

## Following the Nyinkka: Relations of Respect and Obligations to Act in the Collaborative Work of Aboriginal Cultural Centers

*Kimberly Christen*

While John McDouall Stuart and his expedition party attempted to “open” the interior of Australia to white settlers between 1858 and 1862, he charted the seemingly monotonous terrain in his journal: “this plain has the same appearance now as when I first started—spinifex and gum-trees, with a little scrub occasionally” (Hardman 1865:164–174). The terrain was also unforgiving to those unfamiliar with its intricacies. Over several excursions, Stuart and his entourage were thwarted by harsh climates, an unpredictable landscape, and ill health. On December 20, 1861, with failing health and a stubborn will to reach the north of the continent, Stuart embarked on what would be a successful journey. By July 25, 1862, Stuart and his party reached the Roper River and followed its tributaries to the Indian Ocean. The day before he saw the ocean he recorded “hearing the sea,” and knowing that success was finally his. “If this country is settled,” Stuart wrote that day, “it will be one of the finest colonies under the Crown, suitable for the growth of any and everything” (Hardman 1865:x).

Stuart’s expeditions paved the way for the telegraph line that would eventually stretch from Adelaide in the south to Darwin in the north. The telegraph line signaled Australia’s connection to the modern world linking the new nation to its Commonwealth cousins and opening the possibilities for international trade and communication. The route also became the path for the Stuart Highway, the only north-south road to cut through the continent. Today the highway is lined with plaques commemorating Stuart’s expeditions through Central

Australia. Every hundred kilometers or so a sign reminds weary travelers that this seemingly empty land is indeed “settled.” A final pyramid-shaped brick memorial sits on the western side of the highway as one enters the small town of Tennant Creek from the south.<sup>1</sup>

Down the road from Stuart’s memorial, on the same side of the highway, a set of buildings and another series of plaques marks the landscape. Dwarfing Stuart’s memorial, the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre sits just off the main road (figure 1). Entering through the main gates, following the winding path past the visitor center and café, one comes upon a pile of large black rocks behind a slight fence. Here a sign written in both Warumungu and English explains the site’s significance:

This is the home of the Nyinkka (spiky-tailed goanna). Nyinkka Nyunyu is the Warumungu name for the area where the town of Tennant Creek now stands.

The Nyinkka used to go out hunting all around these rocks, digging around with her yam stick for flying ants and termites. Other dreamings also went around this site—the Sugarbag and the Flying Fox, and the two Munga Munga women went around here looking for bush coconuts.

The Nyinkka dug a soak with her shovel made of snappy gum, behind the site of the Papulu Apparr-Kari Language Centre. The dirt she threw to one side when she was digging forms the low hill on which the Catholic Church of Christ the King stands.

There was another ancestral being, Crow, at a place called Yawu. The Nyinkka used to go



1. The main building of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre, Tennant Creek, Northern Territory, Australia. December 2005. Photograph courtesy of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre and Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation.

from here to dance for that Crow. One day when she was dancing, the Crow killed her. Yet her essence or spirit lives on in these rocks.

The sign explains the social-spatial significance of the seemingly sparse landscape. On this very ground the *Nyinkka* and Crow danced, ancestors met and foraged for food, Warumungu people congregated and a small town grew up as part of ancestral actions and colonial invasion. What remained unseen to Stuart and others unfamiliar with Aboriginal ancestral landscapes, were the tracks of the Nyinkka ('spiky-tailed goanna') whose movements through the territory and relationship with Warumungu people defined the landscape and its potential set of relations. Over generations the Nyinkka forged a track through much of the present-day Tennant Creek landscape cultivating relations with other ancestral beings as well as with humans. The Nyinkka's track marks a set of territorial relations between humans and ancestors defined by mutual relations of reciprocity and respect and the boulders mark a territory whose

human-land connections and obligations were not erased by Stuart's overlaid tracks.

During the 1980s and 1990s Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory regained ownership to the territories claimed by Stuart and others through lengthy land rights battles. With nearly 50 percent of the land in the Northern Territory now under Aboriginal title (Merlan 1998:163), many communities have leveraged these land rights victories into the *possibility* of connecting economic sustainability with culturally viable local projects.<sup>2</sup> Warumungu people in Tennant Creek are no exception. The impetus for building the center was manifold: to protect the Nyinkka site, to recognize Warumungu ownership of the land, to tell the history of Warumungu people from their own perspectives, to create a place for young people to learn from elders, to increase Aboriginal employment, and to educate visitors in the region (Tregenza 2000:13–15). These goals informed the production process at every stage as multiple collaborators—various Warumungu groups, out-of-town consultants,

government agencies, and Aboriginal organizations—worked to maintain the integrity of this particular Warumungu vision. Yet the singular objective of building a cultural center brought with it many levels of negotiation, translation, and production for all participants as they sought to carve out a new Warumungu cultural space defined as much by institutional notions of display and tourism as by local ideals of respect and obligation between people, places, and ancestors.

In their recent study of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Haidy Geismar and Christopher Tilley redirect the efforts of museum studies away from the view of a museum as “an institutional complex that visually deploys material culture within a wider ‘exhibitionary’ paradigm” towards looking at the “other museum work less visible to the general public” (2003:171). Sidelining institutional meaning-making allows one to emphasize the social-political frameworks in which indigenous-owned and run cultural centers populate the ideological and physical spaces that national museums once held. If museums were once “part of the checklist for being a nation” (Kratz and Karp 2006:3), indigenous cultural centers are part of an emergent list of practices and projects aimed at redirecting the national gaze and rewriting a new list framed by self-determination and self-representation (Clifford 2004; Erickson 2002; Fienup-Riordan 2000). In this context, the “showing and telling” (Strang 2000) of Aboriginal culture is predicated on the interconnection and acknowledgement of ancestral, territorial, and human relations as part of the social practices of cultural production, as well as the political necessity to rewrite national narratives of aboriginality. As Howard Morphy suggests, “museums become sites of persuasion that people attempt to use to get their version of history and their regime of value acknowledged and disseminated to wider audiences” (2006:472). Specifically, Morphy argues that, “Indigenous societies have to use the very institutions that created earlier interpretations to change the climate of opinion about their way of life” (2006:495).

Indigenous cultural centers are, as James Clifford argues, “minority or oppositional projects within a comparative museological context. But in other crucial aspects they are not museums at all: they are continuations of indigenous traditions of storytelling, collection, and display” (1997:110).

At the same time as cultural centers reanimate the work of museums through traditional cultural modalities, they also reframe touristic spaces as part of an expanding indigenous-museological context in which local display-making practices re-orient the fantastical tourist gaze, dominant national histories, and local claims to indigeneity. Fred Myers suggests that in this emergent museological field we “consider the museum process of recontextualization as a broader activity of cultural or discursive *production* in which the representation of culture is significant” (his italics 2006:505). In this field of cultural production, the daily work of making culture plays out in a dense network of relationality where the lines between insiders and outsiders blur into a more complex terrain of contingent collaboration.

In what follows, I examine the micro and macro politics involved in the production of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre and its visual displays. Focusing on the “behind-the-scenes” work involved in the Centre’s production allows me to situate Aboriginal cultural centers and their display-making practices within sets of interdependent relations that have the potential to reframe touristic museum spaces. It is in these collaborative spaces of intercultural exchange—awkward and ambiguous as they may be—that I suggest the practices of indigenous representation are made visible and viable as emergent forms of cultural production and clearly articulated modes of self-determination.

### What Could Be

The Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre’s official ground-breaking ceremony in April 2002 capped a nearly seven year roller coaster ride of community planning, grant applications, architectural plans, and meetings with government officials to secure funding.<sup>3</sup> The ceremony that April day brought together Warumungu traditional owners from various family groups, the town’s mayor, the Chief Minister for the Northern Territory, and many of the out-of-town consultants (myself included) who had been working on the project. Bulldozers sat idle on the dirt-covered ground as a crowd gathered in the partially erected café. Children played in the piles of dirt outside the propped open glass doors. Inside a series of speeches marked the occasion’s significance. In her comments to the mostly Aboriginal crowd,

Warumungu community member Dianne Nampin hailed the Centre as a place where “kids would learn language and culture” under the direction of “the old people.”<sup>4</sup> Nampin’s choice to focus first and foremost on “kids” was certainly no accident, nor hyperbole directed at outsiders. Nampin’s acknowledgement of the Centre as a space for inter-generational communication and learning was, in fact, echoed by many community members, young and old. Throughout the planning stages, older women and men were careful to include teenagers and younger children in the meetings and arrangements. Kids were told they would work at Nyinkka Nyunyu one day; this would be their place. This meeting strategy was both a formal link to traditional modes of cultural transmission through emersion, as well as a nod to the changing space of cultural practice. The Centre could provide *another* space for cultural instruction apart from town homes and bush camps. As Nampin continued her list of what the Centre *could* be she reminded everyone that this was a work-in-progress; much more work was necessary to bring her wish-list into being.

Nampin proceeded with a pointed discussion of past projects and the need for continued partnerships with funding agencies. Her nod to past projects and unfulfilled promises was a not-so-subtle critique of the government officials sitting in the front row that day.<sup>5</sup> The whitefellas who lined the sides of the newly built café, as well as her fellow community members, were all in her oratory view as she defined the Centre’s potential impacts: increased employment, language programs, care for artifacts, and a place for elders.<sup>6</sup> Following Nampin, Claire Martin, the Minister for the Northern Territory, similarly saw Nyinkka Nyunyu as a benefit to the “whole community.” She thanked the “traditional owners who opened their land to visitors” and restated the commitment of the Northern Territory government to seeing “Aboriginal tourist ventures” such as this one through to fruition. Allies throughout the room pledged their commitments before the bulldozer dug its first ceremonial scoop of dirt on the main building site.

Echoing Nampin, Trisha Narrurlu, Women’s Supervisor for Nyinkka Nyunyu, in a speech to a group of visiting dignitaries that same month, said that Nyinkka Nyunyu *must* be a place for

Warumungu kids to learn about their past, their language, and their culture. It was a passionate speech in which “culture” took center stage. For Narrurlu the Centre *could be* a place where kids would “learn about Warumungu culture” and not “only speak English.” Nyinkka Nyunyu *could be* more than a place for culture to be stored and displayed. Narrurlu and other community members had been to national museums in Melbourne and Adelaide and were aware of the dominant representations of them conjured through their cultural materials sitting alone in display boxes. As Narrurlu and others imagined it then, Nyinkka Nyunyu *would be* a place to reunite with a part of Warumungu history that was taken and to create new versions of that history in line with the communities’ emerging economic expectations and cultural practices.

Museums throughout Australia embraced the idea of reconciliation through new policies aimed at consultation with indigenous communities and redefined management protocols toward indigenous materials (Sullivan, Kelly, and Gordon 2003:208–210). Most have signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with Aboriginal communities and have included Aboriginal consultants in exhibitions and display planning (Morphy 2006). But Aboriginal cultural centers are poised to reframe both display modes and institutional alliances through their locations within Aboriginal communities. While MOUs and increased dialogue with museums on a national level are significant developments, they do not account for locally run centers that reconfigure Aboriginal representational practices within these emergent museological-tourist spaces.

The possibilities imagined by Narrurlu and Nampin reflect the redefinition of museum and touristic *spaces* as Aboriginal cultural, economic, and political *activities* that manage and redirect the assumed voyeuristic and consumption practices to other (and multiple) ends. The physical layout of the Centre makes the multi-directionality of the Centre’s work clear. The café separates the outside performance grounds from the main building housing both the visual displays and the community rooms. As a stand-alone building, the café attracts locals wanting a nice meal and curious tourists not willing to pay the entrance fee to the Centre. Behind the café, large bushes and native plants cover the women’s and men’s dancing areas. Bough sheds act as shelters



2. Nyinkka Nyunyu's gift shop. December 2005. Photograph courtesy of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre and Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation.

and gathering areas for men and women prior to ceremonies performed for tourists.

Inside the main building the shop and displays are open to all (figure 2). Walking into the Centre through the main doors, one must immediately make a decision—pay and enter the museum portion to the left, or enter the shop to the right free of charge. To the left a curved wall holds inset dioramas, displays of Warumungu kinship, glass cases with local artifacts returned from national museums, and plasma screens looping digital video of everything from the local Eagles footy (Australian football) matches to women's *yawulyu* ('ritual songs and dances'). To the right along the curved glass storefront the wooden shelves are lined with products—books about Aboriginal life and culture, T-shirts with silk-screened images of the Nyinkka on the front and

their cyber-address "[www.nyinkkanyunyu.com.au](http://www.nyinkkanyunyu.com.au)" on the back, coffee mugs with aboriginal designs, and artwork produced by local artists.

Past the main counter, however, the wall extends and glass doors divide the center in half. Through the doors a wide-open room with many offshoots makes up the community area—signs mark the space: "Community Members Only" and "Nyinkka Nyunyu Workers Only." Men's and women's work spaces are marked with makeshift signs. Computers, white boards, painting supplies, a refrigerator, phones, and plenty of coffee and tea define the much-used open community space. At any given time, Warumungu children might be found surfing the Internet, doing their homework, or locating their homes on Google maps. Men and women may be writing their histories, digitizing language tapes, painting for tourists,

scanning old photos, or preparing for a performance. The large white board at the northern end of the room lists some of the tasks for the week, for example:

1. men's meeting Wednesday 10:00
2. Kunjarra tour Friday 9:00
3. computer training Monday 9:00–3:00

Out the back doors Aboriginal men, women, and children come and go, take coffee breaks, have a smoke, discuss local news, arrange pick-ups for their children from school, and watch passersby. Those defined as Nyinkka Nyunyu workers (and paid as such) make up only a small portion of the people coming and going everyday.

Separate—but linked—these spaces reorganize the role of cultural centers throughout indigenous Australia as locally adapted versions of national museums and global tourist markets in which indigenous people are expected to “fit the touristic master narrative” (Bruner 2005:10). While all the hallmarks of cultural tourism and museum displays can be ticked off a check list, what can not be so easily accounted for (either economically or culturally) is the behind-the-scenes work that marks another set of community goals: caring for country, maintaining social ties, teaching language, and preserving cultural and historical artifacts and memories. As Nyinkka Nyunyu went from being an idea to a reality these goals were articulated through the production process and in the collaborative work of cultural negotiation between many interdependent parties.

### **Framing Interdependencies**

In 1995 J. Frank Jakkamarra, a senior Warumungu man, and Elliot McAdam, an Aboriginal man and the General Manager at Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation (Julalikari), contemplated the idea of building a cultural center near the set of black boulders embodying the home of the ancestral Nyinkka. Although commercial buildings had been erected surrounding it, the lot on which the Nyinkka's home rested remained vacant through the 1990s. Jakkamarra knew this place well and was interested in protecting it from destruction. As an elder in the community, a fluent Warumungu speaker, and a ritually knowledgeable man, Jakkamarra wanted to see many things preserved. Taking the lead, Jakkamarra used his established role as a senior man in the community in tandem with his more recently honed skills of bureaucratic

bartering—earned through years of interaction with station managers, missionaries, anthropologists, government officials (and policies), and lawyers—to work with community members and various contractors to envision the Centre's promise.

McAdam and Jakkamarra both knew that a project the size and scale of Nyinkka Nyunyu would require several types of local and national alliances. Neither man was new to the idea of joint ventures on Aboriginal land. McAdam had worked tirelessly to facilitate the expansion of Julalikari and its success as an Aboriginal corporation working with and for residents of the Barkly region. Jakkamarra championed the idea of practical, profitable collaborations during and after the land claims in Tennant Creek. He was an ardent supporter of cultural and linguistic revival, and he knew that making tradition part of the present meant working with outsiders. Having lived through an extended land rights battle and the continual restructuring of “Aboriginal issues” by the government, Jakkamarra was also keenly aware of the need to manage expectations. Young people would still need to go to school and learn Aboriginal law, tourism was part of the possibilities that lay ahead, but it was never imagined to be a shortcut to a productive Aboriginal future.

In their “Tourism Industry Strategy” report, Australia's national indigenous organization, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), put tourism at the top of the list for indigenous economic development.<sup>7</sup> They did so with several caveats: tourism must be part of a far-reaching economic strategy that includes education, training, Aboriginal ownership, positive partnerships, and indigenous choice. ATSIC outlined an emerging industry and a set of complex choices.

There are opportunities for Indigenous people as investors, joint venture partners, employers and employees within the industry. However, increased participation needs to be encouraged without raising false expectations: the tourism industry does not provide for quick or easy benefits, and it requires considerable commitment and patience . . . some of the most successful tourism ventures involving Aboriginal people are joint ventures, involving a combination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal skills and resources. [ATSIC 1997]

Moving slowly and cautiously into this new global market, ATSIC called for informed, collaborative,

and economically feasible tourist ventures that made sense for particular indigenous communities. Like Jakkamarra, ATSIC pointed to the possibilities of joint ventures to define a new type of independence—that is, new ways for Aboriginal communities to create sustainable *interdependencies*; mutually beneficial, economically viable long- and short-term working relationships. Yet both also acknowledge that there is no quick fix; cultural tourism is not the “answer”, but a limited set of possibilities offered in response to ongoing social and economic problems faced by indigenous communities. As such, tourism should not be the primary motivation for promoting partnerships; instead, tourism can be used as a vehicle to address the many local issues that Aboriginal communities face.

When McAdam and Jakkamarra brought the idea to consultants in 1995, they made it clear that the project had to be driven by Warumungu concerns and employ local people. Kutjara Consultants, a semi-local Alice Springs based consultation group, provided the necessary framework to ensure Warumungu supervision of the project.<sup>8</sup> At the first meeting, over one hundred people showed up. Kutjara Consultants wrote down everyone’s suggestions and compiled a list of community members’ hopes for the Centre. To meet the community goals, years of meetings took place before any additional contractors were brought onto the project. This strategy, while lengthy, allowed for in-depth conversations to take place between family groups, Aboriginal organizations, and other interested parties in town creating dialogues that would stimulate debate and direct the eventual production parameters.

Individual consultants brought their own styles to the project. They were all given “skins” (‘subsection kinship designations’)—and thus at least temporarily inserted into the social and political fabric of Warumungu life. Sometimes aesthetic choices had to be reworked as they butted up against protocols concerning gender and age-related materials. Men’s and women’s copies of plans and programs had to be produced to ensure that restrictions on viewing gendered objects could be upheld.<sup>9</sup> Numerous and often contextually redundant meetings were held to discuss issues with various Warumungu family groups. Bush camps were set up so everyone involved could meet in one place, with meals provided, to gain consensus (see figure 3).

Consultants used to definitive answers and timely schedules had to make way for a more fluid decision-making process and a constituency that would be involved at every stage of construction. Negotiation processes—over seemingly small and overtly enormous decisions—were often lengthy and trying for consultants who needed to know exact numbers so storage cases could be built, text written, and graphics designed. Speed and urgency were matters of perspective. Consultants who had worked on land claims and other repatriation projects knew that the “community” in community consultation projects varied and were often at odds with one another. Kutjara Consultants’ long-time relations with many community members, however, made much of this negotiation process smoother, as they were always more than willing to have extra meetings, facilitate trips, and work with other organizations in town to ensure that the proper groups were consulted and advised.

Even still, almost no one was able to duck criticism. Some of the women I worked with were heckled by other families, accused of being “greedy”—taking too much interest in the project and calling too much attention to themselves. One young man who worked with Julalikari told me he liked to disappear for a week or so every now and again, just to duck some of this verbal fire. Workers rotated as plans moved ahead. The elders who were consulted first, did not, by and large, work directly on the day-to-day production of the displays. They continued to be consulted when necessary; their knowledge was central not only to creating accurate displays, but also to the continuance of culturally-mandated protocols for relations of respect. Some community members did not want to be involved. They did not necessarily disapprove of the Centre itself, but they were not interested in that type of work, they were tired of “talking to whitefellas,” or their health kept them from daily involvement.

Disagreements and disputes between family groups should not be ignored—they are part of the fabric of Aboriginal community decision-making. These tensions contributed to the make up of those involved in the Centre’s production, but they did not silence the voices of those who did not participate. Their anger and frustration was registered outside of the formal meetings, on the streets and in the town camps (away from out-of-town consultants) where disputes were managed and mediated amongst small



3. A bush meeting near our camp at Kunjarra. Elizabeth Tregenza outlines some of the possible visual displays on a white board for some Warumungu women. May 2002. Photograph by Kimberly Christen.

groups. Some days new workers showed up at the workshop. Other times, informal meetings were held in town camps to account for the differences of opinion. There was no one formula to ensure a wide array of community involvement; but there were many venues for participation.

The bulk of the labor involved in producing the displays for the Centre as well as leveling the ground, hammering in nails, planting the gardens etc., fell to the younger generations, those who would be the custodians of this site for years to come. Even this group changed as people dropped in and out. There was a core group to be sure. But the number of workers fluctuated as production ebbed and flowed. At the peak of production in 2002, when all the visual displays were being manufactured in town and construction was underway on the main

building, dozens of Warumungu people were employed through Julalikari—most paid through local Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP).<sup>10</sup> Others joined bush trips to get out of town or get a good feed. Kids, elders, male and female workers were all part of the mix as production got underway.

Through these meetings and workshops this community—hard as it was to pin it down—defined just how to display their histories and culture. Unwilling to be, and present, only what was expected, Warumungu community members set out to construct a series of displays that both catered to, and redirected, the normative tourist gaze. Working within the framework of museum exhibition and curation standards, Warumungu community members, and the consultants that they worked with, set



out to reanimate the display terrain in an act of what Ann Fienup-Riordan calls “conscious culture” (2000:167). Planning for the displays revolved around Warumungu negotiations of what culture was, how it mattered, and who should have access to it. The production of, and processes by which, ten historical dioramas and a group of 16 self-portraits were assembled demonstrates collaborative cultural production as it is worked out in the daily interactions of differently situated, motivated, and obligated partners.<sup>11</sup> The displays exist as objects of cultural pride, as educational tools, as historical refutations, and as possible sources of revenue. Their boundaries are porous and their intentions multi-directional.

### It’s About Respect

When Nyinkka Nyunyu was still in the planning stages, the idea for an explanation of *punttu* (‘subsections’ or ‘skin relations’) was discussed as a possible permanent display. Aboriginal kinship systems have been the focus of anthropological study from the first ethnographies in the 1800s through land claims cases in the 1980s that saw the political fallout of too-rigid understandings of kin relations (Merlan 1998; Povinelli 1993). Certainly kinship, as it is imagined in popular discourse as a mix of spiritual, territorial, and human relations, is *something* that Aboriginal Australians are said to still “have.” Warumungu people are well aware of these generalized ideas about aboriginality that circulate and they are concerned with presenting their social relations in their own terms. Displaying the *punttu* system, then, seemed a logical choice for a cultural centre that had as one of its aims to educate a non-Aboriginal audience (mainly white Australian tourists). Consulting charts in the Warumungu Land Claim book and in other anthropological sources, however, lead only to frustration. These black and white charts with lists of names did not articulate the system of relatedness assumed through *punttu* relations. Warumungu *punttu* relations are vibrant, continuing, relations of respect demanding more than sterile views of bloodlines to depict them.

Several meetings took place as people fleshed out ideas for types of displays. Alison Alder, the visual arts consultant on the project, raised the possibility of using a set of lithographs to display the intersecting kin relations.<sup>12</sup> In early 2000, Alder and

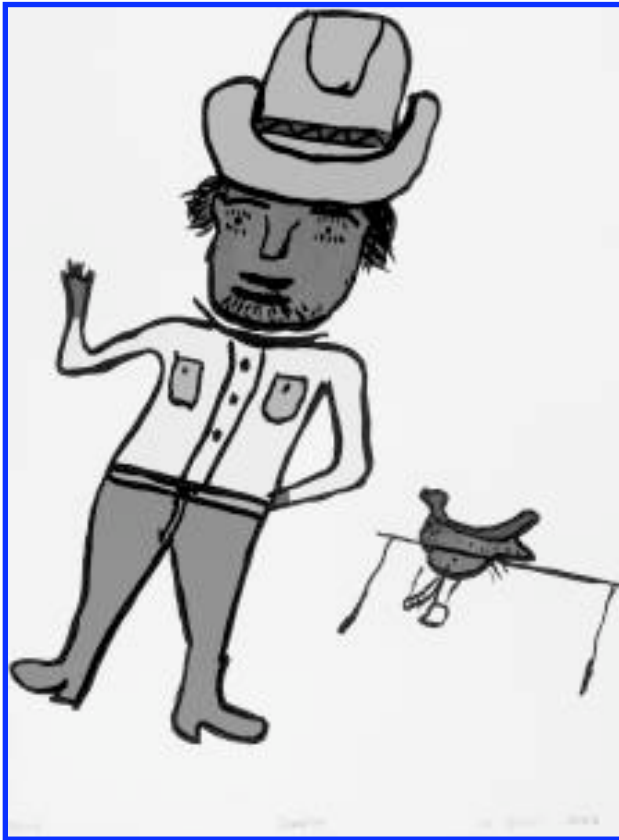
several artists from the Julalikari Women’s Arts and Crafts Centre conducted a workshop during which they made silk-screened self-portraits.<sup>13</sup> The workshop generated many ideas for the *Punttu* display as women painted expressions of themselves, their kin, and their relations to each other in bright colors and with bold designs.

The display’s production allowed a range of people to take part in creating a picture of what Warumungu kinship looks like today. Through months of production, people doodled on sketchpads, showed drafts to family members, worked late at the Centre, or just “gave it a go” with Alder urging them on. Local non-Warumungu artists were included in the production process—painting a few of the portraits, aiding with gathering materials, helping with the lengthy process of layering the color over the screens—and still others are tacitly invoked in the back-stories of each painting.

In 2002 as work progressed for the opening of the Centre, several people began sketching portraits. An elder in the community and the Men’s Supervisor at Nyinkka Nyunyu, Michael Jampin was one of the first. Late one afternoon in June, I came into the Centre’s temporary production offices to the roar of laughter. Jampin was seated in the corner with a group of men circling him. Next to him Alder was holding up a large sheet of paper. Walking closer, I could see bright yellow and green emanating from the sheet. Jampin’s self-presentation was one I could have easily guessed. There he was in green trousers, yellow shirt, cowboy hat and boots, standing next to a saddle-draped fence (figure 4).

Jampin spoke frequently and with longing for his stockman’s days. Like many Aboriginal men his age in the Northern Territory, Jampin worked from a young age on cattle stations owned by white settlers, but run by Aboriginal stockmen. These men and their families often lived on their traditional lands and the men’s stock work allowed them to travel and maintain many of their traditional practices.<sup>14</sup> Jampin spent most of his life on cattle stations, working with his father, traveling across large tracts of land, mustering cattle, and then raising his own children. His life is filled with memories of cattle stations and his self-portrait is a testament to their import.

Jampin’s portrait, as part of the *Punttu* display, calls attention to the enduring and adaptive nature of Aboriginal kinship relations within histories



4. Michael Jampin's self-portrait produced for the Punttu display. Photograph courtesy of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre and Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation.

meant to displace them. Jampin's self-portrait is a reflection of these intertwined histories and social networks. For those who know him, Jampin's painting is a clear reflection of a significant time in his life. For those viewing it without that intimate knowledge, the portrait may conjure paradoxical notions of cowboys, the white frontier, and the unsettled outback all jumbled in this image of an Aboriginal man as a cowboy *himself* settling the country. Neither viewer could deny the coexistence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories colorfully depicted in Jampin's portrait.

The collection of self-portraits illustrates the connectivity of Warumungu-local-national-personal histories as the constitutive grounding for kinship relations. Scanning the finished Punttu display, I see Juppurla's painting of himself donning his favored Jimi Hendrix t-shirt. Namikili's rendering of her brother Jungarrayi, smiling, ready for a night out on the town (figure 5). Jakkamarra's rendering of



5. Rose Namikili's portrait of her brother Jungarrayi produced for the Punttu display. Photograph courtesy of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre and Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation.

himself is in a bright red t-shirt and baseball cap. Nappanangka's image of her sister-in-law, Narrurlu, pictures her with blue eye shadow, dangling necklace, and highlighted hair. Together these images create the basis for rereading kinship, relations of respect, and histories of contact in ways that defy historical narratives of separate pasts and current visions of irreconcilable futures. There is no image where a comfortable set of frontier narratives can easily be invoked—us and them, old and new, settled and savage. Rural and urban are intertwined, not as the wish for assimilation or the tragedy of mixture, but as the reality of interdependent relations forged in spite of, and out of tragedy, loss and dispossession. The prints refuse to separate everyday experiences and life histories from structures of kinship and community. Work, play, and everything in-between, shapes the relations one has and the fabric of those bonds. Choices individuals made in

their self-expressions grew as much out of mundane practices and events as from an emphasis on the collective representation of kin relations. These are not purely DNA-determined kin relations, but relationships built from connections to country, families, and histories. T-shirts and cowboy hats jostle alongside land rights displays and historical revisions.

The Punttu display makes the familiarity of town life acceptable and the continuing connections of kin visible.<sup>15</sup> Even if a visitor does not know Jampin, they could imagine the many whitefellas and other *Wumpurrarni* ('Aboriginal people') he met and lived with on cattle stations. Juppurla's Hendrix t-shirt might give away his interaction with local white teenagers and their embrace of American rock music. These portraits present Warumungu kinship as a system of sociality and relatedness linked by common pasts and shared experiences, everyday travels, and extraordinary events. They bring together layered histories—personal and communal, national and global—in ways that neither downplay change nor privilege tradition. Walking past each portrait, the accompanying text invokes the network of continuing relations. Under Rose Namikili's painting of Jungarrayi, the text reads, "Jungarrayi is brother for Namikili." For Jangali we read that, "Jangali's son's punttu is Jampin and Jangali's brother's son is also Jampin—they are brothers." For Flora Nalijarri's self-portrait we learn that, "Warumungu people know Flora as Nalijarri, but her Wambaya punttu is Balyarrinya, it has the same relationship as Nalijarri."

Local artists, community members, Warumungu, non-Warumungu, young and old created a display that mocks the static lines of genealogical charts and invites a new dialogue on kinship, community, and historical relations. The portraits' confident colors, divergent historical references, and personal eccentricities demand new ways of thinking kinship. The triangles, circles, and connecting lines of the standard anthropological representation of familial relations are broken under the weight of this dynamic expression of relatedness. This dialogue begins with connections to tradition; but it does not stop there, it offers a conversation about relationality built from the desire and demand for respect.

Michael Jampin wrote the text that accompanies the Punttu display. More than a display of kinship, rigidly defined, Jampin emphasized punttu as "respect."

*Manngara jinta arnkulunu wumpurrani ngini. Wirnkarraja arnku nyunyu punttu karrinyki, ngulyaka, wangarriki, yiwalaka, lukurnuku ngapaka, kuyuku mukuku ngarnttanya appa manungku wurr ngunta.*

We Aboriginal people show respect to each other. Wirnkarra ('the Dreaming') gave us skin names for people, soakages, hills, trees, stars, water, animals, for everything in the country.

We don't cut trees in another person's country without permission, or take water, dig the ground, or split rocks. People have different ways of showing respect to different relations. We avoid people after taking part in initiation ceremonies together. We show respect to our in-laws, and don't talk directly to them. We act modestly towards our elders, fathers, mothers, grandparents.

In the evening we see the dark and the red glow. These were divided by the Dreaming into the two groups of skin names: Kingili and Wurlurru. The red are the Wurlurru and the black are Kingili. Each Warumungu person belongs to one of these two groups, and these in turn are divided into sixteen punttu.<sup>16</sup>

Jampin's words give voice to a system that incorporates human and other-than-human persons and territories in a network of overlapping relations of respect (Myers 1986). Proper actions result from knowing and showing respect. In Jampin's text, the social landscape is made up of reciprocal relations that demand proper actions, expect certain behaviors, and take actions when people fail to meet standards (Peterson 1993).

A month after the Centre opened when I asked Jampin about the text he had written, he elaborated further on the idea of respect. "In English we might say skin, we might say it like that—but it's all respect. Respect is in the ground we walking on. '*Manngara jinta arnkulunu*,' we say. Like we might be little bit shame for other people because that's respect—*manngara*, we call in Warumungu." For Jampin, being a "little bit shame" means acting appropriately, according to Warumungu law. Being respectful is to be and show "shame"—a type of reverence for and deprecation to the abiding law.<sup>17</sup> Punttu relations define respect within a field of relationality where kin are intimately involved in the well-being of their social world.

Jampin continued to explain: "See, old people couldn't take it lightly. Like playing around, or talking during ceremonies, in those days people

didn't do that. You might get killed. That was hard law. Old people still got that respect, still got it." For Jampin and others the display embodies the old "hard law" as it manifests in contemporary settings. The loss of land and disruptions of law are acknowledged at the same time as the possibility for their resignification is made clear. In Jampin's view the Centre would be *one more place* where the hard law of their elders would be respected and passed on to younger generations and made available for outsiders to understand and acknowledge. Jampin's emphasis on the "law" and "respect" as part of the Centre's pedagogical aim points to the extension of Warumungu cultural modes of relationality through the Centre itself. While tourist dollars keep the doors open, they also aid in the circulation of local cultural practices. Tourists are one—and not the primary—expected audience for these displays.

### Dynamic Displays

Like the Puntu display, the creation of a set of ten dioramas to display aspects of Warumungu history and culture brought together a rotating set of Warumungu men and women of all ages with local and not-so-local consultants in a process of collaborative history making. After several trips to other national and local museums, archives, and cultural centers, discussion over display styles, and suggestions about content, the dioramas emerged as the most efficient and engaged way to display Warumungu histories. Each diorama would visualize a specific story, event, or theme through the overlap of national, regional, and Warumungu narrations. Using archival documents, old photos, and newly produced clay and wood figures, the dioramas would mimic the linkages between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories while also reversing the national trend of maintaining the white settler narrative as the dominant point of view (Alder 2007; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Healy 1999).

The list of possibilities for the dioramas underwent many revisions. Several factors came into play, not least of which was the building's material space.<sup>18</sup> Although there was an extensive list of ideas to choose from, the curved design of the wall, the size of the diorama boxes, and the space needed for lighting all limited the final number. When the interior architect on the project presented a virtual

walk through of the display area at a community meeting, it was clear to all that the large number of dioramas some anticipated was unrealistic.

In early 2002, when Alder and several Nyinkka Nyunyu workers began the construction process, there were 18 "themes" from which they would ultimately have to choose nine to produce. Meeting after meeting—inside and outside the bounds of consultants and organizations—the list dwindled closer to nine. The final dioramas—"Jurnkkurakurr" ('the dearest place'), "Wurulyjukunjalkki" ('taken away'), "Cubadgee Jappangarti", "Pulikikari" ('pastoral industry'), "Mangkamanta" ('Philip Creek Mission'), "Putjali" ('ceremonies and dancing'), "Wangarri Wantijalkki" ('mining'), "Tapinyngara Wirranta" ('Night Patrol') and "Nyanjalkki" ('Pioneer Theatre')—are collections of histories with similar scenarios throughout Australia.<sup>19</sup> The similarities should not, however, negate the necessity or personalization of their telling. Warumungu histories, and the personal lives to which they point, are retold in the dioramas not only to educate, to reorient, and to remind *others*, but also as a way to celebrate, honor, embrace, and to not forget the many Warumungu histories that extend from this remote town.

Although they were months in the making, each diorama presented its own set of challenges. Who was to be consulted (and how many times), which stories could and should be incorporated, just how much information was enough, and so on. Each diorama presented its own set of concerns. Yet, as Alder shows, "These conundrums were solved by people working together, tossing around ideas, producing small sketches and drawings, going out to the sites where events happened, and discussing the problems with the old people of the community" (2007). As the main supervisors, Trisha Narrurlu and Michael Jampin took on the task of organizing consultations, working in conjunction with different families, speaking with elders first, and gaining permission when needed. Once construction of the displays was underway, Narrurlu made a point to continue the consultation process and to open the doors at the Nyinkka Nyunyu workshop to anyone who wanted to tell (or not tell) their story. Although it was rare for someone to speak up and say "no" to an idea, it became apparent through slouching shoulders, back-channeled talk, and flat out silence that some themes were either not acceptable or their reproduction in material form seemed unimaginable.

*Wirnkarra* was one.<sup>20</sup> Although everyone agreed that *wirnkarra* was central to Warumungu life, no one could, or would, step up to say just how it might be displayed. Dianne Nampin expressed the difficulty in displaying *wirnkarra* this way: “see *wirnkarra* is our law, and it’s hard that law, we follow from our father’s dreaming, we have to do it that way.” *Wirnkarra* is normally translated in English as “dreaming” or “law.” Throughout Australia “dreaming” is used as an English translation for Aboriginal social-political systems in which ancestors, land, and people are connected in ongoing relations (Morphy 1996; Myers 1986). The simultaneous re-translation of dreaming to law by Aboriginal people signifies an attempt to demonstrate the power of Aboriginal social systems as legitimate, legal, political frameworks.

As Nampin attempted to explain the potential conflicts with depicting *wirnkarra* in a diorama, I looked around at all the women nearby. No one looked up, everyone sat with their eyes fixed on the ground, digging with sticks or rocking infants. The silence made their uneasiness and reluctance clear. Nampin continued, “Some people might not want that in the building, it might make them old people feel sorry.” Although the dreaming is the preeminent category associated with Aboriginal culture, *wirnkarra* was left off the list. Instead, the land claims display, the stories told on the plasma screens, and the *wirnkarra* travels etched in the map wall would all speak to the continuing presence of, and multiple connotations for, *wirnkarra*.

Jurnkkurakurr, on the other hand, remained on the list of possible dioramas from the beginning. There never seemed to be any question as to its standing: it was there to stay. Jurnkkurakurr is a waterhole, a permanent source of water in an arid landscape, and a place at which several Warumungu ancestors live. Jurnkkurakurr was also a site of settler intrusion. In 1872, the Overland Telegraph Station was built near the waterhole, marking the long-lasting encroachment of white settlers into Warumungu country. Jurnkkurakurr—or Seven Mile as it was known in English for its distance from town—served as a point of contact between early white settlers and Aborigines when the region embodied the economic hopes of a new (white) nation. Outside the tight grip of police and government officials in its early years, the Station served as a temporary site of respite for many

Warumungu people who were able to remain on their ancestral homeland and access resources at the Telegraph Station (Nash 1984). It later became a site for pan-Aboriginal ceremonies and a source of rations and employment for the Warumungu people displaced from the town’s newly drawn boundaries (Christen 2004). Today the yellow rectangular “Aboriginal Land” sign defines the territory once again.

Lining the back of the diorama, a photo of the landscape surrounding Jurnkkurakurr taken on the same trip that gravel and sticks from the site were collected to line the base of the diorama. One of the buildings from the telegraph station is reconstructed in miniature form as clay figurines are seen receiving rations from a white station hand. In the background, Warumungu women dance near a bough shed and others work while nannie goats feed. The Jurnkkurakurr diorama, like the others, is a visual catalog, a tactile archive of memories pieced together from several sources (figure 6). It reminds people of a past, but it also invokes memories of the present: the trip to get the photos, the lovely chicken sandwiches we ate near the waterhole after a day recording stories, traveling to the archives, painting the green trim on the telegraph station building—just the right shade of green. In each diorama one can see the confluence of many histories: the seeming efficiency of government policies, the subversion of these by people like Cubadgee Jappangarti, the success of community projects like Night Patrol, the enduring sadness left by those “taken away,” and the celebration of land and kin in the performance of ceremonies.<sup>21</sup> As part of the larger visual display in the Centre the dioramas act as an historical anchor and a contemporary political commentary.

In one sweeping glance, viewers encounter Warumungu place names, plasma screens, and dioramas—all embedded in one curved wall—at once evoking fixity and fluidity. Place names etched in black, foreground territorial permanence. Dioramas protected behind glass reconstruct significant historical moments. Interspersed between the dioramas, plasma screens play a continuous loop of contemporary scenes: Jalajirrrpa, a local Warumungu band, playing their own rock-n-roll/country/hip-hop hybrid, elders and younger generations discussing mining on their land, a young man hunting a kangaroo, and an aerial shot of the town’s



6. The Jurnkkurakurr ('dearest place') diorama. Photograph courtesy of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre and Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation.

main street. The dioramas have many contexts; they speak to many people and invoke many memories. There is no way to be sure of just how they will be seen and read/interpreted. Presenting new ways of viewing the past, their narrative work is far from over. Behind the glass cases, through the months of production work, the diorama's generative capacities are rendered visible.

Focusing on the production practices highlights the subtle ways in which the stated goals for the Centre and its displays were met and altered. Negotiation and collaboration are often the "buzz words" for indigenous projects (Fienup-Riordan 2000:213). Taking a close look at these partnerships, one can see that they are manifest not as total inclusion, or ill-defined institutional bureaucracy, but as fraught practices that connect with Warumungu notions of respect and "properness" (obligations to

act) and articulate these with the demands of creating a space for tourists, local non-Aboriginal visitors, and the many Warumungu groups who claim a right to narrate their own histories (Christen 2006). Nyinkka Nyunyu, as an institutional entity and an ongoing community project, suggests the need to rethink the boundaries and critiques of indigenous cultural collaboration and production.

### Brokering Change

The construction of the visual displays for Nyinkka Nyunyu brought the connections—sought after and imposed—between the Warumungu and their many interlocutors into focus. Some community members, like Trisha Narrurlu and Michael Jampin, took on leadership roles within the organization using their knowledge of connections

between family groups, Aboriginal organizations, and country histories to their advantage. Narrurlu and Jampin's differences—in age, gender, cultural and linguistic knowledge, and life histories—highlight the emergence of newly articulated cultural roles linked to both legal notions of “traditional owners” extended from land claims legislation, and cultural ideals of generational and gendered knowledge-based responsibilities. While land claims defined particular individuals as traditional owners of, and culturally knowledgeable about, their territories, this did not negate on-going cultural protocols concerning the obligations groups of kin have to their countries, ancestors, and family groups. Although individuals are often characterized as “bosses” in relation to rituals and territories, power rests in one's ability to work with and demonstrate knowledge to related kin groups (Christen 2006; Dussart 2000; Myers 1982, 1986; Povinelli 1993). As Myers demonstrates, part of the obligation to act is framed in the necessity to “always ask” the proper boss/owner of a territory, site, or knowledge set for permission (1982:184). This is a social network in which access to knowledge and accountability for its uses are intertwined logics of cultural action and responsibility. Access to knowledge, country, and rituals is determined by proper actions within a system obliging one to act while at the same time restraining one's ability to work alone.

Both Narrurlu and Jampin are members of well-respected (and connected) family groups. They are responsible community members, with expansive knowledge bases about the intricacies and histories of the Aboriginal communities in town. However, while both are certainly knowledgeable about Warumungu culture, what allowed them to fill *these* roles was their social savvy—their abilities and desires to work with the various constituencies (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in town as well as in Canberra, Melbourne, or wherever they were called upon to present the vision of Nyinkka Nyunyu as a Warumungu project. They were more than “go-betweens” or “middlemen”—their work began and ended with an assumption of overlapping spaces: nation and town, bush and city, museums and tourists, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. There is no between.

The bureaucratic and cultural roles accepted by Narrurlu and Jampin are certainly part of the contingent rearticulation of intercultural exchanges often

glossed by assigning individuals the status of a “culture broker”—someone adept at navigating overlapping cultural/political spheres for the benefit of their community. Yet this designation often eclipses the deeply inter-social and intensely local aspects of cultural brokering. In his discussion of Native culture brokers and their relationships to museums in the mid-1900s, Aaron Glass suggests that, “theories of cultural brokerage often suggest that the successful broker is one who lives on the boundary between two worlds and is capable of translating values between them” (2006:25). Glass details the strategic positioning of Native peoples spatially and temporally between metropolitan museums and the rural Native communities from which they collected objects as necessary for the success of the individual brokers and the museum collectors. But this assumed (and enforced) distance actually obscures the intersection of “two different regimes of cultural value” (Glass 2006:34). This artificial construction also negates the formidable community voices and connections rendered audible within individual representations of culture/cultural objects and their values.

For Jampin and Narrurlu their roles depended on and demanded the collaboration of many sets of stakeholders and their abilities to continually align systems of obligation, respect, and valuation amongst them. Whether holding a bush meeting with disgruntled community members, lobbying ministers for funding, or negotiating display details with architects, the work involved in these culturally established and socially necessary roles are not captured or rightly situated by the sometimes-derogatory notion of a “tribal elite” or an emergent “Aboriginal bourgeoisie.” Whereas the former can encompass a range of cultural mediations, the later often presupposes a perceived cooptation of Aboriginal people by outside/non-traditional systems. By focusing on the presumed newness of these roles—and explicitly linking them to capitalist narratives—their continuity with, and renegotiation of, Aboriginal systems of sociality and exchange are erased.

Brokering change and bartering with culture are not only (or always) the effect of capital's commodity logic or neoliberal agendas, they are also part of the dynamism of cultural change within settler nations where the currents of capital are rerouted and *partially* undermined by systems of respect and obligation. When skeptics of collaborative indigenous projects begin with assumptions of

co-opted, commercial, erasure of indigenous voices, they write out the possibility of viable, partial, situated culture work. Cultural centers are *one* part of *many* strategies for indigenous self-determination and as such they articulate with histories of intercultural exchange, violence, and marginalization as well as emergent practices of alliance-making and political partnerships (Clifford 2004; Erikson 1999; Geismar and Tilley 2003; Myers 2006; Nesper 2003). If collaboration is viewed narrowly through a neo-colonial prism, the hard work of rerouting and muting colonial practices in the present is denied. When a coherent indigenous viewpoint (or community) is assumed, indigenous heritage and tourist projects are held to an impossible standard of representation and an unwillingness to envision collaboration as *sets of compromises by overlapping constituencies*.

One day in July 2002 I walked around the Nyinkka Nyunyu construction site with Michael Jakkamarra as he mused about his future employment and the possibility of “getting back all them objects from them museums.” “Those objects,” he continued, “that’s ours, it was taken from here, but we saw it in the museum down there, I saw it there and knew it was Warumungu peoples.” Dianne Nampin expressed a similar tainted joy upon seeing Warumungu cultural artifacts in the museums.

I am happy, smiling with all my heart. Many of the objects displayed here were taken away a long time ago to various locations, both interstate and international. The removal and dispossession of our ancestors belongings—things they made and used, gave and received as gifts, objects associated with Dreamings and dreaming sites—left an empty space. We, their descendants, went on trips to the store rooms of the South Australian and Melbourne museums, where many of these objects were located, and held discussions with the curators about the artifacts and other materials held in their collections. They agreed to return the materials to us to store here at Nyinkka Nyunyu. Now our children have access to these objects, resources and language materials.

Nampin’s sentiments, expressed on her return from museums in Melbourne and Adelaide, reflect the feelings of most Warumungu people involved in the repatriation process. Stories of items—and ancestor’s remains—returning to Warumungu country elicit an array of emotions: anger, consternation, joy, and

hope.<sup>22</sup> The process of reclaiming objects, relatives, and histories covered up, sidestepped, stolen, and locked up has been an on-going journey for Warumungu people in Tennant Creek.

Throughout the 1990s museums dedicated themselves to producing new relationships between themselves and the indigenous communities from whom they held cultural materials. This shift included Museum Australia’s 1993 “Previous Possession, New Obligations” policy. The document aimed to produce a:

framework to guide the development of relationships between museums in Australia and Indigenous Australians by identifying protocols, policies and procedures based on consultation with Indigenous people for (1) dealing with human remains, secret/sacred material and the general collections of Indigenous cultural material; (2) including Indigenous people in research and public programs; and (3) addressing issues of governance. [Sullivan, Kelly, and Gordon 2003:208]

While the policy did not specifically address indigenous-operated museums and cultural centers, it did create an atmosphere of collaboration. Indeed, several museums including the South Australian Museum opened their doors to Warumungu community members and worked with the staff to facilitate the use of a rotating set of objects for display at Nyinkka Nyunyu. This *partial* repatriation was a necessary compromise given the size of the Centre and its display and storage space. The temporarily repatriated objects embody the past of Australian exploration and exploitation, as well as, a present in which Warumungu curation and display modes undermine the reaches of that past.

The Warumungu land claim was the catalyst for the previous generation to join together, speak their country stories, and reveal some of their knowledge in order to get back what had been taken from them. Nyinkka Nyunyu now holds the same tentative promise for a new generation of Warumungu who confront national histories of erasure through ongoing economic disenfranchisement and social marginalization. This generation may not have court battles and legislation as their benchmarks of success. The work ahead for those invested in Nyinkka Nyunyu is to define just how success will be measured when it is not up to a judge to decide “victory” or “defeat.”



### Determining Success

In July 2003, after nearly eight years of planning, consultations, and production, the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre opened its doors. Sadly, J. Frank Jakkamarra passed away before the Centre opened. But with tears running down his face, Elliot McAdam, now the Local Member for the Barkly region (i.e. legislative representative to the Northern Territory government), recounted the struggle and success that the Centre represents for the Warumungu and other Aboriginal people in the region. Elders who had worked as consultants on the project, younger generations who built the dioramas that lined the walls, out-of-town contractors, long-time Tennant Creek residents, and Warumungu people from the surrounding area celebrated for two days as their dream became a reality. The jubilation was well deserved. Over the eight years of its planning and production the project stopped and sputtered due to lack of funding, the death of Warumungu elders, and lack of local support from non-Aboriginal town leaders. But in the last few years before it opened, a groundswell of local Warumungu enthusiasm and an influx of funding from a range of sources put the project on steady ground.

On opening day both men and women performed traditional dances. Children staged a play reenacting the explorer John McDouall Stuart's first meeting with—and fateful defeat by—Warumungu people at Attack Creek. Gifts were given to the Aboriginal traditional owners, objects returned from national institutions, and more than one tearful speech was made. When Warumungu women performed their *yawulyu* ('ritual songs and dance'), Kathleen Nappanangka interspersed her singing with short bursts of speech calling out "nyinkkanyunyu spiky tail's home this one." The day was full of such impromptu moments of joy and unscripted announcements of hope. Inside the main building Warumungu culture, art, and history are now on display. In the stories behind the production of these displays, an account of the creative and contested traditions and alliances that make up the mixture of tourism, cultural survival, and economic success emerges. They are the stories of how culture can work.

In the guest book at the front desk one visitor remarked, "I'm sorry" and another wrote, "This is a beautiful place, you should be proud." Like the visitors to the Centre, the Warumungu community moves between the sorrow they may feel towards

the past and the hope that is inspired by the creation of places like Nyinkka Nyunyu. The opening of Nyinkka Nyunyu signaled the end of one set of relations and projects and the continuation of others as the Centre opens its doors to tourists, community members, town residents, visiting politicians, and researchers. Nyinkka Nyunyu is a "success story"—a community project built on abiding and temporary partnerships between local, regional, national, and international groups that met the needs of multiple Warumungu constituencies, as it looked out to strangers and inward to extended family units. Predicting whether Nyinkka Nyunyu will pay off as an economic shot in the arm for the community, town, and region is premature. Tourist dollars are never guaranteed and government funding is continually being cut back. If Nyinkka Nyunyu's success is judged in purely economic terms, by the generation of tourist dollars, one negates the cultural and social directives that drove the production of the Centre, as well as the realities of small-scale indigenous tourism in remote locations.<sup>23</sup>

On quick glance, many indigenous centers perform the role of compliant subjects; they repackage traditional dances for nighttime shows, design t-shirts with Aboriginal themes for sale, and present cleaned up, memorable versions of exotic locals. My focus has been on the other spaces opened up, outside of this view, in spaces where collaboration is neither easily defined nor harmoniously executed. Neither happy native nor perpetual victims, this Warumungu version of touristic display makes a decidedly less fantastic statement: we are here, come in, stay a while, and have a chat. As much a place where tourists may see what Warumungu community members want them to see; it is also a place where *Wumpurrani* ('Aboriginal people') know whitefellas will continue to see what they want to see. Acknowledging the necessity and vitality of the separate community spaces and projects within this tourist space is a crucial part of defining the agenda set out by the Warumungu constituencies who use them. The singular, sought after, "aboriginal experience" may be available for some people. But the Warumungu culture, history, and partnerships produced through the Centre's production and continuing existence is as much about the work behind-the-scenes as it is the performances and products in plain sight.



7. Rose Namikili leads a group of tourists to a local site, discussing the various bush medicines and bush foods in the area. February 2006. Photograph by Kimberly Christen.

The daily work of Warumungu community members—in the café, as tour guides, managers, performers, and consultants—creates a nuanced picture of contemporary Aboriginal life, emergent museum practices, and continuing culture work (figures 7 and 8). Indigenous cultural centers—as tourist destinations, storage houses for cultural artifacts, educational centers, and sites of historical renarration—embody many voices, coexisting agendas, and divergent communities. The business of building a cultural center “reveal(s) a process of collaboration between diverse peoples amid conditions of unequal empowerment.” But as Patricia Erikson also reminds us, “cultural centers are both translators and translations, agents of social change and products of accommodation” (2002:27–28). Culture may be on display, but it is not displaced.

For now, cultural centers are preeminently “spaces of hope” (Harvey 2000). They are sites of

local and national desires for material and cultural success and historical redress. Taking a moment to celebrate the Centre’s opening and the path to its completion does not assume that all the intended goals will come to fruition. Trade-offs and triumphs will occur. There are payoffs and pitfalls in constructing hope. The possibilities are not endless. There are limits to be sure. The path of the Nyinkka moves across the landscape in many directions, overlapping with other ancestral tracks, linking communities, land, and ancestors. The path has been partially obscured by roads, train tracks, buildings, and bulldozers. But it has not been wiped clean. Following the Nyinkka the Centre reminds us that hope is not so easily dashed, nor only cynically defined. We should take our cue from the sign at the entrance to the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre: “*Kurtu apijirra yingalmana*. Don’t be frightened, come in” (figure 9).



8. Noelene Nakkamarra works near the main garden at Nyinkka Nyunyu. December 2005. Photograph courtesy of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre and Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation.



9. The main sign as one enters Nyinkka Nyunyu from the south along the Stuart Highway. July 2004. Photograph by Kimberly Christen.

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### Notes

1. Tennant Creek is located 500 kilometers north of Alice Springs in Australia's Northern Territory. The population is approximately 2,500; 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. I worked in Tennant Creek for several months in 1995 and then for 26 months between 2000-2006. This work was supported by grants from the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (Grant # G2001/6585), the University of California Pacific Rim Research Program, and a Washington State University, College of Liberal Arts Faculty Travel Grant. For more information about Nyinkka Nyunyu, their exhibitions, and current community projects visit their website at: [www.nyinkkanyunyu.com.au](http://www.nyinkkanyunyu.com.au).
2. The 1976 *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* allowed Aboriginal claimants to seek ownership of unalienated Crown land. As part of the process Aboriginal communities had to document their relationships to one another and to their land. Defined by the *Act*, claimants had to designate "traditional owners" (a list of individuals) who had "primary spiritual responsibility" for the land (Commonwealth of Australia 1976, 3.1, 50.1a). Neither this legislation nor the more recent 1993 *Native Title Act*, allow for massive reterritorialization of indigenous land. Instead, both limit what land Aboriginal people can lay claim to and under what conditions their claims may be sought. See Peterson and Langton (1983) on land rights in Australia; Merlan (1998) and Povinelli (1993) for particular cases in the Northern Territory; See Nash at <http://www.anu.edu.au/linguistics/nash/aust/wru/land.html>, accessed March 14, 2007, for a timeline of the Warumungu land claim.
3. The bulk of the funding for the construction of the Centre and its displays came from federal and Northern Territory government funding bodies. During the many years it took to complete the project, Aboriginal organizations, including their governing boards, community members, and contractors lobbied government officials, wrote grant applications, and worked with government bureaucrats at all levels of government to secure the funding necessary. The Centre also established a "Friends of Nyinkka Nyunyu" campaign to solicit private funds.
4. I refer to people by their first names and their "skin" names according to their preference. Warumungu people belong to either the Kingili or Wurlurru patrimoiety. These are further divided into eight subsections (referred to in English as 'skins') each constituting a male/female coupling. In the Wurlurru patrimoiety, skin pairs are: Nappanangka/Jappanangka, Nappangarti/Jappangarti, Naljarri/Jappaljarri, and Namikili/Jungarrayi. Kingili skins are: Narrurlu/Juppurla, Nampin/Jampin, Nakkamarra/Jakkamarra, and Nangali/Jangali. Anthropologist 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).
5. At any given time in Tennant Creek, Aboriginal organizations may be working with a number of regional, national, and transnational groups (from non-profits to corporations, miners to academics) on a range of projects (Christen 2004, 2006). Nampin, like many others, has worked with a range of "others" (anthropologists, linguists, lawyers, government officials, etc.) for decades. The fact that she is still willing to see the possibilities ahead does not discount the failures she has witnessed.
6. Whitefellas is a commonly used designation for non-Aboriginal outsiders who work for and with Aboriginal organizations.
7. After years of attack, Prime Minister John Howard and his conservative party were able to successfully dismantle ATSIC in 2004 (Altman 2004; Cowlshaw 2004). Throughout 2005 ATSIC's demise was used to usher in Howard's new policy of "mainstreaming" and a "whole-of-government" approach to indigenous affairs. With this most recent shift, funding for local indigenous operations are under threat as new procedures for allocating government monies are being written (Altman 2004; Gray and Sanders 2006).
8. Kutjara Consultants are an Alice Springs-based consultation group which has worked extensively with Aboriginal communities in the region and already had ties to the community through other projects.
9. Gender divisions within Aboriginal communities are generally defined as "women's business" and "men's business." While it is culturally the case that men and women often separate during ritual performances or for other work-related activities (such as meetings), it is not the case that specifically gendered groups act independently of one another or that one group exerts a direct and hierarchical pressure over the other. See Bell (1993); Dussart (2000); and Merlan (1998).

10. Government-funded Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP) were designed to reduce unemployment in Aboriginal communities through the sponsorship of local community projects. CDEP employees receive a wage just slightly over the welfare (often referred to as sit-down money) rate. The program began in the late 1970s and has in the last two years been steadily eroded by emergent job training schemes (ABC 2007; Altman 2004, 2005; Rowse 1993; Sanders 1998).
11. The dioramas and self-portraits are the main permanent displays in the Centre. As such they became the focus of much of the community work.
12. Alder lived in Tennant Creek for many years, working for Julalikari as the manager at Women's Arts and Crafts Centre. Her familiarity with community members and her previous work with Aboriginal artists all eased the way for the production of this expansive project.
13. Julalikari Women's Arts and Crafts Centre opened in 1994 as a place for Aboriginal women of all ages to work on various art projects including, but not limited to, paintings for tourists. In fact, the women wanted a space separate from easy tourist access so they would not feel "humbugged" (pressured) to paint for tourists (Alison Alder, personal communication, May 15, 2002). In the intervening years the women at the Centre have changed their minds and have opened the Centre to tourists as a way to sell their paintings (Alan Murin, personal communication, November 27, 2006). See [www.julalikariarts.com](http://www.julalikariarts.com) (accessed March 14, 2007) for more on the artists and their work.
14. The history of Aboriginal labor on white-owned cattle stations vary throughout Australia and even within the Northern Territory. Some Aboriginal men were able to remain relatively autonomous as long as they did their work, others met with violent bosses who did not allow them to speak their languages or perform rituals. Women and children also had different histories on stations. Women often were required to stay on the station and do domestic work, while children often attended white-run schools. See Rowse (1998), Cowlshaw (1999), and McGrath (1987).
15. Since the opening of the Centre, a copy of the Punttu display was purchased by the National Museum in Canberra and another set is part of Artback's Visual Arts program available as a touring exhibition throughout Australia (Artback 2004). The first display of the portraits outside of the Centre took place in Alice Springs in February 2004.
16. Jampin wrote the text in both Warumungu and English as it is here. He gave no explanation as to why the second half of the text is only in English.
17. 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 a verb—one can "shame" someone else. See Arthur (1996) and Harkins (1994) for more on the use of the term within Aboriginal English.
18. Alder describes the process in more detail highlighting the intersection of practical artistic matters of material availability and techniques with the involvement of multiple groups (2007). For more on Aboriginal art generally see Morphy (1998) and Myers (2002).
19. *Jurnkkurakurr* ('the dearest place') depicts life at the telegraph station in the early 1900s; *Wurulyjukunjalikki* ('taken away') represents the stolen generation (children taken away from their parents by the government due to their mixed-race status); *Cubadgee Jappangarti* tells the story of "Dick Cubadgee" the Warumungu man who aided explorer David Lindsey (see note 22); *Pulikikari* ('pastoral industry') uses two dioramas—a men's and a women's—to show life on the many cattle stations, as it is remembered by many of the present-day Warumungu community members, where women performed domestic chores and men ran cattle; *Mangkamanta* ('Philip Creek Mission') depicts life on the mission where adults and children were separated in an attempt to cut the generational transmission of language and cultural practices; *Putjali* ('ceremonies and dancing') shows a version of traditional men's dance; *Wangarri Wantijalkki* ('mining') tells the story of Blue Moon Mine from the perspective of several of the women who were taken there as young girls to work; *Tapinyngara Wirranta* ('Night Patrol') shows the community at work helping one another to work out differences without violence; and *Nyanjalikki* ('Pioneer Theatre') depicts the early days of the town's life when Aboriginal people were not allowed in town, but were brought in from nearby missions to watch Hollywood movies.
20. For more on the term's historical and colonial roots and its use throughout Australia see Morphy (1996); Swain (1989); and Wolfe (1991).
21. Locally run Aboriginal Night Patrol services function in many small towns and outstation communities throughout the Northern Territory. In most Night Patrol services, volunteers from the communities work with local police to intervene in community disputes before they turn to violence. In Tennant Creek the Night Patrol vans also take intoxicated people home to avoid altercations with the police. Tennant Creek's Night Patrol was honored with a 1992 Australian Violence Prevention Award.
22. The remains of Dick Cubadgee, a Warumungu man who assisted explorer David Lindsey in his quest for cattle land in the Barkly region, were returned to the community in 1991 nearly one hundred years after he died. Between 1886 and 1889 when he died, Dick Cubadgee performed Aboriginal "fire magic" for museum crowds, worked with Afghan trackers, met Australia's burgeoning bourgeoisie, and pleaded his case for Aboriginal territorial autonomy to the political elite (Jones 2005). Other Aboriginal communities' attempts to repatriate human remains have met with mixed success, as recently as 2006 British museums still refuse to relinquish remains to Aboriginal communities (ABC 2006).
23. In their study of Aboriginal tourism policies in Australia over the last 25 years, Whitford, Bell and Watkins find that there has been a lack of consistency within tourist policies fluctuating between economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Furthermore, they suggest that government policies focusing on economic outcomes are misguided and overlook the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' goals are more evenly

directed to social and cultural results. In addition, these economic-based policies ignore the facts of the size and scale of Aboriginal tourist ventures, the remote locations of most, and the lack of management skills pertaining directly to tourism and marketing in most communities (2001:169–173). See also Altman (1993) and Martin (1995).

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*Kimberly Christen is an Assistant Professor in the Comparative Ethnic Studies Department at Washington State University. She has collaborated with the Warumungu people of Tennant Creek, in Australia's Northern Territory, since 1995. Her forthcoming book with the School of Advanced Research Press examines Warumungu alliance-making strategies in more-than-local projects and practical partnerships. Additional multimedia collections related to this article and Kim's other projects can be found at her blog: [www.kimberlychristen.com](http://www.kimberlychristen.com).*

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### *Abstract*

In July 2003 the Warumungu Aboriginal community opened the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre in Tennant Creek, Northern Territory, Australia. Nyinkka Nyunyu is a Warumungu community center, museum, and tourist destination. As such it embodies the eclectic and practical modalities of Aboriginal business. This article examines the practices of Aboriginal representation and self-determination through the behind-the-scenes work of community consultation, collaboration, and culture-making. Looking to existing social relations and systems of obligation, the Warumungu community's production of the visual displays for the Centre demonstrates the interdependent networks forged out of a colonial history of displacement and a present trajectory of alliance-building. [Keywords: indigenous peoples, cultural centers, museum displays]



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