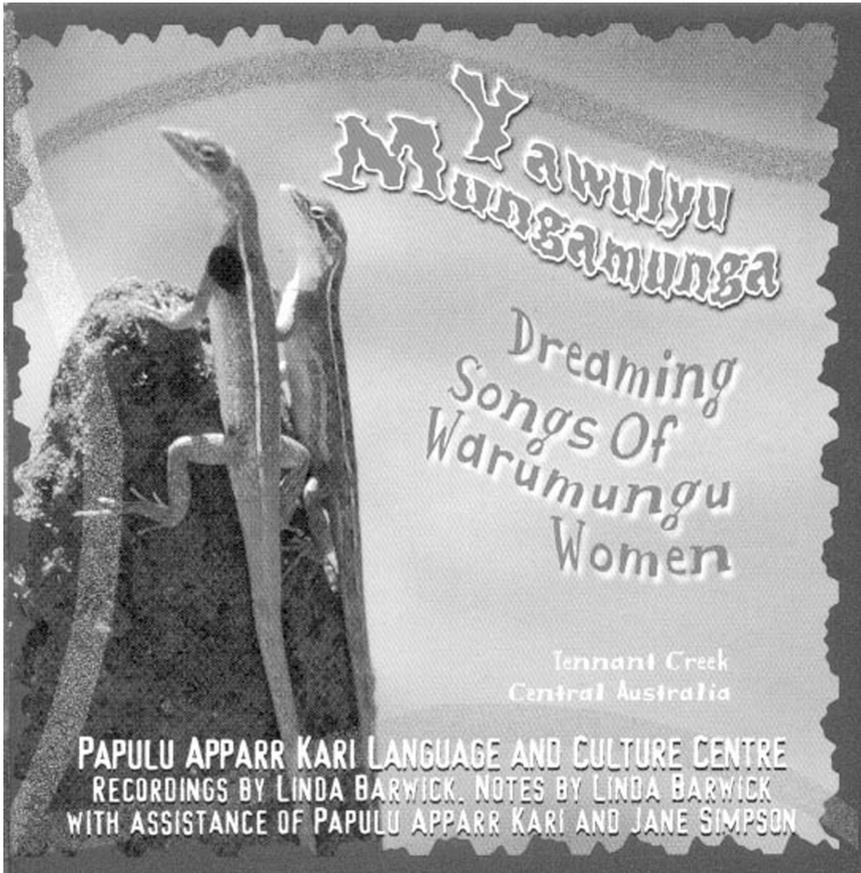


# Tracking Properness: Repackaging Culture in a Remote Australian Town

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On March 25, 2002, Claire Martin, the Chief Minister for the Northern Territory of Australia, met with Warumungu women and men from Tennant Creek to discuss the planning for their new cultural center.<sup>1</sup> When Martin was asked to join the elders and address those gathered, Kathleen Nappanangka, a senior Warumungu woman, approached her with a gift.<sup>2</sup> As Nappanangka sat back down in her seat, Martin unwrapped it to find a cellophane-sealed copy of *Yawulyu Mungamunga Women's Dreaming Songs*, a compact disc released internationally by a group of Warumungu women (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> With the compact disc in hand, Martin turned to show it to the audience of mostly Aboriginal people. I watched this scene unfold from behind a camera, videotaping the event for a local Aboriginal organization. Later, as I viewed it with one of the Warumungu women present that day, we discussed the connection between the production of a compact disc, the community's long struggle for land rights, which now enabled them to build a cultural center, and Warumungu women's continued use of ritual song and dance to assert their power and presence in the town and to the nation.

This article examines the production and circulation of the Warumungu women's compact disc as a cultural object that repackages tradition and repositions indigeneity. From its initial release in 2000, the compact disc prompted debate about cultural openness. It became a source for performative innovation, and was held up as an exemplary model of what Judy Nakkamarra, one of my Warumungu collaborators, defined as "culture work"—those daily activities that ensure the reproduction of Warumungu tradition (Christen 2004). As Warumungu women actively repackage tradition, I explore how local concerns for the continuation of "proper" tradition have rearticulated ritual practices, remapped commercial spaces, extended ancestral tracks, and created the possibility for new alliances.



**Figure 1**  
 Compact disc cover: Yawulyu Mungamunga Women's Dreaming Songs.

### Determining Properness

In 1996, a group of Warumungu women from Tennant Creek began working with Linda Barwick, an ethnomusicologist from the University of Sydney. Barwick showed the women compact discs that she had recorded with other Aboriginal people and they were hooked. After many years of performing *mungamunga* (female ancestors) songs for one another, for other Aboriginal women, and for national audiences in Sydney and Melbourne, they were keen to extend their lyrical tracks.<sup>4</sup> Over the next four years, Barwick returned to Tennant Creek to record and produce a compact disc with a small group of women. The recorded songs define Warumungu women's ancestral relations, their ongoing community status, and their continued relation to specific sets of "country."<sup>5</sup> The lyrics suggest, and sometimes overtly define, human-ancestor-country relationships. Ancestral tracks—as markers in the landscape invisible to those without the proper sets of

knowledge—are linked to song lyrics and given material form in the performance of rituals. Lyrical and landed tracks, then, converge in the women's production and promotion of the compact disc.

For Warumungu listeners, the songs included on the compact disc evoke a set of relations to country and kin and a storied Warumungu landscape where places and ancestors are intimately connected. For example, "Jipanjipan talyaralya" one of the final songs on the compact disc, "names the place Jipanjipan east of the Devil's Marbles, describing the Mungamunga going along poking a stick in the ground looking for water." In "Kurrayi Kurrayi larrana," the lyrics tell of Kurrayi, "an old man of the Jappangarti skin," and Kurraya, "the place where the Mungamunga visit and camp looking for tucker" (Barwick 2000). How, then, would an international audience, who almost certainly would not speak Warumungu or be familiar with these cultural references, make sense of these lyrical connections to land?

When I asked the "boss" of the songs, Kathleen Nappanangka, about the international audience for Mungamunga songs, she mused about the possibilities: "Mungamunga might go then, in America, over the sea. We might sendim that way."<sup>6</sup> But for Nappanangka and the other women, expanding their contacts globally was only one concern. The "young girls" at home were another. Edith Nakkamarra explained the urgency this way: "We gotta keepim up. Them young girls might be thing. They might be shame. We gotta showim, this their *yawu-lyu* [women's rituals], not someone else."<sup>7</sup> Nappanangka and Nakkamarra's concerns index a crucial aspect of Warumungu productions—they are not univocal. Younger generations, audiences in the United States, international tourists, and a non-Aboriginal Australian public are all part of their field of vision. The compact disc is an object that seems to bridge many divides.

Eileen Nappanangka, one of the prominent singers in the community as well as on the compact disc, classifies the process of recording Mungamunga songs, along with the songs themselves, as "properly Warumungu." Nappanangka often uses this English phrase when instructing me about Warumungu "law."<sup>8</sup> As an elder in the community, a ritual boss, and a knowledgeable countrywoman, Nappanangka is adept at teaching. When I first met her she sat with her sister as they described the way old people used to dance: naked, painted, and women only. She looked at me and said forcefully that this was "properly Warumungu." I wrote it down in my notebook that way, linking properness with tradition, the past, and the "hard" (ritually correct) actions of old people. But over the years Nappanangka also used this phrase to define the actions of her grandchildren when they spoke Warumungu—if only partially—and when they played footy (Australian football)—win or lose. She often called my son "proper one" when he mimicked her Warumungu or helped to collect firewood. And when I previewed a prototype for the digital video disc I was producing, using the stories she and her relatives shared with me, she beamed, announcing this to be "really proper one."

Nappanangka's continued and purposeful use of the English term *proper* to define a range of Warumungu products and productions challenged me to think about properness as a type of continuity, as a continually reworked set of actions that align with, but do not necessarily reproduce, an ideal notion of the past. The Warumungu notion of "properness" undoes rigid assumptions about indigenous traditions and modernities by affirming the contingent and collaborative nature of cultural production.

In Tennant Creek, the production of a compact disc is one of several translocal and transnational projects aimed at forging proper collaborations. Over the last ten years, Warumungu people have engaged in negotiations with miners over permissions for geological explorations, with multinational railway conglomerates wishing to construct a portion of the new transcontinental railway on their land, and with a range of consultants in the production of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre in town (Christen 2004). As with Aboriginal communities in other remote Outback towns (Merlan 1998), Warumungu constituencies have turned "successful" land claims into emerging business structures aimed at balancing Aboriginal law with regional and national economic agendas.

In 1978, the Warumungu filed a land claim under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (ALRA), which mandated "primary spiritual responsibility" as the defining characteristic of "traditional ownership." Any "unalienated land" in the Northern Territory would now be open to Aboriginal claims. To meet these legal standards, Aborigines would now have to define (and defend) their relation to land through spirituality (Commonwealth of Australia 1976, 3.1, 50.1a). After a 13-year battle, in which white town residents made accusations of fabricated sacred sites and the government attempted to redraw the town boundaries, Warumungu claimants emerged partially victorious. That is, they gained some land, but the years of attacks and accusations also made the future for partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people seem quite daunting.<sup>9</sup>

The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*, however, did more than allow Aboriginal people a chance at reterritorialization; it also gave the non-Aboriginal public a set of tools by which to judge and comment on Aboriginal relations to land and its use. With spirituality as the de facto national referent for aboriginality, material gain and economic sustainability tear at its assumed essence (Gelder and Jacobs 1998; Maddock 1991; Povinelli 2002). Popular assumptions of spirituality separate material gain from sacred use, shoring up the romantic notion of "traditional" aboriginality as an inherently anticapitalist, nonmaterial form of being in the world. In this scenario, indigenous commercial products are suspect, even as they are courted by the nation.

Lois Peeler, the Aboriginal Tourism Australia Chairperson, suggests that "Australia's Indigenous culture is a valuable tourism attraction in a highly competitive global market" (2003:2). In fact, international visitors to Australia have steadily increased in the past two decades to over three million a year, two

million of whom visited “cultural attractions” (Peeler 2003:2). At least 48 percent of these are “interested in seeing and learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture,” and as part of their experience, tourists spend over ten billion dollars a year (Northern Australia Forum 2002). To take advantage of this contemporary convergence of interests, the Cultural Industry Development Program was initiated to “develop cultural tourism” and encourage “regions with cultural attractions to develop this aspect of their area and successfully market their product” (Australian Tourism Commission 1994). Indigenous cultural products, national economic goals, and a global tourist market unite—if only tenuously.

As an explicitly traditional and commercial cultural object, the Warumungu women’s compact disc, somewhat paradoxically, contributes not only to hopes of economic sustainability and cultural preservation but also to anxious notions of cultural commodification and economic dependency. It also coincides with the rise in popularity of “Aboriginal art” and a global tourist industry that celebrate cultural difference while also demanding rigid versions of aboriginality (Clifford 2004; Myers 2002; Nesper 2003; Tilley 1997).<sup>10</sup> The demands of commercial and traditional circulation routes do not always align. But they do coexist. New cultural objects are produced at an intersection where tourists, international consumers, and multiple Aboriginal audiences converge. The Warumungu women who recorded the compact disc sought to balance the rise in new audiences for their songs with the need to preserve cultural material. Implementing technologies that allow for the reproduction and expanded circulation of their cultural material pushed this group of women to grapple explicitly with the boundaries of Warumungu cultural networks and systems of accountability.

### **Not Being Shame**

Knowing they would be accountable to Mungamunga women as well as their kin, the women spent as much time choosing the songs appropriate for an international audience as they did recording them. Some songs were too “dear” to sing for outsiders. Others made Nappanangka too “sorry.”<sup>11</sup> In cases where the latter were recorded, the lyrics were excluded from the liner notes (Barwick 1999, 2000). Many of these songs narrate the country’s terrain, naming places where old people may have lived, where pivotal events took place, or where people joined ancestors in ceremonies. The songs that bring back too many memories or tread too close to people’s bodies—making them feel “heavy”—were not considered appropriate for inclusion on the compact disc.<sup>12</sup> Nappanangka linked her social responsibilities to country this way: “Some places people can’t go alone, we have to go in one mob.<sup>13</sup> We might have business there, to grow up that place. We go and sing them [songs] there and show that place that we’re still here.” This business is the work of cultural maintenance. Together these women care for their country through seasonal returns to sites, ongoing ritual performances, and the continual preservation of songs.

This group of women grew up together, learning Mungamunga songs from their “aunties” and grandmothers. Together they are recognized as senior women in the community.<sup>14</sup> For Edith Nakkamarra the lyrical and familial genealogy brings together places and people in a continual process of passing on and opening up knowledge.

That old lady [Edith’s mother], she was boss. She was feeling no good, so she passed that yawulyu, dancing sticks, and hair-strings on to her niece to keep it and open it up. The auntie for that one asked her niece and her daughter to carry the yawulyu on. They went to Jurnkurakurr to sit down. They sat there and that old lady gave her that yawulyu, the whole lot. That yawulyu was really big. No men or boys were allowed to see it, or go near the dancing ground. They weren’t allowed at all. It was a hard one, that yawulyu. If men tried to come and gather round, they weren’t allowed, only women. No man can ever see that one. It’s really strict. We took the yawulyu up to Phillip Creek, right around and back to Tennant Creek and opened it now. [personal communication, July 2000]

In Nakkamarra’s telling, yawulyu, which include the songs, dance steps, ritual objects, and associated body designs move between female kin and over an ancestral landscape. The women who share this yawulyu are joined by their responsibility to “hold it up,” that is, to ensure the continuity of their law and the continuation of proper relations with their ancestors through performances. Nakkamarra explained their accountability in this manner: “See we gotta do these, like yawulyu, that’s what them old people told us, not to be shame.” Not being “shame” here means performing, preserving, and passing on cultural knowledge to ensure its permanence in the midst of change.<sup>15</sup>

Nakkamarra continued, telling me that the “old people told us, we have to learn the yawulyu, otherwise people will talk about this mob. They might say we don’t know our country. The other mob might ask where we’re from and we tell them our country is *patta* [hard ground] and then we dance, to show them properly.” Performances are part of defining and claiming territorial ownership (Christen 2004; Dussart 2000; Merlan 1998). For others to be clear about Warumungu country lines, owners must continue to sing and dance these borders. If one fails to perform what they are given in dreams or by relatives, they are considered *munju* (greedy or stingy). Each time Nakkamarra lifts her arms during a dance, I think about the physicality of “holding up country.” More than just an English translation, this phrase makes clear the embodied, physical, and difficult task of maintaining one’s traditions.

As the women discussed their options for recording an internationally marketable compact disc, the idea of performing and publicly displaying their cultural knowledge was a central element. Recordings on tape have been circulating in the community for years, and local community members have all made use of recording devices to announce their claims to country. An internationally available compact disc would enlarge the scope of the “public” Nappanangka and the other women imagined. “See,” Nappanangka instructed me, “we might not see that one, him country might be in America, over the sea. This yawulyu is strong one, it

might go for us.” Burned into a plastic compact disc and wrapped in cellophane, these Mungamunga songs could take the strength of Warumungu women with them to announce their presence. Holding up country sometimes means pushing it away. Objects such as a compact disc recording are not only part of commercial circuits that attempt to deny the sociality of objects but also overlapping aboriginal circuits that demand proper sociality. Neither is erased, but both are certainly altered as this object travels.

A few weeks before she left to perform in the 2000 Olympic Opening Ceremonies in Sydney, I asked Edith Nakkamarra about these new circulation routes.<sup>16</sup> She showed the compact disc to me with pride and told me how they went to Sydney for its promotion. “True,” she said, “so many people were there, all the way.” After their performance, she told me that an “Indian woman, from America” came up to her crying, telling her how beautiful the songs were. The woman “cried, sorry for that one, she took one to America, like you Namikili [reference to author], maybe I’ll go to America and follow that one.” Nakkamarra does not have any relatives in the United States, but she says the Mungamunga are there now. I told her I really wanted to take some compact discs back with me and play them for my friends and family. “Really good that one,” she boasted. “Take them, like that (as she gestured, pushing her hands outward). All that way, Mungamunga too.”

I did. I purchased five copies from the Papulu Apparrkari Language Centre before leaving, and once in California, I ordered three more online. When I googled “Mungamunga” on the Internet, over 20 listings came up on my computer screen. Staring at the lines of text, I wondered what Nakkamarra would say. No doubt she would see this web presence as a source of pride. Each instance of Mungamunga traveling—on a compact disc, in a Toyota Land Cruiser, in my suitcase, and on the Internet (all explored below)—increases the likelihood that Warumungu women will be recognized and reckoned with for decades to come. Yet these same Mungamunga tracks could be harmful. If promoted or reproduced by others out of context, Mungamunga connections could be severed or severely impeded. To a degree, preemptive planning addressed these issues: the compact disc was always intended for an “open,” general, and noninitiated audience. Yet there is no guarantee that even this open material will not be used in a way that the women may find offensive. This is part of the trade-off.

Unlike cultural material taken without permission, the Mungamunga compact disc is part of an expanding set of Aboriginal objects meant for external consumption. These cultural objects are produced at the intersection of commercial and Aboriginal tracks and agendas where social and legal value regimes compete. They are inserted into a market that wants them to be traditional and authentic. Their aboriginality must be recognizable for their consumption to be palatable by sometimes suspicious consumers (Myers 2004:8; Povinelli 2002:65). Yet, at the same time the women’s assumptions of what this object needs to be undoes some of the rigidity of the markets’ demands. This intentionally commercial

production is very consciously inserted into a continuum between past and present that connects the compact disc to the ritual power of this group of women, the transregional set of Mungamunga songs, and enduring ancestral tracks in the landscape. This Warumungu “system of value production” (Myers 2004:9) does not deny the commodity form of the compact disc but allows for a multiplicity of meaning and value production within overlapping circulation routes.

### Traveling Objects

Indigenous cultural objects, especially those made for multiple audiences, often move within awkward zones of contact in which individuals, local cultural practices, and national agendas pull them in divergent directions. There are many types of travel involved in performing, sharing, and soliciting new alliances and allegiances. Late in 2002, after the death of a female relative in Boorooloola, a group of women traveled the 700 kilometers to mourn their loss. Two Central Land Council (CLC) Toyota Land Cruisers carried the women with a stack of compact discs and tapes over the rocky terrain. Over a period of a few days, the Tennant Creek mob sat with the Boorooloola mob mourning their loss. Part of their “sorry business” was the exchange of several ritual objects. The Tennant Creek women left behind several copies of the *Yawulyu Mungamunga* compact disc and other cassette tapes they had made on their own. The Boorooloola mob gave the women several dancing sticks to take with them. In this exchange of wood and plastic were storied objects embodying the possibility for future connections. After a week the women returned to town just as I was walking with my younger son down Patterson Street. We had just passed the Land Council building when I saw the two white CLC vehicles drive by covered with red ocher handprints.<sup>17</sup> I knew the women were back and that they had not come alone. With them, and visible to all, were the handprints of kin—traces of their shared work, interpersonal relations, and ongoing responsibility to care for Mungamunga relatives. On Toyotas and compact discs new tracks continue to be laid.

Recording songs, dances, and country with audio and video equipment is part of the compromise Warumungu people are willing to make as they seek both cultural preservation and innovation. This is not simply the reproduction of culture but part of the mechanisms by which cultural change is controlled. The possibility of harm if an outsider (Aboriginal or not) were to hear or view closed tapes is always balanced with the need to circulate knowledge. Nappanangka wants to carefully monitor their travels, to keep cultural objects safe and their value high. The prospect of an international audience has only expanded the usual give and take that accompanies the “circulation of knowledge” (Ginsburg 2000:31). Aboriginal projects that utilize recording devices to maintain and transmit cultural knowledge are part of a set of activities aimed at preserving and producing knowledge by community members whose health, location, or economic situation often keeps them apart from relatives and away from country.

Exposure is a necessary component of Mungamunga tracking practices. To forge new tracks, the Mungamunga must move. New listeners are new potential partners. Every “Indian woman” who hears these songs, just like the one Nakkamarra met, takes a piece of the Mungamunga back with her. Nappanangka wants the compact disc to travel. She insists on it, “Nungarrayi [reference to author], you take these Mungamunga too, we mob might come some day with you.”<sup>18</sup> As she narrates the Mungamunga travels over the landscape, she links them to her own movements as a young girl on foot and as an elderly woman in a Toyota Land Cruiser. Although she can only imagine herself on an airplane to the United States, she is confident that I will take the compact discs with me. Her hope is that these transnational tracks extend and expand the power of the Mungamunga women’s dreaming and hers as well. Her expectation is that the compact disc’s circulation will increase her power as a “red-ocher woman” while also helping her pay for a new Toyota Land Cruiser.

Opening the Mungamunga songs to a wider audience elicits new “contact zones” (Clifford 1997; Pratt 1992) that bring with them a particular typology of restriction, a new set of practices in which “dear,” “heavy,” or “sacred” songs may or may not circulate. Differing degrees of openness to songs, dances, and body designs reflect shifting sets of accountabilities. The preservation of material that is open enough for a commercial audience does not negate its cultural import. After all as Nappanangka says, these songs are not “cheap ones.” In her study of Warlpiri rituals at Yuendumu, Françoise Dussart shows that the distinction between “cheap,” “half-way,” and “dear” ritual performances is part of a network of accessibility that relies on gradations of knowledge as well as a range of accountabilities (2000:52). In this sense, “access [to ritual knowledge] may be ‘cheap’ insofar as it is free of the costly burdens of initiation, but the material content that finds ceremonial expression in no way lacks value” (Dussart 2000:213). The openness of a performance does not necessarily make it “cheap,” that is, devoid of social and cultural significance. Nappanangka’s assertion that the songs are not “cheap ones” emphasizes both their ritual and monetary worth and highlights the necessity to share them with multiple audiences in varying forms. Sharing requires payment in the form of cash or ritual knowledge, regardless of whether one purchases a compact disc or attends a ceremony.

Mungamunga songs are part of an “economy of exchange” (Myers 2002:263) built along a shifting set of personal accountabilities and community responsibilities. Some are open enough to be sung for *papulanji* (non-Aboriginal) audiences, whereas others are closed, meant only for personal, kin, or family use. Changing and unpredictable audiences, in fact, are one of the main concerns for indigenous people as they produce cultural objects for sale and for themselves (Smith et al. 2000; Fienup-Riordan 2000). The Warumungu women’s decision to produce an open compact disc must be framed within their continuing performances of closed (or otherwise restricted) songs as well as the movement between the two.

Open and closed are not fixed ontological positions but are designations made within changing social, cultural, and material conditions. Women and men negotiate the practices of cultural production through a set of protocols that provide a framework for knowledge circulation (Christen 2005:317). When closed business is set apart as secret or sacred or when it is rigidly defined as traditional Aboriginal culture, then open business might easily be categorized as being mundane or mere entertainment. This binary categorization may produce the appearance that new cultural objects are somehow tainted, “as if their very enactment somehow delegitimated or diluted the value of the information on display” (Dussart 2000:213).<sup>19</sup> That some of Warumungu tradition is open to all should not negate the fact that there is also much that is not. Audience and location often dictate what and how much of a song sequence will be available. Along the spectrum from closed to open, the appropriateness of new products is always negotiated as part of a concern to make things straight, true, or proper (*jurrkkul*). Tradition is mobile and fixed, part of a dialogue between community members and outsiders, linked to material needs and cultural responsibilities. Tradition is always in the making.

### Making it Straight

Like all matters that involve the transmission of knowledge, the production of the compact disc was scrutinized by the “bosses” for the songs, as well as those in the opposite patrimoiety who “follow up” ritual performances as “managers.”<sup>20</sup> At the most basic level this complementary separation is expressed in the division of Warumungu society into patrimoieties: Kingili and Wurlurru.<sup>21</sup> A further distinction is made in the ritual division of labor, between those who dance and those who “paint up” the dancers. During ceremonies, *mangaya* (those related to the country through their father) dance while *kurtungurlu* (those related through their mother) oversee the performance, judging its “strength,” (i.e., its correctness) in relation to ancestral performances.<sup>22</sup> Edith Nakkamarra says that *kurtungurlu* are like the police (*kilipartta*); they watch over the dancers to ensure that they make it straight (*jurrkkulmunta*).

As women compete for recognition within the community, ritual action is a sure way to increase one’s prestige. If performances are judged to be *wangaragara* (wrong-way) and another performance is needed, the women who make it straight may boost their standing in the community. Performances of *wirnkarra* (dreaming) follow the tracks of well-defined ancestral travel routes. Owners and managers, however, continually negotiate and reinterpret what each segment needs to be proper. Weeks, often months, before performances, or in this case, recording sessions, small kin groups associated with the ancestral knowledge being debated will meet to decide the location, who should be present, what should be sung, and which body designs should be applied. The ritual performance of ancestral tracks is not as static as it might seem within this reciprocal structure (Dussart 2000:66). Although the most common metaphor used to describe ritual activity is that of

“following” the tracks of ancestors, these community practices suggest that tracks are not only followed but also fashioned and forged. As ancestral travel routes cut through the landscape, the tracks of new generations link up with these, extend them, and nudge them in new directions.

During the production of the compact disc, negotiations between the women redrew the lines between bush and town, insiders and outsiders, proper and improper performances. In each case, the women deliberated the location at which the songs would be sung, who would be present, and who would follow after Kathleen Nappanangka who, as the boss for the songs, was also the first singer. Most of the songs were recorded out of town, at sites that correspond with the song’s ancestral travels or the place at which they were dreamed. Linda Barwick connects the owner’s rights to the songs in terms of country and ancestral relations on the compact disc’s insert:

Most of the songs in this series were dreamed by an old woman of the Nappangarti skin name. She was given the songs and healing powers by the spirit of her husband (Jampin skin name), who in her dream passed the songs on to her from the Mungamunga women. In the act of receiving the songs she became a ‘native doctor’ able to heal the sick. Later she handed the songs on to two other women (L. F. Nappanangka and J. P. Nappanangka) and then they passed to H. J. Nappanangka. From this woman the present song leader, K. F. Nappanangka, received them in her turn. D. D. Nangali, the sister’s daughter of the Nappangarti women who originally dreamt the song, is also an owner of the series, although she does not lead the singing, and E. G. Nakkamarra has also inherited rights from her mother, J. P. Nappanangka. New songs have been added to the series by K. F. Nappanangka, again through the medium of dream. At the time of making the 1997 recording, a set of new songs, dreamt recently by a young woman of the Nampin skin, was about to be incorporated into the set. She described how she saw the Mungamunga women while driving along in her car one day. Later the spirit of a deceased relative (also of the Nampin skin) appeared to her in dream and gave instructions for song texts, body designs and ritual objects. Sometime soon, when everything is ready, a ceremony will be held that will incorporate these new songs and objects into the existing Yawulyu Mungamunga series, and after that perhaps they can be recorded too. [2000]

Barwick’s genealogy traces the web of relations and historical connections that define and redefine traditional relations and wirnkarra (dreaming) knowledge. As song cycles pass to younger generations, they also travel with Mungamunga ancestors and male kin. Songs and dance steps are shared and exchanged through various performative networks. They may be dreamed (Dussart 2000), exchanged (Bell 1993; Payne 1988), or reopened after years of disuse owing to an owner’s death. Yet, although songs are dreamed and owned by individuals, the power of the songs rests in their performance and their acceptance by groups of women who share and continue to extend these intimate knowledge practices. Françoise Dussart argues that “performative authority is acquired, never ascribed, and so is the status of business leader, a status forever susceptible to (and indeed requiring) challenge and change” (2000:88). Genealogies of ownership, then, are never secure. In fact, the compact disc’s circulation in town ignited an old debate over the ownership of this particular set of Mungamunga songs.

Another group of extended relatives had once been more active in the performance of this yawulyu, but a falling out between these women and those who recorded the compact disc had occurred years earlier. Since then there has been public debate, physical violence, and a continuous stream of verbal attacks back and forth. When I asked Edith Nakkamarra about the rift, she was hesitantly hopeful that they might be able to perform together again. "I might ask her, C. L., we used to sing together all the time, but now, I don't know, must be something."<sup>23</sup> I felt the antagonism myself. Because I had been given my skin name by Kathleen Nappanangka and worked closely with this particular group of women, I was easily identifiable as "part of that Language Centre mob." So when two of the women who contested Nappanangka's right to this yawulyu demanded that I record their versions, I knew my own loyalties were being tested. Seeking solace in the permanence of a digital recording, these women pit one version of cultural knowledge against another.

Knowing that their rivals would be listening to the compact disc as well as tourists and other outsiders, the women recorded their songs several times to get them "right way, good way" (*piliyingara*). Places and singers were chosen with care, and when the performances did not meet Nappanangka's expectations, they were recorded again. The women worked closely with Linda Barwick to make certain their goals were met. Barwick arranged for recording sessions out of town at country sites, and she returned on several occasions to correct and recheck lyrics. She also worked with the women to prepare the in-depth contextual material that they wanted for the liner notes.

The liner notes became another way for these women to assert their territorial and cultural claims while also illuminating the multiple processes involved in "getting it straight." The 14-page insert includes a description of the Warumungu kinship system, a detailed narrative of the production process, a genealogy of the songs, a "story about the Mungamunga" describing their current and past escapades, and a guide to the song lyrics. Although the explanations seem directed to a non-Aboriginal audience, the detailed genealogical accounts of the songs' transmission are also part of local and regional concerns for claiming their portion of the Mungamunga women's knowledge. "This our yawulyu," Edith Nakkamarra announced as we sat in the shade of her backyard tree, with music from the compact disc blaring from inside the house. "Those others they might be jealous for this one, try to stealim." The accusation of others stealing their songs had, in fact, resulted in a shouting match on the main street in Tennant Creek weeks earlier. Writing down their claims on the compact disc's insert was another way to prove the veracity of their ownership.

Still, the women's hope that people in "Sydney and America" would hear the songs motivated the lengthy explications about wirnkarra and *punttu* (skin relations). Knowing their audience would be primarily English speaking (both Aboriginal and not), the women made it clear to Barwick that the insert would need to contain both English and Warumungu.<sup>24</sup> Barwick met with the elder women

and their younger female kin together to ensure that Warumungu concepts were translated correctly. This translation process was more than just getting the “right” English equivalents to Warumungu words; it was also about squelching authenticity debates both inside and outside the community.

The text of the compact disc insert is as much a local symbol of ownership as it is an abbreviated cultural lesson for outsiders. It implicitly answers many of the questions non-Aboriginal people might have and deflects many of the negative assumptions often presumed about Aboriginal “commercial” productions. For example, the opening sentences make explicit the connection between the songs, Aboriginal tradition, land, and ownership: “These songs belong to women of the Warumungu language group, whose traditional country lies in the Tennant Creek area of Central Australia. Despite the fact that Europeans have been in this region for many years, traditional ceremonial life continues to be practiced by the Warumungu women.” In clear terms, the women declare their enduring tradition, their cultural survival despite dispossession, and the significance of this product in relation to their traditional ceremonial life. They make it clear that although these songs have been “opened up,” others remain “restricted.” To those who decry the spurious nature of the “Aboriginal culture industry” and the inevitable loss associated with the commercial use of Aboriginal tradition, the women answer back: This is ours, we own it, and we have decided to share it—properly.<sup>25</sup>

In a nation where accusations of Aboriginal cultural fraud consistently make the headlines and in a town where competing Aboriginal mobs jockey for position and power, everyone must make their claims to tradition clearly and to differing audiences.<sup>26</sup> Indigenous acts of cultural production and instruction often include rigid-sounding claims about the inflexibility of Aboriginal “tradition and culture” while also asserting a desire for innovation and change. Although the compact disc, as a semipermanent record, allowed one group to announce their ownership, it did not protect them from criticism. The defense of the properness, “trueness,” or “straightness” of an object is always only momentary. Cultural knowledge must be sustained through constant care and negotiation, and this sometimes entails inaugurating change.

### **Passing on Properness**

During the compact disc’s production, the older women’s deliberations focused on the best way to include the young girls—who will carry forward these songs and dances—while also respecting traditional practices. The question of the “young girls” is never far from the minds of the older women. While heading out bush to record songs and dances, or sitting in the back of the Papulu Appar-kari Language Centre working on translations, or in the discussions between the women about the plans for the cultural center, time and time again, the question, “what about the young girls?” surfaced.

Warumungu elders worry about who will carry on Mungamunga songs and language and the cultural knowledge that these embody. The women elders especially miss the time they once had to pass on this cultural knowledge. Nakkamarra told me, “kids are too busy today, they might want to go to the disco, or they might be drinking. Too much humbug now. Old days, we used to sit down and listen to them [old people].” Nakkamarra’s words are both a reflection of her own sense of loss and a commentary on the enduring problems of cultural maintenance in the face of persistent pressures on Aboriginal youth. But Nakkamarra also remembers her mother worrying for her. “She told us, ‘you can’t just sit there. You have to do that work.’ She was really strong. When she walked down the street, she might hear someone talking Warlpiri or Alyawarr. She would just talk to them, [she] never mind[ed], true. Must be five languages she could speak. Everybody knew her.” Nakkamarra’s mother certainly worried for her children, for the traditional languages she spoke, and for the cultural practices she wished to pass on. Each generation worries for the next, and in these concerns one can see the tensions between the necessity of maintaining the law, as something that exists unchanged, and the aspiration to translate, extend, and adapt the law to new and challenging situations.

The compact disc is, therefore, a tangible sign of Warumungu women’s strength and tenacity. It is a manifestation of their desire to inaugurate a new generation of “red-ocher women” while reaching out to a global audience at the same time.<sup>27</sup> “Singing,” Nakkamarra explains, “keeps the country alive.” The compact disc functions as one more vehicle for keeping country alive: it is audible in the background during meetings, routinely played during overnight camping trips, and frequently blaring from the audiotape-deck of a Toyota Land Cruiser. In a lineup that often includes P. Diddy, Slim Dusty, and Britney Spears, the Warumungu women’s compact disc circulates in an eclectic mix of U.S. and Australian music. Warumungu children, many of whom are related to these women, listen to and mimic the songs from the recording, just as they do the American and Australian popular singers. Edith Nakkamarra often boasts about her granddaughter’s ability to sing along perfectly.

Nappanangka and the other elder women agree that the compact disc is one more tool in their expanding cultural toolbox. Young girls need to be taught and the Mungamunga songs must be passed on. But, the compact disc’s capacity for preservation does not ensure transmission to younger generations. There is more to “passing on” the songs than teaching girls and young women the words. Anyone can listen to the recording, but the accompanying performative traditions, territorial knowledge, and ceremonial language must be learned as well. In talking about her youth Dianne Nampin said:

I always watched them old people. I learned from them old ladies, they taught me. I had to listen carefully. It comes out in the dreams of people, the ones who dream about it. Those Mungamunga spirits give them this, how to dance so they can’t break it up. They have to do the right thing. Cause if we do anything wrong we’ll get sick, cause it’s a strong spirit that we believe in and we carry on today.

Nampin's emphasis on "them old ladies" and the right way to "carry on" Mungamunga traditions unites the community's health and future. People have to "do the right thing"—listen to old people, share knowledge that comes from dreams, and dance the way the Mungamunga show you.

When the compact disc was completed, the women had an obligation to "open it up"—to announce their claims and display their power to community members. Each time Mungamunga songs are sung and their tracks retraced, the women maintain their part in an ongoing social bargain with human and other-than-human relatives.<sup>28</sup> Pushing their red ochre-stained dancing sticks in the air, they reach out to their Mungamunga relatives. Tilting their heads and pointing to the sky, they call to the white cocky as he passes overhead. The red dirt under their feet stains their toes and ankles, while the white and red ochre on their arms and breasts seeps into their bodies. The tracks on the ground and the ones on their bodies merge. This is wirnkarra, Kathleen Nappanangka tells me. "Anyinginyi wirnkarra manuku, this mob" (This is our dreaming country, this mob).

In May 2000, Warumungu women celebrated the release of the *Yawulyu Mungamunga Dreaming Songs* compact disc with a performance at the edge of town. All of Tennant Creek was invited, although the audience was mostly Aboriginal. When I arrived two weeks later, everyone I met was talking about it. As we planned our overnight bush trips to country sites, the women gave me the highlights of the event. They were especially encouraged by the fact that many young girls danced that day.

In an important difference, however, the body paint that normally adorned women's chests and arms had been replaced by black T-shirts bearing similar white and red designs. Several women recounted their origins for me. A small group of women traveled to Sydney in April 2000 to perform at the University and introduce the compact disc to an international audience. After seeing the very public site for the performance, the women felt shy about dancing bare chested (Barwick, personal communication, July 2003). Being in Sydney and away from their country, with only a small group of Warumungu women in attendance, they were self-conscious about their traditional performance style.

The application of paint to one's body is a crucial part of the transmission of knowledge between ancestors and contemporary community members (Bell 1993; Dussart 2000). But the mixing of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spaces, technologies, and notions of personal modesty prompted this innovation. Edith Nakkamarra had seen some T-shirts painted with dreaming designs when she was at a pan-Aboriginal gathering in Queensland. After discussing the options with the others, Nakkamarra approached Linda Barwick for help. Barwick bought five black T-shirts and some paint. Under the guidance of Kathleen Nappanangka and Edith Nakkamarra, Barwick helped paint the proper designs on the T-shirts just as they would have been painted on the dancers' bodies. As they painted, Nappanangka sang quietly as if they were applying ochre to the women's chests (Barwick, personal communication, July 2003). Later that week, the women wore the

T-shirts for the first time. Nappanangka told me later that she was “proud” to sing the Mungamunga songs in Sydney “for all the papulanji [non-Aboriginal people].”

As the opening celebration in Tennant Creek loomed, these same women arranged for the performance of the songs, only this time there would be more singers and dancers of all ages. Those women who were not able to travel to Sydney would now have the opportunity to sing and dance in their own country. The older women very much wanted to include the young girls in the performance; however, the older women could not persuade the teenage girls to dance bare chested in town—albeit on the edge of town. As a compromise, the women decided to make more T-shirts for all the dancers to wear. Barwick arrived in town with boxes of black T-shirts and paints in the days prior to the launch. The women set up “something of an assembly line” in the back of the Papulu Apparrkari Language Centre and went to work (Barwick, personal communication, July 2003). Again Nappanangka sang the Mungamunga travels that were being painted on the T-shirts. Younger women, the daughters and granddaughters of Nappanangka and Nakkamarra, helped paint and organize the materials, making certain that Nappanangka’s directions were followed.

The decision to wear the T-shirts was not arrived at lightly, nor did everyone approve. Weeks after the performance several women told me that one of the most senior women was livid about the T-shirts. In fact, she initially refused to come to the launch because of it. She made her condemnation clear as she walked just outside of the performance area, announcing her position very loudly. But after her criticism was voiced, she joined the singers and corrected young dancers when they misstepped. Later, I asked some of the women who helped make the T-shirts about their function. They said it was “too cold” during the winter, even in Tennant Creek, to go without them. But even this thinly veiled attempt to sidestep processes of cultural innovation met with smirks and winks as everyone acknowledged the debated change and tension surrounding the adaptation (see Figure 2).

The T-shirts are not meant to signal a permanent shift; rather, they are an accommodation to a differently accessible cultural product. The T-shirts were used again in several performances but they have also sat in their boxes for other occasions. In July 2002, the women were practicing for an upcoming event. We were already at Kunjarra (approximately 15 kilometers from town) when they decided that the T-shirts were necessary. Two of the younger women drove back to town to get the box of T-shirts from the language center storage room. They returned with the T-shirts and quite a story.

Namikili described the events in detail. Namikili and Narrurlu were told by some staff members that they could not take the T-shirts; they were property of the language center and as such only to be used for events sponsored by the center. However, after some negotiation, they managed to clear up the confusion and take the T-shirts with them. Returning to Kunjarra, Namikili climbed out of the Toyota, furious. All the women agreed that this was a serious breach of etiquette. The T-shirts did not belong to the center but to them because their control of the songs



**Figure 2**  
**Warumungu women and girls dancing at Kunjarra.**

and designs asserted their ownership. That night after the dancing, women of all ages discussed the interference as well as the support of outsiders, such as the non-Aboriginal staff and Barwick, in what is clearly their business.

It was clear that, although the T-shirts were not permanent fixtures in the women's ceremonial life, they had become part of their cultural property. What started as an ad hoc attempt to accommodate for a new situation had become the basis for innovation, tension, and division. Acknowledging change and preparing for the future yield new types of cultural translations that are linked to—but not defined by—the past. Although elder Warumungu women have been willing to use compact discs and T-shirts to transmit tradition to both younger generations and tourist audiences, the parameters of change are not boundless. Properness is negotiable. However, its parameters are defined by a set of relations to country, ancestors, and kin articulated through a continual dialogue between past actions and present situations. In the compact disc's production and ongoing circulation, "one can view culture as a negotiation process with creative although not necessarily painless outcomes" (Fienup-Riordan 2000:13).

### **Not Just a Song and Dance**

In the winter of 2002, I camped with a group of Warumungu women at Kunjarra. The scene was a familiar one, with Nappanangka perched on her foldout



**Figure 3**  
**Kathleen Nappanangka sings along to the compact disc recording.**

camp chair, a boom box resting next to her, and the Mungamunga compact disc playing (see Figure 3). Children were running about as the sun faded behind the large auburn boulders south of camp, and Nakkamarra was dragging large branches to make a wind break for what surely would be a cold and windy winter night. Several groups of women sat together talking, sipping tea, and discussing the events of the week. The women were there to practice for an upcoming video shoot. The new cultural center in town would have video displays, and at least one would play “traditional song and dance.”

During the day, I helped to record stories and songs with a digital video camera. Another group of women worked on Warumungu translations to ensure the proper spellings of names, locations, and events for the displays. Still others sketched drawings for possible postcards to sell in the center’s shop. But as the sun set, the women moved from their separate spots toward the center of camp. We circled around the singers and Nappanangka, singing out confidently, took up her usual role as the lead.

During one of the lulls in the activity, she leaned over to ask me where “that young fellow” was. Earlier in the day a Sydney production crew had videotaped the women talking about the significance of Kunjarra, the Mungamunga women, and their yawulyu. Eager to display her prominence as boss for the songs and owner of the country at which we were camped, Nappanangka summoned the men

back to our camp and directed them to record her singing. Although the lighting was poor, the men filmed Nappanangka as she sang and others danced in front of her. After the recording they left for their camp as quietly as they had come.

The next day one of the production crew asked me about the previous night's spontaneous performance. He was perplexed by the openness of what he perceived to be "secret women's business." His question and understanding of Aboriginal "women's business" came in part from the high profile Hindmarsh Island case in South Australia in which Aboriginal women split over the proposed construction of a bridge on their land.<sup>29</sup> The case made Aboriginal women's ceremonial knowledge synonymous with "secrecy." For years, national newspapers, news shows, and talk radio debated the Ngarrindjeri women's claims, popularizing notions of "secret women's business" and the sacredness with which it is associated. After witnessing what he assumed to be women's business, he could not reconcile this openness with the more suspicious assertions of "fabricated" traditions and the "secrecy" of women's business solidified in the Australian imaginary.

Years of debate and over a decade of proposed reconciliation had not made the hard work of cross-cultural translation any easier.<sup>30</sup> It is true that Aborigines have been and continue to be disenfranchised by the nation. National rhetoric of unity and reconciliation can certainly work to cover up violent pasts and presents (Cowlshaw 1998; Povinelli 2002), and Aboriginal people continue to be romantically imagined as symbols of Australian cultural unity. However, well-known Aboriginal artists, performers, politicians, and entrepreneurs disrupt this tidy view. The 2000 Olympic gold medalist Cathy Freeman with her Aboriginal flag, the Aboriginal businesses that educate and make a profit, and new media productions that rethink and critique colonial assumptions often coexist with the more romantic and salacious views, sometimes uneasily, sometimes not.

This, then, is the conundrum for Aboriginal communities. How can they authoritatively demonstrate their "law and culture" without making it seem like just another song and dance? When the national rhetoric of multiculturalism signals only a bland notion of difference, how can cultural integrity be upheld? The delicate balance of showing just enough cultural difference or telling the bare minimum to maintain the law of restricted knowledge systems weighs on Aboriginal communities as they venture into collaborative projects. Can producing compact discs, T-shirts, and video displays subvert the benign celebration of Aboriginal traditions and move toward something akin to political recognition and commercial success?

The range of indigenous products and productions in Australia and elsewhere (Cattellino 2004; Erickson 2002; Townsend-Gault 2004) suggests that the line between selling culture and selling out is always strategic and under review. The question is no longer whether tradition, aboriginality, or culture is real or invented.<sup>31</sup> Instead, global, transnational, and translocal projects that compel indigenous people to represent themselves and repackage some of their culture for multiple audiences bring into view sets of contingent continuities involved in contemporary "culture-making" (Myers 1994:679). The production and continuous

circulation of the compact disc brought up old tensions, created new ones, inspired adaptations, and brought prestige and some material wealth. Although it is a newly produced object, it links to past ancestral travels and country sites, it gestures to the possibilities of collaborative work, and it continues to show the enduring and adaptable aspects of cultural knowledge and practices.

New cultural products also increase “public awareness of the diversity of Indigenous lifeways” on “a scale never before possible” (Smith et al. 2000:3). Marshall Sahlins calls these uneven and ambivalent projects “the indigenization of modernity,” a process whereby indigenous communities are reshaping and redefining economic and social relationships through “adaptations to the global juggernaut” (1999:ix–x). These divergent projects highlight persistent assumptions about the inherent corruption of commodity spaces. Authenticity debates function to dismiss or disrupt Aboriginal commercial ventures. Although Aboriginal art may gain some legitimacy as a “fine art” (Myers 2002), more mundane and explicitly commercial objects often become fodder for those who hastily condemn tourism as a space for cultural delusion.<sup>32</sup> Accusations abound of selling out to the consumer market and thus polluting indigenous objects.

In this arena of consumption and production, many indigenous artists feel the conflict between the recognition of an attachment to a long-standing tradition and the “desire to make their products available to a non-indigenous audience” (Smith et al. 2000:14). Walking a fine line between presenting their cultures on their own terms and being cognizant of what is likely to sell, indigenous cultural producers confront accusations of “cultural fraud,” on the one hand, and not being “authentic enough” on the other hand. However, as James Clifford reminds us, “‘authenticity’ is seldom an all-or-nothing issue” (1997:178). The continued “re-inventing of the immutable” (Dussart 2000:138) by Aboriginal people suggests that cultural authenticity, territorial continuity, and traditional knowledge rests not in a pristine past or in an untouched tradition, but in the continuing practices of cultural change that are limited and enhanced by national politics, global markets, and local social maneuvering.

Christopher Tilley argues that “everywhere throughout the world, local peoples in response to the opportunities afforded by the global tourist industry are putting their culture on display” (1997:73). Culture is not only on display, however; it is also for sale. Indian gaming in the United States, ecotourism in South America, adventure tours in the South Pacific, and cultural tourist experiences throughout the world testify to the “crowded convergence of multiple projects” under tourism’s banner (Bodinger de Uriarte 2003:550). Cultural performances give outsiders a look at traditional practices, museums allow interested outsiders to study and purchase indigenous art, and gift shops recycle clan designs for sale on T-shirts and coffee mugs (Clifford 2004; Tilley 1997; Townsend-Gault 2004). Yet what is not readily apparent from many of these products’ packaging or placement are the ways in which global tourist industries and their commodities are shaped by various nonmarket forces, such as indigenous land rights (in

their various forms), increased use of material culture by indigenous peoples to educate (internally and externally), local and global authenticity debates, and new alliances forged between indigenous peoples around the world to share ideas about achieving successful cultural–economic ventures (Clifford 2004; Erickson 2002; Fienup-Rirordan 2000).

Sitting on the shelf in the Nyinkka Nyunyu gift shop in Tennant Creek or flashing across my computer screen for purchase online, the compact disc defies easy categorization. It is at once a commercial object and a repository of Warumungu cultural and territorial knowledge. The compact disc's placement next to T-shirts, coffee mugs, and local Warumungu art in a cultural center built next to an ancestral sacred site solidifies and complicates this multiple signification. Situated on the main street in Tennant Creek, the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre testifies to Warumungu land claims victories as well as capitalist "victories." Perhaps neither can claim a final triumph because both are partially successful, locally adapted articulations of the other. Repackaging indigenous culture reroutes economic frameworks and modes of cultural production from a not-so-unified inside-out.

By demanding properness, Warumungu women carve out a place in which singing and dancing, compact discs and T-shirts merge into cultural recognition, political power, and a chance at economic success. Tracking the emergence and circulation of cultural products highlights the not-so-uniform networks of social objects and the always only partial victory of dominant modes of capitalism (Appadurai 1996; Tsing 2000). Warumungu women did not choose to record a compact disc in a cultural and economic vacuum. Their choice must be read alongside the continuing structural inequalities and material desires that partially motivated their work. The stresses and strains, as well as the hopes and expectations, articulated in these new business arrangements and cultural products imply ongoing relations of interdependence.

Although tradition is often aligned with noncommercial products and knowledge, Aboriginal commercial ventures challenge the separation of tradition from commercial objects. The work involved in producing new *jurrkkul* (proper) culture suggests a tradition that is adaptable and innovative, historical and political, and continuous with the past but also a vehicle to the future. Producing properness is not easy, it is not always open, and it demands varied types of recognition. Continuity with the past through traditional practices, territorial homelands, and an immutable aboriginal law does not erase the deliberations that surround practices of innovation and the new routes in which cultural objects circulate. Maintaining tradition means combining ancestral tracks and song tracks into a newly packaged version of Warumungu culture. The production of the compact disc is not an anomaly. The T-shirts are not a contradiction. They are both part of an expanding set of practices and products marshaled in the continuing effort to "hold up country" and "not be shame." They are coexisting elements of a newly fashioned, always in flux, traditional future.

## Notes

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1. Tennant Creek is located 500 kilometers north of Alice Springs in Australia's Northern Territory. The population is approximately 2,500 and roughly half of the population is Aboriginal. The town is situated in the traditional country of the Warumungu; however, Warlpiri, Alyawarr, Kaytetye, and Warlmanpa people live there along with non-Aboriginal people.

2. I refer to the Warumungu people I work with by their first names and "skin" (subsection) names in accordance with their preference. A person belongs to the same patrimoiety as their father, and one's skin is determined by one's parents' skins. A person's skin places them in relation to every other person in the patrimoieties. Diane Bell observes that the "skin system provides a sort of shorthand reference to the complex system of kinship and marriage, and to the appropriate behavior for certain categories of kin (1993:18). See also N. 21 on Warumungu patrimoieties.

3. The compact disc was recorded by nine Warumungu women, all of whom are listed on the compact disc's insert (Barwick 2000:13). However, as with all cultural productions, there were many women who accompanied the singers and were part of the larger processes of negotiation that accompany cultural performances. See Dussart 2000 and Bell 1993 for discussions about the parameters of cultural performances and their constant negotiation between groups of related kin.

4. Warumungu women often describe Mungamunga ancestral women as "spirits" in English. They are generally said to be invisible, but when they are visible they have some human physical characteristics (see N. 28 for a description of this class of ancestors). Mungamunga ancestral tracks cross many countries and therefore are associated with several Aboriginal communities (see N. 5 for more on Aboriginal use of the term *country*). Descriptions of the Mungamunga women can be found in the earliest ethnographies by Spencer and Gillen (1904) and in other ethnographies of the region, such as Bell 1993, 1994, 1998; Berndt 1950; Dussart 2000; and Kaberry 1939.

5. Aboriginal people throughout Australia use the English term *country* when they talk about their traditional lands. The term designates both large tracts of land to which people are related through human and other-than-human ancestors, as well as specific territorial tracks that relate to the movements of other-than-human ancestors. See Bell 1993 and Myers 1986 for discussions of Aboriginal relations to land.

6. The English terms *owner*, *boss*, and *manager* are used by Aboriginal people to articulate the complementary relationships and sets of responsibilities they share with particular kin in maintaining their ritual responsibilities. The terms are part of the legacy of cattle stations in the region. Men and women working on cattle stations adopted settler's language to legitimate Aboriginal systems of land use and property in the terminology of their European counterparts.

7. *Yawulyu* is a Warlpiri term used throughout the Central Desert to designate women's rituals including the songs, dances, and body designs associated with them. The main reasons for performing yawulyu are to maintain well being, train younger generations, accumulate and compete for knowledge, share ancestral itineraries with other women, secure and further rights to country, and to deal with personal problems. Central Desert Aboriginal women share many of these ritual cycles. See also Bell 1993 and Dussart 2000.

8. Aboriginal people often use the English term *law* to designate a wide range of cultural and ritual activities, practices, and institutions that inform, define, and sustain their community's boundaries. Many use the term as a substitute for *dreaming*, a term that has a long history of mistranslation across the continent. See also Morphy 1996, Swain 1989, and Wolfe 1991. No doubt the term is also meant to register the relative weight of their cultural and religious practices in relation to national laws.

9. In the high-profile Mabo case in 1992, the High Court overturned the national fiction of *terra nullius* (empty land) that had governed Aboriginal title claims. In 1993, the *Native Title Act* was passed to give the Mabo victory legislative weight. In recent years, Aboriginal communities have used Indigenous Land Use Agreements to sidestep lengthy and costly native title processes. See Hiatt 1984 and Peterson and Langton 1983 on land rights in Australia; Merlan 1998 and Povinelli 1993 for particular cases in the Northern Territory; See Nash 2002, for a timeline of the Warumungu land claim; and Strelein and Muir 2000 for an overview of Native Title procedures in Australia.

10. The increased global popularity of Aboriginal art has been well documented in Michaels 1994, Morphy 1998, and Myers 2002. Emergent indigenous performances and products (such as the compact disc) are part of the changing field of Aboriginal cultural productions.

11. The term *dear* is often used to connote the value of particular types of knowledge. This is not only, or even primarily, the material value, but more importantly the cultural and ritual value placed on the knowledge or practice. The term *sorry* is used to suggest the sorrow that one may feel performing rituals or going to country associated with deceased relatives.

12. Many Warumungu women use the English term *heavy* to explain the way they feel when some songs are performed or when physically approaching territories belonging to deceased relatives. The English term registers the physicality of their relations to land and to knowledge.

13. *Mob* is a common English term used by Aboriginal people to refer to rotating groups of people related by differing attachments to kin, country, Aboriginal organizations, and the like. The term can be very expansive referring to the "Warumungu mob" (all Warumungu people) or very specific as in "the language centre mob" (those who work at the language center in town). See Christen 2004 and Merlan 1998.

14. There is no Warumungu equivalent of the English term *aunt*. One's mother's sisters are referred to as *karnanti* (mother) and one's father's sisters are called *kampaju* (father). The English term *auntie* is used most commonly to refer to one's father's sisters. A younger generation of Warumungu speakers often use *auntie* for both mother's and father's sisters. Some will use *Mum* to refer to their mother's sisters.

15. The English term *shame* is often used by Aboriginal people as a way to define a sense of transgression of some cultural norm within their community. J. M. Arthur acknowledges that shame "is a difficult term to translate into non-Aboriginal English. It differs from the general use of the word shame in that shame can be felt where there is not personal guilt and it can be felt in situations where a person receives positive public attention" (1996:107). The term can also be used as a verb—one can "shame" someone else. See Arthur 1996 and Harkins 1994 for more on the use of the term within Aboriginal English.

16. In September 2000, 350 women from several Central Desert Aboriginal communities flew to Sydney to perform in the Olympics' Opening Ceremonies.

17. The Central Land Council (CLC) is one of many Aboriginal land councils established as part of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. Land Councils are designed to administer Aboriginal land held by land trusts, negotiate on behalf of Aboriginal landowners, and investigate claims concerning Aboriginal land. One of their main functions in Tennant Creek and other remote areas is to provide access to vehicles, an important component of making sure people have access to country.

18. Nungarrayi is the Warlpiri equivalent of the Namikili skin. When Nappanangka gave me my skin in 1995, she called me Nungarrayi. Only later when I asked why she used the Warlpiri word did she and others begin to call me Namikili. It is common to hear both.

19. The linking of "traditional" Aboriginal cultural practices and spirituality is given legal standing through the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976*, which explicitly calls on Aborigines to provide proof of "primary spiritual responsibility" through their "customs and traditions." The 1993 *Native Title Act* demands that Aboriginal communities prove a "continuous attachment" to land by way of "tradition." Bell (1998), Gelder and Jacobs (1998), and Povinelli (1999, 2002) all explore aspects of the tenuous line between open and closed business as it circulates in national, local, and global spheres.

20. The distinction made between *owner* and *manager* gained popularity in the wake of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* as lawyers, consultants, and Aboriginal claimants gravitated toward the English translations to make their claims of ownership more palatable to English speaking judges. See N. 6 and Maddock 1983.

21. The two patrimoiety are further divided into eight subsections (skins) each constituting a male and female coupling. In the Wurlurru patrimoiety skin pairs are: Nappanangka and Jappanangka, Nappangarti and Jappangarti, Naljarri and Jappaljarri, and Namikili and Jungarrayi. Kingili skins are: Narrurlu and Juppurla, Nampin and Jampin, Nakkamarra and Jakkamarra, and Nangali and Jangali.

22. In the Warumungu draft dictionary *mangaya* is defined as "dreamings inherited from one's father." The Warumungu phrase *manu warlji* (one's own country) is also used to express the relationship between people and their patrilineal country (also known through the Warlpiri term, *kirda*). *Kurdungurlu* is a Warlpiri term adopted by the Warumungu and many other Aboriginal people in the region to express the idea of ritual complementarity and shared territorial responsibility. Although there is no direct equivalent of the Warlpiri notion of *kurdungurlu* in Warumungu, the term has been strategically adopted. Many women I work with remember hearing the term as young girls at the telegraph station just outside of town. This was a site of intense cultural contact as it was the first settler-occupied area prior to the incorporation of the town (Nash 1984; Stanner 1979). The term was later adopted during the Warumungu Land Claim to show a range of rights and associations to ancestral countries (Maurice 1985:49–51). See Bell 1993, Dussart 2000, and Nash 1982 for discussions of the relationships between *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* and their political import in various Central Desert communities.

23. Nakkamarra's use of an abbreviation for the woman in question suggests both the power of naming individuals, as well as the cultural practice of avoiding the use of some people's names. This avoidance depends on a number of factors such as the death of someone with that name and one's own ritual relationship with the other person.

24. Most Aboriginal people in the Central Desert region, and at Tennant Creek specifically, speak multiple languages including several Aboriginal languages, Standard Australian English, Aboriginal English, and various Kriols. In Tennant Creek, Warumungu people communicate through an expansive repertoire of overlapping language sets. Most elderly

Warumungu people speak English, which they learned on cattle stations, at missions, or in mining camps. Many of their children learned English simultaneously with Warumungu, but often English became their primary language at school and with peer groups. Today, many of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren speak Kriol amongst themselves and will switch to Aboriginal English with their older relatives (Simpson 2002; Jane Simpson and Samantha Disbray, personal communication, August 2003).

25. Within national debates over authenticity, critiques of emerging Aboriginal consumer ventures have flourished. One notable and notorious figure was Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party. Hanson galvanized the nation with the party's overtly racist rhetoric about the "Aboriginal culture industry" and all those who would "waste tax dollars on those unwilling to help themselves." Hanson organized for people to move against groups such as Aborigines and Asians, which she saw as threats to the way of life of "ordinary Australians" (Povinelli 2002:40–43). Although Hanson's party never garnered any seats in the Federal House of Representatives, her racist rhetoric kept her in the spotlight even as her political appeal faded (Ang 2000; Gray and Winter 1997; Hage 2000; Hamilton 1990; Lattas 2001; and Povinelli 1999, 2002).

26. In the late 1980s, attempts by Aboriginal communities to protect sacred sites from mining and to demand recognition or compensation for use of clan-designs were met by a national questioning of Aboriginal cultural authenticity (Gelder and Jacobs 1998; Merlan 1991). Much of this backlash was driven by a largely imagined assumption that Aboriginal groups could somehow make massive claims over national territories or funds, neither of which has proved to be true even with significant legal victories resulting from the 1993 *Native Title Act*.

27. Many Warumungu women use the phrase "red-ocher women" to signify the strength of their performances and their status as ritually knowledgeable women in the community. The red ocher refers to the ocher painted on one's body prior to ritual performances. Women's strength can be seen days after performances as they walk in town with the red ocher still on their bodies.

28. "Other-than-human" is a term introduced by A. Irving Hallowell in his work with the Ojibwa native peoples in North America (1975:143–144). I use the term to designate the class of persons to whom Warumungu people are related, such as the Mungamunga, who are not human in form, but with whom they nonetheless share personal and community relations.

29. In 1993 after a proposal to build a bridge connecting Goolwa and Hindmarsh Island was approved, local Ngarrindjeri residents sought protection under the 1988 *Aboriginal Heritage Act of South Australia*. Building the bridge, they charged, would decimate a sacred site and trample the Aboriginal traditions in that area. The case turned into a national affair as it dragged on for years, pitting Aborigines against each other in the first high profile case in which the two competing parties were Aboriginal (Bell 1998; Tickner 2001; and Tonkinson 1997).

30. In 1991, Prime Minister Paul Keating established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, with its mission being "to promote a process of reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community" (Tickner 2001:45).

31. For more on recent contributions to invention of tradition debates from the Pacific, Australia, Africa, and Native North America, see Briggs 1996; Erickson 1999, 2002; Jolly 1992; and Lattas 1993.

32. Many of the same debates surrounding Aboriginal art—its authenticity, cultural worth, commodification, and spiritual content—link up with discussions about indigenous use of new technologies, new media, and other things generally assumed to be "non-indigenous." See Christen 2005; Christensen 2003; Ginsburg 1993, 2002; Hinkson 2002;

Michaels 1994; Nathan 2000; Tafler 2000; and Turner 1991 for discussions of the use of new technologies in indigenous communities.

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**ABSTRACT** *Indigenous people around the world have used the contemporary convergence of a global tourist market, increasingly available recording technologies, and ambivalent national desires for reconciliation to repackage their traditional cultural knowledge. This article examines the production and circulation of an internationally available compact disc containing Warumungu women’s dreaming songs. Tracking its production, circulation, and ongoing insertion into cultural negotiations, I explore the contours of cultural change through simultaneously commercial and traditional practices. In a nation that claims self-determination for its Aboriginal population, Australian national sentiments and Aboriginal cultural mandates are not separate. Recent land rights movements, political moves for cultural autonomy, and continuing political marginalization are not just the*

*backdrop for the compact disc's production but part of the impetus for its existence. As Warumungu women consciously repackaged their ancestral song tracks into the compact disc's tracks, they did so in ways that connect their abiding traditions and their uncertain future through "proper" (jurrkkul) cultural actions. [indigeneity, Australia, Aboriginal, technology, tourism]*