PANACHE AND PROTOCOL

IN

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ART

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Perhaps the archaeological break-through in terms of conceptualizing style as social strategy emerged from the extended debate on style between Wiessner (1983, 1984, 1985, 1990) and Sackett (1977, 1980, 1982, 1990). While Sackett's (1977, 1980) early papers argue strongly for a 'passive' component in stylisitic variastion, which her called isochrestic variation (which occurs when choices are made among options which are fundamentally equivalent), his revised position (Sackett 1990:37) recognizes the existence of both active and passive style. During this debate Wiessner developed Wobst's (1977) notion of style as a means of communicating identity, to identify a behavioural basis for style in the fundamental human cognitive process of personal and social identification through comparison. As Gamble (1991:3) points out, a consequence of this notion is that style must be an active tool in the negotiation of social strategy. It follows that any explanation of stylistic variation in relation to social strategy must necessarily focus on style as practiced within the constraints of particular situations. Indeed, Conkey (1990:15), suggests that there need be no necessary correlation between style and social entity – and that a view of material culture as an active, constitutive element of social practice implies that style may be more about the contexts in which group or other social-cultural phenomena are mobilised as process, rather than about group *per se*. Macdonald (1990:52) also addresses this question:

> If it is granted that all human behavior is culturally and socially mediated, an immediate emphasis is placed on the social circumstances that tend to produce observable variation in that behavior. That is, social context defines the limits and modal constraints on the appropriateness of social behaviors; human social behavior is situational and context dependent. Since patterns of social behavior vary among particular situations, then it follows that style will also vary among social situations. The problem is to specify models of style that are appropriate to particular social contexts.

McDonald proposes a model of style that is based upon a distinction between *panache,* which is the stylistic expression of separateness by the individual, and *protocol,* which is the stylistic expression of group identity and membership[i]. Considered in tandem with the notion that style is used in the pursuit of social ends, it follows that this tension between individuality and group membership should manifest in the physical characteristics of style. Certainly, the notion of style as social strategy links easily to concepts of both group and individual social identity as individuals are likely to have strategies in common as well as specific aspirations.

The following discussion examines this dichotomy in terms of the relationships between style and social strategy as manifested in art of an Aboriginal community located in the Barunga region of the Northern Territory, Australia (Figure 1). Aboriginal people from this region produce a wide range of art objects, including paintings and carvings, baskets and mats, as well as occasional rock paintings (though the latter is now rare). From a Western viewpoint, some of these objects might be included under the general rubric of 'craft'. However, Aboriginal people do not make a distinction between art and craft: they see paintings and weavings as broadly equivalent, though produced in different contexts, or by different people. Their principle concern is with the manner in which the production of such objects articulates with their cultural beliefs and laws. To Barunga people, aesthetic value is judged on how correctly the artist represents the dictates and stories of the ancestors, or on the status of the producer in terms of their knowledge of traditional law, rather than on the aesthetic characteristics that inform Western notions of 'art'. Designs are believed to have their genesis in the actions of ancestral beings and it is this which endows them with power: through the reproduction of these designs in paintings, the artist not only makes contact with the ancestral past but also nourishes that past. Thus, it is no co-incidence that most senior artists also have major roles in ceremonies and that those whose work is most respected by other Aboriginal people are important ritual leaders, the recognised custodians of ancestral knowledge. Aboriginal people learn their art as young adults and are generally taught by close relatives, as indicated in the following quotation by Billy Lukanawi[ii], a senior male artist:

> My father and my uncle they show me painting, why I'm not drawing other one. I got to draw that same one, that same drawing. Kangaroo, turtle, crocodile, rainbow [snake], quiet snake, file snake. I got to draw same way my father, my uncle. I got to follow them same way. I got to do red, yellow and white. I got to

put them same way [as they used to do]. My father and uncle, my mother and my grandpa. They used to do same way.

Thus, the philosophy is inherently conservative, one that looks towards the ancestral past (which also, in some sense, exists in the present) for direction and validation. Accordingly, it should be apparent that Western conceptualisations of art in terms of aesthetic value are not congruent with those that exist within remote Aboriginal communities: Aboriginal people from these regions view art primarily as a system of signification/communication, with the value of the work tied to the social position of the artist and the manner in which they fulfill their ancestrally-designated obligations. This approach to art highlights its production within socially and historically produced codes and conventions – that is, its inherently situated nature.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The Barunga region,
Northern Territory, Australia

The central issue that arises for the researcher into style as social strategy is how to identify the ways in which style is used to achieve particular social ends. The principle question becomes 'why *that* style in *that* context?' (cf. Conkey 1990:15). Classic semiotic theory does not provide an adequate method for assessing this question since it is generally interpreted as viewing style primarily as an instrument of social communication, rather than as an active agent in the construction of social knowledge (see Coward and Ellis 1977:21; Sperber 1976:xii). Certainly, a problem with classic semiological and structural theories is that they fail to adequately account for the human capacity to transform or reproduce structure in the (conscious or unconscious) pursuit of (long-term or short-term) social strategies.

These general difficulties are addressed by practice theory, as put forward by Bourdieu (1968, 1977) and Giddens (1977), but this is not without valid criticisms. The most telling of these relate to the emphasis it places on the determining capacity of social action and its failure to provide an adequate concept of culture. Morphy (1995) criticises practice theory as espoused by Bourdieu and Giddens on the grounds that it appears to allocate a determining status to the level of reality represented by action in the context of historically based social relations. He argues persuasively that the duality of structure

must involve *equally* the constitution of the individual through cultural and social process and the role of individual action in the transformation and transmission of socio-cultural systems (Morphy 1995:187). Ortner (1984:150) expresses a related concern, that the desire of practice theorists to emphasise intentionality within social action and/or a growing interest in change as against reproduction may undervalue the degree to which actors do simply enact norms because 'that was the way of our ancestors'. Certainly, aspects of a normative view have endured within archaeology, especially in terms of acculturation and enculturation (Conkey 1989:121; DeBoer 1990) and it would be premature to put this view aside entirely.

The problem that arises in terms of the analysis of style is how to reformulate classical semiotic theory so that it is informed by a praxis-oriented perspective, as envisaged by Bourdieu and Giddens, but which addresses the weaknesses of practice theory, and then how to focus this reconceptualisation on visual arts. This needs a theoretical framework that integrates style, semiotics and social strategy. In establishing an integrated framework one has to consider the question of how visual systems of signification actually operate within a social system that encompasses both structure and social action. This necessitates a general concept of culture and society in order to provide a content to the structuration processes. The programme then becomes examination of the modes whereby a socio-cultural system, as constituted through visual arts, is both produced and reproduced in social interaction that is both constrained and enabled by pre-existing structures. I use the term socio-cultural system advisedly, since I take the position that culture and society are entities which do not exist independently of each other and that they are bound together systematically and, in some sense, cohesively in that there are structured linkages between the two. While the creation of art both produces and reproduces facets of a culture, this firmly occurs within the constraints and capacities of the society as a whole. Morphy (1995) argues that culture and society are best conceptualised as relatively autonomous but mutually interdependent components of reality. He considers this in terms of the Yolngu people from north-east Arnhem Land, Australia:

> The Dreaming is not 'culture' but it is an excellent example of something that makes a concept of culture necessary to anthropological analysis: it is a level of reality that is a co-determining component of socio-cultural reproduction. The Dreaming represents a structure, rather than a set of rules ... (Morphy 1995: check page nos)

Such structures, and the 'systems' within which they exist, are not rigidly determining in the manner often attributed to classical structuralist or systems theories but rather are transformed and transmitted through individual action—as part of a cultural system of shared meanings and behaviours (D'Andrade 1995; Geertz 2000). The actions of individuals are both enabled and constrained by these structures, which themselves are in a constant process of redefinition through action (cf. Hodder 1989:73; Johnson 1989; Shanks and Tilley 1992:71-72). The structures provide mutable, emergent and overlapping parameters, the existence of which call for an artistic system to be analysed in interaction with other facets of the whole, such as religion, economy and philosophy.

This concept of culture encompasses what Bourdieu (1977:78) describes as the *habitus*, a set of culturally-instilled dispositions inculcated in early childhood which incline people to act in particular ways. Bourdieu (1991:17) argues that since individuals are the products of particular histories that endure in the habitus, their actions will always be influenced by more than conscious calculation. The habitus predisposes individuals to act in particular ways, pursue certain goals and so forth. As Thompson (1991:12) points out, these dispositions are durable and generate practices that are regular without being consciously co-ordinated by any 'rule'.

A serious consideration of style and social strategy also needs to encompass the notion of specific meaning since an understanding of meaning can facilitate an understanding of structure. For example, Watt's (1967) analysis of Nevada cattle brands and Faris' (1972) analysis of Nubean body painting did not produce significant insights concerning the artistic systems they were researching. Morphy (1977:3) attributes this to their failure to include a semantic component, as this omission makes it impossible to understand why a painting takes on a particular form or why specific elements are selected and organised to produce meaningful representations. However, the approach taken in this paper does not tie the researcher to an understanding of meaning *per se*. A general analysis of the relationships between style and structure can address the 'why' question of social strategy without an explicit understanding of the 'what' question of meaning.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE
Transformational relationships

A praxis-oriented, but Saussurian-inspired, approach to the analysis of visual signification systems needs to consider explicitly the likelihood that the form of the sign will be influenced by the historically and politically situated positions of both producer and interpreter. This notion is depicted in Figure 2, which shows the direction of transformational relationships within a visual signification system. The primary information flow is from producer to audience via the visual sign. The main influences upon the type of information that will be encoded in the sign – and therefore the form of the sign – are the producer's cultural mode of perception and depiction and social identity of the audience. Secondary, recursive information flows that subtly reformulate social knowledge occur from the sign to the producer and from the sign to the cultural modes of perception and depiction of both producer and audience—what actor network theory might characterize as a human-object co-production (see Law and Hassard 1999; Thomas 2004). Within this study the visual sign is the art object and the individual signifiers are the morphological characteristics that influence the form of the sign.

A Morphological Characterisation of Style

All stylistic description requires morphological characterisation, though it is certainly not identical with it (Davis 1990:22). Style is 'neither equivalent nor reducible to formal variation', as Conkey (1989:119) points out. The classic article written by the art historian Meyer Schapiro (1953) suggests that the dimensions of style include form elements, form relationships and qualities. More recently, Rosenfeld (1991) suggests that the principal criteria for defining an artistic tradition should be in terms of both motif and stylistic conventions, while Layton (1992:187) defines style classes in Australian rock art according to three factors: size, the range and distinctive formal qualities of motifs, and the presence or absence of compositions. Also, archaeologists regularly have discussed the morphological characteristics of style in terms of the analysis of particular types of materials (e.g. Mead 1975; Conkey 1980; Sharp 1988; DeBoer 1990). My interest here has been to identify those *general* features that might influence style in material culture, with particular bearing on Aboriginal art. A general morphological characterisation of the attributes of style, but which is particularly suited to analysis of indigenous visual arts, includes the following features:

- base materials;

- mediums;

- techniques;

- modes;

- dimensions;

- colours;

- relationships between elements;

- qualities;

- motifs.

All of these characteristics of style are amenable to formal archaeological analysis in the sense that they can be observed directly, quantified and analysed in terms of biases in their distribution. 'Style' is the combination of some of the features on this list but it is not dependent on any single feature, especially in the sense of that feature being a diagnostic trait.

Style in Barunga Art

This rather abstract discussion of style is now applied to a concrete study of style in action – in particular, to consideration of how social strategies relating to individual and group identity (panache and protocol) are encoded in style in Aboriginal art from the Barunga region, Australia. The results outlined here emerge from an analysis of all art forms produced by artists from July 1991 to August 1992, during which time I lived in the Barunga community. This more comprehensive approach to the study of style makes it possible to:

- discover how different art forms and stylistic attributes are used to transmit different kinds of information and/or the negotiation of different aspects of social identity;

- use information expressed in one art form to complement, qualify and clarify that expressed in other art forms.

Style, Social Strategy and the Individual

Let us now turn to the nexus between style, social strategy and the individual. A consideration of how the social strategies of the individual are encoded in style must enquire into the ways in which people use style to signal allegiance to a group (protocol) or, alternatively, to assert individual identity (panache). Examples of the art analysed in this study, include didgeridoos (known as *bamboos*), bark paintings, canvas paintings, body art, baskets and *lorrkorns* (burial poles).

Allegiance to a group can be perceived in those art forms or stylistic features that are used by many artists. Figure 3 shows that *bamboos*[iii], bark paintings and, to a lesser extent *lorrkon*s[iv], are produced by many artists, while Figure 4 illustrates the relative ubiquity of cross-hatching as either an infill or a backfill. The ubiquity of these features within the overall artistic system suggests the stylistic expression of affiliation to the regional group – that is, protocol in Macdonald's (1990) terms. Taken together, these features communicate general information about the identity of the group and, taken separately, they indicate the membership of the specific artists within that group.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE
The broad distribution of art forms according to artist

Conversely, some aspects of style were used by artists to distinguish their individual identities from those of others, and are open to interpretation in the sense of panache proposed by Macdonald (1990). This is apparent in the limited use of particular motifs. Table 1 shows that 82 per cent of motifs were produced by one artist only, and that 12 per cent of motifs were depicted by two artists. Only 3.5 per cent of motifs were depicted by three artists and 2.5 per cent by more than three artists. Sixteen artists depicted the most frequently occurring motif in terms of numbers of artists, the solid band of colour. Overall, it is clear that motifs tend to have a discrete distribution between artists and that each artist uses a limited *repertoire* of motifs within the overall *range* that exists within the system. In addition, this clustering of motifs acts to delineate territory, since affiliations to land, clan and most motifs are inherited patrilineally, as described in the above quotation by Billy Lukanawi. This stylistic hetereogeneity, in turn, can be interpreted in terms of bounding between neighbouring peoples, each of which have primary rights to specific tracts of land in an area of Australia which is relatively rich in resources, which itself can be contrasted to the greater stylistic heterogeneity of style in harsh environments (see Smith 1992).

No. of artists	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	16	Total
No. of motifs	260	39	11	3	1	1	2	1	318
Percentage	82	12	3.5	.94	.31	.31	.63	.31	100

TABLE 1

The frequency of motif use according to number of artists

However, to what degree is this individualistic use of motifs truly panache since it actually constitutes the norm within the society? When, in fact, it is the normal behaviour of all members of the group? It seems to me that by asserting their individuality in this way artists are concurrently asserting their membership of the group and that, at this level, their behaviour is consistent with that which Macdonald describes as protocol. Moreover, the selection of motifs is determined largely by appropriate religious and other forms of affiliation and, as such, reflects and embodies shared identity with other (past, present and future) artists who share the same affiliations. Thus, the motifs signal membership of a particular social group, even if depicted by only one person. To that extent, this individualistic motif selection can be viewed as an expression of protocol even though its shared expression may not actually manifest materially within a specific timespan.

INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

The broad distribution of modes according to artist

It seems clear that panache and protocol are operating concurrently, but at different levels. Panache is operating at the intra-group level between local people to signal individual identity. Protocol is operating at both the intra-group and inter-group level. At the intra-group level, individualistic motif selection acts as a protocol that expresses the shared identity of artists with the same affiliations. At the inter-group level between say, local Aboriginal and non-local Aboriginal people, or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people protocol is signaling membership of the regional Aboriginal community. Thus, the same stylistic features are transmitting different types of information *at the same time,* according to the historically and politically situated position of the interpreter.

INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

The discrete distribution of modes according to artist

INSERT FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE

The discrete distribution of art forms according to artist

In contrast, the exclusive production of certain art forms by individual artists can be interpreted purely in terms of panache. This is because this behaviour does not constitute a norm within the society as a whole. While *most* artists produce cross-hatching on bark paintings or *bambus*, as discussed above, *some* artists choose to experiment with other artistic features or materials. For example, Figures 5 and 6 show that certain modes and art forms can be ascribed to very few artists – and that some art forms are produced by only one artist. I now turn to some case studies in order to consider this individualistic use of style at a more fine-grained level.

Case 1: the Blitner brothers and the panache of the family

One of the clearest stylistic manifestations of panache within the Barunga artistic system of action involves the exclusive production of certain art forms by particular artists. For example, Figure 5 shows that senior artist Donald Blitner produced all examples of fish and crocodile carvings and his brother, Fred Blitner, produced all examples of bird carvings (Figure 7). In this way, these artists use style to differentiate their individual identities from that of the group.

However, this does not imply the existence of a rule that prevents other artists from producing these forms. It is also based on pragmatic factors such as the availability of tools, though this is not an insurmountable problem. More than this, it reflects a fluid process associated with the capacity of the sign to generate meaning: the two brothers have established joint, though separate, identities through the production of unusual, but related, art forms. There is a potential here for these shared stylistic identities to extend to the broader Blitner family. While other artists theoretically also have a right to produce similar art forms there are factors inhibiting this which relate to the panache of the Blitner brothers – for others to produce similar objects would be to somehow 'key into' the identities of the brothers, as expressed through style and this would be seen as an encroachment unless the person had inherent rights through being a member of the

same family. Certainly, the use of motifs within the broader system of action is clearly related to personal rights which are based on inheritance, as illustrated in the opening quotation by Billy Lukanawi, and these values inhibit any unauthorised copying of another artist's style.

INSERT FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE

A bird carving made by Fred Blitner

Case 2: Paddy Fordham and panache of the individual

The clearest example of the panache of an individual artist lies with the work of Paddy Fordham Wainburranga, the most commercially successful of the Barunga group of artists. Like the Blitners, Paddy Fordham sets himself apart from other artists through producing an unusual art form, in his case carved human figures (known as spirit figures in the art world). However, his art is individualistic at many levels – in terms of base materials, techniques and modes as well as through the use of colours and qualities. The detailed analysis of his work gives some idea of the range of variation which is encompassed within the Barunga system of action and I have explored this in Figure 9 through comparing his percentage use of particular features with the percentage use of these features by the remainder of the community of artists. This Figure shows that much of the difference between Paddy Fordham's art and that of the rest of the artistic community is of degree, rather than kind. For instance, he uses dotted backfill in 20 per cent of his art but this also occurs in 4 per cent of the art of the rest of the community. A clearly delineated difference, however, lies with his failure to use cross-hatching as either an infill or a backfill (see Figure 8). The idiosyncratic characteristics of his art are recognised by curators of Aboriginal art and Caruana (1993:45), for example, comments on Paddy Fordham's favouring of 'expressionist and dynamic figurative images' and suggests that he uses dots to create a similar luminosity to that which is produced by other artists using cross-hatching.

INSERT FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE

Painting on linoleum by Paddy Fordham

While Figure 9 plots differences between Paddy Fordham's art and that of other artists in the Barunga community, there are also similarities that should be recognised. For

example, he conforms to the norm in his choice of colours and mediums, which are all naturally occurring. Thus, his panache operates at some levels but not others.

INSERT FIGURE 9 ABOUT HERE
The panache of Paddy Fordham

The panache of Paddy Fordham can also be used to inquire into the notion of style as power. This is illustrated in his stylistic treatment of *lorrkons*. Table 2 compares the length of *lorrkons* according to the four artists that produced this art form, with mean length calculated according to the greater end of each range of lengths. It shows that Paddy Fordham's *lorrkons* have a statistically longer mean length than those produced by other artists: the mean length of his *lorrkons* is 2350mm, almost 80% longer than the mean length of *lorrkons* produced by other artists, which is around 1311mm in length.

This greater length of Paddy Fordham's *lorrkons* is considered a problem in some sections of the Barunga community as length is one way of distinguishing between ceremonial and non-ceremonial *lorrkons*. Ceremonial *lorrkons* are produced in a restricted, male-only context, though they are open to viewing by all segments of the Aboriginal community as part of one of the *lorrkon* series of mortuary ceremonies. They are usually around 2500mm in length. In contrast, *lorrkons* aimed for distribution to a non-Aboriginal audience are produced in a private, though not a restricted, context and are much shorter, as shown in Table 2.

Length of Lorrkon (mms)	All other artists	Paddy Fordham	Total
700-1000	3	0	*3*
1000-1350	4	0	*4*
1350-1700	2	1	*3*
2000-2300	0	1	*1*
2300-2700	0	2	*2*
Total	*9*	*4*	*13*
Mean length	1311mm	2350mm	1631mm

TABLE 2

Length of lorrkons according to individual artists

It is important to be clear that the difficulty posed by Paddy Fordham's *lorrkons* lies only in the stylistic feature relating to dimension, rather than with motifs, modes and so forth. In fact, one solution to the problem that was put forward by a senior artist would be for Paddy Fordham's *lorrkons* to be sawn in half[1]. Both halves could then be sold either together or independently. Since Barunga people do not normally interfere with each other in this way it is clear that certain people see the extra length of Paddy Fordham's *lorrkons* as a serious problem. Yet the artist, who is well aware of the problem, consciously chooses to ignore the principle that *lorrkons* produced for a non-Aboriginal audience should be short and to accept the criticism that accompanies his actions. Why? Why insist upon producing *that* style for *that* particular audience? And *how* does he have the power to negotiate a general principle of art production that most other artists see as immutable?

The answer lies with the situation of the individual artist and how relative identity can be negotiated through style. Paddy Fordham is a highly successful artist whose work is much sought after by the fine arts market. He regularly wins prestigious art awards and his work is held in various public as well as private collections. He has travelled extensively throughout Australia and overseas and has broader experience of the wider world than many other Barunga artists. This experience includes contact with Aboriginal artists from other parts of Arnhem Land who produce long *lorrkons* for distribution to a non-Aboriginal audience. This has altered his perceptions so that he views the restriction on the length of non-ceremonial *lorrkons* as a local, rather than a general, principle since it does not hold in Aboriginal communities outside of Barunga. Therefore, he does not feel that this principle regarding length is something by which he need necessarily abide. In addition, his *lorrkons* are sold for substantial sums, so there is considerable financial incentive for him to adhere to the stylistic formula that he has developed in relation to the fine arts market. For example, two of the *lorrkons* included in the database for this study

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[1] This suggestion would horrify members of the fine arts market who collect Paddy's work, and which indicates how little this market is taken into account by community members.

were sold for $2 500 and $3 000 each and this is not inconsistent with the sums which this artist occasionally commands for other examples of his art.

These sums provide an initial handle on the question of how Paddy Fordham has the power to continuously transgress an important principle of local art production. In a community where people have a medium annual income of around $USA 8,000 the large sums which his art often bring in give him considerable economic power, especially given that most people, including Paddy Fordham, do not save money but share it amongst their extended family. There is a natural reluctance within the community as a whole to restrict any major source of income. The social identity of the audience also has direct bearing on the how question. Paddy Fordham produces all of this art, including the *lorrkons*, in a private viewing context and the finished objects generally do not remain in the community for more than a few days. Therefore, any annoyance caused by his stylistic transgression is not exacerbated by Aboriginal people having to view the object for an extended period of time. Conversely, the *lorrkons* act to stylistically signify Paddy's power when they are viewed by local Aboriginal people, since they are evidence of his unique ability to successfully contravene fundamental rules.

This incident stylistically expresses some of the dynamics of decision making and power plays in Barunga society. The suggestion to cut the *lorrkons* in half can be interpreted as a desire to exert the primacy of the Dreaming (and associated social heirarchies) over that of a market economy (and associated social heirarchies). At another level, it can be interpreted as resentment of a community member breaking with traditional and the exertion of levelling forces in response as well as a certain tolerance because of the financial benefits this work gives to the community. Nonetheless social change is brought about by the successful negotiation of an immutable principle.

The question that then arises is how Paddy Fordham's negotiation of this stylistic convention has influenced the structure of the Barunga system of action. If one accepts that there is a dialectical relationship between social action and structure, then this artist's actions must have repercussions for the system as a whole: each material act has a potential for reordering and bringing about new perceptions (cf. Hodder 1987:8). Firstly, his actions have introduced the perception that it is possible to produce long *lorrkons* for a non-Aboriginal audience. This must make it easier for other artists, both in the present and future, to negotiate this convention. In the present, this is demonstrated in a small

negotiation of the principle by Peter Manabaru, whereby he produced a *lorrkon* for a non-Aboriginal friend, versed in culture, that was considerably longer than those which he produced for the tourist market (see Figure 10). He explained this unusual length in terms of the closeness of their relationship. To some extent, his actions will coalesce with those of Paddy Fordham's to affect contemporary perceptions of the mutability of the general principle and the contexts in which that principle can be negotiated.

So, what of the future? Will this principle exist fifty, or even twenty, years from now? The answer lies with the social-symbolic strategies of both current and future generations of Barunga artists as situated within their ever-changing historical contexts.

INSERT FIGURE 10 ABOUT HERE

Lorrkorn made by Peter Manabaru

Style, Social Strategy and the Group

The issue of how social strategies of the group are manifested in style can be approached through focusing on the social identity of the audience, which Figure 2 denotes as a contextual influence on style. The specific question that is addressed here is: does the social identity of the audience systematically influence the characteristics of style as used by the group?

The social identity of the audience was distinguished by whether the intended viewing audience was Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal or both. The vast majority of Barunga art is produced for sale to non-Aboriginal people as this is a major source of income generation within the community. Other art is produced for the general community, such as when murals are painted on community buildings, or for ceremonial purposes. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people view community art while ceremonial art is normally viewed by Aboriginal people alone. The different uses of these objects have important implications. While it is possible to obtain relatively large sample of art aimed for the tourist market since this is part of an on-going production system, only a moderate sample of objects produced for the community can be obtained, as this art is produced on a less regular basis. Moreover, it is impossible to obtain a large sample of art objects used for ceremonial purposes since the same objects are used on many occasions. I make this point simply to explain the unequal sample sizes that underwrite

the following discussion. However, it should be noted that this bias was addressed in the statistical analysis through the use of significance tests.

INSERT FIGURE 11 ABOUT HERE

The distribution of features according to the context of distribution

One noteworthy result is that there are significant differences between art created for an Aboriginal audience and art created for an audience that includes non-Aboriginal people. For example, as illustrated in Figure 11, the former places a greater emphasis on static, geometric qualities and on bi-lateral symmetry than the latter. In addition, a wider range of motifs are used if the context of distribution includes non-Aboriginal people, as illustrated in Table 3: while 288 different motifs were used in art produced for sale to non-Aboriginal people, 36 motifs were used in a context of distribution which encompasses both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and three motifs occurred in art aimed for distribution among Aboriginal people only.

	Aboriginal *n=10*	*Non-Aboriginal* *n=295*	*Both* *n=16*	*Total* *n=321*
No. of motif types	3	288	36	*327*

TABLE 3

The number of motif types used in different contexts of distribution

These differences in style are recognised by Aboriginal people at an emic level and they comment that art produced for non-Aboriginal people is made 'flash' through the incorporation of a wide range of motifs and modes. This 'flashness' can be interpreted as panache, in that it constitutes dash or flamboyance in style. Conversely, art produced for distribution among Aboriginal people is relatively simple in style and is described by Aboriginal people as 'plain way'. This 'plainness' can be interpreted as protocol, since it is ubiquitous in that context.

Moreover, the social context in which ceremonial art is produced acts to inhibit, or disallow, the artistic innovation that might create greater panache, or stylistically diversity. Art that is produced for viewing by an Aboriginal audience is created by several artists working together, usually in the company of other Aboriginal people, rather than by a single artist working in relative isolation. The presence of other people during the production of ceremonial art reinforces adherence to the core principle, in this case that art should follow the dictates of ancestors. It is likely that this context of production produces a powerful constraint upon artistic innovation.

These results suggest that there are two Barunga artistic systems – one in which a stylistically diverse art is produced for viewing by a primarily non-Aboriginal audience and another in which a more stylistically homogeneous art is produced for viewing solely by an Aboriginal audience. In terms of Wiessner's (1990:109) proposition that situations that switch on group identity include a need for co-operation to reach certain goals, it seems reasonable to argue that Barunga artists as a group are co-operating in protecting the more secret or private features of their culture, as manifested in art objects, while simultaneously taking advantage of the economic opportunities presented by the non-Aboriginal art market.

Conclusions

In this study I have interpreted patterning in the morphological characteristics of style in an Australian Aboriginal system of knowledge in terms of a theoretical framework that integrates style, semiotics and social strategy. In particular, I have enquired into the manner in which the social strategies of both the individual and group may be seen to influence style, and how both individual and group strategies can manifest at stylistic panache or protocol. Social strategies aimed at differentiating the individual from the group manifest in the ownership and use of a wide range of motifs and in the individual production of idiosyncratic art forms. Moreover, the enormous variation in the range of motifs used by individual artists can be seen to operate concurrently as both panache and protocol, in the senses proposed by Macdonald (1990). At the intra-group level, the use of motifs owned by the individual is the operation of panache to signal individual identity and affiliation to particular tracts of land, while the alternate principle of protocol operates through expressing identity with artists who share the same affiliations. At the inter-group level, say, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, protocol expresses

membership of the regional Aboriginal community. Thus, the same stylistic attributes have a capacity to communicate different types of information *simultaneously* according to the historically and politically situated position of the interpreter.

Social strategies of the group are manifested in Barunga art through stylistic adherence to the ethos that art produced for a non-Aboriginal audience should be substantially different from that produced for ceremonial contexts with a purely Aboriginal audience. In Wiessner's (1990:109) terms, this is a situation in which group identity is switched on in order to achieve a particular goal – in this case, the protection of secret/sacred features of Barunga culture, whilst tapping into commercial opportunities. Clearly, much of the variation in Barunga art can be attributed to the differing emphases that artists place on the stylistic expression of their separateness as individuals or their membership of a group – and this emphasis alters according to the social identity of the people who view the art. Thus, the Barunga artistic system has an inherent capacity to encompass a range of styles according to both the social strategies being pursued by artists and the social identity of the audience: the form of the sign is influenced by the historically and politically situated positions of both producer and interpreter.

Furthermore, this implies that different information is being communicated through style in different contexts. Information transmission can take any of a number of vehicles (e.g. words, art, gestures, music, structured silences) and the potential mix of information sources will differ according to the particular situation (e.g. restricted ceremonies, public ceremonies, domestic situation, teaching situation) and social identities of the individuals involved. For example, art that is produced as part of a ceremony possesses a dynamic quality and a public voice that should be distinguished from the more passive and private voice of other forms. The art object/sign that is produced for this social use will differ in form to the art object/sign that is produced for other social uses. This general notion is implicit in Saussurian semiotics and Morphy (1991:144), writing in relation to the range of sign systems in humans societies, comments that:

> It [the Saussurian perspective] allows for the fact that different sign systems may encode things in different ways, may encode different things (or the same things with different values) and may have different communicative potentials. It is not possible to say the same thing in every code, partly because some codes have

limited purposes and limited possibilities, but more generally because different codes have different properties and encode different things in different ways.

The types of issues addressed in this paper are intrinsic to a conceptualisation of style as a system of signification allied to the pursuit of social strategies. While this paper has addressed a basic question concerning the relationships between style, semiotics and the social strategies of the individual and the group, there are many more complex issues to be studied. Certainly, one of the most interesting challenges facing contemporary archaeological studies of style is that of developing methods of analysis, including classificatory systems that are capable of dealing with the dynamics of image creation and perception. Clearly, strategizing style is going to be a major challenge for us all.

Endnotes

1.   Macdonald's 'panache' and 'protocol' can be usefully compared to Wiessner's (1983) distinction between 'assertive' and 'emblemic' styles. The principle difference between the two is that Macdonald's categorisation is based on whether comparison occurs at the level of the individual or the group. His category of protocol encompasses behaviours that are both vertical (to do with status) and horizontal (to do with etiquette). Taken together, they are broadly equivalent to Wiessner's emblemic style (Macdonald 1990: Figure 6.1).

2. While I have worked in the Barunga community every year since 1990, the paintings incorporated into the statistical analyisis presented in this paper were produced in a relatively tight timeframe, from July, 1991 to August 1992.

3. I refer to the artists with whom I worked by their names for two reasons. Firstly, this grounds my research in the concrete, situating the results in actions of known individuals. Secondly, when I raised this issue with Barunga people they replied that they wished to be identified by name since then non-Aboriginal people would 'believe'. However, anyone visiting the Barunga community should be cautious about using the names of these artists since some are now deceased and it is considered dangerous to say their names aloud.

4. Musical instruments, referred to by non-Aboriginal people as didgeridoos.

5. Burial logs used to hold the possessions of dead people and, in the past, their skeletal remains.

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