no research has been undertaken in Papulankutja about the art and its associated practices. Most community research has been opposed locally.¹⁶ In recent years, artwork from this region has gained wide appeal among people engaging in art, and also in contemporary Australian art discourse. However, there are very few accounts and critiques that incorporate a contemporary ethnographic perspective, addressing the artists' perspectives and their own engagement with commercial art production. Both Inge Kral (2007) working in the field of Ngaanyatjarra education, language and literacy and David Brooks (2011), a Ngaanyatjarra anthropologist, state in their recent doctoral theses—both grounded in Ngaanyatjarra culture—that there is relatively little published anthropological writing on the Ngaanyatjarra region. Kral states:

Ngaanyatjarra Council has been hesitant about research *per se* as a consequence of the publication of unauthorised material by an earlier researcher (Gould 1969). As a consequence, there is little published material on the area. (Kral 2007, p. 15, footnote, 3)

Concomitantly, few research applications have been approved. However, with the enthusiastic support and help of Papulankutja/Ngaanyatjarra community and artists, I propose to redress this paucity of knowledge. My aim is to

¹⁶ Early resistance to the display of sensitive material in the 1980s sets this region apart. It led to division and distrust, which were pivotal justifications in earlier negative art practice decisions to reject painting in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

contribute insights from an emergent set of interrelations that stem from the complex webs, both historical and contemporary, that have developed in and around contemporary creative practice. This thesis builds on these trajectories and generates discussions about practices that are embedded in and are part of the flow and movement of everyday life.

The deficiency is therefore not that historical and anthropological analysis of the Ngaanyatjarra people was not already a key area of research. Rather, it is that there has been little joining up of the *relationality* of cultural, contemporary and creative bodies of work theoretically or empirically. The study of the theory of place and of its representations in art and literature are often undertaken in isolation from the ethnographic and qualitative literature on art and cultural production. I propose to analyse practices of *relationality* to understand meaning that is produced through the texts and representations with other things, in practice and as part of place. One of the undertakings of this thesis is to make connections between these approaches.

Contribution of this thesis

This thesis proposes to fill this research gap through a detailed ethnography of art production as a situated practice. It asks:

- Can a relational approach to space and place generate insights about contemporary Ngaanyatjarra art and artists, allowing us to re-think the way current representations are understood?
- What are the everyday practices that shape art production at Papulankutja?
- By exploring the histories, values, attitudes and feelings associated with art production, what meanings can we attribute to the art?

- By studying painting practices, what can we learn about the objectives of the painters and their application of paint?

This study aims to illuminate the everyday, emplaced aspects of art-making, grounded in ideas of culture as lived, constantly changing and shifting, and contributing to Ngaanyatjarra everyday life. It further advances an area of research that until now has remained largely unexplored.

Papulankutja: history and location

Papulankutja art making practices have been part of community engagement dating back to its settlement. As a result of the 'back to homelands' movement,¹⁷ Yarnangu settled at Papulankutja in the late 1970s. Since then, various social, political and cultural shifts, through processes of transculturation¹⁸ and

¹⁷ The election of the Whitlam government in 1972 led to the disbanding of the assimilation policy in Indigenous affairs. It was replaced by a self-management or self-determination policy. The new policy framework allowed for the start of the homelands movement. This refers to the movement of Aboriginal people back to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them, and to the formation of small decentralised communities of close kin.

¹⁸ Transculturation refers to a multi-directional and endless process between various cultural systems. In a selective interpretation, Mary Louise Pratt uses the concept to refer to the ways in which 'subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture' (2008). The term originated with Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1947 to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures. See chapter two for extended analysis.

modernity¹⁹, have brought about changes in customary and social ways of being. These shifts, usually mediated by non-Aboriginal Australians, take on increased significance as they often parallel the trajectory of contemporary art production.

Papulankutja (also referred to as Blackstone) is a small Aboriginal community located in the Goldfields–Esperance region of Western Australia, within the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, situated between the Western and Great Victorian Deserts. Images 1.9 to 1.12 details community structures and surroundings. On the eastern side of Western Australia, Papulankutja is located 80 kilometres from the tri-state border with South Australia and the Northern Territory as identified in the map of the Western Desert Region (page 14). The community exists on the traditional lands of the Ngaanyatjarra people, many of whom were transported to Warburton Mission in the 1960s. In the 1970s the Ngaanyatjarra people returned to the region and since that time the community has steadily grown in population and in the spread of community land and facilities. Since this period a growing number of artists have worked

¹⁹ Modernity can be interpreted differently, given that there is no worldwide definition of modern. The notion modernity has also been contested due to its Euro-centric underpinnings and the fact that its ways of knowing are traceable to the European Enlightenment. However, as used in this thesis and humanities and social sciences, the term designates both a historical period (the modern era), as well as the ensemble of particular socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices that arose in post-medieval Europe and have developed since, in various ways and at various times, around the world. More specifically, as a historical category, modernity refers to a period marked by a questioning or rejection of tradition and a turning towards scientific and technological processes. See also modernity in art, Osborne (2013, p. 74).

innovatively with acrylic paints, fibre and punu (carved wood), which is an integral part of the Papulankutja artists' practice and economy.

Aboriginal people in the Western Desert region of Australia lived a relatively unchanged existence for thousands of years prior to contact with European culture.²⁰ People, places and ancestors are tightly linked together. The Ngaanyatjarra Lands have been relatively free of long-term incursion by outsiders. David Brooks, working with the Ngaanyatjarra since 1988, notes that because the Ngaanyatjarra as a group have never left their country, nor has their country ever been annexed or occupied by outsiders, 'the difference in the quality of the 'people to country' bond is palpable' and this is a significant factor in the strength of the Ngaanyatjarra today (Brooks 2011; Kral 2007). In past years the harsh desert terrain has provided the Ngaanyatjarra with water, food, shelter, medicine and the materials to fashion tools and utensils. In this ethnography I demonstrate the remarkable flexibility and resilience with which Ngaanyatjarra family groups have responded to relatively recent unprecedented changes and events. Although a large portion of the artwork produced relates to ancestral stories and crafted implements often associated with divergent perceptions of time,²¹ making art 'is equally part of the

²⁰ Peter Veth (2005) reports that archaeological research from the Western Desert indicates a human occupation between 20,000 to 30,000 years ago, while those on the fringe date from 30,000 to 40,000 years ago.

²¹ Research has shown that the Aboriginal Australian philosophy of time philosophy is central to their understanding of life, their values, and attitudes towards daily life and continues to this day. Aboriginal Australians' relationship to time is the antithesis of that of the European industrial culture. Aboriginal Australians perceive time as a subjective quality that is intimately connected to the importance of an event. Research findings by Kelly Adams show that 'key aspects of Aboriginal time perception include

contemporary context in which people live, and reflects their lives in the postcolonial context' (Morphy 1999, p. 160). Moreover, people from Central Australia have been innovatively producing designs in introduced media from the beginnings of colonisation (Morphy 1999). The painting movement grew out of an Indigenous design tradition, motivated by an exploration of the individual artist's social and spiritual relationship with place (Myers 1999).

Papulankutja stands on the Wati Kutjarra tjukurrpa²² track, where two large rocky outcrops remind Yarnangu of the ancestral story about two goanna men and their unconventional escapades. This place embodies a rich and complex outlook of the world and is the site where the two lizard men are permanently set in stone. They are a visual reminder of ancestral and customary ways. Making various forms of art has been part of the way of life here since the community was established, and the art centre looks directly across at the line of travel taken by the Wati Kutjarra ancestral beings. The art centre, trading commercially as Papulankutja Artists, was established in 2001 and incorporated in 2004. The centre grew out of Blackstone Women's Centre. After many years

'time as subjective, time as a circular quality, daily time prioritised in past, tradition, and stability, and time as dependent upon obligation' and that these aspects 'are all reflected in barriers to Aboriginal recruitment, retention, and progression through the workforce' (Adams 2009; Janca & Bullen 2003; Nguyen 1992).

²² Tjukurrpa or the Dreaming is a subtle and impalpable Indigenous Australian concept or philosophy that is difficult to translate. Stanner writes: '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' (Stanner 2009, p. 57). The Dreaming plays a fundamental role in the life world, culture, land tenure system, relationship to country and ritual life of Aboriginal Peoples throughout Australia.

of working through the Women's Centre and then the community hall, Papulankutja Artists opened their own art studio in 2009. During my research/fieldwork period, the manager was Jane Avery, who had started work in 2011 and was the third Arts Coordinator/Manager to hold the position.

Geography

While the locality does not fit the widespread conception of a sandy wasteland, Papulankutja's geographical classification is that of a desert. Daytime temperatures are consistently very hot in summer and temperate in winter. Nights are temperate in summer and cold in winter. The district is characterised by summer rainfall and dry winters. Rainfall is uncertain, irregular and low, resulting in a difficult environment for its inhabitants (Brokensha 1975). Water is scarce. However, the community now accesses water through two large artesian bores.²³

The visible physical features of the landscape are impressive, and although harsh and arid, I have found the landscape to have an uncanny sense of what could be described as raw or unprocessed beauty - perhaps even sublime. The grandeur of the escarpments, overlaid with uneven sized dark umber coloured

²³ Although beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that the science and environmental professionals working in the region state that the artesian water source is one of the world's largest groundwater resources. It has sustained Aboriginal people for thousands of years and now supports a wide range of communities, enterprises and industries (Tubman & Booth 2011). See also (Macfarlane 2005) for a comparison with colonial technological capacities of underground aquifers, where colonial 'expertise' came to override local Indigenous knowledge and where a negotiation of the complex processes of insertion of new 'water places' into an existing cultural landscape, reconfigured the old water places.

angular boulders, are emphasised by the spread of richly coloured deep red sandy soil sparsely covered with clumps of spinifex, mulga scrub and herbaceous (and medicinal) plants and river gums as seen in images 1.13 and 1.14. Yarnangu connectedness to the land is expressed through the people's intimate understandings of their environment and the tjukurra connected with it. Yarnangu artists have helped me refine my own perceptions of the environment in many ways and throughout this thesis I convey different perspectives of the natural world.

Filling the research gap: approach and methodology

In this thesis I analyse the social, cultural and economic trajectories of art production and art at Papulankutja Artists. Over the decades the phenomenon of contemporary Aboriginal art has been theorised by art historians and anthropologists. During this time there have been many influences between the disciplines, and in this subject, the two disciplines have converged. My analysis builds on these approaches, and presents a study that locates itself firmly in the theoretical conceptualisation of place and space. While this tradition accepts that anthropological and art historical theories have made a positive contribution to our understanding of contemporary Aboriginal art, the importance assigned to place and the manner in which it is approached is by virtue of recognising space 'as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions' (Massey 2005, p. 9).

By undertaking the research in this way, I aim to generate a renewed framework for understanding and theorising Yarnangu art and interconnected practices. As argued throughout this thesis, the art cannot be analysed in isolation from the social practices that influence it and the beliefs and doctrines through which it is conceptualised. However, place, as rooted in locality or based on community, is often romanticised, so it is important to understand

place as flows and changes, and as influenced by the outside world. Doreen Massey writes:

place and locality are a foci for a form of romanticised escapism from the real business of the world. (Massey 1991, p. 26)

Place is defined not through physical boundaries or internalised histories but rather through interaction with the world outside (Massey 1994, p. 146). This thesis then takes a relational approach: it examines the relations and interactions through which the everyday flow and movement of local customs continuously interact with the national and global flows of meaning.

To fill the research gap I bring together Doreen Massey's conceptualisation of place and space and Tim Ingold's ontological and anthropological perceptions of the environment. I also draw on theories connected with the contact zone conceived by Mary Louise Pratt and hybrid economies espoused by Jon Altman. According to Massey's understanding of place, and moving Massey's reading to Papulankutja today, we can see that the place that is Papulankuja is necessarily still in process:

we recognise space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far. (2005, p. 9)

The structure of this thesis is driven by the methodological considerations detailed in chapter two. In brief, the methodology involves:

- sensory ethnography
- case study

- oral histories and orality
- memory discourse
- snapshot-of-life vignettes
- indigenous methodological perspectives
- collaborative interaction and discussion, interviews, observations
- primary source material including art criticism, newspaper articles, government discourses and policy documents.

I have been guided by the methodological approach demonstrated by social anthropologist Sarah Pink. Pink considers a sensorial approach fundamental to how we learn about, understand and represent other people's lives along with how we apprehend the past, whilst engaging with the present and imagining our futures (Pink 2015, p. 3). I distinguish my approach from Pink's in that I present a sensory auto-ethnographic outline through personal vignettes and case studies to enhance and enrich the study. Furthermore, in a nuanced and close analysis this thesis will draw directly on the artists' perceptions and reflections²⁴ in order to reflect a temporal, locally emplaced emphasis. An example of this is found in image 1.15, which shows an original 1970s wiltja (shade or shelter). Janet Forbes, a senior artist and one of the principal participant contributors in this study often reminisces about her happy childhood living with her parents and sister in the traditional Yarnangu wiltja. The original distinctive architecture (originally built from upright mulga boughs and local grasses and foliage) still stand on the outskirts of

²⁴ For example, the wiltjas that were the early homes during the 'back to homelands' period are often reminisced and visited and have been left intact.

Papulankutja. The structures are timeworn yet sustain traces of 1970s habitation that include old rusted food cans and drink containers.

Thus, this thesis seeks to understand the transcultural engagements that underpin art production at Papulankutja through conceptual frameworks which have shaped transcultural relations as multi-pronged, culturally diverse and embedded in spatial, material and technological relations. Throughout this thesis I take a reflective position, expressed with snapshot-of-life vignettes. Papulankutja has transformed me, shaping the person I am now and the socio-cultural and art historical interlocution that I practice. Rarely do art historical accounts incorporate participation within current community activities, together with the persons and things that make up Papulankutja art production. Life in the art centre is intensely social and contemporary, yet connected to the spiritual and to the past. In short, social relationships are an integral part of Yarnangu ways of being in the world. Artists' lives are almost entirely taken up with socialising: in the art centre or while hunting and travelling to visit friends and close relatives elsewhere in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and Spinifex Country.²⁵ Painting and arts practice are inevitably constituted within the 'throwntogetherness' (Massey 2005) of this life world and place. To give greater depth and nuanced understandings to this examination I consider art-making practices and places through divergent entry points: each chapter views through a different lens of multisensoriality, movement, memory, orality and art history. Where possible, localised terminology relating to the arts practice, such as

²⁵ Spinifex country is the land that extends to the border with South Australia and to the north of the Nullarbor Plain. The centre of the homeland is in the Great Victoria Desert, at Tjuntjunjarra, 700 kilometres east of Kalgoorlie, WA. Many of the people living at Papulankutja have close ties with this region.

'story', is applied in the thesis. I propose an analytical distinction that recognises art production in all its real-life messiness and that captures and *re-presents* new paths in relation to and alongside methodological knowledge systems. Thus, the linked concepts of space and place support an approach that researches *with* people, places and practices, rather than simply *about* them.

At Papulankutja, artists are establishing new ways in which to ensure the preservation and transmission of knowledge, while creating the contemporary platform for appropriate transcultural interest and critique of their art. My argument is premised on ethnographic research drawn from a period of over five years, during which time I interacted with artists and manager at the art centre and experienced a range of related 'bush' trips and cultural events. I have been given access to some of the artists' views and perspectives on art and life as encountered in complex entanglements during its production.

In making art production and its relationship to everyday life the focus of this research, it became clear to me that the first step to understanding the themes and paintings produced was to disentangle key concepts related to customary Yarnangu ways of knowing. To do this I legitimate the art centre's pivotal role as the predominant point of both cultural and commercial articulation and intercommunication in the community (see image 1.16). Central to this entanglement is the term 'story'. The term story is used every day and is complex, making it difficult to give a precise meaning. Depending on the context of the moment it can be understood as both tjukurrpa knowledge and law, and ways to conduct one's life. On the other hand, it is also a social expression for imparting information and communicating. Michel de Certeau (1984, pp. 115–6) points out that narrative is a spatial practice. We organise experience and memory in terms of where things happen, as itineraries of action in place. Stories and memory link places together, make distinctions between

them, and produce meaning by integrating fragments (Macfarlane 2005, p. 314). Thus tjukurpa stories such as *Wati Kutjarra* (image 1.17) and *Kungkarangkalpa* (1.18) and other stories become a central focus of this thesis, as they are recurrent themes in the art produced. Theoretically, I have found it useful to engage Doreen Massey's formulation of space, as multiple, relational, and always in process. This formulation offers a broad context and is valuable as it challenges the theoretical and political strategy of thinking space in favour of a 'totality of connections' (Anderson 2008), demonstrating the 'here and now' as an ongoing process that interacts with the world around it (Massey 1994).

The strength and importance of physical location and ancestral creation identities, interwoven with intergenerational narratives and family/social mobility, are recurring themes for the artwork. Engaging in nuanced and multisensory approaches that are sensitive to Yarnangu ways of being elicited the subtleties and nuances that are often lost when transposing meanings in artwork. To achieve a degree of refinement I present specific case studies and examples, and argue that Ngaanyatjarra artwork is embedded within a range of meaningful social practices and reflects broader cultural contexts. Significantly, my research interacts with the artists' oral recollections, and transmission of story (knowledge) that materialises²⁶ by way of collective memory, manifesting in acrylic painting, sculptural weaving and woodcarving. For example, chapter five is differentiated from other chapters by its themes of orality and the *Wati Kutjarra* story. Here, senior artist Elaine Warnatjura Lane's painting of *Wati*

²⁶ I use the word 'materialise' in the general sense: to come into perceptible existence; appear; become actual or real; be realised or carried out. For example, tjukurpa entities are materialised from collective memory and oral story to a visual perception or representation i.e.; as painted on canvas.

Kutjarra forms the backdrop for the culturally significant story that gives Papulankutja its name. Chapter five also espouses the importance of Indigenous knowledge and integrated knowledge systems still actively present in the contemporary 'everywhen'²⁷ (Stanner 1979). The transcultural exchanges and ideas are identified in terms of theories related to contact zones, such as an engagement with the community art centre; where art related agendas and stories are discussed, mediated and collaborated through a variety of exchanges, and central to 'sense of place.'²⁸.

In this thesis sensory ethnographic methods provide the route to interpreting disparate social and cultural worlds. The impact of such a study, enhanced through interpretive chapter entry points such as memory and orality, has the potential to broaden the scope for deeper analysis and advance existing knowledge about Ngaanyatjarra art production as a socio-cultural process.

Findings

My main findings at Papulankutja relate to the art centre in its pivotal role, not only as a centre of art production and circulation, but also as a site of encounters and storytelling. Additionally, it represents a site of cultural collections and material heritage, storing, displaying and safekeeping particular items and art for intergenerational learning.

²⁷ The Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner conveyed the idea of The Dreaming (tjukurrpa) in his 1953 essay, in which he aptly termed it the 'everywhen' suggesting that one cannot 'fix' The Dreaming in a particular time: it was, and is, 'everywhen'.

²⁸ 'Sense of place' is used here to express somewhere that has a strong identity and character that is deeply felt by local inhabitants and by many visitors. Generally, a set of cultural preconceptions that shape the way we respond to the place, and in some measure reshape the place to fit those preconceptions.

Art production at Papulankutja draws together the contemporary painting world with tjukurrpa places and with people holding custodianship of the songs and ancestral stories of the places of that country, in a connected visual language. Different ways of knowing a place are embedded into particular places and are all simultaneously present, the 'everywhen', in each particular place. This contemporary production of art represents a turning point, which acts as part of the *renewed* network of relationships through which people's lived experience constructs a meaningful world. The contemporary art is dynamic, embedded in 'fields of shifting relations and meanings' (Pink 2012). The artwork reflects strong relationships between the artists, their land and culture, and storied environments²⁹. Artists at Papulankutja draw attention to their art by depicting the desert landscape and its stories in a vibrant and colourful style.

Arts practices at Papulankutja also facilitated active participation for artists in the commercial operations and local economy, which is an important element in the remote area economy for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Artists advised me that their families were better off thanks to their (albeit small) painting income.

Art production also generated a groundswell of resilience and dignity among artists who enjoyed the collaborations both at the art centre and the associated exhibitions and travel. Artists enjoyed seeing their artworks admired and purchased by audiences around the country. Additionally, artists and their families gained benefits from the bush trips connected with the art centre where

²⁹ I use 'storied environments' as a descriptive term that is expanded on in more detail in chapters five and six with relation to the tjukurrpa stories and knowledge contained in Wati Kutjarra and Kungkarangkalpa.

the outdoor customary physical hunting pursuits led to higher fitness levels and enriched diets.

Thesis outline

Each chapter of this thesis begins with a short personal vignette. Each vignette is relevant to its chapter and provides a 'snapshot', shaping the scene. Chapters three and four include additional vignettes that highlight particular circumstance. I use direct language and examples to describe the disparate world within which this study takes place. In short, I draw on personal experiences with participants that give a particular insight or 'slice-of-life' as a means of 'enhancing the representational richness and reflexivity of qualitative research' (Humphreys 2005, p. 840). Throughout the thesis I interweave intergenerational narratives and descriptions of artists' idiosyncrasies to illustrate the performativity and the personal that structures creative art production. All the data I draw on was collected during ethnographic fieldwork.

Chapter two is concerned with the methodological and theoretical approaches and research methods employed in collecting data and its analysis. Drawing on Doreen Massey's conceptualisation of place and space, I position the art centre as a place that is a specific constellation or moment within time. This approach aligns art production as an 'event' with a particular negotiation of the 'here and now's' (Massey 2005). I show how approaches to new and emerging ways of thinking through relational understandings of space develop through the focus on people's relationships with their environments. Underpinning the discussion is a commitment to reflexive practices and sensibilities towards Indigenous knowledges that shape the context from which insights were gained. In applying that approach, I show how the role of the researcher is part of place in data collection and analysis through an application of interdisciplinary *multisensoriality* of experience (Pink 2015). In summary, I lay

out the theoretical tools that inform the thesis and that make sense of the way meaning is exchanged during social and cultural interaction.

In chapter three I situate the art centre at Papulankutja and argue for its significance as a contact zone and arena for transculturation. In this first case study I use the interpretive frame of the art centre as the locus for discourse, arguing it is a complex of multiple agents that combines the commercial with the creative and cultural. The chapter sets out how the art centre operates by critically discussing and identifying the competing global influences and day-to-day work practices that affect the management and administration and that make up remote art production. By looking closely at the administration of the art centre as a 'bundle of trajectories' that include a complex mix of histories, management, peak bodies and power, I suggest that we can better understand the politics and practices related to art production at Papulankutja. This chapter thus sets the scene and prepares a route to a closer analysis of the meanings within the art, presented in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter four builds on the notion of the art centre as a place of multiplicity. The chapter situates the collaborative network of artists offering perspectives on painting as practice and meanings embodied in the art. I draw on these perspectives to explore the relationships between Western and Yarnangu knowledge systems that impact on the cultural themes and motifs that distinguish Ngaanyatjarra artwork. In doing so, I learn to know in practice and research *with* rather than *about*, resulting in new and rich insights that are not possible using traditional visual methodologies. This chapter offers a way of seeing the interior world of the artists, who are happy to discuss their creative and cultural vocation. The venue, art and paintings offer a lens through which to understand cultural difference.

Chapter five further situates the art-making practices in relation to place with concepts that connect stories, memories, images and local identity. I develop this account through themes of story and orality, which have an intrinsic relationship to painting. Stories offer a learning process drawn from lived experience and embedded in oral tradition and provide a way of understanding meanings behind the art. I demonstrate these concepts through an analysis of Elaine Warnatjura Lane's painting *Wati Kutjarra*. The analysis links an important and widespread culturally significant tjukurrpa story with contemporary art themes, orality and customary storytelling practice. Fundamentally, I show how the influences of the oral tradition are directly related to the artists' abilities to respond and represent knowledge visually.

Chapter six builds on the theme of tjukurrpa story and orality by examining a different painting. However, in this chapter and case study I use memory as a theme to locate meanings in the art. I draw on Angiliya Mitchell's artwork, practices and memory to highlight the *Kungkarangkalpa* story. This story is central to Yarnangu everyday life, and is also being explored scientifically by astronomers, and in the study of geomythology.³⁰ It is a story that brings together disparate knowledge systems. At the art centre stories are 'materialised' – made tangible through the performance of painting. This chapter challenges ways of comprehending the world around us by offering divergent ways of knowing, offering a lens through which new meanings become differentiated as they are transposed into contemporary and creative settings.

³⁰ Geomythology is the study of etiological oral traditions created by pre-scientific cultures to explain geological phenomena such as volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, fossils, astronomy and other natural features of the sky and landscape.

Importantly, this study is based in a remote community that is essentially disadvantaged. With few other avenues for economic activity, art making is a means for artists to earn money, while simultaneously making powerful statements about the things that matter: land rights, customs and identity. Chapter seven highlights these disadvantages through the concept of cars. I explore the relevance of cars in remote communities and use *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* as a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of both cars and grass at Papulankutja. I explore how the artist's ideas and values underpin the creation of a life-sized tjanpi Toyota sculpture, which won the Telstra Art Award in 2005. The chapter draws together themes from previous chapters and discourses circulating at the art centre and examines the successful social enterprise structured as 'Tjanpi' (grass) weaving. Principally, I show that Tjanpi advances new ideas and techniques within Aboriginal art in the areas of fibre arts and sculpture. By using the interpretive frame of cars in popular culture I demonstrate through art that the consumption of popular culture is never passive but always reworked into the existing cultural practices of the community (de Certeau 1984).

Chapter eight is a synthesis and critical reflection. The concluding discussion returns to some of the methodological literature, contextual debates, and foundational theoretical concepts that shaped the study and which the ethnographic fieldwork challenged or justified. This chapter addresses the discursive construction of the value of art production, clarifying the social, cultural and economic value as exemplified by the Papulankutja Artists organisation. The concluding discussion demonstrates how the constantly changing and shifting cultural practices of the art centre are contributing to the community's contemporary everyday life and sense of place. As the inquiry is in an emerging area of interest, the discussion also suggests future avenues of study. ■

Vignette 2

Curating the art place: multisensorially and conceptually

The curator's job is not to create meaning or to impose meaning on works of art, but to create the circumstances out of which meaning might arise—circumstances that might prove meaningful to the beholder.

(Hickey 2007, p. 97).

Curatorship in this research is an important act of trust. In recent years Yarnangu (mainly women) have invited me into their yarning circles.³¹ The yarning circle is a way of describing a group of artist participants who come together to share, disclose experiences and knowledges in a relaxed and protected environment. This is not something new. It is Yarnangu way. I take guidance and direction from Yarnangu women of the yarning circle. It may occur out bush, as storytelling, or within the myriad practices involved in art production. I acknowledge the cultural customs, beliefs and practices, through which I have become part, and recognise the ownership and protection of specific private information and respectfully present/curate only that which can be shared publicly.

³¹ Yarning is an Indigenous cultural form of conversation. Yarnangu use the word yarn. However, the term 'story' is used more commonly at Papulankutja when narrating the event. For example, Janet Forbes will say, 'Lets have a yarn. We will tell stories.' Yarning is an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study. It is a process that requires the researcher to develop and build relationships that are accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research.

My curatorial practices entail selecting and writing about artwork, stories and biographies while acknowledging and thinking about the ‘multisensorial’ (Pink 2015) conceptualisations. Sensing how best to select and to produce the results of new understandings about the range and types of sensory categories that constitute art production. In thinking through understanding the senses I find it useful to draw on Tim Ingold (2011b) who considers the senses as interconnected. Ingold’ emphasises the inseparability of separate sensory categories in the processes of perception (Ingold 2011b). His work usefully highlights the inseparability of human sensory and imaginative experiences embodied in the artwork. Other important thinkers such as creative and cultural researcher Ross Gibson have referred to the multiple sensory experiences as a multisensorial encounter, or a ‘multi-modal experience’ (Gibson 2011). Yarnangu have gathered corporeal information through their sensing bodies as they interacted with the local ecology, as in hunting and storytelling, reliant on embodiment, sensoriality and co-presence.

As I become enmeshed within this community, my yarning circle encounters and my own ways of seeing and experiencing are further augmented so that I might start thinking about curating the narrative and story about Papulankutja and its arts practices. I understand art production as part of the experience of moving through and around this ‘place’. As I have suggested it is related to perceptions of embodied knowledge, contingent on stories and tjukurpa, on social relationships, co-presence and spatial flows. Such flows are part of a ‘zone of entanglement’ (Ingold 2007) that constitutes place, entangled with other trajectories, including curation. Curation forms part of the wider ‘meshwork’ of art production, and about which we need to understand ‘that in relational systems of meaning and value one thing cannot be separated from another’ (Gibson 2011, p. 149).

So the notion of curatorship during the course of this project is complex and inevitably involves the production of new relationships between the material and sensory environments and activities that constitute the production of art. Curatorship is a reciprocal gesture, and one that is eagerly anticipated by the artist participants. It involves the parallel production of a contemporary archive that has

been ‘co-produced’ ethnographically, addressing these social, spatial and cultural issues affecting the art centre. Specifically, the aim of my curatorship is to present my research, a montage if you like, as a contemporary archive to the Papulankutja artists. A condensed version of this thesis—a picture book copy—will be printed as a reciprocal gesture of thanks, along with an initial collection of detailed profiles (biographies) of Papulankutja artists (see the appendix in volume 2 of this thesis). Curatorship in this instance becomes another contact zone for a space that draws together connections with arts practice and applied agendas. The situation is experimental and requires communication and involvement with the artists and participants in collecting, interpreting and presenting artworks. It requires collaboration, sensitivity, ethical sensibilities and reflection. It requires trust. And thus, some mnemonic practices, and some experiences, infinitely layered and communicative, have been shared through this trust. In this sense it becomes the artists’ story, co-curated, and offering two-way understandings of the representational layers of art production.

The role of the curator and researcher is therefore a multifaceted one. It involves considering what to look out for, avoid or reconsider. This requires a reflexive approach that is sensory and that acknowledges the politics and affiliations both within and external to the field of art. I am guided by the work of Maura Reilly (2011). In her essay ‘Toward a Curatorial Activism’, Reilly regards curatorship as a counter-hegemonic initiative, a way of giving voice to those who have been historically silenced (2011). Reilly examines curators’ ethical responsibility, particularly to Australian Aboriginal art, to ensure that present and future presentations — if not those of the past—are more inclusive than exclusive. Curating has passed through many changes throughout its history. Current developments that question the objectivity and authority of judgments decentralise the curatorial process. These new developments are not just about the presentation per se, but try to bridge the making/curating divide.

Empowering artists to tell their own stories about their art exhibits allows the artists to exercise agency. This process provides a piece of contemporary archival

material that can be accessed for future reference. It is also a creative form of reciprocity that acknowledges participation and ownership of the knowledge. This is an approach that expresses the ideology behind theories of Participatory Action Research³² and ethical curatorship. Moreover, this approach demonstrates that the research has benefits beyond the university and academic scholarship. ■

³² Participatory action research is a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and that recognises the unique strengths that each brings. Participatory action research attempts to break down the distinction between the researchers and the researched and integrates knowledge and action by disseminating findings and knowledges gained for the mutual benefit of all partners.

Chapter two

Methodological overview: researching place and arts practices



There is a role for art to play in reconnecting us to a sense of place to help us identify more closely with our lives as organic beings living in a physical world and to respond accordingly. (Biagioli 2015, p. 11)

What is special about place is not some romance or pre-given collective identity or the eternity of the hills. Rather what is special about place is ... the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here and now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of thens and theres); and a negotiation which must take place with and between both human and nonhuman. (Massey 2005, p. 140).

Introduction

In the previous chapter I alluded to some of the theoretical debates and the scholars who have developed ideas and theories on place and space (Ingold

2011b; Massey 2005; Pink 2012). I considered how their conceptualisations equip researchers with approaches to new and emerging ways of thinking through relational understandings of space, much of which has developed through a focus on people's relationships with their environments. With this in mind, in this chapter I develop a critical discussion of the issues and strategies surrounding my methods and approaches to researching the art, creative arts practices and production at Papulankutja Artists, and how I developed procedures that capture the continuous everyday flows of art production in practice and in place. To carry out this research I needed to make choices about the research methods concerning both practices and places—the sites of art production through which this research takes place, and which I treat as a route to knowing and understanding. In this methodological discourse, I include how we might understand the meanings and representations embedded within each of the artworks. In closing, I build on these research practices to briefly discuss positionality and the affective practices that implicate the transcultural ethnographic researcher. However, firstly, I introduce the emerging consciousness surrounding an enquiry of how an Indigenous research paradigm might complement long-established research methodologies across academic disciplines.

This study was designed as a sensory ethnography project in a remote Aboriginal community where I am considered a visiting outsider. In this chapter, I outline a way of thinking about and approaching ethnography that takes as its starting point a Yarnangu perspective. I explain how my use of Indigenous methodologies ensure that this research on Indigenous issues is carried out in a true, respectful, ethical, sympathetic, useful and beneficial manner, seen from the point of view of Indigenous peoples. According to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, it is 'the stories, values, practices and ways of knowing which continue to inform indigenous pedagogies' (2012, p. 15). Smith

shows us that 'oracy, debate, formal speech making, structured silences and other conventions which shape oral traditions remain a most important way of developing trust, sharing information, strategies, advice, contacts and ideas' (Smith 2012, p. 15). As suggested in the preceding vignette, trust through my inclusion in yarning circles and collaborative interactions shaped this thesis, thus allowing me to provide the collective cultural 'stories' inculcated through the production of art. Smith also stresses that in the process of disseminating research results, the researcher must consider reciprocity and feedback to report back to and share knowledge with researched communities (Smith 2012). Accordingly, she argues that any research project has to be considered as not merely a single contribution to the body of academic knowledge, but rather as a contribution in respect of Indigenous peoples' interests and needs. Presently, ethnographers from a range of different disciplines increasingly try to apply these reciprocal perspectives that represent alternative ways of thinking about research processes (Chilisa 2012; Martin 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Nakata 2007b; Smith 2012). I am guided by these Indigenous approaches in my own research on Ngaanyatjarra art and culture. These new approaches do not compete with, or replace, conventional Western research paradigms; rather, they confront it and contribute to a more inclusive spectrum of knowledge in an ethical and culturally appropriate way. Throughout this chapter I expand on, and respond to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodological issues, which are important for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in the interests of Indigenous perspective.

Interdisciplinary methodological considerations

As mentioned in chapter one, a set of common concerns have emerged across disciplinary boundaries. These concerns invite reflection on my selections of contexts and on the methods I used for researching art and its production at

Papulankutja. These included addressing the Indigenous contexts, sensory aesthetics, collaborative and participatory methods, reflexivity of being 'in' the field, and accounting for the flow of everyday workplace arts practice. Pink argues that 'practices of any kind must be understood as part of wider environments and activities' (Pink 2012, p. 28) and are integral to both ways of experiencing and ways of knowing. I first explore these issues and highlight their implications for the following discussions on how I used these methods to research place, arts practice and the meanings behind the art and its production.

My research methods place me, the researcher, as part of, and an active agent in, the process of ethnographic study at Papulankutja. I recognise that as a researcher I am in some ways *in* the life and world of the Papulankutja artists. I am engaged with the research participants in a collaborative process 'in ways that are practical, creative, imaginative and empathetic, and these engagements form part of research practice' (Pink 2012, p. 31). This process is demonstrated in my empathetic apprehension of artist's practices, like those of Angiliya and Elaine (images 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4), whose individualised tjukurrrpa paintings are discussed in detail in chapters five and six. Understanding the artists' paintings forms a fundamental part of my contemporary reflexive ethnographic practice, enabling me to write artist biographies that recognise the lives and worlds in which they live. Sarah Pink contends that the development of this reflexive approach, whilst attending to the process of knowledge production, means that the researcher acknowledges her own situated subjectivity and include some analysis of wider structures of power and control (Pink 2012). Such an approach enables me to work with the artists whose lives are very different from mine, and to comprehend a world into which this research process has placed me.

My research is a continuation of scholarly interest formed earlier during university and honours study. I define myself as a person of middle age in a

privileged position, with a career that spans various positions working in the creative arts. I have three grown up children and live with my partner on the outskirts of Sydney. My research and fieldwork focus has been on developing reciprocity with research participants. As such, I take and share technical skills with the Papulankutja community, contributing and teaching in a volunteering capacity. My contribution to the research project itself is reflexive and in the spirit of giving something back.

As Pink suggests, as a reflexive ethnographer I think carefully about sensory, embodied and affective experiences and gendered relationships (Pink 2012) and ensure research participants have some influence or say over the research and how it is presented (Smith 2012). In doing so I also understand that my research position can be understood as a process of *translation*, a point I discussed in the foreword to this thesis. As an ethnographer I corroborate these methods through participant observation, and other contemporary, collaborative innovative ways that are within the Indigenous research paradigm. Sometimes these occurred as inadvertent 'in-the-moment' events; the serendipitous encounters that occur across rhythms of movement and circulation of multiple bodies giving substance to the concept of 'throwntogetherness' (Massey 2005) in the space of art production. Here, an emphasis on spatial relations allows new insights to unfold. These processes and flows are ongoing and dynamic and are spatially and temporally contingent (Desmond 2014).

As part of this research process I responded through processes of 'reflexive practice',³³ recognising that the emphasis of the research was on the importance

³³ Reflexive practice can be viewed as the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher; defined as a conscious experiencing of the self as both the inquirer and respondent, teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process

of culturally appropriate investigation. Yarnangu insights based on their and my experiences and encounters, often expressed through the exchange of stories, shaped and influenced research findings. A reflexive and open-minded attitude to the community and participants enabled the perspectives and insights of Yarnangu to be heard through the research (Rix, Barclay & Wilson 2014). Moreover, a reflexive approach is integral to the visual and sensual methodologies (Pink 2007, 2015) that inform the research examined in the following chapters.

The reflexive and participatory approach of anthropological ethnography outlined above responds to critical concerns about other methodologies employed in contemporary Aboriginal art discourse. Anthropologist Howard Morphy argues that Australian Aboriginal art has been an agent of change in Australian art discourse, stimulating inclusion and offering new approaches to the exhibition of art objects, in turn, influencing categorical distinctions made between them (McLean 2011; Morphy 2011). Morphy claims that over a period of time Aboriginal art has undergone a process of recognition and reception that establishes it as a member of the Western category of fine art, influencing contemporary Indigenous arts practice (Morphy 2011). His argument is based on the premise that to appreciate the art one needs to know about it, just as with Western art:

We need to acknowledge an underlying cross-cultural category of art that is independent of the Western fine art concept, but which in a

of research itself (Guba & Lincoln 2005). It differs from reflection, which takes the form of a cumulative body of knowledge that can then be used to improve practice. Reflection is related to self and to improving future practice through a retrospective analysis of action.

loose sense includes its objects [and] engage with this process to understand where these objects came from—how objects shift categories over time. (Morphy 2011, p. 5)

Essentially, Morphy is suggesting that art history needs to *engage* with these processes to understand more about the art objects—where they came from, how they were made, their cultural and ontological significance—as a source of information about the art and about people’s lives and worlds. Following Morphy’s approach, my own research at Papulankutja Artists is a response to such discussions, where research knowledge is co-produced, in a collaborative process. This approach to research is consistent with the direction emerging from within the work of Indigenous theorists (Chilisa 2012; Langton & Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (Australia) 1994; Perkins et al. 2007). Thus, Morphy’s ideas correspond to my reflexive focus and emphasis on ‘understanding’ of the objects produced. In this instance, the participants become co-producers and users of research knowledge, ensuring the research group participates as ‘knowers’ in the entire research process. The method requires a continuous cycle of practice and reflection based on real life experience. It is a method that empowers the research group through collective enquiry and collaboration, thereby demystifying the research process and developing new insights and practice (Chilisa 2012).

For example, senior artist Angiliya Mitchell paints at the art centre each day (see image 2.1). Although Angiliya speaks no English at all, we have developed a unique and personalised mode of communication that allows Angiliya to co-produce research knowledge. This collaboration highlights the social dimension of the inquiry and its emphasis on understanding the artwork. Reflecting on, developing and extending Angiliya’s ways of knowing allows me, as researcher, to reconcile theoretical understandings about the detail of local activities with

the sensory perceptions and human embodied experience that are implicated in reflexive processes that constitute practice and place.

In chapter one I reflected on the notion of research being part of a continuous flow of shifting actions and practices in and around the art centre. In previous research in anthropology, scholars have adopted relational approaches to fieldwork (Appadurai 1990; Marcus 1998), 'designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions (that come to support) the argument of the ethnography' (Marcus 1998, p. 90). Known for his work on the geographies of modern living, geographer Ash Amin adopted Doreen Massey's term 'throwntogetherness' (Amin 2008; Massey 2005) to describe the whirl that is generated by the unrestrained flow of human and non-human actors in a shared physical space, as well as the role played by the visual, material culture and technology in the generation of such spaces (Amin 2008). Amin conceptualises this as 'situated surplus' or 'situated multiplicity': a space made of thick patterns of bodies, movement, technologies, material and visual culture, impulses and nature; a space intended as a site of 'cultural formation and popular practices' (Amin 2008).

Both Amin's and Massey's ideas inform not only the object of my research at the art centre, but also the overall approach to art production in my methodology. The flows and interconnections of persons and things are subject to continual change (artists, sites, materials, paintings, other artworks), and the interpretation of meanings generated are contingent on these constantly shifting configurations. These interconnections constitute the 'flow' within this creative environment. My methods are therefore based on perceiving these persons and things as part of what Massey terms 'event of place', and hence are relevant to establishing how the production of art might be researched in the context. Again, as Morphy has argued, one needs to *know* about the art to understand it.

To think through these relational understandings of space, I turn to Doreen Massey's definition of space as 'time-space', as 'the contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories; a simultaneity of stories-so-far' and as a 'throwntogetherness' of diverse elements in relation' (Massey 2005, p. 12). The emergent product is a set of interrelations stemming from its complex web of historical and contemporary relations—interrelation—and usually involves change. Thus place, as 'bundles of trajectories' (Massey 2005, p. 119), is continually under construction, where flows of people, movement, time and space are bound together and where we see 'places not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; as spatio-temporal events (Massey 2005, p. 130). Massey's relational conceptualisation of space is useful for my research on two levels: both for methodology and for methods. At the methodological level, art production in its entirety can be conceptualised as space. At the methods level, studying the art involves adopting multiple methods that explore relationships and change over time.

In chapters three and four I use art production at the Papulankutja Artists art centre itself as a 'bundle of trajectories' or 'simultaneity of stories so far'. Interpreted from this perspective, non-human things like money, shop, dogs, materials, stories and tjukurrpa are also crucial to the constitution of place and are intermixed with the social relations and creative practices that make up broader webs linking the local and the global. Vignettes embedded within these chapters highlight the effects of the transcultural tenor of Papulankutja and Yarnangu interactions with the contemporary world. In chapter seven I develop an approach that follows the flows of weaving tjanpi from its production in the bush; gathering of the grasses, hunting, and using cars through which to connect land and cultural memory. Recognising the collaborative processes of interweaving these non-human 'things' into not just

events but also into popular contemporary sculptures helps me as a researcher to gain a sense of complex contemporaneity.

A relational approach enables me to address how we come to understand the meanings behind the art produced and to see these meanings as embedded in art production at Papulankutja. Contemporary geographers such as Derek Gregory see space as being produced through action and interaction, so constituting, rather than containing, everyday life (Gregory 2009). Massey argues that space can be thought of as a concrete, emergent product of interrelations, where distinctive elements of a particular place are bound up in its complex web of historical and contemporary relations made and not made with other places. She stresses that the local and the global are 'mutually constituted' (Massey 2005, p. 184). I argue that it is these interrelations that hold together a range of entangled trajectories embedded with the making of meanings.

Encounters from those outside communities are not restricted to those by ethnographers and arts coordinators. Stephen Gilchrist, a Yamatji³⁴ man, independent curator and academic at The University of Sydney, suggests that within new Indigenous museology and curatorship there is now a participatory and relational experience of culture, and where liaising with 'source communities' is becoming the norm (Gilchrist 2014). Importantly, it is in these remote source communities, like Papulankutja, that disparate social structures underwrite the production of Aboriginal contemporary art. Art is produced amid this network of complex webs that highlight the significant intersections

³⁴ Yamatji is a name commonly used by Aboriginal people in the Murchison and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia to refer to themselves, and sometimes also to Aboriginal people generally, when speaking English.

between cultural embodied practices like Angiliya's individual painted stories and the global influences of technologies and art world institutions that enable its very constitution, and through which meanings are disseminated.

The participatory and relational experience, in collaboration with remote source communities such as Papulankutja, also offers effective opportunities for doing place-based 21st century art history. In his essay titled *Art History in Remote Aboriginal Art Centres*, Darren Jorgensen argues that remote art centres are a source for the production of scholarship about locally produced art (Jorgensen 2013). Jorgensen states:

As a new generation of painters emerges from remote Australia, the dynamic shifts in the visual identity of art from different remote communities will constitute a large body of material that art history is uniquely placed to think about. (Jorgensen 2013, p. 79)

To date, museums and art galleries have provided much of the material for the art histories of the twentieth century. However, these major institutions that collect and exhibit Aboriginal art are also often said to be implicated in the legacy of colonialism, in what Indigenous artist and activist Richard Bell suggests imposes and perpetuates superiority over art not produced in the Western manner (Bell 2003). Jorgensen advocates an art history that should not be tied to the major institutions that collect and exhibit Aboriginal art, but rather where the art is 're-placed in remote Australia, where the art is actually made' (Jorgensen 2013, p. 78). This claim reinforces my decision to establish this research project 'at the coal-face', in place, and with a relational emphasis on the local, cultural and social Yarnangu environment and its arts practices. The flow of people, things, meanings and their narrative stories represents a 'totality of connections' (Anderson 2008) through which I become part of the specific research engagement at their source. Ultimately this encounter contributes to

how I arrive at the intersections where meanings and art history are made. In agreement with Massey (2005, p. 107), I argue that this space is constituted through its relations.

As outlined earlier in chapter one, there is an increasing focus on the senses and aesthetics across the social sciences and humanities (Gibson 2011; Gilchrist 2014; Ingold 2011b; Pink 2012, 2015). This emphasis attends to the 'multisensoriality' of the ways in which the both ethnographers and participants experience their lives and worlds and is an approach now recognisable within the disciplinary traditions of art history, ethnography and textual analysis (Pink 2015, p. 19). This approach is concerned with understanding not just the verbal and conventional methods of observation and interaction, but with connecting also with the tacit and the unspoken. In practice, I developed an interactive and sensorial relationship with Angiliya, an artist in her seventies, and who, up until recently, had had very little communication with her 'outside' world. Our connection evolved organically and recursively, where our avenues of communication and the discovery of new meanings were both visual and haptic. My situated emplacement alongside artists whose first language was not the same as mine depended on my learning to know in practice. As outlined in chapters one and two, theories of place combined with a perceptive sensory ethnography allows access to the unique web of links and histories that constitute and are implied by everyday arts practice experiences. Together, Angiliya and I created an especial set of shared individual representations and meanings. I apply Sarah Pink's approach of engaging the senses for thinking through research environments. Pink suggests that research should take as its starting point 'the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice' (Pink 2015, p. xi). In doing this I was able to *sense* particular moments of significance. (See, for example, vignette six, which outlines a revelation about Angiliya's extraordinary pink dream painting.)

The senses can also be linked with the visual and the verbal in ways that are not highly articulated in cultural studies and textual analysis. Pink argues that although highly developed semiotic analyses of images can imply or invoke particular haptic experiences of the visual and the verbal, semiotic readings of sensory experiences have some limits (Pink 2012, p. 35). In some instances, sensory experiences like body movement and texture, experienced through senses such as taste, hearing, smell and touch, are difficult to communicate. Jennifer Biddle has examined this relationship between the visual and the haptic in her scholarly work on Warlpiri paintings. Biddle argues that the sensory dimensions operate as performative and affective (Biddle 2003). Her work is a reorientation of how we might think about Aboriginal art by focusing on what the art 'does' rather than what it 'means' (Biddle 2007). Breaking with a generation of scholarship that has identified these works as traditional symbolic representations of country, Biddle challenges the ways that these paintings have been understood, particularly paintings by women artists such as Emily Kngwarraye and Kathleen Petyarre. Here, Biddle identifies their work as an art of the body: 'In short, Petyarre's paintings do not *represent* the Dreaming. They *enact* it' (Biddle 2003, p. 64). Biddle goes on to state:

Viscerally-charged and haptically exuberant, Petyarre's work is above all else, *affective*. These paintings incite and excite; they enliven, they move us, the viewer, by their movement. (Biddle 2003, p. 64)

As Biddle's examples demonstrate, conceptualising artworks in terms of their capacity to evoke multisensory experience engages the senses of the visual as well as touch, sound, taste and smell, thereby reducing the need to use a semiotic method of reading each text. I found this approach useful, particularly where I saw a direct, contemporary relationship between the performative actions of painting on the body at the 2015 Desert Conference dance performance, and the art produced at Papulankutja. On this occasion I had been

invited by the participants to become involved in the sensual act by assisting with the application of paint to the body. I saw those same patterns and textures being re-produced on canvas later the same week.

Art production and its practices do not need only to be read through particular texts such as the paintings and artwork produced at Papulankutja. Production practices are implicated in the processes of applied research itself. How might I engage with the artists? How do I invoke everyday arts practice, as it exists, in ways that are place-contingent? Pink advocates developing sensory and empathetic verbal dialogue with participants in the research (Pink 2012, p. 36). By forming close ties with the participants and art community, my social relations represented a mutual engagement of participants, as producers of the research, and where a space of exchange was created. Aboriginal knowledge informed the research. This knowledge included participatory practices and the forming or sharing of yarning circles and gathering stories (Chilisa 2012).

Towards the end of my fieldwork it was regular practice for the artists to invite me to engage with them in cultural storytelling practices. Here, the emphasis of the participatory research was that the artists themselves participated as knowers in the entire research process. This research method requires a continuous cycle of practice and reflection based on real life experience. In practice, this method empowers the research group through collective enquiry, and collaboration, demystifying the research process and developing new insights and practice (Chilisa 2012). Aboriginal knowledge and participatory methods inform all collaborative methods that produced the research discussed in chapters three to seven. The methods are discussed further below.

The methodological considerations for this qualitative research project include sensory aesthetics, collaborative and participatory methods, reflexivity

and flows. In the following section I explore the implications of these aspects in this study.

Experiencing place: perception and interaction

Chapters three to seven of this thesis represent a methodological orientation that locates art practices in their everyday situations. This method develops through a focus on the artist's relationships with their environments in the context of contemporary creative practices. This has involved developing research methods that are culturally appropriate in the environments that constitute art making at Papulankutja. Creative practices and their representations in paintings, sculpture and weaving are situated as part of place. Hence my research practices and sensory encounters with both persons and things have their starting place at the Papulankutja Artists art centre, where fieldwork was carried out. My methodological approach both builds on and departs from existing scholarship about place in ethnography. I first outline the points of departure before discussing the methods I used to research place in more detail.

In early ethnographic tradition, place and space have been marginal to location. Breaking with this tradition, what is known as 'new' cultural geography (Taylor 2013, p. 807) has a relational emphasis that forms part of the cultural turn within geography, as well as being part of the transdisciplinary spatial turn (Taylor 2013). There has also been an increasing appreciation of place as a focus for ethnographic research (Pink 2012). Ethnographic researchers who have examined place as a site for discourse (e.g. Feld & Basso 1996; Gupta & Ferguson 1997) defined places as localities, with connections that implied power relations and difference, and emphasised flows of movement. In doing this, they maintained an understanding of place as exhibiting particular qualities, and as an empirical reality rather than a conceptual tool (Pink 2012).

As I outlined in chapter one, my departure from these approaches aligns with Pink's re-thinking of the concept of place. I am also influenced by Massey's *For Space* (2005), in which she argues for a re-imagination and revaluation of space. These ideas need to reconsider the relationship between the idea of a research site and a place. Underwriting this thinking is how we as researchers become part of place. We become involved in a locality, encounter the social, sensory and material elements of that environment, and our trajectory becomes temporarily intertwined with the people and things that also constitute that place (Pink 2012, p. 38). My ethnographic study of art production at Papulankutja meant becoming part of the framework of the research-place-event as I *encountered* the research. Therefore, the case studies I consider in the chapters three to seven are examined through divergent interpretive lenses, where places 'are not simply 'localities', but rather, the intensities of everyday social relationships, materialities, sensory experiences, practices, representations, discourses and more' (Pink 2012, p. 38). Following Massey, the case studies are 'spatio-temporal events' (Massey 2005, p. 130). It is by means of understanding these as *in place-events* that the zones of intensity (places) occur through connections and intersections of localities: the art centre; materialities of performing cultural stories; the socialities of trips to country; and other constituents such as ceremonial activities, non-human entities and everyday life. The conceptualisation of a constantly shifting place–event underpins a paradigm of movement (including my own as I move around with the participants), and also structures the focus of research. Thus, these movements are not limited to only the subjects/participants and creative practices, but to researchers as well. This position resonates with the ideas of Tim Ingold, who argues that places are delineated *by* movement and that place is 'the entire meshwork of intertwined trails along which people carry on their lives' (Ingold 2011a, p. 149). In his essay *Ways of mind-walking: reading, writing, painting* (2010),

Ingold suggests that we move in and through environments, as part of that environment and the moves that we make contribute to its condition.

Thus the methods used to produce the research at Papulankutja Artists and discussed in the following chapters specifically address environments and are related to movements, both human and non-human, in order to research through the creative art practices of Yarnangu artists. Each day I encountered and became part of this constant flow of both people and things, in and around the art centre: the place-events. I became *part* of this place: moving through spaces with the participants and engaging in the social, sensory and material elements of their environment. At the art centre the research methods involved both observation and participation: moving around the creative environment to explore the workspace with the research participants, and engaging sensorially in social and collaborative practices. In a transcultural learning process both the participants and the researcher were able to identify areas of interaction that were mutually favourable.

As an example, I draw attention to reciprocity, an important cultural aspect that is integral to all Indigenous research. In his research to improve Indigenous education learning outcomes, Australian Indigenous scholar Martin Nakata makes the point that:

Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems work off different theories of knowledge that frame who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge. (Nakata 2007a)

With this in mind, I consider that we are all knowers in our home environments. However, as I move around the art centre as a visiting outsider, it is the research participants who are the knowers and inform this research. Importantly, the action of reciprocity is a shifting engagement within the

research paradigm. Both participants and the researcher understand and acknowledge reciprocity as practice in place. I engage with participants and artists as a volunteer at the art centre. This volunteering shifts and changes, integrating the research within local activities and trajectories. My volunteering turned out to be a mutually beneficial arrangement and agreeable to the artists. I moved around the centre, learning how to mix paint (properly), cutting and stretching canvases (a skill that I brought with me), sharing some of my own technical skills, making cups of tea, driving the Toyota for hunting expeditions, learning how to dig for honey ants and maku (witchetty grubs), and most favourably (for both researcher and participant), sitting down and telling stories. The material context of the art produced invoked commentaries from participants about their memories, experiences, stories, values and practices that often became the threads that connected their own material lives with the art that was produced.

In summary, we can think of the art production as space and as a 'bundle of trajectories', referring to all the living and non-living elements that make up art production. Each of these elements has come from somewhere and is going somewhere, and each has their own particular 'story-so-far', including the researcher (Massey 2005, p. 119). I illustrate this in chapter seven by introducing fibre weaving as an innovative and performative art form. That chapter advances new ideas and techniques within art at Papulankutja in the areas of fibre arts and sculpture. The chapter also shows how art practice is constitutive of a domain in which the space–time relationship is fixed in movement through cars. Cars are connected and constituted in diverse ways in all remote communities. To demonstrate this, I centre chapter seven on a large woven grass car that won an important art prize. In doing this I was able to position cars in the community and demonstrate how they are inscribed in its social

fabric as symbolic meaning, in a context where the status of car ownership is highly sought.

The studies in chapters five and six draw on predominant cultural stories, and through the lenses of orality and memory, highlight the consequences of movement through mobile engagements with ceremonial visits and practices. As I walked around with the artists I became aware of the material content and links to the sites seen in both a physical and intellectual environment (physical, as in site specific; and cerebral, through story). The fieldwork involved walking around with the artists in their historical environment and acted as a way of defining it for me. It also developed an understanding of how the artists both define their history/environment and experience it, and by way of artistic representation, communicate it. As I will demonstrate, there are a number of local activities and trajectories—complex entanglements—that together make up art production. These trajectories yield useful insights for my enquiry about the nature and relationships between these elements, including between the researcher and her trajectories. I have been able to engage with the experiential ways of being involved in the artists' events, and as such, with their multisensory experience of place (Pink 2012). Thus, researching place involved moving through environments that were material, sensory and mediated (Pink 2012, p. 40). Each of the methods, or lenses, I used allowed for a differential access to understanding the different practices that constitute everyday art making practices. Finally, doing research about the production of artworks at Papulankutja involved ways of researching place that re-think the way current representations of art and its practices are understood.

The practices of art production

My research approach seeks to understand arts practice and production at Papulankutja through both human experience and practical activity. Sarah Pink

reminds us that the idea of a sensory ethnography is based on an understanding of the senses as interconnected and interrelated. This approach goes beyond the classic observational approach (Pink 2015, p. xiii). In this sense, and in order to make meaning of paintings and other artworks, I am concerned with the 'everyday' practices at the art centre, a place selected for its pivotal role as the predominant point of both cultural and commercial articulation and intercommunication in the community. I wanted to see what things the artists just 'do', in the context of multisensory embodied practices, and not just what has already been discussed formally in a Western style art critique. My research about practices is drawn from a combination of observations and interactions at the art centre, and also includes the practical activities that are related to the production of art and its selected themes and subject matter which were usually being out in the bush or hunting. I also drew on interviews and discussions about the art and arts practice and the practice of story telling and dissemination of Aboriginal knowledge. Thus, I am engaged in the study of practices as they are performed, *in practice*. As I demonstrate in chapter seven, outlined through the art of tjanpi weaving, the performance of practice is a key site for understanding processes of change, and through which methodologically, I access these practices as they are performed (Pink 2012).

As I have mentioned, Aboriginal art has previously tended to be analysed by anthropological reporting and discourse analysis, often not connecting the relational and performative elements that make up everyday contemporary arts practice. In ethnography the use of verbal reporting by research participants in the format of the interview is the most established and prevalent sociological research method. It provides a valuable route to knowledge about how people describe their activities and values, and how they feel about painting and creating art and other related practices that they engage in that inform the art. Sarah Pink, an extensive writer in the field of ethnographic practice, states:

It allows focus on individual variation or on collective patterning. Interviews have been appropriately lauded for their ability to produce conversational, emotional and empathetic research encounters, and to give voice to those who are not normally heard. They can show us how people represent verbally and classify their sensory experiences of specific environments, localities, performances and practices, and in this sense offer a useful way of understanding the representational layers of everyday life. (Pink 2012, p. 41)

As an ethnographic researcher, and prior to undertaking fieldwork at Papulankutja my planned methodological approach incorporated a number of individual informal interviews with selected participants in conjunction with observational study and participatory arts practices. I had prepared finely honed questions that I had hoped would elicit representational motivations and justifications that delineated the art pieces to further our understanding about the art. Although I had already established good relations with the art community through previous visits, my fieldwork for this study consisted of six field trips to the community, each lasting for between two and six weeks. During these periods I camped out, joined hunting trips and was invited to attend ceremonial events. On one occasion this included being 'painted-up' for a ritual occasion. I had developed a good, close relationship with Jane Avery, the Art Centre Manager, and artist participants.

My research focus envisaged a comfortable transition from casual chat to a casual interview process. Yet, what I found was that interviews were also limited routes to Yarnangu understanding. In the interview situation each participant had a rote answer that he or she had honed and used routinely to 'answer questions'. Participants wanted to be guided into the 'correct' answers, either by myself or other participants. Although there was a great deal of support within the community for the research that I was doing, I realised that

my interview practices needed to be re-thought. I needed to develop new ways of accounting for practice as performed (Pink 2012). This led me to further reflection and a return to the theorising of Indigenous issues and methodologies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that within an Indigenous framework the methodology determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and shapes the analyses (Smith 2012, p. 144). Methods are often a mix of methodological approaches and Indigenous practices (Smith 2012). A key Indigenous practice is telling stories.

Stories, as they are referred to by Yarnangu, are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture, serving to connect the past with the future, the land with the people and the people with the story (Smith 2012, p. 146). As a research tool listening to stories is a useful and culturally appropriate way towards *knowing* and can be used to invoke a set of shared understandings, histories and everyday life practices. Oral history scholar Ruth Finnegan suggests that story is a way of 'opening a door to the vast oral creativity of humankind so often devalued in the print-dominated outlook of Western scholarship' (Finnegan 2010, p. 13). Thus, this method of enquiry replaced my previously prepared interviews and successfully enabled me to gain rich, locally oriented information that related to Yarnangu creative arts and informed this study. As Finnegan points out, this method of enquiry:

allows us to approach the arts of the word in a worldwide frame and see them in new ways, stimulating the exploration and appreciation of forms which might otherwise remain scattered or dismissed as of parochial interest only. (Finnegan 2010, p. 14)

This approach widened my sphere of knowledge and research findings because it facilitated my gaining an understanding of a different set of values and practices about what was vitally important to the participants, not necessarily

relating to my Western art worldview or my own set of interview questions and enquiry. As the researcher I was therefore enmeshed *in place* and part of the 'bundle of trajectories'. The stories were *experienced* by me and *performed* by artists in the course of their creative practices. Stories were practices that happened as part of the flow and movement of everyday life. As Massey argues, we are always in a process of moving on. In research, it is by focusing on how people are moving in and through the world that we can develop 'a progressive concept' of place. She continues:

First of all, it is absolutely not static. If places can be conceptualized in terms of the social interactions, which they tie together, then it is also the case that these interactions themselves are not motionless things, frozen in time. They are processes. (Massey 1994, p. 155)

The processes through which art practices such as painting transpire, and the contexts through which they are understood, are sometimes less social and are often embedded in the artists' memories that may be both personal and/or collective within Ngaanyatjarra histories. Frequently these histories relate to the tjukurrpa and events that don't always invite the presence of a researcher. Research at these times required that I recognise the ethical considerations at the intercultural interface between the participants and myself as researcher. In such contexts, I learned from watching, listening and observing *about* rather than in *doing* the practice. During my research visits, this didn't happen often at Papulankutja Artists, although there were instances where an artist was particularly keen to record something on canvas that was meaningful and may or may not have been explained until later. This was the case described in vignette 6, when senior artist Angiliya had had an important tjukurrpa dream and in a solitary endeavour proceeded to paint silently all day. Alternate routes to exploring such practices sometimes involved discussions and stories at a later time or led to processes of non-verbal embodied learning, encountered

through silence that offer perceptive experiences about *how* the practice was performed and what meanings might be learned.

In chapters three and four I focus on the detail of arts practice through my observations and experiences as both a volunteer and acting manager at the Papulankutja Artists art centre. I was able to define the practices that I encountered on an everyday basis through interactions with the artist participants, and which included discussions, observations, participatory actions, and the use of camera and video recordings. In chapter seven I took a different route to exploring practice, focusing instead on a particular aspect of art-making practice. Here, rather than an intensive observational and interactive experience, I recounted practices related to the art of making tjanpi. While situated in the material and sensory contexts that were the outcomes of such practices, the analytical focus shifted from the performance to flows, experiences and contemporary encounters that demonstrated shifts in practice and the influences of transcultural exchange.

In chapters five and six the analytical focus shifts further from the detail of practice to ways that mark a divergence in how we might understand the art that is produced in Papulankutja. I have drawn on different methods of memory and orality. Here the analysis of representations in paintings elicited rich, textured, personal and collective outcomes. While participants engaged in the practices of painting, they recalled spiritual frameworks that provide the overarching cultural system within which Yarnangu life is constituted. Important Yarnangu knowledge, conceived through the *Wati Kutjarra* and *Kungkarangkalpa* stories, are represented through several levels of meaning, and correspond to diverse ways of retelling the mythical travels of ancestral heroes in contemporary times. In these artworks, painted by Elaine Warnatjura Lane and Angiliya Mitchell respectively, both Elaine and Angiliya's painted canvases

draw on memory to renew artistic, pictorial and narrative oral heritage. Chapters three to seven therefore demonstrate the various ways through which I have researched practice and show that these have an impact on the sorts of understandings that are derived from my investigations on art making practices at Papulankutja.

Researching art: meanings and representations

There is a manifest relationship between the everyday arts practices performed and practiced at Papulankutja and the paintings and art that are produced. Paintings and sculptures produced at Papulankutja represent a part of the creative and cultural lives of Yarnangu. They are integral to the mediation of contemporary production encounters and practices experienced through entities such the art centre, related exhibitions, commercial enterprise and technological adaptations making up contemporary art histories. Although Australian art histories are now written within a postcolonial paradigm, the production of scholarship still predominantly rests on colonial values and art histories. This history is largely written for a non-Indigenous audience and remains within a Eurocentric discourse (Gough & Naylor 2008).

With this in mind I was prompted to modify my approach to art research, and I looked to scholars who offered an alternative route to understanding contemporary art production. I consider Doreen Massey's (2005) work on the relational conceptualisation of space as a multiplicity of trajectories to inform art production research at its source. Thus, meanings that I derive from the art are established through multiple methods that explore relationships and change over time. I used the themes of memory, orality and popular culture to create paradigms that assisted in identifying the elements essential to creating unique spaces and places that examined the contexts and role of contemporary art at Papulankutja. Various settings influenced the experience of art and transformed

how spaces were contemplated. In embarking on this relational approach I again build on the work of Tim Ingold (2010) whose insights examine the conventional ideas of representation in the visual culture approach to drawings and paintings, and suggest that in research we might approach them as being *'like things in the world'* rather than *'of things in the world'* (Ingold 2010, pp. 16, original italics).

I argue that meanings, represented in paintings and art, cannot be read solely through a general analysis of texts as representation. My 'reading' of Angiliya Mitchell's paintings, for example, is a departure from the semiotic focus so often used to examine and analyse her images and content. By placing Angiliya's work in location, I suggest that her work is an act of place making and her paintings need to be understood through their relationality with other things, in practice and as part of place (Pink 2012). In Angiliya's terms, painting becomes tied up in complex entangled imagery, which is associated with her personal tjukurrpa dreams, traditional women's law, culture and everyday practices. Angiliya refers to family, country and sacred sites in her paintings, and includes the decorations and rock carving associated with visits to the ceremonial site of Kura Ala. The social nature of space intersects with the multiple levels of rhythm in her practices of everyday life and is comprehended through the art. As Massey writes:

And it is in the terms of engagement among these intersecting trajectories that lie the politics, the productivity, the questions, the expectations, the potential for surprise. (Massey 2003)

In the art produced at Papulankutja, meanings emerged at the intersection of painting and weaving, and performing everyday arts practice. Both Massey and Ingold present an argument that supports my methodology for a 'sense of place'

that adequately places art history within Aboriginal perspectives and should form the basis for meanings and representations in art and its production.

By drawing on the notion of Aboriginal perspective, political artist and activist Richard Bell draws our attention to the differences in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art analyses. Bell argues:

why can't an Art movement arise and be separate from but equal to Western Art—within its own aesthetic, its *own voices* (my emphasis), its own infrastructure, etc? (Bell 2003)

Bell accompanies his controversial 2003 Telstra Award winning painting *Scientia e Metaphysica* with a critical text titled 'Bell's Theorem: Aboriginal art—It's a white thing' (Bell's Theorem). In this text he provocatively inscribes the words 'Aboriginal art it's a white thing', presenting his own perspective of the Aboriginal art scene and restating its significance to Indigenous communities, outside of the demands of the art market (Watson 2007). The work parodies the art market and critiques the domination of the modern Western tradition in Australian art. His art is a political response to the appropriation and assimilation of Aboriginal culture into the white art market and white cultural identity. Bell is dismissive of work from remote areas.³⁵ However, Indigenous artist and curator Brenda Croft champions his work as part of the '21st century Dreaming' (Croft 2012). Croft discusses the challenges for Indigenous artists in a recent review about a book on contemporary Indigenous art, where she suggests that, although she found the book meticulous in its content and outline

³⁵ Bell considers art from remote communities as 'traditional' art and says it cannot be classified as contemporary art from urban areas. He is critical of what he sees as the Aboriginal art industry's exploitation of regional artists by highlighting the 'overt primitivism' of desert art.

of the history of contemporary Indigenous art in Australia, she found Indigenous voices were absent. The book omitted the voices of Indigenous curators from community organisations and ethnographic fine art museums (Croft 2012). To strengthen her argument, in the review Croft also made reference to a recent Desart conference. Desart is an advocacy group for art centres across central Australia. Croft notes that:

much of what was discussed was, frustratingly, the 'same old, same old', with few apparent lessons learnt from the experiences of those gone before—artists, curators, art centre coordinators, etc. (Croft 2012, p. 113)

Both Bell and Croft take a hard line on Aboriginal recognition and non-Aboriginal control of art-marketing strategies (Bell 2003). Bell and Croft have thrown up many questions in need of further investigation by pointing out that the Aboriginal 'voice' is still absent from much art-related discourse. Central to this thesis is a concerted focus on Aboriginal perspective (and collapsing Bell's Theorem) in accord with a methodology concerning place. Both place and space, and Aboriginal participant perspective have grounded my methodological choice, and they set the focus for the following chapters.

Methodologically, my engagement is with a 'constellation of processes' (Massey 2005, p. 141; Pink 2012) between myself as researcher and the Papulankutja Artists participants. The strength of my methodological approach lies in its ability to manage and draw insights within and across various themes and methods. Following theoretical concepts of place, my methodology acts as a scaffold around place, and draws on research processes that were informed by sensory, embodied and affective encounters (Pink 2012).

Researching positionality and ethics in place

The research presented in this thesis was conducted within all the guidelines for research ethics and the participants were included in the study after informed consent. They were informed about their right to withdraw or not answer questions they found intrusive. Aboriginal perspectives were given foremost consideration. A key factor in the successful completion of this transcultural project was its collaborative and reflexive approach to research. A heightened sensory awareness and sensitivity to the way the methodology was designed and enacted guided both the researcher and participants through the social and material worlds of Papulankutja Artists and the everyday practices of art production.

However, as identified in the foreword and chapter one, a limitation of the study became apparent when my own social position in relation to the artists moved from being that of researcher to that of acting manager. This event shows how positionality can change throughout the course of research and how it may be multiple and continually mediated in response to the anticipated or experienced perceptions of how participants receive, accept, or reject the researcher's prevailing position. During her fieldwork in rural India, Canadian researcher Prachi Srivastava suggests that:

it is simplistic to assume that the creation or crafting of a field identity is a one-time occurrence during the field—it can change multiple times in relation to different participant groups and even during a single field event. (Srivastava 2005, p. 136)

Srivastava's experiences corresponded with mine in that my positionality was recast, thereby challenging my field-identity. Due to unforeseen and extenuating circumstances, and during a particularly complex time in fieldwork, my position as sensory ethnographic researcher shifted when I became acting

manager of the art centre. This involved me taking on additional responsibilities that went with the position. My newly acquired position increased the perceived and ascribed power differential and my positionality was in flux. The changed power relations were immediate and unanticipated. In some instances, a condescending attitude by some artists towards my new status caused tensions and discomfort. Money was the principal issue and there was a perceived rationale that in this new position I would be able to administer and provide finance for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, this was not the case. To the participants and artists at Papulankutja Artists, the structures of power and the contexts in which the power relationship between the researcher and the researched appeared unequal, and in favour of the researcher.

Another scholarly fieldworker, Farhana Sultana (2007), argues that at times like this it is important to pay greater attention to issues of reflexivity, positionality and power relations in the field in order to undertake ethical and participatory research. I draw on Sultana's suggestions to manage the uncertainties, discomfort, tensions and instabilities of such subjective positions and to be reflexive about, and work through, the contradictions in my positionality. My temporary in-between status had to be constantly reworked as I undertook my new field management position. Different dynamics, in terms of concerns of insider-outsider and politics of representation, placed me into a different outsider category. It 'othered' me and negotiated the relationship on a continual basis (Sultana 2007). However, I was able to bridge differences and become 're-accepted' over time thanks to the length of time I had spent in the community, the relations of trust I had developed in the field, my ability to engage in regular conversation, the existing good relations that had been established, stories that we had shared and the knowledge that had been co-produced during our extensive research. I believe that I located myself in the

study openly and honestly and confronted my relationship with the participants in 'a reflexive appreciation of the practices of the researcher and the places of which these become part' (Pink 2012, p. 47).

Conclusion

This chapter has described the methods used in the investigation of art and its production at Papulankutja. I have outlined the methodological considerations I took into account in engaging in research in contemporary Western Desert art practices and production methods at Papulankutja Artists. My account accommodates an understanding of the practices, places and meanings embedded in the paintings and woven sculptures that make up creative arts practice across the multiple sites of arts engagement at Papulankutja. As a sensorial ethnographic researcher I moved through, experienced and participated in research contexts in order to be part of, and a co-producer with, Yarnangu artists. In this chapter I have outlined the interpretive lenses, in particular Massey's (2005) human geographical, relational theories of place and space, that underpinned my use of multiple methods. In the chapters that follow I present the findings and insights drawn from these methods in the form of case studies that explore how these relationships changed over time. The first case study, in chapter three, examines the administrative and economic components and flows of art production at Papulankutja Artists. ■

Vignette 3a

Pamela

Pamela had borrowed the art centre troopie³⁶ for a couple of hours in the evening. She had some family business to attend to and none of the cars parked in front of her house were in working order. It was ‘only for a couple of hours’, and she had said that it would be returned before dark. Pamela assured me that it was okay and that Jane allowed her to borrow the car on occasions. I had verified this with Jane. However, there were conditions. One of these was that it should be returned early, the same evening that it was borrowed. But Jane was away, and a ‘couple of hours’ are never finite out here. I felt sure that everything was fine so I went to bed. As I expected, Pamela and the car turned up at the art centre late the next morning. Everything was fine.

Pamela has paid employment at the art centre. She works around five to six hours each day. Being able to use the car occasionally is one of the rewards that goes with the job. With six children, five of them still living in the family home, Pamela is kept busy. At 35, she is also a grandmother, and wife to Daryl. He is very shy and speaks no English. Pamela’s financial contribution to the family means her children are well fed and usually dressed in the inexpensive yet fashionable new clothes available at the store. They are often playing with plastic throwaway toys purchased from the store, more often than not cast out onto the street when the novelty has worn off, consolidating a motley mix of prams, bikes, plastic bottles and various wrappers from foodstuffs. Shelf life is short—intrigue and possession even shorter.

³⁶ Troopie refers to a Toyota four-wheel-drive vehicle, similar to an old army truck with bench seats.

Pamela is also the only artist I know who has a painting hanging in her house. The colourful artwork is placed in the window frame at the front of the house and it faces the road for everyone to see.

I have worked closely with Pamela for some time now. I enjoy her company and we often chat about anything and everything for hours on end. I have learnt that she loves photography and is keen to pursue it further. She won a competition recently with a photograph named 'I Love My Family' (see image 3.1) and enjoyed dabbling with the filters and lenses on the camera to gain different effects. Pamela said that she used the computer to alter colours and re-mix the photograph. 'A lot of thinking went into the picture,' she said.³⁷ The work was staged and designed by Pamela and she told me that she enjoyed taking the children out to a place that she thought would be an ideal backdrop for the photograph. 'I knew exactly what image I wanted to capture,' she said. Pamela's achievement of creating a prize-winning photograph empowers her, and through the self-confidence gained in the reflexive process of individual production she makes explicit the voices and concerns of Yarnangu who are usually 'invisible' in public forums. Her job requires that she take photos of all the artwork completed at the art centre and she has become adept at cataloging and making an inventory of stock on hand. Pamela also updates the centre's Facebook page, promoting the paintings and artists for exhibitions. Her sound technological experience makes her a key asset in the day-to-day running of the arts practice.

Pamela said that she would also like to move back to Tjuntjuntjara in the Spinifex Country to be closer to her own extended family. She often drives (with her children) the 600 kilometres to be with them, sometimes not returning for weeks or even months. This is usually because the car that took her there is not up for the return trip, or she had grabbed a lift with someone else who was going that way

³⁷ Personal communication 4th September 2015.

and then had to wait for another lift back. I learned also that one of her brothers³⁸ is a well-known Australian screen and theatre actor. She would like her own children to pursue further education like he did, and maybe become an actor or a teacher. I also learned that Pamela likes attending workshops and exhibitions related to her art or the Papulankutja Artists art centre. She has had a lot of opportunity to travel to larger cities and interstate and enjoys experiencing culturally different places. Pamela likes shopping and buying modish clothes. This isn't customary for many of the women in the Papulankutja community who wear long skirts, usually patterned and baggy, bright floral tops, a beanie if its cold and sometimes a sweater or cardigan in winter. Some wear shoes, some don't. As an outsider, I am always conscious of wearing culturally appropriate clothes—covered shoulders, longer dresses and nothing too tight.

However, although she appears very 'modern' in the contemporary Western sense, Pamela's Yarnangu worldview is pivotal to all other aspects of her life. Ngaanyatjarra tjukurpa and ceremonial ties to traditional and customary beliefs are significant and there have been many times that Pamela has divulged incidents or stories that make up her Ngaanyatjarra life that is so different to my own. One particular story made quite an impact—this was when Pamela related her encounter with Featherfoot. She had been walking home one evening and saw a small flame or fire ahead. In the dark, up against a wall was the silent mamu figure who often stalks Yarnangu and frightens local groups. Pamela saw Featherfoot when she was with her youngest son Isiah just a few nights ago. It was dark and the small flame that he holds indicates that it is actually Featherfoot. Pamela saw the flame, which disappeared as he fled. Pamela scooped up Isiah and ran home. Pamela said that there was no doubting it was Featherfoot and three-year-old Isiah

³⁸ A brother can be a biological brother, half-brother or cousin. Ngaanyatjarra do not differentiate between these, giving equal status to them all as they all grow up together with mothers sharing the caring of all of the children.

confirmed this. Featherfoot is a bad spirit believed to have supernatural powers and who kills people. Yarnangu call these spirits mamu. Featherfoot can never be followed or found because his feet are made of feathers so he leaves no tracks. Pamela's version of events was particularised and unnerving.

I can't recall ever seeing a painting of Featherfoot. He is elusive and not often spoken about. At Papulankutja Artists, paintings tend to have themes that relay favourable occasions and stories. By contrast, even after relating the scary events of the evening's siting, Pamela's paintings are bright and colourful renderings of Kungkarangkalpa (The Seven Sisters Story). Sometimes I watch Pamela (image 3.2) sitting on the floor painting with the other artists and admire the way she is able to straddle the two worlds in which she operates. Such is the nature of social relationships and transculturation: blurring the boundaries of contemporary art making practices and Yarnangu cultural life. Pamela is an asset to the contemporary arts practice, sharing cultural wisdom and knowledge and teaching others how to navigate Aboriginal and Western Worlds. ■

Chapter three

The business of making art



The contact zone is a space of transculturation, wherein members of subordinated or marginal groups selectively use materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture to invent unique new forms.

(Millner 2006a, p. 30)

Introduction

On a searing day in mid-summer 2016, with temperatures due to reach the mid forties, I stood in front of the newly erected art centre gallery building to take photographs. It's one of those unattractive, cost-effective, prefabricated iron structures that was transported to the site and assembled in a couple of days, meeting the needs of the art centre as a gallery space. The gallery is situated in front of the main art centre building and next to an old shipping container used for storing art materials. The building replaces the former gallery and storage room, a large donga-style structure that, in early October 2014, was burnt down by a grass fire. The fire destroyed all stock waiting to be sold, which included

paintings, artefacts, bush soap, weaving, woodwork and important works from artists who have since passed away. The loss of stock was estimated to be valued at over \$200,000. As I snapped my photographs I reflected on the previous 12 months and the collaborative efforts and myriad of interactions that had produced new challenges and changes within and between the living and nonliving elements that make up this place. I made my way inside the gallery and took photographs of vibrant, colourful canvas artworks hanging on the walls, surrounded by woven tjampi papas (dogs) and bowls (image 3.3, 3.4). Yarnangu paintings are bold, vivid, raw and above all charismatic. I recognise and associate with each artist's work and consider how it is simply not possible to separate the emplaced lives of Yarnangu from their contemporary art-making practices.

Jane, the Art Centre Manager, had told me that although the fire had caused immense damage and a financial loss, the artists were positive about the newly rebuilt gallery space and were eager to start painting again. A crowd funding campaign, together with donations and a grant, had successfully raised enough to rebuild. The artists and Papulankutja community produced a video to mark the circumstance and assist the appeal, and just about everyone in Papulankutja took part, singing, dancing and lamenting. Senior artist and language interpreter Maime Butler read her message through video:

Our art gallery was like our voice going out to the cities and overseas.
Help us start again so we can put our tjukurrpa in songs on canvas so
the world can know. (Papulankutja Artists 2014)

For many years, Papulankutja artists had been working in the Womens Centre prior to the establishment of Papulankutja Artists in 2001. Around this time, they moved around a bit, using the hall and the Women's Centre. The art centre/studio was finally built in 2009. During this period three managers

have overseen operations and art production has become a viable form of income, generating creative and social practice. During my five-year association with the artists and art centre, the manager, Jane Avery, and the Papulankutja artists were my main sources in tracing the development of current creative practices. I developed a close working relationship with the manager and artists, culminating in extensive field trips in 2015–16. This was part of an ethnographic approach in which I also met other residents, bureaucratic agents, community services employees and during which I participated in additional events connected with Yarnangu life.

Ostensibly, the art centre seems rooted in local concerns and Ngaanyatjarra culture. It is an Aboriginal owned organisation with a local Board of Directors operating within the Ngaanyatjarra Council, and managed by an appointed arts coordinator/manager who has entrepreneurial experience and connections to other art centres, peak advocacy and support agencies, and various community focused programs. The local community supported its planning stage, which received financial support from both Commonwealth and State government grants. Embodied arts practices including painting, carving and weaving, and the associated socially embedded customs of gathering materials, the practices of storytelling, hunting, ceremonial site visits, and attending and meeting as a group in the early stages of development were all essential to its overall development. However, as I pointed out in chapter one, the consumption of art is complex and is circumscribed within a transcultural terrain that sets in motion the flows. These flows intersect with production and are bound up with global processes. The centre is an example of how everyday embodied art practices are instigated locally but are situated within a broader international art world. This results in complex mediation roles between remote area artists and diverse marketplaces and shifting global spectrums. Transcultural experiences and collaborations ensue in an environment partly shaped by Yarnangu culture

and community, but significantly different from social practices and customs traditionally associated with Yarnangu body painting and sand drawing. Peak body advocate and scholar Tim Acker suggests that although 'the marketplace has multiplied and mutated and the choices for artist and consumer are now manifold, art centres still provide innovative art enterprise services in demanding conditions' (Acker 2008).

In chapter two I discussed an approach to researching art-making practices that put the emphasis on spatial relations and I suggested that new insights might unfold through research that focused on the continuous flow of shifting actions and practices in and around the art centre. My approach recognised that these processes and flows were ongoing and dynamic rather than static and were spatially and temporally contingent. In this chapter I focus on place and arts practices through an analysis of the practices, flows and movement, materialities and sensoriality of the Papulankutja Artists business processes, comprising the negotiations and operational engagements associated with the production of art. This chapter situates the administrative and economic components of art production. In contrast, chapter four draws on the multifaceted creative perspectives. The art centre is a complex of multiple agents, combining the commercial with the creative and cultural. In this chapter I argue that an experience of place yields useful insights and makes evident the intersections of Yarnangu ways of knowing, social and entrepreneurial processes and contemporary links with commercial and global flows.

Existing research into remote art centres

A growing field of scholars are interested in research investigating and proposing more detailed and accurate assessments of art production that supports community controlled art centres (Acker, Stefanoff & Woodhead 2013; Altman 2009; Carty 2012; Jorgensen 2013; Morphy 2011; Wright & Morphy

1999a). In the last 40 years over 100 community-controlled art centres have been established across remote Australia (Acker, Stefanoff & Woodhead 2013). In their recent analysis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island artists, Acker, Stefanoff and Woodhead point out that:

remote area art centres, operating at the intersection of very different world views, are enmeshed with the priorities of their communities; these relationships and activities are at the nucleus of the art centre model and its success. (Acker, Stefanoff & Woodhead 2013, p. 13)

Yarnangu social and creative practices reflect the relationships between people and community processes and are important for maintaining and enhancing social cohesion within a mediated working environment. Jon Altman, from the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, argues that a hybrid economic model incorporating both customary (traditional knowledge and practices) and market interaction are crucial elements of this model. Altman argues that Aboriginal economic decision-making is influenced by a mix of Western, individualistic and market-based norms on the one hand and Aboriginal, group and kin-based norms on the other (Altman 2011, p. 5). Both the parameters of social cohesion through arts practices and intersecting worldviews through market interaction inform this case study at Papulankutja Artists located within the everyday practices of Papulankutja art centre environment. However, my approach to arts practice and place adopts the theoretical concepts outlined in chapter two.

In this chapter I argue that Massey's formulation of space as 'the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories' (Massey 2005, p. 119) has the potential to inform this case study based at Papulankutja Artists. Putting Massey's theory in conversation with Altman's, I extend the theoretical discussion to explore how Altman's hybrid economic model might highlight Aboriginal economic

decision-making and how this might be understood in relation to wider global flows. I also examine the way we understand and interpret transcultural commercial activity by drawing on theories connected with the contact zone. To develop some of these ideas I consider the art centre as a space of cultural encounter and revival and draw attention to the crucial interaction of art practitioners and wider market forces that make up this junction between 'the local', 'the national' and 'the global'. The task of the chapter is therefore to locate art production in relation to the way that it constitutes contemporary social work spaces, drawing on Massey's conceptualisation of space as a 'constellation of processes' (Massey 2005, p. 141). The focus on relations between these spaces is where cultural expression and personal commercialism converge. To do this, and following Pink (2012), requires a framework for conceptualising the everyday human and material relationships and embodied knowing of everyday arts practice in the interrelations of place, and an understanding of how arts practice and art is implicated in the constitution of place.

Extending this analysis, I also outline some of the competing influences that have emerged around art production and that intersect with the continuing advances of modernity. According to Massey (2005) the negotiation of multiplicity in places pose the challenge of the relational politics of the spatial. Consistent with this, I draw attention to the constant negotiations between different competing events and influences. I link local struggles with broader global influences, expectations, individualities, and contested politics within and around the space of the art centre and Papulankutja community. These challenges and spaces require negotiation and I enquire into the competing influences of the local store, now a meeting place and social centre. Following Massey, I suggest that these 'temporary constellations of trajectories, these events which are places, require negotiation' (Massey 2005, p. 153). I also find it

useful to draw on Ash Amin's 'politics of public space'. Amin points out that in public places:

many impulses that constantly change the character of the space,
many actants [...] have to constantly jostle for position and influence.

(Amin 2008, pp. 10-1)

At Papulankutja, the local store, a form of public space and one that competes on multiple levels, might be considered this way. Amin calls such places 'situated surplus': spaces formed out of the entanglements of bodies in motion and environmental conditions regulated by the rhythms of invention, order and control, and generated by multiplicity (Amin 2008). Thus, in thinking through this place that is the art centre, I characterise it as a process or event that involves the coming together of entanglements that include both the competing influences (store, government agencies) together with Yarnangu arts practice, painting and weaving, social customary practices, workplace conventions. To describe it, I borrow from Amin 'the different temporalities of modernity, tradition, memory and transformation' (Amin 2008, p. 12).

Art centres are spread across the Central and Western Desert areas and are seen as key institutions in remote communities (Acker, Stefanoff & Woodhead 2013). They offer a unique example of how places might be constituted and lived in the context of both local situatedness and broader processes. The preservation of stories and cultural heritage is embedded in vibrant artworks that are intentionally designed to travel the world to art fairs, exhibitions and biennials. Few academic studies of the everyday practices of the art centre work environment have taken as their starting point the interconnectedness of local community and culture and the everyday practices that constitute it. There is, however, a broad literature on many aspects of Australian Aboriginal art which is inherently anthropological. Yet, I recognise in this study that the art centre

and the artists who work within it are locally and individually differentiated. In contrast to other studies, my enquiry at Papulankutja extends the theoretical framework to one that calls for a material relation to space, sensorially and socially, and invites a degree of self-reflexivity and Yarnangu worldviews.

With this in mind, I found Massey's formulations of space a useful theoretical underpinning for the art centre study with regard to conceptualisation of place. However, I was also interested to see how my account could be informed by analysis of the art centre as a contact zone. Here, the art centre can be seen as a space of transculturation, wherein members of the art fraternity work in a mitigated commercial environment and selectively use materials circulated to them by the dominant non-Aboriginal art world. The artists themselves are motivated by economic need and, more recently, by government strategies and welfare incentives to take part in some form of vocational program. Mutual customary understandings among artists intermingle with structural production methods. Together, with miscomprehension and incomprehension, and often in a random or haphazard way, both camps grapple to find a middle ground. This process emphasises 'how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other' (Pratt 2008, p. 7). Ash Amin explores more generally the need to develop an understanding of the relatively unconstrained circulation of multiple bodies and their 'throwntogetherness' in a shared urban physical space. The research focus then needs to be shifted to 'the entanglement between people and the material'. As Amin suggests, we need to examine:

from a particular spatial embodiment of surplus, the mingling of bodies, human and non-human in close physical proximity, regulated by the rhythms of invention, order and control generated by multiplicity. (Amin 2008, p. 11)

The latter part of this chapter offers a lens through which to examine the politics and practices of art production at Papulankutja by taking a closer look at the administration of the art centre as a 'bundle of trajectories' that includes a complex mix of histories, management, peak bodies and power. In doing so I communicate a clear understanding of the operations of Papulankutja Artists that combines a cultural-theoretical framework of place, and that generates a rich and multisensory perspective within a complex of often competing multiple agents. However, examining the art centre through the complex personal and transcultural relationships among the artists and workers is taken up in subsequent chapters, as an essential route to a closer analysis of the meanings within the art.

Understanding the art centre: a brief structural overview

In the past quarter century, a new generation of Australian Aboriginal artists began to exhibit their contemporary works, and a renewed Aboriginal aesthetic has emerged. As art centres spread across the country, Australian Indigenous artists have been taking up painting and developing new and innovative ways of expressing their culture and strengthening relationships between people, country and communities. In the desert areas of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands nine commercial art centres operate as independent, non-profit and transparent cooperatives. These engage approximately 600 artists. Art centres are community-based enterprises, owned and managed by Aboriginal people in their communities. They provide economic, social and cultural benefits and link remote area artists to the national and international art market. At Papulankutja, a community of around 160 people, 80 identify as artists and paint at the centre. The majority of these artists are women and mostly over 40 years of age, with the dedicated regular painters over 60 years of age. Art centres are unique Aboriginal enterprises, which have evolved to serve the specific needs of artists

who work in these contexts. The art centre is still the most effective model to support art in remote communities (Davidson 2009).

The model

The art centre developed as the preferred model for providing a workplace environment for Aboriginal art production and for establishing links between remote artists and urban audiences. The success of Papunya Tula Artists³⁹ served as a model for the formal economic activities of organised production and community-controlled institutions that characterise the contemporary remote arts sector (Acker, Stefanoff & Woodhead 2013). Many of these centres were set up in the 1980s to initiate and manage the flourishing commercial art industry and suppress the growing licentious deals that were brought about by unscrupulous carpetbaggers and dealers. More recently, a new wave of centres has formed, like Papulankutja Artists, which became incorporated in 2004. In her extensive study of art centres, Felicity Wright conducted an exhaustive survey and assessment, examining every aspect of their operations. She advocated the adoption of policies to improve conditions for both artists and art workers, and her review has functioned as a comprehensive template for remote art centre operations (Wright & Morphy 1999b). However, despite the report's many sound recommendations, 20 years on art centres are still under-

³⁹ The Papunya Tula Art Movement began in 1971, when a school teacher, Geoffrey Bardon, encouraged some of the men in the settlement to paint a blank school wall. The murals sparked tremendous interest in the community and soon many men started painting. In 1972 the artists successfully established their own artists' cooperative, which has inspired many other Aboriginal artists to initiate art cooperatives in remote locations across Australia. This became a watershed in the history of the Australian contemporary Aboriginal arts movement.

resourced and the staff over-worked, although modern computer and internet technology has resulted in more streamlined and sophisticated operations connecting remote locations with distant commercial regions. Most art centres are now managed through database systems such as SAM (Story, Art, Money) which administer cataloguing and documenting artwork and sales, generate certificates of authenticity, track consignments and manage financial transactions. The system makes it possible to quickly access a concise artist biography and photographs of both the artist and their artwork, which can be sent off to clients directly. This action alone transcends all previous management systems.

Development and government funding

The achievements of art centres are not confined to creative arts practices and commercial outcomes. Rather, they represent organisations that are at the intersection of government policies, the global and national art market, communities and artists. The support of the Indigenous art communities through government funding sustains an environment where art can be produced. In their report on art centre finances, Tim Acker and Alice Woodhead identified funding as coming from federal and territory or state sources. They noted that grant funding is now the main source of income for most art centres, with federal funding providing between 79% and 100% of the funds (2014). More recently, increases in funding make provision for wages to be paid to art workers, providing additional employment opportunities and benefits and ensuring that the art centres are creating additional new vocational roles (Acker & Woodhead 2014). Acker and Woodhead also noted that 'specific policy and government funding for art centres is, at least in part, for non-art outcomes, with the Commonwealth's Closing the Gap agenda highlighting art enterprise contributions to health, employment, training, safer communities, governance and economic participation' (Acker & Woodhead 2014). They cite

the Commonwealth's claim that 'art sales are the primary or only source of non-government income' (Commonwealth of Australia 2012).

A quarter of total government funding is provided to peak bodies and for industry development. Federal and state/territory governments evenly share peak-body funding, although there is significant variation in the levels of funding between state and territory agencies (Commonwealth of Australia 2012).

Yarnangu paid employment: a hybrid economy

At Papulankutja Artists, Pamela Hogan and Narelle Holland, both local artists, work five days each week at the art centre. They are paid for the number of hours they attend the centre. They fill in time sheets at the end of each week. Their duties are multifaceted and include opening and/or closing the art centre, photographing artworks, database entry, mixing paints and stretching canvases, cleaning and occasionally travelling to distant venues to exhibit and sell art or attend vocational courses. During our fieldwork discussions, both Pamela and Narelle expressed a positive attitude towards their employment, both agreeing that it made a difference towards the quality of family life. Pamela has five children living at home and she acknowledged that the extra cash put more, and better, food on the table. Narelle says that she enjoys helping out financially at home and with the upbringing of her grandchildren, often travelling to distant art exhibitions in order to shop at one of the large commercial stores.

Many of the artists and casual paid employees are working in a modified model of economic practice that Jon Altman terms a 'hybrid economy', in which there is some flexibility around the pursuit of customary non-monetised activities (business, hunting, gathering) with the conventional more rigid market economy. Pertinent to Altman's hybrid economy's *way of doing* is the delineation of the extensive (and often intertwined) social, cultural, economic

and ecological benefits supported by customary sector engagement (Russell 2011, pp. 2, my italics). I argue that the art centre can be recognised as a hybrid character institution that has both commercial and cultural facets. Both Pamela and Narelle and the other artists experience the complex and competing demands of combining cultural and commercial engagement, successfully occupying both roles.

The spaces of transcultural exchange

Art production at Papulankutja Artists emerges as an example of the complex intersections and intensity of relations that are constituted and produced by its everyday art practices, socialities and human–non-human interrelations. The art centre needs to be understood ‘as equally constituted through global flows, local politics and more’ (Pink 2012, p. 91). In Massey’s (2005) terms, these continuous processes and flows are a negotiation of ‘multiplicities’ in places and pose a challenge. Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of *multiplicity*; that is, space ‘as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting *heterogeneity*’ (Massey 2005, p. 9). In the next section I outline this ‘throwntogetherness’ of place through the theoretical concept of a contact zone. This concept reflects and intersects with a relational approach to the study and with Massey’s idea of the multiplicity of place as sense of place (images 3.5 and 3.6).

Through the lens of the contact zone

In considering the details of processes through which places are constituted in relation to specific practices and socialities, I turn to the theoretical work of scholar Mary Louise Pratt (Pratt 2008), who offers the useful concept of ‘contact zones’. Pratt defines contact zones as a way to describe ‘copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power’ (Pratt 2008, p. 7). Pratt argues:

While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. (Pratt 2008, p. 6)

Specifically, at Papulankutja Artists, Aboriginal ways of knowing are constituted in a transcultural environment. As members of art centres the artists are often in close collaboration with non-Aboriginal advisors and intermediaries in the art market. Moreover, my own presence as researcher contributes also, in a small way, to alter spaces and to participate in their continuing production (Massey 2005). I was therefore enmeshed in place and part of the 'bundle of trajectories' creating a link in the shared and changed experiences. Both the artists as participants and myself as researcher changed through our experiences and the web of interrelationships that make up the art centre space.

As an example, both Angiliya and I agreed that snacking on maku (a delicacy for her) is an acquired taste, and yet, the practice of digging deep into the roots of acacia shrubs to prise them out, although hard work, was an enjoyable activity for us both. In this shared space we both changed, each of us developing a greater appreciation of one another's personal and cultural customs. This is what makes places specific, especially this gathering of diverse entities, 'here and now'. As Massey puts it, 'This is the event of place' (Massey 2005, p. 140). In this mediated environment the commitments to the production of art by artists and art coordinators are mutual and reciprocal. The art centre offers valuable insights into the artists' lives and their communities while also facilitating professional/vocational development opportunities. Art centres also offer an interface between an 'inside' and an 'outside' world. Just *being* at the art centre each day opens up a new world for many Yarnangu artists. Some artists like Anawari and Jennifer are always eager to speculate (gossip) to one another

about whether or not a visitor to the art centre might buy a painting. An outsider stimulates tremendous amounts of Yarnangu chatter.

As the artists sit together painting there is also a fair degree of 'in house' speculation about possible outcomes. However, on one occasion, a visiting doctor was keen to meet the artist who had painted the artwork he had just purchased, and hear the story and knowledge related to the painting. He was kind and polite and asked Anawari if she could explain particular markings on the painting and tell him a little more about it. Although happy to do this, it became a difficult task for Anawari. Like many of the artists she is shy, especially when talking to strangers. Most of the artists find it awkward communicating and explaining their art to an outsider. The doctor was very respectful, understood the circumstance, smiled and thanked her sincerely for her efforts. In this instance the art centre and its environment created a buffer, an interface that mediated the social, transcultural interactions within its 'zone'. Here, the process of translation manifests as cultural collaboration, and depends on both sides acknowledging the other's identity. This transcultural contact zone offered, not a binary of two opposites, but transcultural influence already supported within both groups. The collaborative nature of engagement that has developed between artists and their outsider visitors personifies the subtleties and sensitivities still associated with transcultural commercial communications. Moreover, interviews that I conducted with artists indicated they had a straightforward understanding of the art market rather than a comprehension of its many layers. For example, when visitors arrived at the art centre in September 2015, Pamela or Jennifer greeted them and showed them the paintings that their own families had painted. They would briefly explain the meaning (or story) associated with the painting and then find Jane or myself to develop proceedings.

In recent years artistic innovation and strategic commercialism has led to the further development of this art production interface. The broad umbrella of the collective Australian Aboriginal art market (a broadening of the contact zone) has empowered geographically remote artists in their isolated and sheltered environments. The notion of contact zone is useful here as a term to rethink the art centre's role in relation to Ngaanyatjarra art production. In her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt (1992) defines the contact zone as:

the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict. (Pratt 2008, p. 6)

Pratt borrows the term 'contact' from linguistics, where the term refers to contact or creole languages that develop among groups of speakers of different native languages. In 1997 Anthropologist James Clifford further developed Pratt's scholarship on the subject of contact zones as a space of colonial encounters in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Clifford 1997). He proposed including museums and other sites of cultural performance as contact zones, where different cultures come into contact and collaborate in an attempt to create an environment as spaces of exchange, negotiation, understanding and communication.

Space of pivotal encounters and multiplicity: exchange and negotiation

Building on Clifford's ideas, I argue that art centres act as small-scale cultural museums, operating within the source locality of its artefacts and ethnic collections. They can thus be regarded as contact zones. In a small room, on the top shelf, at Papulankutja Artists there is a remarkable collection of important Yarnangu artefacts and art—shields, weapons, boomerangs and more; many of

which were stored at the art centre for safe keeping. Previous administrators have carefully labelled each piece in order to preserve the collection (images 3.7, 3.8). Clifford explored the characteristics and limits of museums as contact zones in the globalised world, and focused on the museum's role in transcultural discourse in the 20th century. Clifford also prompted a move beyond the focus on museological production to the organising structures and productions, which I suggest might be the same as those functioning at Papulankutja Artists. This implies reconceptualising the museum's role in relation to other cultures. The aim is to challenge the power relations inherent in the long-established museum model, often based on the legacy of imperialist appropriation. To this end, Clifford proposed that the museum could become a space of pivotal encounters, where communities could challenge and revise imperialist narratives of artefacts and objects (Clifford 1997).

Clifford's rendering of the relationship between museum space and place offers a way of understanding how 'museums as contact zones' can be brought into dialogue with communities, in the same way that the art centre is negotiating its own collection. Following Pratt, the concept of contact zone also relates to interactions across geographical, social and cultural borders (Clifford 1997). In the same way that museums now foster transcultural collaborations in terms of collections, research, exhibitions and programs, I contend that the art centre at Papulankutja acts within a corresponding environment, even though distant from urban centres. Here, the emphasis is on negotiable liaison and collaboration, where two-way learning occurs across diverse cultural, creative and commercial interfaces. Australian art historian and scholar Jacqueline Millner similarly acknowledges the creative arts arena as an example of Pratt and Clifford's contact zone and its sense of complexity, stating that:

to conceive of the artwork or exhibition as a contact zone heightens the potential for the transformation of viewer into active participant, not only in the interpretation of meaning but also in the generation of new knowledges. The corollary of this is the potential transformation of the artist into cultural agent able to generate new relationships, in particular between the audience and the content of his/her work.

(Millner 2006b, p. 7)

A space of transculturation

Millner argues that:

the contact zone is a space of transculturation, wherein members of subordinated or marginal groups selectively use materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture to invent unique new forms.

(Millner 2006a, p. 30).

Using this definition as a basis for understanding the contact zone means that the art centre, the artists, the art industry, the art works, and all connected exhibitions and art fairs constitute the broader contact zone. The contact zone is essentially an interactive and intercultural environment that harbours potential changes in cultural identity, perspectives and consumption.

In his scholarly presentation of anomalous Australian Indigenous artefacts, Philip Jones's (2007) *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers* draws on contemporary curatorial ideas. Jones suggests that the colonial 'frontier is not a hard line separating cultures but a zone, which may unify and can also create new forms of engagement, new forms of exploitation'. As curator at the Museum of South Australia, he argues that art and artefacts function as crucial symbolic as well as material objects. They are 'a medium along which important ideas passed, from colonised to coloniser and back again' (Jones 2011). Through descriptive object biographies, and in line with Massey,

Jones reminds us that each artefact signifies the special relationship between material objects and human communications in the contemporary world. He too draws on the work of Pratt, who proposed that these frontiers are not only 'contact zones,' but are also zones of communication (Pratt 2008). Jones suggests that the idea of one culture trying to see into, or 'past the other' accentuates the need for a biographical focus on objects and art itself, as a mechanism for exchange and transcultural communication. Thus, these zones are also meeting places of ideas and traditions.

The storeroom at Papulankutja recalls the biographical focus that Jones emphasises. It calls out for an accent on objects that are in the process of exchange. The storeroom can thus be seen as a communication zone, where we can focus on both sides of the exchange process. Therefore, the art centre offers an alternative, contemporary process of exchange where space is always 'under construction' and never finished, always in the process of being made (Massey 2005, p. 9). As such Papulankutja Artists offers us an example of how place might be constituted through interactions and communications within contact zones.

Advances of modernity: a global influence

The approach I have developed in this chapter understands the experience of the art centre in terms of the 'material, sensory and affective qualities' (Pink 2012) of processes and entanglements of humans, art-making practices, the social and cultural, and more, through which it is made. However, these experiential aspects of art production are also constituted in relation to discourses, economies, agencies and power. The art centre's development has been contingent on management, financial and funding sources and the broader institutions of the local and international art market and the entanglement through which these are intensified or comingled. For example, as I will

examine in vignette 3b (money story), the administration and the community have quite different understandings about money. On the one hand, the art centre is structured financially around an art market, funded by government grants and private donations and is dependent upon competitive and financially sound accounting principles as set out by the art centre manager. On the other hand, local Yarnangu supplement their welfare payments with monies earned through creative processes at the art centre. At the same time, artists face the competing global influence of the store, through which they must negotiate and budget their regular day-to-day purchasing and payments.

If the art centre is theorised as a place, it can be understood as the intensified entanglement of everyday arts practices. Within these entangled processes—through which the art centre is constituted as a place—are the concealed local and global influences such as flows of capital, political processes and ideologies and the Aboriginal art market. In what follows I first focus on the practices at the art centre relating to money, its materiality and the ways it is known, understood and situated for the artists. I then examine the global flows and intensities that are unavoidably entangled with money.

Understanding local and global flows

Art production is the only sustainable external commercial business in Papulankutja other than the store. As Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai 1996) has argued in his theories of globalisation, the idea of deterritorialisation is applied to flows of people, ideas, knowledge, and images, affecting consumerism and everyday place-making practices, transcending specific territorial boundaries. According to Appadurai (1996) the deterritorialisation of different aspects of social life and identity transforms the reproduction of culture.

This thesis must recognise the competing influences of the community store. In doing so I extend the theoretical discussion to explore how Papulankutja

might be understood in relation to global flows. The store will be examined as an example of how place and practice shift over time by analysing how the store has been transformed through the activities of globalised and local commercialism and has become the undivided central hub of Papulankutja (replacing the art centre). When it is open, the store is a place where the cultural and the global grapple. The interconnections include hanging out, either for money/cigarettes/minkle (humbugging), for the social interaction (just to be there), purchase food and merchandise, or, just to 'spend'. See images 3.9 and 3.10.

In our globalised world, people's imaginations are no longer confined by their local, cultural or national territorial boundaries. The Papulankutja store is a transforming space that reflects changes in all aspects of social and cultural life. In recent decades, the imagination or imagined lives of individuals in this small remote community have become more complex, diverse and more blurred, yielding easily to external pressures (Appadurai 1996). The store, another zone of contact, and one very closely related to the realities of art centre life, is a means of access to the global cultural flows and commodities so recently foreign to the region. This access raises many issues and problems to do with the connections between cultural flows and commodity flows, and demonstrates how all economies, including those of both the store and art centre, are a constant flow of material objects that enter and leave specific exchange spheres (Appadurai 1999).

The 'store' beckons — and competes unpretentiously

'The odds of going to the store for a loaf of bread and coming out with only a loaf of bread are three billion to one.' (Erma Bombeck, cited in Hunt 2015)

It is useful to explore this business enterprise through the lens of Arjun Appadurai's (1996) work on global cultural flows. Appadurai writes about the influences and the unprecedented speed of economic and social change (Appadurai 1996, p. 32). I find it constructive to relate his work to the changes occurring now in areas like the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Globalisation is manifest in 'a complex, overlapping, and disjunctive order', not a linear process (Appadurai 1996). It is characterised by fundamental disjunctures between global flows in the fields of economy, culture, technologies and politics (Appadurai 1999). Until recent decades, the cultural transactions between different social groups had always been restricted by the facts of geography and ecology (Appadurai 1996, p. 27). In the modern world, and relatively quickly in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, this access has altered social life and identity, transforming the reproduction of culture. The two-way impact between global and local forces on art production and everyday life at Papulankutja is examined in the following accounts of the local store.

The 'store' in Papulankutja offers to the community an array of consumer items, 'deterritorialising' as Appadurai suggests, and unsettling the status quo. Merchandise introduced via the shop competes with the customary values within the cultural realms of Yarnangu. 'Popular' items (videos, fast food, toys and technology) are displayed in prominent, eye-catching ways that emphasise the cultural values of dominant urban society. As another example, some of the foodstuffs and consumables available for sale include 'boutique' cheeses, fine pickled delicacies and condiments—all expensive and possibly suitable for (the limited number of) people on higher incomes working in the region. There is an emphasis on sweet and fast food, although I have been reliably informed that the price of fresh fruit and vegetables is kept low. In some ways the storeowner determines the diet of a community. Videos are sold as 'throw in the shopping trolley' items at three and four times urban prices. Mobile phone cards and

cigarettes are the best-sellers (expensive, and similarly overpriced) and increase the checkout bill disproportionately. At the checkout, banking cards are often declined because the amount purchased far outweighs the capacity to spend. The video, phone card and cigarettes are unlikely to be the products returned to the shelves in order to reduce the purchase total. At this point, pressure is placed on anyone in the vicinity to help with the bill (researcher included). Moreover, the pressure to spend is inordinate and invariably spills over into the art centre domain, which is seen by Yarnangu as another 'provider' with access to the distribution of money.

Local and global interconnections are complicated

As I noted above, the Papulankutja store operates through a specific set of discourses and global interconnections that need to be considered when conceptualising the everyday human and material relationships that affect art production and culture. A critical interrogation of values, practices and ideologies and how the processes of 'local' and 'global' flows become co-implicated sets up complexities and apparent contradictions that affect the artists and their commercial production of art.

Both the store and art centre sustain these flows of global communication, although the mixed messages and values complicate a sound understanding of economic systems. On the one hand, we can evaluate how the cultural flows affect the commodity value of the shop items and their transforming affect (transculturation) on consumer and cultural identity. On the other hand, at the heart of Appadurai 's argument is the idea that art production/commodities are 'things in a certain situation' (Appadurai 1986, p. 13). A commodity situation is 'the situation in which (an object's) exchangeability for some other thing is a socially relevant feature' (1986, p. 7). In sum, the blurring and complexities of producing esteemed fine art that embodies culture and identity values is in

stark contrast to the throwaway commodification of 'things' at the Papulankutja store. This deterritorialisation of different aspects of social life and identity transforms the reproduction of culture (Appadurai 1996) and changes the context through which parallel commercial identities—the store and the art centre—are understood.

Money to shop: art centres are both producers and consumers

I have demonstrated some of the complexities through which both globalisation and capitalist global flows are implicated in the everyday practices and realities through which Yarnangu negotiate both the store and their creative commercial vocation. Another example of the 'allurement' is the *necessity* to 'shop'.

Yarnangu (mis)management of power cards⁴⁰ means that they are 'used up' quickly, making refrigeration unviable. Thus, shopping is done on a daily basis and money runs out quickly. The high cost of all commodities is due to the enormous distances fresh food and consumables need to travel. The delivery truck arrives on alternate weeks (fresh fruit and vegetables and frozen foods one week; packaged foods the other) and takes two days to travel non-stop from Perth. My field visit to the community over the Christmas/New Year period 2015–16 was particularly stressful. The store was well stocked with food

⁴⁰ Electricity supply arrangements in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are enacted by the use of pre-purchased power cards where electricity is supplied using card-operated pre-payment meters. Pre-payment meters were originally introduced into communities with agreement from the local councils and electricity suppliers. Significant issues affecting the accessibility and affordability of electricity for households in remote communities include (among others) households being unable to afford credit, resulting in people going without electricity frequently and/or for long periods of time.

and consumables. However, no one in the community had any money and the next welfare payment was two weeks away. I found draining the experience of constant humbugging for cash, complaints of starving and hungry children, daily visits to art centre for 'money-story' and continual personal approaches to me to buy something that had been crafted. During this same period there were three store and house break-ins in one week, including at my own house and at that of a person whose house I was attending each day to feed animals whilst the owner was on holiday.

The affective dimensions of the active art centre are contingent on these entangled flows. It is the first 'port of call' for breakfast, afternoon tea and/or an advance on earnings. Without clear understandings of money management, artists wishfully envisage anticipated painting sales, and will often ask for an advance on earnings. This is especially the case around leaner times (after Christmas, New Year) and more artists attend the art centre to paint. The reasoning is twofold: to stay cool in the air conditioning, and secondly, in the hope that there may be some instant pecuniary gratification. Subsequently, artists will continue to phone or visit the centre daily for an update on their painting's marketing progress through the SAM (Story, Art, Money), the computing database. SAM is a web-based system linking all art centres. It records sales and keeps records of all transactions and payments. Artists may check in on the progress of their work/sales by asking for updates from the system. However, this has its disadvantages for the art centre manager, who has to spend considerable time checking and updating profiles. The manager can find herself in an unenviable position, confronted by a parent who has no food for the children and put under pressure to help out financially. Art coordinators learn to be fair, consistent and diplomatic. They also need to be able to assess whether or not the call for aid is genuine or not. My experience indicates that, generally, when the arts manager is new, the requests for assistance are

innumerable. One often finds out later that the money was spent on minkle weed, cigarettes, gambling and lost playing cards, or was given away to another family member.

The examples discussed here suggest it may be useful to build on the themes that analyse the social processes related to 'money story', which dominates existing policy at the Papulankutja art centre. Understood as a process of translation the store defines and redefines the relationships between Yarnangu and negotiations involving money. Following, I use a vignette to posit commercial circumstances and practices that make up the entangled, embedded money story paradigm.

Vignette 3b

Money story

It is time space and money which make the world go round.

(Massey 1991, p. 24)

One of my first encounters with the pervasiveness of the money-story exchange, and the social relations connected to it occurred on my first day at work at the art centre. I was initially overwhelmed by the universal and tenacious position adopted by many of the artists, and the chaos it brought about. This caused me to reflect on the idea that space entails the unexpected—that sometimes 'happenstance' of juxtapositions that creates an element of chaos (Massey 2005).

Literature on money and financial management in Aboriginal Australia is scarce and there are only a few studies that describe how Aboriginal communities understand, want to use, or manage money. Exploring the dynamics of income and expenditure and attitudes to money, and interpreting this through a Western cultural framework

requires a different set of values and meanings (Senior, Perkins & Bern 2002). However, with the art centre the only income-generating community enterprise at Papulankutja, it is worthwhile briefly examining money management within the centre and the interconnected artist community. Although a comprehensive study is beyond the extent of this research, cultural identity with relation to financial literacy needs to be addressed in order to fully understand the complex impact of combining culturally meaningful work with money. My study suggests that the current system of social obligation within families and the community, combined with the developed strategies of rules around art payments, creates a complex and characteristic pattern of income composition that varies significantly from that in non-Aboriginal communities.

The lack of financial services and the information needed to manage financial affairs in remote communities has resulted in poor financial literacy (Demosthenous et al. 2006b). Guidance in financial affairs is often not sought or easily available. The very limited opportunities for mainstream employment in the community lead to pressure being exerted on family members to help out whenever money is available. My earliest observations revealed a significant pecuniary theme that contributed to the day-to-day interactions between community members, myself as researcher and the art centre manager. The money-story discourse is negotiated at every opportunity, to the point that it becomes repetitious and mechanical.

Moreover, the conditions that set in motion debate about payments and money pivot around the family and its responsibility to other members. In earlier qualitative research Basil Samson examined how Aboriginal cultural values of relatedness, sharing, kinship obligations and equality influence the way that money is managed in remote Australia (Samson 1980). Furthermore, Samson's studies describe how money circulating in Darwin's fringe camps is not a generalised medium of exchange with a fixed monetary value—its value is a socially calculated variable (Samson 1988). In a study of the Ngukurr Aboriginal people of the South East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, Senior, Perkins and Bern found that 'the bonds of kinship' necessitate an obligation to share (Senior, Perkins & Bern 2002, p.

46). Their assessment was that social obligation to kin and community influenced money and money management. They also found that cultural identity influenced financial literacy and shaped money and money management experiences (2002). These studies are useful in understanding the money-story paradigm at Papulankutja, where people's experience of money and social obligation to kin and community influence the management of the money earned from art sales. As a result, an important aspect of cultural identity at Papulankutja is a person's obligation to kin, and research needs to recognise the community's influences on money management practices.

Sharing

The ethic of sharing and the expectation that people will share their assets if asked is well documented for remote Aboriginal communities (Altman 1987; Godinho & Russell 2013; Musharbash 2008; Myers 1989). Myers' significant research in this domain draws attention to the binding relationships between relatives and community that may result in pressure on those who are better off. Myers suggests that kinship and shared identity requires that one who has something should share with the less fortunate (Myers 1986). However, new, contemporary intergenerational pressures are confounding, if not exacerbating, these family associations, resulting in anguish and disharmony. Younger family members today are distanced from the historical ties to their parent's past cultural norms, and are often addicted to recently introduced harmful substances. They visit the art centre demanding more money from their elderly artist relatives. As a consequence, the social status quo is altered and cultural ties to the past are uncertain. The conflicting pressures of problematic contemporary Western influences, including drugs and gambling, affect community identity and financial outcomes. Personal communications and discussions with several senior artists suggested to me that some of the artists fear their authority as elders in the community is no longer assured, and that their considerable symbolic weight as councillors and cultural mentors is slipping away. On one occasion, I watched as, after a lengthy period of verbal abuse and harassment from her grandson, an elderly artist unwillingly took

money from under her clothing. Visibly piqued by his abhorrent behaviour, the artist adopted a considered act of resistance: rather than passing the money directly to her grandson, she carefully placed the note under her foot and then kicked it angrily to him. In another form of resistance, senior artists are 'banking' or saving their artwork sales payments in personal accounts held in trust by the art centre, in an effort to reduce the pressure from family members. In this way they need only to access small amounts when necessary and resist having to carry large sums of cash or a card around. This reduces the incentive for family members to impose pressure on an artist who has just been paid.

My research suggests there is a need for culturally appropriate and inclusive methods for Yarnangu to understand financial concepts and money. Senior artists are now 'banking' by sheer necessity money that was previously prioritised for sharing, rather than for saving. Artists feel that this has been imposed on them and comes from outside their culture. It is a concept that disconnects them from their traditional knowledge systems and law. 'Western' financial systems, financial terminology, and telling the 'money story' can be directly opposed to Yarnangu understandings. As a recent study by Godinho and Russell (2013) demonstrates, an understanding of 'Indigenous money' influences participants' financial capability. Godinho and Russell found that traditional Aboriginal knowledge systems (including norms of exchange and trade) did not have any place for money, which was introduced relatively recently in the late 1960s to the communities they studied. They also noted that the elders consistently said they did not fully understand the 'money story', which compromised their ability to influence the younger generation's use of money, and caused 'shame'. The study's findings on the money story parallel those that I observed at Papulankutja. This reinforces the need to understand the Papulankutja community's financial capabilities in order to understand how Yarnangu themselves view money and its meaning within their traditional culture. The Yarnangu money story coexists with other stories. Every story has its own trajectory and is part of a complex relationship, understood through a space of multiplicity. Thus, Massey states:

The imagination of globalisation as a historical queue does not recognise the simultaneous coexistence of other histories with characteristics that are distinct (which does not imply unconnected) and futures which potentially may be so too. (Massey 2005, p. 11)

Exploring the Aboriginal economy: money is an 'event'

Sometimes I just watch as I wait to pay for my groceries at the store. One time I witnessed senior artist Anawari, along with her middle-aged daughter Marcia, visit the shop together several times. The store manager said that they had been in to purchase items seven times that day. The purchases were unplanned impulse acquisitions. Undoubtedly they had recently secured some cash. That was Wednesday. On Thursday they were both at the art centre humbugging and asking me about the money story. Both wanted an advance on their painting money. That's how it is.

These observations linked to the money story are widespread throughout the community, and personal conversations with the artists reveal the delicate balancing act that art centre managers maintain in identifying and connecting with the artists' sensibilities, their families and the political realities and demands of mixing culturally meaningful work with money. The painting culture at Papulankutja had initially developed to demonstrate creativity and confidence and supplement incomes through an activity linked to their own values and sense of self. This has been undermined by the comparatively damaging effects of capitalism on cultures not built on a monetised economy (Myers 2002). Here it is useful again to think about ideas related to hybrid economies (Altman 2009; Altman 1987; Altman 2001). A hybrid economy is premised on the notion that customary non-market cultural activity is undertaken accompanied with some form of private or public paid employment. Hybrid are economies based on regionally specific industries/activities (such as art production), where the activities are sensitively appropriate. These economies are contemporary and distinctly Aboriginal, based on a series of coexistences or articulations between all sectors. The system is flexible whilst at the same time improving the community's economic status. As Austin-Broos points out,

however, community based development groups, including Altman's hybrid economy, generally also need to engage to some extent with labour market strategies (Austin-Broos 2011).

Historical shifts

Exploring an Aboriginal economy and the concept of managing it dates back to the early days of colonisation and commodities of exchange and value (Banks & Morphy 1997; Myers 1986; Rowse 2002). Commodities, as objects of economic value, have become tangled up in debates about the rudimentary and modern rationing systems that were initiated in the early establishment of remote Aboriginal communities. Current practices are underpinned by historical legacies and a profound period of change due to accelerated modernity (Kral 2012a). In his assessment of the historical accounts of the Australian government's system of implementing its assimilation policy, Tim Rowse (2002) contends that the rationing regimes of flour, white sugar, food and tobacco were linked to planned reforms to convert Aboriginal Australians to colonial ideologies.⁴¹ His critical assessment of the culture of colonisers, specific to most parts of Australia, draws on notions of behaviour management. Rowse makes comparisons with the Australian government, who extended rationing as a social technology administered through missions up until as recently as the 1960s (Rowse 2002). This interventional measure consciously and coercively determined future transcultural power relations and profoundly impacted on Aboriginal culture. Rationing was the material basis for a

⁴¹ In the early years of settlement, the Australian government regularly gave out items of food and clothing to the Aboriginal people as demonstrations of good faith, rewards for good conduct and inducements to adopt European ways. These rations were regarded as a form of compensation, replacing the subsistence that European occupation was progressively denying the Aborigines and, theoretically, removing the temptation for them to attack European stock and property. In remote regions flour, tea and sugar were the staple items rationed.

variety of colonial ventures into Central Australia and the precursor to the current system of welfare instalments that were introduced after the missions closed.⁴² Many Papulankutja artists grew up in the Warburton Mission and remember these periods of rationing.

These initial inducements, exacerbated by changing government welfare policies, the lack of employment opportunities, and the dramatic transition from a nomadic to a settled life caused the Ngaanyatjarra to become accustomed to a sedentary life and dependent on a European lifestyle. Managed consumption, including dogging, the sale of artefacts and cattle work, followed this period with the various economic enterprises transacted with the Aboriginal communities, each kind leaving its own mark (Rowse 2002). This legacy links to the problems of economic and financial management in communities like Papulankutja and is compounded by remoteness and the absence of direct interaction. As a result, Australian Aboriginal experiences of money and money management have been linked to these historical models of dependency. Senior et al reviewed some of the literature relevant to the Aboriginal experience of money from the pre-mission days, through the colonial years to the present time and found that people's experience of history influenced their view of money and money management (Senior, Perkins & Bern 2002). Historical influences continue to overshadow the present, and affect Yarnangu attitudes and behaviour towards money. The history of not having had the opportunity to manage their own money has contributed to poor money management practices (Demosthenous et al. 2006a).

Low incomes and a cultural obligation to share all resources and money in large and often overcrowded houses can and does strain relationships. Individuals typically learn financial skills from their immediate circle of family and friends, and an inter-

⁴² The practice of distributing rations came to an end in the early 1960s, when Aboriginal people became eligible to receive the same government unemployment (welfare) benefits as other members of the Australian community.

generational lack of financial experience severely compromises sound financial money management (Demosthenous et al. 2006a).

In summary, money management practices at Papulankutja are consistent with research findings by Demosthenous et al (2006a), who found that cultural identity influenced Aboriginal Australians' ability to understand how money works in the world and shaped their money and money management experiences. For the most part, art centre earnings have made a difference to overall spending in the community and have strengthened the capacity of families to access funds for food and family. Consequently, the experience of money management that is relational and globalised, yet shaped by Ngaanyatjarran historical and cultural relationships (family and community) influences the contemporary money story at Papulankutja. The money story is culturally distinctive and underpins Yarnangu perceptions of money management, influencing many aspects of daily financial decision-making.

Economies and power: art centre management

This book is not simply about inequality and difference but also the politics and policies that these issues have produced. (Austin-Broos 2011, p. xix)

‘Yes. You get things out of this job that you wouldn’t get anywhere else in the world. Really. [...] None of us will ever regret it.’ (Emilia Galatis, interview 8th May 2015)

Earlier parts of this chapter have provided the background for understanding the extent of art production through local and global flows and has drawn attention to the crucial interaction of art practitioners and wider market forces. This global–local nexus is crucial for commercial art production and its analysis enables us to understand how local practices and configurations of place are implicated in wider processes of change. This latter part of the chapter focuses on the intersections of complex sets of power relations that frame the experienced realities of management and art production. Thus, the relational complexity of the place expands where intersecting groups, on a range of scales, make up a set of relations between multiple entities.

Peak bodies

Rather than thinking of the art centre as bounded (like a locality), I employ Massey’s suggestion that places are not bound but are always *under construction* (Massey 2005, p. 130). Massey argues that space, ‘is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed’ (Massey 2005, p. 9). In the context of Papulankutja Artists, we can see art production as comprised of networks. These networks function like peak bodies: they operate in parallel with and become part of place, attending to the new processes being made (exhibitions, fairs, book launches) and balancing production and practices. Desert is the peak body associated with Central and Western Desert regions of Australia. It

collaborates with and assists art centres with their distribution of art and sales by providing opportunities to market and promote products. Desart, based in Alice Springs, is the non-profit peak industry body associated with over 40 Central Australian Aboriginal art centres. Its members represent approximately 3000 artists, from 16 distinct language groups, spread across the Central Desert region of Australia. The organisation provides a range of support services and acts as a united voice for art centres while delivering programs supporting the maintenance and governance of best business practice. Desart advocates that the organisation is ‘committed to supporting Aboriginal art centres, which provide autonomy, sustained growth and stability for Central Australian Aboriginal communities’ (Desart 2014).

Industry Standards

In 1999 in an effort to assess art industry standards and accountability (particularly in relation to art centres), Felicity Wright and Frances Morphy produced *The Art and Craft Centre Story*. This extensive study collected all the fundamental information about art centres, their activities, staffing, role in their communities and their relationships with commercial and non-commercial sectors of the Aboriginal arts industry (Wright & Morphy 1999a). Thirty-nine government supported community art centres in remote Australia were surveyed in order to evaluate their performance. Desart initially proposed the study, which ultimately became the summary and model of industry standards that all art centres could follow. The study also raised the consciousness of art centre governing bodies and staff (Wright & Morphy 1999b). The outcome of the study is, today, still the structure and basic framework that makes up what is commonly known as the art centre model. I contend that this study represents a watershed, a critical juncture in the articulation of Aboriginal art

production that has resulted in unification and consolidation of the Australian Aboriginal Art industry network.⁴³

Peak bodies also act as regional facilitators and have successfully achieved recognition by reducing the workloads of art centre staff by combining some of the key marketing strategies. I suggest that their input reduces the limitations in creative output by artists by streamlining and coordinating the regional Aboriginal art network. In the Central and Western Desert region *Desart* is the peak organisation that coordinates advertising, exhibitions and promotions, employment opportunities and vocational workshops. Like *ANKARR* (Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists) in the north of the country, *Desart* supports and delivers programs as a united voice, and acts as a conduit for broad engagement through arts industry and government.

The art centre manager

My ethnographic study is situated spatially and temporally and invites collaboration with both the artists and art centre manager in a contact zone grappling with complex and contrasting value systems. The art centre employees, managers and artists have allowed me to share stories about life and art in the place of art production. I present my analysis in relation to these stories—processes of transcultural mediation that occur during transcultural

⁴³ It should also be noted that some artists independently and successfully sell their art directly through dealers and galleries. These arrangements are generally made with highly successful artists who make their own decision to work directly with private, commercial operators. As there are no artists at Papulankutja with these contractual arrangements, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider these particular implications with regard to assessment and commercial outcomes.

encounters that incorporate both language translations and mixed dialogue. Working at the art centre, I found it impossible to separate the artists' personal daily lives from the activities the broader Papulankutja community and the place-events that occur in and around Papulankutja. The art centre is often chaotic and noisy. Aliveness is in the extreme and 'in the moment', and can result in some forms of physical force. Thus, in her doctoral thesis on the work of arts coordinators in the far north of Queensland, Coral Neave writes that:

For arts coordinators there will be times that friction and possibly resistance to the demands of life in a community could see them fail, but they are expected to overcome the shortcomings, poor living conditions, poor pay and constant demands of the artists, arts workers, executive board and the community citizens to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (Neave 2013, p. 29)

Neave's analysis summarises difficulties confronted by art centre managers. In a study to determine the employment motivations of art centre managers, Seet, Jones, Acker and Whittle (2015) found that shocks, in the form of threatening and frightening situations, contributed to high staff turnover. The job entails stoicism, resilience and determination. It requires that the manager develop nuanced understandings of a highly complex work/cultural space. In the following chapters I present details of the small, seemingly insignificant events of practice and place that might be applied to the complexity of arts management at Papulankutja.

The art centre operates Monday to Friday on a nine-to-five basis although many hours are worked well beyond this schedule. During my research visits Jane Avery was employed as Art Centre Manager, often referred to as arts coordinator. The Papulankutja community appointed Jane as manager at Papulankutja Artists five years ago. She is punctual, efficient and stoic. Through

her friendship with Astra McKellow, the land and culture anthropologist, Jane forged a working relationship for bush trips and cultural ceremonies. Jane's position calls for a multi-skilled arts professional able to perform in an advocacy role to conduct ethical partnerships with commercial and public institutional galleries for the wider distribution of the artworks. According to her business model and budget for the year, she may employ staff and she encourages arts practice by nurturing and inspiring younger artists, mentoring established artists and providing professional development. She employs two full-time Yarnangu. From time to time, and dependent on production levels and sales, she may also employ others for stretcher framing and general duties. Jane also needs to have significant entrepreneurial skills to manage the responsibilities attached to advertising and marketing. Additionally, she oversees and visits once each week a satellite art centre connected to Papulankutja Artists, which is located 80 kilometres away at Mantamaru (Jameson).

Each year there are a number of trips organised to attend exhibitions and peak body functions, awards ceremonies, conferences, and trips to the airport to collect volunteers and arts development professionals. The nearest airport is at Yulara (Uluru), a five- to six-hour drive from Papulankutja. Alice Springs and Kalgoorlie are the nearest urban service centres, each an eleven-hour trip by road. The only other way in or out of the community is by mail plane, which arrives and leaves weekly on Tuesdays. Reiterating, reliable road transport is essential and one must be resilient enough to cope with long hours sitting behind the wheel of a regularly serviced car fitted with a satellite phone.

Jane Avery told me that she didn't have an arts background before she accepted the position. She suggested that her experience working extensively around the world for a large hotel chain, often with indigenous populations, equipped her with the credentials necessary for the job. Her art experience

consisted of having owned an Indigenous art print gallery prior to taking up her current position. Previous employment experiences, she said, alerted her to the difficulties that she might face (personal communications, 2014). She stressed that:

‘It isn’t just an art centre. It’s more than an art centre. It’s like, it’s social, you’re doing social work, you’re doing medical work, you’re doing counselling, you’re doing, fixing up cars, you know ... spending money for prison. I mean it’s just not an art centre. Art is almost the byproduct of what you do.’ (interview 8th May 2015)

In their review of art centre managers, Seet and colleagues state that the most demanding part of the job is cultural and involves living and working under pressure with people who have a very different world view. This demands ‘adapting external and often disconnected systems to the social logic of remote Indigenous communities’ on a daily basis and resulting in profound challenges to his/her personal and professional boundaries’ (Seet et al. 2015, p. 766). As an example, on one occasion during a field trip, I witnessed Jane being chased by an angry woman wielding a shovel. She was unhappy that there was not enough car space to enable her to join a bush trip. Incidents like this can flare up abruptly and without warning and highlight the volatility and, as mentioned earlier, the ‘in the moment’ tenor of life in the desert. On another occasion, while I took a group out for a hunting afternoon during a very hot summer day, one of the artists, in a fit of pique, possibly over an unsuccessful hunting yield, started bashing the side of the car with a steel crow bar. ‘She’s looking for a fight,’ another hunter muttered. These sorts of incidents are not uncommon and must be handled with diplomacy and tact. Seet et al suggest that art centre management and experience is an under-researched area, especially in the creative arts industry. They write:

Most of these managers, who are almost always from metropolitan centres and do not have Indigenous ties, do not extend their tenure beyond their initial term and leave, resulting in significant skills turnover problems for the Art Centres. (Seet et al. 2015, p. 781).

The study also found that shocks, in the form of threatening and frightening situations, were also influential in explaining staff turnover (Seet et al. 2015, p. 781). In an interview with three art centre managers who found their own experiences rewarding, I gleaned from their comments that although totally enriching and fulfilling it was not a straightforward job and was difficult. To quote from the transcripts:

Mel: It's a hard life. It's a hard job. I think it depends where you are at.

Jane: I've worked in hotels. They're hard jobs! It a hard job!

Emilia: It's physically hard.

Jane: It's demanding.

Emilia: It's a sacrifice that you are making to your life.

Mel: It's your family, friends, your age, you know. (Melanie Henderson, Jane Avery, Emilia Galatis; interview 8th May 2015)

Managing ethical practices

Building on difficulties around the money story, Tim Acker argues that the vastly different concepts of finance has consequences for artists:

Aboriginal artists are often willing (or, by virtue of family obligation or personal circumstance, forced to be willing) participants in transactions that are grossly unfair; yet trying to assess or compare the decisions of worldviews as different as desert artist and consumer are confounding. (Acker 2008, p.64)

With this in mind, art centres grapple with unethical marketeers. Art centre managers often resort to cunning tactics to secure ethical arrangements for their artists. One art centre manager I spoke with provided an example of her ingenuity. She said that during the summer periods, when galleries are quiet and money is tight, an artist is vulnerable to unethical practices, particularly if the artist visits large centres such as Alice Springs. So, before the summer period, if she was worried that a particular artist might try to procure funds, the manager would leave some cash at prominent galleries (those that the artist is likely to visit to tell the money story) on the art centre's (and artist's) behalf. The thinking behind this strategy is that if the artist has access to cash, he/she is not likely to consider other unethical options when propositioned. It generally works and these prominent artists keep working at the art centre under conditions that are far better than those they may be offered by unethical dealers at opportunistic times.

It is usually prominent artists that are propositioned, as they provide access to high earnings for unscrupulous dealers and carpetbaggers. These artists are also the key figures in the art centres, for whom training, marketing and guidance have been key to their success. They have been nurtured at the centre and are vital for future profitable sales and teaching. Not all painters become highly ranked artists, and if they do, it is at that stage of their careers that the art centre gets a 'return on investment' both economically and socially. Less accredited artists often wait months before hearing that their painting has sold. Small galleries annexed to art centres are full of artworks that will probably never make it to a commercial gallery or tourist outlet. It can take a long time for a painter to become an artist in the commercial sense.

The diversity of unethical (and illegal) practices reported to the *Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's Indigenous Visual Arts and Craft Sector*

2006-07 ranged from operations in a cash-only system (bypassing the tax system), underpaying artists or overselling to customers, crippling legitimate community enterprises, entering into unconscionable contracts, bartering art for cars, drugs or alcohol, or manipulating the social obligations within Aboriginal systems to 'kidnap' artists (Acker 2008). Following the enquiry, a Code of Conduct and other legislative enforcement and policy initiatives were proposed. In 2009, for the first time a coordinated approach was initiated to address the legal loopholes that made exploitative practices possible. It is through art centres and industry advocates like Desart that a safer system can be maintained. These organisations alert artists and offer as much protection as possible against competing unethical agents.

'Power geometries'

Over a period of five years I noted a number of changes within the Papulankutja community that were altering day-to-day activities. There are now many more services available in the health and social welfare profession (although still no doctor) who provide assistance in various fields. There is a healthy living officer, mothers' groups, nurses, social welfare officers, police, aged community care, a child welfare officer, an anthropologist, land and culture staff, a handyman, a cleaner, shop staff, schoolteachers, project officers and community office staff. The number of non-Aboriginal people working in these capacities has tripled in the last two years, taking the onus for offering aid away from art centres, which are still (in smaller communities) the first place people turn to. These services have been put in place to improve community outcomes.

However, although well intentioned, various government and community services overlap, competing with one another and the art centre to implement their service or resource. Massey captures a similar dynamic in her definition of

power geometry when she writes of 'the relational politics of the spatial' (2005, p. 148). She draws attention to the negotiation of multiplicity in places which pose challenges, with a focus on understanding the nature and processes of different aims, expectations and individualities within the space. Thus, drawing on Massey's view of interrelations in art production can give us a clearer understanding of the complex, enmeshed and unequal power relations in a place like Papulankutja, and how these relations directly and indirectly influence art production. Massey describes this power-geometry as the 'very distinct ways in relations to [the] flows and interconnections', in relation to the movement between different social groups and different individuals (Massey 1991, p. 26). A completed examination of all the power relations is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is worth noting some of these competing influences that affect a streamlined arts practice.

Jon Altman, who has worked across the Indigenous sector for many years, suggests that the socio-economic gap has been largely created by the 'colonial encounter, historical legacies, cultural differences, intergovernmental buck-passing and decades of neglect' (Altman 2005, p. 15). It appears paradoxical that now so many agencies should be administering their services without a set of concrete and collaborative roadmaps directed at community liaison. For example, it was my experience that a new 'women's group' was to be set up in direct competition with the working ethics and structures put in place by the art centre. It is an ironic situation for an agency to compete with the only economically important employment available at Papulankutja. The art sector and art centres in remote Aboriginal communities make a sizeable contribution to the livelihood of remote Aboriginal communities, playing a role in generating (self) employment. Art centres are an important source of economic benefits, with a recent government report noting that 'art sales are the primary or only source of non-government income' (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous

Corporations, 2012, pp. 764–765). Jane Avery suggests that a lack of liaison between agencies is one reason for the scant responses to the recent implementation of some programs. As governments change and professionals move in and out, clashing timetables and insufficient mediation thwarts projects. Additionally, instead of trying to instigate new groups, liaising with the NPY Women’s Council⁴⁴ might produce more satisfactory results. This group is one of the most organised and mobilising forces in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and has been operating with Yarnangu women in the region since 1980, delivering services and successfully addressing the common interests, family and cultural connections of women and their communities. Members meet in groups regularly and are responsible for organising Women’s Business⁴⁵ in the region. They have received many accolades for their services to community, with Aboriginal leader Andrea Mason, who runs the organisation, named the 2016 Australian Businesswoman of the Year.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council offers a forum through which Yarnangu and Anangu have an opportunity to advocate directly about decisions and, if necessary, secure funding to deliver services identified by members. As a membership-led organisation, their work is vital to the women and families across the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands for maintaining and building a better future for all communities in the region. See <https://www.npywc.org.au/about-mpywc/welcome/>

⁴⁵ Business is the generic term for ritual. Ritual is a central activity and focus in the lives of the desert people. Known in English as ‘Law business’, or simply ‘business’, it is, like the Dreaming itself, a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

⁴⁶ See Zillman 2016.

While literature on community art centres has its emphasis on the local and culturally significant social and commercial factors, art production is also a site produced through the intersections of global flows of ideas, practices, agencies, bodies, exhibitions, galleries and more. In her revaluation of space, Massey reminds us that there may be a social politics of mobility and access, where some groups have more mobility and control over others. This can weaken the less mobile and thus the 'time-space compression of some groups can undermine the power of others' (Massey 1991, p. 26). With this in mind, the art production process thus becomes an example of how global and local politics and flows, political ideologies and materialities are involved in the production of art. Massey's work invites us to think further about how the detail of local activities may raise questions about power relations and agency beyond place yet implicated in the constitution of place.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on an analysis of practice and place applied to the complexities of the administration of art production at the Papulankutja Artists art centre. These experiences cannot be understood in isolation from global ideological and material flows (Pink 2012). In Massey's terms, place is also a space of 'relational politics of the spatial'. In other words, place refers to movement and communication across space in response to spatial politics. In this place, the relationality (relations, connections, associations) among different social groups are interconnected and their flows and movement require negotiation (Massey 2005). The embedded complexities of the environmental conditions have important implications for how individuals and agencies engage across all the stages of art production. Christina Davidson, Chief Executive Officer of ANKAAA, speaking on behalf of art centres, sums it up thus:

Art centres are the most reliable, secure and ethical source for acquiring art made in remote Indigenous communities. They are unique Indigenous enterprises, which have evolved to serve the specific needs of artists who work in these contexts, and are still the most effective model to support art in communities (...) Art centres sustain Aboriginal art for the long-term. There is no equivalent to the art centre model in the non-Indigenous art world and it is very important that recognition is given to their rich and multiple functions. (Davidson 2009)

In this chapter I have shown that the movement of people, things, resources and funds, are at the intersection of arts practice and its administrative and cultural performance, and accounts for its complexities and relationality. This analysis helps to explain how art production through Papulankutja Artists has come into being and how it is maintained. I have outlined how transcultural practices relating to money, administrative contingencies and power geometry impact on the implementation and sustainability of art production performance.

In chapter four, I continue constituting the art centre as place through the notions of maintenance and movements. However, I shift the focus to explore the painting practices and art through performances of painting and everyday creative and cultural practices that make up art production. I demonstrate how a cultural visual aesthetic can be conceptualised as part of a constantly shifting place-event constituted through constellations of everyday creative customs and procedures. Once I have situated the detail of everyday practice in relation to painting, art practices and place, we can access an analytical route that enables an understanding of the wider ecologies from which individual differences in art emerge. ■

Vignette 4a

Dogs are part of place too

Jane often recounts the story about one of her dogs named ‘Papa’ and how a fortunate stroke of serendipity landed him the best dwelling place in the community. He is a cute, short, little canine with ears too big for his body and the appearance of being a mixture of dingo and corgi as seen in image 4.1. Papa is smart, active and gentle by nature. He lives at the house with Jane and Gertie, another very large dog. Both dogs have a privileged life—unencumbered access to the house; they are well trained, well fed (unusual in Papulankutja), and sleep inside, usually in Jane’s air-conditioned bedroom. Compared to the many dogs in the community, it’s a life of sheer luxury.

Papa appeared outside Jane’s office during the first week of her arrival in the community to take up her new role as Art Centre Manager. He was a tiny puppy, seemingly abandoned and generating a lot of attention. ‘Papa, papa’ everyone kept saying in excitement. All avenues of enquiry led nowhere yet always involved the word papa. The pup had no home and needed care. Jane decided to keep him at home until an owner turned up. She named him ‘Papa’ as everyone seemed to be suggesting. In the *Ngaanyatjarra Word List (Revised Edition)* the word papa translates to ‘dog’ in English (Glass 2005). She kept the name anyway!

As I collaborate with the artists at Papulankutja, listening to their stories and as part of the art-making collective, I must also engage with their dogs. I have watched as both babies and dogs sleep together on floor mats and eat from the same vessel while the babies’ mothers and grandmothers paint. Angiliya has between two and nine dogs, depending on who is residing with her at a particular point in time. Pamela has four (all with collars—unusual). Jennifer Mitchell and her mother

Tjayanka Woods share four. Elaine has two and so does her brother Mr Donegan. And so it goes on. The art centre can be an overcrowded shared space crammed with both human and non-human elements. As I consider the central, manifest and homogenous association between Yarnangu and their dogs, I argue that it is impossible to interpret and comprehend the creative practices, as embedded and part of the everyday, without considering the artists' relationships with people and animals that are enmeshed within the practices of art production.

A distinctive feature at Papulankutja is the considerable number of dogs. Dogs are an integral part of Ngaanyatjarra life. The word 'papa' is often one of the first Ngaanyatjarra words that become familiar to outsiders visiting the community. At the art centre there are always at least as many camp dogs⁴⁷ as there are artists. The motley groups of varying sized mixed breeds wander through the centre looking for food and activity with their owners. They provide companionship and sometimes security and warmth, and accompany their owners at all times. They are often hungry, lean and malnourished. In many instances they will walk (or fight) across the unfinished wet paintings, which results in raised, high-pitched voices calling 'wiya, wiya, wanti!'⁴⁸ Sticks appear from everywhere and are bandied about. Dogs yelp, run or cower, and before long all is back to normal, dogs in tow and painting resumed.

On a hot day, four or five artists (with their dogs) will cram into the tiny office space next to the painting room—just to sit, hang out and chat. It is usually too hot to work, even with air conditioning. It is an opportunity to discuss paintings, future

⁴⁷ The term camp dog is used to describe the groups of dogs found in and around Aboriginal Australian communities across the country. In some communities they are often hungry, diseased and occasionally aggressive, although this is not typical at Papulankutja.

⁴⁸ 'Wiya' translates to 'no' in Ngaanyatjarra. 'Yuwa' translates to 'yes'. 'Wanti' means 'leave it'.

exhibitions, local gossip and travel, while flipping through books, catalogues, brochures and paperwork. It can become close to claustrophobic, as it gradually becomes stuffier and hotter. I have taken to 'shooing' all dogs from the office in such instances. Then they lie outside patiently on the large, covered cement verandah area and wait for their owners to return to them (see image 4.2). Most Papulankutja camp dogs have dingo characteristics. Since the arrival of outsiders, hybridity, the result of crossbreeding between dingo and dog, has resulted in a crossbred mixture. Pamela told me that there are still many wild dingoes around. She has seen eight recently, including one black one. They often come in from the bush looking for food and can be seen along the roadside. Jennifer Mitchell says she leaves food out for them.

Dingoes and other dogs have been woven into the fabric of Aboriginal life and culture over a number of years. It is thought that dingoes were first brought to the mainland by Asian mariners who had trading links with the Indigenous Australians around 4000 years ago. Since this time Indigenous Australians have used the dogs as companions, for security and their hunting prowess, and as a source of warmth. At Papulankutja this is still the case and I have noticed that some of the elderly people in the community, who prefer to sleep outside in the front of their homes, nestle with their dogs curled up beside them for added warmth and comfort. Periodically, when blankets disappear, or there are not enough to go around on a particularly cold day or night, the dogs fulfil an important bedding role.

Dogs are deeply embedded in the social life of the community. They attend all community events: shopping, meetings, work and football. At the recent Blackstone Festival football game, it was entertaining to watch desultory dogs run onto the field with the sportsmen and chase after the play. It didn't appear to bother the players and the referee saw no need to intervene.

Beliefs about the dingo/dog as a mythic Dreaming ancestor are prevalent throughout the Western Desert and many of the published dingo stories come from this area (Parker 2006). In her doctoral thesis focused on the Australian dingo, Merryl Parker suggests it is probable that today domestic dogs have replaced all

purebred dingoes in Aboriginal settlements (2006). Many dingoes have crossbred with dogs, which gives the dogs an association with the living tjukurpa stories. At Papulankutja tjukurpa stories relating to the dingo contain messages and stories that inform Ngaanyatjarra life and pictorial tropes. As Muecke indicates, the continuity of stories of dingoes is achieved by the way Indigenous Australians, in this case Yarnangu, incorporate contemporary events into narratives about the past (2005, p. 92). In some communities people speak of how the Dreaming Dingo made people. A reference supporting this claim can be found in an interview when Yarralin elder Tim Yilngayari, in conversation with Deborah Bird Rose in 1980, explained how the Dreaming Dingo made people. He spoke of the similarities between dingo and human, confirming that people were descended from Dreaming dingoes (Rose 2000, p. 47). The dingo occupies a special place in the life of Yarnangu and they are seen as an absolutely basic part of everyday domestic life. David Brooks, who compiled a record of Yarnangu tjukurpa stories over a twenty five-year period states:

Mostly, the Dog appears in the Dreaming in its wild form, and in this regard its signature activity [...] is the hunting of the kangaroo [...] One of my main informants, Fred Forbes (b. 1923), once conveyed to me his vision of the elemental forms of human social life, and he described a man, his wife and their dogs sitting by a camp fire. (2011, p. 260).

Merryl Parker argues that in Aboriginal discourse the dingo links the environment with people, harmony and nurturing (2006). However, in Australia she suggests that settlers challenged and opposed all indigenes, while the dingo and the Aborigine stood together, linked by a discourse of exclusion and difference (Parker 2006, p. 30). Parker's reference to the strong bond that aligns both dingo/dog and human is profound where she states:

The dingo and the Aborigine have run side by side for five thousand years and the similarities between them are remarkable. They survived in the pre-colonial times, creating the world through their shared role in myths, accommodating each other even to the extent of moving in and out of

each other's bodies. They have both suffered from the colonists' attempts to exterminate and displace them and both have experienced the denigrating discourse, which justifies such acts. Importantly they have survived, the dingoes struggling through gaps in the fence; the Aboriginal people refusing the 'dying pillow,' articulating instead Ruby Langford Ginibi's defiant statement: 'we are here and will always be here'. (Langford-Ginibi 1988, p. 269; Parker 2006, p. 308)

In Yarnangu environments there is no perceived division between human and non-human actors. Yarnangu representation of papa is grounded in tjukurpa knowledge and stories and mythologies associated with the dingo. At Papulankutja, as in most Aboriginal communities, dogs and humans are intricately linked (Senior et al. 2006) and both are implicated in the activities at the art centre. ■

Chapter four

The practice of making art: tracing creative flows



Eric Michaels believed that contemporary Indigenous desert painters were not merely objects of postmodern desire, but creative partners in the global art market, matching ‘the postmodern methods of appropriation with their own counter-appropriative strategies’ in a ‘highly sophisticated exchange’. (McLean 2011, p. 54)

‘Integral! You know, I think they are incredibly proud of their art centre—it’s their home, they own it. It’s their space. They come to it each day. For us, a percentage of every sale goes into an account, which then provides money to buy the lunch program, so everyone has a healthy meal at the art centre every day. So, it’s just without it, they wouldn’t be fed every day, they wouldn’t have a warm place to be. They wouldn’t have an outlet.’ (Melanie Henderson, Art Centre Manager, interview 8th May 2015)

Introduction

Angiliya Mitchell sits quietly, cross-legged on the floor, leaning over the painting that she is working on. Milo, her scruffy little mixed breed dog is, as always, sleeping by her side. He is one of the nine dogs I counted currently living at her house. Milo is 'special' and travels everywhere with Angiliya. As is her habit, she is humming and appears to be in a trance-like state. This state of preoccupation is characterised by momentary abstractions; hypnotic rhythms induced by the rhythmic melody and painting themes that draw on law and customs, her family, culture and setting. Angiliya wears the same clothes that she has had on for days and wears no shoes. She is small, grey haired and has a pleasant, yet often serious face. Most days Angiliya arrives at the art centre early, sometimes hungry for breakfast, often just to paint—or just to be there. She is usually first to arrive (and last to leave) and attends quietly to locating her unfinished painting, then sits down and starts work.

This scene authenticates how both the art and the art centre have become rich sites of transcultural exchange, endorsing both Indigenous and Western epistemologies. Arts practices at Papulankutja converge with Western contemporary art practices in shared painting applications comprising Western materials of acrylic paint and canvas, and which Western Desert painting practices have easily and creatively assimilated. Additionally, I recall a number of occasions during workdays at the art centre, when Yarnangu men or women have called in to borrow pots of acrylic paint from the store cupboard. The intended use was for body painting during customary business or ceremony. Transculturally, modern acrylic paint is simpler to use (replacing) than the traditional ochres previously applied for Yarnangu body painting, accentuating the entanglements in both contemporary and traditional circumstance. Arts practice at Papulankutja, rooted in the patterns of ceremonial body decoration, underscores the occurrence of transculturation and the convergences between

Western Desert and Western art practices. However, when Angiliya and I muse over one of her half-finished canvases, about why she used a particular colour, or other subtleties associated with the meaning of the painting, it also draws attention to the divergences surrounding her practice, and Angiliya's multilayered sharing of Yarnangu knowledge, her collaboration and our transcultural exchanges. The broader artworld is of no interest at all to Angilya. Angiliya just wants to paint. She records important Kungkarangkalpa business and other stories related to her tjukurrpa. Importantly, she also gets paid for it. Angiliya's art is responsive to the immediacy of her life at Papulankutja, incorporating her stories and dreams associated with it. Negotiating the wider world through the production of art, Angiliya has embraced contemporary creative mediums and negotiates the power dynamics of both worlds. Whilst anchored in her rhythmic reverie and tjukurrpa themes, Angiliya earns a small income producing cultural paintings, punu and tjanpi for the Western contemporary artworld. Among her painting peers, she is emblematic of the old ways of life in the desert. Angiliya's arts practice at Papulankutja 'demonstrates that Indigenous contemporary art is wide ranging in its interactions with the contemporary world [...] and where the contemporary artworld has an ambiguous presence' (McLean, 2014).

In a semi-translated three-way conversation I had with Angiliya and other artists, she tells me that she loves painting and that it is a specific part of her life.⁴⁹ Although she crafts for money, painting, tjanpi and punu 'is special, pleasurable and makes [her] very happy'. Angiliya's mother gave her custodial permission to paint the uncles and aunties' country for which she is now

⁴⁹ Personal conversation with Angiliya Mitchell and Jennifer Mitchell on 17th November 2015.

custodian for the *Kungkarangkalpa* story, at the culturally significant Kura Ala site. Angiliya has been painting at Papulankutja for at least 20 years. Her body of work, although having had some broader and national acknowledgement, and unlike some of her Papulankutja Artists cohort who have won significant national art prizes for exceptional work,⁵⁰ continues to confound audiences with well-executed, idiosyncratic and aesthetically appealing artwork. Resonant with cultural memory, and refreshingly innovative in both style and content, her paintings have been (and still are) very well received within the contemporary art world. Angiliya is a commercial artist who sells her work both publicly and privately, and consistently, throughout Australia and, to a lesser extent, internationally.

Angiliya's painting activities in contemporary Papulankutja involve complex human perception of, and purposeful engagements with, aesthetic, material, sensory, social and religious environments. Angiliya Mitchell, and artists like her, strengthen their conscious perceptions of the Ngaanyatjarra storied environment through contemporary renderings of their art and practice. Angiliya's paintings are conceptualised as she makes connections between her multisensorial experiences and her profound local knowledge. In this chapter I expand on the theme of situating painting practices in relation to place as developed in chapter two, to explore how painting practices at the art centre are implicated in both the making of place, and in situating the art and its embedded meanings. I unravel some of the entanglements of life and art such as exhibitions and hunting trips, and consider how understanding these engagements might better explain the meanings behind the art. My focus is on

⁵⁰ Papulankutja artists and Tjanpi Desert Weavers, led by K. Benson, won the National Telstra Art Award for Tjanpi Toyota in 2005, and senior artist Jimmy Donegan won the same prize in 2010.

the artists, their art, and their everyday practices. I attend to differences in the aesthetic and thematic selection of paintings, and to both how individual artists engage in the multisensory practices of painting and how these paintings reveal embodied belief systems, life experiences, feelings and beliefs synonymous with Yarnangu cultural practice. I will then expand art production thematically in chapters five, six and seven. These understandings, I argue, are essential for interpreting how paintings impart Yarnangu cultural knowledge and have implications for comprehending the nature of painting practice at the art centre, which is adapting to contemporary changes in innovative and aesthetic ways. The chapter can therefore inform an understanding of the potential for creating commercial art production that supports sustainable hybrid work environments. It additionally foregrounds convergences and translations underlying Yarnangu art production.

The examples discussed in chapter three outlined the complex business and operational constituents of art production at Papulankutja. That discussion highlighted the multiple agents who were engaged in the commercial process—i.e. the continuous flow of shifting actions and administrative transcultural practices that make up art production at Papulankutja. If we take as our starting point an understanding of arts practice as place-events and multisensory environments that can be experienced in relation to a series of creative, commercial and environmental factors, then this provides a route to analysing how paintings and artworks are constructed and experienced. With this in mind, in this chapter I build on the art centre as a place of multiplicity and convergence. I take as my focal point a collaborative network of artists who offer perspectives on their painting as practice. I do this through an interactive ethnography of place that demonstrates the artists' agency and ways of knowing. I draw on perspectives of painting as practice and explore the

relationships between Western and Yarnangu knowledge systems that impact on the cultural themes and motifs that distinguish Ngaanyatjarra artwork.

Art centres are hubs for art production, and pathways for Yarnangu who want to be artists. My ethnographic analysis shows that an art centre acts not just as an art studio and workshop but also as a resource centre for artist members and art historians alike. It is a social site, a transmitter of cultural knowledge, a maintenance and exchange point, a museum and keeping place for cultural artefacts, a cultural history resource, a library of artist biographies, a learning/educative centre (both creatively and technologically), a safe place, a commercial warehouse, and importantly, an art school where elders may instruct successive generations of new artists. It is a social place, as Jane noted:

Because it is not only for painting that they come. There are many who have been coming to the art centre who have never picked up a brush. It's part of the routine. Go to the shop; go to the office, got to go to art centre. That's what's on the list of things to do. There are many people who come in and never ever paint. They will come in for a cup of tea, come in to use the phone, they will come in to find somebody, and they will come in to have a look (Jane Avery, interview 8th May 2015).

Art production as a multisensory practice

In this chapter I approach art production and place through an analysis of affective art making practices. In doing so I extend the theoretical discussion to explore how we understand and interpret crucial interactions of artists with contemporary social workspaces, again drawing on Massey's conceptualisation of space as a 'constellation of processes' and 'stories so far' (Massey 2005). Human and material relationships and embodied knowing about interrelations of place are relevant to an understanding of arts practice and the art created.

To frame this perspective, and building on the notion of a sensory ethnography, the discussion is informed by a particular sensory aesthetic that takes into account the ‘multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice’ (Pink 2015, p. xi). My own experiences and the ways that these interconnect with the artists, their environments and things can be explained through rich descriptions involving direct and sustained contacts. For example, painting as practice itself synthesises both aesthetic forces and traditional authority, as can be seen and understood through the work of senior artist Mr Jimmy Donegan,⁵¹ a man in his late seventies. Mr Donegan’s paintings are rich with cosmological detail, harmonious in visual design and a testimony to the rich systems of knowledge and practice that lie behind the detail of the artwork. This detail is a complex labyrinth of swirling lines and dots that relate an important story. Mr Donegan’s story of his father’s country and rock hole called Dulu, and where there are lots of dingoes living, digging up the water and hunting, is a strong composition. Mr Donegan’s work shows how, through painting, each artist has their own unique trajectory, involving dynamic ancestral and family context, particular experiences of living and travelling across country and their own understanding of Ngaanyatjarra tjukurrpa—both the human and non-human elements.

As a result of collaborative interaction with artists and visual analysis of creative data I bring new and rich insights to the research process. Examples link knowledge systems like storytelling, tjukurrpa themes and cultural hunting knowledge, connecting customary and ancestral contexts involving imagination and memory with the contemporary practices of painting, acrylic polymers and canvas. I explore how place and arts practice shift over time by analysing how

⁵¹ At Papulankutja the prefix ‘Mr’ is a respectful title given to elders in the community.

this specific environment has been transformed through the activities of Yarnangu artists and their painting themes, and through my emplaced positioning and sensorial ethnography, set within their art centre environment over a four-year period.

Papulankutja Artists provides a site where artists' agency can be exercised as it undergoes contemporary changes in the face of global processes that influence values, practices and ideologies. An approach to understanding art and its practices calls attention to a series of implications applicable to the entanglements that have come to make up contemporary life today, including the art space with emphases on interaction, communication, improvisation and navigable translations (Jones 2007). Finally, to highlight this point about agency, in conversation, artist Anawari Mitchell emphasised to me the importance of good cultural exchange and communication through her art (personal communication 31.12.15). It is important to Anawari that her art demonstrate the significant cultural values associated with country and tjukurrpa stories. As one of the more vocal artists, Anawari will often take the time to explain why she is doing the painting, her new techniques, and what it means to her and how she would like it depicted (images 4.3, 4.4). She explained:

'I like painting [...] I was taught by my aunty [...] told me the stories and I seen the place and I want and I was thinking about doing a painting about my grandmother's country. The painting is my grandmother's country. My auntie's family's place [...]. It's Seven Sisters. It's whole story, whole story [...] It's a Dreaming of young girls turning into woman. It's a Dreaming [...] Mine is different because of the circles and the lines. The lines is the dancing track. Yuwa. It's that track of ladies dancing. It's mine the lines my idea. Yuwa. Everyone's patterns is different [...] yeah it tells a story [...] Yuwa the whole generation, Yuwa, from the generation to generation, passing it on to,

they passed it on to me, and my mum Mrs. Brown.’ (Conversation with Anawari, 31 December 2015)

The art centre: a place of multiplicity

To understand practices at Papulankutja Artists I reflect on my personal engagements with the artists during my visits to the community in 2015–16. The artists both discussed the material, sensory and affective dimensions of their work and performed and reflected on their art and cultural practices, particularly relating to coexisting stories and themes, thus providing a contemporary understanding of paintings and meaning. As suggested in chapters two and three, art production and paintings can be understood as occurring within a complex cultural ecology constituted by persons and things and their material, commercial and autobiographical memories and beliefs. Thus the paintings and practices cannot exist in isolation, but ‘unfold’ from what Ingold aptly names the ‘meshwork’ of place (2008). This specific meshwork of place is made up of innovative, contemporary painting practices produced through both the personal and collective performances of painting, as well as exchange (i.e. the ways in which this is contingent on the wider art market, critics and commercial and institutional domains).

Stephen Muecke (1983, p. 88) identifies paintings as text through narrative and describes narrative stories as ‘items of exchange in the cultural arena’ that constitute a site for the reproduction of aesthetic discourses. Muecke’s definition is useful for understanding how Yarnangu paintings are situated in recently developed cultural practices that have been transformed to sustain the conventional Yarnangu ethos, values and ways of being. Paintings are also frequently sites for developing interpretations (of tjukurrpa) and innovations that depart from traditional ways of doing, being and experiencing. In this chapter I show through artists’ personal accounts how the artists, develop the rich research archive of Yarnangu knowledge in its various forms and

expressions as they work at the intersection between cultural production and practices of painting, stories and their performances.

In what follows I first focus on understanding the multiplicity of creative practice at the art centre, its materiality and the ways it is known, understood and situated by the artists. I then examine the global flows, imaginations and convergences that are inevitably produced by this multiplicity.

Ways of knowing, ways of seeing

There is an increasing interdisciplinary interest in the concept of 'Indigenous ways knowing' (Ingold 2011a; Martin 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Rigney 1999). This focuses largely on knowing as inextricable from a network of relationships that incorporate the contexts as well as the processes, as Karen Martin explains:

Knowledge about ontology and Entities is learned and reproduced through processes of: listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging, applying [...] It is more than just information or facts, but is taught and learned in certain contexts, in certain ways at certain times. [...] there are varying types of knowledges, having different levels that have to be operational for group function. This keeps the Entities known to and in a network of relationships. Without this knowing we are unable to 'be', hence our Ways of Knowing inform our Ways of Being. (Martin 2003, p. 10).

Martin's explanation helps us to understand the way Yarnangu apprehend knowledge. Yarnangu reproduce their knowledge through the sensory processes of listening, sensing, viewing, observing, and through their experiences at the art centre. On this basis, creative Yarnangu ways of knowing and imagining are elicited through art making practices. Local artists were driven to be interested in the art centre so that they could practice—paint and

create art that embodied Yarnangu ways of knowing, specifically Ngaanyatjarra tjukurrpa—and generate earning potential. The artists' creative motivations were based on embodied knowledge and practices, and the experience of 'being there' in the place of contemporary art production.

Ways of being

As an example of 'being there in place', I will set the scene with one of my field visits. While sitting on the floor of the art centre (as is customary), beside Jennifer Mitchell, and next to an electric bar heater, I watched and listened as she painted (images 4.5, 4.6, 4.7). She dotted the canvas and interacted with other artists. As I sat down beside her she squeezed my hand as she laughed and talked. The noise was constant, yet had become familiar, and in a strange way, comforting. Jennifer had her mobile phone resting in her lap in case her brother, in Acacia Prison located on the outskirts of Perth, should call and want to chat. She told me that she keeps this phone especially for his calls only. Jennifer has another phone that is used for all other communication. The Telstra tower had been erected about 18 months earlier and the store sold out of phones after the first week of connection. A tribe of mongrel dogs, all shapes and sizes but with obvious dingo heritage, lay about the spaces left between the canvases and human bodies. One of the dogs had trodden on an unlidded blue paint pot and the wet thick smoothly mixed paint was dispersed across most surfaces. Water tins, plastic paint pots, tobacco tins, food scraps, cups of sweet tea and the occasional baby made up the patchwork of things, both human and non-human, all connected in some way with the uniqueness of this particular place, evoking its complex web of historical and contemporary relations made and not made with other places (Massey 2005).

Half-finished paintings were hanging on all the walls and kangaroo tails defrost on side benches in preparation for campfire cooking later in the day. The air had a distinctive smell—a mixture of paint, minkle bar (mingkulpa), food

and bodies. While other artists and family members came and went, distracted by humbug, hunger, their children and their dogs, Jennifer spent the hours sitting cross-legged, carefully painting her *Kungkarangkalpa* story. Angiliya sat beside her, humming, also engrossed in another *Kungkarangkalpa* painting, and other female artists in the room exchanged a variety of stories while they painted. Two male artists sat together outside the room on the verandah painting quietly. Mostly, as is customary at Papulankutja, males and females paint independently of each other in separate rooms.

This description situates the art centre as part of Yarnangu artists' contemporary creative work environment, where the material and affective qualities influence the *experience* of being at the art centre. Taking this as a starting point, the art centre experience can be understood as a process of sensorial and embodied engagements (painting, interacting) and other more practical activities (planning, selling, organising, financial matters). All these sensorial and affective practices—painting, weaving, planning, imagining and socialising—impact on the way that the art centre and the art produced might be understood transculturally and contribute to the art centre's unique relational space.

The entanglements of life and art: practices in place

Art production at Papulankutja Artists is not a material thing or a specific locality on a map. Rather, it is the weaving of all the stories together that make up the 'here and now', through integrations of space and time—as events (Massey 2005). Moreover, and following Ingold (2008), it can be understood as part of a wider ecology of things, conceptualised through a notion of place as a 'meshwork' or zone of entanglement (2008). Ingold states:

Life is rather lived in a zone in which substance and medium are brought together in the constitution of beings which, in their activity, participate in weaving the textures of the land. (2008, p. 1804)

Particularly significant in both Massey's and Ingold's formulations of place is the notion that wider issues can be mobilised in the pursuit of understanding how art production 'works' in places like Papulankutja. In this product of intersections lie all the constitutive things that are relational and are congruous with Aboriginal understandings. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a Quandamooka woman and scholar, defines this relationality thus:

One experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory. (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 16)

Massey connects place with stories and writes about the 'the elusiveness of place' (2005), a point that is particularly relevant to ideas that I explore in this chapter. She describes place as a collection of 'stories-so-far':

If space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. Their character will be a product of these intersections within that wider setting, and of what is made of them. And, too, of the non-meetings-up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributes to the specificity of place. (Massey 2005, p. 130).

It is in this specificity of place, I argue, that practice emerges as a way to articulate an affective notion of place. If we were to see paintings as a 'bundle of trajectories' or 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (Massey 2005, p. 54), how might this impact on issues such as understanding and representation in Yarnangu

art? While identity is rooted in place, the nature of place is always shifting with each artist's expression of it, changing in each painting.

Painting is knowing

As I have observed in my fieldwork, as the artists paint, they draw intuitively on strong cultural knowledge and use traditional iconography. This implies that they paint with a distinct confidence of knowledge of the country (image 4.8). They're not concerned with how it might be perceived by outsiders. They are painting what they know. Papulankutja art is not just about painting for money. Artist Janet Forbes says she draws on her creativity and emotions that come from something very deep within herself. 'I paint from deep in my heart,' she says. Janet paints cultural knowledge and Yarnangu ways of seeing the world. For Janet, the landscape is a starting point; Wati Kutjarra story its core theme. It seems clear that, in making a painting, she is attending to the canvas as landscape, composed of colour, rich textures and surfaces and of incisive marks (images 4.9 and 4.10).

While many observers may think of the desert as barren and monochromatic, artists suggest their country is full of colour and human and non-human life. Janet's degree of knowledge about country is evident in her confident manner and adept painting skills. She is one of the founding members of Papulankutja Artists. Across her art career her paintings have changed, developing from subdued and subtle dotted hues to the bright and dynamic colourful depictions that sell well and that she currently exhibits throughout the country. She is a painter who becomes absorbed in her current project and often

takes a painting home to finish in the evening.⁵² (Janet is a rare artist who sells everything that she paints and Papulankutja Artists has no unsold work by her in stock). The visual activities of the landscape such as the dotting of dance tracks or the bright violet and pink colours of desert blooms are all tangible expressions of ancestral presence. Nicci Cumpston, curator of *Desert Country* at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2011, and which consequently toured around the country until 2013, offers the following explanation, articulating clearly an Indigenous expression of desert and Aboriginal art, and which is also relevant in Ngaanyatjarra art:

When we, as Aboriginal people, talk of 'country', the term takes on a much broader meaning than the notion of 'country' for non-Aboriginal Australians. Country is spoken about in the same way non-Aboriginal people may talk about their living human relatives: Aboriginal people cry about country, they worry about country, they listen to country, they visit country and long for country. Country can feel, think and hear, it can accept or reject and be difficult or easy, just as living people can behave towards one another. Aboriginal people are born with an inherent cultural responsibility for their country. We believe that the land owns us, not the other way around, and we must do our utmost to care for it. State and territory borders do not exist for Aboriginal people. Our boundaries are drawn by our birth places and our relationships to those places, made manifest through the ancient stories connecting our people to their country. (Cumpston in, Cumpston & Patton 2010, p. 12)

⁵² Janet's paintings sell well. A busy commercial gallery in Tasmania is an ardent supporter of her work and eagerly accepts (and pays for) any painting that Janet finishes.

The space: painting in place

The art centre building is a studio workspace, as seen in images 4.11 to 4.19. It is also a locality where materialities, sensory experiences, social relationships, storytelling and painting practices are entangled. Inside, the building resembles a large paint-splattered studio room with concrete floors and cement walls. Half-finished paintings hang crookedly on the walls; large tjanpi baskets and sculptures rest on shelves high above. A large sliding door opens and closes throughout the day—keeping unwanted dogs out and heated or cooled air in, depending on the season (image 4.20). The building itself is representative of other structures in the community: concrete and corrugated iron. It is this ‘constellation’ (Massey 2005) of things in process that makes the painting studio/art centre a unique place.

The art centre building itself is uninteresting—besser block, ochre- coloured painted tin and concrete, with a flattish tin roof, and two caged and padlocked verandah spaces. The walls are coated in a soft red dust and the ground outside is scattered with paper, used and empty plastic containers, broken furniture and a thicker coating of red dust and sand. The interior is simply constructed, with a walled division separating the centre into two separate areas to allow for two separate painting rooms. Although not always the case now, it is occasionally uncomfortable for men and women to paint together in the same space. The male artists who have strict Law ethics and adhere to the old ways prefer that their paintings of ancestral stories are not done in proximity to females (especially those with whom they are unfamiliar). They prefer to be segregated and the artwork restricted from view until complete. Two distinct painting areas allows for a complete separation if necessary.

Both rooms have air-conditioning/heating, washtubs, large floor space for painting, cabinets for paints, basic metal shelving. One room has a large table. This table could seat four artists comfortably, although it is unusual for an artist

to sit on a chair to paint. It is, however, a useful, raised flat space for experimenting with printing techniques and/or sorting canvases and art materials. It is also often used to roll and wrap paintings for transport. There is a small lock-up office at the end of the second room for the storage of finished artwork, artefacts and a second computer. The main computer, camera and other office equipment are all housed within the separate lock-up office. Adjoining the back of the building is a large covered and caged verandah space with large benches where canvases can be stretched and sealed, and where various craft activities take place, such as soap-making and tjanpi work. There is another large double sink in this area. Having spent many hours in this veranda space, I personally find it an excellent vantage point from which to watch the comings and goings of artists on their way to the centre, children (who should be at school) playing, dogs fighting, people fighting and the general noisy interactions of community life.

The building stands in the centre of town and next to the only store in Papulankutja. This four hundred square metre area becomes the hub of life on any weekday. It is central and fundamental to the community. The art centre and the store are the commercial/financial transaction centre. They handle all the financial exchanges in the region, other than those handled by the Commonwealth Government office, which is a combination of bank, post office, communication access service, Centrelink and almost everything else except health. It is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate further on these auxiliary services, other than to comment that the health sector is crucial to the maintenance of feasible and healthy community life. Many of the people in the community, not just the elders, have some form of illness. A large number of them rely on the clinic and are taking some form of medication to stay alive, which requires regular health checks. Clinic staff visit the art centre regularly.

Collaboration, culture, exchange

The art centre functions in a similar fashion to drop-in centres. It is a site of human movement, socialities and embodied actions, where the artists can paint together in (most of the time) a collaborative and friendly environment. Sometimes artists become so engaged in their creativity that they need reminding that it is time to go home (image 4.21). They feel secure, safe and comfortable in an environment that offers community camaraderie, companionship and cooperation—fundamental to its success. Some days are busy. Some are extraordinarily quiet, especially if there is sorry business or other cultural commitments taking place. Yarnangu worldview and culture, and ways of being associated with life on the Lands are part of this place. As I show below, these cultural practices are crucial to the community and affect everyday life at Papulankutja.

In their work, the artists draw on cultural meanings, stories and language that shape their memories. Paintings and artworks are constructed to be worthy of attention. They grow out of Yarnangu ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing. Yarnangu core relatedness and groundedness to the land and family, and the interconnectedness to tjukurrpa is crucially important to the throwntogetherness and messiness of art production. Tjukurrpa is the fundamental reality that ensures continuity of the Ngaanyatjarra world; it is also the space-time through which transformations are validated (Poirier 2005, p. 244). Anthropologist David Brooks has been working and researching in the Lands for nearly forty years and the following quote from his doctoral thesis is poignant and thus affirms my own findings at Papulankutja. He states:

The people of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands speak of country in ways that leave no doubt about the centrality of its significance to them; and the same message is just as clearly demonstrated when we observe their

characteristic activities, the way they conduct their lives, and indeed most of their whole historical trajectory as we know it. (Brooks 2011)

Ngaanyatjarra memories are recollected, reminisced about and experienced through art production. As artists mingle at the art centre, a series of patterned and ancestrally derived events and stories are reconstructed in their social setting, and then, often painstakingly, prioritised and delineated in painting. The performativity of painting and retelling stories is inherent within the whole participatory art-making process. As I demonstrate further in chapters five and six, Yarnangu lives and culture are given 'voice' through the art, both as individual and collective memories. The production of locality, in context with the community's social logic of ceremony and ritual, show that, in Appadurai's words, 'space and time are themselves socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation and action' (1996, p. 180). Art-making practice in this sense is a collaboration that locates and connects people and communities, binding the spiritual with the physical and bringing together painting, story and culture. Massey's notion of place reminds us that the uniqueness of any one place, derived from both its contemporary and historical links, expands the relational complexity even further when wider family and cultural contexts are taken into account.

Below I discuss the two types of practices at the art centre through which art production is achieved: through tangible practices of painting, and practice through events. The events are constituted through two vignettes that recount memorable circumstances that make up the affective processes identified as part of place. The first, Vignette 4b, was a weeklong excursion to Alice Springs for a collaborative exhibition and dance performance at the annual Desert Exhibition and Conference in 2015. The second, Vignette 4c, portrayed hunting as a cultural practice recognised as such through regular Wednesday afternoon hunting trips that are part of the art centre schedule. Collectively these

interrelated processes maintain the Papulankutja Artists' identity, as they participate in the art market's national network, thus enmeshing them in the wider transcultural and global processes.

Practices of painting

Artists mostly paint individually at Papulankutja Artists, although there have been a few collaborative works completed. Experienced artists have developed particular skills, styles and techniques. For example, Jennifer Mitchell's use of acrylic paint is thick and gives the works a rich, dense and sumptuous tactility. This stylistic shift has located Jennifer's work as tactile, tangible, a quality that develops from many years of painterly application. Predominantly blue in colour, her paintings are often described as having a cosmic aura and beauty. Angiliya, on the other hand, paints bright, bold and colourful artworks. They appear raw, often the visual sequel of a dream that she has experienced. She deftly marks the canvas with fine dots and strokes and her paintings are innovative in both style and content. She completes her artworks quickly and is absorbed in the practice of painting, appearing impatient to finish the work. However, this rapid execution of Angiliya's mark-making is never perfunctory or careless. She is a creative, spontaneous and spirited painter who works at an instinctual level, placing both figurative and iconographic strokes and dots on her canvases, although she uses iconography less than other artists. Her *tjukurrpa*, *Kungkarangkalpa*, inhabits each painting; its construction constitutes a contemporary aesthetic visual statement from a traditional Ngaanyatjarra conceptual schema. Her paintings are bold and sometimes confronting as will be explained further in chapter six.

Thus, the textures and ways that the paint is applied varies from artist to artist, despite the artists' proximity to one another and the fact that they are often working together from the same paint pots (mixed up in large batches when needed), distributed to every artist. Each artist has a large plastic tub

etched with his or her name on the lid and filled with small pots of his or her preferred colours (image 4.22). Each box is personalised and includes various sized brushes, rags and sticks for dotting. Painted dots are usually administered with the wrong end of a paintbrush (for larger dots), or more often, a cut-off kebab stick—perfect for small, neat, uniformly sized dots.

For the most part, the artists' designs are not closed in but extend laterally into a virtual distance beyond the edge of the canvas. There is never an end or 'edge' to a painting. The view is just a snapshot of a much broader and never-ending world view or story. This capacity to de-limit paintings is not unusual in contemporary Australian Aboriginal artwork. Paintings may be completed in a day, a week, or sometimes a year. The art centre is filled with many incomplete paintings.

As previously mentioned, dogs are deeply embedded in the social life of the community; they are present at most important activities and always present at the art centre as part of place. They can often add impromptu inclusions to a painting (blurs, hair, wee, extra colour).

Relational events: contemporary practices

I refer to Massey and Pink as I segue into the first of two vignettes in this chapter. The vignette is based on local experiences that help define the intersection between human practices, materialities and their respective agencies. It elaborates upon aspects of transcultural relations in Yarnangu art production and Papulankutja artists engaging with the contemporary world. The vignettes point to 'the bringing together of (unbounded) constellations or intensities of things in movement' [where], 'we can consider how within this, practices, materialities and self-identities are essential and dynamic elements' (Pink 2012, p. 54).

Vignette 4b

Desert Mob September 2015 Alice Springs

Day 1

Desert Mob is the annual trade and cultural event that brings together Desert member art centres, artists and the public in a three-day creative, cultural, celebratory and commercial event. The 2015 presentation is noteworthy as an occasion commemorating 25 years of continuous operations in Alice Springs. It celebrates the highlights and successes of the contemporary Aboriginal art movement in the Central Desert regions. To mark this occasion an extra celebratory function was scheduled—an outdoor dance site—which incorporated traditional regional dancing from various language groups. Additionally, and in conjunction with the celebratory dancing, the theme for the annual all day symposium explored and commemorated the past and future of Aboriginal art from art centres in Central Australia.

Members of Papulankutja Artists were invited to dance Kungkarangkalpa. As this is a traditional ceremonial dance, there are restrictions on who can perform it. Kungkarangkalpa songs have been sung and danced through generations and kept alive by those who carry custodial responsibility to adapt and nurture them. The opportunity to dance was one of the highlights of the trip and it was performed as a special affair at the close of the symposium on the second day. Four other dance groups from desert communities were also invited to perform ‘painted-up’ presentations, which drew a considerable public audience.

Other highlights of the trip included the exhibition (images 4.23, 4.24), shopping, exhibiting art at a large and prestigious event, consuming fast and exotic foods, and gambling at the casino. The ten-hour journey to Alice Springs from Papulankutja is

arduous and entails bumpy driving in the troupe carrier through rough, dry and corrugated terrain. For this particular expedition two four-wheel-drive vehicles travelled the nearly 1,000 kilometres, driven by the art centre manager and another experienced Ngaanyatjarra employee. Eleven artists were participating in the event. The vehicles were cramped and chaotic, with blankets, bags, people and food competing for space (for this trip the dogs were left at home). Excursions like this are always anticipated with excitement and a sense of adventure. Shopping trips and casino visits, and the what, where and how of things in Alice Springs were discussed and planned before the trip, along with debate about what might be on the room service menu in the hotel. As a yearly event, the artists are familiar with the routine and there is always much confabulation about whom they may see, what they might buy and how much art they will sell. Nevertheless, for this trip, the opportunity to achieve a successful performance⁵³ of Kungkarangkalpa takes precedence over all other opportunities that may or may not arise and the long car trip was spent discussing outfits and making yellow wool headbands for the concert.

Preparation details (including costumes) are always left until late and can be arranged whilst travelling in the car. All (any) packing for the trip is done within the hour before departure and usually consists of one plastic shopping bag and a blanket. As always, the flow of everyday events at Papulankutja is 'in the moment' and 'as it happens'. Events happen in the 'now'! Planning appears non-existent, unclear and haphazard. There are always modifications, arguments and to-ing and fro-ing. The enmeshed mix of people, things, places and travel are woven into the *mélange* of event. Yasmin Musharbash, in her PhD case study of contemporary life in Yuendumu, calls this the 'immediacy of sociality' where people live out their lives in continual co-presence and where intense discursive activity between groups of people results in essential exchanges of important information (Musharbash 2003).

⁵³ Some of the artists are very experienced performers having been invited to dance at the Olympic Games, Sydney 2000.

I borrow her term ‘hithering and tithering’ to describe the convoluted route a car will take touring the community before actually leaving it. It refers to the hour-long collection of travellers (collected individually, at their house or camp) before going on a camping or hunting trip. Musharbash relates this as an exact connection between people and places; a crucial activity underlying sociality (Musharbash 2003).

Hessian screening at the back of the outdoor arena acted as a ‘back-stage’ dressing room for the performers. Seven artists were performing the dance. As the preparations were taking place, another group from a distant community was performing for the large outdoor audience. The black skirts and matching tops that had been hastily purchased on arrival in Alice (for the performance) were pulled out of plastic bags and the women prepared to dress. However, Maime and Anawari, speaking for the group, were quite insistent that the dancing should be performed in the traditional way. ‘The way that was taught to us by the elders’ Anawari said. They wanted to dance in what they called the ‘proper’ fashion. The other participating dancers agreed. They decided not to wear the shirts that had been purchased for the event and chose instead to be ‘painted up’ for the occasion. And in true Yarnangu manner this decision was made right at the last minute. In the ‘flurry of the moment’, shopping bags full of ‘things’ for the trip were spilled out onto the grass changing area. Art centre acrylic paint and brushes appeared and in lieu of animal fat, vegetable oil was applied to the women’s upper body areas so that the paint was able to furnish the designs (and come off later). Shirts they shed and a plethora of assorted clothes were shoved into larger plastic striped storage bags. In pairs, the artist-performers started painting each other’s bodies. Slowly and confidently mimi⁵⁴ circles were painted yellow inside broad wide white brush-stroked outlines, forming the collar, or area to be painted in iconographic patterning (image 4.25). Each of the women’s breasts was carefully transformed

⁵⁴ Mimi is the Yarnangu word used to describe girl’s and women’s breasts.

into ceremonial allurements. Great care was taken to make sure all designs complemented each of the others, and I was surprised at how relaxed and calm everything had become given the drama and indecision only minutes beforehand and which had caused such a flurry. However, time was of the essence, and with an uneven number of artists, and only minutes left before 'show time' Narelle Holland asked if I would paint her 'collar' on her breasts. I felt honoured! She explained what needed to be done. 'Just like the others,' she said. Taking great care, I glanced at the other artists to make sure that my circles and lines were in keeping with the group. After the event, and even though the vegetable oil had been applied, Narelle informed me in a matter-of-the-fact way that the paint was probably a bit thick and that she would have difficulty removing it from her skin. 'Just so you know for next time,' she said.

The dance routine (image 4.26) and its subject Kungkarangkalpa correlate with themes and concepts interwoven throughout this thesis and demonstrate how customary tjukurrpa values and inherent cultural traditions are made tangible in the contemporary setting. Kungkarangkalpa is important to the women, and to their painting at the art centre where meaningful social and cultural embodied experiences connect with multisensory communication. Sarah Pink (2015) defines these non-verbal types of communication and knowing as producing knowledge on different levels, allowing our observational studies of interaction to acknowledge the sensoriality of contexts and processes. The dance routine is in itself reverential and important to the Ngaanyatjarra women, and its enactment, although exciting, is taken seriously. Angiliya, for example, during the dance performance, evinced a level of intensity that suggested an almost trance-like state that opens the dancer to communication from mediating tjukurrpa beings, and where communication with the spiritual realm is enhanced (Tonkinson 2010). However, the dance also invites an audience to engage not only with the story and theme being conveyed, but also with the material and sensorial qualities of the bodies, the paint, the smells, the aura and the interaction. The decorated dancers emerged from their hessian hiding

and in succession as in ritual, with slow, heavy, stamping steps circled in front of the audience.

The mimi markings painted on the women's bodies are similar in pattern to those that are naturally etched/stained into the rocks at Kura Ala—an especially sacred site for Ngaanyatjarra Lands Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa. The sandstone rocks at Kura Ala are formed of various colour combinations ranging from soft pinks and reds to muted yellows and white. Narelle Holland and Elaine Lane⁵⁵ told me that these natural colours and markings in the rock itself have special significance in Kungkarangkalpa story and influence the way that particular colours and markings are transformed and painted on to bodies, paintings or drawn in the sand. These particular patterns have been memorised through generations and transferred to the body for ceremonial dancing and onto canvas for contemporary art. Each of the circles and lines represent tjukurrpa and Ngaanyatjarra knowledge and play an important part in the story. They are painted as white lines and circles with a yellow coloured centre. Matching yellow headbands were worn as an accessory. The instructions given to me for the body painting were specific—seven adjoining circles on each breast painted in white with yellow coloured centres. This corresponds with the naturally occurring colours in the rocks at Kura Ala.

The dance performance invokes the transmission of cultural knowledge by the artists through their collective sensory memory and through which their own ways of knowing are constituted. The embodied and sensorial dimension offers us a way to perceive how the Ngaanyatjarra might experience their environments. In relation to the multisensoriality of the event, the social and material relations might be linked to the embodied knowing produced in artwork at Papulankutja. My own immediate emplaced experience meant that I had located new meaningful knowledge about body painting by participating in the collaborative, cultural event.

⁵⁵ Personal communications at Alice Springs 5th Sept 2015.

My knowing in place is continuous and engaged, and part of the process of active participation and engagement. I am able to reflect on and define what meanings are constituted in relation to the artists and their paintings through their participation. Moreover, from this perspective I provide a basis for the development of ways of knowing that promotes an understanding of event practices related to art production at Papulankutja.

The women performed their Kungkarangkalpa dance. With decorated bodies they were transformed. Their bare feet pounded hard on the red earth in a sensual, meditative shuffling and stamping action, each dancer surrendering to the moment. During the performance they looked down towards the earth, their stamping feet causing low dust clouds to form. Through this physicality of movement, a physical memory, I was reminded of the excitement and energised anticipation of performing Kungkarangkalpa. The dance encounter was marked by moments of poetic language in the form of chants, disciplined ritual and collective embodied experience. These revived memories and embodied collective knowing can be understood in terms of everyday social life practices as occasions where, through dance and story, the relationship between the senses and collective ways of knowing are inextricably tied. I will expand on this theme in chapter six, where memory and its 'materialisation' in paintings are read through the lens of Kungkarangkalpa.

Day 2

The second day of the Desert Mob event is the more formal symposium, which is designed to promote and celebrate the creativities of artists and art centres in the Central and Western Deserts. In a large lecture theatre/auditorium artists from central Australia present stories, images and films about their art, art centres, Country and culture. There were also a number of guest speakers presenting and promoting upcoming projects. Invited artists also promote their art and stories to the large, mainly arts professional audience.

Day 3

Culminating in an artwork sale, the final day proved financially fruitful. The Desert Mob Market Place is advertised widely as offering buyers the unique experience of buying contemporary Aboriginal art directly from the producers at very reasonable prices. It attracts interested consumers from around Australia and is one of the industry's premier events. Both Narelle and Pamela help Jane prepare, present and sell specially priced artworks. This is an opportunity for remote centres to interact with the general public and sell surplus stock. I noted that at least an hour before the advertised starting time crowds of prospective 'buyers' were queued outside each of the several entrances. At 10:00 the doors and gates opened for this indoor/outdoor market event and the venue became overcrowded with anxious and enthusiastic customers in the frenzy that took place as demonstrated in images 4.27 and 4.28. From all accounts the day was highly successful in both a cultural and commercial sense.

The Desert market place is representative of art production in contact zones as discussed in chapter three. Art production as a contact zone is a space where things and people grapple; artists and consumers meet in an exchange of ideas, cultures and spaces. Yarnangu artists become active participants in a variety of art-related transactions. Consumers from many walks of life come together to meet the artists, talk about their art, purchase products that they admire and interact. Women dressed in their distinctive colourful, flowing, printed shirts and blouses and wearing the archetypal beanie, and the men usually in more formal, yet casual stockman style dress, come together creating the 'throwntogetherness' of the event. I was therefore enmeshed in place. I volunteered my services at the market stall for a while, when things were hectic, and noted that many of the buyers were keen to meet the artists. If the artist was present, it often sold the artwork.

Both Narelle and Pamela were keen to do some of their own shopping in the town so I took each of them separately to their shops of choice. Kmart proved to be most popular, although there was interest in specific boutiques. The variety of

consumables available at Alice Springs excites the travellers and this point cannot be over-emphasised. The choice and availability of just about anything is too good to miss and most of the artists consider the shopping expedition as one of the most important incidental attractions of the trip. The combination of cultural and art related events, hotel with room service, gambling exploits and shopping engendered a multi level experience of multiple trajectories. ■

Imaginations: creativity and themes

As multisensorial research, my approach positions *experience* at the forefront of the examination. By engaging with experiential ways of being in art production and the associated events, I learn to know in practice and research *with* rather than *about*. This is brought about through a reflexive and participatory outlook that identifies and acknowledges affective processes that make up arts practice and where I can explore concepts through contrasting frameworks. The plurality of trajectories and 'throwntogetherness' of place is relational and binds together the layers of elements that make up contemporary art production. Practice as activity is a way to explore ways of knowing that might reveal Yarnangu imaginations and worldviews that intersect with painting themes and art production.

Practices of art production are multisensory: painting stories

In the middle of summer in 2016, while out bush on a regular hunting trip, Janet Forbes called me over, patted the ground to her side, and gestured to me that I should sit down beside her. She sat cross-legged in the dirt and started clearing the sand in front of her, removing pebbles, small sticks and vegetation. 'Sit with me. We want to tell stories,' she said as she used four fingers to draw patterns in the sand. She worked quickly, drawing and then erasing, patting then smoothing, explaining the story as she traced. This practice is part of the everyday flow of desert life and I do not recall one day when I didn't witness someone drawing in the sand. The practice combines the verbal and the visual, engages all the senses (touch, vision, sound) and subsumes embodied layers of experiences that make up this multisensorial social activity. I notice too (at the art centre) that as artists select their canvases to paint, they run their hands across it, to *feel* its texture, in the same way that one might smooth the sand, clearing it before marking. The process of marking pliable sand is 'at once

tactile, visual and sonic' (Watson 2003). Similarly, the practice of painting embodies some of the same sensory exchanges.

As I demonstrate in more detail in chapter five, the verbal storytelling or 'song' of the story is materialised in acrylic paintings. Sand stories and drawing are part of a verbal art form and are used as a way of narrating everyday events. In her significant study on Aboriginal sand drawing, anthropological linguistics scholar Jennifer Green (2014) maintains the drawings give some context for contemporary Aboriginal art practices (Green 2014, p. 232). Consistent with Green's analysis, Christine Watson writes that studies of art in the Balgo region found that marking is not only visual but tactile and multisensorial, forming a multisensual communication between the selves of humans and Ancestrally empowered land, and that reading the art is a response 'more immediately and viscerally to the communication that they are making not only visually, but sonically and through the sense of touch' (Watson 2003, p. 69). Thus, characterising and observing Janet as she paints I seek to capture a social process that not only interweaves the trajectories of people and things but is also a more complex sensorial and cultural entanglement. Janet's paintings are an engagement with the embodied, sensory practices of the sand drawing experiences that have preceded her work. I watch as she picks up the dry gesso coated canvas. Before she applies the thick acrylic paint to its surface, as is her habit, she rubs her hand across its surface as if she were preparing the ground. Janet has also created a space here for dialogue. She shares her perception of things (canvas, sand) and stories, reminding her audience of customary ways in contemporary spaces. The effects of Janet's transcultural exchange are produced through dialogue and collaboration within the contact zone of art production.

Sand drawing is a major influence on the Papulankutja Artists contemporary painting movement (image 4.29). On most days, each of the

artists still practices one or the other, or both. Another senior artist, Anawari Mitchell,⁵⁶ said that she had learned painting techniques through watching her auntie paint and then added that they were the same as those that they had always done in the sand. Comments similar to this from several other artists prompted the art centre manager, Jane, to initiate a series of screen-prints in 2014, based on Anawari's recollections of sand drawing—see image 4.30. The prints are an example of how artists at Papulankutja merge traditional cultural practices like sand drawing with the contemporary techniques of current creative practice.

Themes in this series of prints were based on the sand drawings that the artists had themselves effectuated in the sand at an earlier period in their lives. The strength of the work lies in the idea behind it: each print represents a sand story that the artists remembered well. Artists drew on the introductory sand markings that narrators often produced when storytelling, often while hunting and singing amid vast plains of mulga and spinifex sand country. The artists told me that many of the paintings they created at Papulankutja begin with these austere markings, which are part of the sand story and the story-telling process. During the printmaking process, Anawari, in consultation with elder Tjayanka Woods, said that each print signified the beginning; its genesis was drawn from the original finger marks in the sand. Thus, art-making practices such as the prints have historical significance as well as aesthetic appeal. Examining collaborative projects shows how processes of renewal and change are lived, experienced and are symbolic of the everyday arts practice and research contexts. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, storytelling,

⁵⁶ Personal communication 31 December 2015.

sand marking and song are harmonious within Ngaanyatjarra cultural practice and consistent with the social circumstances that identify artists of the desert. These images are *part* of the whole story and reflect personal and exclusive blueprints that define history and family connections, kinship and camaraderie.

Themes: theorising the familiar

The application of an embodied perspective that views arts practice as place, and the ethnographic methodology of having been there and involved, helps me to comprehend artists' imaginations. The art and paintings offer a lens through which to apprehend cultural difference. Themes that are pertinent to practice are concerned with cultural difference, and are exemplified in the hunting experience outlined in this second embedded vignette 4c for the chapter.

Vignette 4c

Wednesday is hunting day

As a senior Ngaanyatjarra law woman with competent bush skills, Angiliya Mitchell knows how to hunt. A short, slight woman in her early seventies, she is still very active and one of the best hunters at Papulankutja. It is important to remember that certain middle-aged and older Ngaanyatjarra people had spent their formative years walking across their lands. These people had regularly walked tens of kilometres on

some days. In earlier times, especially in pre-contact⁵⁷ days, lizards, kangaroos, emus and other small game of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, were an important food source. Angiliya, unlike others of her era, rejected a missionary upbringing, constantly running away back to the bush and the hunting lifestyle she loved and knew well. Consequently, she speaks very little English. Other artists speak reverently of her prowess at being able to successfully hunt down and catch large, live goannas. She will chase it down its hole in the sand, and with great strength, pull it from its earthen habitat. I have watched as Angiliya tracked and excavated goannas and rabbits from their burrows; if they were hibernating she would spend more time sounding and digging burrows to locate which, if any, burrow in a burrow complex they were in. It is hard work and these days thin, long metal crowbars have replaced timber digging-sticks as the essential tool, along with small shovels and other implements adapted for the task.

In the contemporary era, hunting is one of the most enjoyable pastimes for people living at Papulankutja. Yarnangu worldviews are still focused heavily on their Western Desert Ngaanyatjarra world, and there is a marked lack of interest in trying to become more like other Australians (Tonkinson 2013). For example, the ability to hunt in the bush establishes an authentic Ngaanyatjarra identity for both sexes that is pervasive and persuasive (Povinelli 1992). At Papulankutja the Wati Kutjarra

⁵⁷ Although the specific moment of European encounter varies across the Western Desert due to the general remoteness and impenetrability of the area, it is generally accepted that in this region pre-contact refers to a period around the late 1950s and early 1960s. At that time outsiders first penetrated the region, in the form of government patrol officers making short trips into the area. However, some Yarnangu and Pitjantjatjara encountered early prospectors, doggers, sandalwood collectors and other European 'explorers' in the south from the 1890s onwards but Europeans were far less evident in the north (Brooks 2011, p. 26). According to anthropologist David Brooks, in pre-contact times there were perhaps 2000 Ngaanyatjarra people, widely dispersed over a large region of the Great Victoria Desert (cited in, Kral 2012).

creation story governs the social network and its landscape. In this story, creation beings left their 'tracks' so that, as people travelled in search of food and water, they would be constantly reminded of how their world was created for them. The landscape provided them with food and water and a strong spiritual connection to Country, which is maintained today. The artists' paintings contain many symbols that represent these hunting and spiritual tracks as well as depicting the stories and the food that may have been procured. As we head out of town, any passing location is likely to include a number of criss-crossing mythic and historical sites, previous camps, a mother or father's birth-site and various 'tracks'. These places are identified as we pass through; for example, a large hill with rocky outcrop next to a rock hole is the sacred area (where no photographs can be taken) important to Freda Lane. This is the spot, she tells me, where she was born and on which the two-goanna men had travelled, and a site where Freda's mother wandered naked and would carry her on her head in a piti (large wooden dish) (personal communication 2015). They would collect different seasonal bush fruits and seeds although they would spend more time wandering and searching for food in the dryer and hotter seasons.

Erratic and highly variable rains and storms provide an abundance of water and increase both plant and animal activity (Australian, Bureau & Statistics 2016; Walsh 2008). However, long dry periods occur throughout this region and people rely more on permanent water sources (rock holes) and soaks (Walsh 2008). The artists still collect desert fruits such as bush tomatoes and quangdongs, collected along with bush medicine plants for healing. At least 25 species of medicinal plants have been recorded as used in pre-colonial times on Ngaanyatjarra lands (Reid & Betts 1979). Currently, anthropologists work with the hunters and gatherers to identify and record many of these plants. Often, when I have been on hunting trips with the local anthropologist/environmental officer and Yarnangu, details are recorded; where and when these plants were found, nowadays with the added assistance of GPS location systems.

On most Wednesdays the art centre closes at lunchtime and vehicles are organised to take out a hunting group. Regardless of weather conditions a trip ‘out bush’ is always preferable to staying in the community. As I have mentioned, it takes about an hour of ‘hithering and tithering’ (Musharbash 2008) to collect all the hunters, their respective implements, younger mothers and babies, dogs, blankets and the billy and tea for supper. The troopie is often cramped and full beyond recommended passenger limits. It is anticipated that firewood or hardwood roots for punu (images 4.31 and 4.32) will also be collected and brought back in the troopie on the return journey. Additionally, ‘the catch’ is cooked and eaten on site usually just before dark as illustrated in images 4.33 and 4.34. This ‘event of place’ also provides an important nutritional supplement to the diet (Povinelli 1992). As is the custom, we sit around the fire, cook, and then eat from the bed of sand and coals in the red earth, and tell stories. My trips out bush with the artists are some of my most memorable desert experiences, particularly when it involved camping out at night, under the stars, in a swag, in the remotest places—unlikely to be found on any map.

As my culinary tastes are markedly at odds with that of Yarnangu, I am usually happy to watch and help with the physical tasks of the expedition (mainly digging). However, my preference is for tjala (honey ants), and although I do enjoy the ‘modus operandi’ and assiduous practice of foraging maku (witchetty grubs), the honey ants are a delicacy—the sweet, sticky honey is a memorable taste sensation despite having to suck the body of an insect. Initially, a cultural challenge, once overcome, the taste is truly remarkable. On one particular trip, Elaine Lane and her daughter Janet spent the entire afternoon digging a very large, deep hole (image 4.35). Then, with her fingers, Elaine carefully scratched out the ants from the side of the hollow, placing them cautiously onto a flat piece of bark. They looked like shiny, glistening dark coloured pearls (image 4.36) against the rich, red earth. As I marvelled at the sight of these freshly procured delicacies I remembered Nora Davidson’s Multju painting. When interviewed she told me that her paintings were always about Multju, a place to find good sweet honey ants and where her family

holds the story for Illurpa, a story about a mother and her children who have great success finding these ants. Her paintings are a colourful myriad of honey ant tracts.

The artists laughed and chatted throughout the afternoon, engrossed in an embodied practice that gave them great pleasure. One implication of foraging for bush foods is the multiple ways in which women's personal and collective identities and social inter-relations are shaped in the course of an afternoon's hunting. Bush foods comprise only a minor portion of Yarnangu's total diet now. However, the practices associated with it have a major influence on the women's sense of purpose and wellbeing and positive outlook at the art centre. Elizabeth Povinelli (1992), who did a study amongst Belyuen people west of Darwin, explained that the meanings and purposes of foraging in contemporary Aboriginal Australia gives Aboriginal people 'a way of attending to, re-enacting, and ensuring the physical and mythical reproduction of the environment, the human body, and the social group' (Povinelli 1992, p. 172). Yarnangu artists (and researcher) enjoy hunting as a happy and rewarding experience.

Watching Angiliya at the end of the day, unsympathetically scooping up her catch, in control of its destiny, and attending to the more unsavoury elements of hunting, I am aware of not just the pleasurable aspects of the afternoon, but also of the performance of an activity (with fulfilment) that appears embodied and systemised. Angiliya's, Anawari's, Elaine's and Janet's hunting and foraging practices (images 4.37 and 4.38), along with those of the others, can be broadly defined as a means of maintaining the physical health of people and countryside and of constituting their social group and personal selves (Povinelli 1992). Like dance, hunting expeditions are influenced by the traditions and spiritual ways of being that still exist in Yarnangu society today. However, it is the older people, like Angiliya and Elaine, who are the principal drivers of the maintenance of this customary knowledge, and others who are not so experienced are learning along the way (image 4.39). Moreover, these healthy, physical outdoor activities contribute significantly to Yarnangu strong sense of self and identity. They are lived out in practice and in

place through art production, and embedded within a broader cultural framework that, in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, stresses collective cooperation and unity. ■

Conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that a relational conceptualisation of place has enabled me to understand how Yarnangu artists experience, construct, understand and embed meaning into art production practices. As with chapter three, this chapter focused on the art centre. However, in contrast to the administrative aspects, this chapter's concern was with contexts of affective creative and cultural practices. I have demonstrated some of the complexities through which both the local and global comeingle in the creative flows at Papulankutja Artists. These complexities are implicated in the everyday practices of the artists. Both realities and imaginations are influenced by experiences brought about by transcultural encounters as illustrated in the vignettes. The vignettes suggest that art production might be analysed as social, commercial and indeed, community-strengthening processes. Socio-cultural outings and outdoor practices such as hunting can be associated with local health benefits. I have attended analytically to the multiple flows and intersections of the performance of these practices, steadily integrating themes and stories through which these practices are constituted and which I develop further in the chapters that follow. In the ensuing chapters I situate these practices in relation to place, through a discussion that brings images, memories and local identity to the fore. Thus, in chapters five, six and seven I develop the emerging themes by analysing favoured pictorial tropes. From the perspective of my analysis, practices are not just individual; nor are they dislocated from a bigger context. Rather, analysis of the themes is fundamental to understanding art and art-making practices at Papulankutja. I begin this themed development in chapter five with the salient story of *Wati Kutjarra*, which indicates the ongoing influences of the oral tradition. ■

Vignette 5

Bush trip to Ngaturn: Nora's country

Aboriginal art from remote communities is invested with the urgency of its total place in the world. This place is country, the regional and spiritual affiliation of the artist with traditions of land. (Jorgensen 2008, p. 415)

Diary entry Friday May 22nd 2015

Eight vehicles, equipped to negotiate rugged, fluctuating desert terrain, were packed with swags, small tents and foodstuffs. The travelling party totalled 21 including Jane, the Ngaanyatjarra land and environment anthropologist, Astra McKellow, and myself. The purpose of the overnight bush trip was a cultural visit to ceremonial and ancestral homelands. I had been invited to attend and was respectful of my inclusion. It was my preference not to take a camera or notebook, and the Ngaanyatjarra members of the travelling group have sanctioned all that is chronicled in this vignette.

Shortly after we left the familiar sites of Papulankutja and Mantamaru (where we picked up another carload of travellers) Jennifer Mitchell and Angiliya Mitchell, travelling in the same vehicle with me, started humming and chanting customary song and story. They were both excited about the trip and eager to start telling me some more of their own stories—the ones that give a more thorough and descriptive (often restricted) version of familiar themes. However, these stories are their own, and not associated with the country through which we are now travelling. This is Nora's country, they say. Nora's birthplace and her mother's country! There are others in the travelling party who also hold custodianship to this region. However, Nora is a close friend and painting associate, and they are excited for her and this significant visit (see image 5.1).

Mr Murray, a ninkiti⁵⁸ man, possibly in his mid sixties, is also travelling with us. He has ties to the region and once traversed the land on foot earlier in his life. He was extremely keen to relate the stories of his youth. He has a wealth of information about particular soaks, rockholes, noteworthy trees and rocks of significance. I found him to be truly moved by this visit. He proudly and confidently energised our trip by constantly relating long-lived stories about particular rocks in clay pans and the dangers of not adhering correctly to customary protocols. At some of the sites the men in our group sang, and as Mr Murray and Mr Donegan, both senior Law men, joined in with the chant, the introspective and sacred nature of our trip became evident.

Advice by various members of the party was passed on to me at individual sites. At one rockhole I was advised to be silent and not make too much noise—just whisper. At another, the most reverent site visited, I had to remove my red spectacles as the colour red would bring untold misfortune and heartbreak to myself, and perhaps those travelling with me. Respectfully, I placed my glasses in my pocket and noted that all red had been removed from sight. Anawari exemplified the importance of this customary restriction. She decided to change her dress for another as the one that she was wearing had slight red patterned colourings. At this particular site Nora took my hand, and led me to a large round and smooth rock. Here, she insisted that I meet with the rock, which was a bird. It was important for Nora, and the others, that we all approach the rock and perform a specific rubbing action, using both hands, in order that we make a cordial connection with it. The travelling group had been smoothing the sandy soil around it and cleaned the rock upon arrival. The undisturbed smooth, rounded, large white rock stood alone, appearing out of place and perched upon the red sandy soil. It was solitary and to me appeared quite

⁵⁸ Ninkiti is the term referred to as naked. In this case the term is used to describe men in the community who lived naked in the desert around thirty-forty years ago.

dislocated. The sand all around the rock had been 'prepared' - flattened and made uniform, and a windbreak, made from collected foliage and sticks, was erected around it.

This particular site is off-track and situated far from any centres of population. It is a place not on any map. I sense reverence, responsibility and guardianship during our visit. Yarnangu in the group who didn't have direct connection to this Country were mindful and respectful, often opting to stand back and allow others with closer ties to reconnect and elucidate.

A little further on we discover some old grinding stones that would have been used to finely grind the seeds growing on small shrubs all around us. We all look closely at each very flat and smooth piece of rock. Most of our party were reminded of their earlier years and demonstrated to the outsiders how these were used for grinding to make flour and then turn it into damper. The grinding rocks were very old and re-placed carefully exactly where they were found. Some of the party knew exactly where they were. I wondered when they were last used? We moved on to the next site.

The group made a few stops along the way, in the hope of digging out goanna from their hole where they were nesting, or rabbits burrowed below ground. Neither proved fruitful on this particular trip. Others made their way straight to the acacia bushes with crowbars to dig for maku.⁵⁹ The catch was cooked up with dinner. Bush medicines and edible succulents were sampled. As a ranger for the land and environment department, Anawari identified and clarified the differences between various plants and alluded to their medicinal purposes. I tried some of the edible succulents we found (image 5.2). They tasted very salty—reminded me of Mexican food.

⁵⁹ Maku or witchetty grub is found in the roots of the witchetty bush (*acacia kempeana*).

The colours and shapes of these strange yet beautiful pastel coloured flowering plants are helpful in our understandings of some of the paint colour selections at the art centre. As many of the flowers are mauve and pink (image 5.3), it explains why many of the acrylic paintings at Papulankutja Artists are permeated with mauve, purples and soft pink. I recall asking about this colour choice at the art centre some years ago. Why, I thought, would you use such a pastel-coloured palette? Everything I see is red or ochre. Laughter was their response. Didn't I know that these were the colours of the desert? Our ways of seeing were different. My Western-centric eyes were (ill-)informed by the dominance of 'comprehensive' colour—hues like red for soil, blue in the sky, and the unusual sienna brown of rocks etc. I neglected to see the detail, brought about by years of tactile and local cultural knowledge, interwoven with customary life and practices. For me, the authority of red overpowers the other subtle colours. The red is striking and so inescapable that it permeates my visual senses. But the artists see a more nuanced hue. The artists' 'experience' and 'ways of seeing' look past the paramountcy of red, ingesting the subtle colours of the grey bushes with their tiny purple or pink flowers. The artists are familiar with the edible plants, some with soft grey foliage, or bulbous fruits like the quondongs, with their dark purple/red skin. In spring, and after rain a multitude of colours are abundant, evoking Yarnangu multisensory experiences that might then be expressed or interpreted in terms of visual sensory categories such as art.

The Country we visit is also familiar to Narelle Holland as it was her first husband's country and she had also spent many years living and foraging in the area. She told me that she paints the story involving the smooth rock all the time, then covers it with layers of elegant dotting so that the restricted information that the painting holds is not open to public scrutiny.

We camped at a spot judged suitable by the group. As the sun set fires were lit and the cold winter air descended on the party. Small groups formed and cooked kangaroo tails and damper in small individual fires. I moved between two groups,

my outsider colleagues and a small group of women who suggested that I should camp with them. My swag lay in between Jennifer and Angiliya and before long I was snug and warm and gazing into a clear sky filled with millions of twinkling stars. I fell asleep feeling safe and saturated in new experiences, after listening to the cosmological stories that Angiliya, Jennifer and Elaine told.

It is very cold in the desert at night. After a bitterly cold start to the morning breakfast was cleared away and the camp packed up and moved on. 'Can't leave a mess here,' said Jennifer, 'not like in community'. We burned the rubbish and travelled further into the parched and dehydrated land. Visited more sites. I had experienced emotional and empathetic research encounters of specific environments and representational layers of Ngaanyatjarra being.

As we passed through arid countryside matches were struck and thrown out at the dry spinifex, which ignited instantly into raging flames and smoke, driven by the heat and crisp scrubby foliage. We sped off and looked back—a trail of black smoke and fire roared behind us, as seen in image 5.4.⁶⁰ ■

⁶⁰ The fires are lit as a form of bush and fire management. Indigenous desert bush-burning practices result in smaller, cooler fires and help conserve reptiles and smaller mammals while promoting plant diversity. This regime also disturbs contiguous habitat and provides more successful firebreaks that limit the spread of large fires. Ngaanyatjarra fires, whilst promoting plant diversity, remove the spinifex clumps that tend to out compete with other species. See 'Traditional Aboriginal Burning', Department of Parks and Wildlife, Government of Western Australia.

Chapter five

Viva voce: re-presenting oral knowledge visually in the Ngaanyatjarra world—the Wati Kutjarra story



This mythological Being, who now lives in the heavens, gave Aborigines their tribal laws and customs. Aboriginal myths, legends and stories were told to laughing and open-eyed children centuries before our present-day European culture began; stories that stand today as a link between the dawn of the world and our latest civilization. (David Unaipon, in Muecke & Shoemaker 2001, p. 4)

viva voce: a phrase that literally means 'with the living voice'

Introduction

Papulankutja is a picturesque place at the foot of the Blackstone Ranges with a plentiful ground water supply and many trees. At a place known as Putjarr, two large stony outcrops shaped like big lizards (or men) face each other a few

metres apart and border the settlement. These geographic, ancestral rock formations⁶¹ are the spiritual representations of *Wati Kutjarra*, the story of Two Men and their exploits, who also took the form of goannas. The name Papulankutja is derived from this powerful and widespread story.

In considering the details of processes through which places are constituted in relation to specific localities such as the art centre, I now broaden the enquiry to examine the cultural conditions that sustain and impact on the creative flows of art production at Papulankutja. Specifically, I define place as a rather more complex intersection, an intensity of relations, that shapes the conditions for art production and that intersects with Yarnangu ways of knowing. As I have explained in the previous chapters, Yarnangu artists and art practices are often better understood as being entangled with one another in complex ways that involve the global, financial and creative flows. In chapter four I situated the art centre as a place of complex and multiple agents that combined the commercial with the creative and cultural. I discussed art production practices, with an emphasis on the creative and cultural aspects at the art centre. As already noted, other narratives about Western Desert art and related creative and cultural practices became interwoven in art production in the constitution of place. I find

⁶¹ The rich Indigenous oral history of the region is often shown through geological phenomena and land formations that occurred in the past. Such phenomena were codified in terms of the local knowledge of the time and gave rise to well credited myths which spread and influenced the local cultures for centuries, and in many cases leading up to the present time (Piccardi & Masse 2007). See 'geomythology' a recent term used to analyse mythological stories to learn about geological events portrayed in them and that give valuable information about unknown geological events.

it useful here to make connections with Massey's conceptualisations of space and place. Massey calls for an understanding of place that embraces the way all the living and nonliving elements that make up a particular place at a particular time create 'the happenstance juxtaposition of previously unrelated trajectories' (Massey 2005, p. 94), where people and things relate in new ways. Massey's relational view of space helped me build on and complement Aboriginal understandings. The production of space has the potential to coalesce thinking around space-time and customary Yarnangu knowledge, principally storytelling. In this chapter I will show how the relational complexity expands exponentially when wider cultural contexts are taken into account, when we connect space-time with the multiple temporalities of Yarnangu worldviews, country, and the tjukurrpa themes recurrent in the artists' paintings. The purpose of this chapter is to further situate art making practices in relation to place with the concepts of stories, memories, images and local identity. I develop these connections through the themes of story and orality, as the living voice is intrinsically linked to painting and art centre practices.

Going beyond painting practice

Recently, after a long day of fieldwork, in temperatures that soared way above the forty-degree mark, I lay on the couch in front of the air conditioner. As I rested, silently, I could hear the usual community noises. If I listened carefully, I could distinguish that the noises thumped out from a few locations. Music from distant houses, clattering cars loaded with locals cruising, whistling and voices. Not just talking voices, but yelling voices—loud, sharp cries piercing the air. Then, a shrill whistle would follow. I noted that this happened many times, most days—a sharp, piercing yell from someone from one location to another. 'Wiya, wiya!' they call. This would be followed by the all too audible shouted

message. Were these vocalists conserving their energy, avoiding having to walk the extra distance to get their information across? Or is this just the way that messages are relayed to one another? The scene was all very oral and animated. The noises also made me think about Angiliya, an elder, who often 'sings her story' to break the silence while she paints at the art centre. Her friend Elaine often joins with her as they sing and paint together.

The observations made me wonder about the ongoing influence of oral traditions, and whether the deep generational influence of orality still prevails in the small community of Papulankutja. One point to consider here is that it isn't very long since there was, exclusively, only oral communication. Many people in the community, especially the elders (but not exclusively), speak Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara, the local languages, and cannot read or write. This chapter is based on my ethnographic observations.

In chapters three and four I examined the operative and collaborative network at Papulankutja Artists, considering the flows of persons and things implicated in it. Through the framework of the contact zone I described the mitigating, competing and complex influences affecting painting and art production. I explored how we might understand crucial interactions between artists in contemporary social workspaces like the art centre. I demonstrated how human and material relationships and embodied knowing, in the interrelations of place, help us understand how arts practice and the art created are implicated. The art centre emerged as a site where artists can exercise agency, even as the centre undergoes changes in the face of transcultural processes that influence values, practices and ideologies. In this chapter I focus on these Yarnangu values, practices and ideologies to understand how these might affect painting practices and themes in art produced at Papulankutja

Artists. To do this I engage with the artists in discussions about orality, memory and Aboriginal knowledge (stories), conveyed through paintings. In doing this I recognise how place is constituted differently in different knowledge systems such as at Papulankutja. Place emerges not only through relations and material-semiotic assemblages but also—and predominantly—through story and orality.

This chapter furthers the theoretical analysis of practice and place established in the preceding chapters through an exploration of Aboriginal ‘story’ and how these stories interact with the day-to-day practices of art production. I show how Yarnangu transmitted tjukurrpa stories, orally and regularly, often incorporated into song and sand drawing, and their impact on the artists’ engagement with arts practice. I also demonstrate the value and cultural importance of these stories for artists who are continually immersed in storied environments. In particular, this chapter highlights the *Wati Kutjarra* story and oral traditions. As shown below, through the lens of orality and *Wati Kutjarra*, we can better understand how stories, customarily imparted orally and finger-drawn in the sand, shape dominant themes in paintings today. In doing so I offer a new perspective on how we might comprehend meanings embedded in paintings, providing us with analytical routes to understanding both human activity and the creative art environment.

In terms of creative practice and themes at Papulankutja Artists, many of the paintings are attributed to a particular ‘story’ related to tjukurrpa. The rich oral storytelling tradition still plays a significant role in Yarnangu socio-cultural life and remains intrinsically linked to both religious and mythological worldviews and Ngaanyatjarra social organisation. The concept of *story* relates to Yarnangu knowledge systems. I link these to the oral traditions of Yarnangu with story and storytelling. By representing oral stories *visually* analysis can

show how they help to define a particular belief system that operates in tandem with the contemporary lifestyles of the Ngaanyatjarra people today. This chapter offers new insights into meanings embedded into the art produced at Papulankutja by defining traditional oral storytelling in the context of 'today'. I illustrate how paintings have become a visual extension of the traditional oral heritage. I provide a framework for conceptualising the everyday through the vocal and visionary relationships and embodied knowing that emerges in paintings. This knowledge has a narrative basis and can be sung or told orally, painted in condensed visual form, or rendered in other material or non-material form (Nicholls 2016).

Meshwork: a web of discourses

'When you look at the Walu rockhole you look at, you think, and you know, when you look it's the shape of an emu, a emu shape that rockhole is, when, and the stories, Dreamtime stories like this 'bout people sitting round that rockhole, sitting round, and there should be an emu there, like sit round like the emu meat was [...] I've got the landscape and the 'other' painting underneath then the picture and I always do the dots over [...] yuwa, yuwa. I've been doing this all the time with my paintings and with my stories. *Walu*, people sitting around the rockholes and sometimes it's not a rockhole it's an emu, the shape of the emu. When you look at that rockhole it look like emu's shape.' (Narelle Holland, personal conversation 27 May 2015)

Yarnangu have come to know about themselves and others through story and song. Each time Narelle relates the story of the Walu rockhole, either orally or visually through her paintings, the personal versions and details, arising from her personal experiences and imaginings, are animated by contemporary

influences. For example, sometimes her own grandchildren and family experiences become enmeshed in the long, sustained narrative that starts at the rockhole. Her stories are a mode of transmitting and transposing personal and collective knowledge and ancestral experience, and her means of making sense of the world and everything in it. Narelle's story explains the travels and actions of the ancestors located in webs of knowledge then and now. The emu and the rockhole are just the scene setting details at the beginning. The lengthy story proceeds to explain the dire situation of two children caught in a willy-willy. Social knowledge, remembering, and first hand accounts of life encounters are marked and recollected at each of the places named in Narelle's *Walu* story. The landscape acquires significance through the cartographic marking and mapping of experiences and events (Magowan 2001). As Magowan points out:

Storytelling is, therefore, embedded in ancestral creation but animated by contemporary action, such that the cartography⁶² of country is also a cartography of the mind. (Magowan 2001, p. 43)

Narelle's mapping occurs over and under varied layers of the painting, depending on whether or not particular knowledge should be imparted to outsiders or those without familial authorisation (see image 5.5). For Narelle, the art centre is a place where Western Desert cultural knowledge and Western art skills converge in the making of art commercially. By dotting over sensitive information she negotiates the difficulties involved with transcultural exchange.

⁶² For an expansive, detailed account of mapping processes in Australian Indigenous societies, see Peter Sutton, *Icons of Country: topographic representations in classical Aboriginal traditions*.

Narelle, and other artists, are conscious of the value of commercial art production to their community, although each is careful to ensure the culture encoded in their art is suitable for sharing.

Narelle passes on first-hand stories of life experience or the telling of received stories as cultural wisdom, providing intergenerational transmissions that communicate either new or personally discovered truths. Songs parallel this storytelling and support the major narrative. Events and places are sung or spoken into being through the imagined world of the storyteller. At Papulankutja everyone tells or sings stories and some of these stories are transposed into paintings and art. Thus the art is another aspect of oral knowledge.

Unravelling story, oral traditions and orality

Throughout this thesis the term *story* is used, as this is the terminology that Yarnangu participants prefer. It is a complex term and relates more to a way of life—of connectedness and belonging. It should not convey the impression that information from the tjukurrpa or Dreaming is not true or is trivial, or that it only happened in the distant past. It refers to ancestral knowledge and cultural wisdom. There is both a ‘then’ and ‘now’ in each story. The temporal relations between ‘then’ and ‘now’ are important transcultural perspectives and illustrate differing conceptions of time. Stories impart Yarnangu understandings of the world and its creation. Some tjukurrpa stories represent the beginning of knowledge, from which came the laws of existence. The tjukurrpa world was a historical time of the Ancestor Beings. People may have particular affiliations to specific stories. Story often parallels tjukurrpa and can mean dream, story, Dreaming, original period of landscape customs and laws, and the creative period that continues in the present. Story also relates to Yarnangu

connectedness to land and sacred sites, and to a certain extent, one another.

According to Inge Kral:

In the Western Desert, oral memory and the transmission of cultural knowledge and learning through the *tjukurrpa* (in this sense meaning both Law and story) have been critical to the maintenance of a regulatory framework that has bound culture over generational cycles. (2007, p. 197).

Substantially, in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands today, 'the past still remains close to the present here' (Brooks 2011, p. 35).

Oral tradition refers to cultural material and traditions that have been transmitted by word of mouth through successive generations. There is no doubt that Yarnangu value oral storytelling. During my camping experiences with Yarnangu artists, the performance of storytelling around the fire was customary (image 5.6). In the evening and after the camp fires were made and windbreaks of bushes put up as a protection from the night air, our group cooked tails and meat, then gathered comfortably around small fires, and settled down, ready for some storytelling until all were too tired to talk anymore. Stories were told of family and friends, how the last hunting trip went, and also who ended up fighting. The lively imaginations of what happened years ago were interwoven with what happened yesterday, and as the story progressed mingkulpa was being blended with white ash and passed around. Mingkulpa is the regularly ingested, mildly intoxicating 'bush tobacco' (called pituri throughout Central Australia) and chewed by most Yarnangu (including many children) at Papulankutja. The evening was filled with humour, story and song. There were shrieks of laughter as memories were brought to the fore and the oral tradition of storytelling enriched the event.

Orality itself can be defined as ‘thought’ and is comparable to verbal expression in societies where technologies of literacy (especially writing and print) are unfamiliar to most of the population. This applies to a large proportion of the artists at Papulankutja. The dynamic process of remembering and telling is deeply embedded in orality (Errante 2000, p. 25).

Stories: Different Ways of Knowing

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.

(Stanner 1953, p. 57)

The Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner conveyed the idea of The Dreaming (tjukurrpa) in his 1953 essay, in which he aptly referred to The Dreaming as the ‘everywhen’. He wrote:

One cannot ‘fix’ The Dreaming *in* time: it was, and is, everywhen.

(Stanner 1953, p. 58)

Stanner was an empathetic and perceptive scholar who understood the ‘subtlety, complexity and all-encompassing, non-finite nature’ of the tjukurrpa (Nicholls 2014). Knowledge and tjukurrpa are infinitely entwined at Papulankutja, as I will demonstrate.

During my interactions with the artists, it became clear that much more could be understood from the paintings by understanding the *knowledge* held within them. Most of the paintings’ themes are central to tjukurrpa stories (knowledge), and parallel the construction of oral narratives. Angiliya’s singing is an element of the storytelling and defines her painting. Indeed, rhythmic oral patterns have figured in the work of orality. Existing understandings of orality emerge from extensive research undertaken by Walter J. Ong, who offers

insights into 'thought and its verbal expression in oral culture' (Ong 1991, p. 2). His classic text *Orality and Literacy: The technologizing of the word* delves into memory systems and oral-based thought, arguing that orality is highly rhythmic, and that recall is helped by the linking of rhythmic oral patterns with gesture (1991). Ong (1991, p. 34) notes that protracted oral-based thought becomes intertwined with memory and verse. In the context of this research, I argue that Angiliya's painting becomes a visual extension of traditional oral knowledge 'through which meanings emerge in their intersections with practices' (Pink 2012, p. 45), and where gesture (for example drawing in the sand) may also inform the visual representation.

In Western Desert culture, storytelling, song, gesture and painting are seen as intrinsically related (Klapproth 2004, p. 347). Angiliya and Elaine will often tell or sing their stories while they are working on a particular depiction. Megowan argues that song is a 'means of narrating one's own life world and those of others, shaping a sense of personhood, obligation and affiliation' between performer and audience (2001, p. 42) and transmitting and transposing both personal and collective knowledge. Fiona Megowan's teaching and learning philosophy draws on anthropological and ethnomusicological insights from Yolngu life stories. Megowan's research is underpinned by a concern for the role of the senses and emotions within the disparate and artistic musical expressions performed by Yolngu. The research revealed the complex ways religious and spiritual values are negotiated, articulated and evaluated. I draw on her key theoretical insights in the auditory and co-dependent visual strands relating to flows and moments of remembrance in song and story.

Yarnangu paintings reveal the complex intersections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of knowing. Ngaanyatjarra or Yarnangu ways of

knowing reflect Australian Aboriginal conceptualisation of oral narrative traditions which are related to both the meaningful tjukurrpa tracks of the desert and to scientific knowledge. Both are interwoven implicitly into local traditions. My research suggests that the influences of oral tradition are directly related to the artists' abilities to respond and represent knowledge visually. As Errante points out, 'dynamic process of remembering and telling is deeply embedded in the orality of oral histories' (Errante 2000, p. 25). I argue that memories *and* knowledge, shared through oral communication and story, are also inscribed in painting. Thus, each painting conveys complex and idiosyncratic notions of Ngaanyatjarra ways of being. Christine Watson, researching in the Balgo region, conceives the practice of painting two-dimensional artwork as a 'multidimensional practice of transmitting knowledge' (2003, p. 72).

This chapter reports on an examination of paintings produced at Papulankutja Artists and which record and transcribe narratives, places, and geographic landforms. Building on earlier chapters that situate place as knowing memories and imaginings as constituted through 'entanglements' that involve ongoing practices (Ingold 2008; Massey 2005; Pink 2012), there is strong evidence to suggest that these paintings deliver a powerful account of Yarnangu sense of place. The participatory embodiment of two well-known tjukurrpa stories like the *Kungkarangkalpa (Seven Sisters)* and *Wati Kutjarra (Two Men)* play an important role in Western Desert Aboriginal ways of knowing and their conceptualisation is a way of recasting contemporary thinking (Muecke 2004). Each day, as artists sit together at the art centre, they talk, paint, revive and renew traditional stories (image 5.7). In doing this they interweave into the traditional stories recent events that relate to it and give it contemporary

relevance. These stories convey values about social behavior and social relatedness in terms of their story content and various levels of socio-cultural life. Ngaanyatjarra storytelling has retained its predominantly oral character. At Papulankutja stories have not been written down or passed on by Yarnangu in any other way, until recently: *visually* at the art centre. Stories are told and sung, as artists paint their visual representations of landscape and story, often reminiscing about a particular dance track or where a large goanna had just been caught. Select groups of individuals will be responsible for telling the stories of distinct sections of a tjukurrpa track. These places may be ceremonial sites along the track to which they have particular custodial authority. For example, Janet once said to me, 'I can't tell that story! That one belongs to Nora.'⁶³ The land is thus a verbal repository and constitutes the organic link between the reality of the tjukurrpa and the people who inhabit the land (Klapproth 2004).

These stories also shape and define the storyteller and who they are or how they came to be who they are (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010). Although storytelling in the non-Aboriginal community is often referred to as narrative, Aboriginal people prefer to refer to the process as the telling of our story or stories (Wingard & Lester 2001). Collaborative voices of Indigenous authors verbalise and validate Indigenous knowledge systems. In the postcolonial contemporary era, the two ways of knowing are captured through stories in painting. Some scholars have likened painting to an adapted form of reading and writing (Bardon & Bardon 2004; Munn 1973).

⁶³ Personal discussion with Janet Forbes, with Nora present, 3rd January 2016.

Apprehending Ngaanyatjarra identity requires an understanding of the fundamental ontological worldview derived from the tjukurrpa—the spiritual framework that provides the overarching cultural schema within which contemporary life is played out (Kral 2012a). The contemporary cultural identity of Yarnangu is derived from the tjukurrpa. Through the lens of the tjukurrpa Ngaanyatjarra people interpret aspects of the world, and conceive the links between people, country, events and phenomena (Kral 2007). It is understood that in the tjukurrpa, the Ancestral Beings created the landscape. These Ancestral Beings, who assume both human and non-human shapes, are believed to be responsible for both the contemporary landscape and Ngaanyatjarra social and religious practices. Tjukurrpa is an all-embracing concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as rules for interacting with the natural environment. Tjukurrpa provides for a total, integrated way of life. The tjukurrpa isn't something that has been consigned to the past but is a lived daily reality. Anangu⁶⁴ women stated:

'The tjukurrpa has always been. Not only does it refer to the time of creation of all things, it is still unfolding, alongside present events, and it is being re-created and celebrated by Anangu today.' (Mutitjulu 1990, p. 35)

Janet Forbes notes:

'At Papulankutja Artists people paint many different stories from their mother's and father's country, from grandfather's and grandmother's

⁶⁴ Anangu (Central Australia) mainly speak Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara and some Ngaanyatjarra as dialects of the Western Desert Language. Anangu means people in Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara, near Ngaanyatjarra.

country. Sometime I do painting from my grandmother's country, *Pulypal* sometimes I paint the *Wati Kutjarra* story from here. The story is about two men travelling across the desert through Blackstone to Docker River.'

Keeping culture strong: visually

In this section I explore everyday arts practice through a storied framework of the Papulankutja story of *Wati Kutjarra*, the Story of Two Men. To do this I draw on a series of paintings infused with motifs based on *Wati Kutjarra* and that demonstrate the ways that contemporary art among Yarnangu artists has emerged from a distinct knowledge system. My discussion draws on arguments from anthropology, Yarnangu philosophy, geography and art history that refer to connectedness, contemporaneity and story, and is based on the oral accounts of senior men and women in the community. I argue that we should be careful not to underestimate the significance of this system of oral knowledge transfer. Seeing and knowing are rarely the same thing. The overall 'picture' can be marked *for* and *by* the artists who remain holders of an *inside* knowledge. I propose that by bringing together approaches that are sensitive to Yarnangu knowledge and beliefs and that bring meanings to the contemporary art, we retain the structural foundations of arts practices in an environment that supports understanding and contrasting worldviews.

A storied realm – through time and space

Stories like *Wati Kutjarra* connect people and are recounted through a process that identifies with specific and memorised places. Such places are interconnected with the land, people and the tjukurrpa. Historical ties of identity are combined with those of the contemporary era, forming a perpetual story connection through space and time, yet not acknowledging the linear

Euro-Western space/time system. Resultant paintings and art forms convey connected meanings, suggesting these paintings are equally part of the present and the past, incorporating the multilayering of different times and connections (Morphy 1998, p. 64). I have observed at the art centre how this unique temporality engenders the enriched and evolving story. The story is continually changing as contemporary circumstance alters perceptions. Each story is painted for that place and at that 'non-specific' time and may have ancient and modern temporality. Stories become progressive maps, or webs, that articulate not simply the land, each other and the tjukurrpa, but all that is connected to it. However, time is never fixed. This worldview is defined by connectedness, and it connects all things across time and space. It is also the foundation of being. The *Wati Kutjarra* story draws from a time when ancestral beings travelled across the landscape, creating the world and everything in it. However, it is not restricted to the distant past. The residue of these events remain in the present creating a landscape imbued with ancestral signs. Yarnangu elders, the 'Holders of their Culture', or 'Keepers of the Stories', both men and women, pass their knowledge on as storytelling. Retaining what they learned is just as important as the learning process (Berg 2005).

As I discussed in chapter two with reference to yarning circles, although predominately called 'story' or 'storytelling' at Papulankutja, the word 'yarn' is sometimes used and can be applied to informal conversations. Yarning also builds on the oral tradition of handing down information and involves sharing information through the telling of stories (Bessarab 2012). Indigenous researchers Dawn Bessarab and Bridget Ng'andu explored the concept of yarning through storytelling. They approached yarning as a process of meaning making. Dawn Bessarab, from the Bardi language group in Western Australia,

affirms that yarning is part of Indigenous pedagogy, building on oral traditions of handing down information and sharing it through the telling of stories (Bessarab 2012). Bessarab and Ng'andu said that stories do not always fit into neat little categories and often take meandering routes, appearing messy and following their own conventions in relaying information (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010). The rigour in the yarn is to listen and allow the story to flow, establishing a connection by sharing information, and enabling a real and honest engagement (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010). They write:

Yarning is conducive to an Indigenous way of doing things; its strength is in the cultural security that it creates for Indigenous people. (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p. 47)

The pathways in stories are often connected by animals, who are metaphors for different groups of people, both within the same language group and those beyond (Drew & Harney 2004). Bill Yidumduma Harney's explanation illustrates storied concepts eloquently. A senior Aboriginal elder of the Wardaman people, north of Papulankutja, from west of Katherine in the Victoria River District of Australia's Northern Territory, Bill Harney gives his creation story to researcher Julie Drew to provide his people with an understanding of the images that were put on the rock by the ancestors. Part of the story is as follows:

First, all the lightning people were '*moodoo*' meaning everyone was silent, then later they became ones with the mouth so they could talk. When they talked that's the time when they tell the stories about this place. They put all the creation stories and songs together. Then they invented all these different tools showing how to go about it and how to put them together. (Drew & Harney 2004, p. 92)

Bill Harney's timeless account of creation stories connect the elements of the earth, the weather patterns, the species, plant life, landforms and people, and also shows the sacred Law and the penalties for not following that Law (Drew & Harney 2004, p. 96). All stories are highly valued and Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith states:

The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest contract and mark of difference between Indigenous peoples and the West. It is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control ... yet. (Smith 2012, p. 74).

Smith goes on to argue:

Each individual story is powerful. But the point about stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story [...] ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further [...] to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other. (Smith 2012, pp. 145–6)

Strengthening Smith's argument, Papulankutja artist Jennifer Mitchell reminds us of these connections through time and space, and the importance of maintaining this knowledge through stories and painting:

'Before the painting we always get a story from aunties [...] from nana, and you know, from mem, you know [...] yuwa from memory. And my grandmother, and from my aunty, and from my uncle, and from my brother [...] them old people always tell them people now to go [...] tell to look after the country, and not to go this way, this is men's, this men's business way, you know, men's tjukurpa, and this one for

the minyma [...] just do this one [...] yes [becoming more important as I get older] because a couple have gone, aunties gone, mother's gone, now we've got the tjukurrpa to teach all the young ladies, and so they can do that story you know. Follow the track [...] to learn people got to take people to the country and tell them you do this, don't do men's. Yuwa, the men teach the young children, the boys. [...] Some people they learning from the oldies. Getting stories from the oldies.'

(personal conversation with Jennifer Mitchell, 17th November 2015)

Researchers offer divergent ways of understanding the representational layers of time, space and story. Tim Ingold offers a useful approach through his theoretical work on storied knowledge in which he develops ideas about the *art of storytelling*. Describing them as woven 'from the past into the texture of the present' (Ingold 2011a, p. 164), Ingold recognises that these stories are fixed by their paths of movement in unfolding fields of relations that intertwine, as each becomes bound up in the other's story (2011a). According to Ingold:

to tell a story is to *relate*, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, bringing them to a life in the vivid present of listeners as if they were going on here and now. (Ingold 2011a, p. 161, his emphasis)

Putting Ingold's argument in conversation with Anangu, the synthesis and evolution of the story goes further:

From these stories of deeds and misdeeds anangu continue to learn the proper way of being in the world and of living with each other. [...] Protecting the Tjukurrpa and the land is more than a concern that the stories and songs of how things came to be are not forgotten. For

anangu it is the protection of the essential nature of all things and of a unique way of being.⁶⁵ (Mutitjulu 1990, p. 35)

Painting as a visual extension

My fieldwork and research at Papulankutja developed by building on contemporary perspectives, focusing on artists' relationships to both stories and paintings within Yarnangu environments. Both stories and paintings impart knowledge, foundational values and the moral and social codes by which Yarnangu live. Artists have offered some key insights into how the cosmological Ancestral Beings shaped the land and traverse each story through time and space. I have listened as storytellers dispense with superfluous and timeworn miscellanea, reviving and enhancing events with dramatic details that update the story for current situations and schemas and create an overlap between past and present events. On occasions, after a visit to a ceremonial site or a bush trip, the recent events may trigger an innovative and contemporary 'updated' outlook, often including relatives or other friends and artists. This then becomes a renewed or updated moment in or version of the story. In this way, stories and other oral or narrative accounts have a continuing life of their own, with particularities often understood only by those present, and rarely translated as written text.

I argue here that *visuality*, then, can take on a linguistic form and become a recognised sign (Benterrak, Muecke & Roe 1984; Langton 2003). As Marcia Langton has noted, the use of traditional Indigenous pattern in art composes the pictographic form of text, which can only be read by a person literate in

⁶⁵ Reproduced in part from the leaflet titled 'Tjukurrpa' with permission from the Mutitjulu Community.

Aboriginal culture (2003). This then suggests that oral stories are directly transcribed as pictures with both 'inside' and 'outside' signification. According to Christine Nicholls, paintings can act as a 'visual shorthand' or as an abbreviation of a complex semiotic system of the 'expanded fuller *oral* narrative' (2001, p. 29). Building on this discussion and my own experiences at the art centre, I suggest that these 'abbreviations' or 'moments' in Aboriginal story, wonderfully modulated in its orality, circumvents exact written translation and continues to hold a commanding position in the everyday lives of Yarnangu today, through the agency of painting.

Massey writes that places are best imagined as 'articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings', where most of those relations and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what for that *moment* is defined as the place itself (Massey 1993, p. 66, my italics). Paintings become embodiments of the moments of oral expression and story implicated in the constitution of place.

Painting: a genesis in sand drawing

Interwoven with the story to picture coupling is the manifest tendency towards gesture: Yarnangu artists often draw with hands and fingers in the sand, especially when telling the story. As discussed in chapter four this customary practice of drawing pictures with fingers while explaining and re-telling the intricacies of a story is integral to the traditional oral heritage. The story behind the Papulankutja artists' paintings emerges from a history of collective story telling. Its genesis is linked to the original finger markings in the sand. Sitting on the ground with Yarnangu artists, I have listened and watched as the storyteller narrates the story orally, seemingly unconsciously gesturing and drawing patterns in the sand. This sand drawing action clarifies and

substantiates the story being told. Many of the paintings on canvas at Papulankutja commence with these replicated visual shorthand sand markings.

As senior artist Janet Forbes paints the *Wati Kutjarra* story she tells me that marking in the sand has always been part of the story and the story-telling process. As a consummate storyteller herself, a raconteur, Janet commands attention from her audience, clears the ground by rubbing and sliding her palm across the dry dirt, and starts the process by using either fingers or sticks to visually describe a particular event. Each *episode* is rubbed away and cleared for the next as the story continues. Both narrator and audience draw on this sensorial engagement between story and land. Thus, storytelling, sand marking (and song) are intrinsic to Ngaanyatjarra cultural practice and are consistent with the social circumstances that identify artists of the desert. Furthermore, the introductory markings on canvas can be understood to have their counterpart in the sand, where images and oral stories like *Wati Kutjarra* were, and still are, told. At the art centre the culmination is a form of *verbal art* incorporating speech, song, gesture and drawing, which has become transposed on to the canvas.

Geoffrey Bardon is regarded as a pivotal figure in the formative stages of the Western Desert painting movement at Papunya in the 1970s. He offered his own perspective of Pintupi sand stories, observing a haptic quality in connection with the artwork. Like Janet, rubbing and sliding her palm in the sand, Bardon also noted that painters engaged sensorially with their work:

The sand drawings held within them an interior 'horizon' which vanished as it was covered over and *narrationally* put aside, a likeness to this being the turning over of pages of a book, so that the

representations one is reading become overtaken or substituted or over-imposed by what follows. (2004, pp. 42, my emphasis)

Storytellers moved their hands across both sand and/or artwork to create new meanings, and as the 'visual words' were wiped away, new ones marked the sand 'transcribing the story-thought and carrying the narrative along' (ibid, pp. 42-3).

These multisensorial practices are understood by some scholars as 'multi-modal'. Ross Gibson helps us to understand these relationships through transcultural multi-dimensional analyses that link both time-layering and sensory multi-modal awareness. Gibson describes transcultural aesthetic relationships that mesh people and things as multi-modal engagements around several senses. His encounters with song and song-cycles drawn from studies of encounters with remote Indigenous Australian cultures by scholars such as Barry Hill and Martin Thomas capture 'a sense that Indigenous knowledge is arranged in people in space and time in ways that are completely at odds with Western presumptions about cognition and interpretation' (Gibson 2011, p. 145). His emphasis is on the multi-modal nature of interrelations, where the senses become 'altogether inseparable, infinitely layered and communicative' (Gibson 2011, p. 146). Just as sand drawing and painting engage 'visual words' to tell important stories like *Wati Kutjarra* as representations of tjukurrpa and land, so too multi-modal practices are:

evidence that Indigenous Australian cultures uniformly arranged themselves with relational and systematic thinking which is to say that to differentiate and to hierarchise singular notions such as sight, vision, touch, taste, smell and thought is to miss the systematics and

the improvisatory quickness of the “ecological” kind of mentality that is always informing Indigenous experience. (Gibson 2011, pp. 150-1)

Gibson’s comments suggest we might better understand Yarnangu arts practices as multi-modal engagements that entangle the senses. For example, when Angiliya uses melodic sound and the embodied practice of chant when she evokes the experience of Wati Nyiru in her *Kungkarangkalpa* paintings; when Janet Forbes rubs the sand or the canvas before painting the land; and when Elaine uses collective story, dance rhythms, tracks and ‘proprioception’ (Gibson 2011) to give insights about *Wati Kutjarra* stories materialised as art.

My ethnographic research has thus offered a framework that demonstrates the visuality of paintings is effectually comprehended through relationships that connect orality and story with sensorial gesture through sand drawing. The practice of painting can also be defined through its multi-modal and multisensorial engagements. Paintings like *Wati Kutjarra* invite us to understand arts practices as something that is not static, but dynamic and changing; it produces both stability (in customary, cultural practices) and change (visually, in painting). Finally, it is evident that the cultural practice of drawing in the sand is a vehicle ‘through which adults reinforce habitus and the philosophical values of the society’ (Watson 2003, p. 106).

Painting = story

At Papulankutja, as in other Aboriginal communities, stories can take on a localised orientation. This happens when one person’s story ends where the story of another person takes off (Benterrak, Muecke & Roe 1984). The auditory and the visual are co-dependent and often reliant on the ‘sounding’ of images in the mind’s eye (Magowan 2001). Ethnographer and cultural theorist Stephen Muecke offers us a useful way of understanding this by suggesting that

mimetic moments are the central points of access for the listener, when language is put aside and the illusion of being there is complete (Benterrak, Muecke & Roe 1984). In his discussion, Muecke clarifies this with his emphasis on story:

the framework of the story is built: the dialogues of the characters, the narrator's voice, the gestures of sand drawing or direction which illustrate the story and firmly place it in its specific context, the laughter of the narrator and audience which bursts through the mimetic illusion and thus constitutes the pleasure of the event.

(Benterrak, Muecke & Roe 1984, p. 54)

At Papulankutja Artists, mimetic moments are represented in the artworks. Depictions are enlivened, drawing together the threads of entangled worlds that find themselves, in the end, applied to canvas. *Picturing*—representing in the form of paintings, words and music—connects past and present. Image making and its conceptualisation is not purely visual but integrally involves senses of sound and touch. Resultant pictures capture the complex networks that make up Papulankutja stories and contemporary life and that were once oral and locally experienced. I argue that the artists reconstitute the pleasure of the event, at the same time as they retrace a path through time and space, often set out as tracks. They change the form of expression, the oral with the visual. This point is well illustrated in the artwork of Fred Untjima Forbes.

Fred Untjima Forbes always had keen memories of his early life, and told long narratives of his family's 'foot-walking' travels. In later life he began to transpose these oral stories onto canvas. He listed the sequence of waterholes visited, the people in the party, and events, both routine and unexpected, which occurred along the way. Fred Untjima Forbes is remembered as a charismatic

and reflective man for his role and life in the region. He was among the first people to establish the community at Papulankutja in the back to the Ngaanyatjarra homelands movement in the early 1970s. He is also the father of Papulankutja artist Janet Forbes. His intimate knowledge of the Ngaanyatjarra landscape and its features over an area of several thousand kilometres endowed him with an intimate knowledge to formalise in his paintings. Fred applied the acrylic colours made available to him. Instinctively, without any training, he drew on his inherent knowledge of country. He was always keen to maintain his own culture and identity and adhered strongly to the underpinnings of Ngaanyatjarra cultural knowledge and law, encountering life as the most knowledgeable of Ngaanyatjarra men (Brooks 2012). Janet says he had the best knowledge of the immensely detailed tjukurrpa tracks of the desert in the region. He had actively sought this knowledge from his elders and began to record on canvas some of his knowledge and feelings about his country, as illustrated in images 5.8 and 5.9 (Brooks 2012).

A storied painting: Wati Kutjarra

The story of *Wati Kutjarra* is widespread across the vast desert region, and at Papulankutja Artists many of the artists, both male and female, paint their depictions of this story. Artists give contemporary resonance to the ancient concepts like *Wati Kutjarra* in many ways, with many variations in style. For instance, Elaine Warnatjura Lane will sometimes include figurative work within her canvas (images 5.10 and 5.11), creating a fusion of both human and animal, cosmic and vegetative. Her works are a cluster of creative and ancestral elements, articulated both figuratively and geographically, in subtle colours, variegated dots and meandering lines. Her paintings are delicate and beautiful. Through her paintings she affirms her identity and relation to tjukurrpa by

interweaving her knowledge about creation stories, passed on to her orally, with creative visual expression. Nearly always, the paintings are her story of a place near Jameson on the *Wati Kutjarra* (Two Men) tjukurrpa track. The story is about two men who took the form of goannas as they travelled from Noongar country (now called Perth) across the desert through Papulankutja to Docker River. The two men were powerful magicians. They often punished or killed wrongdoers and sometimes went too far, being cruel in the exercise of their powers. To amuse themselves, they sometimes played the tricksters. They usually took the form of a goanna but they could turn into other animals as well. At Papulankutja, they actually tricked one another when they both changed their appearance at the same time. This is behind the meaning of the name Papulankutja ('they couldn't recognise each other'), which is also the Aboriginal name for the community.

Elaine Warnatjura Lane: oeuvre

Elaine was born in the bush, the traditional way, close to a rock hole. Her father was a Donegan and she is sister to Pantjiti Mary McLean and Molly Nampitjin Miller. Elaine lives in Papulankutja close to her brother Jimmy Donegan, a well-known senior Law Man and artist, mentioned in earlier chapters. Elaine paints the country around Papulankutja and her work reflects the seasons, using subtle colours that encapsulate day-to-day life. The layers of colour that overlap across the painting express, she says, the texture and flow of the country. Elaine paints the country from Mantamaru to Papulankutja and her representations of *Wati Kutjarra* embody the seasonal colours of the vegetation. Elaine⁶⁶ says that

⁶⁶ Personal conversations and SAM data entries identified during the field periods in 2015–16.

the country floods during the wet season and then bursts into a landscape of wildflowers and grasses that are used for bush damper. The lines in her work depict the tjukurrpa tracks that direct travelling ancestors. Her work remains deeply connected to the landscape.

Elaine paints at the art centre amidst a group of female artists, sitting cross-legged on the floor and painting on stretched canvases that are also laid out on the floor, one canvas in front of each artist. Around the room a scattering of scrawny dogs wait for their owners. They are usually stretched out and filling in any spare spaces in and around the painting area. Dogs in desert communities tend to make a dramatic first impression on outsiders. As well as a series of named, pet dogs, there are also dogs that are loosely attached to households but not really owned by anyone. Despite the value given to particular dogs for hunting, this is not usually their purpose. Dogs are involved in and interconnected with a number of human social activities, as examined in vignette 4a, and include 'hanging out' at the art centre. Elaine sits with her two small companion dogs.

The centre is never completely quiet as artists are often telling their stories and routinely laughing. Many sounds permeate the space. Sometimes the dogs bark or fight. Sometimes there is friction among artists and they fight. Visitors come and go. Some artists sit peacefully, and softly sing their painting. Elaine often talks while she paints. Sometimes she sings with Angiliya. Most often they appear comfortable and relaxed.

Elaine's paintings are vibrant—scatterings of colourful dotting, marking the flood plains rich with life after the rain. Single lines score the artwork (image 5.12), depicting the ancestral walking tracks. They mark the way for travelling ancestors, and are now augmented by contemporary marking—the unsealed

road to the nearby community of Jameson. Elaine is a strong woman and elder and visits the art centre each day to materialise⁶⁷ her tjukurrpa. Her paintings embody forms of collected identity, memory and the shared traditions of extended groups of people. Each of Elaine's paintings can be viewed as visual extensions of an oral knowledge system and a way of reinforcing authenticity and cultural authority over land.

While the origin of oral traditions is not known, stories like *Wati Kutjarra* have been passed down through generations as cultural knowledge in a learning process drawn from lived experience and embedded in the oral tradition. For example, the Two Men are regarded as having given vital information to people about how to bring about an abundance of various desert food items and as having performed acts like creating waterholes, rearranging landscape features, watercourses and the like to benefit human habitation (Brooks 2011). Particular stories often show the two men destroying *mamu* (spirits) that are dangerous to humans. Thus, memories and knowledge are generated collectively through sharing stories in diverse contexts, one of which is art making.

In Ngaanyatjarra culture the ownership of stories is respected and gives directives about life. For example, the two men with their magic powers of destruction provided a wide range of help to humans, often amid some questionable, bumbling conflicts and quirky exploits at different periods throughout their journeys. Seen as outsiders, interlopers and even braggers, they represent the antithesis of ideas about proper and strategically effective

⁶⁷ I use the word 'materialise' in its literal sense, i.e. to become actual fact; happen; to become visible.

behaviour that are held very dear by desert people (Brooks 2011). These exploits focus on 'self' instead of always acting in the service of others when required, and where behavioural excesses are not condoned. However, David Brooks suggests that largely because of the nature of their powers and personalities, the two men are seen as helpful 'mates' and that this 'explains why the *Wati Kutjarra* Dreaming has a 'public' feel to it, in a way that the other Dreamings do not' (Brooks 2011, p. 267).

Elaine paints the two men, represented as the two rock formations near the town's border. At Papulankutja the two lizards are 'for once not doing anything, not dismembering anyone or playing games or even camping, but simply sitting, or representing themselves to the world' (Brooks 2011, p. 25). She carefully depicts one of these boulders as slightly smaller and also darker than the other. It has numerous small, etched markings on it – arrows and lines and the like (see image 5.12). As she paints, she talks about the story and the place, her homeland on the other side of Jameson. There is an old small tin house that was erected on her family's custodial land which remains vacant now and is strewn with camel bones. Elaine paints this place acknowledging the surrounding rockholes and tracks. She combines icons and indices with dot band sequences and infill techniques, and has developed her own individual painting style. Elaine's *Wati Kutjarra* paintings are transcultural representations that emphasise and interpret different ways of seeing the world. Elaine's intense dotting and intricate detail visually records both ancestral presence and the beauty of natural elements of Country. She relates the happy memories of her early years walking this land with her parents and siblings and later with her husband, his other wife, and their children. She paints the hills and sand hills brown, and the

yellow circles she has drawn are the small stones that mark the well-travelled track. She says:

‘That’s my colour. Lovely one, lovely one [...] these are all the little bushes, walking ‘round looking at the little stones - yapu, yapu. Same like that.’⁶⁸

She dots and dabs and talks about the tracks and the travels. She paints the water holes a soft, rich textured chocolate colour and tells me that she prefers to use colours that remind her of the land. Here, Elaine draws together relationships that were previously collective and oral. At the same time, she depicts tangible and visual memories of her story, now embedded in her paintings on canvas. Elaine (with the help of artist/translators in the group) tells me that the voices of the grandfathers and grandmothers are embodied in the work, protecting and sustaining cultural difference and Yarnangu knowledge, and passing on the stories connected to the geography of the region. Elaine sits beside her friend Angiliya, who sings the land as they both paint together. Elaine hums along!

Elaine’s style is delicate, particular and experimental. Her work is easily identified by its scattering of fine dots carefully placed on the canvas to emphasise particular tracks, waterholes and ancestral beings. Many of Elaine’s paintings are distinguished by the inclusion of figuration. This figuration is a distinctive feature of art emanating from the Papulankutja area of the Western Desert. The inclusion of single point perspective figurative representation in

⁶⁸ Personal conversation with Elaine 14th January 2016. Yapu is Yarnangu word for small rock.

some work is most likely influenced by local rock art in the region. Although some of her painting techniques are formalised and controlled as part of traditional knowledge, a number of experimental adaptations, particularly concerning layout of design are not. Elaine's work is rarely symmetrical or centred. There may be a concentration of fine dots and story heavily weighted to one side, or at the top or bottom. Sometimes, a large portion of the canvas will be left unmarked. Although there is interchange between the artists, sometimes leading to the influence of one artist's style on the other, Papulankutja artists tend to establish their own individual methods and approach to painting their stories. Preferring to paint stories and Ngaanyatjarra landscape, Elaine limits painting the uniform and traditional iconographic body designs seen in some artists work at Papulankutja. The use of soft complementary colours – dotted tones of pinks, mauves, soft blues and greens, shows a willingness to experiment with colour and design if not with iconography. Her work also experiments with internal lines of dotting which mark tracks that Elaine has walked, or the track marks formed by ancestral beings.

In addition to telling Elaine's personal *Wati Kutjarra* story, the finished painting also gives us details of how particular experiences might have shaped Elaine's outlook on life, culture and community. These memories, transposed from oral stories she heard as a child to the canvas, enrich my understanding of the importance of not just the tjukurrpa, but of what this knowledge in art represents.

In recent years Elaine's oeuvre is almost completely *Wati Kutjarra* tjukurrpa, although each version may be slightly different (image 5.13). Her ways of knowing are bound up in paintings embodied with Ancestral designs. These paintings, then, are arguably also abstractions of far greater knowledges that

define a cosmology, a worldview and processes that differ from my own. The oral stories embodied within each one illustrate to some extent the historical, social and cultural processes that constitute life on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands today (image 5.14).

Conclusion

Practices of any kind need be understood as part of wider environments and activities. As I have shown in this chapter, theories of place based on ways of knowing acknowledge the diversity of things and processes that converge in what Massey (2005, p. 141) calls the 'event of place'. This approach allows us to situate stories like *Wati Kutjarra* in such a way that we recognise its entanglement with and contingency on other processes, materialities and visual representations. This framework expresses the dynamism of operating within constantly changing ecologies and does not pin down practices into static contexts (Pink 2012). Here I have argued that the lived reality of oral practices and stories and the event of painting *Wati Kutjarra* can be understood as contingent and mutually interdependent.

Thus, my learning about oral traditions at Papulankutja, and their relationship with contemporary customary painting practices, demonstrates the ecological links between the stories that have been told orally for generations and the ways that narrators remember and tell them through visual *representation*. The rich tradition of oral storytelling, sand drawings, tjukurpa stories and knowledge, and Yarnangu ways of knowing makes *Wati Kutjarra* a remarkably resilient vehicle for conveying such knowledge whilst continually allowing it to be adapted and revitalised with modern updates. In sum, this chapter encourages researchers to rethink the processes and approaches through which knowledge about some Yarnangu paintings is gained. This

perspective attends to the environments and activities through which life is lived, and recognises that Yarnangu imaginations and practices are inescapably bound up with the both the personal and collective identities and biographies of those who perform them. As I have demonstrated, at Papulankutja place is constituted not only through relations and material-semiotic assemblages but also, predominantly through story and orality.

This chapter has also argued that the stories legitimise oral histories as sources of documentation. These stories are mediated by the nature and context of remembering. In her *Wati Kutjarra* paintings Elaine synthesises the spiritual dimensions of the story and then maps out the route that her family took when hunting and gathering and recasts her memories for a contemporary visual audience. Elaine Warnatjura Lane is an artist who transmits cultural knowledge with strength. Artists like Elaine are committed to their practice, their success inspiring others in small desert communities (images 5.15 and 5.16).

Orality in its spoken and visual forms expresses the binding laws and knowledge of the land and its culture. Orality is continuous and authoritative in defining the cultural realm (Langton 2003). This oral knowledge is now interwoven with visual expression. The oral basis is pivotal in understanding Yarnangu art. Painting enables contemporary Yarnangu to make visible the connections and continuity of stories apprehended from the past generations of storytellers. Elaine's way of painting is representative of these connections with the past. The art centre is also the place where a unique transmission of voices and oral culture adapts and moves to a future of cultural renewal and growth. The continuity between past and present is manifest in ceremonial oral traditions of tjukurrpa knowledge, now rooted in the present. This freedom of

voice (often loud and animated) reflects contemporary circumstance in Papulankutja and encapsulates the vibrant orality of the region.

This chapter has revealed how the oral communication of culturally significant tjukurpa stories helps to define the particular belief system that operates in tandem with the contemporary lifestyles of the Ngaanyatjarra people today. I have used the example of *Wati Kutjarra*, memorised, told orally and painted by Elaine Warnatura Lane, to show how visual art is another aspect of oral knowledge, one that is produced *viva voce*, drawing on 'the living voice'. I have argued that a close examination of contemporary art from Papulankutja reveals that deeply rooted traditional oral knowledge overrides all other considerations when creating art. This chapter has evaluated the art from a Yarnangu perspective, embedded in Ngaanyatjarra culture. The paradigm of orality has provided a framework for the oral retrieval and representations of knowledge and story in the context of the everyday. Thus, I have demonstrated how stories shape the dominant themes in paintings at Papulankutja. In doing this I offer a new perspective on how we might comprehend the deep-rooted meanings embedded in paintings. In the following chapter the paradigm shifts from orality to memory as I explore both collective and personal memories by analysing representations in paintings of the story of *Kungkarangkalpa*, also known as The Seven Sisters. I draw on Angiliya Mitchell's artwork and memory to highlight another story central to Yarnangu everyday life

Vignette 6

Angiliya's dream – a reflection

On my last day of fieldwork at the art centre, there was a general air of malaise around the community. After a particularly difficult summer period when artists were either too hot, or disinterested in painting because of lack of sales, and things were generally just very quiet, Angiliya (quite suddenly) disrupted the status quo. Remarkably, after a lengthy lapse from painting she arrived at the art centre determined to paint. Angiliya appeared extraordinarily motivated in what seemed to be a single-minded pursuit. Over recent months Angiliya had been preoccupied with the guardianship of her baby grandson Jordon, which had kept her totally distracted for hours each day. Her painting time had suffered and she often just sat on the ground outside the building to have a yarn with anyone visiting the centre. In a sense Angiliya had been caught up in the problems of local practical activities and sociocultural change, often thrust upon (older) Yarnangu by the social life of others. In this instance, Angiliya's daughter had temporarily abandoned her child-rearing responsibilities and Angiliya had taken on the role.

I had not seen Angiliya paint for weeks and had wondered if she would pick up the brush again before I left to return home. She hadn't been herself during this (my last) visit; each day she had seemed to be preoccupied in reverie—or just disinterested? Lamentable family business was most likely the problem.

Understandably, domestic circumstances had changed for her. But on this particular day there was a firmness of purpose about the task at hand. The urge to paint was overwhelming every part of her very being. I had watched Angiliya paint many times before, always with purpose and a particular seriousness about the subject matter: significant and weighty Kungkarangkalpa knowledge. Angiliya is an artist who is

imaginative, always thoughtful about her paintings, very serious and somewhat meditative.

On this particular day—my last day after a lengthy stay—Angiliya sat quietly on her own, consumed by the practice of painting. The painting itself, awash with all shades of pink, was glaring, vivid and extraordinary. As I was myself preoccupied with finalising countless loose ends before I left the management position I had had abruptly conferred on me, I was unusually distracted and hadn't paid close attention to the art production. However, throughout the course of the day, I was aware of the painting developing. It appeared very different to anything Angiliya had painted before. And, although artists at Papulankutja are not afraid to use bright rainbow colour palettes, I don't recall the overstated use of pink in earlier works. I scurried past as she painted, each time more and more intrigued. So pink! What did this painting represent? My peripheral vision connected with its intense presence. I had written so much about Angiliya and her art. She was my 'star'—my thesis thread—and my friend. I wanted to know and to understand! Her single-mindedness with regards to this painting seemed at odds with her detached demeanor of the past few weeks. Finally, she had found the urge to paint again and I wanted to know all about it.

Angiliya painted all day. She didn't stop for lunch. She painted until very late.

It wasn't however until the end of that day that I was able to engage with Angiliya. I sat with her and we had some photographs taken (images 6.1 and 6.2) and at the same time she began to sing. The gentle hum and melodic tune was like a soft chant, almost trance-like. Mixed emotions passed between us and it brought tears to my eyes. I hadn't heard her sing for months and as I gave her a big hug she started talking about the painting. I couldn't understand all she said except when she muttered 'Seven Sisters ... special' in strained English. Then it dawned on me. The painting was about the pink rocks that Angiliya and others had shown me near the cave at Kura Ala. I asked if that was it. She smiled. 'Yuwa, yuwa!' She knew that I

knew. Then, she broke into a lengthy description about the painting in Pitjantjatjara (Angiliya's language). She directed the conversation to both Pamela and myself pointing at different aspects of the painted canvas and explaining its ancestral revelations. I didn't understand, so as Angiliya relayed the details, Pamela translated it all back to me.

I gazed at the pink painting. Yuwa, this was the cave, a significant and valued place known only to those women invited to be part of its cultural and ancestral condition. Its 'everywhen' or tjukurrpa knowledge is concealed deep within a multi-layered, pinkish rock escarpment away from elsewhere.

Angiliya had had a powerful dream⁶⁹ during the night. It was a dream about Kungkarangkalpa and the pink cave. It was vivid and she said she was compelled to paint it. I was in awe of the influence and power that possessed Angiliya now—so strong that she should be so overwhelmed with the dream's immensity and intensity. Angiliya's cosmology does not separate human from non-human, nature from culture, or the relevance of dreams from daily life. It is part of her being and her tjukurrpa. She knew that I understood. She smiled so much. She seemed so happy. And here, just as I was leaving she wanted to talk and tell me all about it. In the moment, I felt I understood what she was saying. And Pamela had translated pretty well.

Moreover, this was the day after Pamela and her son saw Featherfoot in the evening on their way home. Pamela was quite spooked about that incident.

Angiliya's powerful dream, a meaningful dialogue, was being represented in a visual language, woven into daily discourse. Significantly, recorded on canvas. I was moved by the serendipitous reality of being part of this unexpected disclosure. The

⁶⁹ Actual dreams and the Dreaming, although to a limited extent related, are not the same thing. For a contemporary analysis of tjukurrpa dreams, see Silvie Poirier (2005).

strength and power of her tjukurrpa overpowered Angiliya and inspired her to do something that was meaningful to her. Angiliya knew that I understood what was important about this painting, and to her, and she was happy to share it. I had only imagined that I might experience such an occasion—when art bridged cultural difference in a most meaningful way. Angiliya and I had connected in a powerful, intercultural way. The art had become a meeting point between two people and two worlds. And we both understood. And, just as I was leaving she wanted to talk and tell me more and more about it. Even though she was speaking in her Pitjantjatjara language I knew that I understood what was being said. I think that this artwork is a powerful expression of Angiliya's identity—her agency to impart values of Ngaanyatjarra tjukurrpa and cultural difference⁷⁰—her 'voice' and her place in the world. ■

⁷⁰Recognising tjukurrpa in sleep (kapukurri) is closely linked to and a means of interaction with this vital dimension of Western Desert life. For analysis of dreams and Dreaming in the Western Desert, see Sylvie Poirier (2005). Also, Robert Tonkinson 'Aboriginal dream-spirit beliefs in a contact situation', in Ronald Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, 1970). Also see for epistemological status of dreams and on their significance in whole process of socialization (Poirier 1992) and (Tonkinson 1971).

Chapter six

Kungkarangkalpa: materialising memory—defining the Seven Sisters of Pleiades in the Ngaanyatjarra world



These tales are neither simply illustrative nor simply explanatory; they are fanciful and poetic in content because they are based on visionary and intuitive insights into mysteries; and, if we are ever to understand them, we must always take them in their complex content. (W.E.H. Stanner 2009, p. 63)

‘They [outsiders] was saying Seven Sisters. Before they was saying Seven Sisters they [yarnangu] was saying it was Kungkarangkalpa. Kungkarangkalpa story.’ (Jennifer Mitchell, 2015)

Introduction

In chapter five I drew connections between oral storytelling, which reflected some of the spontaneity and shared features of sand drawings, and contemporary painting practices at Papulankutja Artists. Through a lens of

story and orality the study expanded our knowledge about the foundations of ancestral reality through story and tjukurrpa. I described the paintings as communicating the comingling of current everyday practices with stories like *Wati Kutjarra*. Thus, oral knowledge is often interwoven with visual expression as forms of transcultural practice. I demonstrated that story mediates knowledge and showed that at Papulankutja there is a conduit between ways of knowing the world of the ancestors and the visible canvas surface world of the artists. In this way, stories connect memories, images and locality. In this chapter I argue that the oral history then becomes communal or collective memory and I explore tjukurrpa stories as a framework for the retrieval and representations of memory and tradition, transposed, and now maintained in artworks. This embodied remembering actively shapes the paintings transposed onto the canvas through the mind and the senses.

When I was a child growing up in Sydney I always looked forward to my father's astronomical explanations about the night sky. As children, my brothers and I would listen and look attentively at the dark mass sprinkled with twinkling stars, and learn about particular constellations in our sky. My father had learned to navigate by the stars as part of his training to be a navigator on Lancaster airplanes during the Second World War, and his knowledge about the sky was vast. For me, the constellation named Orion was always the easiest to find. And just to the right of that well-known group lies the cluster of stars called the *Pleiades*, or *Seven Sisters of Pleiades*. My late father could never have imagined that so many years later my childhood memories and interest in Australian Aboriginal culture and heritage would lead me back to the skies in order to track some of the ancient tjukurrpa stories, many of which are reflected in the patterns in the sky.

Now, as I lie in my swag, warm, under a clear sky and canopy of a thousand twinkling stars, I can see Orion and I ponder this contemporary circumstance.

Angiliya, Jennifer, Anawari and Elaine lie beside me in the camp we have set up sheltered from the wind. The night is icy cold and I can't sleep because I am too overwhelmed. I think about Orion and look for Pleiades and give thought to the new story called *Nyiru* that my fellow campers related to me. But it is *Kungkarangkalpa*, the story of the seven sisters, that plays on my mind. I imagined being a child and growing up with an embodied and deeply felt involvement with this long and complex women's story. At Papulankutja there are a group of senior women who are the custodial holders of this particular part of the track that the sisters once travelled. They treat with reverence the eminence bestowed upon them through familial ties. Their memories of the story are sharp, yet fluid. Angiliya, Jennifer and Anawari are the holders or custodians of the story. All three paint very little other than their own detailed versions of the story of wati Nyiru and his persistent pursuit of the seven sisters. The ancestral story is widespread across many parts of the country, and is a women's story, although men have their own version. For artists at Papulankutja the ceremonial site known as Kura Ala is the focal point on the extensive track. It is the place where these women grew up hunting and gathering at a time before 'ways of being' changed. At Papulankutja *Kungkarangkalpa* is told in 'small chunks' of story. It is a story about seven sisters being chased on land and across the skies by a lecherous and 'tricky' man. His actions and how the sisters respond express moral values, humour and grief, and impart knowledge, especially to girls. Cardinal elements of this story have been memorised and passed on for generations. Each successive group remembers.

I am interested in the women's capacity as artists and holders of knowledge to portray the multifaceted experiences of place, and how their practices of memory and imagination form part of a wider story and art ecologies. On the one hand, this entails types of memory practices and personalisation associated

with one's own family story and personal experience, as in Angiliya's dream. On the other hand, the story forms part of an undertaking that perpetuates a collective set of memories of cosmological stories from past generations.

Conceptualising materialisation and memory

The markers of *how* we remember vary considerably. Some particular forms of remembrance depend on cultural and societal signification. These memories may be individual or collective, constructed by temporal or environmental spaces. They may carry spiritual transcendence. Sometimes they are embedded in utilitarian objects or art. Remembrance may be active and performative, or embodied and productive. Memories may be strictly channelled and very ordered. They often become narratives of identity, reiterated through continued practice. Memories, or remembrance, may be part, or all of the above.

I first reflect on how one might materialise memory. The focus of this chapter concerns how memories may be materialised, or made tangible. I approach this by offering an analysis of selected Yarnangu artwork. My research will demonstrate that in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, contemporary creative practice provides a framework for the retrieval and representations of memory, transmitted through vital tjukurpa stories. Culturally embodied memories, often emphasise an environmental relationship between memory and place, and may be interpreted as part of our everyday life experiences, and continually reconstituted through practice (Casey 1993; Pink 2015; Seremetakis 1996; Stoller 1997). These memories are performative and enlivened in the contemporary art space, implying that sensory memory is 'part of the processes through which ways of knowing are constituted' (Pink 2015, p. 38). For example, Ross Gibson argues that the mind (and therefore memory) can be mapped as country, and that this mapping can help one realise 'how deeply the country can be surveyed, tested, tasted, appreciated and expanded in the mind' (2008, p. 13).

Both individual and collective memories and histories can be recovered, performed and recast. This approach helps me analyse the contemporary ways both story and painting inform our understanding of different ways of knowing, ways of doing and ways of being (Martin 2003).

Thinking about memory has led me to further research queries. These are questions about whether this method helps me understand how contemporary Yarnangu artists perceive their own subtle engagement of the conditions and current aspects of their contemporary environment? How are the emotive and affective qualities of Yarnangu knowledge being transmitted and preserved in remote desert communities today? In geographical terms, Yarnangu location is technically 'very remote' and is situated in a barren desert landscape with a harsh climate and inaccessible terrain. However, distance and landscape are no longer markers of exclusion and isolation. In today's world of computer technology, tablets, telecommunications and mobile phones, memory has become 'a field where different times coexist' (Berger & Mohr 1982). The field is continuous and evolving, stimulated by the interconnectedness of events (Berger & Mohr 1982, p. 280). This inter-connectedness of events, the importance of place, and the value of stories form part of the rich ecology of memory that informs my study.

This chapter does not seek to situate Yarnangu paintings and art in the aesthetic and commercial sense, but to elucidate the contemporary significance of *story* in art. In a collaborative process with the artists (both custodial elders and storytellers), I present their transcultural account, which provides further insights into Ngaanyatjarra culture at the sites of cultural production. The artists describe, through their own versions of *Kungkarangkalpa* and other stories, how their depictions in art relate to concepts of tjukurpa and their contemporary everyday lives. Often encoded within the shapes and markings of ancestral animals, plants, dance or tjukurpa tracks, is the authority of the law and local

customs. As she paints delicate dotted lines across her paintings, Elaine explains to me that a tjukurrpa track is a dancing track that can be identified through physical places in the landscape. It may also be a conceptual track that the ancestors made for those coming after to follow. My analyses are derived from observations at the art centre, interwoven with the artists' own personal reflections. I draw on examples of the *Kungkarangkalpa* / Seven Sisters story⁷¹, which is transmitted extensively, and often discreetly, across Australia.⁷² Drawing on the notions of collective knowledge and both communicative and cultural memory (Connerton 1989; Lewis 1992), and the practices of oral history discussed in chapter five, I develop insights into how we interpret memory and understand its environmental and temporal qualities. I propose that by bringing together these approaches we can explain *Kungkarangkalpa* today with sensitivity and insight.

The chapter extends on the idea that contextualised cultural customs at Papulankutja are performative and evolving and are expressed in terms of painting *Kungkarangkalpa*. To illustrate this, I explore with the artists how culturally significant tjukurrpa stories help to define a particular belief system that operates in parallel with the contemporary lifestyles of Yarnangu. With the artists' contributions and collaboration, I build on and re-define historical oral storytelling in the context of today, and indicate its relationship to important (and sometimes confidential) cultural knowledge that pervades current (and

⁷¹ Seven Sisters is the Western term used to describe the historic tjukurrpa developed in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands somewhere between 1986 and 1995 (Jennifer Mitchell informed me). Before this the story was called *Kungkarangkalpa* story. Unless otherwise cited I will use the Yarnangu term *Kungkarangkalpa*.

⁷² Many parts of the story cannot be told, especially to men and people without custodial authorisation.

past) daily life. At this point it is important to stress that only information given to me on the basis of it being shared with wider communities has been used, and with acknowledgements and permissions from the artists and custodial keepers. As stressed in earlier chapters, I have ensured that the research was carried out in a true, respectful, ethical, sympathetic, useful and beneficial manner, seen from the point of view of Yarnangu artists. In line with Indigenous methodological issues, my observations contribute to an inclusive spectrum of knowledge in an ethical and culturally appropriate way. I also link the historical significance of stories with current scientific study. I suggest that historical and contemporary knowledge systems are now finding ways that integrate Indigenous and Western knowledges. Additionally, I argue in this chapter that performative memory styles are embedded in Ngaanyatjarra culture and materialised in *Kungkarangkalpa* paintings. By illustrating how cosmic and scientific knowledge are inherently interwoven into local traditions I aim to demonstrate how this particular form of memory is different from Western understandings and ways of knowing. The *Kungkarangkalpa* narrative is not simply cognitive recall, but a valued, coexistent process that includes imagination, astronomy and re-casting the past. I explain this point with examples of contemporary paintings that show how memory is collective, has social cohesion, and can be ‘materialised’.⁷³

⁷³I use the term ‘materialised’ in its literal sense, i.e. to become actual fact; happen; to become visible. The stories are materialised as art. Memories become tangible and visible and expressed through painting. As pointed out elsewhere in this thesis, meanings are materialised through the tjukurrpa: recounted through the agency of memory, and then animated in the media of painting and storytelling. Memorised images are transferred to a contemporary canvas depiction.

Practices of memory

Yarnangu artworks are place-specific and are practices of memory. With this in mind, the visual effects and vibrant colour combinations of country, and the tangible expressions of ancestral experience in art, as we see in Tjayanka Wood's paintings, constitute a re-enactment of the power of *Kungkarangkalpa* in her place in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Tjayanka Woods, a senior Pitjantjatjara artist, was born around 1925, near Kalaya Pirti (Emu Water) near Mimili and Wataru, South Australia. As a child she lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle in the bush with her parents, frequently camping at Kalaya Pirti, where they would hunt ngintaka (goanna) and kalaya (emu) and gather bush foods such as kampurarpa (desert raisin), ili (figs) and maku (wood grubs). Tjayanka's paintings illustrate her intimacy with the land, women's mythology and ceremonial practice. They are alive with movement and colour and culturally significant for their embodiment of knowledge of place. These days Tjayanka paints less and sits quietly under a tree with her dogs and a long stick to aid walking. Although frail she is never far from the art centre and paints only occasionally now. Tjayanka, and her friend Anmanari Brown refer to *Minyma Kutjarra* (Two Women) and *Kungkarangkalpa* in their artwork (images 6.3 and 6.4). Their paintings are structured like mud-maps tracing the journey of the sisters around the perimeter of the canvas, outlining the rock-holes and land formations created by the sisters as they foraged and walked through the country together. The landscape is both evidence of an ancestral past and also a place of intimate connections. There is activity in the paintings—a place that gives out energy, unparalleled colours that vividly embody new action and movement around the environment.

In Wood's paintings, *Kura Ala* and *Kungkarangkalpa* are the solid foundations of the reordering of place and ancestral presence in contemporary works. Her motif is the mutable desert landscape, but its power is revealed

through the artist's ability to express important ceremonial and ancestral connections, collectively memorised in a contemporary way. Like Woods, Angiliya Mitchell heightens apperception through a contemporary rendering of stories and art. Now and then, as related in vignette 6, Yarnangu can have a sudden and unasked-for experience of their tjukurrpa in the course of their everyday life, during which 'large fractions of their lives are given over to communication with the Dreaming Powers they know' (Sansom 2001, p. 3). These irruptive⁷⁴ moments are often all the more marked because revelation has been sudden and unexpected (Sansom 2001). Angiliya's dream is affective and edifying. At the art centre she transfers her memorised images to a contemporary 'here and now' as *multisensorial* practice. Images of the past 'legitimate her present social order' (Connerton 1989). Her shared memory, frequently in the shape of stories like *Kungkarangkalpa*, is mentally and emotionally aligned with the memories of the other artists who paint with her. In their research on autobiographical remembering, Wang and Brockmeier explain that these processes involve many-layered interactions between individuals and the belief structures of their society. They describe autobiographical remembering as 'a cultural practice' (Wang & Brockmeier 2002). Thus, Angiliya, Tjayanka and Anmanari present painting experiences at the art centre that are dependent on their knowledge of the past, and where

⁷⁴Basil Sansom (2001) emphasises such moments of revelation as 'Dreaming's irruption' and says it may take two forms. One can be witness to a happening in which a Dreaming is made manifest; alternatively, one becomes party to a vital truth on hearing a story of reversal in which a Dreaming suddenly takes charge to reveal its character and power. By an act of irruption, a Dreaming works to defeat human misconception by bringing receptive humans to an enhanced understanding of the world. Irruptive Dreamings put things straight.

their paintings continue to validate collective memories and interrelatedness to the tjukurpa. As suggested earlier, Yarnangu art practices highlight the transcultural nature of contemporary art production at Papulankutja Artists. It challenges the logic of Western epistemology and calls attention to the divergent traditions through which contemporary Western Desert artists now operate.

Ancient and modern: transposing knowledge

But, as Aboriginal stories point out, they have always known about space travel, not only in terms of magical stories of 'flying' or rapid travel underground, or visiting places (spiritually) via the agency of the Dreaming, but also, in a more everyday sense, in terms of Aboriginal philosophies being anchored to specific sites, distributed in space, along tracks that people travel. (Muecke 2005, p. 02).

In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, both individual and collective memories are bound up with an identity of cultural tradition and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Oral narratives are predominantly local and linked to remembrance. Deborah Bird Rose suggests:

[Stories] generate meaning through their very openness. They are told by people who have particular interests and expertise with respect to the issues involved: they draw on shared memories; they construct continuities between past, present and future; they link specific events to broader processes; they show the options available for determining the meaning of events, and they do so with respect to local understandings. (1989, p. 138).

Moreover, as well as being locally conceived, stories are intergenerational and traditionally share a strong oral tradition in which customs, personal and cultural histories, and other narratives are passed across groups and between generations. The term 'collective memory' is often used, but this is a term that is understood and defined in many different ways.

Memory

Following Halbwachs, most historians who study collective memories understand collective memory as collectively shared representations of the past. Collective memory can only function in a collective context and is selective (Lewis 1992). Scholars of memory studies acknowledge that historical representations are 'negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative' (Kansteiner 2002, p. 195). Collective memories originate from shared communications about meanings of the past 'that are anchored in the life-worlds of individuals who partake in the communal life of the respective collective' (Kansteiner 2002, p. 188). As Michael Rothberg writes:

Not strictly separable from either history or representation, memory nonetheless captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side and the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past. (2009, p. 4)

Various layers of historical and contemporary scholarship exist around various strands of memory research. Some scholars who work with memory theories are concerned with the transmission of memories environmentally and culturally over several generations. Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011b), working on memory and environmental perception, explains that this transmission of knowledge distinguishes memory from environmentally situated experience and memory becomes the encyclopaedic resource on which groups of people can continually draw for regular life guidance. Critically, Ingold implies that objects of memory pre-exist and are imported into the contexts of remembering, as they are already present, in some representational form (Ingold 2011b, p. 138). A community's practices of engaging with the past also encompass 'seeing, knowing and experiencing the multisensorial places where memories are made' (Monchamp 2011, p. 58). However, as a collective phenomenon, memory only 'manifests itself in the actions and statements of

individuals' (Kansteiner 2002, p. 25). Angiliya, Tjayanka and her daughter Jennifer collectively share their representations of *Kungkarangkalpa* as tacit knowledge through story, locality and painting practice. Paintings happen through a shared memory practice that leaves material and memory traces of a series of meanings.

My observations at Papulankutja suggest that collective memory is performed through story telling. Daniele Klapproth, who works in the field of sociolinguistic narrative, argues that 'the primary function of storytelling is not so much the transmission of information, but the joint construction and shared experiencing of narrated worlds' (2004, p. 158). At Papulankutja there are many interrelated ways of remembering tjukurrpa knowledge, such as specific verses of *inma* (songs), site-related stories, ritual dances and, now, art. An *inma* is a celebration of the earth and land with song, dance and feasting—the song and dance performance of the tjukurrpa. Often, artists will break into dance and song,⁷⁵ pounding with their feet as they stamp part of the *inma Kungkarangkalpa*. The stories are in harmony with the wider socio-cultural contexts of the culture from which these stories arise, and that culture includes learning the performance of dance and ceremony almost as an obligation:

For a person to become a socially responsible human being, he or she must learn the named tracks, places and songs of his or her tjukurrpa. (Mutitjulu 1990, p. 35)

The spiritual significance of the land is remembered narratively and ceremonially in songs and stories and in social practices that range from public and open events to secret sacred ceremonies (Klapproth 2004, p. 338). Artists like Angiliya who are knowledge holders are also 'intellectuals, philosophers,

⁷⁵ See vignette 4a, 'Desert Mob 2015 Alice Springs (4th September 2015)'.

and scientists, and their knowledge systems are equally systems of law, and science' (Davis 2008, p. 27). Angiliya's storytelling and transmission of knowledge, more recently through art, is part of a long history of generational story telling also through song and dance. As demonstrated in chapter five, the narration and descriptive means (like sand drawing and dance) are performative and social.

The Ngaanyatjarra people have a history of occupation of the desert that on the archaeological evidence appears to extend back for around 12,000 years and possibly as long as 35,000 years (Brooks 2011). The issue of how far back in time orally transmitted human memories can reach is a topic that has exercised many scientists (Nunn & Reid 2016). Most agree that memories of particular events and persons can generally survive no more than 500 to 800 years, largely because the original information has by then become completely obscured by the layers of narrative embellishment needed to sustain transgenerational interest in a particular story (Barber & Barber 2004). Jennifer Mitchell thinks it is much longer than that and says 'thousands of years'.⁷⁶

Scientific and Indigenous knowledge converging

In recent years there has been some scientific interest in tjukurrpa stories. Contemporary Western astronomical data confirms that Australian Aboriginal peoples were most likely the very first astronomers (Norris & Hamacher 2009). There is increasing and significant interest by Australian astronomers in tracking stories as a means of understanding the importance of astronomy and science in Aboriginal cultures (Leaman & Hamacher 2014, p. 38). For example, it has become evident that some stories demonstrate that traditional Aboriginal people had a sophisticated understanding of the differing paths of both the

⁷⁶Personal conversation with Jennifer Mitchell at the art centre 11th November 2015.

moon and the sun and early eclipses. Through collaborative research and careful readings of Australian tjukurrpa and creation stories, Norris and Hamacher hope to increase knowledge of the sky and the motion of celestial bodies across it, and in so doing 'build an important bridge of understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' (Norris & Norris 2009, p. 26).

The Pleiades star cluster, along with the Orion constellation, are of major significance across Australian Indigenous cosmologies. Amongst Indigenous people there is a deep awareness of the placement of the visible stars. The changing phases of the moon and seasonal effects of the sun helped form their social and cultural patterns. Where European ancestors explained the patterns of the stars in terms of constellations of Greek gods, Aboriginal people interpreted these differently, seeing meaning also in the dark patches in between the stars and clusters (Norris & Norris 2009). Australian Indigenous people also used the stars for time keeping, navigation and events and as a seasonal calendar. For example, the Pitjantjatjara people say that the rising of the Pleiades in the dawn sky in early May heralds the start of the winter season. I have observed at Papulankutja that the time of day is judged, not by timepieces and watches (I have not seen a watch in the community), but by gesture and hand signals that often describe by where the sun and/or stars are positioned in the sky at a particular point in time. The time is often also judged by a past event or occasion. Time is seasonal. In another example, Jennifer once described a particular event as having occurred when the flowers and fruit distinguished the quandong tree.⁷⁷ The appearance of certain plants also

⁷⁷ *Santalum acuminatum*, the desert quandong, is a hemiparasitic plant in the Sandalwood family widely dispersed throughout the central deserts and southern

indicates that the dingoes are breeding and will soon be giving birth to pups (Hamacher 2014).

Identified on star maps as M45, the Pleiades or Seven Sisters open star cluster can be seen in the constellation of Taurus, where it forms the bull's shoulder (Levy 1995). It is the most acclaimed open star cluster in the sky. Although it contains more than 500 stars in all, only six or seven can be sighted with the naked eye (Levy 1995). The alphabetic and numerical designation of the stars in the Pleiades refers to their astronomic classification in the *Messier Catalogue*, so named for the 18th century French astronomer whose inventory of 110 celestial objects includes star clusters, nebulae and distant galaxies spread over most of the sky (Levy 1995, p. 89). The Pleiades are a group of stars congregated together in a relatively small area. It is among the nearest star clusters to Earth and is the cluster most obvious to the naked eye in the night sky. Pleiades has several meanings in different cultures and traditions, and can be identified in both the northern and southern hemisphere skies. But the Australian Indigenous perspective of the universe is very different from the Western European one. There is no relationship between the Indigenous Australian and the Greek mythological accounts of this star cluster, despite the fact that they share the name of Pleiades and the stories are remarkably similar.

Scientists suggest that there is considerable evidence to support the practical application of the Pleiades for measurement, geometry, geodesics, architecture and navigation (Andrews 2004; Clarke 2003; Norris & Hamacher 2009). Norris and Hamacher, both astrophysicists based in Sydney, are currently conducting research into traditional Aboriginal knowledge of the stars. Norris and

areas of Australia. The species, especially its fruit, is also referred to as quandong or native peach.

Hamacher argue that Aboriginal cultures have always had a deep awareness of the motion of objects in the sky, and that this knowledge was used for practical purposes such as constructing calendars (Norris & Hamacher 2009). They believe that 'traditional Aboriginal Australians made careful records and measurements of cyclical events, and paid careful attention to unexpected phenomena such as eclipses and meteorite impacts' (Norris & Hamacher 2009, p. 10). This information was recorded orally, with each generation memorising and reiterating important information through stories, ceremony and business.

This storied knowledge tends to be left out of academic histories. To chart comprehensively all the Indigenous understandings would require an extensive oral history project in multiple languages. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues that Western understandings of 'knowledge' are dominated by a Western narrative or 'regime of truth' that marginalised Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledges. Smith contends that the (Western scientific) view of the world is through 'imperial eyes', a view which (re)inscribes dominant, exclusionary Western beliefs. A two-way project is required to disrupt these previously held preconceptions, and that challenges the superiority of Western worldviews. To this end, a new educational intervention has emerged, where traditional systems of knowledge interact with new systems.

In 2009, during the International Year of Astronomy, a project was conducted to link the culture of Aboriginal Australia with astrophysics. Supervised by Professor Steven Tingay, this involved working with a group of Aboriginal artists during the installation of a large telescope near their community at Yamaji, Western Australia. The project's goals were to explore Aboriginal and Western interpretations of the sky and to discuss the telescopes' installation in the Wadjarri Yamatji country (Tingay 2015). In an unlikely collaboration of art and science, the Aboriginal artists and astrophysicists interacted and concepts emerged from both groups. Each group drew in

different ways of knowing to connect to the past. By looking back in time to the beginnings of both origin and universe, stories about the past and stars flowed naturally between both groups (Tingay 2015). Tingay suggests that in trading both Aboriginal and Western stories, both groups learned about the different ways we view the same patterns in the sky—including the Seven Sisters/Pleiades (Tingay 2015). This example shows the understandings that emerge from transcultural collaborations that combine art and science, and that reject the totaling processes of the dominant one-way knowledge.

Elders from communities in and near the Ngaanyatjarra Lands claim that the *Kungkarangkalpa* story has been orally transmitted for thousands of years by people who traversed the Western Desert bloc, an area of some 670,000 square kilometres stretching over Western Australia, South Australia and Northern Territory (James 2013). This region is identified anthropologically as the Western Desert cultural bloc due to the historic and current strong cultural and linguistic links between the estimated 7,500 Aboriginal people living there (James 2013). The bloc may be thought of as a ‘zone of entanglement’ (Ingold 2007) due to the movement of people across it, which have generated ‘intensities of entangled trajectories’ (Pink 2012). Oral storytelling is part of the flows that have constituted this place. Analysis suggests that *Kungkarangkalpa* has been memorised and transmitted intergenerationally by the mesh of people moving across this space. The story has recently become materialised in contemporary arts practice. This connects with Massey’s idea of space not as a surface, but as a meeting up of histories (2005, p. 4).

More recent collaborative research projects have been motivated by accounts of the transmission of certain stories, and interest in the historical approaches to memory and science of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. In an effort to understand how Indigenous astronomical knowledge is developed and encoded in oral traditions and material culture, the

Nura Gili Indigenous Research Centre at University of New South Wales is looking at the anthropology and history of *Kungkarangkalpa*. This project covers the *Kungkarangkalpa* Dreaming track that comprises an area of 486,000 square kilometres, stretching from Australia's north west to the South Australian coast (Nura Gili 2015). Research by Diana James, in conjunction with the Australian National University and the National Museum, is also tracking the *Kungkarangkalpa* story, tracing the connections and logic of Indigenous Australian law and knowledge of country. James argues their study 're-centres the cultural history of the region to an Indigenous perspective' (James 2013, p. 31).

These approaches to understanding *Kungkarangkalpa* are sensitive to both the science of everyday Indigenous (Yarnangu) realities and the processes of memory and story. In previous examples I have shown the interrelations between the local practices of story and painting. My research and that of others shows how these local practices intersect with global flows, including with the global principles of a scientific and astronomical world. These collaborative projects draw on and develop further ideas about diverse ways of knowing, and highlight how processes of renewal and change are lived, experienced and represented through the *Kungkarangkalpa*. Notions of ancient and modern converge in the tjukurrpa, which is a concept, that Stanner so aptly called the 'everywhen'. It brings together knowledge *through* story about how 'to make touch with whatever it is that is continuous between The Dreaming and the Here-and-Now' (2009, p. 60). Moreover, the nature and philosophy of tjukurrpa is subtle, complex, all-encompassing and non-finite (Nicholls, 2014). Tjukurrpa embraces time past, present and future.

Kungkarangkalpa: the story and the paintings

Throughout this thesis I have argued that practices happen as part of the flow and movement of everyday art production at Papulankutja. Astronomical observations and enquiry are not separate areas of Yarnangu knowledge. They are integral parts of everyday life, reflected in storytelling, song, dance, art and ritual, and are related to the meaningful tjukurrpa tracks of the desert and its sky above. As I have made clear, *Kungkarangkalpa* is a major narrative extending across the extensive desert regions. It reflects, to a significant extent, the values and traditions of cultural life within the region. In this section I locate the *Kungkarangkalpa* story within Ngaanyatjarra contemporary philosophy. By drawing on examples that involve memory, story, and painting, I foreground the educative messages conveyed by the narrative and explore how stories help define a belief system that operates in tandem with the contemporary lifestyles of the Ngaanyatjarra today.

The story

There are some variations to the story as it moves across and adapts to different locations along the vast tjukurrpa track. My understanding is defined by memories and imaginations that are customary at Papulankutja. Sometimes the story involves only two sisters and is called *Minyma Kutjarra*. Jennifer Mitchell maintains that it is through stories like *Minyma Kutjarra* and *Kungkarangkalpa* that ‘we learn about the world, passed down from generation to generation through family [...] strong tjukurrpa [...] teach the young girls.’⁷⁸

Kungkarangkalpa comprises a whole field of Yarnangu learning about the conduct and exploration of what is known as ‘women’s business’ (Brooks 2011).

⁷⁸Personal conversation with Jennifer Mitchell 11th November 2015.

The Pleiades, across Australian Aboriginal astronomical traditions, are typically associated with a group of young women, usually seven in number (Johnson 2000). In the majority of narratives, told through story and song, the central leitmotif involves seven sisters running away from the unwelcome advances of a man. Although there are differing versions, most agree that the sisters did not want to be caught and eventually flew up into the sky where they remain as the Pleiades cluster of seven visible stars. The story of the *Kungkarangkalpa* is widespread, and remarkably, embodies a similar storyline to that in Greek mythology where the hunter Orion often chased Pleiades, or the group of seven sisters. However, at Papulankutja (and in no way connected to Greek mythology), and by way of a very simplified synopsis, the *Kungkarangkalpa* story comprises the sisters, in a variety of hunting and gathering situations, being watched, pursued, and eventually chased by an evil man named wati Nyiru. In some versions this is because he takes by force the oldest (sometimes youngest) sister for a wife.

The exact context and details of each story differ across its many versions. However, the substance of the story at each site along the way concerns how close wati Nyiru manages to get to the women and what devious tricks he plays in the execution of this pursuit. Sometimes the story is quite violent. As a women's story, or guide, themes relate to the listeners' development and may include menstrual information, sexual behavior (men's and women's), rape, snake metaphors, hunting and water sources, ceremony, Law, bush medicine, the cosmos, food and botanical collection and preparation. Moreover, although collective and interconnected, each individual version of the story relays a personal interpretation of events, ideological beliefs and teachings. For example, Papulankutja artist Jennifer Mitchell will only paint the 'happy' versions of the story, preferring to leave out the parts that frighten her. Her paintings depict stellar and cosmic travels or the sisters socialising and enjoying a meal around

the campfire or rockhole at a site on the tjukurrpa track. Often Jennifer's sisters are celebrating successful evasive tactics taken against wati Nyiru. She says that she likes to sing and smile as she paints. Conversely, Angiliya takes an alternative approach and delights in the inclusion of weighty and serious issues, including parts of the story that have a grisly and violent nature.

As I have previously discussed, the duration of oral traditions is not certain and remains a topic of debate. Examples suggest that the inter-generational transmission of cultural knowledge and wisdom can last thousands of years. Stories have been passed down through generations as cultural knowledge in a learning process drawn from lived experience and embedded in social relations that strengthen and maintain ideological beliefs in the tjukurrpa. At Papulankutja these beliefs are dynamic yet resilient. The stories and artworks based on them are situated in specific environmental conditions, suggesting that they happen *in place* and are part of everyday life. Contemporary art production is thus implicated in the making of places in unique combination with other processes. This story/memory, then, is a collective oral history that is shaped by the context and culture of the community at Papulankutja.

To begin to understand *Kungkarangkalpa* and tjukurrpa I cite William Stanner, who said 'the Dreaming' is 'a concept so impalpable and subtle (it) naturally suffers badly by translation in our dry and abstract language' (Stanner 2009, p. 57). He writes:

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.

(Stanner 2009, p. 99)

The journeys and events of the tjukurrpa (Dreaming) are validated through ceremonies and dance, corroborated continuously through narrative story and,

more recently, through painting. Amongst the Ngaanyatjarra, the beings and stories of the tjukurpa not only formed the geography of the desert lands and all creatures related to it, but conferred the Law that people still follow today.

The painting

At this point I re-introduce Angiliya Mitchell as I follow the execution of a *Kungkarangkalpa* painting. A relative of Jennifer Mitchell and Tjayanka Woods, Angiliya is an artist who gives the *Kungkarangkalpa* story a contemporary perspective. Through her creative, personal interpretations we learn more about the story and begin to understand its importance and guiding nature.

As previously stated, in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, *Kungkarangkalpa* is one of the predominant creation stories. Through collective and personal remembering, contemporary artists paint their individual versions of events that collectively constitute the *Kungkarangkalpa*. Angiliya Mitchell is a senior custodian for the preservation and maintenance of this story. Her senior status in the community awards her particular respect and implies that she is a woman who has 'been able to go on caring for the Dreaming and the land' (Jacobs in Brock 1989, p. 85). She is seen to hold valuable cultural inheritance to be protected and maintained. At the art centre Angiliya comfortably and confidently recalls her story through memory, and communicates it through painting.

I watch Angiliya at the art centre as she paints the intricate stars on her painting and I am reminded of the connections between cultural mnemonics and Angiliya's personal understanding of events in the sky and events here in on earth.⁷⁹ These events include laws, customs, and religious traditions and

⁷⁹ As used here, the term 'cultural mnemonics' refers to the system of cultural remembering. Ngaanyatjarra collective knowledge has been passed from one generation to the next, consolidated and energised through story and song.

these are all interrelated, forming a vast network of relationships that extend throughout the desert. Angiliya's paintings embody forms of collected identity and shared traditions of extended groups of people. With style and passion Angiliya reflects the importance she places on Ngaanyatjarra knowledge and her relationship to artistic practice. Her memories—which are collective memories—constitute a process where she recasts the past and *materialises* wati Nyiru and the sisters from her imagination. She transposes these memories to her paintings, expressing a multilayered view of what *Kungkarangkalpa* means to her. Her understandings of the story have been reinforced by visits to sacred sites like Kura Ala, roused on ceremonial evenings under the stars, and remembered through social interactions with others. Thus, 'her' version is interdependent with collective community knowledge and Ngaanyatjarra ways of being.

Angiliya's highly individual style is both sensitive and elaborative. Together we surveyed a recently completed painting (see image 6.5) and Angiliya helped shape my understanding of the artwork. I watch and follow as she runs her hand across the meandering, russet-coloured lines that are surrounded by intricate, dotted, subtle tones and combinations of colour that she explains represent the sisters wandering, stopping to eat and walking. The aqua-blue of the rock-hole sites are set in contrast to the hundreds of tiny, white, dotted stars that are scattered across the dark navy sky. In the centre of the painting is a large 'creepy' snake. Angiliya tells me that this carpet snake was observed in their surroundings and it acts as a metaphor for wati Nyiru's genitalia. I am conscious of the 'everywhen' in Angiliya's analysis as she unaffectedly blends time. This well-told story of one man chasing the sisters has many adaptations, and Angiliya's highly individual depiction has the sisters both frightened in one

instance; and then elated, higher in the painting. The painting⁸⁰ is itself like a topographical map that anchors the various travels and encounters the sisters endure. In one section of the painting wati Nyiru has disguised himself as a snake in order to ‘trick’ the sisters. At the top of the painting, female figures with arms outstretched high in the air summon their transference into the stars, where they ultimately form the constellation Pleiades. Angiliya confirms that the sisters can be seen in the sky at night—the seven stars that come out together.

Angiliya Mitchell: painting Kungkarangkalpa

Inspired by stories told to her by her parents, Angiliya’s emphasis is on the traditional country where she still resides. The social relationships and custodial rights supporting her ancestral narrative determine her choice of subject matter. Angiliya’s birthplace is near the Blackstone Ranges in Emu Country near Kunmarnarra Bore. There are also important men’s Dreamings in this country, which is a traditional Law area. Angiliya is a strong Law woman with prodigious bush skills, having a wealth of traditional knowledge and a capacity to live on this land. In recent years Angiliya was appointed the caretaker for an important women’s tjukurrpa, linked to *Kungkarangkalpa*. Angiliya’s connectedness to this country, and her knowledge of the significant ancestral stories of creation beings and their existence, are intrinsic to her being and of vital importance in her life world. Moreover, her worldview is also complex and elusive. Today, Angiliya’s connectedness is not just to Country but also to its cultural production. She continues to perform her role of a leader

⁸⁰ The National Museum of Australia has selected this particular painting for purchase and negotiations for its sale were taking place at the time of one of my visits to Papulankutja Artists late in 2015.

in cultural maintenance but through a contemporary framework. She brings together a number of worlds, and a number of different avenues of inquiry. Through public display (for example, through her artworks), she negotiates the diversity that is part of the 'character of place' (Massey 1994). Thus, Angiliya practices place, constituting it through her stories and her paintings.

Massey and Rose note the dynamic construction of place in their work on public art. They write:

Tradition, here, is something which is continually under construction—the responsibility is therefore not just to 'hang on to it' but to build it. This is *place as practised*. Such a view, as we have said, does not imply ignoring the past (all the different processes, practices and trajectories which have interwoven to make this place what it is); but it does mean not romanticising it or holding it in aspic, nor allowing it to dominate the present. The past of a place is part of its present and future and it is in that guise that it can best contribute to the making of a sense of identity. (Massey & Rose 2003)

Aboriginal concepts of place and practice can be understood through an Aboriginal ontology that explains how and why things are so. Australian Indigenous scholar Errol West argues that 'our ontology is the inherent meshing of the spiritual events and the material world, this includes literal geographical connections and related events that occur regularly in our lives' (West, cited in Foley 2003, p. 47). Analysis of Angiliya's social patterns and art themes together provide the tools for transcultural understanding and knowledge. In chapter three I used Pratt's concept of the contact zone to capture the ways in which artists are constituted in and by their relations to each other (Pink 2015). Within the creative and commercial environment of the art centre, comfort, safety and structure alleviate and moderate cultural juxtapositions (see image 6.6). Here, Angiliya mediates between the competing

influences, choosing to paint about the themes of her past and the tjukurrpa associated with them (image 6.6).

From an aesthetic perspective, Angiliya's paintings have an evocative quality that has its origins in her socially interactive and spiritual processes. Paintings demonstrate the artist's innovation and individual creativity. They embody energy and vibrancy. Artworks are rich in colour and complex, expressing deep layers of symbolism related to Kura Ala and *Kungkarangkalpa* tjukurrpa. They grab the viewer's attention as they are also distinctively contemporary art forms. The paintings are anchored in the present, which seems at odds with the historical content they capture. Angiliya's paintings draw from her own personal history and collective memory and are not simply examples of art but are also a representation of her cultural identity. Her work draws on particular cultural directives and rules that are defined by the Aboriginal Law that Angiliya has experienced, remembered, practiced as cultural protocol and confirmed in ceremonies throughout her life. Angiliya brings her own ways of seeing into the contemporary space. The act of painting becomes another contact zone where she negotiates concerns about customary propriety and modern Western audiences. Her profound sense of memory and place are the focus of her artwork, as seen in the construction of one of her intricate paintings in images 6.7 to 6.12.

The *Kungkarangkalpa* dreaming track is said to pass through the north of Warburton and to the southeast, land that Angiliya knows well. There are hundreds of locations that feature in the story. Throughout their travels over the country, the sisters are also pursued by carpet snakes and water snakes, who themselves have evaded the sisters by disguising themselves as various things, including purple or red quandong fruit, often painted into the artwork. The snakes are, in fact, different forms of Nyiru and feature in most of Angiliya's paintings. Movements, tracks, activities and campsites experienced by the

sisters are favoured themes for paintings. Angiliya often portrays the clever Nyiru, who is never far away, usually camping just out of sight.

The story is sacred and engulfed by strict protocol and responsibilities at many levels. Artists like Angiliya are the guardians of song cycles and custodians of sites that celebrate the travels of ancestral beings. They have strong spiritual links to their tjukurrpa stories. Traditional knowledge about food foraging and water source locations along tjukurrpa tracks are equally dominant themes. Angiliya and her sister Anawari tell me that their mother, elder Anmanari Brown, instilled in them the many levels of knowledge that this story holds as they were growing up. Bit by bit, as they grew older, more and more information would be imparted. I am deeply aware of the need to respect Yarnangu trust and confidences and although I am not able to discuss all details, I was invited to attend a special visit to the sacred site of Kura Ala. Here I learned first-hand the significance of this ceremonial place and perceived the Yarnangu deeper level of understanding associated with this site. Here it becomes clear how the senses, skill and knowing in practice and human and non-human agencies intersect in the process of cultural maintenance and renewal.

Angiliya's Ngaanyatjarra selfhood is evident in her visual artworks. Although many accomplished Yarnangu artists paint the *Kungkarangkalpa*, each *Kungkarangkalpa* is a unique original. Angiliya and her paintings are ultimately indivisible. They are usually forthright and bold in content. The colours used are mostly bright, yet thoughtful and each individual painting is unique in its cognition and approach. Angiliya's paintings are raw, often the visual sequel of a dream she has had, as described in vignette 6, and usually comprehensive. Angiliya will portray details of a story that other artists will not become involved with, where the visible and the tjukurrpa are inextricably linked. But she is always careful to not display information in a way that contravenes the

strict Ngaanyatjarra hierarchies of secrecy and revelation. Above all, her paintings are dramatic, textural and bold, usually vivid in colour, drawing her audience to the exceptional aesthetic power of the painting. Angiliya's art transforms the metaphysical realm of her tjukurrpa to one of tangible, materially visual and pictorial contemporary communication.

Tjukurrpa worldview

In Ngaanyatjarra culture the ownership of stories is respected. Stories give directives about life. *Kungkarangkalpa*, a women's story, informs girls and prepares them for womanhood, marriage and child-bearing and certain ways to behave (Bell 1998). This suggests that the story is not merely mythological, locked in a past era, but 'a story that speaks to the living' (Bell 1998). Law was and is a code for moral and social behaviour. Law is embedded in Angiliya's stories and is derived from powerful tjukurrpa knowledge. These stories set out an important aspect of the Law for Yarnangu and explain relationships between the land and sky, the living and the ancestors.

Stephen Muecke offers a useful way of understanding the philosophical and representational layers of these cultural associations. The relationships between tjukurrpa stories, ritual acts and lived experiences are the forms of expression for what Stephen Muecke calls Indigenous Australian philosophies (Muecke 2004). Angiliya's paintings, he would argue, are an 'expression' of the Dreaming. Muecke especially emphasises that 'expressions' *are* the Dreaming (2004). In the representations she refers to as 'my country' and/or 'my *Kungkarangkalpa* story' Angiliya is expressing, as Muecke suggests, 'that this very object—the painting—carries some of that country's vitality (power-to-grow) with it always' (Muecke 2004, p. 21). The painting confirms Angiliya's sense of belonging and strengthens the importance of physical location and ancestral creation identities. Her participatory embodiment of the story plays an important role in Indigenous Australian philosophy today. Angiliya's artworks are a way of

recasting contemporary thinking, by showing that her teachings were and are always here (Muecke 2004).

Materialising memory

The intangible values embedded in story play an important role in how people interact with their social and cultural environments (Clarke & Johnston 2003). Even today, stories are told and retold, reinforcing the memories of people, events and location. Again, I consider Massey's idea of place as a theoretical and abstract notion rather than as an actual bounded physical location. This conceptualisation of place can offer us a way of understanding the diverse components that constitute the contingency of complex environments in which Yarnangu storied practices are actually lived and experienced. *Kungkarangkalpa* storytelling involves sets of practices and processes that are both experiential at a personal level, embodied and social. In practice storytelling also demonstrates how the repetitive nature of these stories (their knowledge) is crucial to the way meanings are expressed and learned (Davis 2008, p. 26). These meanings then are *materialised* through the *Kungkarangkalpa* tjukurrpa: recounted through the agency of memory, and animated in the medium of painting and storytelling. This collective cultural memory surfaces in these contexts, and at Papulankutja *Kungkarangkalpa* situates itself in the contemporary everyday and is presently enlivened through dynamic contemporary art.

Paintings embody memories of deeper meanings for places and landscapes. Sacred ceremonial sites aligned to these stories come to be performative sites, their recasting becoming an act of remembering, through ceremony and painting for example. The visiting and renewal of sacred sites is performed today both literally and metaphorically. Resultant paintings and art forms convey the connected meanings. Anthropologist Howard Morphy suggests ancestral paintings are equally part of the present and the past, incorporating

the different times and connections (Morphy 1998, p. 64). The performance attached to these sites can also be a way of remembering—recounting stories that may constitute ownership, spiritual maintenance and acknowledgement of past ancestral connection (Clarke & Johnston 2003). As Stanner indicated, we can locate the Dreaming (tjukurrpa) now, then and always (Stanner 2009).

As an example I am able to relate some of the events that took place at Kura Ala on a bush trip. This occasion linked performativity, collective memory and Angiliya's contemporary paintings. Yarnangu artists invited me to attend a ceremonial camp held at the sacred site associated with *Kungkarangkalpa*. In the evening, under the Pleiades stars, I sat with the women around a large camp fire listening to their soft singing which invoked a kind of nostalgic memory within the group. The euphony of the singers' voices led me to revel in a captivating and relaxing meditation. As the stories were told in song, versions born of personal, collective and ancestral experience, they gave rise to new experiences, creating a series of life events that were intimately related to others, both locally and further afield (Magowan 2001). Intimate knowledge and nostalgic reminiscences permeated through the group. The collaborative series of utterances in verse and song reassured all of us who were present that *Kungkarangkalpa* was being reinforced and enlivened once more. The past comes into the present. It is re-presented—materialised as *Kungkarangkalpa*, rethought and restored, then painted by Angiliya, and maintained and reconstructed through concepts of memory and nostalgia.

Although these events in the song took place in the past, they are narrated in the present as if they are 'presently emergent' (Magowan 2001). Around our campfire, some of the women were convinced of the presence of wati Nyiru, lurking around us as he has done for perhaps thousands of years. These memories are not 'recollections of times past' but part of present understandings of the past that need bear no relation to what actually happened

or was (Morphy & Morphy 1984, p. 475). The relationship between the past and present has been continuously reconstructed so the myths about the past fit the conditions of the present (Morphy & Morphy 1984, p. 462). Thus, as Ingold implies, this 'social learning' taking place 'across' generations, is stored and preserved and carried as memory that can be continually drawn on for guidance (2011b). The Pleiades star cluster remains immutable. It is a constant that binds together the events in the sky with what happens on earth. Thus *Kungkarangkalpa* becomes interwoven with contemporary culture, as seen in Angiliya's paintings.

During this customary creative performance and contemporary maintenance of story we see a process of the 'shifting and aligning of 'old' and 'modern', the everyday or the profound versions of events' (Davis 2008, p. 26). *Kungkarangkalpa* performativity evokes a personal attachment to the past, triggering nostalgia and transforming the past by imagination. To be located within the story paths of memory is to be able 'to know'. Individuals and groups become situated in collective and complex mediations and constructions of knowledge (Rose 1989). Angiliya's story moved from past to present, evoking a particular temporality—and wati Nyiru *is* still out there, lurking ... The women sing him away ...

One way of making sense of this can be found in the ideas of academic and anthropological consultant Fiona Magowan. She suggests that these 'landscapes of consciousness' activate collective memories in the present, creating a sense of mutual bonding between those past and present. The story is therefore 'much more than a series of events to be told; it is a moment of expressive embodiment, the manifestation of personal attachment and past regret' (Magowan 2001, p. 26). In Angiliya's paintings we see the materialising of this embodiment—each painting constructed around her own personal bond and interpretation of both past and current events. And, as in Jennifer's approach mentioned earlier,

Angiliya's personal preference is *not* to include wati Nyiru or any 'scary' parts to the story.

In summary, the repetitive nature of this knowledge is crucial to the way meanings are expressed and learned (Davis 2008, p. 26). These meanings are materialised in the *Kungkarangkalpa* story, and are recounted by memory through the medium of painting, song and storytelling. Cultural memory surfaces in various contexts. In Papulankutja, *Kungkarangkalpa* situates itself in the contemporary everyday, and is enlivened through contemporary art. Ann Marie Monchamp, working in the field of autobiographical memory, suggests paintings become 'geographies of memory' (Monchamp 2014, p. 127). A painting is a complex multilayered 'view' of Country—Country as a proper noun—it watches, sees, takes notice (Monchamp 2014, p. 127). Monchamp's extensive fieldwork and autobiographical memory studies were centred at an Australian desert community. Monchamp calls paintings a single point of view, existing over time, not as a static unchanging location but as a place participating, seeing and caring. A painting is the Country's vision—taking note of all the actions and interactions within this geography of memory (Monchamp 2014, p. 127).

My experiential approach to place, story and remembering converges on the locus of the intimate lives of Yarnangu artists. Since memories are essentially motionless, their materialisation in art and painting transforms them into something more tangible, circumscribing a memory in time. The art embodies a community of memories on the canvas. The art is 'lived' and Angiliya's past situates itself within it. Thus, this materialisation of memory is not simply a set of tjukurpa stories with a narrative thread, but a co-penetrating series of memories about *Kungkarangkalpa*, events, people and things.

Entanglements of place

Several contemporary ethnographers have explored knowledge transmission in current Australian Aboriginal painting practice (Biddle 2007; Jorgensen 2011; Michaels 1994, p. 161; Morphy 1991; Myers 2002). In his seminal work *Bad Aboriginal Art* (1994), Eric Michaels argues that certain intrinsic problems with discourse analysis and evaluation of Aboriginal art arose because paintings involved very different creative and authorial practices. Working closely with Warlpiri artists and paintings in the 1980s, he observed that as a result of certain negotiated positions within systems of inherited rights and obligations ‘these design traditions are considered to originate in a collective past and to project toward an infinite, impersonal future’ (Michaels 1994, p. 144). Michaels draws our attention to the importance of collective agency, authority and memory that are invested in art-making practices. My own research findings support Michael’s argument that paintings should be considered in terms of the ‘social practices that produce and circulate them—practices that promote issues of authority’ (Michaels 1994, p. 161). Such a conceptualisation becomes evident in examples like Angiliya’s: she is the traditional custodian of *Kungkarangkalpa*, and she paints with authority and her own trademark style. My research additionally indicates that there are many auxiliary versions and shifting *Kungkarangkalpa* stories recalled and recounted by way of memory across the vast desert landscape. I am not privy to all parts of a particular story. Little pieces of information are given at various times, slowly building my knowledge, which is updated and ever changing. As with all custodial stories some parts will always remain silent and secret. The silence, an active silence, could indicate an absence of knowledge, but most frequently points to the management of knowledge—another form of information, the withholding of (restricted) knowledge (Rose 2001, p. 99).

Memory styles like those found at Papulankutja Artists reveal a high degree of interdependence on other people and particular places and could be considered ‘living memory’. As Monchamp so clearly articulates, ‘the unique culture of these stories resides not only in their content but also in their form and structure which are integral parts of particular social ways of being in the world today’ (Monchamp 2014, p. 163).

Angiliya’s and Jennifer’s *Kungkarangkalpa* paintings show that their personal relationships with *Kungkarangkalpa* knowledge and art are related through both personal and collective memories. Their art embodies lived and ancestral memories. Their paintings are in fact a remembrance—a way of materialising memory. Their collective memory, then, is their collective oral history, which is shaped by community, its context and its culture, and mediated by ways of knowing and memories as constituted through entanglements that involve other ongoing practices (images 6.13 and 6.14). The notion of place as entanglement (Ingold 2008) has offered us a useful way of understanding the art centre as place. The art centre contributes to the sensory aesthetic production and memory of *Kungkarangkalpa* and is shaped by the other sensory and intangible components.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the collaborative *representing* of traditional stories and knowledge such as *Kungkarangkalpa* enlivens the past in the contemporary era. These stories are pivotal to daily circumstances. By way of materialised autobiographical memory accounts—like Angiliya’s contemporary canvas representations—we are more able to understand collective and complex constructions of knowledge that are different to our own. As Ingold argues, the critical implication is that objects of memory pre-exist within individual groups (Ingold 2011b, p. 138). Each Yarnangu artist

evokes these objects of memory as contexts of collective remembering, being already individually present in some representational form. Through contemporary representations of *Kungkarangkalpa*, informally told narrative histories are recast, in alignment with a process of what could be thought of as perpetual 'value-adding': both past and current events make up the moments of expressive embodiment that convey the conditions of the present and keep the story 'alive' each time it is told.

This chapter built on the framework of tjukurrpa story and the concept of orality set up in chapter five. However, I diverged in this chapter to employ the concept of memory to locate meanings in the art and point to the great diversity of how notions of place are co-constituted through a wider ecology of processes. I examined how knowledge is transmitted through the agency of memory and I focused on how perceptions of memory may be materialised or made tangible by presenting a more indepth reading of selected artworks. I drew on Angiliya Mitchell's artwork, practices and memory to highlight this. My research not only challenges ways of comprehending the world around us through ways of knowing that diverge from normative epistemologies, but also offers a lens through which new meanings become differentiated as they are transposed into contemporary and creative settings and become a site of transcultural exchange. I argue that this close examination of contemporary art from Papulankutja reveals that deeply rooted memorised oral knowledge is embodied, and for the artists studied in this research this oral knowledge overrides all other considerations when creating art. In Angiliya's paintings we see the materialisation of this embodiment. Each painting is constructed around her own personal bond with and interpretation of both past and current events. I have argued that paintings are directly materialised, passed orally and visually through memory, generally bypassing the written text, into which they are rarely translated.

I started this chapter recalling my personal memories of my childhood and my father's patience and delight at teaching us things he himself had memorised over his years of flying. Aside from the stars, he also had a great interest in and concern for Indigenous Australians and kept his own collection of files and writings about the field stored up high in bookshelves. I never got to discuss these reflections with him as dementia struck my father later in life, making the storage and subsequent retrieval of his information impossible. His memory was lost forever. In different ways both my father and I, and Yarnangu artists, have explored how the past lives on in the present. These Aboriginal knowledge systems, constructed around story and song, are building important bridges of understanding between diverse cultural arenas. In different knowledge systems, such as at Papulankutja, place is constituted differently, not only through its relations and combinations of material processes and semiotic practices, but also through story, orality and memory.

This chapter has drawn together themes from previous chapters: the intersections of business and transcultural practices at the art centre; story and knowledge; orality and memory. I have demonstrated how, in contemporary times, the impacts of change through time generate multiple *other* processes with which practices might become interwoven. I have suggested that a theory of place supports an understanding of such practices as part of wider ecologies. Such a framework does not pin down art production into static contexts, but operates within a dynamic environment that has constantly changing and *moving* constellations or ecologies. In the next chapter I broaden this notion of mobility and explore the practice of 'doing tjanpi'. Focusing on cars, I show how the contemporary practice of tjanpi weaving connects with all the other art making practices that have been discussed. ■

Vignette 7

Freda's spinifex country—a bush trip in the Toyota

Diary notes, 18th March 2015:

An axe, a crowbar, a shovel and a car.

Spinifex: a grass with coarse spiny leaves and spiny flower heads which break off and are blown about like tumbleweed, occurring from East Asia to Australia. (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2nd edition, 2011)

It is hot—close to 40 degrees—but this hasn't deterred anyone from travelling out bush. It will probably get a littler warmer as the afternoon advances. Astra has four passengers in her Ute and I have two children, two dogs, one teenager and five adults in the Toyota.

We drive for at least one hour off the 'main road' towards Wingellina and then off that track onto another that is hardly visible apart from two old narrow tyre tread trails, barely noticeable. At first the scenery is picturesque, peppered with trees and scrubby bush. But as we drive deeper into the wasteland the terrain changes and becomes more rubbly, with rocky outcrops—a combination of a dry rocky surface that is light in colour, in other parts a very soft ochre colour, and then contrasted with the soft, almost powdery, grainy, rich red soil. Spinifex tufts abound. The land is sparse with the occasional tree and is unevenly covered with mulga and dried acacia bushes. So much is dead and dark coloured from previous fires. It looks harsh, hot and inhospitable as can be seen in images 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3.

And yet, the excitement in my car is palpable. Angiliya can't wait. She spots some tracks as we trundle along. Everyone starts yelling to stop the car. She jumps out

and heads off towards the tracks, on foot. Axe in hand, she is first to jump out of the Toyota Troopie and, barefooted, walks with brisk stealth towards the scrub. She appears to be on a mission and disappears out of sight. Always a loner when it comes to hunting, she is happy to venture further afield, seemingly oblivious to time and company. Apparently she saw goanna tracks from the car window. She goes after it. We make this our stopping point. The others in the party are happy to grab their shovels and crowbars and smooth out the grainy sandy earth at a selected spot on the ground for setting up camp later on. Then everyone takes off in all directions—some alone, some in pairs. The hunters and foragers are gone for hours.

The wind has picked up. It is now very windy—a hot, dry summer current and I wonder if a fire is safe. However, as there are about a dozen tails to cook, I start collecting firewood. No-one appears concerned about the heat. Astra is the Land and Culture ranger for the area and I follow her cues. After the hunting and gathering, we throw each tail straight on to the fire to singe the hair off the meat (image 7.4). The char is then trimmed/scraped from each tail, which is then wrapped in AL foil, slightly buried in the hot coals and soil and cooked slowly until done (about 20 to 30 minutes). The meat is greasy and juicy and extremely well liked by Yarnangu. It is eaten regularly. I find it a bit fatty.

As we sit around the campfire, tails and maku are cooked and eaten. We drink tea from the billy and Freda Lane tells me that we have passed through her birth country and are now in her sister's country, although she whispers that this whole area is men's country. We tell stories for a while longer, burn the rubbish and pack up. It's getting late. It's still hot. A few in the party gather up some young, softish spinifex grasses that they call tjanpi. Angiliya hands me a bunch and asks if I can help her wrap it in her jumper for carrying home. I help her pull some more out of the sandy red soil and we head back to the Toyota. Never fails to surprise me how much and how many we fit into this vehicle.

No one says much on the way home. Everyone is tired, full of tails (and tales) and tea. We have a carload of people, dogs, plastic containers and emptied Coke bottles filled with maku, and tjanpi for weaving. ■

Chapter seven

Driving tjanpi in the Western Desert



The whole Western Desert is crisscrossed with the meandering tracks of ancestral beings. (Berndt 1959)

It is not uncommon for a car or truck-load of people from another settlement to pull up at a relative's house in town, or at an outstation camp and call out to kin trying to persuade them to jump on, these new passengers often leaving without even a bed-roll or a change of clothes, departing to another location and returning weeks or months later. (Smith 2004, p. 252)

Dwelling in the world, in short, is tantamount to the ongoing, temporal interweaving of our lives with one another and with the manifold constituents of our environment. (Ingold 2011b, p. 348)

Introduction

During my fieldwork I noted the extent and the fluidity of movement in contemporary social relations, in and around the art centre. I also noted that these movements were in relation to other social and customary practices that

extended to bush trips and travel whenever a car became available. The opportunity to hunt and gather tjanpi out bush was never passed up, often resulting in an over-crowded car full of eager participants. Tjanpi is the Ngaanyatjarra word for grass. It also represents the art of 'doing tjanpi', the colloquial expression used by Yarnangu to explain any or all of the aspects and processes associated with the gathering and weaving of various desert grasses (predominantly spinifex) into art forms. I began to soak up the whole environment of art production, seeking to identify the flows of people, things, practices and movements through which art production is performed. An analysis of the practices of tjanpi weaving draws together all the themes from previous chapters and in doing so foregrounds the movements and flows of things and persons implicated in its practice as part of the wider ecologies of place that interact with the technologies of 'today' —specifically cars.

The terms 'weaving' and 'meshwork' have appeared throughout this thesis. In this chapter I use them as a metaphor for weaving together not just the threads and clumps of grass, raffia and wools into sculptural pieces, but the weaving of life and other trajectories, together, in collaboration, 'woven together out of ongoing stories', integrating space and time as '*spatio-temporal events*' (Massey 2005, pp. 130-31). Following Pink, we gain an understanding of how 'intensities of place occur through the coming together of localities, materialities, socialities and other constituents' (2012, p. 38). Thus, the material objects such as grasses and the practices that might be considered as fundamental to tjanpi weaving cannot exist in isolation from what Ingold calls the 'meshwork' of place (2008). They are all also part of the process of continual movement, making a meshwork (Ingold 2008) of the threads and traces of things as people move around the bush environment, gathering the spinifex grasses and then later sitting together in groups to stitch, ply and weave. As outlined in chapter two, Ingold (2008) argues that we should think of the environment of which we

are a part as a '*meshwork* of intertwined trails along which people carry on their lives' (2011b, p. 149, my italics) in order to understand the 'organisms being constituted within a relational field' (2008, p. 1805). Here Ingold means 'a field not of connectable points but of interwoven lines, not a network but a meshwork' (2007, p. 80). Ingold's emphasis is on the relatedness of discrete entities and I believe his argument can be applied in this chapter to convey notions of 'doing tjanpi' as a meshwork of relatedness and movement. Thus these sorts of embodied and affective relationships with grass, and the ephemerality of these, can also imply similar social attitudes and relationships towards cars.

As I have stated in earlier chapters, in Papulankutja cars have a very short life cycle and enter and leave the community in quick succession. Paradoxically, however, the metaphorical significance or semiotic content of art forms produced from ephemeral materials such as grass, for example a life-sized award-winning car, becomes a mirror in which people can see reflected the fundamentals of their own culture. In expanding on this in this chapter, I offer a way of understanding how the diverse components that constitute 'doing tjanpi' are bound up in the meanings behind unique hand-crafted pieces. As in painting, each tjanpi artwork has a symbolic capacity as well as an aesthetic appeal. Writing about the visual arts, Doreen Massey and Gillian Rose highlight a similar point when they say:

we'd like to retain a sense that artworks themselves have their own agency, to a degree. As a particular kind of object or event, each artwork has its own unique range of resources: resources of colour, light, shape, form, composition, sound, smell, change, volume, dynamism, text, and so on. We would suggest that these offer a range of *potentialities* with which an audience can engage. (Massey & Rose 2003)

Rather than thinking of weaving as a bounded creative trajectory, the concept of meshwork offers an alternative way of conceptualising making tjanpi woven sculptures as a place where the flows would be part of a 'zone of entanglement' (Ingold 2007) that constitutes place (Massey 2005). These flows relate to other intensities of entangled trajectories (Pink 2012), forming part of the wider 'meshwork' of which human movement and cars are also a part. In other words, arts practice is constituted through the multiple other processes with which art production becomes interwoven. A tjanpi analysis advances new ideas and techniques within Aboriginal art in the areas of fibre arts and sculpture.

This chapter examines the contemporary practice of tjanpi weaving and uses the theme of cars to broaden the notion of mobility, expressing constantly changing and *moving* constellations or ecologies. I address a range of theoretical debates about Yarnangu art history at Papulankutja and offer alternative ways of viewing and thinking about creative design in art. The point of particular relevance in this chapter is the consideration of places that unite customary cultural pursuits and everyday life with creative arts practice and contexts. I show this by using the representation of cars as my starting point, and build an analysis around the award winning *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*, created by Tjanpi Desert Weavers at Papulankutja in 2005. My emphasis is defined by materiality,⁸¹ memory and sensoriality through movement, whilst considering the

⁸¹ Materiality here again is expressed in its literal sense and not in the sense of new materialism in art. I define materiality as a material quality or thing, i.e. the quality of being composed of matter. Materiality in this sense may define the role of 'things', exploring the roles of non-human entities. It concerns the nature and quality of a material, its colour and texture, the way that it is formed and fits together. Materials also intertwine with community aspirations, culture and traditions, a society's preoccupations and the history of a place.

metaphorical implications and irony of designing and building a life-sized car made of grass. Is its creation representative or symbolic of owning a *real* Toyota? Therefore, the research contexts I consider in this chapter are not merely localities but, rather, the intensities of creative 'social relationships, materialities, sensory experiences, practices, representations, discourses and more' (Pink 2012).

In this chapter I also demonstrate how tjanpi is innovative and invests in new forms, genres and materials, acting as an agent of transformation. As cars are inscribed in the social fabric of the community as symbolic meaning, I investigate the relationship between cars, community identity and popular cultural representation, drawing on the development of a form of fibre-weaving called tjanpi and its broader cultural context. I establish how we can locate the *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* within a contemporary art discourse that engages with contemporary culture through the entry point, or lens, of sundry cars.

The chapter focuses on flows and practices that include story and tjukurrpa themes. These include 'doing tjanpi' and driving cars. I position art production and place as 'unbounded' (Ingold 2008), and explore the experiences that Yarnangu as performative, transformative and contemporary. I also demonstrate how a new art aesthetic can be conceptualised as part of a constantly shifting place-event that is constituted through constellations of technological change and reworked into the existing cultural practices of the community. Yarnangu embodied practices are bound up with global processes and can be understood as forms of entanglement (Ingold 2008), in which human perception, art production, movement and global flows co-constitute place. This chapter draws on ethnographic and follow-up research to consider how cars and community are implicated in tjanpi art production.

Innovation – transportation – aspiration

In Papulankutja, cars, and in particular Toyotas, are not simply utilitarian vehicles but are inscribed with symbolic meaning in the social fabric of the community, where car ownership is a highly sought-after status. In this chapter I investigate the relationship between cars, community identity and contemporary cultural representation, drawing on the development of a form of fibre-weaving called tjanpi and its broader cultural context. I bring to the fore different routes to knowing within the meshwork that connects practice, politics and an understanding of place. A useful starting point and focus is a specific milestone in the art history of Papulankutja. This watershed event occurred in 2005, when the *Tjanpi Desert Weavers*⁸² of Papulankutja were awarded the most prestigious national award for Indigenous art – the ‘National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award’ – for their large, woven *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*. Artists involved in the project and award were Kantjupayi Benson (deceased), Shirley Bennet, Nuniwa Donegan (deceased), Margret Donegan, Melissa Donegan, Janet Forbes, Ruby Forbes (deceased), Deidre Lane, Elaine Lane, Freda Lane, Janet Lane, Wendy Lane, Angela Lyon, Sarkaway Lyon, Angiliya Mitchell, Mary Smith and Gail Nelson.

Tjanpi has developed into a popular weaving art form practised in Australian Central Desert communities. Weaving tjanpi is a relatively new contemporary art practice and I will demonstrate how we can locate the *Tjanpi*

⁸²Tjanpi Desert Weavers is the specific organisation that manages the distribution of Tjanpi and trades under the umbrella of NPY Women’s Council. Tjanpi with a capital T is the trade name through which Tjanpi is distributed. Tjanpi is a social enterprise that provides a source of income for hundreds of women who collect local bush grasses and weave them into baskets and sculptures, which are then exhibited and traded commercially.

Grass Toyota within a contemporary art discourse that engages with contemporary and popular culture. Additionally, this analysis will also explore the relevance of cars in Papulankutja, which underpins the artists' ideas and values behind designing the artwork. I will present cars in contemporary art as an example of the engagement in the culture and consumption of material objects, and for contrast, compare Papulankutja's *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* with other recent examples of art cars.

This ethnographic and art historical account examines the collaborative, transcultural and commercial aspects of creating tjanpi, and considers how it links to previous themes of the art centre and its practices, orality and stories, collective memory and representational forms. By combining customary movements, contemporary technological mobility, other forms of creative art (art cars), and my own ethnographic *being there*, I was able to engage with the experiential achievement of this form of art production and study its involvement in associated cultural events, experiencing first-hand the multisensory experience of place. I draw on Massey's definition of the relationship between space and place to understand how diverse flows and movements become intertwined in what she calls the 'event of place' (2005, pp. 140-41), which produces what she calls 'simply a coming together of trajectories' (Massey 2005, p. 141).

Tjanpi means grass in Ngaanyatjarra (as it does in Pitjantjatjara). It also refers to the practice of making fibre art, or 'doing tjanpi work' (Foster 2012). In addition, it refers to the finished pieces or the art objects themselves. Anawari Mitchell explains it this way:

'Tjanpi work is a weaving team that goes out to camps with the ladies, also at the art centre [...] It's a grass, dry grass out in the bush, just get it, break it out, take it home.' (Mitchell 2015)

Using the art centre Toyota to drive 'out bush' is, for Yarnangu (and the researcher) one of the most enriching cultural activities at Papulankutja. The travelling party collects grass, hunts for goanna, rabbit, honey ants and maku; tells stories around a campfire; and occasionally reminisces at birth/family and ceremonial sites. These interactions among Yarnangu and their environment contribute to the entanglement of forces that create an intensity of place (Ingold 2008).

Tjanpi Grass Toyota connects experiential, collaborative realities with the environment and local economy. The artists' choice to construct a car made of grass is symbolic and metaphorical of the comprehensive desire to own a 'real' car like it. Tjanpi operates in a domain where local and global trajectories are entangled. The creative transformation of grass into a woven car can be understood as a process of sensorial and embodied engagements. Appreciating the size, smell and overall aesthetic appeal of *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* leads to new routes to understanding the practices and places of art production at Papulankutja. Furthermore, the tjanpi creation demonstrates how collaboration is ingrained in the culture of all Yarnangu practices. Yarnangu are usually inquisitive about new creative genres and skills.

Weaving tjanpi

Tjanpi weaving has its origins in Papulankutja. It is a form of weaving adapted for women in the Central and Western Desert regions of Australia and is adapted to particular ecologies of place. The first woven spinifex baskets were made by women from Papukankutja. The emergence of Aboriginal fibre sculpture is a prominent medium of some women artists in Western Desert communities within contemporary Australian Aboriginal art.

Origin

The art of making tjanpi evolved in 1995 as a cultural initiative of the NPY Women's' Council. The NPY Women's Council's prime objective is to improve the life on the Lands⁸³ for women and children. The 'Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council's membership region encompasses a vast area comprising three main language groups, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (Watson and Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council. 2012). As a passionate and political organisation the strong, collective group established a number of women's centres around the Lands providing the pivotal platform for the eventual establishment of community art centres (Foster 2012, p. 151).

In 1995, the council decided to develop a newly learned craft. Fostering new creative initiatives that support economic opportunities was a way for Yarnangu and Anangu women to use technical skills and a range and diversity of ideas to both create and further develop social relationships within and outside their immediate art community. Inspired by Perth-based fibre artist Nalda Searle, the council employed Thisbe Purich to assist women in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The new weaving idea was introduced to Papulankutja women and initially woven baskets were made. Since then, the creative work has extended to include figures, including dogs and other animals, reptiles, birds and people. These objects became vehicles for the retelling of cultural and intimate narratives, some of which have been mentioned in previous chapters. For example, *Kungkarangkalpa* is a consistent and popular theme for tjanpi artists. Additionally, many of the moulded and bound figures take the shape of 'papa' (dog), expressing the relationships with and attachments to the many camp

⁸³Lands is a shortened term for Ngaanyatjarra Lands, commonly used throughout the region.

dogs in remote communities and in tjukurrpa stories. As I have mentioned in earlier chapters, dogs remain integral to the fabric of Ngaanyatjarra culture and are one of the most popular tjanpi sculptures.

The tjanpi project drew on a long history of Indigenous people creating fibre work from grasses, human hair and seeds for ceremonial practices, personal ornamentation, head padding for carrying objects and daily use. Yarnangu women mastered their revived creative techniques and tjanpi became instantly popular. The art of weaving tjanpi draws inherently on a combination of both the traditional practices of women working together, and equally the more recent community participation within the contemporary domain of commercial creative art practice. Moreover, tjanpi weaving, while a new art form, draws on the cultural histories of the region, specifically on the pre-existing uses of grass throughout the Central and Western Deserts. Aboriginal people's uses and stories remain embedded as a cultural memory in the material and materiality of the woven figures.

Current tjanpi work is informed by novel ideas and the use of transformative, accessible materials. To produce contemporary fashions, tjanpi pieces are first stuffed with spinifex grass before then commonly being bound in colourful wools, raffia, cottons and twisted fabrics along with a variety of seeds, buttons, berries and other found objects. Tjanpi weavers draw on everyday things for their sculptural designs. They turn to mass-produced everyday objects in lieu of, and in addition to, traditional themes such as baskets, containers and customary local artefacts and animal themes. The artists get ideas from the mass-produced products and images that surround them every day. Sometimes these pieces may have a distinct political message, as for example at the 2015 'Venice Biennale' where, Fiona Hall's tjanpi animals conveyed the plight of endangered species. However, more often, they are playful, fun, quirky and innovative. They are often impromptu pieces formed in

a moment of experiment, such as crockery, planes and cars. In her essay examining the emergence of contemporary Aboriginal fibre sculpture in Australia, Christiane Keller argues that 'going sculptural' has helped re-position Aboriginal fibre art in the wider national and international art market, and is a very recent, successful development (Keller 2010: 9). Moreover, I argue that the modish identity of these forms, such as the cars, aeroplanes and domestic objects, also positions tjanpi fibre weaving as a locus for contemporary engagement with popular culture. Tjanpi production incorporates the key concepts and practices of representation, identity, production and consumption.

Weavers' skills were consolidated through practice and a series of workshops. The artists followed their own interests and ideas, incorporating recycled and found objects (West 2007: 23). Here, the shift of ideas into the everyday is the beginning of a new contemporary phase in tjanpi weaving. I argue that at this point tjanpi weaving evolves. The artists' experiments with new ideas, which incorporate inanimate objects like saucepans and motor cars, demonstrate a marked move towards a more popular and consumer-driven interpretation. The replication of everyday found objects and contemporary ideas and themes ensured its quirky appeal and widespread acceptance in both national and global markets. Its commercial viability is twofold. First, as a marketable product that has an earning capacity it increases the personal household income of the producer. Second, its commercial viability throughout both the art and tourist markets ensures that tjanpi thrives as a commercial enterprise and as a sustainable occupation.

Following the collaborative collecting of grasses, rushes, camel hair and human hair, this raw material is harvested and woven, and creatively fabricated into contemporary art forms. Tjanpi weaving has evolved into an important social and commercial enterprise that links community values of kinship and socialisation with creativity and commerce. Regular hunting trips and family

reunions often involve tjanpi production by incorporating the collecting of grasses for future use (or instant arrangement) and such activities are seen as natural and enjoyable inclusions in everyday life and social practices. Tjanpi can be made at any time, and anywhere, and requires only a few readily available resources—just grass and a needle. Artists can take semi-structured pieces on their travels and carry on working whenever time permits. The women speak of the pleasure they gain from collecting native grasses, gathering and hunting for bush foods, visiting sacred sites and teaching their children about the country as they go. Artist Josephine Mick highlights these local perspectives and the importance that the artists attach to a community bound together in companionship and learning together:

‘So here we are in our own country, with our sacred sites all around us, and we are all nguraritja here, which is a word meaning traditional owner of this country. We are so happy to be here, us nguraritja, working in this workshop and skillfully manifesting in this clever new way, a different depiction of our own country.’ (Mick Watson and Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council 201, p. 265)

Grass: entangled fibre

The Women’s Council directly brought about Tjanpi’s experimental beginnings in 1995 for the purposes of integrating the resourceful use of grass as a creative medium for cultural transformation. The council was looking for something more culturally appropriate than the normative model of working inside an art centre (Gough & Purich 2004). Council coordinators introduced the new idea of coiling baskets from grass as an idea for an arts employment opportunity. This grass is commonly known as spinifex and its distribution is extensive, spanning more than one-quarter of the Australian continent. It is considered to be the most common plant in Australia (Latz 2007). Spinifex is also commonly known

as porcupine grass or hummock grass and is spiny in appearance. I have observed Angiliya, as she appears to effortlessly pull suitable clumps⁸⁴ from the dry sandy soil. However, now that I am no longer just an observer, I have learned from tugging at the wrong tufts and ending up with scratched and sore hands. I understand that tjanpi requires a particular skill, particularly a discerning eye. Despite the widespread distribution of the various types of spinifex grasses, their use by Aboriginal people has attracted relatively little research (Pitman 2010).

In contrast to the strong and dynamic weaving traditions of Northern Australia, there was limited customary use of fibre in the desert regions of Central and Western Deserts, where most domestic utensils were made from wood (West 2007). Although there is no recent history of spinifex weaving in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Heidi Pitman's research into the Aboriginal use of spinifex identified various historical applications for its use (2012). One such practice was spinning and weaving the grass leaves into head rings, called manguri, which were placed on one's head to aid in balancing and carrying piti bowls that would be filled with water or seed. Artist Freda Lane often reminds me that her own mother carried Freda as a baby on her head in one of these large oval bowls made of wood. Depending on the size these dishes were called wirra and piti (small and large dish). The baby would be placed in the piti first, 'then they used to put rabbit, goanna together with the baby and carry it back home, after they went out for hunting' (Pulpurru, Warburton Ranges, October 1989, in, Proctor & Ngaanyatjarra Council 1990).

⁸⁴Not all spinifex is suitable. Those gathering will look for the softer, younger clumps of grass as they are less prickly and easier to work with.

Other creative applications for spinifex use in central Australia were to use it to shore the sides of wells, and to wrap it around sacred objects and other materials. It was also used as padding between the head and other objects being carried. For example, at Ernabella, in 1943 Borgelt (1943) filmed women and children carrying firewood on their heads, many using spinifex as padding (Pitman 2010). Sometimes selections of other grasses were combined with the spinifex, including minarri (woollybutt or *Amphipogon caricinus*), wangurmu (woollybutt or *Eragrostis eriopoda*) and kurtanu grass. Thus, tjanpi weaving, while itself a new art form, also draws on and develops these cultural histories of the region. Anawari Mitchell suggests that it is also a way of passing on cultural knowledge and skills.⁸⁵ Crafting tjanpi is a practice situated in relation to the history and movement of Yarnangu people and things and studying its development can impart a complementary account of the region.

Experimental art forms

Massey suggests that stories-so-far are the 'sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist, as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity' (2005, p. 9). Other theoretical approaches are thus particularly useful in understanding tjanpi. Here, I draw on the work of Jennifer Biddle in the theoretical area of what she calls 'experimental art forms' (2012). Biddle describes women's fibre art as:

an exemplary experimental art form that invents tradition for the first time, and, in so doing, collapses otherwise stable boundaries between subject and object, human and non-human. (Biddle 2012, preface)

She goes on to argue that tjanpi has 'the capacity to engender an encounter of tangible life world exigencies—providing a speculative analysis of the banal, the everyday, as itself a radical site of ontological experimentation and politics'

⁸⁵ Personal conversation with Anawari Mitchell 26th May 2015.

(Biddle 2012, p. 1). Furthermore, Biddle claims that the unique cultural traditions of labour, memories and emotional associations woven into the object forms are felt directly by the consumer, noting that this provides, for the first time, local historical perspectives and experiences (2012). Tjanpi marks the first NPY collective achieved through art (Biddle 2012). She suggests that ‘a new and distinct assemblage (peoples, places, events, things: that is, the emergence of a new public identity) was forged by tjanpi’ (Biddle 2012, p. 3).

In some respects, Yarnangu and Anangu homelands have become better known for their handicraft and are arguably still better known for their tjanpi than their acrylic painting (Mclean 2010). At Papulankutja, Yarnangu were making tjanpi pieces before they were painting. Biddle also offers a useful way of understanding the representational layers of weaving tjanpi. Building on the focus in earlier chapters on the *experience* of place, sensory environments and the histories of practice, I argue that the material production of tjanpi cannot be understood in isolation from what Ingold calls the ‘meshwork’ of place (2008).

The grasses and collected materials that are used to make tjanpi fibre forms hold special meaning for the artists. The produced forms are fabricated collaboratively from the actual grasses that grow in their Ancestral country. The tjanpi artists draw on stories, both historical and current, that hold great cultural and family significance. As I have demonstrated in earlier chapter, these stories connect people and place, connecting with the ways that people make sense of the world around them. As a consequence, the banal everyday items of tjanpi—teacups, bowls, baskets, dogs and reptiles as well as cars, trucks and technological subject matter—underscore the notion of place as ‘entanglement’ (Ingold 2008). Tjanpi also thus supports Biddle’s notion of experimental art forms. Tjanpi are ‘things’ with attitude—Toyotas, TVs, teapots, movie cameras—which Biddle characterises as ‘irreverent imitations and cheeky quotations that provocatively and audaciously find the reproduction not of

anything and everything, but specific hyper-signifiers of modernity' (Biddle 2012).

Collaboration

Making tjanpi baskets and sculptures lends itself to working collaboratively. The collaborative and collective aspects of incorporating tjanpi into everyday life support the community's strong social connections to both friends and family, and underpin the importance of staying close and connected to country. The success of tjanpi can be attributed to the fact that it encourages people to stay connected, and embodies ideas of working and travelling together. During my field trips I became increasingly aware that 'doing tjanpi' was *experienced* and *imagined* by Yarnangu and was related to the *movements* of people, cars, things and even the weather. Thus, collecting the grass has become a multilevel event that involves other enjoyable cultural activities such as travelling, hunting, singing and visiting the country. The women have found a strong connection with their tjanpi work and the activities associated with it (Watson and Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council 2012: 106). Artist Trudy Holland recalls:

When we are going out for tjanpi we say: 'Let's go for hunting at the same time we pick the tjanpi up!' We go to dig honey ants or goanna and come back afternoon, have a nice lunch. Have a fire, sit down and have a lunch, cook some bardies and goanna, then after that, get some wood for the old people. (Watson and Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council 2012: 110)

In 2005, while groups of women gathered every day to collaboratively build the life-sized sculptural *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*, 'the real Toyota went out day after day getting trailer loads of minarri grass' to complete the project (Watson and Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council 2012: 254).

Collecting grass was an added incentive to go into the bush with the children or

to go hunting, visit the country and collect wood for artefacts and plants for medicines (Foster 2012, p. 153). The collaborative nature of tjanpi weaving exemplifies a positive entrepreneurial alliance. It encouraged the women to sit together and share knowledge, connecting traditional skills to modern production and allowing them to take command of a new medium. Importantly, *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* was also the first work in the Telstra Award to be awarded to 'collaboration'. Kanytjupayi Benson, the innovative artist responsible for the idea behind the project stated, 'I enjoy the companionship of making baskets, sitting with my closest companions' (Watson & NYPWC 2012: 18).

Janet Forbes tells me that although it was Mrs Benson's idea, it was she who drew up the design plan on the cement floor in the hall: 'It was my design. I drew it. In textas, texta.'⁸⁶ Janet said that the idea for the design came from the Toyota she saw in the community. The epic, collaborative, reconfigured *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* represents the aspirational attitudes towards the Toyota inherent in the Papulankutja community. It also indicates a distinct Yarnangu engagement with the landscape and a social, collaborative and contemporary sensibility. *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* is an artistic and cultural expression, communicating contemporary desert life. The relationship between access to a vehicle and performing customary cultural pursuits is close to the hearts of Yarnangu and often the theme for both acrylic paintings and tjanpi work.

Revisiting contact zones: commercial and digital

Any time, anywhere: it is keeping in touch with family and connection to country that is most important to Ngaanyatjarra people. Connectivity within

⁸⁶ This was developed through a personal conversation with Janet Forbes, 28 May 2015. Janet has been mentioned throughout this thesis as a senior artist participant whose family was the first to settle at Papulankutja in the 1970s.

regional desert landscapes, for the purposes of socialising and for cultural and commercial exchange, has developed exponentially. Telecommunications, internet connectivity and road transport keep community members in close proximity and in touch with family and friends. Mobile phones, social media and the internet are changing the ways that desert communities like Papulankutja interact as they gradually change, morphing into a remote version of mainstream culture, as discussed in chapter three. For instance, at Wingellina and Papulankutja new media centres are engaging with young, creative musicians, filmmakers and artists, and online trade in the digital desert is now commonplace.

The profound significance of telecommunications and digital technologies has made the development of tjanpi a commercially viable enterprise. Online information systems now perform as recently developed 'contact zones': spaces accommodating divergent and incommensurable perceptions of artefacts and dialogues shaped from the different traditions within which the object has travelled (Clifford 1997; Pratt 1991). Clifford calls these new spaces 'commercial and digital contact zones' (Clifford 1997). Silvia Spitta, writing on objects and transculturation, suggests these sites have become places where 'art and science rub up against each other and commingle' in juxtapositions that arouse curiosity and wonder on the one hand. Spitta says these two systems come into tension, supplanting traditional figurative texts and communal performances (Spitta 2009). Spitta's ideas about how transculturation occurs when two different cultures come into contact with each other are relevant to this study. Using Spitta's approach each text, each work of art, each popular culture production at Papulankutja can be read in very different ways (Spitta 2009). This chapter shows that a focus on the flows and practices that extend through various contact zones allows us to understand how place and the experiences Yarnangu artists have of it are transformed. 'Doing tjanpi' relates identity, temporality and

memory with collective present events, in a mediated environment, unveiling the recollection of customary traditions through more contemporary forms of contemporary and technological culture.

The rise and rise of tjanpi

In 2013 an exhibition titled *String Theory* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney showcased Indigenous fibre-based work from around Australia, including the traditional and the creative use of grasses for string-work and basketry. Art critic John McDonald was not wholeheartedly enthusiastic about the entire exhibition, which he thought displayed a disjunction between art from the communities and the more political work of urban artists. However, he argued that the most outstanding contributions to the show were the ‘ambitious collaborative sculptures’ made by the tjanpi weavers of the Western Desert (McDonald 2013). McDonald commented that the work was ‘a collaboration in the best sense, in which women from different localities gather at a campsite to make work, sing, and swap stories’ (McDonald 2013).

The exhibition included a traditional representation of creation story *Seven Sisters (Kungkarangkalpa)*, with life-sized woven female figurines and gnarled trees with branches and roots outstretched. Although mythical, the story appeared very much alive, tactile and in the present. In his conclusion McDonald reacted to a dichotomy that he regards as problematic, writing:

This intense interconnectedness which binds people, land and story so closely together, is the antithesis of life in modern urban societies, which only seems to grow more atomised and rootless. (McDonald 2013)

I have included this comment by John McDonald to show that as a viewer/spectator of the tjanpi pieces he had perceived the *present-ness* and *affectiveness* of the work. This resonates with Biddle’s suggestion that the figures

are *felt* directly by the consumer. The comment also made me think of my own connection to the artwork. It captures an ethnographic *present-ness* and *experience* that is bound up in the *interconnectedness* of tjanpi production, and where land and story are interwoven with processes and practices. A theory of place supports this understanding of these practices as part of broad ecologies (Pink 2012).

Recently, I was invited to sit in on a tjanpi workshop held at the art centre. We all sat cross-legged in the red dirt, protected from the wind next to the walls of the art centre building (images 7.5 and 7.6). Everyone was industrious and their enjoyment obvious. Most of the interactions and conversations were carried on in the Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara languages. However, there were interludes in English so that I could join in. Both Janet and Anawari insisted that I pick up a needle and join them. They wanted to show me how it was done. They were good instructors and in between making a large 'ear' and a 'foot'⁸⁷ (metaphorical and political pieces for an exhibition) to be stitched on to a tjanpi chair they were making, they each took the time to separate the clumps of grass and guide my hands around the soft, yet prickly stems and then coil it in with raffia and a needle to make a small basket. I used scraps that were lying about and worked meticulously and slowly. It took me two weeks to complete it

⁸⁷ This piece called 'Come Look and Listen' was a collaborative artwork and political statement about living on their country being a 'lifestyle choice' as quoted by the then Prime Minister Tony Abbott. The tjanpi sculpture was shaped like a humanised tjanpi chair. Anawari Mitchell explains that it has an eye to see and ear to listen to what is happening in communities like Papulankutja. There is also an outstretched hand, which is asking for help. The artists: Anawari Mitchell, Janet Forbes, Nora Davidson, Elaine Lane, and Janet Lane. Personal conversation with artists Wednesday 13 May 2016.

in my spare time, and as the workshop had well and truly finished by then, I found myself going through the bins for a few more raffia strands, in order that I finish my tiny piece before going home.

For me, crafting tjanpi was a painstakingly slow exercise and one that required much practice and great skill. I had been out collecting grasses many times with the women yet had not *experienced* the practice of making. I took the tiny finished basket back to my home near Sydney, and although lopsided in structure, it sits proudly on a shelf in my home. As I reflect on its making I am reminded of this particular creative event at Papulankutja and just how labour intensive and difficult it is to achieve a high quality outcome. Thus my research has not been restricted to theorising, but is underpinned by an understanding of ‘the relationship of practices and places as mutually constituting’ (Pink 2012, p. 2). These practices of tjanpi art production cannot be understood separately from their representations, or from the ‘event’ (Massey 2005) or ‘occurrence’ (Ingold 2008) of place with which they are entangled.

Exhibitions

Papulankutja Artists has experienced an increasing interest in both acrylic paintings and weavings in recent years.⁸⁸ Acrylic on canvas paintings, and now tjanpi, have become highly marketable in galleries around Australia and internationally. I draw attention to some exhibitions that have incorporated Papulankutja artists in an effort to show both the creative and commercial successes and demonstrate how these entanglements interrelate with Yarnangu art production and wider global flows.

Recent exhibitions highlight the significance of Ngaanyatjarra artists and their range of congruent and creative genres. A noteworthy example is a recent

⁸⁸Personal discussions with Papulankutja Artists manager Jane Avery.

exhibition 'Vivid Memories: An Aboriginal Art History' at the Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux, France, where the late Cliff Reid, a highly respected elder and prominent member of the Papulankutja community, had his work selected as representative of art in the region. The exhibition's catalogue provided perspicuous explanations about the exhibition, drawing on significant and insightful research by the curators. They wanted the artworks portrayed in a non-linear exhibition of the history of Australian Indigenous art. To this end they limited famous names and instead focused on specific relationships with memory and history (Musée d'Acquitaine Bordeaux 2013). The curators presented the artworks in a way that emphasised ethical responsibilities, particularly in relation to Australian Aboriginal art, ensuring that the production was more inclusive than exclusive with respect to individual artists. Cliff Reid's⁸⁹ work resonated powerfully, with black, white and ochre coloured acrylic depictions of Country, inscribed with meanings and insights of life in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

In my own community on the outskirts of Sydney the Hawkesbury Regional Gallery recently hosted a woven tjanpi exhibition as part of the 'Strong Women, Strong Painting, Strong Culture' exhibition that featured art from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands by senior women artists. The theme celebrated the power and importance of contemporary women's art making in Aboriginal communities. A major feature of the highly acclaimed travelling exhibition was a large presentation of colourful and captivating tjanpi sculptures, objects and installations. The artworks presented were the result of social and collaborative processes consistent with Ngaanyatjarra culture.

⁸⁹I have written more extensively about Cliff Reid in the artist biographies in the appendix.

More recently, tjanpi attained international stature when it was included as part of Fiona Hall's exhibition at the 2015 'Venice Biennale'. Hall was Australia's representative artist at the biennale in Australia's new pavilion, the first 21st century building in the biennale's main venue, the Giardini. 'Wrong Way Time' comprised works by Hall that explore global politics, world finances and the environment. A multilayered and multi-sensorial exhibition, it registered the impact of colonialism and capitalism on a natural environment (Michael 2015). Included within this installation is a collection of hand-made native, endangered animals created with the tjanpi grass (Michael 2015). These were the result of a collaborative partnership with twelve Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara Tjanpi Desert Weavers, *Kuka Irititja (Animals from Another Time)*. *Kuka Irititja*, a collaborative project, took shape at an artists' camp held in June 2014 at a place near Papulankutja's neighbouring community of Wingellina. The women collected the local tjanpi, while Fiona brought Australian and British military garments to incorporate as an acknowledgment of the loss and displacement suffered by the women under colonial and subsequent regimes (Michael 2015). One participant in the collaborative project said:

'Our workshop was a shared space, where we taught each other. Fiona Hall brought out army clothing and showed us how she works with them, and we showed her how we worked with tjanpi.' (Niningka Lewis in Michael 2015, p. 51)

The multilayered work captures sensitive issues surrounding what Hall describes as 'continued erosion physically and culturally on Aboriginal people and their country'. The art also touches on recent Australian political issues, particularly the controversy raised by Prime Minister Abbott's proposal to cut off government funding in remote Indigenous communities (Carrigan 2015). In a collaborative endeavour, the weavers drew on their intimate relationships with animals, Australian politics, and their lived experience or the

interrelatedness of people, place, story and ancestral tradition to present the only collaborative work in the pavilion (Michael 2015: 49).⁹⁰

I was able to visit the 56th International Art Exhibition *All the World's Futures* in 2015. In doing so I learned first-hand how tjanpi was both exhibited and received by global audiences. Many responses from art critics (Carrigan 2015; Hutchinson 2015, May 6) was clearly positive and I found audiences to be engaged and interested in the work. The Giardini group guide also suggested that audience response had been positive. *Kuka Irititja's* setting was very dark, perhaps accelerating a sense of unease and yet slowing us down to a steady flow of reflection. Each tjanpi piece was illuminated and slightly difficult to see clearly unless you stood very close (images 7.7 and 7.8). This added to the intimacy one experienced with each animal. To some extent the darkness seemed to intensify the works and emphasised Hall's sombre concerns for the environment. Each tjanpi animal and bird was set on its own plinth (old flour tins and sugar drums, representing dietary changes as the traditional meat animals disappeared) or was suspended from the ceiling. This created an ambience that was animated and potent. This 'presence' appealed to our human multisensory processes, calling for tactile ways of knowing as well as visual aesthetic appeal.

Tjanpi Toyota

Place and practice shift over time, clearing a space for technologies to intersect in the processes involved in everyday life and in art production. Skills and knowing in practice and human and material agencies become contingent on,

⁹⁰The weavers were Roma Butler, Yangi Yangi Fox, Rene Kulitja, Niningka Lewis, Yvonne Lewis, Molly Miller, Angkaliya Nelson, Mary Pan, Sandra Peterman, Tjawina Roberts and Nyanu Watson.

and entwined in the social, material and environmental intersections that may lead to innovation and a rearranging of customary habits and ways of doing. The car is a 'dynamic resource' flowing into and out of remote settlements (Holcombe 2006, p. 187). Although vehicles are a necessity, not a luxury, they are a scarce resource, and the key value of vehicles is their social importance: their capacity to generate and sustain relationships between people (Holcombe 2006). Given the high status of the car at Papulankutja, it is not surprising that it should be selected as the theme for a creative project. The coordinating group *Tjanpi Desert Weavers* (constituted within NPYWC) calls regularly in their Toyota to deliver materials and buy finished sculptural pieces.

The Toyota and tjanpi are ironically and intrinsically entwined. There is an irony in winning the prestigious Telstra Prize with a large (true to life) Toyota Four Wheel Drive made of woven spinifex. The ephemeral nature of the grass aligns with short-lived personal car ownership. Toyota ownership is, for Yarnangu, unaffordable. The artwork emphasises the contradictory effects of the changing relationship between creating art and the desire for modern and up-to-date convenience. In a reverse appropriation, the artwork makes a witty and relevant social commentary. The artwork synthesises a popular commercial commodity – the Toyota – with an innovative handicraft, in turn decontextualising and appropriating the car's currency. The iconic Toyota represents not just status,⁹¹ but a communal aspiration for progress and change in a community that has its roots (and routes) in travelling extensive distances and fundamentally staying connected to family and land. Desert communities embrace the Toyota as a response to their location and the need to travel

⁹¹ Some would argue that the Toyota Four Wheel Drive is a also status symbol of urban populations and an icon of popular culture today.

excessive distances. As I will show in the next section, cars are of profound importance to a community like Papulankutja.

Movement and mobility: cars + Toyotas

'Rubbish' cars and rugged roads

Like others visiting remote communities for the first time, I was overwhelmed by my first visual impression of the *rubbish cars* in all their stages of decay around the community. Yarnangu use the term 'rubbish car' to refer to a car that needs attention. Nearly all cars eventually become rubbish cars, and I have observed at Papulankutja that cars are still usable without brakes, lights, reversing capacity, petrol gauges or windows. Papulankutja has its own 'rubbish car' dump—places for the countless junky cars that have been abandoned after breaking down. Many cars end up in dumps on the outskirts of towns. Others (often two or more) remain in the front of the owner's house, usually parked randomly in the middle or side of the road, stripped of useful parts and propped up on blocks with wheels removed. The glass is usually gone, smashed or held in place with various tapes. At Pamela's house the vehicle becomes a plaything for children, the wipers, radio and car-horn still functional.

The distances to and from anywhere are in the hundreds of kilometres and many cars simply cannot make the distance. If they do, they last for a very short time afterwards. The roads are constructed of crushed and compacted reddish gravel, which is susceptible to the vagaries of variable weather conditions. The roads are often flooded, cracked or rippled with undulated, uncompacted sand drifts making them nearly impossible to drive smoothly on. There are bits of cars scattered all along the road—chunks that have fallen off as the vehicle pushes on to its (literally) final destination. Apart from mobs of camels, abandoned broken down and rusted cars are the most commonplace backdrop

along these routes. On my last drive out to the community I counted one broken down and abandoned car every five kilometres, as captured in the images at the opening of each chapter. Many of these cars were sold cheaply (and often bought with money earned from the art centre)⁹² and were never intended for the harsh realities of desert driving, as they receive little maintenance. The average car in a remote community has an extremely short lifespan (Currie & Senbergs 2007). Nonetheless, cars have become ingrained into the way of life in remote Indigenous communities (Fogarty 2005). Anthropologist Diana Young, in her study 'The life and death of cars: Private vehicles on the Pitjantjatjara Lands, South Australia', states:

The cars that Aboriginal people in the Western Desert buy are typically in the last stages of their viable life. Coupled with this is the fact that these vehicles operate over long distances and in harsh conditions. Some sedans, and four-wheel-drive vehicles as well, last only a few months before irretrievable breakdown occurs on the punishing dirt roadways. (2001, p. 38).

Socialising the Toyota

The Toyota four-wheel drive is highly valued and the envy of all who live in the desert regions. 'Toyota' has become a generic term for Yarnangu to refer to all four-wheel-drive vehicles (Stotz 2001, p. 223). However, there are very few locals who can afford the high cost of owning one. Those without their own vehicles draw heavily on family and kin relations who have. Those who do own

⁹²Jane often spent hours on the phone trying to resolve broken down car retrieval problems and money issues after artists had spent their art sale earnings on a 'rubbish' car. On many occasions she would organize an artist's passage home to Papulankutja after their car had broken down.

a car face the constant pressures of demands to share, and this ownership can often become a burden (in Myers 1989). Working with Arnhem Land communities and using the car for his analysis on 'humberging', anthropologist Grayson Gerrard (1989) argues that the symbolic dimension of a car in communities is as important as its practical significance. He calls the car 'fetishistic': it is an object that has become an excessive preoccupation. Gerrard argues that Appadurai's analysis of the 'social life of things', with an emphasis on exchange, is a useful theoretical framework for interpreting the importance of the car (Gerrard 1989, p. 110).

Appadurai considers commodity context as a social matter, because it brings together actors from quite different cultural systems who share only the most minimal understandings (from the conceptual point of view) about the objects in question (Appadurai 1986, p. 15). Based on an emphasis on exchange, things are, according to Appadurai, fluid. They may be a commodity in one context, but they may also be people, services and knowledge, as well as physical objects, in this case cars (Appadurai 1986, p. 97). Gerrard argues that as well as having this tremendous symbolic value, community members are gaining access to this very important object through processes like humberging, which circumvent any need for exchange (Gerrard 1989, p. 106). Both Stotz (2001) and Young (2001) also argue that the car has become socialised. Cars come to acquire a contradictory identity on the car and are transformed and, with use, 'humanised'. Car ownership may be low; however, cars have become ingrained in the way of life, evoking social expressions of sharing, reciprocity and humberging—all notions of collectivity and transcultural frustration (Fogarty 2005). These concepts suggest the idiosyncratic relationship Yarnangu have to cars. The relationship is underpinned by the entanglement of practices, places and technologies that mutually constitute the community.

Cars are among the most valuable objects in contemporary Western Desert life, especially trucks and four-wheel-drive Toyotas which are able to carry large loads (and people) across difficult terrain (Myers 1989, p. 23). However, as Myers suggests, and from my own driving experiences at Papulankutja, no matter what they cost the vehicles are regarded as replaceable like spades, shovels and digging sticks (1989, p. 24). At Papulankutja the vehicles assume a community or collective identity. Like the grass Toyota, any vehicle is a collaborative mode of expression, an object of shared production and usage. There is a generally dismissive attitude towards personal possession and actual ownership. This forms the underlying dimension of identity at Papulankutja, making up the social fabric of the community. It also assists in explaining the *replacabilty* of all objects, a point I made in chapter three in reference to the 'store'. There are always 'plenty more motorcars' (Myers 1989, p. 41). Ironically, the 'real' car, which is among the most valuable objects in Papulankutja, is like *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*—materially ephemeral.

In Papulankutja, a community supposedly non-materially inclined (see, Myers 1989, p. 24), the status of car ownership, and in particular Toyota ownership, is highly sought (Acker & Carty 2012). Thisbe Purich, who was responsible for introducing teaching of fibre art weaving into remote communities in Papulankutja, states that 'the vehicle represents the highest material aspiration for an Aboriginal person' (Watson & NPYWC 2012, p. 260). However, she goes on to suggest:

this Toyota, then, is a token to Aboriginal materialism or lack thereof ... given that the average lifespan for a Toyota in the community is about two to three years ... [and so it echoes] the resounding ephemeral attitude towards material things. (Watson & Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council. 2012, p. 260)

The lack of vehicle infrastructure, along with poor vehicle maintenance on vehicles that are already generally second-hand ensures that the lifespan of cars is extremely short (Holcombe 2006, p. 187). In referring to Kantjupayi Benson, one of the Tjanpi award winners, Thisbe Purich said:

‘She knows only too well the ephemeral nature of grass, real Toyotas, ambitions and aspirations and the decline and decay inherent in all things material.’ (in, West 2007, p. 85).

Mobility and relationships

The social importance of vehicles at Papulankutja is profound, and yet these vehicles are often regarded as necessarily expendable. The loss of a vehicle compounds the demands made on other vehicles owned by, or accessible to, others in a community (Holcombe 2006). Desert communities embrace the Toyota as a response to their paucity of access due to their remoteness. Known variously as ‘Toyotas’ or ‘trucks’, vehicles have come to play an essential role in the livelihood practices of Yarnangu and are among the most valued objects in contemporary Papulankutja. Demands from other family members to ‘borrow the truck’ are never refused, as there is always a cultural obligation to family/kin to share, and a car is seen as ‘the occasion for the temporary realization of their relationship and obligations to each other’ (Myers 1989, p. 24). As Myers notes, ‘to have a car, one might say, is to find out how many relatives one has’ (1989, p. 23). However, research has shown us that vehicles are a necessity, not a luxury, for Aboriginal people in remote areas. The connection to homelands and extended kinship networks is a vital aspect of Ngaanyatjarra life and access to transport is a key to maintaining this connection (Currie & Senbergs 2007, p. 7). Going ‘out bush’ and collecting grasses for tjanpi, hunting and other customary practices is only viable with the use of a vehicle. Kanytjupayi Benson commented on the reason the group designed and created the grass car:

'Cars are really important to us for work in collecting our grasses, for hunting in the bush and going to ceremonies. We thought it would be a good idea to make a big one for fun and to show that it is an important part of our lives.' (Benson in Campbell 2005)

Car consumption

At Papulankutja, there are no days when access to the use of the art centre vehicle isn't propositioned. 'Since the car isn't doing anything maybe we should take it out for a run—to get tjanpi or hunt' artists will say. The ways in which these seemingly unrelated and diverse components constitute art production relate to the artists' demonstrative feelings associated with car use. Artists have told me they are painting and weaving so they can buy a car. I have witnessed episodes where a car has divided the community due to its complex social influence. Sociologist Mimi Sheller's work explores the anthropology and emotional approaches to cars and culture, and argues that car consumption is never simply about rational economic choice (2004). Sheller's research links with my earlier discussion about sociability and cars. I also find it useful to draw on her comments on sensory responses, where she argues that it is as much about aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses to driving as about patterns of kinship, sociability, habitation and work (2004, p. 222).

Vehicle availability is a scarce resource with severely limited access and the artists are continuously humbugging for access to one. Many of the women in Papulankutja don't drive as they have no access to a car, although I have noted that quite a few of the elders have been taught at some point in time. A consistent theme running throughout Holcombe's analysis is the issue of women's limited access to vehicles relative to men (2006). With the assistance of the NPY Women's Council, a government-sponsored programme sought to address the paucity of vehicles for women's own use and a programme was established in 1988 that taught women to drive (Holcombe 2006). Unfortunately,

this programme resulted in one shared vehicle per settlement, and limited vehicle access to senior women associated with the Women's Council.

Papulankutja artist Narelle Holland was taught to drive during this period and enjoys driving the art centre Toyota whenever she can. Some of the women who learnt to drive during this period are tjanpi artists today and their intense desires for transport of their own and access to a reliable vehicle helped shape the idea of creating a life-sized vehicle.

Art cars

Art production practices and *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* are connected by explicit discourses about art, cars and culture. Examples of contemporary art cars, including Papulankutja's *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*, can be read as an engagement with contemporary and popular culture. At this point, as a contrast, I will consider some of the differences between *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* and some other Australian art cars. This will show how the Papulankutja Tjanpi Desert Weavers' performance of practice is contemporary, multisensory and distinctive. By contrasting *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* with other contemporary, creative art cars my intention is also to demonstrate how *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* offers its own dynamic present-day contribution to the unusual mix of fabricated art cars.

As icons of popular culture, automobiles have often been incorporated into a broad range of artworks including sculptural installations. Cars in artwork often parody observations about culture and what people do with cars and the cultural images they presume. To make political statement, artists often use the car and other technologies of the modern era as a metaphor. Some contemporary artists use their work as a platform for social and political critique and the following Australian examples illustrate the diverse symbolic values associated with art car culture.

Michael Nelson Jagamara: BMW Art Car # *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*

As an example of cars in contemporary art, and as a way of comparing *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* with aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses to other cars in art, I first consider the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London's 'BMW Art Car Collection'. The Art Car initiative started 35 years ago and leading artists were commissioned to design a car that 'married artistic excellence with *an already perfect object*' (Lohmann 2012, original emphasis). Jeff Koons, Andy Warhol and the Australian Aboriginal artist Michael Nelson Jagamara are some of the leading international artists who have transformed BMW cars with their artwork (see image 7.9). In describing his 1989 art car design, Michael Nelson Jagamara stated that he invites viewers to engage in a dialogue between the modern automobile and Aboriginal culture (Lohmann 2012). Nelson Jagamara said at the time, 'the car is a landscape, like you'd see from a plane – I included the water, the kangaroo and the opossum' (Lohmann 2012). The painted car re-imagines creative traditional stories through an evolving style that connected with contemporary art installation. Coincidentally, 21 years before *Tjanpi Grass Toyota's* win, Michael Nelson Jagamara won the first Telstra (NAAISIA) Art Award in 1984 for his 'Three Ceremonies' painting on canvas.

Tjanpi artists also engaged in a dialogue between the modern automobile and the cultural and social influences that foreground desert life and influence the art. However, their car represents the community's collective identity, and, as Myers maintains, has an autonomous social identity (1989). *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* becomes its own *vehicle* for imparting personal or local Ngaanyatjarra histories and acts as a conduit through which an audience can value, respect and understand desert culture. The temporality of cars and the ephemeral nature of *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* constitute the allegory surrounding its design process. As an expression of the artists' growing confidence, grass has become a

new expressive medium that explores the sculptural potential of working with grass, jute, twine, wire and other recycled products (see image 7.10).

Unlike Nelson Jagamara, who was invited to paint the BMW car as part of an ongoing collection of connected painted motorcars; *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* embraced the novel grass medium and radically challenged conventional tropes. Like pop artist Andy Warhol, using mundane, ubiquitous and inexpensive products that envisioned a new type of art, tjanpi artists used the grass Toyota to confront long-established approaches. Warhol challenged the idea that art had to be portraits, landscapes or abstract pictures of emotions, asserting that things like soup cans and advertisements were just as much a part of our culture as other traditional art subjects. In a similar way *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* is a direct reproduction of the ubiquitous Toyota 'ute'—so popular in car culture today—and bridges ideas about conceptual art and contemporary culture.

In direct contrast to Nelson Jagamara's BMW, *Tjanpi Grass Toyota's* sheer presence and medium are distinctive and assertive. The life-size sculpture consolidates the car's importance as a mode of spatial mobility to Yarnangu. Its smell was its appeal (Murdoch 2005)—not oil and petrol but the fresh country smell of grass and straw. The straw car, like the straw man, may not actually drive, and is perhaps representative of the defective cars in the Papulankutja community. It stands for resistance, its straw carcass representative and symbolic of disadvantage—another car that does not run. Is its perceived lack of animation masking 'embodied sensibilities that are socially and culturally embedded in familial and social practices of car use'? (Sheller 2004, p. 222). Its appearance, although contradictory, makes people smile. Doug Hall, judge and the director of the Queensland Art Gallery, said of the artwork:

'You look at people when they walk towards the work. They smile.

That's a really nice reaction to have for contemporary Indigenous art.

(Murdoch 2005)

The invitation to Nelson Jagamara to complete the BMW commission was associated with enormous grandeur, especially as he was the first Australian Aboriginal artist to be included in the collection. The event took place shortly after Nelson Jagamara had also been commissioned by the Australian Government to design the paved mosaic forecourt of Canberra's Parliament House. As Sally Butler notes, the mosaic design increased his growing reputation, and the publicity surrounding the car-painting commission did much to challenge misconceptions about Aboriginal visual culture as static and unyielding (Butler 2000). At the time of the BMW commission, the Papunya artist's work had already raised the profile of Western Desert painting both in Australia and internationally, and his later work continued to explore the complex, and often controversial, interactions between Aboriginal and western art.

Blak Douglas and Adam Geczy: BOMB # Tjanpi Grass Toyota

Twenty-five years after Michael Nelson Jagamara's successful BMW project, two Australian artists have recently staged an exhibition titled '*BOMB*' at the Aboriginal Art Museum Utrecht (AAMU), Netherlands. Until its closure in June 2017, and after sixteen years as an art museum, AAMU was the only significant museum in the world that was dedicated entirely to the contemporary art of the Indigenous people of Australia. The naming of the *BOMB* exhibition adopts its metaphorical title from an old BMW car retrieved from the desert junkyards of outback Australia (like Papulankutja). The car is *painted up*—directly invoking critical reference to Nelson Jagamara's Art Car of 1989—with dot-styling and a Union Jack. The gallery often hosts exhibitions that pair both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists, the *BOMB* exhibition being an example. Australian artists Blak Douglas and Adam Geczy collaborated in this 2013–14 exhibition for the AAMU in connection with the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Utrecht.

BOMB confronts the themes of nationalism, racism and discrimination, and the relationships between the oppressors and the oppressed (IDAIA 2013). Cars, mostly old Fords, Holdens and Toyotas, and unlikely the more expensive BMW, are often found abandoned in the outback, and for Douglas and Geczy this work represents the contrast between commercially successful Aboriginal acrylic paintings on the one hand, and the harsh reality of the exploitation of the Aboriginal population and their culture on the other (IDAIA 2013). Douglas and Geczy are very critical of imposed symbols, such as the Australian flag and the national anthem, and challenge their romanticized, mass-marketed image of Australia and Aboriginal culture. *BOMB* challenges Nelson Jagamara's art car with a critical and symbolic response to the mass marketing of Australian Aboriginal art. *BOMB* also provocatively and politically challenges Australia's national identity. In an interview with 'Blouin Artinfo', Geczy outlines his sympathies towards Michael Nelson Jagamara and his BMW art car:

'We are not at all criticising the artist, but we see it as a very good example of the decontextualisation of Aboriginal art. Here we have an artist from the Western Desert painting a vehicle that most Indigenous people would not drive, let alone afford.' (Geczy, in Forrest 2013)

Both *BOMB* and *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* challenge representations of vehicle ownership, or lack thereof. Most Aboriginal people living in remote communities cannot afford a reliable car. Both cars dramatically emphasise transport-related disadvantages associated with Aboriginal communities. Moreover, these comparisons actually highlight the iconic status that cars have in the desert regions, where they have become contemporary instruments that connect people with the country and distant family. In desert regions it is the Toyota that enables the spatial mobility so fundamentally tied to Aboriginal life: ceremony, customary economy and land management activities (Holcombe 2006). In their determinations and award rationale, the 2005 award judges Doug

Hall, director of the Queensland Art Gallery, and visual artist Destiny Deacon commented about *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*:

In one sense it takes us to the heart of community life and its tradition of weaving from grass that belongs to the women's country. On the other hand, this work not only recognises but also celebrates the four-wheel drive as central to desert living for Aboriginal people. (Watson & NPYWC 2012, p. 257)

The ubiquity of the *BOMB* (image 7.11) laid a foundation for criticism of desert disadvantage and intensified an acute awareness of unfavourable remote conditions. However, *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* expressed the importance of mobility in the desert in a groundbreaking new form, its emotional and aesthetic circumstances connected with its collaborative production. *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* expresses the relationality of its existence in the material world.

Mimi Sheller argues that the *feel* of different car cultures elicits specific dispositions and ways of life. If we understand these different car cultures, we may be in a better position to evaluate the ethical dimensions of car consumption and the moral economies of car use (2004, p. 224). There is an affective relationship with cars where the 'feelings' being generated around them can be powerful indicators of the emotional currents and submerged moral economies (Sheller 2004, p. 224). In artwork exhibitions, audience feelings are also essential determinants to be considered, including audience responses to the sensory aesthetics, the use of media, exhibition and collaborative methods of the artwork. Ten years on, *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* is still a very popular exhibit with visitors to the gallery. The Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery, where *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* is permanently housed, published a statement to celebrate its tenth year:

‘Ten years ago, the big winner was the Tjanpi Toyota by artists from the Tjanpi Desert Weavers. To this day it’s still a gallery favourite!’ (Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery 2015)

Thisbe Purich commented:

‘Anyway glad to see its still in one piece and enjoyed by all. Took 20 women three weeks in a boiling hot shed in the summer. The scratchy grass was everywhere and they cut the grass with tomahawks on the concrete. The marks are still there today!’ (Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery 2015)

As a sculptural piece, *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* embodies the women’s link to the land and the importance of social and cultural mobility. Its sheer presence and scale, standing four metres long with real wheel hubs, makes it an enchanting and overwhelming sculpture both in size and sensorial impact. As judge Destiny Deacon said, the piece stood out because it was art you could *smell*. Deacon also said the artwork captured the incontestable facts that a car is a necessity in the bush and important for travel, yet, they usually break down. *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* did not move either, and so became ‘something you look at’ (Deacon, in bellebyrd 2005).

Art Car Summary

Cars contrasted with *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* have a sympathetic and political connection to the Australian desert. In its own way, *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* connects with these concepts sensorially, imaginatively and aesthetically. Yet the tjanpi artwork offers a distinctive insight into how experiential elements of both the practices and environments of Yarnangu desert life might be implicated in crucial processes of ‘doing tjanpi’ and other art production.

Although Tjanpi’s recent engagement with the commercial art market has also incorporated objects and *things* from everyday life—cups, teapots, cars and

trucks—*Tjanpi Grass Toyota* moved Aboriginal art into a new media and new aesthetic modes. The sculpture illustrates an imaginative design and technique where the content and meaning of the art car expresses political, social and purely decorative meanings. Importantly, it also implies a transfer of power to the individual artists. The seemingly everyday objects embody significant messages about identity and place. The antecedents of *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* were smaller cars and trucks produced for the commercial market, and subsequent objects have included both helicopters and mail planes—both drawing inspiration from the images and objects of remote everyday life. Moreover, tjanpi artists have achieved some commercial success.

Tjanpi weavers engage within their art practices through performative routine. Their work shows what Biddle describes as a ‘capacity to engender an encounter of tangible life world exigencies providing a speculative analysis of the banal, the everyday’ (Biddle 2012, p. 1). The performative nature of tjanpi demonstrates strong continuity with traditional ties, drawing together traditional skills and contemporary production methods. The artists produce their work while sitting together and sharing stories and knowledge, and having fun weaving for both artistry and money. Importantly, *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* highlights the ways in which Yarnangu production of art is embedded in relations with other things, in practice and as part of place.

Conclusion

When Jimmy Donegan won the 2010 NATSIAA he said he would use his prize money to buy a ‘Toyota with lights’. When Mr Giles looked at his work as it had been recreated on the enormous facade of the Australian Film Television and Radio School in Sydney, his response was, ‘That one’s worth two Toyotas’. (Owen 2013)

In this chapter I moved from an analytical focus on the detail of practices of art production itself towards an analysis of the flows and experiences that constitute place, and the ways in which new innovative materials and sensory positioning enables these shifts in practice. This approach considered how local and global flows are involved in processes through which new skilled practices and related mobility discourses are implicated in the detail of contemporary tjanpi production. I have outlined how tjanpi weaving is innately involved in the multiplicity of Papulankutja's everyday life events. I built my analysis around a consideration of practice and place. With Massey's notion of the 'event of place' as the starting point, the analysis treated tjanpi through its contemporary cultural qualities as an ongoing 'constellation of processes' (Massey 2005, p. 141) in which places are 'articulations within the wider power-geometries of space' (2005, p. 141). I argued that the objects and practices fundamental to tjanpi weaving such as grasses, cannot exist in isolation from what Ingold calls the 'meshwork' of place (2008). I also argued that the examples of contemporary art cars, including Tjanpi Desert Weavers' *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*, can be read as examples of engagements with popular and contemporary culture, through their continued and evolving commitment within local and wider global art fields.

In conclusion, I have considered the watershed event of the 2005 National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award win as an occasion that confirmed *Tjanpi Grass Toyota's* position within the contemporary art fields. I argued that the artworks contemporaneity and use of the Toyota car as an object positioned Papulankutja artists in the everyday life of contemporary culture. The art of creating woven spinifex objects for commercial galleries and the art market has been a beneficial source of sustainable income and a novel business enterprise. Tjanpi works are held in important institutional collections throughout Australia, including the National Gallery of Australia, the National

Museum of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. This chapter also considered how local and global flows are involved in the processes through which new skilled practices of contemporary tjanpi production. I have also shown that tjanpi weaving is innately involved in the multiplicity of Papulankutja's everyday life events. The women speak of the pleasure they gain from collecting native grasses, gathering and hunting for bush foods, visiting sacred sites and teaching their children about the Country as they go.

Tjanpi Grass Toyota can be read as an example of engagement with contemporary culture and an indication that tjanpi is becoming a new *traditional art*. My research findings show that the Papulankutja cars, and in particular Toyotas, are 'not simply utilitarian vehicles' (de Certeau 1984). The tjanpi artists' work demonstrates that the consumption of popular culture is never passive but always reworked into the existing cultural practices of the community, the outcome being a collaborative dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Tjanpi Desert Weavers are artists who have acquired considerable visibility in the art world by creating a new aesthetic that defines and inscribes cultural difference. Through a performative and self-articulated medium, they have gained autonomy with their quirky and contemporary style.

Thus the *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* collaborative project can be characterised as a 'process' or 'event' that has involved the coming together of complex 'entanglements' and ways of knowing. It has involved the mobilisation of existing practices and the production of new understandings, aligning and working in conjunction with other creative art-making practices such as painting and punu. Tjanpi involves the material crafting of local grasses and its constitution of place can be seen in terms of its contemporary environmental situation. The collaborative tjanpi weaving process thus becomes an example of

how global politics, technologies and flows, ideologies and materialities are involved in the production of what is superficially 'simply' a grass car. ■

Vignette 8

A jar of red ochre

I keep a jar of ochre red soil on a display shelf at home. I dug up the rich coloured red sandy soil and poured the soft earth into a clear empty jar on the way home from my last field visit (see figure 8.1). It's there on the shelf to remind me about entanglements, contrasts and difference. It corresponds to a 'mismatching' of two modes of existence, at odds with my own privilege, and remains ever-present. I always find it hard to settle when I return home. I think about this ecology of things as I reach for the jar. I feel worlds apart when I am home and reflect often on a lifestyle so very different to my own. Yarnangu laugh a lot. Mostly noisy, they are comfortable within their place, and speak Ngaanyatjarra when they don't want me to hear things. I'm sure they don't tell me anything they don't want to. Their secrets and knowledge is agency – and power. On reclaimed land they are close to important custodial and ceremonial sites. Yarnangu are generous with their stories. But 'knowing' is not in isolation from the other sensory components that inform Yarnangu experience. I imagine.

I am reminded of the sense of touch - tactility and contact with that red, ochre soil. I remember dark fingers rubbing it, spreading it through their palms or marking it with small sticks as stories were told - or breathing its dust at the football, or watching young children fill used drink bottles and pour it out like liquid across their naked bodies. Or, perhaps it won't make sense anymore. My jar reminds me that my senses are changed. My lifestyle and orientation register new senses and question previous ones.

Yarnangu move about a lot. Cars are covered with the layers of red dust. So are the houses. Yarnangu have visited the big urban centres. Some feel awkward and

uneasy. Others embrace the shopping, gambling and variety. Moreover, communities like Papulankutja embrace being close to family and local knowledges, and regard their sense of place as 'keeping culture strong'.

Skewed against a western linear concept time cycles still remain fundamentally different. It's lucky, at Papulankutja, there is a loud siren that sounds each morning to let everyone know two things: that school has started, and that the shop is open. I was told the siren (like a bell) carries over from mission days. It's broken at the moment. Even I had become conditioned.

My jar reminds me of my Yarnangu friends. Are they painting? Hunting? Passing stories and knowledge? Change is slow at Papulankutja. I liked that. I have been home for three weeks now. After a prolonged and complex stay in the community I am still unsettled. The art centre is open and art production continues. Artists turn up each day to paint their tjukurpa. Papulankutja is the centre of their world, both spatially and socially. It gives them identity, a voice and importantly, a sense of place. Whitefellas come and go. Some stay a year or two, others longer, some shorter. And that's just the way it has been for a very long time. ■

Chapter eight

Conclusion: Papulankutja—a place of trajectories and stories



In the opening chapter of this thesis I explained that this research was motivated by the desire to better understand art and its production at Papulankutja. Throughout this thesis, the vignettes were an attempt to immerse my reader in snapshots of daily practices—or, conversely, give a ‘birds-eye-view’ of experiences and events. This thesis has captured the real-life messiness of art production. The approach in this thesis represents new paths in relation to, and alongside, Aboriginal methodological knowledge systems, and this was an important consideration of the study. Case studies enhanced and enriched the research and highlighted transcultural relations. I have examined contemporary art making practices, not by romanticising how things used to happen but by showing how and why they occur now, each day. I have observed, interacted with and experienced the continuous everyday flows and patterning connected with art production.

In this thesis I have elaborated upon different aspects of transcultural relations in Ngaanyatjarra contemporary art engaging with the contemporary world. The thesis has investigated transcultural experiences in a remote region of Australia where the contemporary artworld has an ambiguous and paradoxical presence.

Overall, the key finding of my research is that transcultural exchange, collaboration and complex relationships are entangled in the processes involved in contemporary art production at Papulankutja. Papulankutja art differs from art produced elsewhere, being enmeshed with and structured around Yarnangu customary storied lives. Perhaps because painting emerged much later in Papulankutja than in other parts of the Western Desert, the Papulankutja artists have audaciously engaged in distinctive, bold styles. Clusters of rainbow colours are incorporated into works of immense visual power and complexity, giving them a strong contemporary relevance. Paintings like those by Tjayanka Woods, Anmanari Brown, Angiliya Mitchell and Elaine Warnatjura Lane express Yarnangu ways of being, transposed onto canvas as story. Art production at the art centre and beyond has become part of the meshwork of experiences and entangled storied environments. This storied environment is part of a specific cultural and social context that often connects art production to specific Aboriginal epistemologies. Art production highlights issues of importance for both creative arts practices and employment opportunities for remote communities. Ultimately, I have been guided towards an understanding of art production as an important function that provides a means of income for artists and that is enmeshed with and structures everyday practices. The art centre plays a pivotal role in the community, not only as a centre for art production and circulation, but also as a site of encounters, storytelling, cultural maintenance and renewal.

Before my research, art making in Papulankutja had not yet been studied. I believe I have made a contribution to knowledge about this art and associated cultural practices. I have also contributed to the development of an innovative approach to the study of contemporary art by bringing into the conversation theories of place, sensory methodologies, everyday practice and contact zones. This multidisciplinary approach is heavily indebted to Aboriginal epistemology.

Summary of findings

This study has used the notion of place to analyse the context of art production in the remote Aboriginal community of Papulankutja in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. I used an analysis of place to map broadly the discursive and material practices within which art is produced in Papulankutja. The analysis made evident the relationality of practices. I identified the entanglements and intersections of social relations and interactions that are implicated in an understanding of place as a shifting intensity or constellation of things of which art practices are a part. Thus, using Massey's (2005) term, I have argued that art production can be characterised as a process or 'event', where an event of place is the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes that includes the coming together of artists, events such as festival, hunting, bush trips and tjukurrpa stories.

This study started by analysing the art production of Papulankutja Artists and its connections to the community of Papulankutja. I explored understandings of contemporary Australian Aboriginal art history and then defined characteristic and collective meanings embedded in Ngaanyatjarra art, and more particularly in Yarnangu artists' individual paintings. I discussed the different ways art-making processes can be understood in relation to the everyday social practices of artists living in the small community of Papulankutja by choosing to frame my case studies around different parameters

of local and cultural knowledge. The case studies and vignettes defined the scope of research and each introduced a focused and nuanced study of particular themes with individual artists.

As well as these conceptual linkages, senior artist Angiliya Mitchell weaves her own thread of meaning from beginning to end of this thesis. Angiliya's discourse expresses her status as custodial senior artist and where she shares the visual knowing and cognitive foundations of her artistic practice and her storied environment. Angiliya's cultural background and life stories characterise the ambiguities of contemporary life in small, remote desert communities. She confidently recalls her story through memory and communicates it through painting. As I have recounted, Angiliya's vast memory and imagination of *Kungkarangkalpa* have a heavy impact on her life and her art, constituting her major preoccupation. Angilya's reflections demonstrate the significance of understanding art-making practices for those who perform them, as well as offering us a prism through which to study forms of art through interaction and engagement interwoven in complex ways in the life of the community.

Summary of chapter findings

This ethnographic thesis combined methods drawn from tools from different disciplines. The multi-focal approach has allowed insights to emerge that link the chapters in a progressive and developmental pattern. However, each chapter covered particular themes as case studies and presented distinct findings that I will outline here. Chapter one defined the scope of the research, examining the complex interweaving of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories and events that led to the establishment of art production at Papulankutja. Locating the research in the context of Papulankutja Artists and its art production shaped the theoretical context of this thesis. It initiated the process of unraveling a collection of trajectories and histories, generating

meanings that identify the shifting and changing patterns and discourses of which practices are part, and which, as this thesis has shown, are also contingent on the activity of non-human structures.

Chapter two outlined my somewhat unorthodox methodological approach and explained how I broadened existing relationships with artists and manager, framing my case studies thematically. I explained how I turned these relationships into a set of deep collaborations between researcher and research subjects as experienced and encountered in complex entanglements. A relational and multisensory approach to place and space defined the theoretical and methodological agenda. A methodology that understood the experiential, mobile and changing nature of commercial art production has offered a route to knowledge that comprehends how Aboriginal epistemology and contemporary art production is part of the flow of everyday life.

Chapter three introduced the pivotal role of the art centre in a theoretical context by exploring the administrative and economic components of art production at Papulankutja. I drew on theories connected with the contact zone and hybrid economies as a route to knowledge that highlights multiple agents that combine the commercial perspective with the continuous flow of shifting actions and the administrative transcultural practices that make up art production at Papulankutja. Employing Doreen Massey's formulation of space as 'the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories' (2005) I located the messiness of art production and its politics and practices in relation to the way that it constitutes contemporary social work spaces and commercial exchange. My research confirms that the art centre is a place where the cultural and global grapple. I demonstrate that it is a safe place of transcultural exchange and negotiation, defined by administrative contingencies and power that impact on the implementation and sustainability of art production performance.

Chapter four assessed the collaborative and creative components of arts practice at the art centre. The chapter explored painting practices through the *performance* of painting and situated the art centre as culturally distinctive, underpinning many aspects of daily life. For Angiliya, it is a specific part of her life that defines arts practice as implicated in both the making of place and in situating the art as embedded with meanings and Ngaanyatjarra life-world. I have shown how Angiliya's paintings offer a lens through which to apprehend cultural difference, in a context where an engagement with pastimes such as hunting and recounting tjukurpa knowledge contribute significantly to her strong sense of self and identity. Arts practice can therefore be understood as part of wider environments and activities where cultural meaning is produced as constitutive and expressive of both human and non-human relations that are co-implicated in the processes through which place is constituted.

Chapter five explored how cultural knowledge is conveyed through story as communicated through *Wati Kutjarra* and painted by Elaine Warnatjura Lane. I drew connections between deeply rooted traditional oral knowledge (storytelling) that reflects some of the spontaneity and shared features of sand drawing with contemporary painting. I located multisensory practices in relation to place using concepts that connect stories, memories, images and local identity. Drawing on Yarnangu perspective and through the paradigm of orality, I recognised how in different knowledge systems such as at Papulankutja, place is constituted differently, not only through relations and material-semiotic assemblages but also—predominantly—through story and orality. I argue that stories have power and that Elaine's contemporary painting gives a powerful account of Yarnangu agency and sense of place in the local storied environment, which is embedded with culturally relevant core values.

In chapter six I explored the way collective and individual memory may be materialised or made tangible. In a critical examination of Angiliya's

Kungkarangkalpa painting I offered a lens through which new meanings became differentiated to show how they were transposed into contemporary and creative settings. I argued that a close examination of the paintings presented internalised, memorised oral knowledge that became embodied in the art. I argue that Angiliya's painting demonstrates the materialisation of this embodiment, constructed around her own personal bond and interpretation of both past and current events. Angiliya's stories and custodial knowledge are transposed and thus sustained through the sensory aesthetic of painting on canvas. These stories are rarely translated to written text. Thus paintings are 'materialised' — made tangible through the performance of painting and record culturally significant memories and tjukurpa knowledge.

Chapter seven focused on tjanpi weaving and considered how movement and cars interact with contemporary arts practices. I demonstrated that flows and movement around Papulankutja are affected by the discourse of cars. I presented the award-winning *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* as an example of tjanpi grass weaving being innately involved in the multiplicity of Papulankutja's everyday life events. A comparative study of art cars highlighted the contradictory effects of the changing relationship between creating art, and the desire for modern and up-to-date conveniences. This showed how these artworks embody significant messages about identity, politics and place. In this chapter I brought together the experiences of 'doing tjanpi' to highlight how the entanglements of arts practices also underscore the importance of transport needs in remote areas.

The case studies used in this thesis have illustrated the need to understand Papulankutja Artists as part of complex wider environments and activities. Art production as practice and in place not only allows us to understand concepts of Yarnangu ways of knowing and being, but also gives us a constant and reliable view of a shifting and changing Yarnangu world. Art, then, can be understood to constitute an accumulation of socially distributed cultural knowledge and is

important for intergenerational recording of local histories. To support this point I have developed four main points.

Firstly, that by using an approach to the art centre in both its administrative and creative capacities, the Papulankutja Artists environment can be understood as a series of complicated negotiations evolving from a distinctly different value system to my own. An example of this is explained through concepts of the contact zone in chapter three, which grapples with the awkwardness of the 'money story'. The art was analysed within this broader framework of 'spatio-temporal events' (Massey 2005). In this way art production is seen as a progressive, socially produced and *relational* process.

Secondly, I found Yarnangu practices enmeshed and structured around storied lives. The concept of orality and storytelling characterises Yarnangu socio-cultural practice which has retained its predominantly oral condition. It has a direct relationship with art-making practices. Themes in artwork are based on story and orality, which have an intrinsic relationship to painting. Meanings then emerged in the art at its intersection of painting and performing everyday arts practice. The oral stories embodied within each painting illustrate to some extent the historical, social and cultural processes that constitute life on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands today, as exemplified in Elaine's painting of *Wati Kutjarra*. The term 'story' is complex and steeped in cultural meaning, yet is often diminished by being understood and evaluated transculturally through art. This thesis has vigorously argued that 'story' is an important dimension of a knowledge system (different to my own). In this way I have tried to show that story and cultural knowledge are interrelated in complex ways.

Thirdly, I have explored the practices of memory and imagination and how these form part of wider story/art ecologies. I focused on how perceptions of memory may be materialised or made tangible by way of a more in depth reading of selected contemporary Yarnangu artwork. I drew on Ingold's

theoretical contributions that link notions of Aboriginal Dreaming (tjukurrpa) and ontological perceptions. I then unpacked new ways of thinking about Yarnangu ways of being as growing from *within* storied environments. These insights reflect assumptions about how paintings are linked to both past and present. As discussed in chapter six, Ingold's suggestion that the tangible landscape and the landscape of the imagination exist on the same ontological level helped me to develop ideas about Angiliya's embodied paintings and to understand how and why they were generated.

Lastly, this study concluded by exploring the notion of mobility and cars, so valued in remote communities and yet such a scarce resource. I explored Ngaanyatjarra understandings through the practice of tjanpi weaving. In doing so I examined the contemporary practice of tjanpi weaving where cars formed the motivation for my discussion, based on a large woven grass car by artists at Papulankutja which, in 2005, had won them the Telstra Art Prize. Throughout the thesis I used the terms weaving and meshwork as a metaphor for weaving together not just the threads and clumps of grass, raffia and wools into sculptural tjanpi pieces, but also for the weaving of life and other trajectories together in collaboration.

Methodological and theoretical implications

In an innovative process that combined the 'throwntogetherness' of place with Aboriginal theoretical debate and methodologies, this thesis has offered 'place' as a methodology (Taylor 2013) for understanding art production within the bounds of both local and global connections. Thus, applying Doreen Massey's understanding of place to Papulankutja has helped throughout the thesis to convey how art and its production generates meaning at multiple levels, and how it has relevance to those who create it, those who view or experience it, and those who analyse it. Place has guided the understanding of making art

through the experiences of production, in the moment, at the art centre and through the interconnected cultural activities through which it is imagined.

In the next step in this analysis, I summarise answers to the research questions and demonstrate their implications by identifying the scholarly debates to which they contribute. This discussion outlines the original theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions made by the thesis.

I began by posing four research questions:

- Can a relational approach to space and place lead to insights into contemporary Ngaanyatjarra art and artists, re-thinking the way current representations are understood?
- What are the everyday practices that shape art production at Papulankutja?
- By exploring the histories, values, attitudes and feelings associated with art production, what meanings could we attribute to the art?
- By studying painting practices, what can we learn about the objectives of the painters and their application of paint?

One way of answering these questions is by returning briefly to the vignette 4c, *Wednesday is hunting day*. This vignette expresses most of the possibilities and problems suggested by the exploration of place in relation to art making in this study. The performance of activities like hunting, foraging and telling stories—regular Yarnangu activities—appears embodied and systemised. Angiliya's, Elaine's and Janet's hunting and foraging practices, along with those of other artists, can be broadly defined as a means of maintaining their diet and physical health, their country, and of constituting their social group and personal selves, influenced by the traditions and spiritual ways of being that still exist in Ngaanyatjarra society today. Papulankutja Artists can thus be understood as part of complex wider environments and activities. Art production as practice

and in place not only allows us to understand concepts of Yarnangu ways of knowing and being, but also gives us a constant and reliable view of a shifting and changing Yarnangu world.

Yarnangu interactions during the processes of art production are thus intersections between human and non-human relations and between practices that are contingent on and constitutive of place. The organising principle of place enables us to comprehend how Yarnangu experience, understand and embed meaning in paintings, sculpture and weaving as performed during the practices of production. The art, then, can be understood as a product of these meanings and practices which are embodied in the work. My methodological approach contributes to literature on multisensory and aesthetic aspects of painting in place, by exploring the experiential qualities of *being* and *doing*, which are enmeshed in relationships, things and environments. The vignettes underscored concepts of story, social practice and multisensoriality. They contributed by exploring everyday relationships between art and the place that is called Papulankutja and its art/cultural practices, the problems it may pose and the possibilities it may open up for further investigation. The methodology used in this thesis thus sets up a framework to produce comprehensive art histories at the coalface.

By viewing each case from various conceptual dimensions—the art centre, story, orality, memory and weaving cars—the case study methodology achieved an integration of theoretical perspectives. For these reasons, previous literature has been dealt with throughout the thesis, rather than in a single literature review chapter.

Reflection: accounting for experience of place

One of the main achievements of this thesis has been to establish an intellectual space for studying shifting ‘moments’ in contemporary Ngaanyatjarra creative

practices against a backdrop of momentous cultural change. During my fieldwork I became completely enmeshed in a contemporary Ngaanyatjarra experience of life and art, which has generated lasting friendships. On occasions, I was invited to be part of ceremony and cultural performances and was able to explore the intricacies of artists' relations to the performance of customary cultural affairs. I have travelled 'out bush' to places that do not exist on any maps, and I have taken part in distinctive Yarnangu gustation, such as cooking maku in the hot coals, ingesting sweet honey ants and eating kangaroo tail. Nora's *Honey Ant Dreaming: Illurpu* painting, discussed in vignette five, is as much about the cultural and sensory aspects of foraging for the ants as it is an aesthetically alluring object to look at. Nora's 'ways of seeing' are much more than just the short story attached to the painting's provenance certificate when it is sold. Her paintings embody cultural performance. The paintings show the delicate tracks and tunnels made by the ants, the strenuous act involved in the digging, the pleasure one gains from procuring these 'pearls' from the cool earth, the sensation of tasting the sweet honey, the complex stories that make up Nora's family and their land around the hunting region, the collaborative and social event, Yarnangu agency and resilience, and the rich imagination and memories. All these are transposed, painted and dotted onto the canvas with thick and colourful acrylic paint. The strength and ingenuity of the paintings lie in these Yarnangu experiences, stories and journeys. In this sense, this thesis is an effort to contribute to a transformed and contemporary Ngaanyatjarra reality where art production is recognised as a 'place' in which artists have a high degree of agency. This thesis represents one way of knowing Papulankutja art and artists. It also provides information that can open up possibilities for rich collaborations and cultural exchange in Australia and elsewhere.

Art production generates a groundswell of Yarnangu resilience and dignity among artists who enjoy the collaborations and exchange. It contributes

significantly to Yarnangu strong sense of self and identity. The added benefits of travelling to exhibitions have improved Yarnangu understandings of the local and global connections related to art-making practices. Artists enjoyed seeing their artworks admired and purchased by audiences around the country. Notwithstanding, connection to country is inherent and Yarnangu selfhood corresponds to a shared identity with others constituted in relation to place and inseparable from it. Their lived experience of transcultural space strengthens an inalienable condition to 'keep culture strong' and maintain their special connections to the Ngaanyatjarra environment.

I have argued that in Papulankutja art production needs to be understood in relation to culturally diverse social practices. The art and its production cannot be analysed in isolation from the sociocultural practices that exert an influence on it, nor can it be separated from the tenets and philosophical structures through which art and art production are conceptualised. By applying theories of place to Papulankutja Artists I have contributed to an assessment of art production that is locally grounded. The study has revealed the different relationships, the role and impact of Aboriginal knowledge (stories), the national networks and artist identities that are integral to Ngaanyatjarra art.

Postscript

On Jane's suggestion my last scheduled field visit, in the summer of 2015–16, coincided with the Christmas/New Year period and beyond. Jane fell ill quite suddenly, shortly after my arrival, and travelled to Alice Springs for medical treatment. She didn't return and passed away in April 2016. This was, and continues to be, a tragic and difficult period for the art centre and the artists. They must struggle to comprehend the unanticipated loss of a friend/manager with whom they had worked closely for nearly five years, and adjust to another manager with new way of doing. From a methodological perspective, as

discussed in chapter two, research encounters and methods are not static, but ongoing and changing, and reflexivity is essential to the ethnographic process. My emplacement shifted and changed and altered my positionality—my identity reconstituted. Thus, the sensory ethnographer needs to account for how one's senses are also bound up with relationships, both with the research participants and between the people participating in the research themselves (Pink 2015, p. 63). Moreover, as in this instance, research may not always follow the path that was mapped out. A reflective approach enabled me to arrive at a new level of personal and ethnographic awareness and knowing. ■

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Places and Stories:

MAPPING NGAANYATJARRA ART-MAKING PRACTICES

(NINTILU KULIRA PALYARATJAKU
NGAYUKU-LAMPATJU NGURRAWANALU)

VOLUME 2 – IMAGES AND APPENDIX

Robyn Williams

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology Sydney**

December 2017

Volume 2: Images and appendix

Please see **volume 1** for the thesis and list of references.

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Image 1.5 Artwork on display and for sale during the Blackstone Festival



Image 1.6 Children's festival craft activities at the art centre



Image 1.7 Tjanpi Grass Toyota, 2005

Tjanpi Desert Weavers

Desert grass, jute string and mixed media

22nd Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award, 2005. Telstra Collection MAGNT.

© The artists/Tjanpi Desert Weavers. Kantjupayi Benson (deceased), Shirley Bennett, Nuniwa Donegan (deceased), Margaret Donegan, Melissa Donegan, Janet Forbes, Ruby Forbes (deceased), Deidre Lane, Elaine Lane, Freda Lane, Janet Lane, Wendy Lane, Angela Lyon, Sarkaway Lyon, Angiliya Mitchell, Mary Smith and Gail Nelson.

Image courtesy of MAGNT



Image 1.8 Papa Tjukurpa and Pukara, 2010 by Jimmy Donegan

Jimmy Donegan discusses his artwork on opening night at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 180 x 200cm.

Image source: ABC News



Image 1.9 Papulankutja community - looking towards the school



Image 1.10 Papulankutja community - looking towards art centre and hall



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Image 1.16 The art centre, car, artists and art



Image 1.17 Wati Kujarra painting, 2015, by Elaine Lane

Synthetic polymer on canvas, 102 x 60 cm

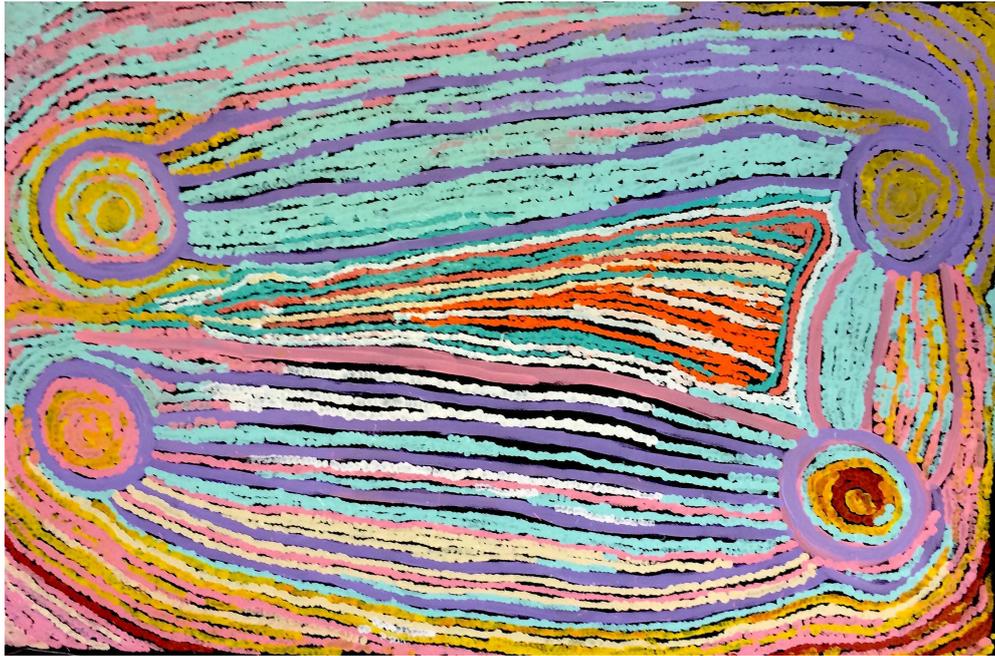


Image 1.18 Kungkarangkalpa painting, 2009, by Tjayanka Woods

Synthetic polymer on canvas, 152 x 101 cms



Image 2.1 Angiliya Mitchell



Image 2.2 Angiliya painting on canvas at the art centre



Image 2.3 Elaine Warnatjura Lane



Image 2.4 Elaine's unstretched Wati Kutjarra painting



Image 3.1 I Love my Family, 2015, photograph by Pamela Hogan

On rag paper, 280 x 420 cm



Image 3.2 Pamela Hogan



Image 3.3 The new gallery space



Image 3.4 Variety of artwork in the new gallery



Image 3.5 Collaborative painting



Image 3.6 Artists painting at the art centre



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Image 4.14 The painting room



Image 4.15 The locked entrance to the art centre building

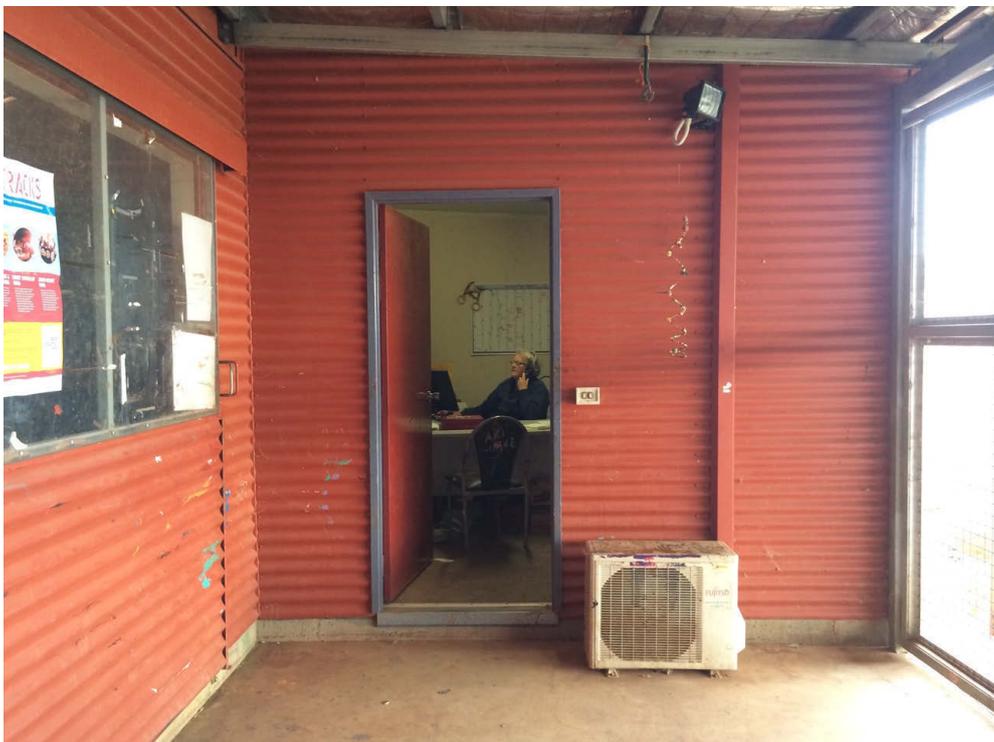


Image 4.16 Jane at her desk in the office



Image 4.17 Paint in bulk tubs before mixed and shared



Image 4.18 Pamela mixes the paints



Image 4.19 The practice of painting



Image 4.20 Dogs are part of place too

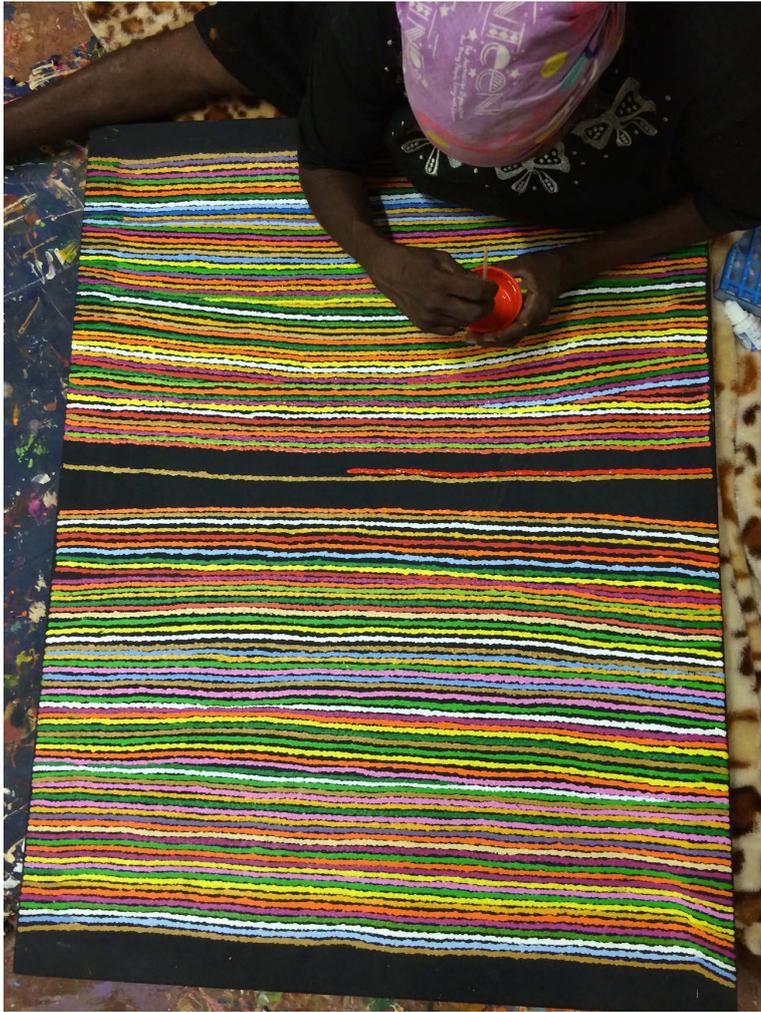


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Image 4.22 Artists' individual accessories painting boxes



Image 4.23 Narelle and Pamela in front of collaborative painting at the 2015 Desert Art Fair



Image 4.24 Manager Jane Avery with Pamela and Jennifer and party at the 2015 Desert Art Fair



Image 4.25 Applying the paint before the dance performance at the Desert Art Fair



Image 4.26 Dancing Kungkarangkalpa at the Desert Art Fair



Image 4.27 Crowds of buyers at the annual Desert Art Fair



Image 4.28 Narelle holds up a painting for prospective buyers



Image 4.29 Camaraderie, sand drawing and story telling



Image 4.30 Anawari Mitchell printing her sand drawings



Image 4.31 Angiliya digging the gum tree roots for punu wood



Image 4.32 Freda pulling at the gum tree root for punu wood



Image 4.33 Foraging maku from the acacia roots



Image 4.34 Cooking the maku in the sand and hot coals from the fire



Image 4.35 Digging deep for the sweet honey ants



Image 4.36 Honey ants look like dark pearls when they are first pulled from the cool earth



Image 4.37 Anawari catches a small rabbit



Image 4.38 Freda attending to a small goanna caught for dinner



Image 4.39 Young child with his maku catch



Image 5.1 Illurpa (Honey Ant Dreaming), 2016, painted by Nora Davidson

Synthetic polymer on canvas, 76 x 76cm



Image 5.2 Purple flowering succulent that tasted like pepper



Image 5.3 Many wildflowers have mauve and pastel colourings



Image 5.4 Bush burning



Image 5.5 Unfinished Walu story by Narelle Holland



Image 5.6 Oral narrative traditions occur around the campfire, in the sand



Image 5.7 Painting together and telling stories



Image 5.8 Fred Forbes's painting: Tjalpu-tjalpu-Dreaming, 2003, The Cuckoo Shrike story

Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Synthetic polymer on canvas, 122 x 152 cms



Image 5.9 The Ngaturn country that Fred Forbes knew well



Image 5.10 Elaine Warnatjura Lane's Wati Kutjarra painting with figures

Unstretched synthetic polymer on canvas, 76 x 102cms



Image 5.11 Elaine Warnatjura Lane, 2016



Image 5.12 Elaine's Wati Kutjarra, 2016, The Story of Two Men

Synthetic polymer on canvas, 91 x 91 cms

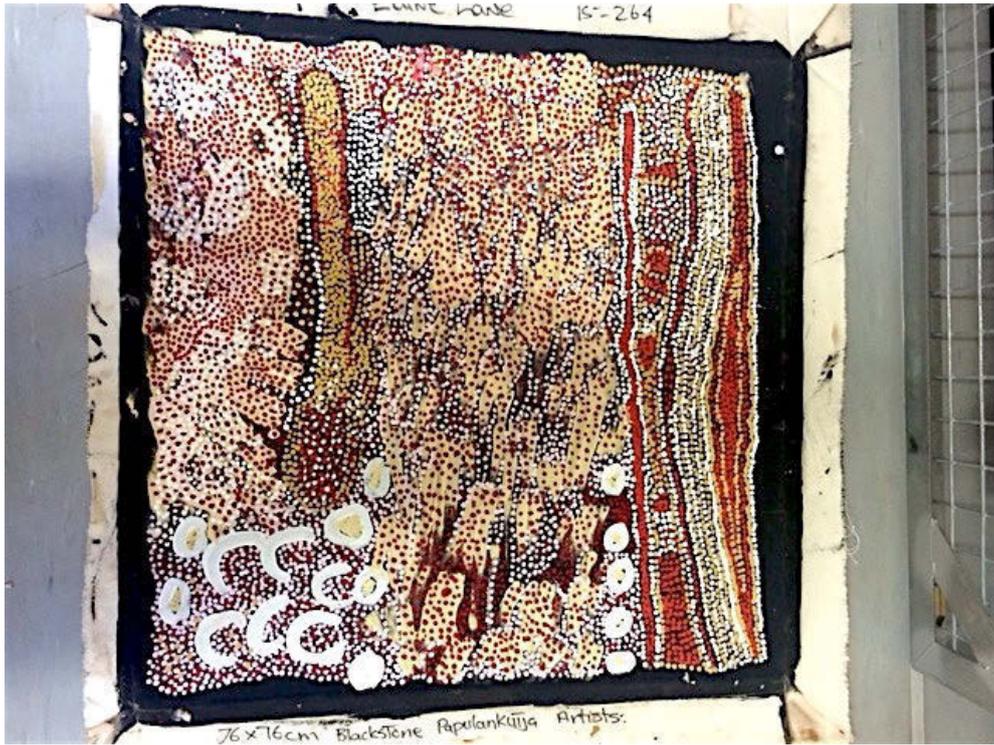


Image 5.13 Elaine's Wati Kutjarra 2015

76 x 76 cms synthetic polymer on canvas



Image 5.14 Customary process: Elaine by the camp fire



Image 5.15 Elaine



Image 5.16 Elaine digging for punu



Image 6.1 Angiliya Mitchell



Image 6.2 Angiliya Mitchell and the referenced 'Dream' painting with author

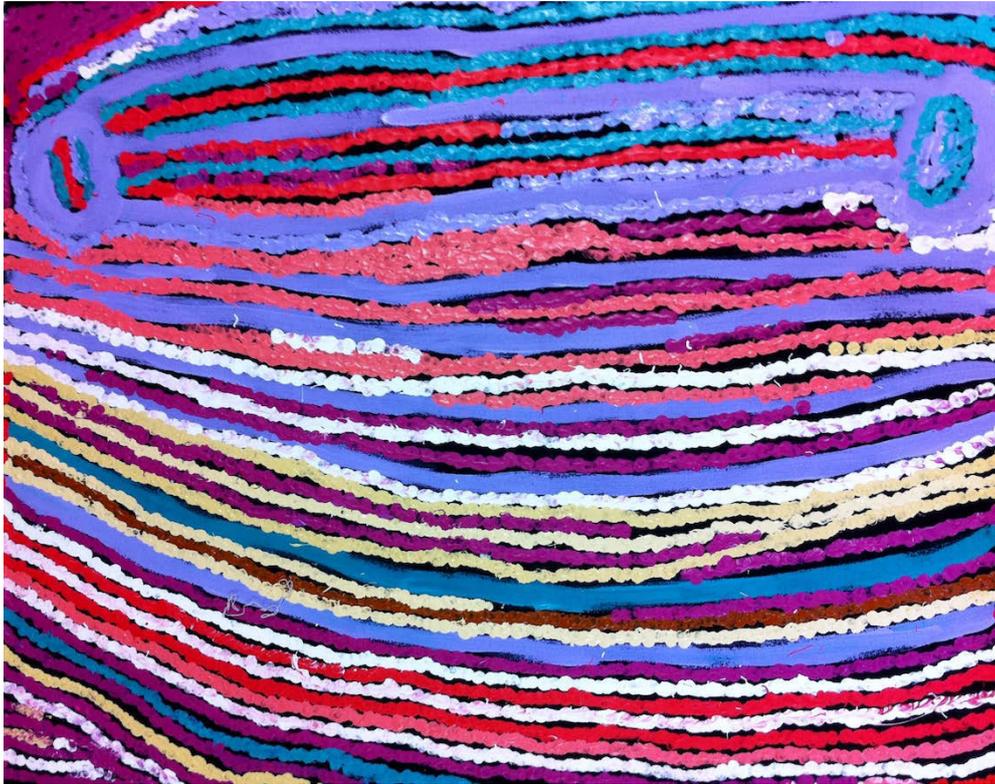


Image 6.3 Tjayanka Woods, Kungkarangkalpa 2012
Synthetic polymer on canvas, 61 x 76 cms.



Image 6.4 Anmanari Brown, Kungkarangkalpa 2009
Synthetic polymer on canvas, 75 x 100 cms



Image 6.5 Angiliya Mitchell, Kungkarangkalpa 2015

Synthetic polymer on canvas, 122 x 122 cms

Collection: The National Museum of Australia



Image 6.6 Angiliya comfortable painting with husband Andrew Mitchell present

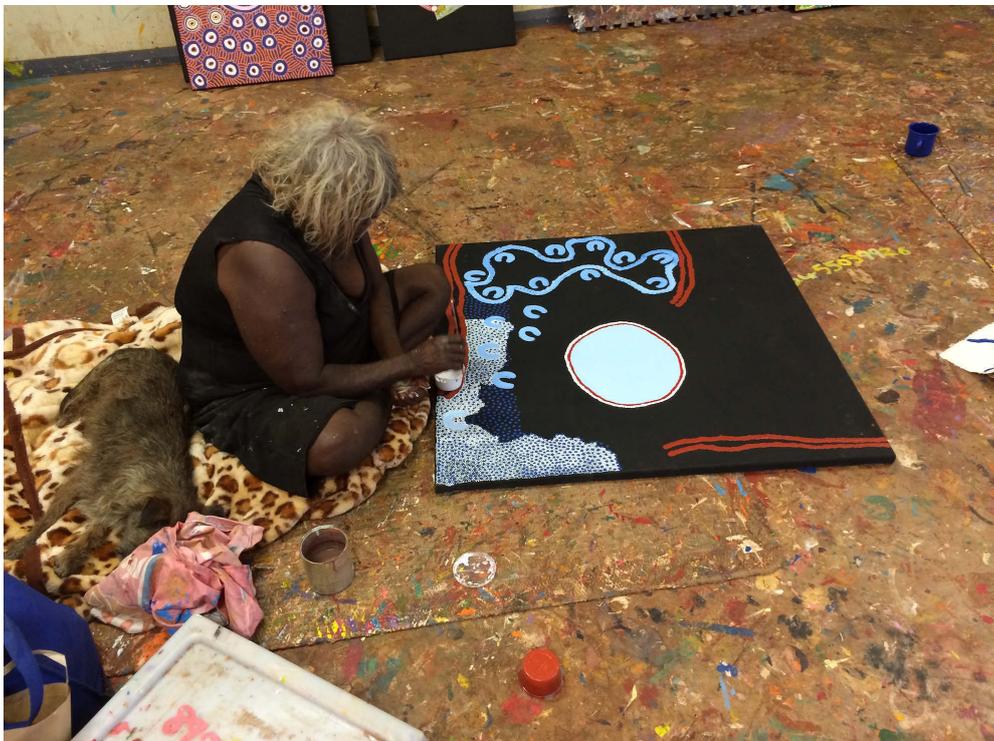


Image 6.7 Angiliya painting Kungkarangkalpa (i)



Image 6.8 Angiliya painting Kungkarangkalpa (ii)

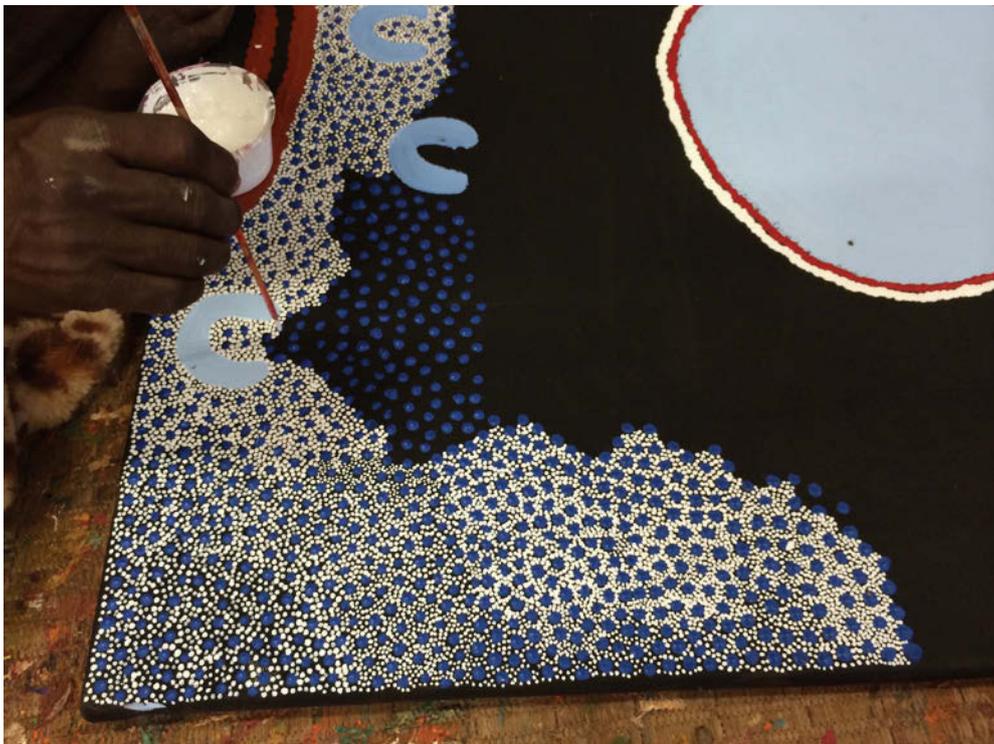


Image 6.9 Angiliya painting Kungkarangkalpa (iii)



Image 6.10 Angiliya painting Kungkarangkalpa (iv)

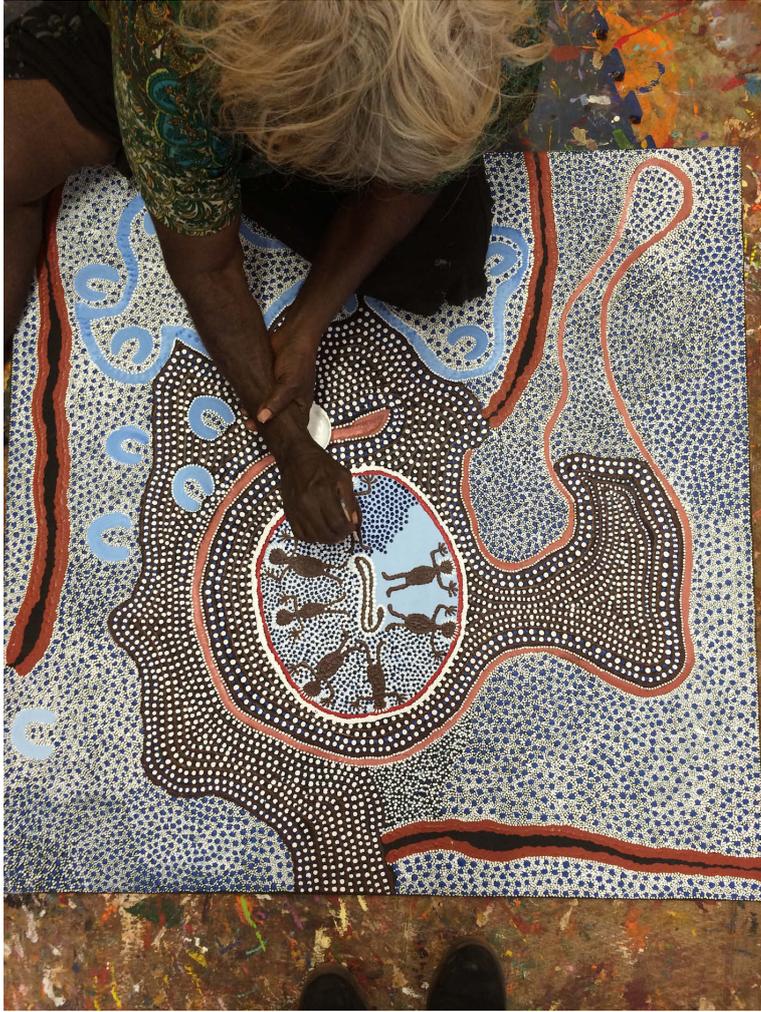


Image 6.11 Angiliya painting Kungkarangkalpa (v)



Image 6.12 Angliya painting of Kungkarangkalpa is complete (vi)



Image 6.13 Angiliya, Jordan and Milo make up art centre contemporeity

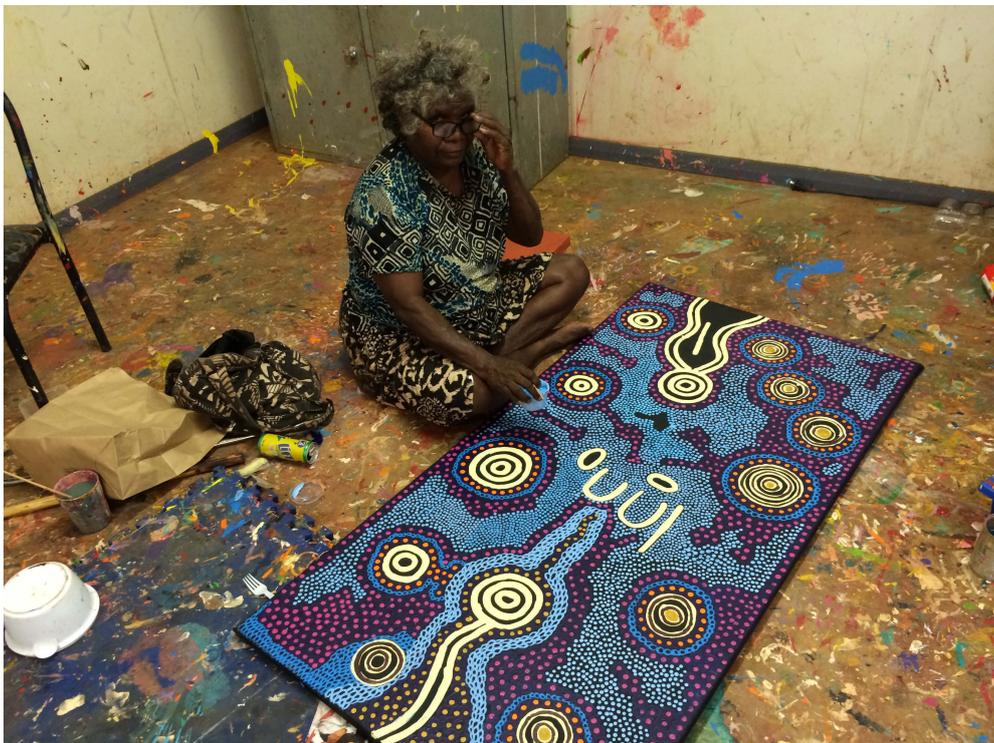


Image 6.14 Jennifer Mitchell materialises memory by painting her version of Kungkarangkalpa



Image 7.1 The track to good hunting and foraging



Image 7.2 Ngaanyatjarra terrain dotted with clumps of spinifex



Image 7.3 Ngaanyatjarra Lands – overspread with rocky terrain and mulga



Image 7.4 Preparing and cooking the kangaroo tails on camp fire



Image 7.5 Jennifer Mitchell winding raffia and wool at tjampi weaving workshop



Image 7.6 Anawari Mitchell holding spinifex grass at Tjanpi workshop



Image 7.7 Fiona Hall's exhibition incorporating tjanpi animals at 2015 Venice Biennale



Image 7.8 Fiona Hall's exhibition and tjanpi animals illuminated on plinths at Venice Biennale



Image 7.9 BMW Art Car, painted by Michael Jagamara Nelson, 1989

Source: BMW Art Car Collection



Image 7.10 Tjanpi Grass Toyota, 2005, at Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory

Tjanpi Desert Weavers

Desert grass, jute string and mixed media

22nd Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award, 2005. Telstra Collection MAGNT.

© The artists/Tjanpi Desert Weavers. Kantjupayi Benson (deceased), Shirley Bennett, Nuniwa Donegan (deceased), Margaret Donegan, Melissa Donegan, Janet Forbes, Ruby Forbes (deceased), Deidre Lane, Elaine Lane, Freda Lane, Janet Lane, Wendy Lane, Angela Lyon, Sarkaway Lyon, Angiliya Mitchell, Mary Smith and Gail Nelson.

Image courtesy of MAGNT



Image 7.11 BOMB, 2013, Blak Douglas and Adam Geczy
Source: AAMU



Image 8.1 Leaving this place called Papulankutja with my jar of red ochre

Appendix

Biographies of Papulankutja artists

All material included in biographies, unless otherwise footnoted or referenced, is the work of the author sourced from fieldwork, personal observations and personal interactions with the artists during fieldwork at Papulankutja Artists 2015-16.

A *Short Biography* is included at the beginning of each artist's biography and acts as a short summary for art galleries, exhibitions and cultural events. It may reproduce text already recorded in the biography.

Anawari Inpiti Mitchell [Pitjantjatjarra, 1959 –]



Image A1: Anawari Inpiti Mitchell

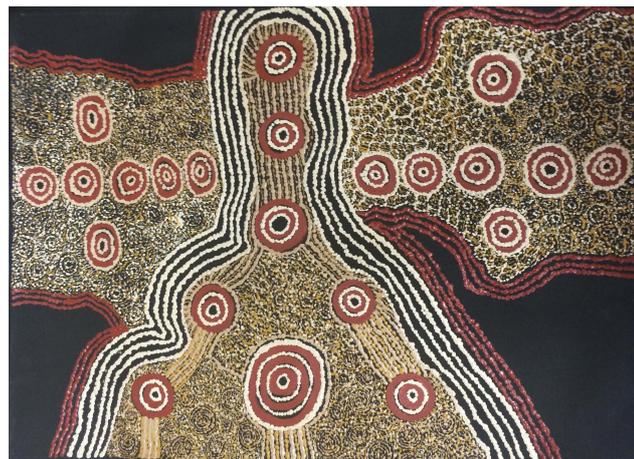


Image A2: Kungkarangkalpa (The Seven Sisters)

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 101 x 76 cms. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

This painting is titled *Kungkarangkalpa* (The Seven Sisters) and is deeply connected to ancestral power and landscape. The representation is symbolic and spiritual, and locates the sacred tjukurrpa site of Kura Ala. Kura Ala is an important ceremonial place for the *Kungkarangkalpa* story. It is predominantly a women's story and the theme for many of the artist's paintings. Whilst each *Kungkarangkalpa* tjukurrpa painting may vary, the fundamental storyline relates

to seven sisters being chased on land and across the sky by a lecherous and 'tricky' man. His undesirable and harmful actions, and how the sisters respond, are central to moral values, humour and grief. The story imparts knowledge, especially to girls. Yarnangu artists create their own elaborate versions of the epic and the evil wati Nyiru and his persistent pursuit of the seven sisters.

Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa is widespread across many parts of the country, and is a women's story.

Short biography

Anawari Mitchell is a senior Pitjantjatjara artist working at Papulankutja Artists art centre. She has a strong desire to represent her culture appropriately, and committed to maintaining cultural custodianship and cultural memory through art. Anawari is innovative and experimental in her arts practice and frequently incorporates modified and inventive patterning into her designs. Anawari is a creative, spontaneous and spirited painter who works at an instinctual level, placing iconographic and intuitive patterning, strokes and dots on her canvases. She has developed a painterly, richly textured style often with intense dotted patterning and iconographic symbols. Her paintings are vibrant, colourful and energetic and her artwork is collected both here in Australia and internationally. Anawari is also an accomplished tjanpi weaver and emerging printmaker.

Biographical notes

Background

Anawari Mitchell was born on the 1st July 1959 at Kampurrapapiti. Her grandmother's country is Kura Ala, a very important site for the Kungkarangkalpa story, which features in most of her paintings. Specifically, she paints the period when the sisters travelled and camped at Kura Ala, which

is situated south east of Papulankutja. Anawari's family (the women of the family) have custodianship over some very important ceremonial places.

Kungkarangkalpa is a story that is rich with intergenerational learning and development. In the story (knowledge) the older sisters teach the younger sisters how they should behave. The stages of womanhood are nurtured with cycles connected to sacred women sites and their country. At Kura Ala there is evidence that women in the region have been connected to this particular site for hundreds (if not much more) years. In the Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa one of these women is hurt by Wati Nyiru, and is then helped by the other sisters. Subsequently, they run from him and as they are chased they all fly into the sky and become stars forming the Pleiades star cluster. The remnants of the women and their ordeal form the claypans in the landscape where the women sat grinding their grass seeds for damper, and Wati Nyiru is now a rock near a particular tree. The artists say he still watches over their claypan landscape. The area where the sisters travelled and camped, slightly east of Papulankutja is Kura Ala. Anawari's family has custodianship over this very important tjukurrpa place.

Anawari explains that you can still see the circles at the site in the cave where much of the tjukurrpa story originates. 'It's the young girls turning into young women. The bigger circles are already big women. They have been travelling for food and they saw that man had already taken the big sister. So they are taking her to the second cave for recovery and getting better [...]. The rock hole down the bottom is called Kuru Ala, and the sisters they drank that water in the early days, and still today you can drink. The water is still there'.

In a history painting completed by Anawari at Papulankutja in 2015/16

Anawari paints her memories (SAM). She remembers the stores truck arriving at Mount Davies where she lived. Her father worked in the mine there, and as

children they were always very excited about the truck coming with 'Kooka'. She remembers collecting the little black stones for the driver as he would give them money and lollies for them. These rocks would be taken back to town and cut to make jewellery (Short Street Gallery, 2013).

Currently Anawari lives at Papulankutja with her husband Winston. They are both active members and contributors in the Papulankutja community where Winston conducts the church service each Sunday. Anawari is also an active field worker for Ngaanyatjarra Land and Culture at Papulankutja and has a thorough understanding of local bush medicine and the plants from which it is derived.

Medium, style and subject matter

Kungkarangkalpa is a multi-layered epic of pursuit and creation. Anawari explains that in the story, the sisters were running away from the lusty old man named Wati Nyiru. He knew how to change into strange things, usually a snake, and he would trick the sisters. The sisters often rested by a rock hole near where Wati Nyiru had surreptitiously transformed himself into a quandong tree. They suspect it is Wati Nyiru as the quandong fruit tastes strange. They continue their flight. Eventually, after several serious misadventures, they fly up into the sky to escape and become the seven stars in the Pleiades star cluster. Wati Nyiru slithers away as a snake. There are multiple versions and multilayered details to this story, each holding specific tjukurrpa meanings and moral instruction.

Anawari's paintings often depict the women, the land and the wati, hiding in the spinifex grass. In recent years, Anawari's palette incorporates white, creams, beiges and brown colours. Although delicate and textural, the paint is thick and applied with brushes, punu sticks and satay skewers. Subtle differences have emerged in some artwork where she experiments with unique and creative

painting methods. Sometimes Anawari will experiment with surface texture by exploring paint application results using something she has found (maybe a dried bunch of leaves) to apply the paint. Anawari further explores the effects of layering paint. By dragging and scooping thick layers of coloured acrylic paint, Anawari creates sculptural surfaces that remain raised and thick, elevated above the canvas. In this way her paintings appear textured which give them a rich and tactile quality.

The construction of each painting constitutes a contemporary aesthetic visual statement from a traditional Ngaanyatjarra conceptual schema. Anawari experiments with different styles, application methods and textures and is ambitious and forthright, often forging ahead with new ideas and ways to extend her arts practice and income.

Recently, Anawari took part in a screen-printing workshop. The series of screen-prints drew on traditional sand-drawing practices. Anawari suggests that all artworks start with simple lines, either on paper, canvas or in the red earth and have developed from customary sand-drawing practices. 'All the stories told through visual mediums start in this way'.

Art history

At Papulankutja there are a group of senior women who are the custodial holders of the Kura Ala part of the ancestral track that the sisters once travelled. To Anawari and her sister Angiliya, this social position bestowed upon them by their mother Anmanari Brown, and other familial ties, is treated with reverence. Their memories of the story are sharp, yet fluid and transformative. The ceremonial site known as Kura Ala, where these women grew up hunting and gathering at a time before 'ways of being' changed, is the focal point for this part of the extensive track. The story is sacred and engulfed by strict protocol and responsibilities at many levels. Authors like Anawari usually have strong

spiritual links to their own particular desert story. Traditional knowledge of food collection and water sources are equally dominant themes. Anawari and Angiliya tell me that their mother, elder Anmanari Brown, developed and instilled in them the many levels of knowledge that this story holds as they were growing up. Bit by bit, as they grew older, more and more information would be given. Anawari and her art community define themselves through a strong identification with this place.

Collection: National Gallery of Canberra

Artist's quote

'I paint because the paintings are about my ancestors, my family's country, my stories. They are important' (personal communication 25/01/16).

'I like painting [...] I was taught by my aunty [...] told me the stories and I seen the place and I want and I was thinking about doing a painting about my grandmother's country. The painting is my grandmother's country. My auntie's family's place [...]. It's Seven Sisters. It's whole story, whole story [...] It's a Dreaming of young girls turning into woman. It's a Dreaming [...] Mines is different because of the circles and the lines. The lines is the dancing track. Yuwa. It's that track of ladies dancing. It's mine the lines my idea. Yuwa. Everyone's patterns is different [...] yeah it tells a story [...] Yuwa the whole generation, Yuwa, from the generation to generation, passing it on to, they passed it on to me, and my mum Mrs. Brown.' (personal conversation 31/12/15)

References

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29 December 2015

Andrew Mitchell [Ngaanyatjarra, 1940 – 2015]



Image A3: Andrew Mitchell



Image A4: Walu, 2009

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 101 x 101 cms. Private collection: courtesy of the owner

Walu is deeply influenced by the already established styles often associated with the male authoritative culture of the Western Desert. The word walu means rockhole, a type of waterhole in which rain is retained in the rock formation. Walu is also an area not far from Mantamaru and rich with ancestral history. This painting *Walu* however, is a tjukurpa story about a small boy who had no parents and was neglected. On a day when the families caught an emu

and prepared to cook it and eat it, this little boy ran to it and took the emu's heart and ran off with it. After the event huge willy-willies came up and swept the families away (SAM). This powerful design is often found depicted on shields and body paintings and is a traditional men's design.

Short biography

Andrew Mitchell lived in Papulankutja with his wife Angiliya and children. Andrew was not a prolific painter, often happy (in recent years) to just sit with his wife Angiliya at the art centre and watch her paint. Sometimes they would paint together. The Mitchell families are custodians of country in the Walu Road region and around Illurpa. Andrew was well known for his wood craft and painting. As a Ngaanyatjarra law man and elder, Andrew's paintings depict men's designs, representing the iconography found on traditional ceremonial shields and body painting. Andrew experimented with his use of paint, often using vivid colours in his designs.

Biographical notes

Background

Andrew Mitchell lived in Papulankutja with his wife Angiliya and their children. Andrew was an active member of the community often going out late in the afternoon to collect firewood for family and relatives. The Mitchell families are custodians of country in the Walu Road region and around Illurpa (SAM). Andrew was always happy to discuss his art and the country and stories around these regions. Unfortunately he passed away before I had the opportunity to talk further and document the details about his arts practice. He did however pass on local information about rock forms and art. He was devoted to his wife Angiliya and it was enjoyable to watch them sit together at the art centre.

Andrew Mitchell was Cliff Reid's friend. They worked together at sheep stations around the Laverton region from an early age. When the art centre became incorporated Cliff succeeded in promoting painting to other senior law men such as Jimmy Donegan, Andrew Mitchell and Reggie Jackson, and so began the commencement of the men's art practice at Papulankutja.

Medium, style and subject matter

After rain, the water collects in the walu and it is usually a good time and region for hunting. Andrew's paintings and stories are derived from his memories and traditional tjukurrpa stories that were central to this region. A characteristic feature of Andrew's art is the depiction of tracks or marks left on the landscape and his iconographic motifs that expressed a wide range of men's ancestral beliefs and practices. Andrew and his art community at Papulankutja define themselves through a strong identification with place. The origins of Andrew's paintings are entwined in strong sense of place and strong tjukurrpa stories.

Andrew's work was visually dramatic, embodying a maze-like iconography with lineal patterning. The interlocking design represented in Andrew's paintings signifies water, and is often customarily incised and inlaid on the hardwood shields used for ceremonial purposes in this region. Some of these shields are held in the Papulankutja Artists collection. Other paintings, like *Walu*, map the traditional and ceremonial geography of the storied site where ancestral activities were embodied in its landforms. A complex matrix of ritual knowledge is located through the network of tjukurrpa sites, usually painted by Andrew in vibrant and striking colour.

Art history

Andrew participated in filming by the National Gallery of Victoria for their web-based presentation of the Colour Cower Collection (SAM). Additionally, together with painting, Andrew is well known for his wood crafts, initiated and developed when he was a younger man, and reflecting Ngaanyatjarra cultural memory and customary mark-making.

Andrew Mitchell painted his country of Walu. Walu is a spiritual and sacred place. Central to themes of stories from Walu are kuniya (carpet python) who reside at Walu, a mother and child, and wanampi (water serpents) who live in the creek that surrounds Walu. This country is a place with dangerous water snakes that live in the water hole and need to be calmed by the older people before entering. Andrew was a senior man with exceptional knowledge and status and he had the customary authority to enter and talk about such sites. Knowledge of these water sources (especially permanent rock holes) were vital for survival in the desert landscape.

Andrew Mitchell was a regular painter with Papulankutja Artists although in later years he was happy to sit with his wife Angiliya and watch her paint. He would often try to relate to me the importance of some of the landforms and stories of the region. Andrew has also participated in painting with the Spinifex Arts Project while in Tjuntjuntjara visiting family.

Artist's quote

'Those paintings on rocks been there a long time. Before whitefella.' (personal conversation 2014).

References

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed 29 December 2015

Angiliya Tjapiti Mitchell [Pitjantjatjarra, c1945 -]



Image A5: Angiliya Tjapiti Mitchell



Image A6: Kungkarangkalpa (The Seven Sisters), 2015

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 122 x 122 cms. Collection: National Museum of Australia

This painting is titled *Kungkarangkalpa* (The Seven Sisters), and is deeply connected to ancestral power and landscape. The central theme of the artwork is symbolic and spiritual, and locates the sacred tjukurrpa site of Kura Ala. Kura Ala is an important ceremonial place for the *Kungkarangkalpa* story. It is

predominantly a women's story and the theme for many of the artist's paintings. Whilst each *Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa* painting may vary, the fundamental storyline relates to seven sisters being chased on land and across the sky by a lecherous and 'tricky' man. His undesirable and harmful actions, and how the sisters respond, are central to moral values, humour and grief. The variations of story impart knowledge, especially to girls. Yarnangu artists create their own elaborate versions of the epic and the evil Wati Nyiru and his persistent pursuit of the seven sisters. *Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa* is widespread across many parts of the country, and is a women's story.

Short biography

Angiliya's paintings, offer the viewer an insightful portrayal of the Ngaanyatjarra cultural landscape. Her tangible interactions with the storied environment are portrayed across the canvas in innovative and imaginative ways. Angiliya becomes subsumed within her own analytical tactic of portraying remembered events, dreams and important life stories. In recent years her paintings are nearly always based on *Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa*, yet each representation is visually and symbolically different. Angiliya's cultural background and familial custodianship of ceremonial country heavily influence her artwork. As a keen and deft hunter, she also carries traditional bush and craft skills into her arts practice and is always eager to carve punu lizards and animals, and weave other creatures into woven tjanpi sculptures.

Biographical notes

Background

Angiliya was born near the Blackstone Ranges in Emu Country near Kunmarnarra Bore around 1945. This is an important area for men's tjukurrpa and the country is a traditional law area. However, Angiliya paints her

traditional mother's story, *Kungkarangkalpa*, and the ceremonial site of Kura Ala where, recently, Angiliya was appointed the caretaker for this important woman's tjukurrpa, linked to the *Kungkarangkalpa Story (Seven sisters Story)* in country a little south of Papulankutja. Angiliya is a strong Law woman with excellent bush skills and she holds a wealth of traditional Naanyatjarra knowledge and a capacity to live independently on this land. Angiliya speaks Pitjantjatjarra and Ngaanyatjarra but very little English. Angiliya was given custodial permission to administer cultural practices such as painting, and other art and cultural related business to the ceremonial tjukurrpa site.

Angiliya has moved around with her family in the Tjuntjuntjara region, Wingellina, Warburton and now Papulankutja. She escaped mission life to spend years hunting instead of schooling and consequently speaks no English. Until he died in 2015, Angiliya was married to Andrew Mitchell, another artist and her soul mate. Andrew would often attend the art centre just to sit with Angiliya and watch her paint.

Angiliya's material interactions with the country and environment that she knows and understands so well are subsumed within her own analytical tactic of portraying remembered events, dreams and important life stories. In Angiliya's world, ancestral beings are always present throughout the natural landscape, having been transformed, or metamorphosed into the forms and tracts of the landscape itself. She is meditatively influenced by her tjukurrpa and enjoys painting after serious consideration of the theme. Angiliya is often seen at the art centre, deeply engrossed in the execution of a painting that becomes embodied with the potency of her cultural knowledge.

Angiliya is also renowned for her fibre art and was one of the weavers involved in the award winning *Tjanpi Toyota* in the 2005 Telstra Art Award.

Medium, style and subject matter

Angiliya is a prolific artist who has been painting since the early days at Papulankutja. In recent years her paintings have nearly always been based around the *Kungkarangkalpa* stories, yet each representation is visually and symbolically different. Her palette ranges from subdued to extremely bright and colourful, and from abstract to figurative. Angiliya's paintings are explicit in their subject matter and often derived from a recent tjukurrpa dream or memory.

Angiliya's cultural background heavily influences her work. As a keen and deft hunter, she carries these customary skills into her arts practice and is always eager to carve punu lizards and animals and weave other creatures into tjanpi sculptures. Recently she also added printmaking to her collection of creative skills.

Angiliya's paintings are often dynamic, colourful and exaggerated. In the broader contemporary art context, her own Yarnangu 'ways of seeing' are brought into the contemporary art space. She has a profound sense of memory and place which constitutes the focus for her artwork. Her own custodial story, a version of the widespread *Kungkarangkalpa* story, is always visible in her artwork. Angiliya's highly individual style is both sensitive and elaborative. Together we surveyed a recently completed painting and Angiliya helped shape my understanding of the artwork. I watched and followed as she ran her hand across the meandering, russet-coloured, sinuous lines that are surrounded by intricate, dotted, subtle tones and combinations of colour that represent the sisters wandering, stopping to eat, and walking. The aqua-blue of the rock-hole sites are set in contrast to the hundreds of tiny, white, dotted stars that are scattered across the dark navy sky. The centre of her painting (above) arouses an awareness of fear - a carpet snake observed in their surroundings. The well

told story of one man chasing the sisters has many adaptations, and in this painting Angiliya's highly individual style has them frightened in one instance; and then elated in another, where, at the top of the painting, figures with arms high evoke their transference to the stars where they ultimately form the cluster of stars known as the Pleiades. These stars can be seen in the sky at night - seven stars that come out together. The 'everywhen', (Stanner, 1979) is a subtle way of trying to describe the 'foreverness' in her paintings and evoked in Angiliya's art. The past and the present are interlaced within the one painting. Her shared memory, frequently in the shape of stories like *Kungkarangkalpa*, is mentally and emotionally aligned with other artists that paint with her. Angiliya and her mother Anmanari Brown present painting experiences at the art centre that are dependent on their knowledge of the past, and where their paintings continue to validate collective memories and interrelatedness to the tjukurrpa. Angiliya takes a carefully considered approach to her painting and delights in the inclusion of weighty and serious issues, including parts of the story that have a grizzly and violent disposition.

On one level, and from an aesthetic perspective, Angiliya's paintings are extraordinary in their ability to capture audience attention and they characterise contemporary art forms. The paintings are anchored in the present, and seemingly at odds with the content and histories embedded within the painting. Angiliya's paintings draw from her own personal history and are not simply examples of art, but equally a representation of her cultural identity that draws upon particular cultural directives and rules that are defined by the Western Desert Law, which has been actuated, remembered, practiced as cultural protocol and confirmed in ceremonies throughout her life.

Art history

By placing Angiliya's work in location, I suggest that her work is an act of place making and her paintings need to be understood through their relationality with other things, in practice and as part of place (Pink 2012). In Angiliya's terms, painting becomes tied up in complex entangled imagery, which is associated with her personal tjukurrpa dreams, traditional women's law, culture and everyday practices. Angiliya refers to family, country and sacred sites in her paintings, and includes the decorations and rock carving associated with visits to the ceremonial site of Kura Ala. The social nature of space intersects with the multiple levels of rhythm in the practices of everyday life and is comprehended through the art.

Angiliya Mitchell is an artist and senior custodian for the preservation and maintenance of the *Kungkarangkalpa* story. Her senior status in the community awards her particular respect and implies that this distinguishes her as a woman who is able to go on caring for the tjukurrpa and the country. At the art centre Angiliya comfortably and confidently recalls her story through memory, and communicates it through painting.

Angiliya's own personal relationship between events in the sky and events here in on earth, which include laws, customs, and religious traditions, are interrelated – a vast network of relationships, extending throughout the desert. Her paintings embody forms of collected identity and shared traditions of extended groups of people. With style and passion Angiliya reflects the importance she places on Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara knowledge and her relationship to artistic practice. Her memories - collective memories - constitute a process where she recasts the past - materialises Wati Nyiru and the sisters from her imagination, transposing them to her paintings, and expressing a multilayered view of what *Kungkarangkalpa* means to her. It has been reinforced

by visits to sacred sites like Kura Ala, roused on ceremonial evenings under the stars, and remembered through social interactions with others, where there is interdependence on community/collective knowledge and Yarnangu ways of being.

Inspired by stories told to her by her parents, Angiliya's emphasis is on the traditional country where she still resides. The social relationships and custodial rights supporting her ancestral narrative determine her choice of subject matter. Moreover, her worldview is also complex and elusive, particularly at an intersection in the multi-layered transcultural life that now governs her habitude. Today, Angiliya's connectedness is not just to Country but also to its cultural production, conveying a continuity of difference through a contemporary framework of cultural maintenance. She brings together a number of worlds, and a number of different avenues of inquiry and through public display the processes of negotiation of that diversity are seen as part of the character of her place in the world.

Angiliya paints regularly on canvas and her works are held in important private and public collections. The *Kungkarangkalpa* painting (above) is now an important addition to the National Museum of Australia, Canberra collection.

Artist's quote

I couldn't understand all she said except when she muttered 'Seven Sisters... special' in strained English. Then it dawned on me. The painting was about the pink rocks that Angiliya and others had shown me near the cave at Kura Ala. I asked if that was it. She smiled. 'Yuwa, yuwa'! She knew that I knew. Then, in Pitjantjatjara (Angiliya's language) she broke into a lengthy description about the painting. (Excerpt from PhD thesis)

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29 December 2015

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University Press, Canberra.

Anmanari Brown [Pitjantjatjara, c1930 –]



Image A7: Anmanari Brown



Image A8: Kungkarangkalpa (The Seven Sisters), 2009

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 75.1 × 152.2 cm. Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

This painting is titled *Kungkarangkalpa* (The Seven Sisters). and is deeply connected to ancestral power and landscape. The central theme of the artwork is symbolic and spiritual, and locates the sacred tjukurrpa site of Kura Ala. Kura Ala is an important ceremonial place for the *Kungkarangkalpa* story. It is predominantly a women's story and the theme for many of the artist's

paintings. Whilst each *Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa* painting may vary, the fundamental storyline relates to seven sisters being chased on land and across the sky by a lecherous and 'tricky' man. His undesirable and harmful actions, and how the sisters respond, are central to moral values, humour and grief. The variations of story impart knowledge, especially to girls. Yarnangu artists create their own elaborate versions of the epic and the evil Wati Nyiru and his persistent pursuit of the seven sisters. *Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa* is widespread across many parts of the country, and is a women's story.

Short biography

Anmanari Brown's paintings are bold and powerful abstractions and representations of country. They are visual, colourful maps that trace the journeys of the ancestor beings and the land formations they created through their activities. Anmanari's work has an unprocessed elegance that is both aesthetic and deeply expressive. Almost always, Anmanari painted Minyma Tjuta Tjukurrpa and Kungkarangkalpa, which relate to where she was born and other places of family significance. The paintings depart from the styles and motifs typical of art in the region. They preference vivid, expansive forms that comprise large sectors of bold colour. Refreshingly innovative, Anmanari's art commands attention. Each painting supports confident thick brush stroked lines that are contoured around distinct blocks of intense colour, each representing journeys or places related to the story. Anmanari was also an accomplished punu carver and tjanpi weaver. Her work draws on an intimate knowledge of the tjukurrpa and to country.

Biographical notes

Background

Anmanari Brown is a senior Pitjantjatjara artist who was born at Purpurnya, a rock hole in the Great Victoria Desert in the early 1930's (SAM). Purpurnya is the sacred country of the wanampi (water snake man) from Pukara (SAM). Anmanari's mother's country was Kura Ala associated with the Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa, the subject of most of Anmanari's paintings. Anmanari is culturally associated with the Pitjantjatjara people and lived a traditional nomadic way of life in the bush with her family until she attended the mission school at Warburton when she was a young girl of about ten to twelve years of age. She spent many years at Milyirrtjarra (Warburton) where she met her husband, Jackie Bell-Rock Brown. She became the third wife for Jackie (customary traditional practice) and they all moved east from the mission to country around Papulankutja and Irrunytju before settling at Amata in the 1960's (SAM). After a period of time at Amata they moved west again to be closer to their traditional country. Together they had eight children, many of whom paint at Papulankutja Artists today. Jackie Bell-Rock Brown passed away in 1999 at Papulankutja and Anmanari and her daughters moved to Irrunytju. She remarried at Irrunytju in her senior years to Nyakul Dawson who was also an established artist. After his passing Anmanari moved to Papulankutja where she had strong family and spiritual connections, and has lived with her daughters Angiliya Mitchell and Lynette Brown. In recent months she moved to the Wanarn Aged Care Facility.

Medium, style and subject matter

Anmanari Brown is a highly respected law woman and senior Pitjantjatjara artist, who paints the *Kungkarangkalpa (Seven Sisters)* tjukurrpa associated with the important and culturally significant region of Kuru Ala. This tjukurrpa, also

known as *Minyma Tjuta* (*many women*) is an epic tjukurpa track (song line), which traverses vast tracts of the desert.

Anmanari's representations communicate how the sisters travelled across the desert, whilst being pursued by Wati Nyiru, a lustful old man who is trying to procure the oldest sister for his wife. The sisters don't want anything to do with this lecherous man and become frightened by his sinister and relentless tracking and stalking. Wati Nyiru is a creation being, and accordingly, has ancestral magical powers. He has the ability to transform himself into plants and animals in order to deceive the women and get close enough to steal Kampukurtja (the eldest sister) from them. Anmanari paints this provocative story, each painting with a slightly different version of events. Indigenous cosmology, cultural and familial influences, and the contemporary art market have influenced her oeuvre.

Using acrylic paint applied to canvas with paintbrushes, Anmanari's work embodies a unique and innovative style. Dynamic large paintings comprise large blocks of vibrant colours that encapsulate the complexities of intersecting cultural tradition and contemporary Western Desert art. Writing about Anmanari's work Judith Ryan suggests that she 'engages with the physicality of paint and the intensity of primary colour, unfettered by precedent or white preconceptions of Indigenous art' (2015). Anmanari created these dense sectors of colour as she entered a phase of intense experimentation with the properties of the paint and canvas. As a result, the uninhibited broad, brush strokes and vibrant colourful acrylic paints, coated thickly onto the canvas, present audiences with a style of art not seen before in the Aboriginal art of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

Art history

Anmanari was one of a small group of pioneering artists who established the community art centre Irrunytju Arts in 2000 (SAM). This inspired the conversion of women's craft rooms into fine art studios across the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yangkunyjatjara Lands as Anangu, both men and women, enthusiastically took to painting (Short Street Gallery 2013). Until recently, Anmanari painted at the *Papulankutja Artists* art centre with her friend Tjayanka Woods, and her daughters Anawari Mitchell, Angiliya Mitchell and Lynette Brown.

Drawing on cultural tradition, Anmanari's bold and powerful works represent abstractions of country and ancestral environments. Like visual maps, they trace the journeying of the ancestor beings and the land formations they created through their activities. Anmanari moved away from figurative representation found in her early works to broad brush strokes of colour; circles (representing water holes and or the women) and patterned lines (representing ceremonial dancing and travelling sand tracks). Anmanari has been a leading artist in the Spinifex, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunyjatjara Lands whose work is held in high esteem. Her paintings are held in important national and international collections. In 2012 an artwork by Anmanari was commissioned by the Tapestry Foundation of Australia as part of the Embassy Collection series, a program, which places Australian Tapestry Workshop, tapestries in missions throughout the world (SAM). Like many senior desert artists, Anmanari also worked in other art mediums including punu (wood carving of utilitarian and sacred objects), and weaving tjanpi baskets.

Collections

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, ACT

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, VIC.

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, WA

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, QLD

City of Joondalup Council, Joondalup, WA

Wagner Collection, USA

The Largerberg-Swift Collection, Perth, WA

The Lepley Collection, Perth, WA

The Corrigan Collection

2011 Tapestry Commission, Australian Tapestry Workshop, Victoria.

(Papulankutja Artists)

Artist's quote

'The women hunted him away, but he still keeps following them. He is always playing tricks to try and get one of the sisters. That Nyiru, he's a cheeky one. He caught one of the sisters, the big sister, and took her. Too much. She died. He is still chasing them' (cited in, Vivien Anderson Gallery 2010)

References

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Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed 29 December 2015

Short Street Gallery 2013, 'Details of Anmanari Brown', Short Street Gallery, Broome Accessed 21 January 2016.

Vivien Anderson Gallery 2010, 'Anmanari Brown and Tjayanka Woods, kungkarrakalpa the seven sisters', in Vivien Anderson Gallery (ed.) Vivien Anderson Gallery, Caulfield, Victoria

Belle Karrika Davidson [Pitjantjatjarra, c1942 –]



Image A9: Belle Karrika Davidson



Image A10: Minyma Kutjarra Tjukurrpa, 2016

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 76 x 76 cms. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

Belle's unmediated strong painting relates to the story of *Minyma Kutjarra Tjukurrpa (Two Sisters)*. The bold colours and iconographic form express culturally specific Yarnangu practices and a deep intimacy with landscape. The textural representation portrays the ancestral story of two sisters who are travelling together throughout the country in order to meet up with some other

family members. In this painting the sisters have stopped to cut some wood to make a digging stick. Belle's circle-line icons and painting technique are synonymous with Western Desert painting practices and relate to ceremonial women's patterns, bound up with gendered hunting and gathering practices.

Short biography

Belle Karrika Davidson employs the use of iconographic symbols, lines and dots in her paintings. The colours employed are generally vibrant and bold and her style is representative of Yarnangu women's emotional and spiritual relationships with country. With an extensive background in the arts, Belle was a founding member of *Irrunytju Arts* and was Chair of Ngaanyatjarra Media. She is also widely known for storytelling skills. Belle relates Ngaanyatjarra cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, communicating some of the complex layers of tjukurpa stories associated with painting and the ancestral beings that traversed the region. Belle works as a painter, translator and producer of short documentaries about local culture.

Biographical notes

Background

Belle Karrika refers to her young self as a 'bush girl'. Karrika Belle Davidson, a Pitjantjatjarra woman, was born around 1942 near Papulankutja (Blackstone). When she was a child her mother died and Karrika, her sister Tjawina Roberts, and brother Tjurparu Watson were taken to Warburton mission. Karrika learnt to read and write at the mission and has fond memories of her time there. She frequently went back to the country where she was taught how to hunt and forage and reconnected with the tjukurpa associated with it (SAM).

When Karrika was sixteen, she moved to live with family at Patinintjara, the first community established at Papulankutja, where she worked as a housemaid

for the manager of the established nickel mine. Karrika recalls camping in the bush near Warburton with her first son and other Yarnangu as a young mother when the atomic bombs were detonated at Maralinga. She and others became very ill and were picked up by a native patrol truck and driven to Warburton mission where sick Yarnangu were lying in every building, including the school classrooms (SAM).

Like most Yarnangu, and when not painting, Belle loves to hunt. She is a keen hunter and forager and enjoys being connected with the occasional social bush trips and hunting outings run in conjunction with the art centre. She holds a gun license and has an excellent eye.

Medium, style and subject matter

Belle Karrika Davidson employs the use of iconographic symbols and dots. The associated soft dotting technique is characteristic of many of the Ngaanyatjarra women artists and reflects an association with painting styles of Western Desert communities. The colours Karrika employs are generally bold and her paintings are striking and intense displaying a confidence commensurate with traditional cultural knowledge. She has an intimate connection with the geographical and ancestral landscape and exercises agency in her spiritual environment. Her painting embody her knowledge of place.

Belle describes her painted story as follows: Two sisters were travelling through this country. They stopped at Ilkuwaratjara and cut a digging stick. That punu (wood) was really straight. The little sister was getting homesick, but that big sister said; 'No, I am taking you to meet your family.' Along the way they were digging for kuka (meat), niny (bilby). They got kuka and they were happy to have a good feed (SAM).

Art history

As a knowledgeable storyteller Belle understands and communicates through art the complex layers of many tjukurrpa stories associated with ancestral beings that traversed the region. She has lived with her family in Irrunytju and then Papulankutja where she has worked as a painter, translator and producer of short documentaries about local culture.

Karrika has been involved in many events including the development of inma performances and also participated in the Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (SAM).

Belle currently lives in Papulankutja and is a senior member of *Papulankutja Artists*. She is a strong advocate for painting and cultural heritage.

Artist's quote

A story Belle told to art centre manager Jane Avery about a history painting completed in 2015 (retrieved from SAM):

This is a painting from a long time ago. When Dulcie and I were young, must be sixteen. The government sent us to work at a station. We arrived on Friday night. On Sunday the boss called us in for dinner. When she was trying to pull some plates out she dropped one, and started putting out her hand asking for money. She said we broke it, we got the blame. She growled at us twice, so we got frightened and said that's it. She frightened our life out so we ran away.

When we were running we jumped over one fence and another. We came to the clay pan and had a drink. Walking on we saw another fence and on that line horses were galloping. Dulcie got frightened and climbed on a tree, and I was standing on the ground telling her to jump down so we could go. We jumped another fence and we planned what to do. 'What about we go and see how far the road is' I said. So

we left our cloths there and walked to the road and we saw a Toyota coming. We ran back to pick up our cloths and nobody saw us.

Walking on, we jumped over another fence and we were walking on the flat. We saw the car coming back and we ran and hid under a tree again. When he went passed we went over a hill and came to the well. We asked one another 'what are we going to do to get the water out, we've got no rope.' We thought and thought and I said 'we've got a belt from our dress's' so we tied them together to make a long rope and we got the water out with an old tin. We started walking just to sun down and we saw a windmill not far from us. We told one another we should've come here to get the water!

It was getting a bit dark and we said what about we look for a camp. We made a blanket bed and had a good sleep. On Monday morning I woke up and opened my eyes and watched three sheep watching me. 'Get up and have a look,' I said and we packed our things and started on walking. We came to the boundary gate and it was locked so we crawled under and through, and had a rest – too hot. We had a little bit of potato and meat to eat.

When we started walking on we came to an old mine and saw a truck standing there. It was broken. I said to Dulcie 'I'll go and see if there's a man there to ask for matches' but Dulcie said no because she was frightened. So we kept going and found water on the side of the road again. We were sitting down drinking, and saw this Toyota coming looking down the road because he saw our tracks. He drove past towards the next station.

References

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed
29 December 2015

Cliff Reid [Ngaanyatjarra, c1947 – 2010]



Image A11: Cliff Reid



Image A12: Warutjarra, 2003

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 126 x 75 cms. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

The tjukurrpa story outlined in this painting is about a time when the turkey people lived in the Papulankutja area and the people had no fire. While all the people shivered in winter, one young man would stand on top of the range at Warutjarra and stretch out his hands in every direction to see if he could feel some warmth. One day he did feel some warmth coming from the north so he flew in that direction hoping to find the source of the heat and take it back to his people. He went all the way to a place north of Tjukurla where he saw people with a fire on the ground below. He stole the people's fire by trickery.

Then they set off after him. He was then unable to return to Papulankutja, and kept flying onwards, fleeing his pursuers. His pursuers chased him all the way to the Great Australian Bight where he dived into the sea to escape them (SAM).

Short biography

Cliff painted in a style that was reminiscent of the traditional rock art in the region. He was keen to enumerate this ochre coloured figurative style and try to explain what he thought it might represent. Cliff was generous with his own observations and his work is acclaimed throughout the country and internationally. Remembered as a man of considerable intellect, he had an amazing memory and could relate detailed stories about his own life and culture as well as stories of the white explorers who had come through this country. The raw ochre colours depict spirit beings, ancestors and tingarri (walking trails). The style is unique to Cliff and he passed his knowledge and stories on to his sons, Thomas and Carlton Reid.

Biographical notes

Background

Cliff was born in the bush while his mother and father were travelling and living a largely nomadic lifestyle. He grew up in the Mantamaru area and went to school for a short time at Warburton Mission (SAM).

Cliff started painting in 2003 and loves to tell the many stories associated with his paintings. He is remembered as a man of considerable intellect with an amazing memory who could tell wonderful stories about his own life and culture as well as stories of the white explorers who had come through this country (Interview Diana Isgar, 2015). Cliff often told people that his work was in the style of the rock carvings and paintings to be found in the Central Desert area.

Cliff had three children with his first wife Ivy. He moved to Papulankutja when he married Ruby, his second wife. Together they had four children, three boys, Thomas, Carlton and Tristan, and a girl, Rona.

Based on some rock paintings in the region, Cliff used their images as a foundation concept for his artwork. The raw ochre colours depicted spirit beings, ancestors and tingarri (walking trails). This style was unique to Cliff and he passed his knowledge and stories on to his sons, Thomas and Carlton. Cliff was an artist who was keen to spread the meanings and understanding of his tjukurrpa and his culture. He was an active participant in the social and cultural life of the community and an important Ngaanyatjarra leader in Papulankutja community.

Cliff enjoyed success through various Australian Galleries and in particular with the support of William Mora Galleries, Cliff's work has been sold to major Australian and European Collections (SAM). Cliff Reid's art can be seen in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne.

Cliff died in March 2010, at Alice Springs, after battling a long illness. His wife Ruby died shortly after in early April, and they were buried together. I am still in contact with their daughter Rona, who now lives in Perth.

'Mr. Reid was not only the best painter of stories, he was the best story teller ... his audience would gather around him enthralled by his personal magic, his enthusiasm and joy in his stories and culture, his eagerness to know about the rest of the world' (Isgar 2010).

Artist's quotation

Daryl Cliff Reid – in his own words, notation by D. Isgar. Recollected, and accessed online after interview with Dianna Isgar, 2015).

I was born in 1947 at Wanarn, Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Western Australia. At approximately 10 years of age, my family, mother, father and younger sister (now deceased), moved to Warburton mission.

I attended the mission school, which was run by the United Aboriginal Mission from Melbourne. There was a boy's boarding school and a girl's boarding school; my sister went to the girl's boarding school. As the school was a boarding school for children only, Mother Kalatji Reid (from the Lewis family) and my father Tommy Reid (from the Newbury family) continued to live in the bush, coming to the mission from time to time with dingo skins which they traded for stores, such as flour, tin meat, sugar, tea and tobacco.

Life at the mission school was busy and regulated. Early in the morning the boys took it in turn to do jobs. A roster was listed and each of the groups for each of the jobs had an alphabetical letter. Cliff did jobs that were listed in the D column on any given day. Others might have jobs listed in the A or F or some other alphabetical list. The mission workers gave the names of the people and families as they did not understand or could not cope with the Wangi or proper names of the people. Some of the jobs were milking the goats, cutting wood, emptying the night bucket, (pot) from the boy's home, cleaning rooms and yard, washing dishes and cleaning eating area after meals. The mission had an extensive vegetable garden and orchard. Some of the vegetables that Cliff remembers are lettuce, tomatoes, peas, and cabbage. Mid morning, after the chores were completed, the boys went to school to learn reading and numbers. They also had religious education and sporting activity. Life was very regimented, they formed lines and marched to each activity, they prayed before every activity, school, meals, Sunday school and so on.

They stayed with their families during the school holidays. Cliff liked life at the mission, it was ordered, a lot of company and good fun activity, playing with friends, for recess they got condensed milk to drink.

Many of the families that he knows now and that live at Blackstone or nearby were at the Warburton Mission at the same time as Cliff. Some of the families came now and then but continued their life in the bush, that is how the Forbes family lived and Cliff's friend Andrew Mitchell, worked at Sheep stations down Laverton way from an early age, while Cliff was still at the boy's home at the mission. While still living at the mission but on holiday travelling with his family, Cliff remembers Len Beadell coming through and surveying the great central highway, then the big machines coming to make the road. He remembers Len's daughter travelling with him as a small girl and now she brings tourists up this way to visit, she will be coming through in August.

In the mid to late 1950s Cliff remembers the bomb testing at Maralinga and he tells of the clouds of bad stuff that come over Warburton.

When the mission closed in or around 1960, there was little to keep Cliff at Warburton and he wandered off, down Laverton way where he found employment with various sheep stations. He worked as a drover, a yard hand and he was involved with the stacking and pressing of wool bales. At Banya Station he dug a large drenching trench for the sheep.

In 1966, 14th February the new Aussie Dollar became currency. Cliff earned enough money in the new currency to buy his first car, which was a Ford Custom Line. He was working at Sturt Meadow Station as a sheep drover at the time. In the 1960s we formed an Indigenous football team with people from Laverton and Warburton ... we were called the Desert Warriors and we played against the employees of the mining companies based at Laverton and Leonora.

In 1970 I returned to Warburton where I married and lived for a while. The children from that marriage live in the Wanarn area now. My sister is now dead and her son Robert comes to live with me at Blackstone regularly.

I was born at Wanarn and the Seven Sisters Story is strong for me on my mother's side. There is important country and Secret Men's tjukurrpa at Wanarn but I am not free to talk about that one.

I have lived a long time at Blackstone with my second wife and children; my wife's father founded this community when he brought his family back here to live in the early 70s. He never made his home in the mission; he always lived the traditional life in country. The first time he settled down was when he brought his family back to this country where he was custodian of many important dreaming stories. This land is very sacred and that is why we live here to look after it. Through my wife and her family I feel a strong link to this place and through my birthplace and my father I have a strong continuing link to the country at Wanarn. My mother being linked to the Lewis family belonged to the area immediately north of Blackstone. This is now my country also.

At Blackstone I helped to build the original airstrip, we had no big machines; we built the airstrip with pick and shovel, by hand. You can still see the remains of that airstrip to the west of the community as you drive out on the Jameson Road. In 2003 Kumanarra Isgar came to Blackstone and I started to paint for her. I feel that I have set a good example to the other people in Blackstone and hopefully to the younger people as well. I have been a leader in the artwork. We will soon have a new art centre and I think that I have been a good influence for that to happen. The Papulankutja artists is a strong organization and very important for the future of Blackstone.

I worry for the future. When I was a boy, there were strong rules, good policemen who ensured that you obeyed those rules. Back then you could be arrested and put in gaol for 6 months for being lazy ... not employed a vagrant. I went out and got work, I kept busy and I learned things. Today there is not good policing to make people work. The rules are too soft, children do not obey their parents and do not understand that they must work to earn money and to stay healthy. I would like to see a police station at Blackstone, where the police kept law and order.

I do not like the idea of the intervention and the government taking control of the tjitji money. I think this will make things worse. (Isgar 2010)

Medium, style and subject matter

Cliff's style reproduces the traditional style rock art located in the region. He replicated several of the key motifs found on the site. The raw ochre colours depict ancestral spirit beings, animals and tingarri. After experimentation with different artistic mediums such as charcoal, hot wire and painting boards, Cliff settled on acrylic paints on canvas (Reid in Acker, T. and J. Carty, 2012). He drew inspiration from the geometric forms carved into traditional punu, and found in the rock art on rock walls. However, he also merged these geometric forms with figurative designs, a feature that is specific to the Ngaanyatjarra cultural region.

Cliff was also the first of the male painters at Papulankutja. Prior to Cliff's own experimentations in art, the women in the community produced paintings, as initially the current Papulankutja Artists art centre was a women's centre.

When the art centre became incorporated Cliff succeeded in promoting painting to other senior law men such as Jimmy Donegan, Andrew Mitchell and Reggie Jackson, and so began the commencement of the men's art practice at Papulankutja.

Cliff insisted that his paintings were intentionally associated with the rock art in the region. It is for this reason that the figuration in paintings produced at Papulankutja is quite typical and particularly distinctive. It is a defining characteristic of the art at Papulankutja that differentiates it from the other more abstract, or geometrically grounded, art of the region (Carty 2012). Cliff became a role model for both artists and the broader community extending ideas about creative traditional practice, and supported a push for a more healthy and productive lifestyle for those living in his community. Cliff instilled the idea that being unique and different in Yarnangu painting tradition was a good thing; not just using the established dotting that had already become common practice in communities around the desert regions. This positive influence has attracted a new wave of contemporary artists who draw from these early influences and also apply their own experimental techniques and painting styles.

Art history

Cliff Reid told his stories with bold, strong lines, using the classic ochre palette of the desert. Strong and distinct figures, are contrasted against bold ochre coloured backgrounds and patterning on the canvases. The paintings, often large, are raw and impressive. Cliff's paintings represented the land, which was for him, inscribed with so much meaning – insights and details about ancestral beings and the traditional owners and Law men who held strong custodial rights for their country.

Cliff paints the stories he was told, and paints them 'his way', 'the same way they painted those stories on Singing Rock, the same way those paintings have been painted for many years'. His work emphasizes the raw gestures, symbols, tjukurrpa tracks of the elders, and the creation beings from the tjukurrpa (Isgar 2010).

Cliff Reid's work was exhibited in galleries nationally and internationally and at the Desert Exhibition in Alice Springs in September 2008, the following quote from Nicholas Rothwell writing in *The Australian*, articulated the powerful audience response to his artwork:

'Perhaps the single most arresting piece in the show is the ultra traditional 'Men's Design' by Cliff Reid, the best known painter at Blackstone's Papulankutja Arts: His work possesses the hieratic strength of Pintupi masterpieces from the early 1970s when the sacred underpinnings of desert men's paintings lay close to the surface of their work' (Rothwell 2008).

Cliff's work is held in important collections here in Australia and internationally.



Image A13: Men's Design, 2008, Cliff Reid

Photo: The Australian, 29th September 2008

Artist's quote

'I feel that I have set a good example to the other people in Blackstone and hopefully to the younger people as well. I have been a leader in the artwork. We will soon have a new art centre and I think that I have been a good influence for that to happen. The Papulankutja Artists is a strong organization and very important for the future of Blackstone' (cited by Isgar, circa 2009).



Image A14: Cliff and Ruby Reid, 2005

Art Mob Exhibition, Hobart. Photo: Dianna Isgar, Papulankutja Artists

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Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed 29 December 2015

Elaine Warnatjura Lane [Ngaanyatjarra, c1941 -]



Image A15: Elaine Warnatjura Lane



Image A16: Wati Kutjarra (The Story of Two Men), 2016

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 91 x 91 cms. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

This painting represents the story of *Wati Kutjarra* or Two Men. *Wati Kutjarra tjukurpa* is about two men who had the ability to change their appearance. They take the form of two goannas as they travel from Perth across the desert through Papulankutja to Docker River. The two men were powerful magicians.

They often punished or killed wrong doers but sometimes went too far and were cruel in the exercise of their powers. To amuse themselves, they sometimes played the tricksters. The men usually took the form of a goanna but they could also turn into other animals as well. At Papulankutja, they actually tricked each other when they both changed their appearance at the same time. This is behind the meaning of the name Papulankutja (they couldn't recognize each other), which is the Yarnangu name for the community.

Short biography

As a senior artist Elaine is one of the pioneering members of the *Papulankutja Artists* group. Her artwork reflects the seasonal changes of countryside around the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, often using the softer, muted colours that surround her every day. Elaine paints her memories and experiences that are associated with her own travels along the tracks connected to the Wati Kutjarra tjukurrpa. Her paintings are made up of many layers of colour, dotted and overlapping, and melding together forming the various levels of understanding that express the texture and flow of the land. Elaine's paintings usually reflect the Wati Kutjarra story situated in and around Papulankutja. Elaine has had a long association with the creative arts and enjoys her work, painting nearly every day. She is an excellent weaver and carves punu animals and piti bowls. Her knowledge of the bush is exceptional and she is very proud of her Ngaanyatjarra homeland.

Biographical notes

Background

Elaine was born in the bush, in the the traditional way, west of Papulankutja/Blackstone near Jameson, close to a rock hole (SAM). Her father was a Donegan and she is sister to Pantjiti Mary McLean and Molly Nampitjin

Miller. Elaine lives in Papulankutja close to her brother Jimmy Donegan, a well-known senior Law Man and artist. Elaine paints the country around Papulankutja and her work reflects the seasons, usually painted with the subtle colours that surround her day-to-day life.

Elaine paints most days at the art centre. She talks as she paints about the story and the place - her homeland on the other side of Jameson. She relates the happy memories of her early years walking the land with her parents and siblings and later with her husband, his other wife, and their children.

Medium, style and subject matter

Elaine's style is delicate, particular and experimental. Her work is easily identified by its scattering of fine dots carefully placed on the canvas to emphasise particular tracks, waterholes and ancestral beings. Many of Elaine's paintings are distinguished by the inclusion of figuration. This figuration is a distinctive feature of art emanating from the Papulankutja area of the Western Desert. The inclusion of single point perspective figurative representation in some work is most likely influenced by local rock art in the region. Although some of her painting techniques are formalised and controlled as part of traditional knowledge, a number of experimental adaptations, particularly concerning layout of design are not. Elaine's work is rarely symmetrical or centred. There may be a concentration of fine dots and story heavily weighted to one side, or at the top or bottom. Sometimes, a large portion of the canvas will be left unmarked. Although there is interchange between the artists, sometimes leading to the influence of one artist's style on the other, Papulankutja artists tend to establish their own individual methods and approach to painting their stories. Preferring to paint stories and Ngaanyatjarra landscape, Elaine limits painting the uniform and traditional iconographic body designs seen in some artists work at Papulankutja. The use of soft

complementary colours – dotted tones of pinks, mauves, soft blues and greens, shows a willingness to experiment with colour and design if not with iconography. Her work also experiments with internal lines of dotting which mark tracks that Elaine has walked, or the track marks formed by ancestral beings. Whilst watching a painting take shape, Elaine describes particular tracks, what was hunted and important ceremonial rockholes and soaks.

The layers of colour that overlap across the acrylic paintings are an expression of the texture and flow of the country that Elaine knows well. Elaine paints the country from Mantamaru to Papulankutja within her representations of *Wati Kutjarra* and each painting embodies the changing seasonal colours. Elaine¹ says that the country floods during the wet season and then bursts into a landscape of wildflowers and grasses that bear seeds that are used for bush damper. The lines in her work depict tjukurrrpa tracks, which directs the travelling ancestors.

Elaine often talks while she paints. Sometimes she sings with Angiliya. Most often they both appear comfortable and relaxed as they recall an event or a particular dream. Elaine's paintings are vibrant - scatterings of colourful dotting, marking the flood plains rich with life after the rain. A single line scores some artwork depicting the ancestral walking tracks. They marked the way for travelling ancestors, and is now replaced by a contemporary marking – the unsealed road to the nearby community of Jameson. The paintings are delicate and have a timeless appeal resembling a vast map of finely dotted parcels of land. They are a mixture of traditional abstract Western Desert iconography and innovative self-expression. Clumps of dots and waves of lines form a

¹ Personal conversations and SAM data entries identified during the field periods in 2015-16.

meshwork of colours combined with areas that are linear and have a sense of movement. Elaine is also known for the figurative work incorporated into some of her paintings. This is not common practice in Western Desert art, although at Papulankutja it has been suggested that it emulates some of the rock art in the region, often including figures, both human and non-human.

Elaine is a strong law woman and elder and visits the art centre each day to materialise² her tjukurrpa. Her paintings embody forms of collected identity, memory and shared traditions of extended groups of people. Each of Elaine's paintings can be viewed as visual extensions of an oral knowledge system and in some ways reinforce authenticity and cultural authority over the land.

Elaine paints the Two Men, now set in stone at Papulankutja. She carefully depicts one of the boulders as slightly smaller and also darker than the other, and it has numerous small, etched markings on it - arrows and lines and the like. She paints the water holes a soft, rich textured chocolate colour and tells me that she prefers to use colours that remind her of the land.

Art history

At present Elaine's complete oeuvre is *Wati Kutjarra* tjukurrpa, although each version may be slightly different. However, earlier artworks incorporated a diversity of themes. Her ways of knowing are bound up in paintings embodied with Ancestral designs. These paintings then are arguably, also abstractions of far greater knowledges defining a cosmology, worldview and processes that differ from Western viewpoints. The oral stories embodied within each painting,

² Materialise – used in the literal sense. To become actual fact; happen; to become visible.

illustrate to some extent the historical, social and cultural processes that constitute life on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands today.

Elaine does not speak English, however, she has related to me that the voices of the grandfathers and grandmothers are embodied in the work - protecting and sustaining cultural difference and Yarnangu knowledge, and passing on the stories connected to the geography of the region.

In her *Wati Kutjarra* paintings Elaine synthesises the spiritual dimensions of the story and then maps out the route that her family took when hunting and gathering and recasts her memory for a contemporary visual audience. Elaine Warnatura Lane is representative of an artist who exhibits a strong transmission of cultural knowledge that is also ongoing throughout the Western Desert, and which is also reflected in the art from other remote art centres. Artists like Elaine are committed to their practice, their success inspiring others in the small communities.

The story of *Wati Kutjarra* is extensive across the vast desert region, and at *Papulankutja Artists* many of the artists, both male and female, paint their depictions of this story. The ancient perceptions of concepts like *Wati Kutjarra* means artists take on contemporary resonance in many ways and there are variations in style. For instance, as mentioned, Elaine Warnatjura Lane will sometimes include figurative work within her canvas, mimicking a fusion of both human and animal, cosmic and vegetative. Her works are a cluster of creative and ancestral elements, articulated both figuratively and geographically, in subtle colours, variegated dots and meandering lines. Her paintings are perceived as delicate and beautiful. They always affirm her specificity of identity and relation to tjukurra by interweaving her knowledge, passed on to her orally by her parents and grandparents about creation stories,

with creative visual expression. Nearly always, the paintings mark her story of a place near Jameson on the *Wati Kutjarra* (Two Men) tjukurpa track.

Artist's quote

As Elaine paints the hills and sand hills, and colours the circles she has drawn, that represent small stones that mark the well-travelled track, she states: 'That's my colour. Lovely one, lovely one [...] these are all the little bushes, walking 'round looking at the little stones - yapu, yapu. Same like that' she says.³

References

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed 29 December 2015

³ Personal conversation with Elaine 14th January 2016. Yapu is Yarnangu word for small rock.

Untjima Fred Forbes [Ngaanyatjarra, c1923 – 2008]



Image A17: Untjima Fred Forbes



Image A18: Tjalpu-tjalpu-Dreaming, 2003

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 122 x 152 cms. Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Tjalpu-tjalpu Dreaming, is a painting now held in the National Gallery of Victoria collection. In it, Fred Forbes depicts waterholes associated with the Tjalpu-tjalpu or cuckoo-shrike Dreaming of the Lilyirr and Ngaturn areas, north of Jameson. These regions have strong connections with men's cultural and ceremonial sites. The painting is large and measures 120cms by 150cms in size, made up of very colourful intricate dotting. As Fred held a vast amount cultural

knowledge, this painting is significant in giving meaning to the cultural and geographic landscape and the spiritual dimension that underlies it.

Short biography

Untjima Forbes had an intimate knowledge of the Ngaanyatjarra landscape and its features over an area of several thousand kilometres. Forbes is said to have had the best knowledge of the immensely detailed tjukurrpa and song lines of the desert in the region. He actively sought this knowledge from his elders and began to record, authoritatively on canvas some of his knowledge and feelings about his country. It was only in his later years, when unable to get out into his bush country, that he took up painting and became a regular visitor to the art centre. His invaluable handful of paintings that were produced illustrates some of the historical, social and cultural processes that constitute life on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands today.

Biographical notes

Background

Fred Untjima Forbes is remembered as a charismatic and reflective man for his role and life in the region (Brooks, 2012). When he was in his fifties, he was among the first people to establish a community at Papulankutja in the 'back to homelands' movement in the early 1970s. 'When the opportunity arose to start a new community in the heart of his family Country at Papulankutja (Blackstone), he took the lead in lobbying politicians and bureaucrats for support' (Brooks 2012, p. 185). With his wife Yuminia and children Ruby and Janet he established the new community of Papulankutja.

Untjima Fred Forbes was born at a waterhole near the community of Jameson, 80 kilometres to the west of Papulankutja (SAM). His tjukurrpa is the emu as he was born at a waterhole that was created by some travelling kalaya (emu);

however, this region is also connected with the marlu (red kangaroo) tjukurra. There were few contacts with outsiders in Ngaanyatjarra country during his early childhood, only the few prospectors and doggers who had wandered into the remote desert with their camels. Untjima Forbes remembered his early life well, and told long narratives of his family's walking travels. He listed the sequence of waterholes visited, the people in the party, and events, both routine and unexpected, which occurred along the way. Although he came into contact with the Warburton Mission soon after it was established in 1932, Untjima and his family (and many other of their relatives) kept up their travelling, hunting and gathering way of life in the bush for many years and resisted learning to read, write or speak formal English (Janet Forbes). Ngaanyatjarra anthropologist David Brooks, who spent a great deal of time with Untjima Fred Forbes, affirmed that he often expressed his belief that thinking in English changes the essence of his people's view of the world, pushing its central meanings to one side and ultimately disempowering them.

Dianna Isgar, who worked as the first art centre manager and assisted in incorporating Papulankutja Artists, had a great deal of communication with Fred Forbes also and wrote the following on her blog in 2007:

'I now grieve for the old man who came to me when I was so sad at the loss of Reggie Jackson, earlier this year. Mr. Forbes who must have been experiencing the loneliness that comes as you watch your contemporaries die; knowing he was one of the last of a generation of Wati who held the structure and substance of his ancient homeland. Mr. Forbes came and wept with me, shared my grief, comforted me. How gentle and great was this man, yet most of the world never knew him and never had the privilege of his company. I should be grieving

for those who never knew him, their loss is greater than mine' (Isgar 2007).

Medium, style and subject matter

Born at a site associated with the kangaroo dreaming track, about eighty kilometres west of Papulankutja at a place called Mantamaru or Jameson, Fred Untjima Forbes, and his family, lived most of their lives following a seasonal food trail, on the move, from waterhole to waterhole. Whenever possible, the family would get together with other groups for social and ceremonial purposes. Fred recalled many of these occasions, throughout his years at Papulankutja, and when, after taking up painting in later life, produced detailed examples of a unique engagement with the land. A characteristic feature of his art is the depiction of tracks or marks left on the landscape that represent both Fred's foot-walking and also those of his ancestors. In the painting *Tjalpu-tjalpu Dreaming*, now held in the National Gallery of Victoria collection, Fred depicts waterholes associated with the or cuckoo-shrike Dreaming of the Lilyirr and Ngaturn area, north of Jameson. These areas have strong connections with men's cultural and ceremonial sites. The painting is large and measures 120 cms by 150 cms in size, made up of very colourful intricate dotting. The colours include various shades of pink, yellow, blues, purple and brown. A feature of Ngaanyatjarra paintings is the rich and multifarious colour composition and insightful, almost, decorative arrangement that characterize many of the works. Large areas of the painting resemble delineated regions that appear to have been mapped or sectioned into separate zones. A feature of this painting, and one that sets it apart from other contemporary Indigenous works, is the figuration incorporated throughout the centre of the painting, and which is typical of artworks from the region.

Art history

Fred Untjima Forbes had an intimate knowledge of the Ngaanyatjarra landscape and its features over an area of several thousand kilometres, which endowed him with an intimate knowledge to formalize the painting, by applying the acrylic colours made available to him, and drawing on inherent approaches to painting on canvas. Fred was always keen to maintain his own culture and identity and adhered strongly to the underpinnings of Ngaanyatjarra cultural knowledge and law, encountering life as the most knowledgeable of Ngaanyatjarra men (Brooks 2012). Fred's daughter Janet Forbes states that he had the best knowledge of the immensely detailed tjukurpa (dreaming) tracks of the desert in the region (Janet Forbes). He had actively sought this knowledge from his elders and began to record on canvas some of his knowledge and feelings about his country (Brooks 2012).

Fred Untjima Forbes had keen memories of his early life, and told long narratives of his family's 'foot-walking' travels. In later life he began to transpose these oral stories to canvas. He listed the sequence of waterholes visited, the people in the party, and the events as they occurred, both routine and unexpected, which transpired along the way (Brooks 2012).

The Tjalpu-tjalpu story is men's tjukurpa, parts of which were delineated to me during a bush visit to the Ngaturn area, a very secluded and remote location with no marked tracks or roads. Although I can not confirm some of the details, it possibly relates to the cuckoo-shrike bird/woman who had lived her life in the area. It materialises in the middle of a scrubby, flat area and appears quite out of context and place. The story is well known, and although principally a men's story, the main theme and characters can be related by women who have their own versions of the story, as told to me by both Narelle Holland and Janet Forbes. 'It is important to only whisper Wiirlu, the name of the bird (personal

conversation with Narelle Holland, 2015). Fred continued to paint until his death in 2008.

Artist's quote

I found the following quote on SAM: no author was acknowledged.

Far from coming to him automatically, most of this knowledge had to be actively sought from his elders over the course of a lifetime. He was entrusted with these things because of his efforts and because of the intelligence and trustworthiness that he displayed to those senior men, all now dead. While he has had many chances to visit different parts of Australia, particularly during those years when he played a major part in the land rights and 'homelands' movements of the desert, he chose, as in the case of learning English, to keep such forays to a minimum. While interested in the outside world, he has, during his 80-plus years, found more than enough to absorb his intellectual and spiritual needs within Aboriginal desert society

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Freda Yimunya Lane [Ngaanyatjarra, c1945 –]



Image A19: Freda Yimunya Lane



Image A20: Tali, My Mother's Country, 2010

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 75 x 121 cms. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

Freda Lane's painting is about a place called Tali, which refers to the sand-hills and country where Freda grew up. Among the tali grow all sorts of grasses and wild flowers and it is through regular burning that new growth each year is ensured. Freda was born in this country. It is her mother's country too. The layers of colour that overlap across the acrylic painting express the texture and flow of the country and the colourful flowers in spring and summer. Her painting is made up of many layers of colour, concentrated as overlapping dots

and then melding together to form the various layers of understanding that are expressed in the painting. The paintings define Freda's affinity with the land.

Short biography

Freda was one of the founding members of the *Papulankutja Artists* group and is a regular painter at the art centre. She enjoys painting the country that she knows well. Whenever possible, Freda still hunts and forages on this land that she calls her mother's country. Themes remembered from childhood of hunting and gathering journeys and travelling across the harsh countryside are central to her practice. Her paintings are made up of many layers of colour, dotted and overlapping, and then melding together to form the various layers of understanding that express ancestral tracks, and the texture and flow of the land. Freda paints from a position of knowing the land intimately.

Biographical notes

Background

Freda was born on the other side of Papulankutja Rockhole some time in the 1940's (SAM). She was born in the bush and grew up with her parents who spent much of their time hunting and gathering. She recalls her unclothed mother carrying Freda on her head in her piti (large wooden dish). Freda is a relative of the Forbes family, and together with sisters Jean and Shirley, has painted at *Papulankutja Artists* art centre. More recently, Freda paints with her daughter Rosie Lane and is passing on the stories to her. They are the stories of the tjukurrpa that were told to her by her own parents.

Freda and her art community define themselves through a strong identification with place. Freda often relates the travels that she and her family experienced when she was a child growing up and foraging for food during drought conditions. She also has many stories about her early years spent in Warburton

where she attended school. There are a collection of old black and white photographs stored at the art centre that foreground Freda's lifestyle during these periods, and are related to her childhood, school days, friends, and her family.

Medium, style and subject matter

Freda's paintings are mostly made up of a single, thick layer of soft pastel colours, dotted and sometimes overlapping. In places the dots merge together to form bands of colour that express textures, tracks and flows within the landscape. Often there are fine lines of darker dots in Freda's work that depict the tjukurrpa tracks and ancestral beings, and which also remind her of the many travels she has had together with her family, often in trying conditions. Freda is always happy to share a story about her wanderings throughout the desert. She explains how they would chase rabbits to their burrows and then tap carefully across the top of where they thought the burrow extended to, in order to identify exactly where the rabbit was inside. They would then go about capturing it and preparing it for a meal. Often, during recent hunting and bush trips, Freda caught small goanna and then slipped it, or them, surreptitiously in her dilly bag to take home and cook later in the day or evening. These social and cultural activities add to the rich and interwoven tapestry of subjects that are incorporated into paintings on returning to the art centre.

During recent visits to the bush, for hunting and foraging, Freda reminisces with me about her life on the land. She identifies particular places as we pass through; for example, a large hill with rocky outcrop next to a rock hole is the sacred area (where no photographs can be taken) important to Freda. This is the spot, she says, where she was born and on which the two-goanna men had travelled, and a site where Freda's mother wandered naked and would carry her on her head in a piti (large wooden dish). They would collect different

seasonal bush fruits and seeds although they would spend more time wandering and searching for food in the dryer and hotter seasons and she remembers these periods as difficult.

Freda paints most days. She paints her birthplace on the other side of Papulankutja. She calls it Witchell Rock but can't talk about it because it is 'man's country' (personal communications). Her paintings are bright and colourful. Freda usually sections the canvas into solid blocks of closely dotted colour. To do this she paints long sinewy lines, dotted and joined together. Alternatively, the segments of colour morph into each other in between the obvious rock-hole formations.

Freda's style does not exhibit a great deal of iconography, and bypasses restricted ritual designs, preferring to paint large swathes of land marked with light, soft colour. The fine dotting is often separated with darker dotted lines to signify geographical changes in the terrain. The complexities and subtleties associated with Freda's engagement with contemporary painting are often not revealed. She likes to paint slowly and silently for hours at a time. She tells me that she loves to paint. More recent paintings have a tendency towards the highlighting of linear sand hills and tracks. They appear like long co-joined semi-straight lines of variegated tones and run evenly from one side of the canvas to the other. Sometimes when looking at these works from a particular angle they appear to shimmer in the light – perhaps like the tali. Freda's daughter Rosie has adopted this style and developed it further, enriching them with more vibrant and thick paint. Rosie's paintings incorporate a much bolder and more striking palette than her mother Freda.

Art history

Freda has been painting at the art centre since its establishment. Nearly always, the paintings mark her story of a place near where she was born and where her

family hunted and foraged before Papulankutja community was established. Freda is one of the artists who was connected to the Women's Centre and was a strong advocate for the art centre to be established, and has held many of the administrative positions. She has been on the board of directors for many years. Recent paintings of Freda's are concerned with either a 'block of solid colour' approach, generally with the large rock-holes very prominent in her themes, or alternatively, they take on the long sinewy lines of coloured dotting, running all the way to the edge of the canvas. Freda says the lines are just sand around the outside of a hill. Culture and memory feature strongly in Freda's art.

Tali is consistently Freda's composition of choice, associated with the tjukurrpa of the region. The long straight coloured lines in the composition can be construed as sand hills and rock holes - places punctuating the terrain. Freda is also an accomplished carver of punu and a tjanpi weaver. She participated in the making of the grass Toyota, which won the Telstra Award in 2005.

Artist's quote

Freda's paintings are tied to culture and to country and not specific to particular tjukurrpa stories. She often says: 'Can't talk about this picture. Mustn't talk.'

References

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed
29 December 2015

Janet Forbes [Ngaanyatjarra, 1962 –]



Image A19: Janet Forbes



Image A20: Wati Kutjarra, 2016

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 30 x 30 cm (Diptych). Private Collection: Courtesy of the owner

This pair of paintings, a recent diptych, relate the story of *Wati Kutjarra* or Two Men. The tjukurpa story is about two men who took the form of goannas as they travelled from Perth across the desert through Papulankutja to Docker River. The two men were powerful magicians. They often punished or killed wrong doers but sometimes went too far and were cruel in the exercise of their

powers. To amuse themselves, they sometimes played the tricksters. They usually took the form of a goanna but they could turn into other animals as well. At Papulankutja, they actually tricked each other when they both changed their appearance at the same time. This is behind the meaning of the name Papulankutja (they couldn't recognize each other), which is the name for the community.

Short biography

The art of story telling influences Janet Forbes's oeuvre. Although mainly acknowledged for her strong and colourful acrylic paintings on canvas, Janet is also an accomplished tjanpi weaver with a long historical art making background that dates back to the first arts practice at Papulankutja. Janet, among other artists was awarded the 2005 Telstra Art Award for the large life-sized *Tjanpi Toyota*. Janet's characteristic painting style is meticulous - fine and precise delicate dotting. The tiny, carefully placed, coordinated dots make up the calligraphic fluidity of the stories and figures reflected in her work. There is always an emphasis on detail. As senior artist Janet Forbes paints the story of *Wati Kutjarra*. Influenced by traditional mark-marking in the sand, Janet's paintings are associated with the customary Yarnangu tjukurrpa story and the story-telling process. Janet's colour palette changes from time to time. Currently her works are multi-coloured and vivid, using bright colours, although that has not always been the case.

Biographical notes

Background

In 1975 several family groups with ties to the area of the Blackstone Ranges moved back to their homeland and established a community. Janet's father Fred Forbes led the first group back to the community of Papulankutja (Brooks, 2012).

Traditional forms of art practice, such as woodcarvings and fibre works, were maintained during this period and continued at the local Women's Centre.

Later Janet became a founding member of Papulankutja Artists art centre.

Janet was born at the Warburton Mission and spent her childhood growing up in the Papulankutja area, which is her grandfather's country. Janet attended the mission and school in Warburton and during the holidays would travel with her parents on foot around the region hunting and gathering and visiting family. She then attended school in Kalgoorlie for one year. She later moved to Norseman, married Craig Morrison and had three children, Albert, Jade and Trenita. In the early years of Blackstone Women's Centre, Janet tried her hand at various crafts including fabric painting and printing, tie dyeing t-shirts and making spinifex paper.

In the 1970s Janet lived with her family in a wiltja to the west of where the community is today until tin houses and then better brick homes were built some years later. Janet has very happy memories of the early days of the community's establishment, and along with her sister Ruby, has been one of the early and vocal advocates for arts practice in the region. These days, as Janet speaks both English and Ngaanyatjarra, she is often called upon to speak on behalf of artists and her community. She has a long history of storytelling and enjoys the cross-cultural interactions.

Medium, style and subject matter

Janet's themes alternate between painting from her grandmother's country, *Pulypal*, and the *Wati Kutjarra* story, which is predominantly a Papulankutja story. The story is about two men travelling across the desert through Papulankutja to Docker River. The two men were powerful and sometimes cruel. At Papulankutja they tricked each other when they both changed their appearance at the same time. This is the meaning of Papulankutja (they

couldn't recognize each other), which is the Yarnangu name for Blackstone/Papulankutja community. Many of Janet's paintings are influenced by this story and often incorporate the two large goanna men.

Janet is meticulous and her style is fine and precise. Tiny, carefully placed coordinated dots make up the calligraphic fluidity of lines reflected in her paintings. These tiny dots are placed painstakingly slowly with a small stick, usually the end of a kebab stick or small paintbrush. Janet says that the variations of season determine the colour palette in her artwork, always painting the Papulankutja/Blackstone area. Janet has said that she 'likes all things creative' (personal conversation) and has participated in many creative workshops across various genres.

Janet's work reflects the subtle elements of touch and the influence of sand drawing, which is still practiced on a daily basis. The surface of the painting is likened to the surface of the sand in which drawing would be done to accentuate an oral story. Marking the ground parallels marking a canvas with acrylic paint. Janet inherently rubs her hands across the canvas to feel and smooth its surface, as she would the sand, before starting her marking. Her aesthetic does not generally put an emphasis on texture and painterliness – more a preference for subtle, delicate stories with appealing visual qualities. As senior artist Janet Forbes paints the *Wati Kutjarra* story and she tells me that marking in the sand has always been part of the story and the storytelling process. As a consummate storyteller herself, a raconteur, Janet commands attention from her audience, clears the ground by rubbing and sliding her palm across the dry dirt, and starts the process by using either fingers or sticks to visually describe a particular event. Thus, storytelling, sand marking (and song) are intrinsic to Ngaanyatjarra cultural practice, and consistent with the social circumstances that identify artists of the desert. These introductory markings on

canvas can be understood to have their counterpart in the sand, where images and oral stories like *Wati Kutjarra* were, and still are, told. The culmination is a form of *verbal art* incorporating speech, song, gesture and drawing, which has become transposed on to Janet's canvas.

Janet spends a good deal of time making sure that her painting is exact and culturally correct. Her style changes from time to time and currently Janet uses vivid, dynamic and bright colours. Previously, her palette incorporated softer earthy hues. Janet's experimentation has earned her a reputation for producing interesting, contemporary pieces that are exhibited throughout the country and internationally. Janet's paintings sell well and there is usually no stored stock at the art centre. Often she will paint in the evenings at home in order to complete commissions for her work.

Janet is also an accomplished tjanpi weaver and along with a group of artists at Papulankutja constructed a life sized woven car which was awarded the 2005 Telstra Art Award. The large life-sized *Tjanpi Toyota* was assembled and woven in the local community hall and is currently on display at the Northern Territory Regional Gallery in Darwin. Although a considerable collaborative community effort, Janet informs us that she is responsible for marking out the diagram for the car on the floor of the community hall. Janet also makes small tightly woven bowls and sculptured animals and has received many accolades for her meticulous work and well-constructed sculptures.

Art history

Janet's father was Untjima Fred Forbes from Tawulbalyana, an important traditional owner of the region around Papulankutja and her mother Yuminiya was from Waltjatjara near Papulankutja. Janet's mother had strong cultural principles and was involved with initiating the Ngaanyatjarra Council and also

worked with the NPY Women's Council. Janet attended the mission school and spent holidays hunting with her parents (SAM).

As Janet's father was an important painter Janet started painting when the art centre opened. Janet learned the stories from her parents and nearly always creates the *Wati Kutjarra* story of the two lizard men.

Janet was taught to make baskets by her older sister Ruby Reid and also learned how to make other assorted artefacts by her mother. Janet's makes tjanpi grass sculptures with great enthusiasm, producing unique well made work.

Janet mixes tjanpi weaving and painting into her regular creative routine and will always see an opportunity to create something for someone. She is outspoken and has a powerful and humorous personality. Janet is well-travelled and often journeys thousands of kilometres to attend exhibitions and perform at dance and art festivals. She also attended the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 as one of the Ngaanyatjarra performers at the Opening Ceremony.

Artist's quote

'With all my heart – painting my grandfathers dreamtime stories'. 'I paint for money and I enjoy it.'

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Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed 29 December 2015

Jennifer Nginyaka Mitchell [Pitjantjatjarra, 1955 -]



Image A21: Jennifer Nginyaka Mitchell



Image A22: Kungkarangkalpa (The Seven Sisters), 2015

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 76 x 76 cms. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa is a story about seven sisters being chased on land and across the skies by a lecherous and 'tricky' man. His actions and how the sisters respond are central to moral values, humour and grief, and impart knowledge, especially to girls. Each artist gives their own detailed version of the story of Wati Nyiru and his persistent pursuit of the seven sisters. The story

is widespread across many parts of the country, and is a women's story, painted here by Jennifer Mitchell, daughter of Tjayanka Woods. Jennifer's painting is distinguished by a notion of looking down on to the painting from the sky.

Short biography

Jennifer has an extensive background in the creative and cultural arts. Her paintings are created both from the perspective of looking from the sky down to the land; and also from the land looking up to the constellations in the sky. She has had a great deal of media contact and interactions with art coordinators over many years and easily translates important cultural stories and information. Jennifer Mitchell gives the *Kungkarangkalpa* story a contemporary perspective. Through her creative, personal interpretations we learn more and begin to understand the complexities, importance and guiding nature of the story. Jennifer creates detailed canvases of *Kungkarangkalpa*, her mother's story. Each painting is packed with details of different events related to this tjukurrpa, and mostly, those associated with the ancestral region of Kura Ala.

Biographical notes

Background

Jennifer was born on the 31st December 1955 at Kalatjutji near Wingellina in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands (SAM). Kalatjutji is an important place culturally as it is the site of the Emu dreaming place and the Wati Kutjarra dreaming story. However, Jennifer is the daughter of senior artist Tjayanka Woods, and currently lives in Papulankutja/Blackstone where her mother and close relatives also reside. They also have strong connections to the area of land near Kura Ala. Jennifer has been painting since 2008. She frequently paints the *Minyma Kutjarra*

Tjukurpa and *Kungkarangkalpa* Tjukurpa, which is the story about her mother's birthplace.

As well as being an active painter at the art centre, Jennifer spends a lot of time on the move between communities. Like many others in her art community, Jennifer defines herself through a strong identification with place.

Jennifer's creativity is diverse, also weaving tjanpi figures and bowls, and has recently taken part in a storytelling exhibition. The exhibition relates to a recent ordeal - being stranded in the bush without food and water for five days. The car that the group had been driving ran out of petrol. A natural raconteur, Jennifer is able to command audience attention with her powerful and usually humorous stories about the bush and various hunting and gathering expeditions.

The exhibition about the ordeal was titled *Kapi Ungkupayi* (*He gave us water*). The story starts in January 2013 when five senior women from Irrunytju and Papulankutja went 'out bush' looking for punu (wood for carving) and the car that they were travelling in ran out of petrol. They had no water or food and weren't found for five days. They survived by eating five perentie (goanna) and some water, which they dug out from a dry riverbed, using bush skills that they had developed years ago when travelling across the country with their families. 'There was only one white cloud in the sky. It followed us and showed us the way to the water. They were digging in that wet sand with a stick but nothing came so they called for us to bring a crowbar. Our lips were dry. And we were thirsty. We took turns digging. It was dark and the sun went down and we were still digging. We collected that water in every bottle we had. And the billy can. When we found water we made a big fire. But no one saw that smoke.' (Related by Roma, another member of the party). The other artists in the group were Roma Peterman, Ivy Laidlaw, Tjawina Roberts, Tjayanka Woods. The

exhibition was selected and held at SASA Gallery in 2015 and the curators were Mary Knights and Claire Wildish.

Medium, style and subject matter

Jennifer's personal paintings about the *Kungkarangkalpa* and the region around the ceremonial site of Kura Ala represent the artist's principal tjukurrpa. Her sweeping and detailed calligraphic work is usually painstakingly painted and dotted in a colourful palette of blues and browns. Each painting is marked with dynamic contours each including many different parts to the story. In Jennifer's approach to painting and storytelling, her personal preference is *not* to include Wati Nyiru or any 'scary' parts to the story. Often Jennifer's 'sisters' are celebrating successful evasive tactics taken against Wati Nyiru. She says that she likes to sing and smile as she paints. Using a myriad of delicate dots the paintings effuse visual power and complexity. They acquire visual elegance through the outpouring of variegated colour. Her compositions are ethereal and somewhat celestial. They are elaborate.

Jennifer creates detailed canvases of the *Kungkarangkalpa* story, which is her mother's story. Each painting is packed with details of the different events related to the story, but mostly those involved around Kura Ala. Jennifer has created a unique style of painted dots and dabs with a brush, which are then overlaid with a more delicate dotting from the sharp end of a stick. She paints the country, looking down from the sky, imagining the delicate dappling of the spinifex and grass overlaying the hardness of the rock surfaces beneath.

Jennifer has an extensive background in the creative and cultural arts. Her paintings are painted both from the perspective of looking from the sky down to the land; and also from the land looking up to the constellations in the sky. She has had much media contact and interactions with art coordinators and can very easily translate important cultural information. Jennifer maintains that 'we

learn about the world, passed down from generation to generation through family [...] strong tjukurrpa [...] teach the young girls' *Kungkarangkalpa* comprises a whole field of Yarnangu learning for the conduct and exploration of what is known as 'women's business'. Jennifer knows Ngaanyatjarra country well, the clay pans, the hills, the dry creek beds and soaks and the sand dunes and with this knowledge she is transported back to country as she paints it from above. Painting is a way of life for Jennifer and most days she crosses between the margins of painting country and visiting country. For Jennifer, the two become one. Her paintings nearly always depict important ancestral sites in her mother's country.

Although Jennifer suggests that *Kungkarangkalpa* is a sad story, she personally looks for the pleasurable parts of the sisters' journey, and will only paint her 'happy' versions of the story, preferring to leave out the parts that frighten her. Her paintings depict stellar and cosmic travels, or the sisters socialising and enjoying a meal around the campfire or rock hole at a site on which the sisters once travelled. Her paintings show that her own personal relationships with *Kungkarangkalpa* knowledge and art are related and brought about through story and both personal and collective memories. Jennifer's art embodies lived and ancestral memories and her methods and approach are distinct.

Art history

Painting is a way of life for Jennifer and she mixes the social with the cultural. She is a very popular individual and makes friends easily. She is communicative both with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and travels often as spokesperson for particular events.

Angiliya Mitchell, Jennifer Mitchell and Anawari Mitchell are holders/custodians of the *Kungkarangkalpa* story. All three paint very little other than their own detailed versions of the story of wati Nyiru and his persistent

pursuit of the seven sisters. The story is widespread across many parts of the country, and is a women's story, although men have their own version.

However, the ceremonial site known as Kura Ala, where these women grew up hunting and gathering at a time before 'ways of being' changed, is the focal point for their part of the extensive tjukurrpa track. As an invited member of a small Yarnangu touring party to the cave sites at Kura Ala in 2015, I encountered important ancestral places, weathered meeting sites, ancient motifs and themes; their importance decoded and explained to me by Jennifer.

The naming of *Kungkarangkalpa* as *The Seven Sisters Story* is a western construct. Jennifer suggests that the new terminology – The Seven Sisters - for the story (used to describe the historic tjukurrpa) developed in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands somewhere between 1986 and 1995 (personal conversation with the artist).

Before this the story was only known as *Kungkarangkalpa* story. Jennifer collectively shares her representations of *Kungkarangkalpa* as tacit knowledge through story, locality and painting practice.

Artist's quote

'They [outsiders] was saying Seven Sisters. Before they was saying Seven Sisters they [yarnangu] was saying it was Kungkarangkalpa. Kungkarangkalpa story.'
(Jennifer Mitchell, 2015)

References

Kapi ungkupayi (He gave us water), 22 September - 23 October 2015: SASA Gallery, curators: Mary Knights and Claire Wildish; artists: Roma Butler, Ivy Laidlaw, Jennifer Mitchell, Tjawina Roberts and Mrs Woods.

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed 29 December 2015

Jimmy Donegan [Ngaanyatjarra, 1939 –]



Image A23: Jimmy Donegan



Image A24: Papa Tjukurpa, Pukara, 2010

Acrylic on canvas. 180 x 200 cm. Collection: Telstra Collection at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

Jimmy Donegan's painting, *Papa Tjukurpa and Pukara*, tells two stories, the *Papa Tjukurpa (Dingo Dreaming)* and of *Pukara*, his grandfather's country in western Australia. Mr Donegan states:

Ngayu mamaku ngura Dulu (my father's country rockhole is called *Dulu*). At this place there are lots of Dingoes living there, digging up the water and hunting at *Pilantjara rockhole* in the country area of *Dulu*. This is *Papa Walka*, Dog design. *Pukara* is [my] grandfather's country. It is a story about a sacred men's site in Western Australia, south of Wingellina. It is a *Watersnake Dreaming* story. This is where the Watersnake fell down and his elbow makes an indent in the landscape. This is the creation story for the *Honey Grevillea*. Birds are really scared of this water at *Pukara*. It is like a 'big boss', this water (cited in, Gosford 2010).

Short biography

Jimmy Donegan, a senior Ngaanyatjarra law man, has been painting on canvas with acrylic paints since 2000. His paintings are representations of the *tjukurrpa*, usually his fathers *Papa Tjukurrpa (dingo dreaming)* and his grandfather's *Wati Wanampi Kutjarra (snake men dreaming)*, always omitting references to restricted ritual and ceremonial ancestral contexts. The variety and colour of lineal forms reflects a freedom of individuality found in his work, which is bold and intense. The paintings are authoritative and powerful with variegated colour applied with richly textured paint. The power of the painting is communicated through banded rows of paintbrush sized dotting that appears to meander across the canvas translating markings of the land, traditional stories and knowledge onto the canvas. Usually referred to as Mr. Donegan, he resides in both *Papulankutja* and *Kalka* communities to be near his sisters. Jimmy Donegan won the prestigious Telstra Art Prize in 2010.

Biographical notes

Background

Born around 1939 at the Yanpan water hole near Ngatuntjarra Bore, Mr. Donegan grew up in the bush with his sisters Molly Nampitjin Miller, Pantjiti Mary McLean and Elaine Warnatjura Lane (SAM). During his childhood he walked vast distances on foot with his family in search of food and water, developing an intimate knowledge of his homeland. He currently divides his time between Kalka and Papulankutja in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Jimmy Donegan speaks both Pitjantjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra languages. Taking up painting in 2000, he remains closely involved with the preservation of traditional culture, religion and ceremonial song. He is a highly regarded law and culture man, much of which influences and governs the themes and direction of his work. Mr. Donegan is remembered for his 2010 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Art Award first prize for his painting *Papa Tjukurpa, Pukara*.

Mr. Donegan is also a wonderful wood craftsman - his spears, spear throwers and boomerangs are prized and much sort-after (SAM). Jimmy Donegan is widely respected for his cultural knowledge and for holding traditional stories. He is a strong man for traditional law and culture, qualities that become apparent through his visual expressions on canvas. Mr. Donegan is an established member of Papulankutja Artists at Blackstone, Western Australia and also at Ninuku Arts at Kalka, South Australia. Often, a painting will remain half finished, hanging on the wall at Papulankutja, until he returns for his next extended visit to the community.

Medium, style and subject matter

Jimmy Donegan paints on canvas with acrylic paints. His style is consistent with that of the regional Western Desert traditional forms and also accordant

with a collection of paintings in the Warburton Arts Collection amassed during the 1990s when the artist was living in that region (Rothwell, 2010). Mr. Donegan's work stands out revealing the strength, value and integrity of his own arts practice. His paintings are rich and interwoven with Ngaanyatjarra connection to country and tjukurrpa, and defining his art through a strong identification with place.

Jimmy Donegan's technique draws together the force of traditional authority with the aesthetics of colour and meandering lines, composing a complete whole from colour lines made up from thousands of large and small dots in different hues, which blend together making up an important story (Rothwell, 2010). The dots are placed so close together that they form lines, adapted from traditional forms of sand and body painting. Almost all of Mr. Donegan's paintings relate to patrilineal stories of his fathers Papa Tjukurpa (Dingo Dreaming) and his grandfather's Wati Wanampi Kutjara (snake men dreaming). The dingo/dogs occupy a special place in the life of the desert people, mostly seen as an absolutely basic part of everyday domestic life. The paintings are rich in colour and thick with painterly texture.

The Papa tjukurrpa that Mr. Donegan relates to is a happy story. Wati, Minyma and Tjitji papa travel to a nearby large rock hole call Tulu, which is on the road toward Tjuntjuntjarra. Mr. Donegan says that this is Mr. Forbes country and that he travelled around as a young man with Mr. Forbes and drank at that waterhole.

The Pukara Rock Hole story is about the sandy country where the Desert Heath Myrtle grows in abundance. Pukara is renowned as a rainmaking site, and also a gainful site for tree honey (*tjurratja*), a desert delicacy that grows particularly well after winter and spring rainfall. The stories attached to Pukara are plentiful and link to great travellers from the tjukurrpa. It relates to two snakes who are

really men, who have travelled huge distances across the country from as far away as Perth, a father and son, and who finally come to Pukara where they stay. They are still there today (SAM).

Jimmy's paintings have a great deal of symbolism hidden in the meandering array of dots. One can learn about the lay of the land and the seasonal flora that is plentiful at a particular season. Pukara also relates to stories of spearings and injuries, and the eventual recoveries to health. It portrays the disputes between the snake/men and the people from differing language groups who want the resources and water that is to be found there at Pukara (Brooks, 2011). In Mr. Donegan's story two water snakes (really men) were trying to pass through the Piuyl Mountains, near Warburton. They threw a magic boomerang that broke the mountain in two. Then they travelled down the back way to Pukara (a large water soak). When they got there the son was sick and said that only animals could drink at that particular water hole. However, later the father allowed people to drink there too.

Art history

Jimmy Donegan's art is important because his paintings have redefined the acrylic medium in Australian contemporary art and more specifically art from the Ngaanyatjarra region. His artwork shows the resilience and dynamism of Western Desert art and is a testimony to rich systems of knowledge and the practices that lie behind it. A closer analysis of his artwork reveals deep connections to country and the knowledge held within traditional Ngaanyatjarra stories. Donegan's work depicts the history of the region, different ways of knowing and seeing, and important ancestral and ceremonial knowledge. This knowledge is informed by a set of multiple relations that he has had throughout his cross-cultural life and work.

Impacts on his practice include growing up in a nomadic hunting and gathering environment until his family settled at Papulankutja/Blackstone the 1950s. Before he began painting Donegan worked as a stockman and craftsman of traditional hunting tools. In 2006, he joined the Kalka community art center. Jimmy has family links throughout the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands and his wife was from a place near Kalka. Jimmy took his wife and children to live at Papulankutja/Blackstone because of his ties to that country. He is now widowed and has returned to Kalka Community to live with his children, and close to his sister Molly Nampitjin Miller. He divides his time between Kalka and Papulankutja Artists where he also paints and is close to his sister Elaine Warnatjura Lane.

Jimmy Donegan's work is widely represented in public and private collections internationally.

Collections

National Gallery of Victoria

Queensland Art Gallery

Gallery of Modern Art

Artbank Australia

Laverty Collection Sydney

W. & V. McGeoch Collection Melbourne

Marshall Collection Adelaide

Sammlung

Alison & Peter W. Klein Germany

Thomas Vroom Collection Netherlands.

Artist Quote

Mr. Donegan prefers to paint alone in a separate room at Papulankutja Artists art centre, and speaks very little English. In 2010, when Jimmy Donegan won the NATSIAA, he said he would use his prize money to buy a 'Toyota with lights.' (Owen 2013)

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Lance Peck [Manyjilyjarra, 1975 –]



Image A25: Lance Peck



Image A26: Kundarmarraka Rockhole (Lake Maitland)

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 102 x 60 cms. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

Contours of his grandfather's country in the Pilbara region of Western Australia inform Lance Peck's paintings. *Kundarmarraka Rockhole* is also known as Lake Maitland near Wiluna. This is the country that Lance paints. It is rich with creek inlets, clay pans and flood plains, and has an abundance of bush foods, which grow on the banks of the lake. Lance says that this country is rich with gold and

is his family's native title land. Meticulously placed fine dotting defines the contours of the countryside. Lance draws on his own visual memory of the country encapsulating the changing terrain with variegated and differentiated colour.

Short biography

Lance Peck's complex and elaborate artwork adorns the front cover of the National Gallery of Victoria's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*. Since developing his own unique painting style Lance Peck has had his work hung in many important collections. Lance was taught to paint at *Tjungu Palya*, in the Nyapari region of the Western Desert and has worked for various art centres including *Tjungu Palya*, *Irrunytju Arts* and *Papulankutja Artists*. His work is distinguished by an' intricate and sophisticated dotting technique, consisting of crystalline patterned areas that metaphorically evoke the landscapes of his ancestral tjukurrpa' (Imago Mundi, 2013). His narratives relate to Kata Kata Rockhole, Wati Kutjarra (Two Men tjukurrpa), Kunarka Waterhole (snake man ancestor), Lake Maitland, and Tjitji Wati Kutjarra Dreaming

Biographical notes

Background

Lance Peck was born at Carnarvon, Western Australia, in 1975. His father is Nanda from Northhampton and his mother Indjibandi from Roebourne (SAM). He grew up in Wiluna, Western Australia and came to the Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara Lands as a young man. He now lives in Kanpi with his wife and daughter. He spent his early years in Manyjilyjarra country, 1,500 kilometres north of Perth. As a young boy he lived on sheep and cattle stations where his mother worked as part of the domestic staff. He attended school at Coolgardie, Western Australia, and subsequently worked as a stock hand and tracker. He

later worked for the mining industry at Wiluna. Lance was taught to paint at *Tjungu Palya* in the Western Desert and has since worked for various art centres including *Tjungu Palya*, in the Nyapari region of the Western Desert, *Irrunytju Arts* and *Papulankutja Artists*.

Medium, style and subject matter

Lance Peck's work is distinguished by an intricate and sophisticated dotting technique, consisting of crystalline shaped and patterned areas that metaphorically evoke the various landscapes of his ancestral tjukurrpa. His narratives relate to Kata Kata Rockhole, Wati Kutjarra (Two Men tjukurrpa), Kunarka waterhole (snake man ancestor), Lake Maitland) and Tjitji Wati Kutjara tjukurrpa.

Lance's paintings move smoothly to the edge of the painting - almost always there is no set finish as they meander around the canvas. The eye is led to understand that there is more painting and more stories outside the frame of reference as the dots wander at random. Aesthetically, the volume and density of the dots are pleasant and delicate delineating the contours of his grandfather's country in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. There appears to be a continuing narrative to infinity and beyond. The paintings are intricate and delicate in earthy colours with a tinged red hue. 'The mosaic-like pattern and the graduations of colour help move the viewer's eyes across the canvas, echoing the narratives of displacement and exile that are embedded with this landscape' (Gilchrist 2015). There are no icons or symbols in the work. The bands of dotting stand out in contrast to the background and are a technique that Lance has developed, which gives the overall appearance of elegance and uniformity.

Drawing on his visual memory of country and familial and cultural ties Lance is suggestive of the changing terrain in his paintings. With tinier dotted lines he

divides the canvas into sections of variegated colour. This 'mosaic-like patterning' is characteristic of his work, imbued with depth and detail. Rich with creek inlets, clay pans, flood plains and abundant bush foods which grow on the banks of the lake, Lance says that this country is rich with gold and is his family's native title land. Like many of the Western Desert artists, Lance Peck defines himself through a strong identification with place.

Art history

Although the range and variety of tonal colour is less than that of other artists in this region, it is rather his precise style and fine technique that differentiates his work. The pointillistic background is made up of very fine, tight, agglomerated dots, interspersed with a restricted colour palette and limited to only three or four colours. Lance's preference being the browns, beiges and reds. He then meticulously deposits very delicate white or yellow points that meander across the canvas and appear to create paths or tracks that break up the changed terrains. Lance's paintings represent his family's country, near Wiluna, and Lake Maitland in fine detail. The rocky site of Kundarmarraka is exact and quite geographically precise which defers from the other artists' paintings at Papulankutja, most of whom are not boundary-specific. Lance explains that the earth is rich, and that the dark coloured areas in the paintings relate to streams and the textured earth that retains the rain.

Lance also paints the area of Kata Kata, the area where his nomadic relatives were found in 1962 (this is well-known story and the subject of a book and film). Lance Peck's artwork is held in important collections, and his major work *Kata Kata* was recently purchased for the National Gallery of Victoria collection.

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Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed
29 December 2015

Maime Marnmatja Butler [Ngaanyatjarra, 1956 –]



Image A27: Maime Marnmatja Butler



Image A28: Miltjiwakal rockhole, 2015

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 120 x 88 cms. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

This painting of Miltjiwakal Rockhole is a descriptive representation of an area known as Miltjiwakal rockhole, which is excellent for hunting. It is part of the country in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands that Maime knows well and depicts special elements of country that Maime and her family traversed in much earlier days. The theme of the story is based on an echidna woman looking around for her

husband the perentie goanna (large monitor lizard). The colours and patterning on the canvas reflect the individuality of Maime's style, which is vivid, textural, bright and layered.

Short biography

Maime is an artist who uses colour and iconography to illustrate her tjukurrpa and tracts of land that she has hunted and knows well. Her compositions are rhythmic and elaborate. Her artwork depicts the variety of colours found in the wildflowers and bush medicine plants in the region after rain. Her paintings are embedded in a profound connectivity to sacred geographical formations and ceremony. Maime is an excellent communicator and speaks three or four languages proficiently, including English. She is able to translate cultural narratives and often works collaboratively in cross-cultural initiatives, which has included writing children's books. As a Land and Culture employee she is also significantly knowledgeable about both flora and fauna in the region, and effective in communicating bush medicine applications.

Biographical notes

Background

Maime Butler was born in 1956 in the Barrumbi Walu area (SAM). Her mother was Kutunga Lyons and her father was Yultukala Norman Lyons. When Maime was around three years old her mother and baby sister fell ill. Maime's mother died and there was no record of what happened to her younger sister. Maime's adopted mother Edith Mitchell, and her extended family, then looked after Maime and they wandered around during times of extended drought and food shortage. This was during a period where the overlapping story of births, deaths, loves and friendships impacted and created strong memories of a difficult and harsh era, and Maime remembers it well. Growing up in the

Blackstone area, she spent much of her childhood in the Benson camp with Kantjupayi Benson. Later she went with the Benson family to Warburton. Maime is a Mitchell and the country north of Blackstone along the Walu road is Mitchell country with many stories and important cultural places. These stories, and memories of her childhood are reflected in her paintings.

Mamie married Mark Butler; from a family in the Tjukurrla region, and spends much of her time travelling between the two areas of Papulankutja and Tjukurrla. Maime has keen memories of her early life, and tells long narratives of her family's 'foot-walking' travels. There is a strong identification with place in her artwork. In later life she has begun to transpose these oral stories to canvas. Highly intelligent and articulate, Maime has a lot to offer in the cross-cultural arena.

Maime is a strong leader in the Papulankutja community and has been the Papulankutja Artists Chairperson on a number of occasions. She has also acted as Deputy Chair for Papulankutja Community Council. She has represented various groups as an English translator. As an active community member Maime also works with Utikulintja at NPY Women's Council Mental Health, and is currently on the Board of Directors for Desert. Additionally, she actively participates in Land and Culture activity. Due to her many other commitments and family, Maime paints occasionally at the art centre as her time is taken up with travel and cross-cultural communication.

Medium, style and subject matter

Maime paints large colourful tjukurrpa stories in acrylic on canvas which are usually based on her travels around the country near Miltjiwakal rockhole. Each painting depicts particular elements of the country she has traversed in earlier days. As a leading advocate for 'keeping culture strong' Maime is keen to extend customary Yarnangu traditions through painting and crafts. The

colours and patterning on her canvases reflect the individuality of Maime's style, often is defined through bright colours, geographical land formations and notions of movement. There is a sense of energy embedded in Maime's paintings, often reflecting dance movements and tracks. The vibrancy of the artwork evokes the actions of the dance.

Maime is an artist who uses colour and iconography to illustrate her tjukurrpa stories and tracts of land that she has hunted and knows well. Her compositions are rhythmic and elaborate, and denote many of the pastel colours found in the wildflowers in the region after rain. As a consequence, pinks and mauves feature quite heavily in many of her paintings. Vivid bright colour is a common element running through Maime's artwork. Some areas are dense with dots of colour, while others have the dots sparsely covering the canvas. The paintings are embedded in a profound connectivity to sacred geography and ceremony, and Maime is also a keen advocate of teaching the younger members of the community the 'old ways' and wants to 'sustain Ngaanyatjarra cultural memory'.

Art history

Maime paints important tjukurrpa stories from her childhood. Her command of English is excellent and she is highly regarded by Yarnangu and non-Yarnangu as being able to articulate clearly what she and others are trying to say in their artwork. Maime is outspoken and not afraid to voice her opinions on a wide range of subjects. She is often used to translate concepts from Ngaanyatjarra to English.

From an art and aesthetic perspective, Maime has used her excellent, well-honed bush and craft skills, to bring traditional bush processes and crafts to the appeal of wide audiences. She draws on wood carving skills to produce wiras and piti bowls for the art and craft market. She fills her painted compositions

with familiar geographical and ancestral locations, where the strength of her work lies in its reference to landforms and surfaces. Maime's paintings are evolving and she is always seeking new ways to advance her aesthetic. Layers of textured colour are applied orientating the rocks, creeks, flora and rockholes of the region.

As a late starter to painting, and often called upon to articulate community and cross-cultural concerns, Maime is unable to spend as much time as she would like on her painting career. She has travelled extensively and participates in many cultural performances and roles, always underpinned by strong educational statements about Ngaanyatjarra life and a love of country.

Artist's quote

'We want to paint-up - dress our way. The way that is appropriate in our culture.' (In conversation re: how to dress for a dance performance, 2016).

Reference

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed
29 December 2015

Narelle Kanpatja Holland [Ngaanyatjarra, 1953 –]



Image A29: Narelle Kampatja Holland

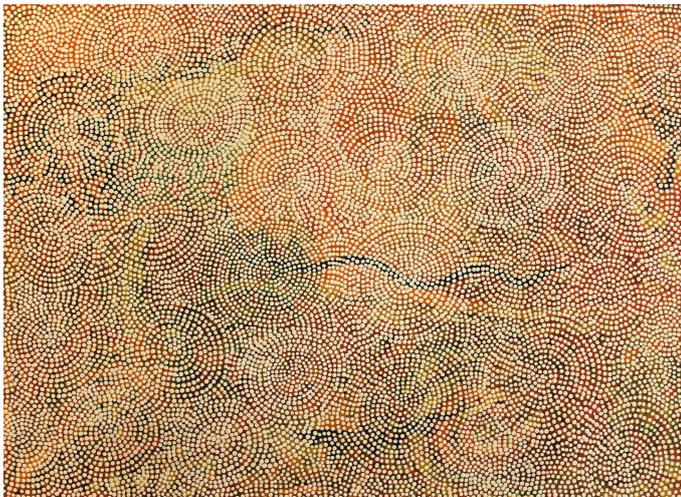


Image A30: Tjitji Kutjarra, 2010

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 119 x 88 cm. Courtesy: Papulankutja Artists

This painting is titled *Tjitji Kutjarra* and is Narelle's depiction of the country around Mantamaru (Jameson). It represents part of the mountain range, which is a prominent landmark just outside Mantamaru. The painting additionally embodies the tjukurpa story about two boys who encountered a snake. The boys caught it and then cooked it and ate it. After eating the snake the boys

could not walk any more and turned into rocks, which are also prominent Mantamaru landmarks. These rocks are called Tjitji Kutjarra. Narelle's cartographic mapping is occurs over and under varied layers of the painting, depending on whether or not particular knowledge should be disseminated by outsiders, or those without familial authorisation.

Short biography

Narelle has had a long and involved history in arts practice in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. As a senior artist Narelle is one of the pioneering members of the *Papulankutja Artists* group and is one of the artists responsible for instigating the art centre at Papulankutja. Her artwork reflects an exhaustive knowledge of traditional tjukurrpa stories, which she integrates with contemporary mediums and skills. Narelle is also an experienced punu carver who is often commissioned to make large wiras or piti bowls. Narelle's painting style is distinguished by circular phases of light coloured dotting painted across the entirety of the canvas so that restricted details are not revealed to those without authority or familial connections. Additionally, Narelle crafts exceptional spinifex woven baskets and sculptures with *Tjanpi Desert Weavers*.

Biographical notes

Background

Narelle Holland is *minyma Yarnangu*, a senior Aboriginal woman from the Central Western Desert area of Australia. Born in the desert between Tjulun and Mungakatju Rock-holes near Wanarn, she grew up with a combination of Western and traditional education. For much of her life she has worked tirelessly in various women's centres and art centres and is a committed spokesperson and advocate for her community's contemporary art forms.

Narelle grew up in the bush before attending the Warburton Mission Primary School. She attended high school, first at Norseman Mission and later at Esperance Mission School (SAM). After her school education Narelle moved around the Ngaanyatjarra Lands working as both a domestic and childcare worker, eventually working at the Women's Centre at Papulankutja where she was responsible for catering and cooking. *Papulankutja Artists* was initiated at the Woman's Centre where Narelle was working. She then gained employment as an arts worker helping with the general duties which also involved assisting in the running of the art centre. She started painting in 1993 when she was employed as the art worker at the Women's Centre.

Narelle now lives in Mantamaru with her husband Robert and after starting work at the art centre there, as part of the Papulankutja Art Centre Outreach program, became the community manager at the Mantamaru Art Centre. She acquires materials and has personal contact with *Papulankutja Artists*, usually once each week. Narelle's workplace efficiency has resulted in this outreach women's/art centre working effectively and productively, and it now has a number of younger artists learning the tjukurra stories and painting them. Narelle visits Papulankutja Artists often, travelling between the two art centres with supplies and artwork. She also holds a drivers license and often assists with driving duties in and around the art centre including associated activities such as bush trips and hunting excursions.

Medium, style and subject matter

Narelle has a distinctive style, which contains traditional Ngaanyatjarra stories about geographical and ceremonial country and important tjukurra. Her paintings start out as complex layered stories, and then, through an established procedure, completely dots over the story and design to hide the ceremonial and restricted information that it contains. Narelle's colour palette is generally

muted, and she mixes up a thick, creamy coloured and textured paint. The paintings are covered in a series of neat white or cream dots, predominantly in circle formation. Moreover, Narelle's story is detailed and carefully depicted, explicit and detailed in content. However, after the story is complete, sensitive information is painted over - overlaid with textured, consistent sized dots, often in concentric circles. By developing this personalised style Narelle has been able to substantiate her visual language, enabling her own personal expression of intimate connections to both tjukurrpa and country, without compromising restricted and sensitive cultural information.

Narelle often paints the country where the emu was hunted. She demonstrates through her art, how the men go to the rock-hole to spear the emu, by being very still, and using this stillness as their weapon. The first layer of paint on the canvas marks the country and its landmarks. The second layer, a delicate covering of lush cream and white dotting, adds the vegetative covering, which depicts the spinifex and disguises the country. The men have been painted with fresh brush strokes on the canvas, contained in the first layer, and the second laying of spinifex and dotting cloaks the men, keeping them hidden from the viewer and the emu they hunt. The result is a painting embodied with cultural significance and contemporary appeal. I have had the privilege of sitting with Narelle as she paints, watching the complex story unfold, then camouflaged.

Art history

Narelle has had a long and involved history in transcultural arts practices. She has become accomplished in batik dying, painting and printmaking, as well as the traditional crafts, which include punu carving and pokerwork, and fibre (tjanpi) weaving. More recently, she has re-started papermaking (a craft that she learned many years ago at the Women's Centre). Narelle spends most of her day, each day, at the art centre. After having many lengthy conversations with

Narelle, about her art, her life and creative work, I can confirm that she has an embodied passion for art and associated practices. This, combined with her extensive customary Yarnangu lived experience, extends her latitude for individual expression. The resulting paintings are aesthetically beautiful and embody intimate cultural and personal knowledge. The following themes are central to her arts practice:

The Nagaturn Rockhole

This is an area to the north west of Papulankutja, off the Walu Road. It is a sacred place for men, where ceremonial rituals are practiced. Narelle is very familiar with this region as she lived there with her husband, hunting and foraging for a period of time.

Kiwilin

These paintings depict an important tjukurpa story. The story centres on a place called Kiwilin. At Kiwilin there is an old woman, who is also a bird, called Wiilu. Wiilu and is related to the turkey. The story is central to the region just north of Nagaturn and is an important cultural story.

Tjitji Kutjarra

These paintings depict the country around Mantamaru. They usually incorporate the mountain ranges, which are prominent landmarks outside the community of Mantamaru. The story is about two boys who spotted a snake. They caught it and then cooked and ate it. After eating the snake the boys could not walk any more and turned into rocks, which are also prominent landmarks. These rocks are called Tjitji Kutjarra.

Bush Tucker

Bush tucker paintings are representative of the country around Mantamaru. Most often they portray the mountain ranges, which are prominent landmarks

outside Mantamaru, along with the many natural bush foods that have been collected and foraged by people in the area for many years.

Artist's quote

'Yes, I like painting, sewing, dyeing. Even like doing the spinifex paper. Easy doing here by myself. Yuwa. I'm happy. Yuwa. Yes, I like running the art centre. Yuwa. I open every day.' (personal conversation June 2015).

Reference

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed
29 December 2015

Nora Nyutjanka Davidson, [Ngaanyatjarra, 1955 –]



Image A31: Nora Nyutjanka Davidson



Image A32: Multju, 2015

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 30 x 30 cms. Private Collection: Courtesy of Karen Connelly, Victoria

This painting is titled *Multju*, which is also the place where Nora was born. It is mulga country and a favourite hunting place to find honey ants. Honey ants are a Yarnangu edible delicacy and can be found by digging holes in the ground. Nora's painting depicts the story of a mother with her two children who have had great success foraging for honey ants. As a consequence, they enjoy the sweet reward for their efforts. Nora's painting is distinguished by a

kaleidoscope of bright coloured shapes and tracks, creating a dotted painted canvas composed of tiny particles of colour and a myriad of storied activity.

Short biography

Nora was born near the community of Mantamaru (Jameson) where her family holds the story for Illurpa (SAM). Nora is known for paintings of her mother's country and the tjukurrpa story of *Multju*, which is an important place for collecting honey ants. Nora's colourful paintings are grid-like and represent the small underground tunnels made by the unique ants, which carry a pea-sized sac on their bodies that are filled with sweet and sticky honey, and enjoyable to eat. As hunting for these ants is pleasurable, the paintings are always colourful, and she says, 'happy stories'. Nora paints regularly at the art centre and regards the social and cultural connections relating to arts practice as highly important. She has a long history of involvement with the NPY Women's Council and the preservation of cultural traditions in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

Biographical notes

Background

Nora was born near the community of Mantamaru where her family holds the story for Illurpa. She recently moved to Blackstone/Papulankutja with her family and enjoys the traditional life offered at Papulankutja. Nora is a regular painter at the *Papulankutja Artists* art centre.

Nora enjoys painting her stories and regards them as cultural knowledge and representations of strong cultural values. She says they play a role in keeping her culture strong. Nora is still active with the women's council and participates in all the traditional bush ceremonies and trips. She often acts as Women's Council representative for the region. During a recent bush trip to Nora's traditional homelands, a place not recognized on any map, Nora was

instrumental and educative in advising the travelling group (many of whom were not connected to her own familial ties) about particular tjukurrpa knowledge in the white rock Nagaturn area. By exploring the geographical and ancestral details of this place, and the traditional practices connected with it, Nora furthered our understandings of the storied environment. She told me that these activities informed her cultural and art making practices. Nora's personal and collective connections and memories have become interwoven with her transcultural practice. Her paintings embody senses of seeing, touching and knowing country. Nora's collectively memorised ancestral world is the driving force behind her imperative to paint in order to 'keep culture strong'.

Medium, style and subject matter

Nora also paints *Pulypal Cave*, which depicts a group of women singing inside a cave next to the Pulypal rock hole. To one side, are a group of men who are drinking from the same water source. The story is about these men who are also trying to obstruct the women from accessing the water.

Notwithstanding, the stories that Nora paints on canvas are mostly related to the place at Ilurrpa where Kuniya stayed. Kuniya is a giant snake that travelled through the desert. At Ilurrpa, Nora says that both male and female snakes have seven eggs. A matted black fibre found at the Ilurrpa bore is said to be the black matted hair left after Kuniya had swallowed many people and was then sick. Part of the story relates to the snake being sick with black hair, which then flowed down the hillside to Ilurrpa.

Art history

As an emerging artist, Nora has not established a considerable art historical background. She paints on canvas and her works are vibrant and multi-

coloured. The Multju tjukurrpa that is her mother's country and the area where Nora was born, is a prominent theme. Nora says that it is a happy story about two children digging for the sweet tasting honey ants.

Nora's paintings have developed a particular iconographic and grid-like style. The paintings are contemporary renderings of her tjukurrpa that are innovative and lush with colourful, vibrant dotting. She has connected many of her own memories and experiences of country to the stories she was told as a young girl, and depicts these aesthetically in her distinctive energetic style. The resultant paintings are embodied with a depth of cultural knowledge that was vital to her ancestors and their way of life. Nora says she represents her culture in a subtle and respectful way. She is proud of her work and has gained an understanding of the painting medium, exercising it powerfully to convey her bush past. Nora paints from a position of knowing the country intimately. The colours are rich, and the artwork textural. Nora purposefully explores cultural themes in her work to allow others a glimpse of her heritage and tjukurrpa knowledge, which she willingly shares with others.

Nora is a strong law woman with a detailed knowledge of the region and traditional and customary ways. She is confident and forthright about her sense of obligation to represent the country and culture she is responsible for.

Artist's quote

'Yes I like to paint [...] the country where I been born. Multju.'

Reference

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desart Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed
29 December 2015

Pamela Gulgulya Hogan [Pitjantjatjarra, 1981 –]



Image A33: Pamela Gulgulya Hogan



Image A34: I Love My Family, 2015

'Highly Commended' Photograph on rag paper. 280 x 420 mm. Courtesy: Pamela Hogan

Pamela entered this photograph in the Desert photography competition. She takes great pleasure in photography and is keen to pursue it further. Pamela won an award with this photograph and enjoyed dabbling with the filters and lenses on the camera to gain different effects. She used the computer to alter

colours and re-mix the image. 'A lot of thinking went into the picture,' she said. The work was staged and designed by Pamela and she said that she enjoyed taking the children out to a place that she thought would be an ideal backdrop for the photograph. It is also country that she loves and knows well. 'I knew exactly what image I wanted to capture'.

Short biography

Pamela has always been interested in painting and the arts. She is an arts employee at Papulankutja artists and is knowledgeable in most aspects of art centre production and administration. Her sound technological experience deems her a key asset in the day to day running of the arts practice. Pamela is a keen photographer and is eager to pursue it further. She is an emerging artist who also enjoys painting on canvas - bright and colourful renderings of the Kungkarangkalpa story. Pamela's interest and experience in the arts has led to many opportunities to travel to large cities and interstate, which she enjoys. Pamela says that likes to experience culturally different places.

Biographical notes

Background

Pamela was born at Kalgoorlie on the 2nd February 1981. As a child, Pamela moved with the family around the Central Desert region, settling for periods of time in Kalgoorlie, Kunana, Yakuduna, Tjuntjunjarra, Kalka and Papulankutja. At one stage she said that the family was picked up by the mission patrols and taken to the mission. When she was fourteen years old, at school, Pamela entered a competition for a painting. It was about her own personal story. She thinks that this is when her interest in the arts began.

Pamela has experienced many forms of employment including working in a playgroup with children, working in a shop, and then in 2009 starting her

employment at the Papulankutja Artists art centre. To date, she is still working at the art centre as a full time arts worker. This employment requires that she take photos of all the artwork completed at the art centre, and she has become adept at cataloguing and making an inventory of stock on hand. Pamela also updates the centre's social media page, promoting the paintings and artists for exhibitions. Her sound technological experience deems her a key asset in the day to day running of the arts practice.

Pamela has six children with husband Daryl. Five of the children are still living in the family home. At thirty-five years of age she is also a grandmother. Daryl is very shy and speaks no English so Pamela communicates necessary information between family, workplace and socially. Pamela's financial contribution to the family means her children are fed well and usually dressed in the inexpensive, yet fashionable new clothes available at the store.

Although presently employed full time at Papulankutja Artists, whenever possible, she will head back to her family in Tjuntjunjarra. Her mother lived there with most of Pamela's extended family. Pamela has lived in Papulankutja for over ten years, but frequently visits her grandfather's and mother's country at Tjuntjunjarra, often staying for extended family visits. She says that she would like to live there one day.

Medium, style and subject matter

Pamela's passion is photography and filmmaking. She is a member of the Desert Emerging Artists Program. In 2015 Pamela won a prize in the Desert photography competition with a photograph titled *I Love My Family*. She mentioned at the time that she enjoyed dabbling with the filters and lenses on the camera to gain different effects. Pamela explained how she used the computer to alter colours and re-mix the photograph. 'A lot of thinking went into the picture,' she said. The work was staged and designed by Pamela and

she told me that it was an enjoyable experience taking the children out to a place that she thought would be an ideal backdrop for the photograph. 'I knew exactly what image I wanted to capture,' she said. Pamela's achievement of creating a prize-winning photograph empowers her. Through self-confidence gained in the processes of individual and collective art production she composes photographic images that are ecological and aesthetic. Her focus is defined through a strong identification with family, culture and place. Pamela explores how concepts of place and traditional practice characterise her art. The intergenerational continuance of an oral and performative knowledge system informs her contemporary art making practices, now in creative and imaginative ways.

Art history

When Pamela became involved with the art centre she enrolled in various courses at Alice Springs, and a camera course with Tim Acker through Desart. As a member of the emerging artists program she has also attended workshops that have developed a further interest in complimentary arts practices. Much has evolved since Pamela started her painting career at Tjuntjunjarra with acrylic paint on canvas, and the material and educative resources have enriched her arts practices.

Pamela likes to take photos of children in the natural landscape and carries her camera around with her often. Pamela says that sometimes she 'can see a good photo when she is out'. As she often has the camera with her she is able to capture the unique and significant moments, as in the case with the Desart award-winning photograph - her children happily tumbling down the hill. 'I like to focus on the movement in the photo'. As a keen photographer Pamela will focus on this course of arts practice in the future.

Pamela also paints at the art centre and her paintings are defined by bright and colourful renderings of the Kungkarangkalpa (Seven Sisters) story.

Notwithstanding, and being younger than many of the senior artists, Pamela's paintings have developed a style that is heavily influenced by contemporary transcultural life. As Pamela negotiates the complexities of visual culture across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, commercial art themes influence her oeuvre. As a result, sometimes there is a fusion of styles in her artwork that may include the addition of an art nouveau style of swirling patterns and decorative butterflies. Sometimes I watch Pamela sitting on the floor painting with the other artists and admire the way she is able to straddle the two worlds through which she operates. She understands transcultural complicatedness, seemingly to have found a balance between what was then and what is now. Pamela is an asset to the contemporary arts practice sharing cultural wisdom and knowledge and teaching others how to navigate Aboriginal and Western worlds.

Pamela says she is keen to focus on creating paintings that are based on the Kungkarangkalpa story. The ideas for this story and painting are developed from memories and stories initiated from childhood in the regions where her family still resides - at Tjuntjuntjarra and Inkulka. Western cultural models and contemporary art culture are also influencing Pamela's aesthetic. As an emerging artist she is experimenting with finding the medium and style that represents her stories best.

Artist's quote

'I knew exactly what image I wanted to capture [...] I have learned how to focus and moving it. Even the afternoon shots – tree, colours, afternoon and the sun. Sometimes you just take a photo of the scenery – you have to.'

Tjayanka Woods [Pitjantjatjara, c1925 – 2015]



Image A35: Tjayanka Woods



Image A36: Kungkarangkalpa (The Seven Sisters), 2009

Synthetic polymer on canvas. 101 x 152 cms. Private collection: courtesy of the owner

This painting is titled *Kungkarangkalpa* (The Seven Sisters) and is deeply connected to ancestral power and landscape. The representation is symbolic and spiritual, and locates the sacred tjukurrpa site of Kura Ala. Kura Ala is an important ceremonial place for the *Kungkarangkalpa* story. It is predominantly a women's story and the theme for many of the artist's paintings. Whilst each

Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa painting may vary, the fundamental storyline relates to seven sisters being chased on land and across the sky by a lecherous and 'tricky' man. His undesirable and harmful actions, and how the sisters respond, are central to moral values, humour and grief. The story imparts knowledge, especially to girls. Yarnangu artists create their own elaborate versions of the epic and the evil wati Nyiru and his persistent pursuit of the seven sisters.

Kungkarangkalpa tjukurrpa is widespread across many parts of the country, and is a women's story.

Short biography

Tjayanka Woods's oeuvre includes *Minyma Kutjara Tjukurrpa* and *Kungkarangkalpa Tjukurrpa* themes. The multi-coloured paintings are structured like mud-maps and sand drawings, usually tracing the journeys of the sisters, around the perimeter of the canvas. They show rock holes and land formations, which were created by the sisters as they travelled through the country.

Tjayanka also paints the stories of the desert tracks she walked as a young girl when she was still living a nomadic lifestyle. Tjayanka's images are vibrant, painterly, lavish and colourful. Confident gestural lines, and concentric circles made with a single brushstroke or solid, dotted sequences link the rock holes and landforms like pieces of string and denote various journeys and activities of beings in the story.

Biographical notes

Background

Tjayanka Woods was born around 1925 close to Kalaya Piti (Emu Water) near Mimili and Wataru, South Australia (SAM). Tjayanka's actual age is hard to determine, but her daughter Jennifer, and other references, estimate her official birth date at around 1925 although it would have been recorded long after her

birth. When Tjayanka was a baby another Aboriginal group chased her mother and father and they fled to escape conflict. With her family, she grew up living a semi-nomadic lifestyle in the bush, frequently camping at Kalaya Piti where they would hunt ngintaka (goanna), tinka (lizards), kalaya (emu) and rabbit. They would also gather bush foods such as kumpurarpa (desert raisin), ili (figs) and maku (wood grubs).(SAM) Walking long distances in the desert, where traditional knowledge is vital, she acquired an intimate understanding of the environment and the tjukurrpa connected with it. As a child Tjayanka learnt to carve utilitarian objects such as wana (digging sticks), piti (bowls), wira (digging scoop) and kanilpa (basin for collecting seeds); sculpt figurative objects and decorate punu (wood) with burn-marks; spin hair string on a fragile hand spun spindle and weave manguri (head rings) and ceremonial belts from hair and emu feathers. She would also make medicines and resins from local flora including the aromatic herb irrmangkairrmangka and grass-tree.

Tjayanka spent most of her life travelling across Ngaanyatjarra country on foot, by donkey or camel, and old trucks. As a result, she was a highly knowledgeable bush woman who retained a vast library of traditional knowledge of the land and culture. Originally Tjayanka painted at Irrunytju Arts (Wingellina), which was established in 2001. She moved to Papulankutja around 2007.

Tjayanka did not start painting until quite late in life, around the year 2000, then rapidly became a familiar figure around the art centre with her dogs, and always carried her customary long stick. In recent years, when she wasn't painting, I often saw her sitting happily and quietly under a tree, seemingly deep in reverie. Tjayanka passed away at Papulankutja in 2015.

Medium, style and subject matter

Tjayanka used brushes to paint the paths the sisters travelled in the desert and a punu stick to paint lines of vibrantly coloured dots detailing her country and travels. Her detailed conceptual maps of the expansive tracts of land contain the stories and special features of the country traversed in much earlier days and held strong in the collective memories of Papulankutja artists. Each of her paintings feature circular shapes, which represent sacred sites or the sisters themselves. Drawing on cultural tradition, Tjayanka's paintings are bold and powerful abstractions and representations of country and communicate how the sisters travelled across the desert, whilst being pursued by wati Nyiru, a lustful old man who is trying to procure the oldest sister for his wife. The sisters don't want anything to do with this lecherous man and become frightened by his sinister and relentless tracking and stalking. Wati Nyiru is a creation being, and accordingly, has ancestral magical powers. He has the ability to transform himself into plants and animals in order to deceive the women and get close enough to steal Kampukurtja (the eldest sister) from them. Tjayanka paints this provocative story, each painting detailing slightly different versions of events. Indigenous cosmology, cultural and familial influences, and the contemporary art market have influenced her oeuvre. Her dynamic paintings embody a unique and innovative style. They comprise large strands of vibrant colours that encapsulate the complexities of intersecting cultural tradition and contemporary Western Desert art. The physicality of the thick paint and the intensity of long sinuous strands of primary colour, sets Tjayanka's work apart. As a result, the uninhibited broad, brush strokes and vibrant colourful acrylic paints, coated thickly onto the canvas, present audiences with a style of art not seen before in the Aboriginal art of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

Tjayanka would often spend several full days sitting cross-legged on a straw mat (in front of an electric bar heater in winter) painting continuously until the work was completed (personal conversation with art manager Jane Avery). Additionally, Tjayanka often sang customary songs as she worked. There is a 'sameness' in the melodic pattern and I understand that this is within the framework of ceremonial music. Sounding like a hymn, and in a replicated style, I found the sound to be rhythmic and gentle, like a sweet bush chant.

Tjayanka mostly refers to the *Minyma Kutjara* tjukurrpa and the *Kungkarangkalpa* (Seven Sisters) tjukurrpa in her paintings. They are structured like mud-maps, and trace the journeys of the sisters around the perimeter of the canvas. Confident gestural lines joined to concentric circles represent the rock holes, clay pans and other land formations which were created by the sisters as they travelled through their storied environment. Tjayanka also paints the stories of the desert tracks she walked as a young girl, when she was still living a nomadic lifestyle.

Art history

Tjayanka originally painted at Irrunytju Arts, which was established in 2001 by Anangu women as a place to paint. It facilitated cultural development and intergenerational learning, and was also an economic initiative. Most of the senior artists living and working at Irrunytju Arts belonged to the Pitjantjatjara language group. Straddling traditional and contemporary practices, many continued to practice cultural law and medicine, hunt, and collect a range of bush foods. At Papulankutja she spends much of her time with her daughter Jennifer Mitchell and friend Anmanari and their array of mixed breed dogs.

The *Kungkarangkalpa* story is the predominant theme concerning Tjayanka's oeuvre. The story of *Kungkarangkalpa*, the Seven Sisters, is the story of seven sisters who were chased across the desert by a lusty man called Nyiru, and who,

after shaping and transforming the land as they travelled, eventually rose up into the sky to form the Pleiades, a cluster of stars in the night sky. The story is predominantly a women's story about various actions and events, and how the sisters respond. The story is central to moral values, humour and grief, and imparts knowledge, especially to girls. Tjayanka painted the stories of these desert tracks and was always keen to expose the physical manifestation of her tjukurrpa to wider audiences. She loved painting and enjoyed the extensive travel to exhibitions around the country.

Recently, Tjayanka took part in a screen-printing workshop. The series of screen-prints drew on traditional sand-drawing practices where artists have stated that all of their artworks start with the simple lines developed from customary sand-drawing practices. As well as becoming a successful painter Tjayanka is known for her weaving and works with Tjanpi Desert Weavers. Her basket weaving techniques are strong and colourful and she favours making the traditional long coolamon or piti shape in her fibre forms.

Artist's quote

Incorporated into the *Minyma Kutjara* paintings is the flight of the eagle, her grandfather, who flies above the path of the sisters. 'This is my father's country close up to Irrunytju. The two sisters were travelling through this country. My grandfather, he is this eagle in my painting. You can see where he flew.'

(Tjayanka's quote on SAM file at Papulankutja Artists).

References

Stories Art Money (SAM) Database, Desert Inc., Papulankutja Artists, viewed 29 December 2015

