

Consuming *Geist*: Popontology and the Spirit of Capital in Indigenous Australia

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On 16 August 1998, several people from Belyuen and I drove to Wad-eye (Port Keats) and ran into the ark of a covenant, a building underway aimed at housing an indigenous spirituality. This building has several aspects, modalities, and scales—physical, subjective, textual. It is dispersed across multiple social fields—law, business, and public life—and the purpose it serves goes by several names: cultural tourism, ecotourism. In this essay, I seek to understand the sources and limits of this built environment and its social, subjective, and economic implications for indigenous Australians.

David Harvey (1989: 339) has noted that post-Fordist capitalism seems to be dominated by “fiction, fantasy, the immaterial (particularly money), fictitious capital, images, ephemerality”; the stock market and various financial instruments are well cited examples. Herein, I examine a related market—the market in the uncanny, the mystery (rather than the mysterious), the fourfold (*morphe*) as it operates in northern Australia. I will propose that one of the operations of this market is to hold certain groups of people accountable for manifesting for certain other groups a Heideggerian form (*morphe*). It will also emerge that the market itself relies upon a complex set of textual mediations generating both an object for and a limit to capital forms of commodification. What might these particular modalities of capital and textuality tell us about the dynamic relation among text, subject, and economic practice at the beginning of the new millennium? More specifically: How do we understand the textual sources of the indigenous Spirit that capital commodifies? Note: I will seek the answer to these questions not in analysis of the representation of the Spirit of commodity capital, but rather in an interrogation of how the building of various sorts of capital

infrastructures is mediated by various sorts of textual architectures and by the subjective inhabitation of both. In short, the logic and timing of the subject are not equivalent to the logic and timing of capital.

REGIMES OF THE SPIRITUAL

We had not gone to Wadeye to chase the market of the Spirit. We had planned to spend the week mapping the coastal region historically associated with the Marriamu and Marritjaben Aboriginal people with other men and women living at Wadeye in preparation for a sea claim to be lodged under the Native Title Act of 1993. The map would help demonstrate the continuing existence of the traditional laws, customs, beliefs, and practices of the Marriamu and Marritjaben. It is such traditional customs that give their native title its legal efficacy in Australian statutory and common law. Most jurists loosely agree with Justice Olney's understanding of traditional customs as a set of laws, customs, practices, and traditions that are "integral to a distinctive culture" rather than a mere "description of how people live" or a description of how their ancestors once lived (*Hayes v. Northern Territory* 1999: 20). It is not required by the national law that these customary laws be demonstrated to be "spiritual" in nature, although in the common sense and common parlance of national courts, parliaments (federal, state, and territory), and public spheres, Aboriginal customary law is considered to be saturated and fully comprehended by the cosmogonic myth-ritual of the Dreamtime. What *is* required of applicants—before their native title claim can be registered—is that they acknowledge their native title rights and interests to be subject to all valid and current laws of the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory. According to the current phrasing of native title applications in the Northern Territory, they also must further acknowledge that the exercise of these rights and interests might be regulated, controlled, curtailed, restricted, suspended, or postponed by reason of the existence of valid concurrent rights and interests by or under such laws. This acknowledgment is a formal textual act: the statutorily mandated form and content of a native title application. Because applications are usually prepared by non-Aboriginal lawyers and anthropologists, most claimants never know they have been represented as acquiescing in this hierarchy of legal power and authority.

But it was neither the expanse of the Dreaming nor the conceit of national law that initially caught my breath. Instead, I was taken aback by the expansion of the local airstrip. Wadeye, also known as Port Keats, is the sixth-largest town in the Northern Territory, a fact often obscured by its remote location, situated as it is off the main highway that runs south from Darwin to Alice Springs. Of these towns, Wadeye is the poorest, with all the health and social problems that attend poverty: low life-expectancies and high childhood mortality, substance abuse, suicide, and depression. My companions and I had driven the long dirt track to the community many times and knew well the actual physical relief of reaching the airfield at the other side. Exhausted by the dusty road, the jarring and seemingly endless potholes, the heat, the racket, we would always wonder aloud why we had not flown. The answer was the cost. And, this time, instead of a dirt landing strip, we were greeted by enormous earthmovers paving and lengthening what was emerging as an airport. *Where the Green Ants Dream* came to my mind, but no one from Belyuen had seen Werner Herzog's 1985 film, with its dramatic exploration of Aboriginal spirituality through the tropic re-figuration of Aboriginal ceremonial grounds and actors as airstrip and plane. Responding to my surprise, my classificatory mother Gracie Binbin described the renovations as an Aboriginal countermovement to the movement of non-Aboriginal desires. "Tourists coming," she said. "Ansett coming to Port Keats. Drop them tourist off. Maybe they look museum. Listen to bush stories. Might be bush food. Fly back. Berragut [white people] like that kind a business. Lot a money gana be this Port Keats."

We never did finish mapping the coast on that trip. Our exercise was interrupted when, on the third day of the field trip, senior Marriamu and Marritjaben men and women were called to witness the ritual punishment of a young male family member. The night before, this young man and several of his friends had stolen and wrecked a car belonging to a non-Aboriginal man living in the community. As punishment, the young men were flogged by their elders, a ritual overseen by white Northern Territory police. A similar practice in a small Aboriginal community just north of Wadeye had made headlines several years before. Several men from Peppimenarti went on trial for, and were eventually found guilty of, manslaughter. As public spectacle, coverage of the Peppimenarti trial focused primarily on the defense argument that the

death was an accidental result of indigenous men's customary ritual business and thus not subject to the Australian penal code (Watt 1992a, 1992b). The defendants lost their case. Practices that provide robust evidence of the existence of traditional laws so vital to native title and land-rights cases may still not be efficacious grounds for an argument in criminal courts.

During the public flogging at Wadeye (which is how people there describe the practice—evoking, in the process, older British codes of colonial discipline), I walked to the newly opened carpeted and air-conditioned Wadeye Art Gallery with one of my classificatory husbands, Timothy Dumu. Some of his award-winning work was featured there. Orienting visitors to the artworks were numerous brochures describing what made Wadeye art culturally distinctive (read: culturally valuable). The brochures drew attention to specific aesthetic forms and represented them as spiritual traditions that visitors could “see” in the art hanging on the walls. What visitors could also see were prices far below those found in regional and national cities.

Local art brochures and prices are simply local nodes of a regional, national, and international supertext generated by the semicoordinated and uncoordinated (indeed competitive) activities of other dealers and art houses. This supertext provisionally coordinates the aesthetic and economic values of Aboriginal art, crafts, music, and culture. The very notion of getting art at a “deal”—and thus of this art instantiating such a deal—depends upon a larger circulation of art and people (Myers 1998). In fact, Wadeye was connected to this circulatory system even before the expansion of the airport and the creation of the art gallery. Wadeye barks painted during the 1960s were featured in the most recent Sotheby's indigenous art catalogue, listed for between \$500 and \$5,000 (all dollar figures in Australian dollars). The head of Sotheby's Aboriginal art collection, Tim Klingender (whose sister acted as the solicitor for some of the men and women I was working with on a previous land claim) has worked with local Wadeye people and anthropologists to trace the barks' meanings, their painters, and the period in which they were painted in order to convey to potential buyers the cultural values that inform the economic value of the artworks. Both Timothys have their own notions about what motivates a tourist to buy or bid on a piece of art. That day at the Wadeye Art Gallery, Timothy Dumu described consumer desire in the following way.

If that thing im Dreaming, Berragut look.

Like this one I been paint,

Im dreaming.

Im got that story.

I been ask.

Im right.

I can paint this one.

Wulman im been say.

Whites are interested if it's about the Dreaming.

Like this one I painted.

It's Dreaming.

It's got that story.

I asked.

It's alright.

I can paint this Dreaming.

Old man said.

White collectors desire nothing more than the consumption of Aboriginal spirituality, their Dreamings, and they are willing to pay good money for it. But my husband linguistically enacts a limit to his compliance with this desire, textually inverting the hierarchy mandated by the statutory requirements for registering a native title claim. The form of his utterance, its poetic parallelism, encloses this spectral interest of whites in the social dynamic of local cultural authority: "Wulman im been say."

But there might be something else to listen for here, something more than a subaltern inversion of discursive hierarchies of desires and authorities: the subjective embodiment of contrasting deontic mandates. What can be made of Dumu's statement, "I can paint this one"? Is it simply a recitation of local customary social norms? Or a performative enactment of the self as a proper Aboriginal subject qua abider of the customary? Or could this quotidian statement—as much and as little considered as any of the remarks that passed in the long conversation we had—be considered the linguistic precipitate of subjectivity in a field of competing capital and cultural obligations and desires? In other words, is Dumu saying something that would appear in its negative form as "I should not or must not paint this design" or as "I cannot paint this design—I literally cannot make my hands move in such a way as to ma-

terialize this *thing*”? Likewise, is his art valuable because he iterates and follows the iterative trail of “the customary,” or because this iteration is also a marker of the subjective strain of obligation in a particular form of national and global life? What matter, politically and analytically, to how these questions are answered? I begin by interrogating the specific spatial economy of the Spirit at Wadeye.

CARGO CULTS

It is hard not to think of the Wadeye airstrip as evidence of the existence of a local cargo cult. But the airport is not the materialization of any purely local scheme. Rather it is the physical unfurling of Commonwealth and Northern Territory government efforts to build national space in such a way as to produce surplus values for national citizen/subjects. This is increasingly the represented function of government in late liberal democracies like Australia. The idea of marketing the spiritual nature of Aboriginal culture and economy has been tested throughout Aboriginal Australia for at least half a century. And not just Aboriginal Australia: as numerous scholars have demonstrated, economies and governments on the local, regional, and national levels are increasingly dependent on tourism, particularly spiritual-cultural tourism (see Smith 1989; Urry 1997; for the Australian case, see Craik 1991; Jacobs and Gale 1994; Frow 1997; Thomas 1999).

But at the core of the question of why such a place as Wadeye has its new airstrip is a systematic textual misunderstanding regarding the scale, temporality, and spatiality of tourist capital. In daily papers, on radio and television, public analysts continually refer to a quantity of capital associated with the tourism industry. For instance, the *Northern Territory News* reported that “The Territory’s \$700 million-plus tourism industry would be hit hard by trade-offs negotiated as part of the new goods and service tax” (“GST ‘to hit NT tourism,’” 31 May 1999). But what is this “\$700 million” that is at risk? On the one hand, it is a sign figuring, in the process of referring to, the sum total of all movements and modalities of capital associated with a delimited domain of economic practice. But on the other hand, “700 million” is a singular nominal form that indexes Singularity, Quantity, and Objectness, a singular, objective quantity of *some thing*. Situated within the grammatical present imperfect, this nominal form figures particular movements and

particularized moments of capital as an aggregated thing: an *it* existing in toto, out there, right now, at continual risk of being “hit hard” — that is, abused unfairly. Lest this seem no more than the unfortunate slip of an overworked copyeditor, note what a tourist outfitter in Darwin quipped to me and, in so quipping, suggested might be the relationship between the public circulation of textual figurations of tourism capital and subjective understandings of the goal of business: “There’s 700 million dollars out there. The question is how we get it here.”

A grammatical and textual figuration is misapprehended as a real condition: Speakers follow their own projections of semantically and pragmatically entailed conceptual space into the world of socially mediated things instead of examining why and how these figured spaces might be used and useful (for the grammatical and metapragmatic unconscious, see Wittgenstein 1998 [1953]; Whorf 1956; Silverstein 1981). The conceptualization of tourism capital as a unified, flowing mass presents businesses with questions of how to freeze, halt, or impede the “flow,” “circulation,” and “migration” of capital. That is, businesses face not only the problem of how to compress space-time to decrease cost and increase profit, but also how to decompress space in order to localize surplus value. At both of these moments of capital, Commonwealth, State, and Territory governments actively assist Australian businesses. Various state agencies and private consumer organizations conduct consumer surveys, support community development schemes, employ consultants to model culturally sensitive approaches to development, and modify physical and regulatory space to ease access for developers and their clients. Indeed, it can be said that built physical environments — airstrips and other physical infrastructures — are articulated within no less built statutory and regulatory environments. For example, in a step designed to facilitate the traffic of tourists, the governments of the United States and Australia have modified immigration regulations in such a way as to permit services such as the issuing of visas — once the province of government agencies — to be provided by corporations such as Qantas Airlines. Meanwhile, the Australian Department of Arts, Sports, Environment, Tourism, and Territories struggles to regulate the transnational movement of Aboriginal cultural heritage and artifacts in the face of studies emphasizing the role played in the Aboriginal art trade by overseas investors who are driven as much by an interest in speculating on an art market as by connoisseurship. It is such loosely

coordinated and uncoordinated physical, legal, and regulatory spaces that constitute the “scaffolding” within which are built the infrastructure of airports and art galleries in such places as Wadeye. Furthermore, these physical and regulatory spaces themselves emerge in a field of textually mediated consumer desires, an emergence that depends at every step on textual projections similar to those informing the presentation of tourism capital. For a germane example: a widely cited 1990 survey conducted by the Australian Council found that 49 percent of international visitors were interested in seeing and learning about Aboriginal arts and culture, 30 percent purchased Aboriginal art or items related to Aboriginal culture, and \$30 million per annum was generated by this tourism (see Finlayson 1991). Likewise, in her study of cultural tourism in northern Queensland, Julie Finlayson found that most tourists wished to speak or live with Aborigines in order to learn about their way of life and the spiritual-cultural attitudes underlying their use of the environment. But she also found that most visitors to the Queensland city of Cairns did not visit the neighboring Aboriginal community of Kuranda, because its proximity made it seem inauthentic, tourist-oriented, crime-ridden, and socially maladapted. Forty-nine percent, 30 percent: Even though no superordinate Being of type “Tourist” exists, Dumu and the Australian Council model their practices on this textually figured and projected thing. Once textualized as part of a homogenous type—Tourists—the thing can be indexed to other things across social space that in theory permits of infinite expansion, the congruencies and differences among individual things built up from variations of type (this/that type of Tourism, Tourist) and dimensionality (this/that aspect of this/that type of Tourism, Tourist). These textual creatures underpin government and business representations of how and why Aboriginal communities such as Wadeye should develop.

And yet when the production of space is viewed with a focus on the generation of surplus value, it can be seen that building pathways for tourists to Aboriginal communities initiates the movement of capital out of the community. More precisely, the community becomes a site in which surplus values are generated for those outside the community (see Loveday and Cooke 1983; Altman 1988; Knapman, Stanley, and Lea 1991). Even if no tourists ever fly to Wadeye, considerable private capital has been generated by the thought that Wadeye is the type of

place they would wish to go to. By convincing local leaders that a certain type of tourism might provide a significant influx of capital (“tourism is a \$700-million-dollar industry”) and jobs (“tourism employs x number of persons”) and by linking social and mental health to capital and jobs (“this will help cut down on juvenile violence by giving young people jobs”), multimillion-dollar contracts can be tendered and awarded for building airfields, art galleries, and hotels, generating revenue and jobs for regional non-Aboriginal people. And deciding how to structure a culturally sensitive form of spiritual consumption generates work for anthropologists, linguists, and social workers. It is true that some public funds and resources are reallocated to local Aboriginal men and women through government programs such as Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP), a work-for-welfare scheme meant to provide training to the locally employed. But private building companies do not hire local labor, and anthropologists’ informants are usually not paid. Instead, the local unemployed, who suffer a degree of economic immiserization unimaginable to most Australians, usually stand as silent witnesses to this consumptive building of their Spirit. Such space as has been structured for them can be seen unfolding in the barbed-wire halos some communities have been erecting on electrical poles to curb youth suicide.

If tourists do arrive in Wadeye in any significant number, their economic value to the local community depends on their consumption of something—a hunt, a piece of art or craft, a story, an experience. Ironically, perhaps, in buying any such commodity, tourists are likely to stimulate rather than prevent the exploitation of the community for the generation of surplus value to the benefit of people outside the community. Most indigenous people living along the northwest coastal region do not produce paintings whose value lies in the \$5,000 range. Rather they produce raw materials for the arts-and-crafts market. Take, as an example, the ubiquitous didgeridoo. Aboriginal men and women are most likely to find, cut, strip, and hollow out the tree trunks from which didgeridoos are made. They then sell these semifinished products to local middlemen, usually non-Aboriginal men and women, who do the painting or employ others to do it. (Many didgeridoos, bark paintings, canvas paintings, and boomerangs are produced entirely by non-Aboriginal people.) Middlemen then sell the finished products to stores

in regional cities such as Darwin, or to other middlemen who ship them in turn to southern ports. Finding, cutting, stripping, and hollowing out ten didgeridoos consumes, at an average, three days labor for one skilled person; at this stage, the value of each hollowed pipe is about \$15. As the product makes its way to the consumer, the price may be radically increased (\$50, \$100, \$200). This price hike is replicated across product categories in the market for cultural artifacts. At the bottom of the chain are the kinfolk of those preparing the object for sale, who are relied upon to be on the lookout for the raw materials to pick up or chop down — seashells, tortoise shells, trees — while otherwise engaged in the bush. These original suppliers receive their remuneration in the form of smoke, drinks, or small change.

But what is the value of these hollow sticks to those who purchase them? One way of finding an answer is to return to Timothy Dumu's assessment of white consumer desire. Before saying what his comment demonstrates, let me first say what I don't think it demonstrates: I don't think that Dumu presents us with an example of a cynical subject deploying identity strategically (though I could present numerous more or less pure instances of such a deployment). Nor, for that matter, do I think that this would be an instance of what Gayatri Spivak (1989) calls "strategic essentialism." Instead, I would suggest that the poetic form and content of Dumu's comment encodes his subjective experience of discursively embodied scales and levels of obligation — culture's embodiment. If so, the very moment of the utterance bears witness to the subjective limit of culture's objectification and transformation into capital and the object-destination of capital consumption. At bottom, the question of whether to regard Dumu's statement as a strategic deployment of customary identity or as an instance of the subjective limit to the commodification of Being-in-culture is a question about where to locate the subject in our reading of the text. Is the subject to be read off the text? Or is the subject outside the text commenting on it? Or should the text be read as the product of a socially mediated subject?

I cite a second example that can clarify what is at stake in these questions and the choice of models we can use to answer them. In a conversation with me in 1993, the late Betty Bilawag described the feelings of panic she experienced when she attended a meeting to discuss whether mining should be allowed in Marriamu country. When she realized younger family members were about to vote en masse in favor of mining

near a particularly dangerous Dreaming site, she described her actions in this way:

I been panic. I been have to get up. I been have to get up, talk now.
“No. No. You’re not going to forget them Dreaming. You can’t forget.
They still there. They still going. They dangerous, that mob. You say
‘No.’”

Panic made Bilawag get up, but this panic can be understood as a corporeal index—a discursive depth charge of sorts—of the embodiment of various orders and levels of obligation. Because the modality and timing of subjectivity is not equivalent to that of commodification, this type of embodied obligation, or modal subjectivity, impedes capital’s spatial expansion, throws its timing off, if it does not halt it.

It is not necessary to conceptualize a coherent subject in order to conceptualize the vital sociological consequences of moments in which subjects experience contrasting yet compulsory obligations. At risk in these moments are not simply discursive norms and legal codes, but the subject him- or herself. The psychic experience of numerous people throughout the northwest coastal region provides examples of the personal consequences of acting wrongly. These are people identified as *piya wedjirr* (literally “head-rotten”), who might be said to have been traumatized by their inability to reconcile competing obligations and desires. Others point to them as evidence of the hard power of “Aboriginal law.” Even so, I am not suggesting we think of these subject limits as *the* limit of capital. Nor would I suggest that true resistance to capital must be affective in nature and form. But Bilawag’s panic does suggest a type of moment that marks *a* limit to capital internal to the subject. As Bilawag’s reminiscences suggest, this subjective embodiment of culture varies, often significantly, across age and social groups within an Aboriginal community—her younger family members were poised to vote “yes,” after all. And what surprise is this, that culture’s embodiment reflects the variations, slippages, dispersions, and ambivalences of discursive formations across the terrain of indigenous social life?

But it is, in fact, the subjective strain of inhabiting these fields of embodied obligation, I am suggesting, that tourists, lawyers, and other visitors mistake as a sign of the distinctive spiritual nature of Aboriginal society. Witnessing the throes of her panic, non-Aboriginal people experience Bilawag’s “spirituality” rather than her travail within ide-

ologies of capital and culture. A subjective grinding in the midst of contrasting social and cultural fields is misapprehended as the movement of the Spirit. While capital might find its limit in moments in which subjects experience the trauma of navigating contrasting social and cultural mandates, such moments are quickly fetishized as authentic culture — as the valuable “real stuff” of culture (and law). It is this trauma that tourists of the Spirit seek to purchase.

Why then do tourists mediate their purchase through objects — drone pipes, postcards, and bark paintings — rather than paying Aboriginal people directly for their acts of alienation, their reformation as a Heideggerian bridge for another? An answer seems to lie in the object of purchase itself, which is not an Aboriginal person or an Aboriginal way of Being in any particular place, but an experience that Aboriginal people manifest when they inhabit particular kinds of placing themselves, or being placed, in a limit — when they straddle the cliffs of contrasting discursive orders. Hollow drone pipes and other cultural memorabilia act as mnemonics for this nomenic experience.

There is no great evil master plan that pushes indigenous subjects like Timothy Dumu toward the variously configured limits of their subjective well-being. Many boosters of Aboriginal spirituality support local cultural practices against other market forces. But it is precisely this support that continually forces Aboriginal subjects to inhabit — to embody — the throes of being in the middle of contrasting and competing deontic mandates. A September 1999 issue of *The Weekend Australian* furnished a good case in point. In an article about the production of Aboriginal art in the Kimberlies, the survival of Aboriginal art — and through this art its culture — was pitted against the economic interests of pastoralists (McCulloch-Uehlin 1999: 5). While such an argument provides a useful reminder of the fragmented nature of capital, it also cites and actually increases the pressure on Aboriginal persons to tarry in spaces of contrasting normative injunctions — to inhabit not only sites of competing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal deontic orders, but also of competing non-Aboriginal political and economic values.

Aborigines have a limited statutory right under two sections of the Western Australian Land Act of 1993 to access their traditional lands without permission from lessees, which may not be relevant in the case of the Texas Downs refusal. “It’s a common experience for Ab-

original people right across the Kimberley,” said Kimberley Land Council deputy director June Oscar. Many people hope Aborigines will simply walk on to a pastoral lease unannounced. (McCulloch-Uehlin 1999: 5)

As the example suggests, the art market is hardly the only national social field that generates stress on indigenous subjects while purporting to support their spiritually imbued customary law, encouraging them to occupy complex sites of negation while leaving unexamined why many people within the nation might desire they do so. Recall that the reason we went to Wadeye on 16 August 1998 in the first place was to produce a body of legally efficacious evidence demonstrating the survival of traditional Marriamu and Marritjaben customary law. In the shadow of the police-supervised flogging, we were quickly reminded that this law is not a recognized part of the Australian common law today, any more than it was in 1936, 1896, or 1789. But this legal fact did not dissuade the state of Queensland in 1996 from proposing “a radical scheme” that would make “customary law—including the use of corporal punishment—compulsory in isolated black communities” (Emerson 1996: 4). The legislation was intended to police juvenile crime in remote communities through the policed agency of traditional culture.

Viewed as a means of unburdening state resources, this state-backed, compulsory return of customary law would be mediated by majoritarian, commonsense standards of corporeality (standards that are, in fact, never described, lest in the description the imaginary of a shared majoritarian intuition about this corporeality be punctured). The Minister of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Mr. Lingard, reassured an (imagined) jittery constituency that “extreme punishments such as spearing would be ruled out,” though “other forms of corporal punishment would be acceptable but would have to be monitored” (Emerson 1996: 4). Far from inciting the public to consider their own commonsense intuitions about corporeality—to interrogate their underlying assumptions critically—Lingard merely cites the ever-bracketed force of liberalism: “There is no doubt that some people might say that customary law might go too far and that some time we might have to look at that but I think the elders would have enough common sense not to go too far” (Emerson 1996: 4).

As I mentioned above, in 1992 some Peppimenarti men did go too

far and were found guilty of manslaughter. Curiously, this very case was cited to me by a Belyuen resident some years later, on 18 September 1999, as evidence of the national legal support of customary law. As vice president of the Belyuen Community Council and as a participant in the CDEP program, Marjorie Bilbil had attended two meetings within the span of a week, one a regional meeting of local governments with territory officials, the other a meeting of senior Aboriginal participants in CDEP. In both meetings, non-Aboriginal persons urged senior Aboriginal men and women to revive customary laws — physical sanctions and rituals — as a method of “settling down the young people.” When she discussed these meetings with me, Bilbil referred to the Peppimenarti case, saying that the young men had not been punished “much” because their actions had been traditional: “They [berragut, whites] don’t do much when they look that traditional law.” Marjorie Bilbil did not stop her analysis there. Instead she noted that the uneven landscape of national and local power had led to a pattern of Aboriginal male dispersion across the Top End. “Like desert way, they got that hard law. But you look, that man he might be Arnhem way, or Roper way, or anywhere, Bagot, Tiwi. They marry into that other family, find that women, stay with her family now. ‘Too hard because, my law. I had to go.’ They say that.” In other conversations with other senior women from Belyuen, the difficulty of reviving “hard law” is discussed from another perspective: that women simply cannot bring themselves to “kill” their daughters (“kill,” in this case, referring to the use of physical force in a way now considered by them to be “too rough”).

To stop the story here would be to end with the following conclusion: Jurists and businesses are producing space to meet their needs, though impeded in their quest by the subjective limits of commodification and the internal dynamic of the relatively autonomous fields of national social life. (What criminal law might prohibit, land-claim processes encourage; what statutory legislation might outlaw, capital might fetishize and commodify.) If subjectivity is viewed as a built internal dynamic, its architecture can in this case be considered to be under a constant state of pressure, as Aboriginal subjects are encouraged to tarry in fields of competing deontic orders.

But I want to go on to argue that the entextualization of the Spirit — the generic production of indigenous spirituality at the millennium —

mediates the building of physical and subjective space in such a way as to impede this simple narrative of gradual homogenization and domination by capital. Thus, I return to the question of why capital is building and chasing this particular phantasmatic form. I focus on a specific genre that I call *popontology* and examine how its figuration of Being articulates with the commercialization of spirituality. To suggest how a genre of the Spirit soils every dwelling built for it, this analysis will range far afield from Port Keats and Belyuen.

Before examining this generic space, let me pause over the simple fact that most Australian citizens and most citizens of other nation-states — judges, writers, tourists — will never encounter face-to-face the special spiritual relationship that Australian indigenous persons are said to have with the landscape. No actually existing Aboriginal subject will describe to them the content, contours, or modalities of her own personal beliefs or understanding of local community beliefs: what she might believe; what must, or should, be believed; or on what evidentiary grounds she might base these judgments insofar as can be said or known. Most people will never smell, taste, or otherwise corporeally inhabit the real space-time of her social life or that of any other indigenous person in any of the variegated global spaces where she or other indigenous people are thought to be found. Whatever understandings observers have of an indigenous modernity, they will never encounter the resistant or compliant, but in either case dialogical, space of an actively listening indigenous subject. Nevertheless, many people throughout the world will come to believe that indigenous persons like those living at Wadeye have a unique ontotheological relationship to their land. That is, knowing nothing of the Wadeye community, they will come to believe they know quite a lot about the spiritual Being of people living there and will feel confident enough about this knowledge to formulate judgments about indigenous spirituality. An inquiry into the source of this self-certainty would reveal that it lies for the most part in cinematic and print texts. As Aboriginal scholar and activist Marcia Langton has written, “The most dense relationship” informing Australian understandings of Aboriginal people “is not between actual people, but between white Australian and the symbols created by their predecessors” — and, it might be added, contemporaries (Langton 1993: 33; see also Michaels 1994; Ginsberg 1991).

The term *popontology*, shorthand for “popularized ontotheological novels and films,” will here refer to a wide range of fictional and quasi-fictional texts that describe an encounter with an unalienated form of spiritual Being by specific types of human beings and social lives. These textual forms and types, modes and modalities share certain characteristics. They are marked by and marketed to class, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and religious groupings; gradable into high-, middle-, and lowbrow types; and manifested in film, print, and musical forms. Indigenous popontology is a subgenre of this form, situating the spiritual encounter with an indigenous person, group, or spirit-Being, usually from Australia or the Americas, less so from Asia, Africa, and Europe. Some sense of the range of indigenous popontology texts can be conveyed by these examples: classic and contemporary New Age texts such as *The Teachings of Don Juan* (Castaneda 1968), *Mutant Message Down Under* (Morgan 1994), and *Crystal Woman* (Andrews 1987); travelogue accounts such as *The Songlines* (Chatwin 1987); high-, middle-, and lowbrow films such as Nicholas Roeg’s *Walkabout* (1970), Herzog’s *Where the Green Ants Dream*, and Stephen Elliot’s *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994); and televisual public service programming such as the series of animated Dreamtime stories shown by the Australian Broadcast Corporation (ABC) in 1997.

Mikhail Bakhtin observed long ago that “there is not a single new phenomenon (phonetic, lexical or grammatical) that can enter the system of language without having traversed the long and complicated path of generic-stylistic testing and modification” (Bakhtin 1986: 65). Though many of the texts I draw on will have little long-lasting commodity or literary value, they are valuable insofar as they index and entail emergent public anxieties about human Being in particular human cultural, social, and technological formations. They present the voicings and legibilities of the present only insofar as they import terms, phraseology, and scenes from other already generically organized social and textual spaces.

The delicate but nevertheless sociologically meaningful nature of the discursive emergences captured in these popontological texts is suggested by two recent films, *The Matrix* (the Wachowski brothers, 1999) and *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999). In both, an insidious

form of irrealis Being, made possible by advances in corpo-perceptual technology, threatens the attachment of humans to reality—or, rather, threatens the continuing relevance of a certain framing of “reality.” In the tradition of such futuristic cyborg fantasies as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987), *eXistenZ* catches viewers up in a play of placement (where the characters *are* in relation to a referentially ungroundable cyborgian virtual-reality) as opposed to a morality play (how one should be fully or properly in any given reality). Although the freedom fighters of *eXistenZ* do fight for a technologically unalienated and unmediated form of reality, the moral question—what it is to be truly, properly, and fully human—is displaced, or at least continually deferred, by the placement question: Where (in what reality) are we now? Not that *eXistenZ* marks an epistemic displacement of older discursive forms of Being-proper. *The Matrix* continues this older anxiety about proper Being, presenting a struggle on behalf of one form of referentially grounded Being as more proper to *human* being than another. But *eXistenZ* suggests the emergence of a new set of questions regarding Being in the context of a discursively as of yet undigested corpo-technology.

Likewise, popontological narratives are not in themselves captivating, boring, or upsetting. They are transformed into these qualities and moods—are produced as sites of success or failure—not simply by the internal logic of their narrative form or artistic style, nor by the inherent allure of their topic (spiritual Being), but by subtler, narratively figured experiences. People feel spiritually addressed because the text has been shaped by the generic shape of the world they inhabit. Even from a purely intertextual perspective, such sites as Australia and the Aboriginal Dreamtime or Peru and its Mayan initiations find their “footing” in previous representations of India and its Hindu gods, Nepal and its Sherpa shamans, Theosophy, Krishna Consciousness, and Transcendental Meditation.¹ But the textual field that provides legibility to indigenous popontology is not limited to the indigenous and subaltern, their gods and enchanted realms. John Sayles’s *Secret of Roan Inish* (1995) occupies a space opened by Robin Hardy’s earlier film, *Wicker Man* (1973), itself grounded in a faux-Freudian matrix of primitive (Celtic) and degenerate (aristocratic) sexuality. Independent films such as *Safe* (Todd Haynes, 1995) and *The Rapture* (Michael Tolkin,

1991), mass-market films and television shows such as *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, 1997), *The Sweet Hereafter* (Atom Egoyan, 1997), and *The X-Files* likewise invaginate and prey on conversations circulating about secular and modern, enchanted and disenchanting Being.

Far from constituting a revolutionary move, therefore, situating the fantasy of real Being in a phantasmatic indigenous scene may be little more than another dispersion of types of bodies that will bear the interrogatory pressure currently exerted on Being-in-general in specific social formations. The indigenous is merely another — perhaps not even the latest — identity to provide a provisional structure to speculations about the state of Being in Western (post)modernity. Indigenous popontology as a distinct form reached a certain public attention in 1968 with the publication of Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. Indeed, the evolving contours and content of the “nonordinary reality” of Castaneda's three-decade-long career provide a case study of how popontological figurations of indigenous being simply construct a site that registers and figures the shifting terrain of public debates.²

What voicings are being caught and figured in popontological accounts of indigenous spirituality? And in what way do the specific media of this figuration — print and film media — contribute to how these voicings are figured and, subsequently, extended as the expectations of visitors regarding actually existing indigenous people? Some voicings should not surprise us. For example, many texts explicitly discuss the epistemological dilemma of staking truth claims while acknowledging that all knowledge is the product of particularizing cultures. That is, the texts voice current academic and public debates about multiculturalism, colonialism, morality, truth, and tolerance. So, for example, if Castaneda's writings mark the emergence of indigenous popontology, they also register the constantly evolving provisional textual resolutions of these cross-fertilizing and contested social fields: activist liberation movements, academic and public debates, and nationalisms and citizenship forms. More recently, Castaneda (1998) has described “the role of culture” as “that of restricting the perceptual capacity of its members.” He credits indigenous people with the discovery of this prison-house of culture. In his commentary on the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *The Teachings of Don Juan*, he writes:

Don Juan Matus and the shamans of their lineage regarded *awareness* as the act of being deliberately conscious of all the perceptual possibilities of man, not merely the perceptual possibilities dictated by any given culture whose role seems to be that of restricting the perceptual capacity of its members.

Fortunately for indigenized *Geist*, if the intention of culture is to imprison us, it would seem that the intent of the universe is to be continually testing our awareness.

[The shamans] *saw* that the universe creates zillions of *organic beings* and zillions of *inorganic beings*. By exerting pressure on all of them, the universe forces them to enhance their awareness, and in this fashion, the universe attempts to become aware of itself. In the *cognitive world* of shamans, therefore, awareness is the final issue. (Castaneda 1998: xix; emphasis added)

If popular narrative accounts of real Being propose that humans can overcome the blinding restrictions of cultural knowing and thereby experience the wholeness proper to *human* Being, in so arguing they turn away from a simple cultural relativist position (a strain of the culturalism Castaneda would have encountered in anthropology courses taught in the University of California system during the 1960s). Instead, in his and in others' accounts, the actual parallel world in which true, unalienated Being resides is not located *in* any one cultural world, nor the composite of all cultural worlds à la Ruth Benedict's "great arc of culture" or Charles Taylor's "final horizon." The task of wisdom seekers is not to develop a theory or understanding of the actual nature of actual cultural worlds, but to draw on local cultural knowledges to experience what is beyond them, us, everyone — the possibility of reaching beyond every actual cultural form into a subtending energy matrix. It is this matrix of Being — a Being that dwells within some social locations more than others — that is the desired object of these texts. No matter the valorization by right-thinking scholars of *entre nous* as the proper position of cosmopolitan consociality, these texts turn toward *au-delà*, or more accurately, *couper*. The between-us is here merely a provisional aural and visual structure that acts as a conduit for a getting-beyond. In other words, it is neither the self nor the other sought in these scenes, but rather a passageway or a transition. As Vincanne Adams (1996) writes

with regard to New Age representations of Sherpas, the sort of spiritual authenticity imputed to them is accessible only *through* intimate bonds with the Sherpas themselves. This *au-delà*, this desire to be liberated from culture (a state now standing in for the travails of contemporary national life), accounts in part for the particular allure of indigenous spirituality. *Indigenous* is nothing less than the name used to designate the state of Being prior to modernity and its concomitant identity formation, nationalism (Povinelli 1999).

The conservative implications of this strain of popontology have been clear to Native American activists such as Vine Deloria for quite a long time, and to many Internet writers and surfers. There were similar cultural critiques in 1998 on the Web site "Wanting to Be an Indian": "When this ritual is brought into a New Age context, its meaning and power are altered. The focus shifts to White people's needs and visions, which in most New Age venues are about individual growth and prosperity. There is no accountability to a community, particularly any Native community."

The divergent politics of indigenized popontology and indigenous social struggles are well expressed by a statement in Marlo Morgan's *Mutant Message Down Under*: "Real Aboriginal People [are] not concerned with racism, but concerned only with other people and the environment" (Morgan 1994: xiii-xiv). Across this literature, narrative plots reinscribe racial hierarchies as they purport to be leveling cultural hierarchies. In plot after plot, a nonindigenous person just happens to be the designated spiritual heir apparent of a dying indigenous group. Castaneda just happened to be the person chosen by the last living members of Don Juan's group, a spiritual selection Don Juan cannot explain. Morgan (1994: 3, 15) was called to her spiritual journey from "two thousand miles" away, an "extreme honor" the Aborigines "cannot explain." Two *National Geographic* reporters just happened to be the "ones chosen" to become the "spirit-journeymen on the path of the Wisdom-keepers" by "the Grandfathers" of a Native American tribe (Arden and Wall 1998: 17, 21).

The discursive voicings that popontological texts register and mediate are not only concerned with the dilemma of maintaining racial and cultural hierarchies in the shadow of late liberal forms of multiculturalism and postcoloniality. Many of these texts compel readers with their treatment of what might be termed the anxieties and aspirations of

little Being, and the exhaustions of ordinary Being—at least those anxieties, aspirations, and exhaustions that writers and market researchers associate with their readership, largely middle-class white women. Prominent themes in these texts thus include: the body (fat, deformation, aging, disease), liberal social issues (racial, gender, economic inequality, environmental depletion), and relationships (divorce, isolation, intimacy, the ethics of care). Popontology is often not framed by big people, big issues, or big Being, but rather by the little dramas of everyday life—a message made explicit in Carlos Castaneda’s most recent writings. Even the works of indigenous authors and filmmakers tend to frame narratives about spiritual and cultural rebirth in the quotidian, familiar scenes of social exhaustion. The New Zealand film *Once Were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori, 1995), for instance, opens with the exhausted spaces of industrialization and the subject-destroying effects of structural unemployment and underemployment on indigenous communities.

Setting these themes aside for a moment, let me ask what, then, are the means by which specific textual media voice the Spirit? Put another way, what critical purchase does understanding the linguistic technology of the popontological Spirit provide toward an understanding of its material entailments? Lest such questions seem too heady for a body of work that amounts to cultural flotsam, let me propose that what is foregrounded in many of these texts is nothing less than the problem posed by the linguistic vehicularization of Being to the description and experience of Being. In *Mutant Message*, for instance, Morgan reflects on the difference between language and “the system of interpretation proper to human beings.” She and other authors urge readers to de-center language as the primary semiotic vehicle of Being, emphasizing instead music, movement, rhythm—or, more accurately, the vibrations from which music, movement, and rhythm are composed (see, for instance, Rael and Sutton 1993).

The dilemma is this: If popontological spirituality positions itself against any and every particular language and cultural system, it nevertheless relies on the semiotic nature of language to signal the provisionality of any and every linguistic proposition. That is, even in negating language, popontological texts rely on metalinguistic framings. They use language to transpose, or map, one set of conventional schemata (“this is language”) against another (“I am referring to a domain out-

side language”). Popontology, as all metalinguistic texts, is trapped in the language it seeks to escape. Popontological Being is not located at either end, so to speak, of a transposition-translation process, but in the transitional moments of this movement into form, in mapping rather than the map or, more exactly, in the sense of a tending toward an incipient mapping. Popontology relies on a procedural rather than substantive Spirit. The proceduralisms of Spirit are braced by repeated explicit dismissals of substantive Being. *Don't focus on the content of the words*, readers are told. Rather, experience (in the movement of semantic, pragmatic, and metapragmatic processes) the Spirit. In putting it this way, these texts once again reveal their delicate ideological sinews, how they incorporate political debates about the proceduralism and substantive nature of liberal citizenship and multiculturalism within their spiritual quests. Different popontology media draw on different semiotic functions to convey the experience of this movement. But all cinematic, television, and print media rely on a set of visual or verbal cross-references that locate Being not in the nominalized scenes being cross-referenced, but in the metasemiotic experience of crossing from, over, and into.

Where the Green Ants Dream (1985) presents a useful example of these textual enactments of the indigenous Spirit. The film begins with two sets of desert mounds: one is composed of the debris of industrial mining, the other is the home of green ants. At its simplest, the film uses a series of cuts between these two types of mound not to encourage the adoption of one perspective or another, or even of their contrastive nature, but rather to incite an interpretive movement, the creation of a new sign from their juxtaposition. Though the film may encourage the sense that the new interpretation arises purely from the juxtaposition of the two images, the movement of interpretation among viewers involves a more complex lamination and delamination of multiple mounds and deserts. The Temptation of Christ and other tropes of prophetic lamentation crowd into the scene, as do Native American images, such as those cited in *Koyaanisqatsi* (Godfrey Reggio, 1983), itself cited in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

The film's depiction of moments of translation (or, more accurately, partial mistranslations) likewise figures the experience of semiosis and interpretation as a glimpse of unalienated Being. Take, for instance, a conversation among the film's three central characters: Tribal Elder,

Spokesperson, and the white protagonist, Hackett. Throughout the film, Tribal Elder speaks in an uncaptioned Aboriginal language, and Spokesperson translates Tribal Elder's words for Hackett and the listening public. Spokesperson's translations are never smooth. He falters, speaks haltingly, starts over, repeats. Rather than diminishing the authority of Tribal Elder's and Spokesperson's utterances, the semantic opacity of the Aboriginal language spoken and its halting translation intensifies it. It does so by indexing the realm the filmic narrative seeks—meaning beyond language, an impenetrable other world-Being. This untranslatable meaning, beyond the perceptual possibilities dictated by any given culture, is in the film mapped into other interactional spaces, for example onto disputes about capitalism's frustration in culturally inscribed spiritual space—that is, a frustration with the type of embodied obligations discussed above.

TRIBAL ELDER: [Aboriginal language]

HACKETT: What's he saying?

SPOKESPERSON: There'll be no digging, and there'll be no blasting.

HACKETT: Ah, I see. And may I ever so politely ask why?

SPOKESPERSON: This the place where the green ants dream.

KOL (a mining engineer): Ants, green ants, dreaming here. Why the fuck can't they dream somewhere else?

These mappings, remappings, and unmappings across conventionalized and invaginated semiotic spaces cannot be followed to their fullest, not for lack of time and space, but because they are theoretically infinite in their play. And it is, I would suggest, the unconscious experience of the movement of this generic play, its infinite invaginations, its provisionality, that is experienced as Being's unfurling. In experiencing this movement as spirit, readers and viewers are not mistaking semiosis for Being, but recognizing the conventional signs by which non-Aboriginal EuroAmericans and Australians know Spirituality, experience it as such, and calibrate its presence in particular human beings.

Though films such as *Where the Green Ants Dream* critique forms of commodification and capital extraction, popontological texts are clearly not divorced from the workings of capital. Some of the texts that make up this genre are honest attempts to rethink the nature of Being in the historical conditions of the late twentieth century. But—in a case analogous to consumer support of Aboriginal art—good inten-

tions often result in increasing the value of these texts as commodities. In trying to appeal to an audience, the authors of socially conscious texts strive to voice compelling critiques of the dehumanizing aspects of capital. Paradoxically, the better they achieve their task, the more successful a commodity form the text becomes.

Take, for instance, Morgan's *Mutant Message Down Under*. The book is an impassioned plea for humanity to take seriously the question of Being, "to understand that pulse [of] being human and human beingness" that alone can begin the "human progress toward *being*" and "stop" the human "destruction of the earth and of each other" (Morgan 1994: xiv, 8, 177). The Real People, a central Australian Aboriginal tribe, lead her on a spiritual journey into the dual interior of the continent and of her self. Morgan recounts her insights as she gradually heals the divisions within herself, and between herself and the world, and learns to understand the artificiality of all social and natural separations, all physical discomforts, and all social and cultural conflicts. The Real People teach her *to Be*, truly and fully, by teaching her to understand all forms of having—including a formal language—as being had by false classification, being possessed by possessions, being alienated from her own and global oneness. Modernity, she discovers, has made mutants of mankind. Though herself a mutant, Morgan is chosen to relay the Real from down under, to denounce the distorting encrustations of contemporary global social conflict.

Morgan financed the original print run herself. But after her book sold more than 350,000 copies, HarperCollins bought the rights for U.S. \$1.7 million, and United Artists began discussions about a possible movie venture. Outraged at what Robert Egginton, coordinator of the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation, called the book's "cultural genocide of the spirit" (Egginton 1997), a delegation of central Australian Aboriginal men and women traveled to the United States and Great Britain to protest the book's representation of traditional Aboriginal culture. In response, HarperCollins added a preface describing the book as a work of fiction, and sales continued briskly.

Bracketing for a moment the question of authorial exploitation, one thing this short market history clearly shows is that the more fully certain texts capture the feeling of modern alienation and anomie, the better they serve consumptive capital. Every time consumers buy or urge someone else to buy *Mutant Message* or any other example of a

myriad of indigenously marked books, films, tapes, and CDs, they position themselves in the divine drama the text describes. They become mutant messengers of hope and open a potential passageway between reader and divine healing—even as they become part of the circuit of capital.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Many writers of popontology insist that their purpose is not to enrich themselves through the exploitation of the Spirit, but to make unalienated spirituality practical. On its dust jacket, the publishers of *Master Dharma Drum: The Life and Heart of Ch'an Practices* tell readers that it “offers us fresh insights into the ways we can bring Ch'an study and practice into our daily lives” (Sheng-Yen 1996). I do not speak as a Ch'an practitioner, but I would not be surprised if such a book did indeed make spirituality practical, for a characteristic feature of popontology texts is that they are articulated within other social fields in such a way as to allow their narratives to be practiced. Understanding the nature of this practice necessitates displacing the concept of “genre” from a purely literary domain into its broader interactional environment—right back, in fact, to Wadeye and Belyuen. In other words, we need to keep in mind Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the dialectical nature of dialogical genres—“the long and complicated path of generic-stylistic testing and modification”—and their embeddedness in the multidimensional and multimediated space that Michael Silverstein (1993) has called “interactional textuality.”

Though not obviously a part of the popontological genre, Blanche McCrary Boyd's *Revolution of Little Girls* nevertheless neatly captures the sociological nature of textual articulations. Toward the end of the novel, the protagonist describes her recent initiation by a shaman: “I'd gone to Peru to be initiated by a shaman, and, in the three months since my return, I'd been pursued by a group of imaginary girls. ‘Some people get in touch with their inner child,’ Meg said. ‘You have to get a crowd’” (Boyd 1991: 182).

With light irony, Boyd uses various “voicings” to gain a foothold in a range of sociological spaces, speaking to readers who might have had flirtations with or still be committed to the New Age, cultural feminism, psychological self-help, or self-empowerment. But Boyd also poten-

tially incites some of her readers to follow her character's track, to click on the Internet and find a Web page like "Return of the Galactic Maya." As of 15 January 1998, this "Mayan initiation journey" promised "a chance to tap into the true power of Mayan culture," which would provide a setting for "contemplating the beauty of the Great Spirit as being of light," a "destiny . . . encoded in our genes." It advertised a summer solstice tour and initiation led by Elder Hunbatz Men, Mayan shaman Quetzal-Sha, and Dr. Carlos Warter, and provided fax and phone numbers where reservation-takers would be standing by, along with state functionaries, their regulatory environments, and the local communities fashioned to receive them. Obviously, *The Revolution of Little Girls* and "Return of Galactic Maya" are just isolated nodes in an unmapped—unmappable because emergent—global track of New Age travel, massage schools, and the casual surfers, chat rooms, and communities of the Internet.

The semiotic mediation of indigenous spirituality presents travelers with a set of expectations about what they might, and have a right to, expect from the people and places to which they travel. At the heart of these textual mediations is the expectation of an experience of Being in the presence of the Spirit. And this expectation is manifested spatially—it interprets physical space and is extended into social interactional space. Compare, for example, Belyuen and Wadeye. Belyuen lies on the Cox Peninsula across the Darwin harbor. Ever since the British settlement of Darwin, the proximity of indigenous camps on the peninsula has provided visiting dignitaries, international celebrities, filmmakers, writers, and academics with access to Aboriginal culture. Periodically between the 1930s and 1950s, it served as a base for national radio programs, films, and anthropological studies, and traveling dignitaries, scholars, and celebrities who desired and were provided with a variety of cultural performances, productions, and artifacts gathered there. However, as the transportation infrastructure between the Cox Peninsula and Darwin improved, Belyuen has gotten closer to Darwin and, in the process, lost its aura of distinctiveness. In 1984, when I first arrived at Belyuen, the ferry ride between Darwin and the Cox Peninsula took upward of an hour. Nowadays, it takes fifteen minutes. Likewise, the drive from Darwin to Belyuen now takes roughly seventy minutes, rather than the two to three hours it previously took, depending on the condition of the dirt road.

The legal status of Cox Peninsula lands has also contributed to a sense that the culture of the area has whitened. Under a land claim unresolved for the last twenty years, most of the peninsula remains Commonwealth land, a no-man's land of economic and political practice. Capital investment for large- and small-scale business ventures continues largely to be unavailable until the claim is resolved. And no Aboriginal group has any clear legally sanctioned mandate for excluding non-Aboriginal people from the country or restricting their activities in certain places. In late September 1999, non-Aboriginal campers defiled a women's ceremonial ground. Several residents of a small residential development nearby responded by saying that, as Commonwealth land, the area was open to everyone for any type of use. It was considered "white land" as much as "black land." The lack of legally enforced Aboriginal title encourages and discourages particular types of visitors. Middle-class families on package tours are not likely to visit. But self-described freaks, New Age travelers, ferals, or sportspersons camp on beaches or in the scrub by themselves or alongside Belyuen men and women. These forms of interactions have their own economy of scale, resulting in small-scale exchanges: beer, food, shirts, or smoke for small informal conversations, song performances, tours to sacred sites.

If physical and regulatory space have fashioned Belyuen as a place too close to white society to profit from the commodification of the Spirit, Wadeye has been too isolated. Located off the Stuart Highway and in the middle of a large Aboriginal reserve, Wadeye is physically hard to reach. Several Aboriginal communities lying closer to the main highways profit from the tourist trade. The regulatory environment likewise impedes tourism. Wadeye lies within the Daly River Aboriginal Land Trust, as designated under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act of 1976. The community can and does require that non-residents obtain permits before visiting; and, indeed, all non-Aboriginal people traveling within the land trust are supposed to have a permit issued for some designated community. Even as they impede travel to Wadeye, the difficulty these physical and regulatory environments present travelers functions as an interpretant of that space as more authentically Aboriginal.

The question facing those building regulatory and physical environments at Wadeye is how to capture the tourism market now serviced by

other Aboriginal communities without, in the very process, deauthorizing space. Put it this way: As Wadeye becomes a bridge to *Geist*—as it forms material space in the Spirit of consumer capitalism—it risks installing the deauthorizing signs of Western commerce.

If popontology, law, and economy provide critical texts by which space and thus its capital manifestations are formed and interpreted, they also orient visitors' expectations of what will be found in these spaces. These expectations include an understanding that a visit to an Aboriginal community is not about: (1) the horror, exhaustion, and anxiety of being in the world of capital space-time, but rather the experience of *Geist* in the midst of this space-time; (2) Aboriginal people or their lives, but rather an experience only Aboriginal people can afford; (3) the aporia of truth, ethics, or moral action in the face of fundamental alterity, but rather the experience of a shared movement of human spirituality in spite of this alterity. Law and capital, publics and politicians do not need to be colluding in some way—to be engaged in a concerted mass conspiracy—to be seen to be producing in different forms and for different purposes certain human beings as valuable insofar as they afford passageway to an enchanted spiritual Being and away from the conditions of the Spirit of capital. Indeed, these various discursive contexts and practices disperse commonsense understandings of indigenous spirituality and themselves constitute the dispersed sites in which this spirituality is produced.

And yet the people who are charged with transporting visitors to this enchanted realm, to an experience of Being-in-dwelling, themselves dwell within the legal and economic debris of advanced capital. They inhabit a form of poverty that makes well-intentioned visitors afraid, physically ill, subject to panic. It is a type of poverty that can place such visitors in limits similar to those in which Timothy Dumu and Betty Bilawag found themselves. Tourism in these limits risks (and promises) opening experience not to the Spirit that capital commodifies, but to the overwhelming presence of liberal capitalism's bad faith, its dirty corners, its broken covenants.

NOTES

1 For the concept of "footing," see Goffman 1979.

2 By 1998 Castaneda no longer considered near-death experiences with psychotropic substances to be the necessary entryways into nonordinary Being; rather, body weight,

flexibility, and stress are diagnosed as what constrains the manifestation of desire under commodity capital, and thus are means by which the practitioner of a new yoga inflected by indigenous knowledge (“magical passes”) can enter extant actual worlds (Castaneda 1998; see also Harner 1990).

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