

who's **upsetting** who?

*Strangeness, Morality,
Nostalgia, Pleasure*

GILLIAN COWLISHAW

I am billed as one with expertise in race relations—perhaps already an example of naming something that we have difficulty naming. In contemporary multicultural Australia we all have direct experience of race relations, and Territorians will have intimate and recent experience of actual interaction between Indigenous and settler or immigrant Australians.¹ I think of race relations as an interface that exists wherever there is interaction among different kinds of people, including in our imaginations. That is, in imagining others to be strange, we imagine ourselves to share a common not-strangeness with those of our own kind. But the category, 'our own kind', can itself be very narrow, depending on the circumstances. Actual embodied encounters between those who define themselves as belonging to two different races are often bizarre or painful, ludicrous or touching. The question I am posing is 'What is it in Australian social life that so often precludes closer interaction and pleasure in difference?'

Race relations is also a space of deplored difference and shameful inequality, ostensibly a source of anxiety and mourning to the nation. In public debates, the blackfellas, the Indigenous people, the Aborigines of Redfern, Bourke or Alice Springs, have become visual metaphors for all that is wrong with race relations and racial history in Australia. In vernacular discourses, the convention of announcing the terrible poverty, injustice and third-world conditions of Aborigines stands in for a more direct engagement with actual people. For instance, when a journalist bemoans the living conditions of artists in remote communities whose work fetches huge sums, she is reproducing a cliché rather than thinking through the different desires, priorities, social conditions and histories of these artists.²

The term racism has itself become a cliché, burdened with overuse, but let us admit that, despite being carefully suppressed among modern cosmopolitan citizens, racism, intolerance and bigotry are things we all know about—a common, banal aspect of human experience, evident in the tendency to stereotype and in a common wariness, suspicion or merely curiosity about ‘strange’ people. It seems to me a subcategory of a normal social process of assessing and categorising people without which social life would be incoherent and unworkable.

So what is the relationship between negative sentiments towards different kinds of people and the *actual difficulties* posed by people with different habits and practices living close by one another? Such difficulties are a space of fear and silence because, in this multicultural postmodern world, we are supposed to celebrate difference in all its manifestations. It is this orthodoxy I want to examine. Let me first note that difficult differences of social practices and preferences are experienced within cultural or racial groups, even within families, as those with teenaged children may be the first to admit.³

As an anthropologist I begin by taking up a cultural studies practice, turning the analytic eye onto ourselves. Where better to begin than at the dinner party, that quintessential ceremony of white middle-class urban social life, and as good a place as any to glimpse the role played by Aborigines in our tribe’s imagination.

— URBAN CONVERSATIONS

I assume that most of my audience, like me, belongs to that segment of the urban population who attend dinner parties, or at least are familiar with their practices. People with very divergent views participate in these events and a host of rituals with informal, pragmatic rules ensure their smooth fulfilment. The dominant requirement is a flow of conversation without too much contention, although some mild disagreement can add spice to the gathering. I want to show the way the idea of Aborigines plays a part in defining boundaries between tribes within tribes by signalling a certain political position in vernacular political debate.⁴

There is a shared national anxiety about Aborigines, but the opinion categories concerning this topic are radically dichotomised in what is known as a left–right divide, creating a moral and political binarism where everyone is forced to participate on one side or another. The defining markers are already laid out. It would perhaps be possible to show that people identify themselves or others in an opinion category according to standard and predictable signs. Sympathy for Aborigines (or other disadvantaged people) is characteristic of a progressive or left-wing view of the world, while another set of opinions, which could be characterised as critical of that sympathy and sometimes of its objects, is deemed not simply wrong but offensive and racist.⁵ We are thus enticed into affirming ‘commonsense’

pieties or remaining silent. The intensity of emotion surrounding these opinions belies a level of personal meaning outside political loyalties and stereotyped opinion. It is instructive to note what happens when dinner party guests do not share an opinion category, and some minor ethnographic observations will illustrate this social situation.⁶

Dinner party 1. In the private home of an acquaintance another guest was told I wrote about Aborigines. She pounced on me to ask, ‘Why do they sit around in the dust with flies in their eyes; I’ve seen them on the TV. We spend all that money, but they want to keep their traditions don’t they?’ A good deal could be said about the ‘but’ and ‘their traditions’ in this sentence, and about the accusing tone of voice, but these are not my focus here. I began to reply but could not keep a note of anger, and perhaps contempt, out of my voice, so I was hushed and the subject was changed.

I am not discussing how to answer such commonplace comments, although there is a certain pleasure in competing for the most withering responses. I am more interested in their ordinariness, and, in a sense, their naturalness, given the social imaginary of which they are part. The impulsive response to such opinion seems based on a desire to protect Aboriginal people from hostility and contempt. Yet the practice of sitting in the dust, which this woman spoke of so meaningfully, is actually sitting on the land, interacting with country of which flies are a part. And yet the naming of such a practice, admittedly with a kind of horrified fascination, arouses a kind of fury in people like myself. And such naming stands in stark contrast to the goodwill, solicitude and careful avoidance of criticism, which characterises conversation at the dinner parties I am usually fated to attend.

Dinner party 2. This was a large social function in Sydney where there were gathered lawyers and academics virtually all of whom would have been active or at least committed supporters of the policy of Aboriginal self-determination. When the conversation touched on Aboriginal disadvantage, there was a general expression of sympathy and understanding. But a woman of immigrant background insisted on recounting her own triumph over deprivation as an explicit criticism of the company’s sympathy for Aborigines’ plight. With confused lowering of eyes the subject was changed and the woman was frozen out of the conversation. Here an assertive questioning of a prevailing anti-racist orthodoxy was met with shocked disapproval, and conversational embarrassment, as well as more specific embarrassment from her husband. I tried to respond, not merely because I rather enjoy conflict, but because I felt some sympathy with this woman’s sentiments—not, I hasten to add, her implied criticism of Aboriginal people (God forbid), but rather her challenge to the conventional sympathy that was being agreed to complacently by the gathering. This pious orthodoxy seems to me damaging to Aboriginal interests because it imagines Aboriginal people to be simply victims with whom we must sympathise but with whom we cannot interact on equal terms; such conversations depend on their absence from the dinner table.

There is something else about such a conversation that is independent of the particular subject. What did the embarrassment and other confused emotions indicate? Perhaps there was fear that confronting these opinions would spoil the dinner with excessive conflict. There may have been confusion about the conditions being referred to because few of the guests had any experience or knowledge of them, but how did the voicing of a critical opinion turn a dinner guest into a pariah?

Dinner party 3. This party is one where everyone understands that Aborigines are victims of injustice, and all want to demonstrate their sympathy and correct political position but without having the story made too complex. For instance, when I tell a colleague that Aborigines in Bourke mock and amplify their own stereotypes he says ‘of course they do’, applauding the *idea* of outrageous behaviour and protest. But when I speak of going to the pub in Bourke he says ‘But is it safe?’ and finally, nervously, ‘You don’t want a bottle in your face’. Thus the sinister image of Aborigines as dangerous lurks beneath the expressions of goodwill. In all these cases speaking about Aborigines has a certain familiarity and confidence. These are indeed ‘our Aborigines’, part of our responsibility, especially to have opinions about.

In these examples, opinion, especially vernacular political opinion on matters such as Aboriginal issues, the Tampa crisis, the war in Iraq and many others, is a significant element in social interaction and group formation. Conversational conventions, both public and among acquaintances and extended family, can break down in the face of wrong opinion although the rules are different among strangers from those among more familiar people.⁷ Seeking compatible opinions is a ‘rule of conversation’ and part of a wider process within a particular social geography of identifying those we like and those we are like.⁸ We habitually assess people in relation to many kinds of things such as appearance, speech style, clothes, as well as cultural and political opinion. Compatibility is identifiable in language and in subtle forms of expression and emphasis, such as tones of approval and disapproval. Among strangers the magnetism of like opinion operates to smooth interaction, while the sudden discovery of an incompatible opinion can cut through conversation like a guillotine, leading to its death in silence, as in the second dinner party. The assigning of new acquaintances to a category of political opinion is thus a subset of a wider process of aligning people in terms of Bourdieu’s ‘distinctions’.⁹

The offensiveness of others’ political opinions is palpable, as my audience’s reaction to the woman at the first dinner party demonstrates. The practice she named—‘sitting in the dust’—would appear alien, embarrassing or shameful to most dinner party guests. While it appears that the naming of others’ strange practices is taken to be offensive irrespective of the speaker’s intention, another part of the impulsive angry reaction to such opinion is to do with protecting ourselves from social discomfort and conflict. Our shared social honour entails being

contemptuous of those with wrong opinions, yet the obsession with those who are wrong or racist itself binds us into our cultural comfort zone. By aligning ourselves with conventional political or moral positions, we are affirming our own rightness, normality and social safety. Similarly with matters of taste where we identify with compatible or superior taste rather than rethink what we like at every moment—‘She was playing country and western music, YUK’. I should also note here that ‘progressivists’, as Noel Pearson has called us, also actively police others’ opinions in a way that is particularly obvious in relation to race.¹⁰ Any generalisation about the behaviour of a minority group is likely to be censured and corrected. Thus we make an emotional investment in being good and having correct opinions, which is part of being ordinary or conforming to the social expectations of our tribe.¹¹ Among academics there is often an added ingredient, a competitive seeking of the higher moral or political ground—in theory at least!

If the very idea of Aborigines, or ‘others’ in general, is a site of such intense moral feeling, fear and self-definition, then it is not surprising that actual face-to-face relationships between Aborigines and whitefellas are somewhat difficult. I want to move from the anthropology of the dinner party to anthropology *at* the dinner party before introducing encounters with some radically real others.

Anthropologists find the world saturated with stereotypes of themselves. Being outed as an anthropologist is likely to evoke images of Margaret Mead in Samoa or digging for bones. Sometimes a social scientist who may also be an Aboriginal person will patronisingly assume that anthropological work in Aboriginal Australia necessarily entails a backward, romantic or colonial view of otherness. This was my experience.

Dinner party 4. At a small conference dinner, I was eager to share an example of the way taken-for-granted categories are so embedded in the ordinary metaphors we use to describe the world that their political implications are invisible. A speaker that day had used the expression ‘without a roof over his head’ as epitomising poverty and need, and I wanted to say that this reflects whitefellas’ fetishisation of houses as the sine qua non of a normal life. Aborigines in remote communities may not see a roof in the same way and many are burdened by assumptions about the significance not only of the house but also of the ‘well-kept home’. It appears to me that Aborigines sitting on the earth in the open is, to most whitefellas, simply pitiable or contemptible, a sign of deprivation and marginality. There is serious material deprivation in remote communities, but housing is not the only or even the main measure of it. In fact, housing is a marked site of contrasting values where candid and honest conversation is difficult. While aware of the danger of misinterpretation, I ventured a brief and, I thought, suggestive comment on this to the select and sophisticated company.

An Aboriginal woman leaned forward to me: ‘Are you saying that Aboriginal people don’t need houses?’ I tried to explain, but with a look of bored indifference she turned aside to

talk to the person at her other side. It was clear she assumed that I was an over-intellectualising anthropologist, one of the outsiders with fancy ideas she is familiar with as a senior public servant grappling with policy and urgent social problems. Perhaps she had a point!

The ill-conceived nature of Australian anthropology's intellectual project has become such a truism that everyone is saved the effort needed to read those ethnographies that might give a real sense of the lives Aborigines lived in the past and how they have experienced history.¹² The substantial classical literature on Aboriginal Australia is now virtually unread, and the educated elite of this country remains ignorant of even the most elementary facts about Indigenous traditions. While there have been obvious limitations in anthropology's intellectual agenda, a significant body of ethnographic writing testifies to the fact that Aboriginal people are not merely people who are or have problems, but they are also people we could enjoy knowing.¹³

— CULTURAL EMBARRASSMENT

In face-to-face encounters with people who are radically or noticeably or publicly different from prevailing norms, we make impulsive judgements. But among progressivists it is usual to profess an acceptance of difference, to suppress judgement and censor any disapproval of the cultural practices of others. Such disapproval is routinely attributed to imagined stereotypical rednecks, whose image plays a major role in race-relations orthodoxies. Yet unadmitted disapproval, bafflement or fear can be a powerful barrier to understanding, let alone enjoying, difference. Impulsive, moralising responses—for instance, to public displays of poverty, or of anger, or to public disorder—are part of what has produced the complex social reality before us. The censoring and self-censoring of impulsive judgements operates to protect us from thinking about what produces and reproduces conflict—for instance, that over public space.

Let us, then, depart from the familiar milieu of the dinner party and enter another, as I did when I arrived in Katherine in 1975. I was seeking a field site for research into traditional forms of fertility control, a subject that was sensitive and is now dated.¹⁴ Katherine was, to me, shockingly racialised. Aborigines appeared like exotic decorations. The black bodies sitting on the bright green nature strip in family groups were quite outside the social life of the dusty little town, yet an essential part of it. Once I began fieldwork among the Rembarrnga people at Bulman (two hundred kilometres east), I avoided whitefellas, because interaction with my own kind became difficult and often embarrassing. The experience of that excruciating embarrassment is, I believe, illuminating.¹⁵

For instance, after some months of fieldwork I was sitting on the nature strip in Katherine with my Rembarrnga friends, Lorna, Dorothy, Smiler, Michelle and other children, when a

middle-aged English couple approached me as if the others were not there and said, 'Excuse me, do you mind if we ask. Was that material of your dress made by these native people?' With Michelle dissolving in giggles behind me, and the older women still and silent, I explained that it was an Indian print, bought in a store across the road.

Similarly and frequently white people would speak to me as if I was one of them rather than one of a group with my black companions. Often there was a question of the kind: 'Do you think there is a solution to the Aboriginal problem?' We whites were assumed to have a common interest in Rembarrnga people as objects, as conversational resources, and as problems for the nation. They were 'the white man's burden', but because these burdens had become my friends on whom I was dependent for everyday interaction and support, I became acutely aware that the virtuous concerns of my fellow whitefellas actively excluded the subjectivities of those they were supposedly concerned about.

On the other side of this divide, the Rembarrnga view of whitefellas was informed by quite different assumptions. An everyday example was twelve-year-old Michelle's response when I chatted to a young white shop assistant in Katherine. Michelle asked in awe, 'Mula, is he your cousin?', that being the only explanation she could think of for the friendly, joking interaction she had observed. And Rembarrnga people often put a question to me that I found hard to answer: 'If you interact with strangers, how do you know which people you should not marry?' Most of you will understand that, for many Aboriginal people, the all-embracing kinship organisation, particularly the moiety system, identifies those people who one can and cannot marry. The possibility of unknowingly entering incestuous relationships seemed to my Rembarrnga friends a source of serious alarm. This is one of many ways the whitefella's cultural realm is as baffling to Rembarrnga as their realm often is to whites. But of course, it is they who are forced to become aware of whitefellas' rules rather than vice versa. It is they who learn to use English, and money, and to understand private property.

Another time I was on my own in the Katherine main street and I nervously noticed a dishevelled drunken black man coming towards me, staggering a bit. He saw me and, just as I recognised him, he shouted at me, 'Mula, I'm sick. I bin drink too much' and he flung his arms around my shoulders and asked me to take him home. It was one of the men from Bulman who had become my putative son as a consequence of the place I'd been assigned in the kinship system. I was both moved and interested in this man's trust in me. I had then lived for only about six weeks in the community and had not had a lot to do with him. But because my subsection or 'skin' was *Ngaritjan* and he was *Gamerang*, he knew I would look after him in his distress. Thus I learned something about my own emotional reactions and something about the ubiquity of kinship and its obligations and that these mutual obligations were assumed to extend across the racial divide.

These incidents are tiny examples of the way everyday life in northern Australian towns includes constant indications of the presence of two sets of assumptions about how to live held by people who are, in fact, living side by side in the same geographical spaces.¹⁶ This is a familiar situation that we all know as colonialism. But no light is shed on the experiences of interaction by such a general and familiar term. Similarly, speaking of ‘racism’ or ‘ethnocentrism’ will hardly assist in responding to radical difference. I found it a surprisingly liberating experience to be able to open my arms to the stereotypical drunken blackfella, who was also a young friend who called me Mula (Mummy), and take him to my car to sleep off the drink. Later he was embarrassed and ashamed, and I found it difficult to explain to him that he’d actually done me a favour in forcing me to recognise that images of the drunken blackfella conceal men and women who are trying, with various levels of success, to come to grips with their present world—for instance, one where space in town has been radically redefined so that there is nowhere to camp. Even sitting on the earth is closely monitored. Further, behind the public images of social problems, there are whole communities of Aboriginal people who are invisible. I should add that this incident later evoked a great deal of hilarity out at Bulman, my putative son’s stagger and my alarm being mimicked and replayed repeatedly for its entertainment value.

Culturally embarrassing encounters have been happening forever. Let me relate just one from the past. The scene is the 1960s at Mainoru cattle station on the southern border of Arnhem Land where a familiar visitor, who claimed friendship and goodwill towards Rembarrnga people, wanted to take photos of family members together, particularly brothers and sisters. He wanted Larry to stand next to his sister Florry, and, as most of you will recognise, this contravenes a traditional avoidance practice and his insistence was thus insulting and hurtful. Larry’s daughter, Annette Murray, described the incident many years later: ‘When that bloke said come close to Florry, my father just bolted like he got electric shock. He never had anything to do with white people after that. If mununga came he’d *begone*.’¹⁷

The photographer’s action was not just the result of an innocent, careless lack of information, but was an active overriding of Larry’s and his daughter’s wishes in the name of benign friendship. To the photographer, avoidance practices were meaningless or uncivilised and so he intruded on a highly emotional and intimate arena of interpersonal relations and tried to force Rembarrnga people to do things that were, to them, heretical or obscene. I am suggesting here that there is a responsibility to know those whom we want to interact with, or do good to, or govern. For instance, you should not assume that Rembarrnga people were hostile to their erstwhile bosses at Mainoru station. They spoke of the McKay family as friends and relations though they were owners in whitefella terms. I was convinced that the McKays had exploited Aboriginal labour, and in a technical sense they did. But Rembarrnga people do not emphasise this aspect of their experience. Cultural embarrassment

was only one element of a world of rich experiences that were recounted with relish and an explicit fondness for the station owners.¹⁸ They were close and were missed as valued human relations. Further, Aboriginal people have become experts at either avoiding or coping with cultural embarrassment—for instance, in schools where kinship categories are regularly contradicted by school authorities who *know* what a brother and sister are and that brothers and sisters should sit side by side.

The examples I have given all involve kinship, and Aboriginal people are having to adjust to the eroded significance of kin relatedness, which is the mark of modern society. Those who live in towns may feel liberated from the strict rules of kinship, and may choose to get away from the legitimate demands of relatives, often known as humbug. Such motives are well recognised, encouraged and applauded by whitefellas. Why is this the case? Has our own history made us no longer able to take pleasure in extended families? Is it that an army of kinsfolk are difficult to cope with in suburban homes? I find it interesting that many white people seem actually offended by the extent and significance of the obligations and interpersonal responsibilities attached to Aboriginal kinship. While most of us take parental roles very seriously, and are deeply shocked when a mother or a father fails in their duties, few have much sense of responsibility towards more distant relatives.

— PLEASURE IN DIFFERENCE?

It surprises me how few documented examples there are of the pleasures to be had from the experience of cultural difference, pleasure particularly in playing with taken-for-granted commonsense or with language. Most commonly, difference seems only to be appreciated when it is domesticated and consumable, as in exotic food or music, and such appreciation attains some mysterious tinge of virtue. Why do many differences make us feel uncomfortable, guilty or afraid? I quote a paragraph from my recent book:

Redemptive sentiments toward Indigenous people are played out in a series of conventional anti-racist performative or discursive positions characteristic of modern cosmopolitan manners. Any expression of distaste for foreign, primitive, or 'different' practices is pounced upon and derided as racist; even the presence of such distaste, either as experienced or imagined, is vehemently denied. But despite the enthusiasm for diversity, everyday urban lives are distanced from foreign practices ... While sophisticated citizens take pride in the appreciation of elements of exotic culture, and deference to difference is automatic among cosmopolitan urbanites, it is always understood that some things are beyond the pale. The conventional admiration of exotic and spiritual Indigenous worlds has been disturbed by recent revelations of Indigenous differences that are labelled unhealthy, chaotic, or cruel.¹⁹

Common anxieties about present dangers—the fear of others and of our own shameful impulses or ignorance—themselves suggest the possibility of other ways of proceeding in interpersonal encounters. Can the pervasive moralism through which the meaning of such encounters is vitiated be inverted so that difference becomes interesting, productive, elating and a source of expanded possibilities? After all, there are two sides of Australia's blemished history; the past is a burden we can share with Indigenous people as was the original intention in establishing a 'Sorry Day' when we would together mourn the past.²⁰ The efforts being made to reclaim the nation as honourable are dominated by white practice. Indigenous people are forced to negotiate with white culture, which affirms what it sees as authentic tradition (as in Native title) and disapproves or demonises other Indigenous practices that conflict with urban and suburban ways of life. I will finish by quoting Nelly Camfoo, an old Rembarnga friend, whose sharp sense of difference is refreshing. She has a kind of exasperated acceptance of the conditions of existence in this mununga (whitefella) world. She is talking about the elections and saying 'in our way, we don't vote for anyone'.

The whitefella might say, 'It's too late now, you have to come in my law.' If he says that I've got to say, 'You can't change my mind. You've got your own mind. I've got my own mind. My own brains tell me what to do.'

I will vote but I'll never win. That's white law. We just vote, we don't get anything out of it. I can vote for some bloke, but maybe I'm voting for a bad man who will bring war to Arnhem Land. I vote because I'm in mununga country now. If I don't vote, poor old lubra me, I'll get a summons letter, and I'm fined fifty dollar or whatever it is. And if I don't pay I'll go to gaol. That's your mununga rule. So I have to vote while I'm here wearing your clothes and talking your English and smoking your tobacco, eating your sugar and tea, and talking to your tape recorder. It's not the blackfella way!

We just had a letter stick, us mob. And for Toyota, we had our foot.²¹

Both whitefellas and blackfellas express the same kinds of nostalgia for a better past and worries about a worse future. Common anxieties about present dangers—the fear of others, the shame and ignorance—can suggest possibilities of other ways of seeing others. Attempts to bridge cultural and racial divides are fraught with misunderstandings and awkwardness, which reinforce the sorrows and sufferings, the hypocrisies and horrors of continuing, unnamed, racial inequality. Can the pervasive moralism through which we affirm our own belonging, and refuse meaning to encounters with others, be inverted so that difference becomes interesting, productive, elating and a source of expanded possibilities? Can we give up the preoccupation with correct opinion and instead begin to find alterity of opinion interesting, funny, illuminating, and an opportunity to expand our horizons?

GILLIAN COWLISHAW examines cultural practices on Australia's racial frontiers using ethnographic research methods. Her most recent works are *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas: Racial Power and Intimacy in Australia*, Michigan University Press, 1999, and *Blackfellas, Whitefellas, and the Hidden Injuries of Race*, Blackwell, 2003. She is an adjunct professor at the University of Technology, Sydney.

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1. This is a slightly edited version of a paper presented at the Charles Darwin University symposium entitled 'Emerging Futures: Shaping Our Territory', held in Alice Springs, 8–9 December 2003.
 2. Debra Jopson, 'Whitefella Dreaming', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 2003.
 3. My broad brush used here conceals a great many important distinctions.
 4. I use the idea of 'vernacular debate' in the same sense Alan Atkinson uses 'vernacular history' as that which is spoken and is thus behavioural and ephemeral, obeying the rules of conversation and orality rather than those of written language. Alan Atkinson, *The Commonwealth of Speech: An Argument about Australia's Past, Present and Future*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2002.
 5. The left–right dichotomy makes little sense to rural Aboriginal people because both sides seem oblivious of Aborigines' responses, for instance, to the effect of the new 'Aboriginal history' on Aborigines' own vernacular history, let alone on personal memories. The dichotomy is problematised when Aborigines joke about sympathetic white opinion as hypocritical or express support for Pauline Hanson's criticisms of government policy. See my *Blackfellas, Whitefellas, and the Hidden Injuries of Race*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2004, p. 201ff.
 6. This evaluation of strangers and their 'opinions' is also part of fitting ourselves into overlapping social spaces. The public presentation of self is extraordinarily powerful as evident in the way ephemeral incidents, such as the sneer or the smile of a stranger, can trigger considerable emotion. Urban residents can operate socially among strangers because we have commonly recognised purposes, common interests and a pragmatic orientation towards certain functions.
 7. A detailed conversation analysis could identify the common markers of opinion categories by using the methods of social linguists such as Harvey Sachs: for example, 'On Doing "Being Ordinary"', in J. Marshall Atkinson and John Heritage (eds), *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversational Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 413–29.
 8. In the 1970s I recall being startled when someone described a new acquaintance approvingly as a 'Nation Review type', the *Nation Review* being an avowedly left-wing weekly. The person was being identified as someone with whom one could discuss current affairs with mutual enjoyment, that is, without conflict.
 9. Pierre Bourdieu made detailed and extensive analysis of the way opinions, social practices and taste were aligned with class position. See *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984.
 10. Noel Pearson, 'On the Human Right to Misery, Mass Incarceration and Early Death', The Charles Perkins Memorial Oration delivered at the University of Sydney, 25 October 2001.
 11. Harvey Sachs examined 'doing "being ordinary"' as part of a technical analysis of how conversations work to establish the ordinariness of experience and responses, that is, to avoid upsetting social relations.
 12. Anthropology has a proud history of serious attempts to understand Indigenous social worlds and make them known to a nation that for many years was deeply indifferent if not hostile. However, the discipline has done little to counter the conceptual gap that allows Indigenous people to be seen as either as enclosed in an impenetrable web of baffling and obscure cultural practices or else as a collective social problem.
 13. Some examples are the personal portraits of friends, such as Lloyd Wamer's chapter on Makarrwola in *A Black Civilisation*, Harper, New York, 1937; W.E.H. Stanner's 'Durmugam: A Nangiomeri', in *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938–1973*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1979; and the diaries, *Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land*, Currie Thomson, South Yarra, 1983.
 14. The prevailing theories of 'population control' were mechanistic and inadequate, and the topic of fertility control among women of other cultural

- worlds was relevant to burgeoning feminist work. This was the topic of my PhD thesis.
15. Details of further encounters are presented in Chapter 1 of my 1999 book *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas: Racial Power and Intimacy in Australia*, Michigan University Press, Ann Arbor, 1999.
 16. For an entertaining and revealing fictionalised account of encounters with others in the Northern Territory, see Kate Finlayson, *A Lot of Croc: An Urban Bush Legend*, Random House, Sydney, 2002.
 17. In Cowlshaw, *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas*, p. 146.
 18. See Cowlshaw, *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas*.
 19. Gillian Cowlshaw, *Blackfellas Whitefellas*, p. 249.
 20. Heather Goodall, 'Too Early Yet or Not Soon Enough? Reflections on Sharing Histories as Process', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 118, 2002. pp. 7–24.
 21. In T. and N. Camfo and G. Cowlshaw, *Love Against the Law*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2000, p. 110.