

Ontologies of the image and economies of exchange

ABSTRACT

In the early 1970s, the Aboriginal artist and activist Wandjuk Marika asked the Australian government to investigate the unauthorized use of Yolngu clan designs on a variety of commodity forms, inaugurating a process of recognizing Indigenous ownership of “copyright” in such designs. This treatment of design—and of culture—as a form of property involves understandings and practices of materiality and subjectivity that differ from those informing indigenous, Aboriginal relationships to cultural production and circulation. In this essay I explore the significance for material culture theory of recent work on and events in the development of notions of cultural property. One of my main concerns is the relevance of local understandings of objectification, or objectness, and human action—as embedded in object-ideologies. I discuss the limited capacity of legal discourses of cultural property to capture and reflect the concerns of Indigenous Australians about their own relation to culture, to creativity, and to expression. [*art, copyright, materiality, Indigenous Australia*]

Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope.

—Raymond Williams (1983:268)

Ownership gathers things momentarily to a point by locating them in the owner, halting endless dissemination, effecting an identity.

—Marilyn Strathern (1999:177)

In the early 1970s, the Aboriginal artist and activist Wandjuk Marika asked the Australian government to investigate the unauthorized use of Yolngu clan designs on a variety of commodity forms, inaugurating a process of recognizing Indigenous “copyright” for such designs. Copyright, famously, is known to involve a particular formulation of materiality, distinguishing idea from concrete expression, with only the latter being subject to ownership rights as a form of property. However sympathetic to the concerns of Indigenous Australians over controlling their culture, this treatment of design—and of culture—as a form of property involves understandings and practices of materiality and subjectivity that are different from those underlying indigenous, Aboriginal relationships to cultural production and circulation. In exploring the significance for material culture theory of recent work on and events in the development of notions of cultural property, one of my main concerns in this essay is the relevance of local understandings of objectification, or objectness, and human action—as embedded in object-ideologies. I discuss the insufficiency of legal discourses of cultural property to capture and reflect Indigenous Australian concerns about their relation to culture, to creativity, and to expression.

The central thesis of this essay is that materiality—as a theory of quality of objectness—is not so much an issue of matter but, rather, is constituted through ideological frameworks. Thus, the formulation of materiality (or materialities) is varied and often conflicting around different understandings of subjects and objects. Nowhere is this more apparent—or palpable—than in situations in which human beings attempt to secure or stabilize—or

limit—the flow of culture, to turn culture into property form. Rather than proposing a theory of materiality, then, I am interested here in pursuing through ethnographic consideration the trajectory of local theories of materiality as Indigenous Australian paintings and designs move through the Western art-culture system and the Western concept of property and as different object-ideologies meet. My interest in this problem derives from ethnography that indicates Aboriginal concerns over the control of socially valued knowledge and its dispersal—through practices of secrecy, exchange, invisibility, and immateriality. These practices clearly depended on the materialities of producing and circulating knowledge through voice, ritual, and object-presentation and equally certainly did not anticipate the materiality of mechanical and digital reproduction. Ultimately, I see this study as one consideration of what happens when “culture” takes on new and varied forms of materiality.

Ethnography abounds in the unexpected: in ironies, complicities, and incompleteness of action—the stuff of social life. Ethnography does not accept the certainties of cultural constructs, like “property,” that are built on an understanding of the radical difference between subjects and objects—on work that Bruno Latour (1993) would call “purification.”¹ My own project over the last several years has been to take account of Aboriginal Australian cultural action and creativity in the arts by following the life of objects and the worlds, institutions, and people those objects bring together (or mediate).² This ethnography has been a response to the Primitivism debates (Clifford 1988; Manning 1985; Price 1989; Rubin 1984) that dominated the framing of Indigenous art’s circulation and that ignored culturally meaningful action on the Other side of the West—rest divide. I have been concerned with tracing the unintended developments of Indigenous Australian art as a form of intercultural production caught up in complex networks and institutions of collaboration.

This is not merely a theoretical project. Humankind is surely living in a discouraging moment, but probably no more so than that facing Aboriginal people in central Australia in 1971, when acrylic painting began as a form of cultural production in the government settlement of Papunya. In the midst of a radical regime of cultural assimilation, with its apparently implacable hostility to indigenous culture, Aboriginal painters found a sympathetic supporter in Geoffrey Bardon, a schoolteacher with art training (see Bardon 1979, 1991). Bardon helped catalyze the Western Desert painting movement that eventually placed its work in the most prestigious art galleries and venues in Australia and elsewhere (Myers 2002). Although I draw attention to the unsettled nature of appropriation and translation here, this emphasis should be understood in relationship to the unprecedented recognition and visibility painting has brought to Aboriginal people and

to their culture within the Australian nation. It was never imagined, even by sympathizers to Aboriginal cultural life, that Aboriginal image-making could be a contemporary fine art, and scholars have much to learn from indigenous understandings of this outcome.

My focus in this essay roughly coincides with problems in what is often called “cultural property,” an important conceptual framework that has been put forward as a basis for claiming protection of indigenous and minority groups against cultural appropriation. The fundamental claim derives from the assertion that art (or culture) is “‘essential to’ or ‘constitutive of’ or ‘expressive of’ the identity of the group” (Coleman in press:1). Frequently, claims for such protection have been articulated by extending the regimes of copyright and intellectual property law, but these legal forms raise many difficulties in the way they formulate intercultural activity (see Coleman in press). Working in the context of Aboriginal life in central Australia, I have by necessity struggled doubly against the weight of Euro-American understandings of property and things—doubly, because these understandings are my own and they are also those against which Aboriginal people themselves struggle. Indeed, Aboriginals’ understanding of property is a subject I first began to imagine when I wrote about motorcars as vehicles of shared identity and about “ownership” of any sort as a manner of objectifying such identities in Pintupi communities in Australia’s Western Desert (Myers 1988). I had begun to recognize what Nicholas Thomas (1991) later described as the promiscuity of objects, and the potential that things have for endless dissemination, pointed out by Marilyn Strathern (1999:177). I subsequently have come to see the way in which relationships to objects can organize boundaries (Spyer 1998).

Categories and boundaries

Let me start with an illuminating story about these matters.

At a small conference on Native American art history held a few years ago, the Haida art historian Marcia Crosby confronted—perhaps confounded—the non-Native people with a question. “We want to know,” she said, “who you are. Why do you want to study us? We don’t know you.” At least one of the senior non-Native participants misread the implications of her words, defensively perceiving them to be an exercise in boundary maintenance or essentialism. He denounced the perceived challenge in liberal terms—as ghettoizing people and potentially legitimizing the converse claims of White Rights and white exclusivism, which he deplored: “If Native people want to close themselves off and say only Native people can learn their traditions, what would be wrong with whites claiming similarly [as they had recently in Berkeley, where such a rhetorical claim had been put forth by advocates of White Rights]?” “Why do you want to take

this all the way there,” Crosby asked in response, “from here [in this room]?”

Apart from the all too obvious issue of differential power, my academic colleague misread Crosby’s question as implying that a Native identity could be conceived in terms of “possessive individualism,” as something one *has*. At any gathering, Native American people typically identify themselves as positioned in relation to their work, as coming from some or another community—as do Aboriginal Australians. Native Americans do not do so to claim for themselves an abstract indigeneity in a legalistic manner; rather, this identification announces their accountability to a community—that their representations and actions are rooted in commitments to a recognized body of Native people. In Australia the question is also one of accountability to a community, of being recognized and responsible for what one does. This is a concern Crosby and other indigenous leaders feel that non-Natives working in their communities need to address as well—as part of their social obligation to and relationship with those communities.

Assuming culture itself to be the most expansive object of shared identity, a position articulated in Terry Turner’s (1993) astute essay on “multiculturalism,” Marcia Crosby’s intervention had offered a way of crossing boundaries, if my colleague (not an anthropologist, by the way) had recognized the potential of diplomacy rather than “freezing into categories what Native peoples find flowing in relationships” (Coombe 1997:92). His defensive reply had assumed instead an assertion of racial categories threatening his privilege to study. In other words, the question “Who are you?” is anything but rhetorical.

Regimes of value

Indigenous people in Australia, as in North America and elsewhere, have too often been compelled to live through the representations of others. “Art” has offered a medium through which they have been able to make themselves visible on their own terms, allowing them, more or less, to intervene in the representations circulating “about” them. But their interventions cannot be understood apart from the *materiality* of painting and of “art” (that is, art’s institutions and properties), as this materiality is distinct from the properties of other media and is instructive in its instability.

I discuss in this essay three cases of scandal—“fraud” or “forgery”—in the Aboriginal art market, because these somewhat extreme and irregular cases help illuminate what happens when contact occurs between the “Western art-culture system” (Clifford 1988) and what I call a “revelatory regime of value” characteristic of Indigenous Australians. I emphasize that I am concerned with the specifics of the art-culture system, which cannot assimilate all of the potential properties of Indigenous painting into its own

schemas. The cases of fraud provide cautionary tales, helping scholars to understand the limits of our theoretical constructs and the transformative consequences provoked by reorganizations of value as objects circulate across cultural borders and between regimes of value. These reorganizations flow from the provocative effect of putting ideas and expectations into material forms that are mediated through the specific historical structuring of the fine art market.

Case 1: Wandjuk Marika

The first scandal I consider occurred in the early 1970s, when Wandjuk Marika—the well-known Yolngu artist and activist from Arnhem Land in northern Australia (Figure 1)—asked the Australian government to investigate the unauthorized use of his sacred clan designs on a variety of commodity forms, in particular, on tea towels. Marika inaugurated a process of recognizing indigenous ownership of “copyright” in such designs, a process that has subsequently continued to play out in a number of well-known cases involving the use of Aboriginal images on everything from T-shirts to carpets manufactured in Vietnam.³

In Wandjuk’s words:

That was 1974.

Then I walked into one of the shops and I found the tea towel,

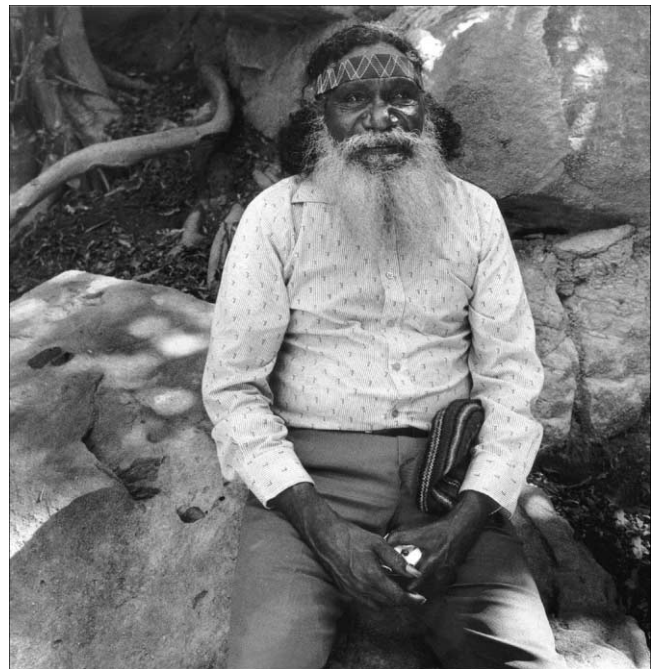


Figure 1. Wandjuk Marika, Yolngu artist and cultural activist, as photographed by Juno Gemes in 1982. Copyright Juno Gemes.

Published in Holland,
Which had my own sacred design on this tea towel,
tablecloth.

When I walk into that shop, and when I saw it
I was shocked and break my heart.

I bought it, cost me maybe \$10
And then I said to the shopkeeper,
"Look you don't charge me that much.
This is my own design, you have no right to sell it.
This is bad. This is my own design, my sacred design.
I will only buy that for \$2, just for the cloth,
Because it is my own copyright design."

Then I was thinking very hard.
What shall I do, where shall I get the help,
Who's going to help to stop this copyright stealing?
Instead of painting their own painting, they always copy
designs
From the traditional areas.

They don't know what the painting is.
They thought they are just pleasure paintings
But it's the symbol, the power, experience and
knowledge.

After I found my own design on the tea towels I was
shocked and I lose my power to paint,
Lose my power for a number of years.

Yes, I was thinking and thinking;
I try and try and at last something was coming into my
mind.

Ah, I said, I have to send this to the Prime Minister,
The former Prime Minister, which is Gough Whitlam.
Gough was Labor Prime Minister,
And I sent the two towels to Canberra to Prime Minister
and I say, "OK, I need help to setting up something to
protect the copyright.
I need the lawyer or something,"
And they say to me "OK. Don't worry Wandjuk, we'll
help you."

[Isaacs 1995:118–119]⁴

Marika's claim evoked sympathy among non-Aboriginal Australians. In the 1970s, of course, few people who heard his story would have been disadvantaged by recognizing indigenous ownership on copyright grounds. More importantly, the translation of indigenous rights into the framework of copyright—or cultural property—seemed an intelligible "recontextualization" (Thomas 1991) of indigenous painting within the commodity regime. This recontextualization transposed what might be seen as one set of signs and practices into another regime of value.⁵

Wandjuk objected not simply to commodification as a form of desacralization but more specifically to the display

and use of designs by those lacking ritual authority to do so. The misuse affected him: He lost the power to paint. Even though he also perceived the effects of the commodity circulation of these forms, he *surely* must have imagined conditions or conventions under which legitimate holders of these designs *could* circulate them, as had occurred with the famous Yolngu bark petition for Land Rights to the Australian Parliament in 1963 (see Morphy 1992; Wells 1982; see Figure 2) and with other ritual diplomatic exchanges such as the Arnhem Land *Rom* ceremony taken to Canberra in November 1982 (Wild 1986). Painters at Papunya Tula Artists in central Australia likewise imagined themselves able to exchange their designs for money or other objects. For now, I present the case Wandjuk made as the one that best fits the understanding of intellectual copyright, in which the flow into commodification violates and harms the Aboriginal artist's own relationship to inalienable property. In this case Wandjuk also narrates his own importance, through his relationship to then Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, as a guardian against the promiscuous dispersal of his clan's designs.

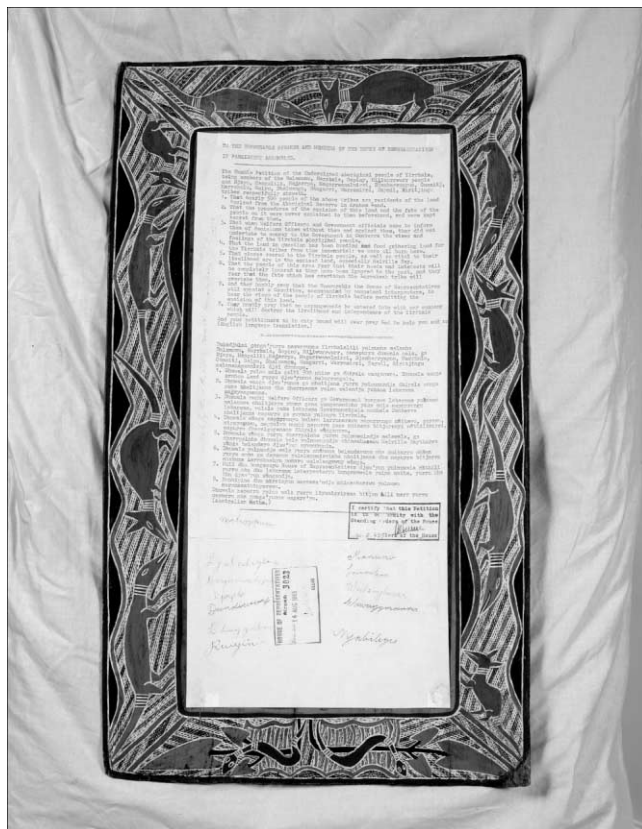


Figure 2. The Yirrkala bark petition, sent to the Australian Parliament in 1963, where it is still housed. Reproduced with permission of the Yirrkala community.

To understand this situation in terms closer to those of indigenous participants, it is critical to look at the relationship between local understandings of objects and human action—as embedded in practices of personhood, relatedness, and secrecy—and what happens with the regulation and classification of the new form of Aboriginal painting. The treatment of design—and of culture—as a form of intellectual property in the legal setting involves understanding ideas and practices of materiality and subjectivity—of object and subject—that are different from those underpinning indigenous, Aboriginal relationships to cultural production, creativity, and circulation. The “object ideology” of this revelatory regime of value is organized around the practical consciousness of materiality as something brought forth into “sensory presence”—what Pintupi people mark with the concept “*yurti*.”⁶ Materiality, in this conception, is objectified in revelation or transmission rather than created *de novo*. That revelation of ancestral knowledge and events in material form such as in painting, ritual, or song is colloquially known as “the Dreaming” (*tjukurrpa* in Pintupi).

As Wandjuk Marika suggests, it is possible to translate the social practices of indigenous image making in terms of their resemblance to practices of intellectual property, of ownership and copyright, but only partly. Aboriginal people (Yarnangu) in central Australia say that the story-song-design complexes of the Dreaming—like the rituals of which they are considered part and like the landscape, which is a further manifestation—are “held” (*kanyinu*) by various groups of people.⁷ Perhaps I can make this ontology clearer: The Dreaming is not the landscape itself or principally even an explanation of it, although that is one of its attributes. Rather, the landscape is the materialization of the Dreaming as a sensory form to be experienced (that is, *yurti*), a manifestation of it but not an account of what it is (see also Poirier 1996). The right to “show” (*yurtinipa*, “reveal” or “make sensorily present”) a ceremony lies in the hands of those one might call “owners” of that country and its associated Dreaming stories. It was on such grounds that the men I knew typically painted their own country—“making visible” or giving, in this way, components of their own identity (see Figure 3). But although Aboriginal artists might “give,” “reveal”—or exchange—them, the images remain (as Marika’s statement points out) always a part, another extension or embodiment, of those who are custodians of these Dreamings and of the Dreaming itself, which is the identity ground of the painters.

But the materiality of this knowledge—objectified in particular forms such as the landscape, ritual, or acrylic and bark painting—has distinctive consequences. Objectifications of Aboriginal myth and ritual knowledge have material qualities beyond the narrative structure; insofar as the stories are linked to specific places, they have

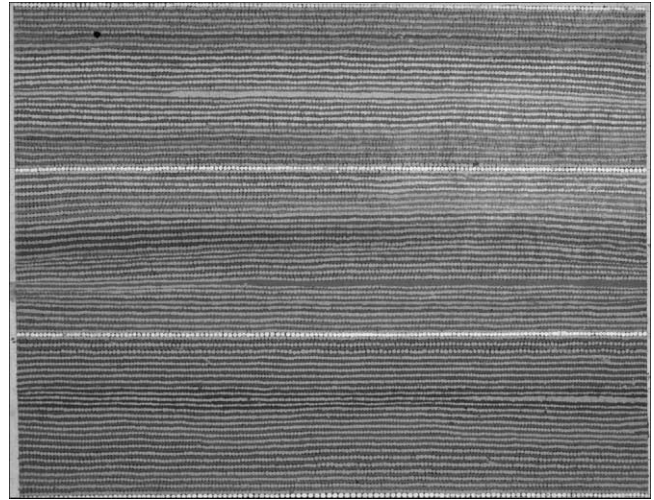


Figure 3. Turkey Tolson’s painting of “Straightening Spears.” Iconically representing spears through the image of lines, this painting emphasizes the large number of men gathered in the Dreaming, straightening their spears at Ilingawurngawurrnga and preparing to engage in battle. This version of the famous image has been made available by permission of the Robert Steele Gallery. Copyright courtesy of Aboriginal Artists Agency.

extension in space, which may become an important material property in formulating a social identity among those who have rights to different stories located along the same ancestral path. Realized in sound and performance, stories and the ceremonies re-enacting them—along with the associated paraphernalia and designs—can be owned and exchanged; rights to speak and transmit them can become the objects of social and political organization, and the material properties of such rights encourage distinctive strategies of concealment and transmission.

The concern of people in such a system is to limit dispersal, to control the potential or manifestations of the Dreaming (*tjukurrpa*). Understood as objectifications of ancestral subjectivity, manifestations of the Dreaming are further identified with certain persons and groups who have a kin-based obligation to control the rights to reproduce these images as well as to determine who can see them. Unlike the case of classical Western copyright, the images controlled here are not thought to be of human creation.⁸

This system of value production is in many ways distinctive, and I mark it as such by calling it “a revelatory regime of value.” The distribution of relationships to images and image making defines a system of identities. As a “total social fact” (Mauss 1990), the Dreaming discursively and practically articulates personhood and ontology, mediating significantly the sociopolitical relations between people organized spatially (in territorially dispersed groups) and intergenerationally into a system of identity, of similarity and difference, of autonomy and

relatedness (see Myers 1986). It is a distinctive mode of cultural production capable of generating and transmitting specific forms of value. The production of images within this framework, especially in ritual, is a fundamental medium in which a person's—or a group's—autonomy can be expressed and drawn into relationship with others (see Myers 1986, 1988).

To restate my case, Aboriginal painting is not an idea. It is a material and social practice that brings into realization not simply the creativity of an artist (the fundamental property protected in copyright) but an image that has a distinctive history and is generative of social relationships. Such a regime of value did not anticipate the ways in which technologies such as the market and mechanical reproduction could detach signs from those who make and circulate them. For Aboriginal people, then, it is not fundamentally human creativity objectified in form that copyright proposes to regulate; rather, copyright would regulate rights to esoteric ancestral knowledge and creativity. And if it is not human or individual creativity that is at stake, as will become apparent below, the mere potential for ownership (existence as a material object) does not suggest an easy placement in the fine art system.⁹

The accommodation of Aboriginal image making and the art-culture system has not been unidirectional, nor has it been settled (Figure 4). Waves of scandal and rumor have followed the entry of indigenous painting into the system of fine art, a recognition supposed to be accompanied by an emptying or subordination of political and ethnic values to those of a transcendental or formal aesthetics.¹⁰ The scandals that have erupted around these processes reflect a contestation over the hierarchical organization of the values adhering to these objects—as distinctive

regimes of value are brought into contact. This contestation, as much a tournament of values (Appadurai 1986) as a recontextualization (Thomas 1991), can contribute to a consideration of materiality, involving a movement or possibly a double movement into and around James Clifford's paradigm from "culture" to "art."

In raising questions about the materiality of recontextualization, I use Clifford's (1988:224) well-known diagram of the "art-culture system" here (Figure 5) simply to indicate that classification as "art" involves assessing an object as original, singular, and unique. An object with these values is placed on the side of authenticity, in contrast, on one hand, to fakes or reproductions that have commercial values indicative of mere artifacts and of inauthenticity, and, on the other hand, to the class of objects that are seen as traditional and collective. The fine art classification, based on connoisseurship, markets, and art museums, recognizes a kind of human creativity and execution that has little value and only contingency in the revelatory regime in which the production of Aboriginal art originates. On the other hand, the art-culture system supposedly does not recognize the racial or cultural identities of the artist. To qualify as art, an object cannot be collective but must be expressive of a more sublime characteristic that subordinates other properties to individual creativity.

Although I cannot take up the point further here, I emphasize that the art-culture system in this form has an ideological function—as Clifford noted. This system constructs an anthropological image of the concept "MAN-KIND," which in turn provides grounding for what is perceived to be a universal human creative and aesthetic potential. This is "Art" and Roland Barthes's (1957) "Family

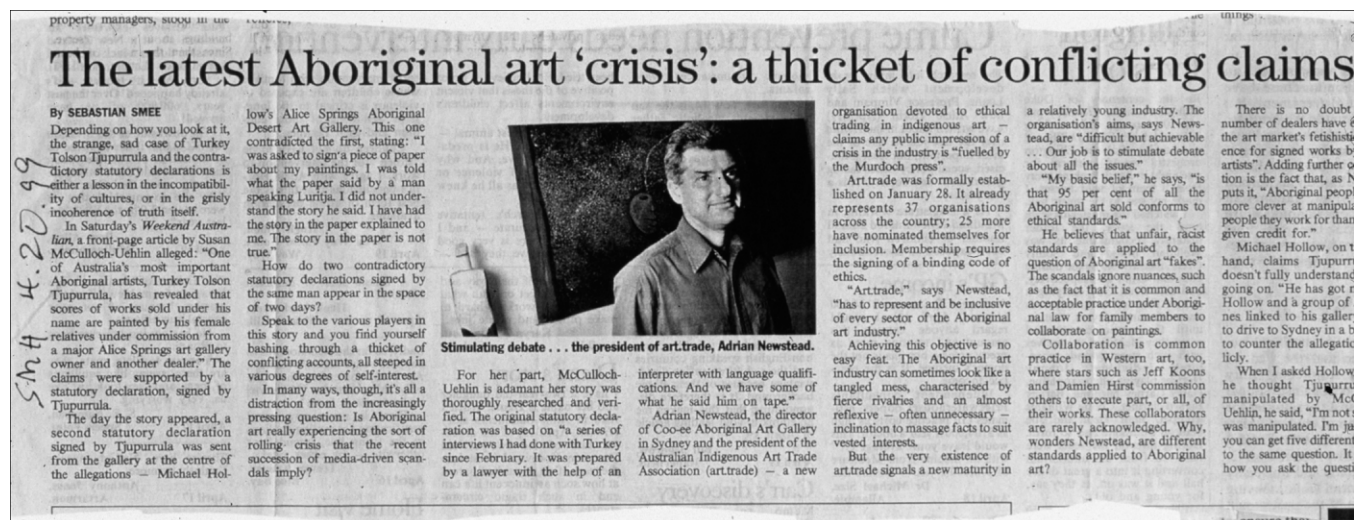


Figure 4. One of a flurry of articles in major Australian newspapers on the Aboriginal art "scandals." Reproduced with permission of the author, Sebastian Smeeth.

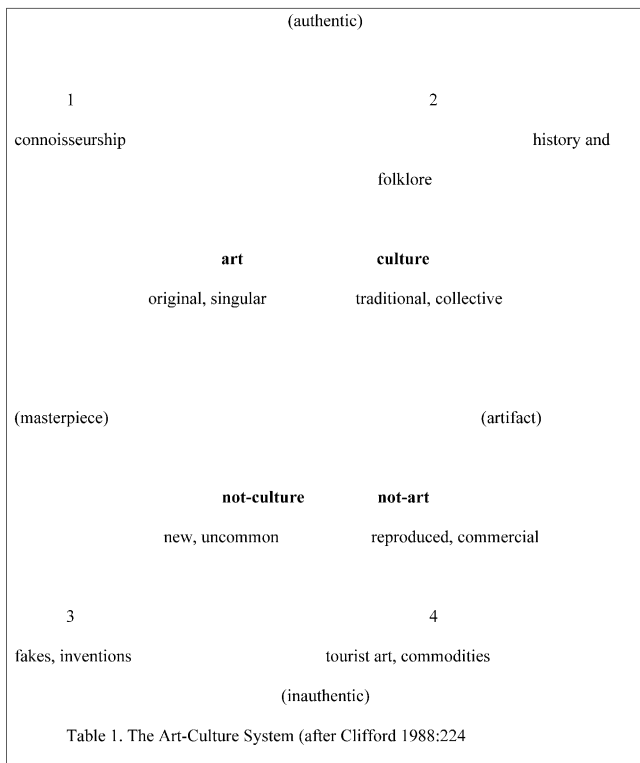


Figure 5. The art-culture system (after Clifford, 1988:224).

of Man”—in which all art is “human art,” precisely the contested terrain for those concerned with appropriation.

Art and culture

Clifford has identified a key dynamic of value production in what he discusses as the “modern art-culture system,” the cultural machinery through which “objects collected from non-Western sources are classified into two major categories: as (scientific) cultural artifacts or as (aesthetic) works of art” (1988:222; see also Phillips and Steiner 1999). This system, he argues, “classifies objects and assigns them relative value—according to a set of features. It establishes the ‘contexts’ in which they properly belong and between which they circulate” (Clifford 1988:223).

As Clifford’s diagram implies, the classifications—“art” and “culture”—are rooted in or linked to distinctive material institutions and practices that they mediate (art: art museums, art history, art dealing; culture: anthropology, natural history). This is an elegant model of a regime of value, a truly hierarchical organization of related values that represents the practices and institutions that shape the process of classification (for others, see Beidelman 1997; George 1999). The movement of Aboriginal paintings into the zone of fine art necessitates their recognition by the art gallery rather than by the natural history museum,

their appreciation on the basis of aesthetics rather than of context, and their study perhaps by the methods of art history rather than of anthropology. Yet, I would argue, the recontextualization of Aboriginal objects is also transforming the context of fine art itself, as the cases of scandal indicate.

Imaginations

In articulating their contemporary practices, Aboriginal painters in central Australia have drawn on a framework that is not particularly concerned with the usual sources of value for cultural objects marked as “art” in the West. These artists, in fact, are responsible for the movement of acrylic paintings into the purview of Western viewers and patrons in terms that challenge the ways in which cultural objects are familiarly formulated for Westerners. They use an ontology and set of practices drawn from the world of the paintings’ production, imagining the circulation of the images in the terms of the local economy of exchange, the revelatory regime of value I described earlier. Their paintings, they often say, are given “to Canberra,” understood as the site, or country, of the Australian Federal Government on whom they are dependent, to their “bosses,” or *mayutju*, who by virtue of this “giving” or “revelation” are thereby drawn into a relationship of both monetary obligation and moral identity. For individual purchasers, the gift requires appropriate compensation. Although perhaps claims like that of one Pintupi man that he should have been paid “four hundred thousand dollars” cannot be sustained, the painters expect buyers to recognize that payment is compensation for revelation of Dreamings and not for the mere execution of the painting.¹¹

Case 2: Elizabeth Durack

Forgery matters to the Aboriginal people of remote Australia; their designs are inalienable dimensions of their identity. Forgery is “theft,” and not simply because it diverts the money-producing component of the image. Forgery can take a variety of forms, as suggested by the following case, in which the work in question does *not* involve an appropriation of specific indigenous designs.

In the first scandal story, the tea towel designs were clearly Yolngu. The second case I present raises a different question: Does it matter if a presumed Aboriginal work is not produced by an Aboriginal person? The case I have in mind is that of the white Australian artist Elizabeth Durack, who painted pseudonymously using the invented identity of an Aboriginal man, Eddie Burrup (MacDonald 1997:7; McCulloch 1997a:21, 22, 1997b:14–21; see Figure 6).

Although she did not appropriate specific indigenous designs, Durack entered her work in competitions of

"Aboriginal art." The revelation of her actions provoked outrage in some Aboriginal quarters. The journalist Lenore Nicklin reports that

when Djon Mundine [a well-known indigenous curator] discovered that Eddie Burrup was really the 81-year old West Australian painter Elizabeth Durack, he was furious. Here was cultural appropriation at its worst. "It's a fucking obscenity," he said. "It's like Kerry Packer [a leading, aggressive Australian businessman] pretending to be Mahatma Gandhi." [1997:22]

Although many must have suspected that the large prices and attention commanded by Aboriginal art would attract the notice of white artists, Durack's invention does not appear to be a case of appropriating Aboriginal identity and images purely for profit. A member of a famous pioneering family and a longtime friend of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, Durack described Eddie Burrup as something of an alter ego. McCulloch reports that "in creating Burrup, Durack felt, insofar as it was a conscious decision . . . that he became a conduit for her huge and somewhat eclectic reservoir of knowledge about the Aboriginal world" (1997b:23). Durack saw painting as "Eddie" as working within the spirit of reconciliation, and she was shocked at the misunderstanding of the works and of her reasons for doing them. Mundine complained, "She's from the squattocracy. Elizabeth Durack saying she mixed with Aboriginal people is like Prince Charles saying he mixed with nannies. I'm sure she played with Aboriginal children when she was a little girl, but she came home and slept between white sheets" (Nicklin 1997:22). This judgment evaluates Durack's Aboriginality (or lack thereof) as the basis of her right to participate as an Aboriginal person, policing the identity boundaries in a particular way that rejects a common Western fantasy of *personal and artistic self-invention*. Mundine's comments here reflect a position he has articulated frequently in relation to the growing number of

"wannabes": One does not become "Aboriginal" simply by an act of invention.

But complex identifications in "place" and hybrid identifications not confined to racial or ethnic identity, including Durack's close and enduring relationship with Aboriginal people with whom she grew up, are coming to be more commonly acknowledged in contemporary Australia.¹² One close friend of Durack's is Jeff Chunuma, a respected member of the Waringarri community. Less severe than Mundine but still critical, disapproving of Durack but still her "son," Chunuma is reported to have passed on his community's response to her "deception" as follows: "You tell 'im 'e's got to come up here, sit down and talk to us. It's no good what 'e's doing. That old man behind her shoulder. She got to stop doing that" (McCulloch 1997b:19).

One gallery director, clearly operating in terms of the Western art-culture system, claimed that the issue of identity was irrelevant. This is clearly in line with a position recognizing art's universality: "I don't give a hoot who painted it. I care about the picture," Edmund Capon of the Art Gallery of New South Wales said. "I don't see it as fraud because the painting itself is going to be judged on the painting itself; it's not going to be judged on who painted it" (McCulloch 1997a:2). To do otherwise would be to admit that indigenous painting was judged on different grounds than other "art" and to raise questions about whether such painting was really of a quality to be called "art."¹³

Mundine, speaking from the geographical distance of Sydney, correctly recognizes a larger picture in which Aboriginal people's right to control their culture and art is being transgressed. But actual relationship and geographical propinquity to Durack color peoples' judgments of her. The reaction to Durack's impersonation was

generally milder in the West—from both Aborigines and others who know the Duracks well from the family's longstanding pastoral connection with the Kimberley. Durack, they said, had been speaking for Aboriginal people through her art for years, and while her Aboriginal creation may have been misguided, it was based on altruistic motives and a genuine attempt at cultural bridge-building. [McCulloch 1997a:2]

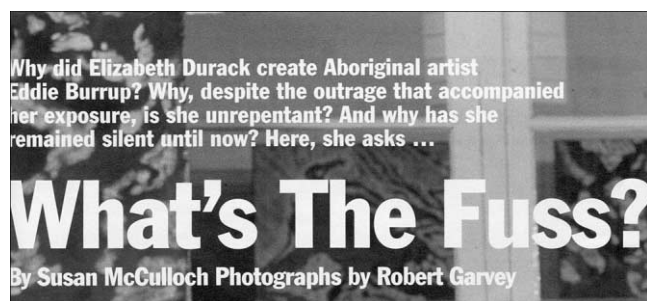


Figure 6. An example of the attention to the Elizabeth Durack–Eddie Burrup story.

much the art market regime of value attempts to purify or deny such relationships.

Case 3: Turkey Tolson

Other examples of “forgery” or “fraud”—by which I mean paintings done by non-Aboriginals and passed off as “Aboriginal” or paintings signed by famous Aboriginal painters but not actually painted by them—have also weighed on the art market. For example, a painting that won a National Aboriginal Art Prize and that was said to have been done by an Aboriginal woman named Kathleen Petyarre was later said to have been painted partly by her Welsh (white) husband (see McCulloch 1997c:3). In another case, the famous Pintupi artist Turkey Tolson signed paintings done by female relatives (see McCulloch-Uehlin 1999:1, 4).

When a work is passed off as having been executed by an Aboriginal person—and becomes part of, for example, the Prime Minister’s collection—does the scandal inhere in the fact that viewers can’t tell the difference between a painting done by an Aboriginal and one done by a white? Is a good painting a good painting, no matter who paints it? Most theorists of modern art would insist that this is the case.¹⁴

And what is one to make of Turkey Tolson’s admission (Figures 7 and 8) that he signed works painted by others (his wife, for example)? Surely his admission affects the monetary value of works he has signed, because his signature is no longer evidence of his execution and of the paintings’ part in *his* story. In Aboriginal terms, this is unproblematic because Turkey authorized the painting of his Dreaming and oversaw its correctness. What do people own, therefore, when they buy one of “his” paintings? Some art dealers, of course, might benefit in the short term, if they can have a few more “Tolsons” to sell, because his signature makes a painting worth more than others. But the revelation of the practice threatens the overall structure of investment.

Here it is not the absolute Aboriginality of a painting that is compromised, because an authorized Aboriginal person executed the painting, and yet the sincerity of the sign (in this case, a signature) is questioned when the commercial motive appears to dominate. The Alice Springs art seller Michael Hollows replied to the allegations about Tolson’s work by insisting that the artist substantially reworked any paintings to which he put his name, in that way making them properly—by market

Painter tells of secret women’s artistic business: I signed relatives’ paintings

Figure 7. Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula’s art practice causes a furor.

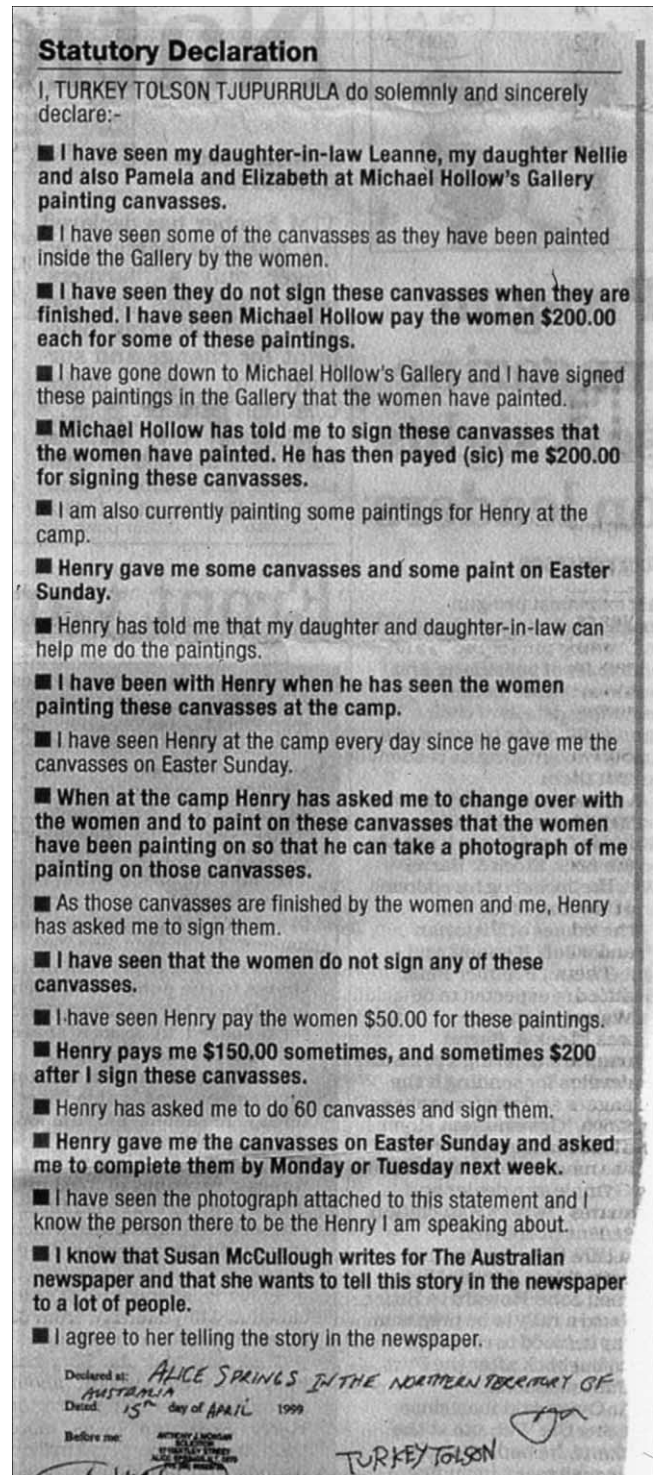


Figure 8. The statutory declaration made by Turkey Tolson in 1999.

standards—bearers of his signature (McCulloch-Uehlin 1999:4). However much these art market considerations must be recognized, the problem of Aboriginality and the deeper authenticity required from “art” than from “tourist souvenirs” remains lurking in the background.

Does Turkey's oversight rather than his sole creation of works represent a compromise of some deep identity on his part? Or has he, rather, been caught up in an art market game that has consequences for him but whose ethics and standards are different from his? Whatever the details and personal motivations, the circumstances are clearly those of the art market's race for "product," the competition for "name" artists, a competition that has led dealers to vie with each other for the affections, loyalties, and paintings of Aboriginal artists. The artists believe they have the right to sell to whomever they please (a marked cultural continuity—"The paintings belong to us!") but now find themselves uncomfortably placed in the corruption of the system.¹⁵

Scandal

A range of features are all "present" or potentially present in painting, and they appear to be part of the basis on which the paintings were first collected and classified as "culture"—indexical of collective expression—and subsequently as "art"—authored, aesthetic, masterpiece, singular. During this revaluation, various formulations of intellectual copyright and cultural property have been articulated. Yet the movement of objects from the revelatory regime to the commodity world of culture and art—in which the role of "creators" is variously conceived—has been only partly successful, as the ongoing scandals of the art world demonstrate.

Not only does the commodification of Aboriginal images detach them from the controls under which their dispersal was traditionally regulated, but mechanical and digital reproduction also subjects them to a range of new materialities, far beyond that represented by the Brisbane tea towel that Marika found bearing his clan designs. With the rise of connoisseurship and of a fine art market—which I have described elsewhere (Myers 2001)—that claims some works by Aboriginal artists to be examples of universal fine art for which the Aboriginal content is irrelevant, there are, literally, hundreds of stories depicting the other, less celebratory aspects of the new Aboriginal fine art scene—the battles and scandals involving forgery, frauds, and the structuring of the art market. Everyone involved in Aboriginal art experiences this unsettled state, the Aboriginal participants as much as those who report on such art in the press. The art market's requirements of authenticity (that is, of integrity of product: *Aboriginal art*) have provoked waves of scandal, rumor, and media sensationalism that threaten the security of the market's structure of economic value. These, however, are only some of the ways in which Aboriginal paintings' achievement of commodity status challenges or subverts values attached to these objects, as the works partially resist and partially accommodate their specific commodification as fine art.

And whereas the reputations of some dealers no doubt deserve the tarnish they are receiving, the integrity of Aboriginal painters as artists producing something more than tourist decoration is also implicated, a view signified in the implied question marks that carried the controversial television documentary "Art from the Heart" into the print domain.¹⁶ In the rumors and scandals that have accompanied Indigenous painting's new fine art status, one may recognize struggles over fixing the place and limits of Aboriginal culture's very appropriation by the market.

Negotiating identity

Marilyn Strathern eloquently summarized the promiscuous possibility of materiality and possession, drawing on the critical potential of insights from Papua New Guinea ethnography, insights that no doubt reflect a local object ideology. "Ownership," she has written, "gathers things momentarily to a point by locating them in the owner, halting endless dissemination, effecting an identity" (Strathern 1999:177). Rather than detaching producers, objects, and owners, the circulation of Aboriginal images is producing new identities. Litigants accuse legal representatives of Aboriginal organizations of appropriating producers' interests (as in the carpet case), and indigenous activists attempt to create new organizations to represent the copyright claims of indigenous artists. I see the indigenous art scandals in a positive light, as a renegotiation of the boundaries of indigenous and other identities. This renegotiation takes place largely through the materiality of mediations such as I describe.

The scandals represent a significant moment in the conceptualization or institutionalization of cultural property, a social drama or struggle in which contested evaluations are made evident and hierarchies (or regimes of value) are put to the test. This is the model of social fields (Turner 1974)—wherein values, strategies, and resources are all up for grabs and boundaries are made in the process of adjudication rather than assumed.

Intellectual copyright law may allow compensation for unauthorized use of designs, but—as most supporters of this remedy acknowledge—copyright does not represent fully what is at stake in the problematic circulation of acrylic paintings as cultural artifacts (see Coleman in press). A range of values attach to these objects, and—at varying times—different properties come into view as salient. Copyright payment cannot, for example, remedy the threat or harm to cultural identity—nor can it assuage memories of the history of genocide that erupt in the exploitation of sacred designs and objects. These memories defined fundamentally the occasion for sending such images out to be seen by whites, and there is no question that for many viewers, owners, and producers of the paintings, this history is vitally represented in the images'

very existence. In any case, the question of what kind of objects these paintings might be is not resolved in the legal imagination, as the growing interest in the frauds, forgeries, and misrepresentations indicates. It is not at all clear that Aboriginal peoples' rights over their designs or even over the concrete objects themselves can be severed absolutely by the act of sale.

These attempts at stabilizing the meaning and ownership of Aboriginal painting have produced an "excess"—where meanings and practices subordinated in one representation are not completely erased but continue to adhere to the objects. One might say that, in this regard, these objects have resisted the process of simple commodification by retaining a series of properties and values that cannot be reduced by the market and that recognize the interests of those beyond the owner and maybe even beyond the producer, as in the case of Marika's clansmen. The retention of such properties and values, one presumes, limits any attempt to conceive of objects and relations of cultural property within the regime that has been developed in the West for property in general.

So Aboriginal people objected to Elizabeth Durack's impersonation of an Aboriginal neither as a criminal act nor—despite some views—as a "theft" of identity, as if identity were a form of property. The Aboriginal criticisms suggest that her painting as an Aboriginal was problematic because she hadn't discussed it with a relevant Aboriginal community. This reaction seems to reflect considerations similar to those that became visible when, with permission, Euro-Australian artist Tim Johnson painted with the dot style.¹⁷ He did so not *as* an Aboriginal person but through an identity some Aboriginal people had accepted. That such a performance might not have been acceptable to all Aboriginal people with rights to those designs does not make it different from the situation of Aboriginal people performing their identities—a performance that is always dangerous and subject to counterclaim and retaliation.

In other cases, which I do not discuss here, the scandal erupts at the boundary of Aboriginality and money. What are observers to make of these scandals? Does the apparent motivation of the painters for monetary reward necessarily imply the loss of genuine Aboriginality—and the corruption of the profound relationships to the Dreaming—that should underlie their projects, an alignment of Aboriginal painting's sincerity with art's proper authenticity as coming "from the heart?" If so, then those who have celebrated acrylic painting as "fine art" on the modernist model have been misguided in announcing the "end of Aboriginality" (and in recognizing the painterly aesthetic strength of the work), an end that for some seems to threaten Aboriginal art (and culture) with the possibility of simple commodification, marked by

named painters making simulacra of their earlier successful paintings at their dealers' behest.¹⁸ Surely what is taking place is not a simple commodification, not a reduction of objects' significance to their quantitative exchange value but, rather, a reorganization of the hierarchy of values adhering to the objects.

But if "Aboriginality" is not the principal content of the paintings, what is the threat posed by non-Aboriginal painters painting in an Aboriginal style or by those disguising themselves as Aboriginal? On the one hand, then, such instances mark points at which fraud can occur and when a painting's indexical connection to Aboriginal people and their cultural project can be faked in the sign's detachment from persons in the market. Indeed, the claim that one can tell when an Aboriginal person has done a painting is perhaps mistaken. On the other hand, if one *can* tell, what happens to the claim that this art is valued just because it is *good* art (not because it is good *Aboriginal* art), deserving of entry into the nonghettoized category of "contemporary art" and not merely "culture?" Contrarily, then, why can't white artists paint "Aboriginal art?" Is painting reaching a new stage in the detachability of these signs—as music reached earlier with schizophonia (see Feld 1995)?

What is at issue in this boundary activity are the possibilities of "corruption" (see Lomnitz 1993).¹⁹ The Durack case, of a non-Aboriginal person impersonating an Aboriginal identity, does not constitute a crime, but, of the cases I have documented, it may be the most upsetting for Aboriginal people.²⁰ What should be recognized in the salience of this example is the effect of such corrupting practices on indigenous self-production. Complaints from Aboriginal people framed in terms of copyright (see Johnson 1996, n.d.) and the theft of their culture conjoin with equally long-standing concerns for self-determination for Indigenous people within Australia, which has typically meant securing the right to speak for themselves, to represent themselves. This activity is not just the backward-looking protection of "one's culture," conceived as a static object. What is sought in some form of cultural being is an uncorrupted sphere in which "Aboriginal people" themselves can communicate. For others to presume to speak in their voices, however, corrupts Aboriginal people's opportunities for self-determination. Put more analytically, forgery and fraud undermine the possibility of forming an identity. At the same time, especially in the Durack case, the question "Who are you?" raised by Marcia Crosby in my opening story, is anything but rhetorical. Although the local Kimberley community's assessment of Durack stands in some contrast to the more assertively essentializing identity politics of national Aboriginal activists, however, the latter must defer, officially at least, to the former because the category of community member has priority in recognition of identity. The art market is necessarily less open.

Turkey Tolson's artwork is threatened by corruption but not because Turkey paints for money. Most of the painters do so, and they have become a source of money for their relatives, whose economic demands are intense and never-ending. Painters inscribe their identities in their paintings and exchange the paintings for cash—but in the broadest terms, the painter is trying to manage this identity in the midst of an onslaught of desire. Turkey's work is threatened by corruption because the conditions of his presence in Alice Springs—his need for more regular income and his dealer's need for "product"—draw him away from the experiences that inform his painting. Ultimately, the scandals revolve around the dispossession, appropriation, or corruption of the principal good that indigenous people may have in the contemporary cultural conjuncture—their identity.

The very existence of these objects and their circulation depend at least partly on the intentions of the Aboriginal participants. We know that many indigenous artists in central and northern Australia have agreed to—and have even initiated—the circulation of some forms of their religious imagery in commodity spaces at the same time that they seem to insist on the imagery retaining some of its indigenous meaning and value. This objectification has not been a simple matter. The sustaining of indigenous—or perhaps "traditional?"—notions of cultural authority and identity through copyright, urged by Wandjuk Marika as long ago as the early seventies (see Isaacs 1995; Johnson 1996b; Marika 1986), has constituted an insertion of Aboriginal views into the broader Australian framework that governs cultural production and circulation. What seemed an unlikely and unrealistic wish on the part of older Aboriginal people—that Euro-Australians would *recognize their culture* if Aboriginals revealed it to them, that the images *have* power over those who see them—has proved more the case than anyone would have imagined. But it must also be recognized that the paintings—whether the acrylics of central Australia or the barks of the north—are hybrid objects, embedded in a complex and transformed network of actors and actants, however much indigenous participants claim the objects originally as their own.

Aboriginal people did and do want to exchange their paintings with outsiders, but on terms that define desired relationships. As images understood to bear the potential for identification and shared identity, indigenous paintings are tokens of exchange with the dominant society as objectifications or emblems of the desire for relationship. They are a medium of identity and relatedness and therefore cannot easily be understood as existing within boundaries. They are, moreover, objects around whose production and dissemination identities are managed, regulated, and policed. This is why scandal erupts when their circulation escapes those boundaries. The scandals,

then, demarcate potentials to cause harm, harm that may occur from the mismanagement of cultural properties but that is entailed by the very materiality of social action objectified in concrete form.²¹ Such objectification itself represents a continuity of indigenous regimes of value within the fine art market.

In this brief elucidation of some telling cases, I hope I have shown something of the way in which the immateriality and materiality of indigenous art and its re-embedding in a broader social world expose images to intensified resignification—to promiscuous proliferation—as people and institutions organize themselves around the relationships made possible through the circulation of these material forms. Attention to ownership and to the production of relationships, rather than to cultural emblems, is extremely useful here, showing how identity is potentially effected by control over dissemination, control over the promiscuous potentials of objects. Surely the exchange of indigenous art was initiated and understood by its Aboriginal proponents to have other goals. The question of ownership is an issue wherein the dynamics of regimes of value can be clearly seen as unsettled at the zones of contact.

Conclusion

The larger question I have raised here is whether the prestige of the fine art market can come to Aboriginal acrylic painting without that art's succumbing to the processes of commodification—to the complete detachment of the art objects from their producers and from those authorized to have them produced. Can commodification be resisted? What is gained and lost by entry into this market?

My intuition has been that Bruno Latour's (1993) conception of modernity as organized by regimes of hybridization and of purification would be helpful in addressing these issues. It seems clear that the art-culture system and the category of fine art within it should be understood as a structure that "purifies" the objects that enter it—detaching from them the properties irrelevant to the system's aesthetic order. This is another way of stating what Weber recognized in modernity as the autonomization of the domain of art (and religion, etc.) and what Bourdieu attempted to explain with the delineation of fields of cultural production. Yet what I have discerned in the Aboriginal art scandals is the continued eruption of Aboriginalities (externalities of the fine art field) as the full materiality of indigenous practices and understandings resists the detachment of the objects from their authorizing ontology. The paintings cannot be separated from the persons identified with them, from the fundamental understandings of Aboriginal life; at the same time, the aesthetic value of the work has become undeniable. As others have

also argued, the question of “authenticity” remains a critical component of the legitimation of Indigenous art (Hoban 2002; Merlan 2001). In this respect, Aboriginal art shares with Western fine art something like the “art for art’s sake” idealism that positions the field of art production against the profit orientation or utilitarian aim of other fields (see Hoban 2002; Marcus and Myers 1995).

The attention to authenticity in these scandals is not engaged simply by the specter of money but is further motivated by the context of Australian multiculturalism and the governmental commitment to tolerance of cultural diversity that led to early support for Aboriginal painting in the first place (see Merlan 2001; Myers 2001). The suspicion among the general non-Aboriginal public is that Aboriginal painters are not genuinely Aboriginal but are really just like other Australians—and therefore not deserving of any special consideration. That is, culture is no longer the basis for recognizing a special difference. Thus, these scandals actually seem to flow toward a suspicion of cultural difference altogether, and they have flowed toward the other pole of differentiation, “race,” as another way of delineating or containing the flow of Aboriginality. The art scandals show the inability of the fine art world fully to commodify the works both because of Indigenous understandings and because of the growing politicization of identity itself. In this situation, where “whites” painted as “Aboriginals,” Aboriginal critics and commentators had conflicting views as they sought to protect the integrity of this vital resource of hope. But their position, I believe, shared much with Marcia Crosby’s openness to scholars becoming accountable members of a community. Even though there are, no doubt, those who would never agree, prominent Indigenous people, usually in closer geographic and kinship proximity to the Kimberley community, were prepared to accept Durack’s work should she be willing to observe the obligations of participation with Indigenous communities.

The resolution of this tension is taking place through the production of a new category—“Aboriginal fine art.” This new category, or new subfield, of art production (Hoban 2002) is subordinated to fine art in general but accepts the general standards of connoisseurship that distinguish it from “ethnographic art.”²² From my point of view, what is most interesting is that the art must be conceived as the product of a specific network of cultural actors and institutions, one that includes whites and Aboriginal people. It is necessary to note that this emerging category is part of a larger network of recontextualization, of battles over power and cultural capital that aim to move what had been “ethnographic art” to the context of “art museums”—of which the French production of *art premier* is a salient example. Many have suspected that the creation of this category and of the museum to hold such art owes more to Jacques Chirac’s desire for his own

monument, and to his relationship with a prominent African art dealer who stands to profit from this development, than to the claims of those who are identified with the production of the work. Art premier seems particularly problematic to me in that it fails to recognize any of the problems that “Aboriginal fine art” addresses in advancing the work of commodification beyond the claims of the objects’ histories. The placement of objects in the category of “fine art” should more adequately proceed through the clarification of local art histories that emphasize the work of producers rather than the simple judgment of collectors and dealers. The claim of the producers is that these objects should not entirely be removed from them, and the truth of this lies in the story I have told.

Notes

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1. In this sense, I believe the modern world—in Latour’s words—is susceptible to anthropological treatment of “the seamless fabric of what I shall call ‘nature-culture’” (1993:7).

2. My understanding of Aboriginal life and painting is based on extensive fieldwork with Pintupi-speaking people in various communities of central Australia in 1973–75, during periods of 1979, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, and 1988, and during a variety of shorter field trips and work with dealers, curators, collectors, and government representatives in Australia, France, and the United States during the 1990s. I have described these relationships and the ways in which they guided my understanding in Myers 2002.

3. In 1985, Aboriginal Artists Agency brought suit on behalf of Arnhem Land artist Yangarininy Munungmurra against Peter Stripes Fabrics in New South Wales for adapting the artist’s work to furnishing fabric. A second important case pitted a group of Arnhem Land artists, including Johnny Bulun Bulun, against a T-shirt manufacturer in Queensland that had produced many shirts using the Indigenous group’s bark paintings, and more recently, Bulun Bulun and his brother George Milpururru sued R & T Textiles Pty., Ltd. (1998) for importing and selling printed fabric featuring their work. The carpets case was heard as *Milpururru v. Indofurn Pty., Ltd.* (1995). Other cases have involved the use of Aboriginal images on Australian currency.

4. See also Marika, 1986.

5. The significance of Thomas’s discussion of recontextualization is broad. In a development of actor-network theory focusing on the market, Michel Callon (1998) praises the way in which Thomas distinguishes between the market transaction and the gift in the following quote: “Commodities are here understood as objects, persons, or elements of persons which are placed in a context in which they have exchange value and can be alienated. The alienation of a thing is its dissociation from producers, former users or prior context” (Thomas 1991:39).

6. I am borrowing from the model of language ideology, as used by Schieffelin et al. (1998) and Silverstein (1979).

7. I am drawing on my own fieldwork with Pintupi and other central Australian painters in a variety of communities over the years 1973–2000. See Myers 1986 and 2002.

8. Indeed, Pintupi painters always insisted to me that their images "are not made up, not made by us. They are from the Dreaming."

9. As Joseph Sax (1999) has noted, the detachability of art objects from their creators is a problematic area of property law. Recent legal trends have limited the rights of owners to detach these commodities from the biographies of their producers.

10. On the significance of these scandals and the problem of translating indigenous value into the field of Western art production, see Coleman in press; Hoban 2002; and Merlan 2001.

11. To be sure, Pintupi paintings can enter meaningfully into an aesthetic regime of value. The virtuosity and success of acrylic painting is heavily indebted to the palpability of the sign vehicles (see Myers 1989).

The iconic elements of this representational system are circles, arcs, lines, and meanders. A visual element can represent any object to which its shape is "similar"; each visual element conveys a category, a number of possible meanings. Ambiguity (or multivocality) may constitute part of elements' aesthetic force (see also Morphy 1984, 1992).

An aesthetics of combination also exists. Pintupi ceremonial designs frequently combine the basic elements in more or less *fixed configurations* (unlike the transient assemblages of any ordinary story) that come to be linked with the specific Dreaming they depict. Thus, although the designs tell or reveal a story, they are more than mere transparent referential instruments. Because they are believed to have been the designs of the ancestral beings themselves, handed down "from the Dreaming," the designs are also intrinsically valuable, themselves proof of the Dreaming's existence.

As signs, the forms are themselves meaningful. They may be designs (*walka*) that the ancestors wore on their bodies and that contemporary ritual actors wear in ceremonies, or they may be what are understood as ancestral body decorations that have been metamorphosed onto rock faces as circle and line designs or ritual objects turned into stone formations or hills.

The resulting image gathers together a number of elements drawn from ritual experience, narrative of myth, and knowledge of the country—a whole set of signs associated with a story. Moreover, the organization of images may reveal distinctive patterns and templates that are not necessarily narratively significant (Sutton 1988). Indeed, the template's similarity to or difference from those employed in other design contexts may be the information most significant for Yarnangu.

Even the word for such designs is considered sacred, and knowledge of designs, as well as the right to use them, comes usually as a consequence of ritual discipline and revelation, as a gift that must be reciprocated. They are not free.

Furthermore, the reference of these designs is not simply the story, and their referent is not merely the country or the landscape. The more one looks at Aboriginal paintings, the more one comes to understand that a painter doesn't just choose appropriate iconic signs—although iconic they are. Among desert Aborigines, it is well known, some men's designs may be incised on a variety of wooden or stone sacred objects; other designs are made in ceremony in various ways—in body decorations with bird down or vegetable fluff, or with ochres in body, cave, and ground paintings, in paintings on shields, and so forth (see Meggitt 1962; Munn 1973; Spencer and Gillen 1899). In an important sense, experience with these media provides a technical basis for the kind of design virtuosity expanded in paintings. This experience is also central to the Yarnangu understanding of their acrylic paintings on various media as transformations of these designs, as representations that are still both iconic and indexical of the country and of Dreaming events.

12. I am thinking of the ways in which many young people in Australia have adopted features of Aboriginality for their own, expressing themselves through indigenous music and values.

13. In a Radio National interview (August 18, 2000) occasioned by a major exhibition of Papunya Tula art, the questions posed to me by Michael Cathcart carried a probing nuance. Was this really fine art, or was it just a kind of sentimental recognition of Aboriginal culture? "Fred Myers," he asked me, "what's your take on this? Is it fair to see this kind of art as part of a world-wide phenomenon in art, or do we need to see it within a purely Aboriginal context?"

14. For example, proponents of acrylic painting as fine art—such as John Weber—have insisted that Aboriginality doesn't matter, that who painted a work does not matter: Such proponents say that this work is just good art, or "I like the way they move the paint." This might imply that no special pleading is needed for *Aboriginal* art, that this art works in the modernist sense.

15. These scandals have become part of Australia's national conversation with itself, and have led the well-known Australian intellectual Germaine Greer to decry such developments as "Selling Off the Dreaming" (Greer 1997:5; for a reply to Greer's controversial views, see McDonald 1997:9). In her argument, Greer follows an earlier line of criticism set down by Anne-Marie Willis, questioning "the progressive agency of Aboriginal art for Aboriginal people" (1993:125). In fact, Greer's denunciation only delineates quite clearly the difficulties of managing two ongoing problems for the contemporary life of Aboriginal culture: its authenticity in contexts of copresence with the market (commodification) and with white society itself (cultural identity).

16. "Art from the Heart," produced by Richard Moore and Jeremy Eccles, was broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission on May 25, 1999.

17. For discussion of the Tim Johnson case, see Johnson 1997 and McLean 1998.

18. There is not space here to consider the complexity of Western stances toward so-called modern art—the varieties of modernism and doctrines they represent. "Formalist Modernism" as set forth by Clement Greenberg and his followers is, after all, very different from the modernism that celebrates the primitive. I have explored some of these issues in other writing (see Myers 1994). What I think is "modernist" in total, and what links this problem of Aboriginal fine art to the considerations of Weber and Bourdieu, is the pursuit of an essential formulation of "art" in line with its autonomy as a field of cultural production.

19. I should say that the use of the term *corruption* here is my own here, that it signifies an external judgment of the way these processes affect the values of participants. As a conception of certain kinds of processes, "corruption," of course, resonates in an opposing fashion with the tendencies represented by "purification" and also, therefore, as Rena Lederman (personal communication 2003) suggests, with the essentializing tendencies emerging from both the art market regime of value and the Aboriginal revelatory regime. Nonetheless, engagement with these processes seems to bring participants face-to-face with degradations of their values even while they pursue what seem to be acceptable pathways.

20. Turkey Tolson's willingness to sign paintings executed by his relatives is unproblematic for them.

21. The availability of acrylic paintings in the art market raises the question of how such objects are to be treated, by whose rules, and whether there are in existence meaningful regulations to manage them and the interests they represent in an adequate way. In summary, concern over cultural appropriation may in-

volve (1) prevention of cultural degradation, (2) the preservation of cultural goods as valuable objects, (3) deprivation of material advantage, or (4) failure to recognize sovereign claims. How to convert these perceived injurious experiences into culturally meaningful bases for dispute and action is a significant problem. These more abstract considerations allow understanding of the cases of scandal because they clarify the central values that are under threat.

22. There is, I am arguing, a practical conflation of discourses as well as new openings that might cut across the Aboriginal-white distinction. In respect of the nature of the confluences, Jane Desmond (personal communication 2003) suggests that Clifford's art versus culture schema could be redrawn slightly to accommodate indigenous products that migrate into the "art" category. Some consideration of her argument will help illuminate the point of my own position. These products "remain marked by the hand of their maker in a very literal way," Desmond points out, and "that identity authenticates the product in the system of value that it now circulates in." Desmond argues that "this new type of 'authentic art' is not authentic because it produces with individual consummate skill and vision and version of the 'genius' but rather because it yields a piece that combines a skillful stylistic and aesthetic mode that is produced by an 'authentic' member of a minoritized group."

This position represents what is happening in some of the art market, but in the specific case of Aboriginal high art that I consider, I believe the emphasis on connoisseurship and quality in the market tends toward identifications of the painters with versions of "genius." In that sense, the maturity of the Australian Aboriginal art market creates something more like a subcategory of fine art.

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