

ART AS POWER: ART, MUSIC AND DANCE IN THE LIVES OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLES¹

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INTRODUCTION

There are several things which all the peoples of the world, throughout every age have shared: forms of family and political life, economic systems, systems of beliefs, and forms of symbolic and artistic expression. However, the ways in which they develop and give meaning to these social activities varies considerably. There is a tendency, however, in perhaps all cultures, to assume that the way *we* do things and think about *our* lives is the most obvious or common sense way, or even the "right" way.

Thus, one difficulty many people have when trying to appreciate Aboriginal people's lifeways and cultural practices in Australia — both in general and in relation to aesthetic, symbolic or artistic expressions such as art, dance and music — is that they may try to think of them in their own cultural terms. This can be a problem: first, it may distort the ways in which certain practices should be understood as a part of a people's culture and, as a follow-on to this, it will prevent the inquirer from learning the fuller, richer meanings of the activity. How do we decide if an activity and its product constitute the same activity and product as in another culture? In this brief overview of Aboriginal arts I am going to assume that what we usually call arts or artistic forms of expression, by which I include music, singing, dance, painting, sculpture, poetry, acting and so on, do not have the same meaning in Aboriginal societies as they do for the majority of people in industrialized societies today.

For many people the visual and performing arts have become one of

life's optional extras, tacked on to the serious business of living, something to go and see in one's leisure time, or something companies in Tokyo are encouraged to import from overseas so as to provide their workers with congenial working environments. Instead of using the term "culture" as the total expression of our shared lives, some people use it in the nineteenth century, pre-Taylor sense, to refer specifically to the arts, these "extra", perhaps even superfluous, activities that are available to affluent societies and affluent people — sometimes even referred to as "cultured people".

Certainly it is true that terms such as art, creative expression, or aesthetics usually denote, in English, sets of activities and their products which can be separated from other aspects of social life (Berndt 1985: 367). Unlike politics, economics and the like, they are not "useful" and have no "practical" ends: "art for art's sake" as the saying goes. But for Aboriginal peoples this has never been the case. In both the past and present these forms of artistic expression are as central and integral to people's lives as family life, preparing food, tending to the sick, or organising political ventures. There is nothing exotic or optional about them. In no Aboriginal language is there a word, a collective term or concept equivalent to the English word "art" (Dallas 1977: 111; Hoff nd.). Aboriginal arts have been classified, according to modern artistic conventions, as paintings, dances, music and so on. But they cannot be separated out and subjected to the same kind of critique or understandings. However, in no way does that make them 'inferior' or 'inadequate' as Europeans judged them to be in the nineteenth century. As Smith has pointed out:

Europeans have tended to see the art and culture of others in two simple categories: as either civilisations or as pre-civilised, primitive societies. The art and culture of China after a certain stage, for example, or the great religious movements such as Buddhism or Islam, were clearly the expression of comparable, if usually inferior, civilisations. African, Pacific, Oceanic, and Australian Aboriginal peoples

were seen as a lower evolutionary order, and thus their art and culture, whatever its qualities, was seen as essentially primitive. These views are simply inadequate in the face of the phenomena with which they purport to deal. They lock perceptions of the art and cultures of these "primitive" peoples into a nineteenth-century time warp. In fact the depth and complexity of Aboriginal society and its art is the expression of a set of cultural and religious traditions comparable to those of Buddhism, Islam or Christianity (Smith 1989: 18-19).

THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF AUSTRALIA

To put my comments about Aboriginal arts into a social context I need to digress to explain some aspects of the experiences of Aboriginal peoples. This introduction will also necessitate making some rather sweeping generalisations for the sake of brevity and simplicity. First, there have always been and still are hundreds of different Aboriginal societies with distinct cultures and languages, and thus distinctive styles in music and art. The term "Aboriginal", which just means 'original inhabitants', is one introduced by British colonisers which leads people to wrongly assume that these peoples all have one culture. The term should be understood in the same way as the terms "Asian" or "European" are used — a way of describing peoples of different societies distributed over a large continent, but which recognises the great linguistic and cultural variations which exist throughout the area.

Second, these different societies in Australia have different histories. In particular, they have had very different experiences of British colonisation over the past two hundred years. For many it meant traumatic decades of massacres and poisoning programmes, sponsored by the incoming British developers, their government and police. In a few cases, whole societies were wiped out. In a great many, where their land was wanted by the British, they were left robbed of their ability to continue their chosen lifestyles and subjected to on-going

government programmes whose expressed aims were to completely destroy any remaining Aboriginal traditions, including denying people the right to speak their languages, bring up their own children, or perform cultural practices. In yet other societies, the fact that Europeans did not want their land until comparatively recently gave them a degree of protection to continue cultural and linguistic practices.

These different histories have given rise to the terms 'traditional', used to refer to Aboriginal practices which continue to be primarily inspired by cultural practices with literally hundreds of centuries of inherited tradition behind them; and 'urban' referring to activities influenced by various non-Aboriginal practices, by post-invasion Aboriginal experiences, and by innovative contemporary approaches to their lives, as well as by their Aboriginal spiritual heritage. It is rarely possible to say Aboriginal activities and beliefs today are either one or the other. More usually they are more of a mix: a creative response to the demands of modern living within the broader framework of the world's oldest living culture.

So, I want to make the point that in the present, as in the past, there are many different ways of being, and looking, "Aboriginal", just as there are different ways of being "Asian". But there are also many things that the people of these various societies have common. One, again both in the past and present, and across Australia, is an experience of art as empowering — as giving not only power but life itself. This is an important aspect of understanding Aboriginal arts, whether in 'traditional' or 'urban' contexts.

THE DREAMING

Aboriginal societies had a spiritual philosophy or set of guiding beliefs and practices which are known today as their Dreamings. Whilst these differed from one society to another, and have changed considerably in some societies since their invasion, there are some general points I can make. To speak of one's Dreaming, or one's society's Dreamings, is to speak of the creative spiritual life forces which brought all life into the

world, formed the landscapes within which each society lives, formed animals and peoples, and established the social and ecological order of things which all people must follow if life is to continue. These spiritual ancestors are as active a force in maintaining and regulating life today as they were in their initial creation journeys throughout the land. They bind people together in a nexus of land/people/spirits which cannot be broken without chaos, sickness and death being the result.

The way in which people communicated with these spirits, and the spirit people with them, was primarily through art, dance, music and song. These are not "art forms" in the contemporary sense of the word but *the manifestation of the spiritual life forces themselves*, and at the same time codifications of history, and of religious, philosophical and legal principles. All Aboriginal societies believed, albeit not in exactly the same ways, that their forms of artistic expression were given to them by their creator ancestral spirits. The arts were intimately related to, indeed inseparable from, the ways in which people were organised socially, the land on which they lived and with which they identified, and the spirits of that particular land. Art forms were not independent of the integrated system of land, people and spirits. They could be shared with other societies in some cases, but they were not transportable in the sense in which most modern art forms are. Any one of Aboriginal artistic expressions might include information about land and its ownership, about ritual performances, other social and religious information, and stories about creation ancestors. Each form of expression and each act of expression fitted into the traditional body of sacred knowledge which belonged to each society:

Collectively [these arts] represent all that is most essential to the spiritual existence of the land and its inhabitants. They are a range of insignia with which and by which the country and its inhabitants can be identified (Biernoff 1977 : 101).

In the act of producing these art forms Biernoff describes how the artist becomes the creator, becomes spiritually changed, participating intimately in creation by his contact with the sacred objects, including

songs, dances, paintings and so on. In this way, people becomes sacred themselves, they become "a container for and emanate a sacred power or essence for the time during which the sacred object is being carved or painted" (Biernoff 1977 : 102). von Sturmer (1986 : 16) has described dance in inland Cape York, for instance, as revealing the dancer "for what he already is": as a fully spiritual person.

The primary purpose of Aboriginal music and dance in the past was not entertainment in the sense in which Australian music and dance generally are. Although their arts certainly could and did entertain, entertainment is not what was definitional about them. Artistic expression is the lived experience of the sacred knowledge of the ancestral peoples. To paint, to sing, to produce music, is to bring the power and life of the spirits into the very presence of those who are re-enacting the spirits' own activities. This is very much the case in ceremonies which are highly sacred and secret, but applies just as much to public displays in which everyone is involved: artistic expressions are, in Biernoff's words, "a serious, almost awesome business". This power imparts knowledge, affirms people's identity and relationships with each other, their lands and the spirits themselves.

So it follows that an art form or a ritual in Aboriginal thinking was not just a finished piece of work, or the performance at the end of all the rehearsals. The preparations themselves, as people painted themselves and objects around them, as they sung ritual songs accompanying the painting, as they danced to the short songs or music associated with various acts of preparation, as they gathered and prepared the special ceremonial foods, wove the baskets required to carry certain ritual items — all these activities were the ceremony. This is *participatory* art, not performance art. There are no spectators or guests but, rather, people with varying degrees of responsibility for the spiritual creation. It is not something one watches but something one experiences, as people and spirits come together as a spiritual 'presence'. Allan (1979 : 21-22), speaking of his participation in Aboriginal ceremonies, said:

It is hard to pinpoint the moment when a ceremony moves into the feeling of immersion in 'Dreaming', where every element becomes fused and tears involuntarily spring to the eyes. However you can be sure that what has transpired is the result of knowledge gleaned from the cumulative experience of countless generations. The essence of that knowledge is the recognition of the inseparable link between the music elements and the conditions in which they are produced ... the participants and the music become suffused with the timeless re-enactment of the sense of 'being'.

As Hoff (nd) remarks, Aboriginal peoples "believed creative expression was central to human existence and all men or women were expected to participate". I was interested to hear well-known Aboriginal film and stage actress, Justine Saunders, say of her own contemporary performances:

I don't see myself as breaking new ground ... I'm sort of more following in the footsteps of what you could say was a tradition of culture. Because before the white man came we were all artists. Every man and woman could sing, every man and woman could dance, every man and woman could paint. So it's a natural thing (Chayko 1985).

Yirrkala artist, Marika, has described art as explaining the "why, where, who and how" of her life. Despite having given the first major exhibition of art by an Aboriginal woman in 1985, she doesn't call herself an artist (Tait 1985: 2).

But, while everyone was an artist, but not all their products gained the same status:

Valued art works were those which made great demands on the creator's abilities. Inspired by complex doctrines and aesthetic values, they contained varying degrees of spiritual power. The greater this power, the greater the need to

restrict certain expressions from people who were not initiated, not senior enough, or of the wrong gender, so as to avoid the danger of anyone coming into contact with them who was not ritually protected from that power. They could be so full of spiritual power that they would actually be destroyed after a ritual (Hoff nd).

Thus, there is an awesome power transmitted through participation in artistic expression. Traditional songs, for instance, encode the laws of life, those spiritual, social and environmental laws without which there can be no life, only chaos: no songs means no rules (Ellis 1979:27). The power of song is the power to draw on the creative power of the spirits. The songs have the power to move people or enchant them, make rain, lull people to sleep, heal the sick, cause someone to die, keep snakes away, or free someone from jail (von Sturmer 1986:5). Anthropologist Strehlow (1971:677) once commented that Aboriginal songs "were regarded as the greatest treasures any man could aspire to. They took the place of private wealth ... to own a large number of songs meant supreme social prestige for any man".

As songs invoke the spirits, so dance demonstrates the presence of the spirits, and thus is even more powerful than the act of singing (von Sturmer 1986:14). The nature of traditional dance has been described as being to "identify and define" (Williams 1987:2): bringing to light, as it were, the ancestral spirits themselves. As with certain paintings, onlookers may also need to be protected from the power of the dance if they are not initiated members of that spirit's dreaming, or if they are of a different spiritual inheritance.

This also explains why art forms have been used in recent Aboriginal political movements. For instance, the first petition claiming land rights was made by the Yirrkala people of Arnhem Land to the Federal Government in the form of a bark painting: the painting is the visible evidence of land ownership to Yirrkala people. Likewise, paintings, songs and dances have been used in court hearings in order to establish ownership of land in recent land rights cases. These are

the Aboriginal equivalent of title deeds, proof of ownership: as binding, in fact more so, than contracts honoured in the legal systems of industrialised nations. When artist, Charlie Tjaruru Tjungurrayi was asked why he painted, he said: "If I don't paint this story some white fella might come and steal my country" (Smith 1989: 19).

THE MODIFICATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF ABORIGINAL ARTS

von Sturmer (1986:20) has cautioned against inviting Aboriginal people to participate in performances which are, from an Aboriginal point of view, illegitimate: as when the spirit becomes subservient to the instruments, the recording machines, the video screen. His caution is addressed to us, the non-Aboriginal observers. It is we who will "deny ourselves the possibility of ever understanding how the techniques and content of song [etc.] come together for the creation of such intense meaning, overflowing with conviction".

However, Aboriginal artistic expression *is* now produced for the western consumer. Paintings are painted to be sold, music produced for cassettes, dances performed on stages. What impact is this having? I would say that there are both happy and unhappy outcomes from the various dialogues or meetings of these two different cultural traditions. Let me first say something about the more negative side.

Many traditional Aboriginal art forms have been appropriated, modified and commodified by Europeans for the arts and tourist industries. This often robs these art forms not only of their intense meaning but also their dignity and integrity. I had a disturbing experience on a recent trip to northern Australia when I went to see what was advertised as an "Aboriginal corroboree". The standard of performance was bad, the costuming and setting very artificial, and the white MC [master of ceremonies] was a picture of benign paternalism, parading his children before us. To me it was a mockery, a travesty — not a way in which one came to know and respect another culture, but an exercise in trivialising and degrading that culture, turning the Jawoyn peoples of Katherine into caricatures of "the primitive other". I

felt angry, and I felt sad that the Aboriginal people themselves had felt the economic, or perhaps political, necessity to participate and acquiesce in this tragi-comedy.

On the other hand, I agree with John Mundine, Aboriginal arts advisor, who says "Art is [Aboriginal people's] big chance to educate the rest of Australia and the world about our living Aboriginal culture. It must not be trivialised" (cited in Hawley 1987:9). This is an important caution in an atmosphere in which many westerners, even those spending huge amounts of money on Aboriginal art, are not understanding the cultures that make its production possible in the first place.

It is important for the continuation of Aboriginal cultures that non-Aboriginal people try to understand the complex meanings in their art forms and the relationship of these to their land, history and social life. It is also important, I believe, that Aboriginal people try to avoid the temptation to water down their arts, to modify them into meaninglessness in order to cater for the tourist market or the art dealer's dollar; hard to do when Australia offers Aboriginal people few other economic alternatives, but essential if they are to survive as anything other than tourist trivia. But in voicing similar concerns, Smith (1989:18) reminds us of an underlying strength when he says that, if Aboriginal arts are to survive the current white enthusiasm for them brought about by "well-meaning welfarism and the rapacious international marketing", it will be because they are "based on cultural resources which the white world has scarcely begun to comprehend". I think Smith was probably referring to the rich spiritual understandings of traditional societies when he said this. I would want to add, based on my many years of research into the cultural resources of urban-living Aboriginal people, that they too are greatly underestimated in Australian society today.

URBAN ABORIGINAL ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

To develop this point a little, I want to note that Aboriginal people have been expressing themselves through European-derived art mediums, along with their own, for as long as Europeans have been in

Australia, including drawing, painting, music, dance, poetry, acting and song. Perhaps because of the great importance to them of artistic expression in general, many quickly acquired European drawing and music styles. Much of this has been disregarded by westerners who only saw it as an indicator of "cultural loss". Sullivan (1988:64), has rightly pointed out that:

the performance of non-tribal music by Aboriginal people has been both an important part of their social identification and communal identity and is in itself a particularly rich manifestation of their culture.

Sullivan's research in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland uncovered a performance history dating from at least the 1850s of a "vibrant, creative and unique tradition of social music, paralleling the white traditions but in itself a separate entity with its own creative thrust".

Interestingly, she found that it was many of the older Aboriginal people, those still strongly bound to their own traditions, who were also expert violinists and accordion players. To these instruments they added mouth organs, spoons, gum leaves from the Australian eucalyptus tree, and later, of course, the guitar. White violinists learnt from Aboriginal violinists how to use wallaby (a small kangaroo) sinews to string their instruments, the sinews having had many uses in pre-European times. At times Aboriginal people also introduced European instruments into traditional ceremonies, and used traditional tunes and language for European-style dancing. One of the best known composers of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century was Billy Redman. Sullivan describes his role as a topical and gossip song-maker as a fusion of tribal and western idioms, a continuation of the Aboriginal practice of communicating the funny and the sad side of the day through gossip songs, dance and mime. The gum leaf bands were once in every Aboriginal community in eastern and southern Australia, and one marched in the parade opening the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the early 1930s. Later, of course, guitars were added to this repertoire and have

now become commonplace, the traditional didjeridu being hollowed out to merge with the sounds of electric guitars and so on. Brian Syron, Aboriginal director and actor, said in the 1980s that we were:

witnessing an emergence of Aboriginal people being strengthened by their art and culture and being made aware of the smorgasbord of technology there for us to use (Bacetic n.d.: 53).

This is clearly seen in works such as 'Urban Corroboree', performed by participants of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music in Adelaide. This is a stunning example of how Aboriginal people from different parts of Australia, of both urban and rural traditions, have brought together a variety of Aboriginal and European music styles and instruments into a performance which clearly locates them at the social and musical interface. It is an intense expression of conjuncture and disconjuncture in the meeting of flute and didgeridu, past and present, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, emphasising the Aboriginal learning styles of participation and enjoyment, non-verbal communication, repetition and imitation. Ellis has said of the Centre that, whatever music styles the students learn, they learn "self-respect, dignity and confidence in their own traditions"—the experience Europeans have denied Aboriginal peoples in the past. This makes Ellis's statement a very moving recognition of the social significance and power of music.

From the brief look above at traditional spiritual activities, and European-influenced practices, it is clear that not only do Aboriginal people have different forms of expression available to them, they also have a great deal to say; a complex history to celebrate and express in their art forms. Not only does this include themes from the pre-European invasion days, before the nineteenth century, but also one to two centuries of horrific violence as they saw their kinspeople killed in front of their eyes; their children taken away to be trained for servitude, never to be seen again; their most sacred and holy places destroyed by another culture's desire for resources and wealth; and discrimination that prevented, and in many places continues to prevent

them from gaining access to adequate and appropriate health services, education, jobs, food and even clean water to drink. Contemporary art forms are ways in which Aboriginal people can express their angers, frustrations, deep sorrows, hopes, awarenesses, and loves; their experience of living — or, as some put it, of 'surviving'. A well-known contemporary song by Aboriginal reggae band, No Fixed Address, goes: "we have survived the white man's world, and the horror and the torment of it all".

Aboriginal people have effectively used almost every possible art form to try and change the minds of modern Australians about Aboriginal people, to show them the real history of Australia, and to communicate their hopes for justice and recognition. A primary purpose of their arts has always been to "communicate something about Aboriginal life and values to whites" (Smith 1989:19) as much as to make statements for and about themselves.

In 1972 the newly-elected Prime Minister Gough Whitlam created the Aboriginal Arts Board, the first time that Aboriginal artists were given both recognition and resources, and the power to make decisions for themselves about their work. The Board led to the starting of such bodies as the Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre and the Aboriginal and Islanders Dance Theatre, both in Sydney. These and other organisations have been described as having "changed the face of modern Aboriginal Sydney", enabling people to express themselves through arts who were once too poor to do anything but struggle for their existence (Roberts 1985:1).

Likewise, the Central Australian Media Association have helped reggae, rock and country music bands such as Coloured Stone, from Koonibba in South Australia, to become one of the best known bands in Australia today. One reviewer said of the band Coloured Stone's first album that "political issues are present in the band's work but their messages are carried subtly perhaps too subtly". Band member Buna Lawrie commented that he saw his songs as "hopeful or optimistic", he liked to see people enjoy themselves when the band played (Totaro 1985:2). This comment highlights one feature of

Aboriginal artistic expression today that surprises many non-Aboriginal Australians: even when it expresses anger and frustration, when it talks about one of the most violent histories any people have had to endure, it looks forward creatively and humanely — humbling those who take the trouble and time to listen.

Work by the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre has been called a “heady mixture” of political comment and dance: the comments are on subjects “close to Aboriginal hearts — all the way from the day on the beach on a Torres Strait Island to deaths in custody” (Davies 1987:18). On the other hand, actress Justine Saunders says she does not go looking for ways to make political statements through her acting. However, she adds:

I firmly believe in our causes — with what’s happening in Australia regarding land rights. Though the media is one of the areas that I believe we will make our stand, not as in getting up and killing whites or whatever, but by bringing to Australians the positive image of Aborigines — what we’re about, why we’re asking for land rights, that we’re not all living on welfare (Chayko 1985).

One of the first exhibitions of urban Aboriginal art was described by the Sydney Morning Herald’s reviewer as a contribution to the visibility of contemporary Aboriginal problems, a correction to stereotypical images, a sign of the growth of Aboriginal cultural self-confidence. He noted that urban Aboriginal art was concerned with concrete and tangible things like the deaths of Aboriginal people in custody, land rights, preserving cultural identity and values in modern Australia (Allen 1989:14). But this applies not only to “urban” art. Thirty Aboriginal artists from Arnhem Land in north Australia painted 200 burial poles in the traditional manner to commemorate the Australian bicentenary in 1988 — a two hundredth celebration of arrival for non-Aboriginal Australians, of invasion, destruction and death for Aboriginal societies. These poles traditionally hold the bones of the dead but it is interesting to note that the ceremonies in which they are used not only

signal the death but also the rebirth of the spirit: again a message of hope.

One of the best known of the central Australian desert art styles has been developed by a school of artists who call themselves Papunya Tula Artists. Papunya is the name of the society to which they belong. "Tula" means "friendly" or "cooperating" (Identity 1974:8) — another reference to the reaching out that Aboriginal people have committed themselves to through their arts. *The Cake Man*, written by Bobby Merritt, was the first play to be performed that was written by an Aboriginal playwright. Charlton (1984), when reviewing a new performance of it, commented:

The extraordinary thing about this play is its generosity: in the end the *Cake Man* does come, and he has white skin. The goodwill of whites is assumed, rather than demanded. But the point is made too, that goodwill by itself is not enough to counter ignorance. *The Cake Man* doesn't come until black and white have looked into each other's eyes.

Will Aboriginal people in Australia continue to be able to give expression not only to their own cultures, but also to the relationships they find and seek with non-Aboriginal peoples. I believe this will only be the case if their cultures are given proper political and legal status and accorded dignity and respect. This has not been, and is not, the case in Australia today:

[It must be understood that] contemporary Aboriginal art is an important element in the current Aboriginal insistence on due recognition and respect from white Australians. It poses, dramatically, the question: how can a people capable of this quality of creativity continue to be treated as if they were lesser human beings? Aboriginal art has [also] had specifically political aims and effect. the desert paintings are striking witness to the central value at the heart of the cause for Aboriginal land rights: an inherited, felt, physical

and imaginary identification with a particular place, expressed in a visual language that is both distinctly different but also evidently beautiful. Here we glimpse the full dimension of what would be lost if the modernist art machine does succeed in absorbing Aboriginal art. Not only would the paintings become just a phase in the history of Western art appreciation and marketing, they would lose their edge as social and political statements (Smith 1989 : 19).

It is still the case that many Australians want the Aboriginal painting or cassette, but they don't want the Aboriginal person, they don't want to give them the right to their own lifestyles, which means their own resources, their own lands, their languages and the right to negotiate their own identities; those things which make these arts possible in the first place. Non-Aboriginal Australians can enjoy the symbols Aboriginal peoples produce but can choose not to hear the messages within them: they do not want to give back to Aboriginal peoples the material, social and spiritual resources that have been stolen from them. In fact, what little was not stolen, such as artistic knowledge held in some parts of Australia, is still in danger of being appropriated to also serve European ends. If Aboriginal culture is allowed to just become an artifact of the commercial world, it will complete one of the greatest acts of cultural genocide that the world has ever seen: and, in this case, the genocide of the world's longest continuing cultural heritages.

That Aboriginal people have survived at all in this most gruesome of histories is a testament to the strength of their culture. I have often wondered how they did it. One of the most incredible resources they have is humour. Another is the strong value placed on personal integrity and independence. Another is great flexibility and adaptability. And yet another is their ability to express their joys, sorrows, angers and desires through art forms that not only allow them expression but also teach us, the onlookers and outsiders, what they have been through and who they are.

Urban Aboriginal people in Australia are sometimes described by European Australians as if they are people who have "lost" their culture. This is far from the reality. True, many are not able to continue "traditional" practices because of past violence by Europeans, and many choose not to. But the alternatives to traditional forms are many and include an increasing repertoire of art forms that signify the dynamic and changing quality of Aboriginal cultures in different parts of Australia. This should not be interpreted as *cultural loss*, even when it has entailed the loss or destruction of certain cultural practices. It is cultural change. Among Aborigines we can witness the amazing capacity of a vibrant culture to respond to changes in creative ways, despite the harshness of their experiences.

When Aboriginal people take elements from both their own and European traditions they are, of course, recognizing both of the major influences in their own personal and social histories. There is no way in which we can understand Aboriginal life in Australia today without understanding the profound impact on it of their relationship with non-Aboriginal peoples and lifeways. "Urban" arts give expression, through various art forms, to the breadth of experience which is Aboriginal Australia today.

John Clegg (1977:12), talking about a rock art site in Sydney which has childish and inartistic engravings by white people superimposed over the ancient Aboriginal art, claimed that these engravings "epitomise the whole scene of Aboriginal-European contact": the two cultures "are in contact but are out of communication". Today, Aboriginal people take the heritage of their own and European cultures, whose respective members have been in almost constant conflict all over Australia for over two hundred years, and bring them into communication. This requires courage, empathy and vision — qualities that each of us needs if we are to reach out to other cultures and, at the same time as we enjoy our differences, celebrate what we have in common as expressive and creative human beings.

I mentioned before the awesome power of artistic expression in the Aboriginal tradition. The power that is called forth by the act of

singing, painting, making music and so on in Aboriginal traditional life is a continuing feature of contemporary Aboriginal art forms. Aboriginal people, through sharing their arts with people throughout the world as well as in Australia, are doing what statesmen and politicians, social scientists and reformers, welfare agencies and missionaries all too often have failed to do: bring people who are in conflict into new relations of understanding and compassion. That is a continuing recognition of the immense power and potential of music, song, dance and art in all of our lives.

Notes

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力としての芸術：オーストラリア 先住民族における美術、音楽および舞踏

〈要 約〉

ゲイノア・マクドナルド

一つの文化を他の文化からとらえようとするのは如何なる場合でも難しい事です。オーストラリアのアボリジニ文化における、われわれが普通に「芸術」や「芸術的な表現形態」と呼んでいるものを理解しようとしたとき、われわれはこの行動のもっと広く、深い意味を学ばなければなりません。この抄訳の中では、アボリジニ文化の芸術的表現形態を社会という視点より、複雑な、また、豊かな文化としてみています。

アボリジニ文化は「伝統的 (traditional)」芸術と「都市的 (urban)」芸術に分けられています。前者はアボリジニ活動のうち、それまでの文字通り何百世紀にもわたって受け継がれてきた、現在も続いているものをさし、後者はイギリス侵略以降の経験、さらにかれらの生活への革新的な現代文明の接近などに影響された諸活動をさすようになりました。

次に、アボリジニの霊的哲学、「ドリーミング」と呼ばれる、すべてを創り出した創造的な霊力について取り上げました。この創造的な霊が彼らと交流するのは、芸術、踊り、音楽、そして歌を通じてでした。つまり、これらは現代の「芸術形態」ではなく霊的な命の力そのものの顕現であったのです。どの表現形態、どの表現行為もそれぞれの部族が所有している伝統的な聖なる知識の総体に調和していました。

芸術的な表現は祖先の聖なる実体験なのであり、描き、歌い、音楽を作り出すことは、霊自身の活動を再演する事によって、霊の力と命を、その

存在そのものへ導くことです。芸術的表現に参加することはだれもがする、生活に不可欠で中心的な活動でした。

芸術的表現を通して畏怖するような力が伝えられます。例えば、伝統的な歌は、いのちの法則、つまり、それなしでは生命は失われてカオスのみになってしまうような霊と人間社会と自然環境の法則を記号化します。このことは、なぜ近年のアボリジニの政治活動に芸術形式が使われてきたかを明らかにします。例をだすと、土地に関する権利をめぐる訴訟でも、土地所有権を立証するために踊りや歌が法廷審問で使われました。

伝統的なアボリジニの芸術形態の多くが、近年、美術、観光産業のために形を変えられ、商品化されてきました。これは、こうした芸術の確固たる意味を奪うのみならず、その尊厳と完全性をも奪い取ってしまいます。しかし一方では、アボリジニの文化に対する他のオーストラリアに住む人々の理解も促しています。アボリジニの文化の存続のためには、アボリジニ以外の人々が、かれらの芸術形態の複合的な意味と、芸術がかれらの土地や歴史や社会生活に対して持っている関係を理解しようと努めることは大切です。

伝統的な芸術表現の他に年々増える芸術表現のレパトリーがあり、彼らの変わりゆく文化やオーストラリアの他の側面を表しています。アボリジニの人々は、ヨーロッパ人がオーストラリアに住み着いて以来、自らを表現するのに彼ら自身のものと一緒にヨーロッパからきた芸術的手段をも使ってきました。現代のアボリジニの芸術様式は近代のオーストラリアに対する、彼らの怒り、不満、深い悲しみ、希望、意識、愛などの、生活経験や生活史を表現しています。

今後、アボリジニ文化に正当な尊厳や政治的、法的な地位を与えることが出来なければ、彼らは芸術的表現を続けることは出来ませんし、また、彼らの求めるアボリジニ以外の人々とのよりよい関係を築くことも出来ません。これらのことを考えますと、彼らの強靱であふれる創造力が理解に苦しむ人々を理解と共感のある新しい関係へと導いてくれることを願って

やみません。これは同時に私たちの生活全般に存在する、曲、歌、踊りなどすべての芸術の持つ計り知れない秘められた力を、これからも認識し続けることを意味しています。