Chapter 1. Theoretical Approaches to the Study of the Indigenous Musical Cultures of South-eastern Australia.

Section One. Introduction.

We who were Australians long before

You who came yesterday,

Eagerly we must learn to change,

Learn new deeds we never wanted,

New compulsions never needed,

The price of survival.

Much that we loved is gone and had to go,

But not the deep indigenous things.

The past is still so much a part of us,

Still about us, still within us.

We are happiest

Amongst our own people (Oodgeroo Noonuccal 1990: 22).

In this excerpt from the poem *Integration – Yes!*, Oodgeroo Noonuccal cogently and eloquently charts the broad course of development navigated by Aboriginal Australian culture in its relationship with white society. With these few understated lines, the poet expresses profound and fundamental insights. Immediately she affirms the existence of a persistent overarching Aboriginal identity that, in one sense, cohered long before Europeans invaded this country. In a tone of restrained resentment, Oodgeroo acknowledges a legacy of cultural loss. But this is characterised as a necessary result of Aboriginal actors' responses to pressures threatening the very survival of their cultures. Notwithstanding this transformation, Oodgeroo concludes that the essence of Aboriginality endures yet within indigenous

Australian society — identified with a strong sense of the past, with personal relationship, and with the emotional dimension of community.

Integration – Yes! is addressed to white Australian readers as a corrective to tenacious misapprehensions concerning recent Aboriginal history. Basically, these involve the perception that Aboriginal cultures and their expression, especially in the south-east of the continent, were rendered quite moribund soon after initial invasion. Indigenous forms, and therefore indigeneity itself, are considered in this view to have been replaced by European genres, suggesting a profound cultural defeat for south-eastern Aboriginal Australians (Miller 1995: pers. comm.). Cultural conquest is seen to have come about through intensive occupation by a European population which quickly out-grew its native counterpart — a process assisted on the one hand by vigorously-prosecuted immigration schemes, and on the other by disease, murder and dislocation. Existential despair amongst survivors, and the swamping of modern Aboriginal society's nexus with old-time indigenous practice, were considered the necessary and irreversible consequences.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal rejects such a simplistic construction. She denies, in effect, the mainstream European premiss that what might be apparent to the casual observer represents a deeper truth about Aboriginal society. Indeed, it is argued below that, through the persistence of vestigial evolutionary and deterministic theory, the nature of certain social entities has been obscured, to the extent that recent Aboriginal history is still too often seen as a tableau of unmitigated cultural loss. The alternative view asserts that, while expressive forms for Aboriginal people have changed in response to the availability of European alternatives, deep indigeneity has been purposefully and successfully maintained by south-eastern Australian communities. In order to apply historical detail to the argument, this thesis concentrates on indigenous

music from the New England region of New South Wales. More specifically, it attempts to trace aspects of musical development — particularly those relating to 'text' and context — from the time of first contact with Europeans to the years before the outbreak of the Second World War.

To this end, the present chapter examines theories that have long hindered a clear perception of many aspects of both white and Aboriginal societies, and declares its commitment to a theoretical paradigm which specifically resists their influence. Chapter two details the qualities of south-eastern Australian Aboriginal music at and soon after the contact period, regarding it as a base from which significant developments arose. Social interaction between white and black on the New England Tableland forms the subject-matter of chapter three, which demonstrates how Aboriginal society robustly endured, and furthermore maintained sufficient cultural 'space' to enable musical expression to flourish. Chapter four examines the surviving evidence for nineteenth-century New England Aboriginal music, and highlights its importance as a vehicle for spiritual knowledge and experience. It is argued in chapter five that European music offered local indigenous performers an increased range of options, many of which were actively incorporated into a particularly Aboriginal artistic expression. Examples of Aboriginal musical development, particularly in north-eastern New South Wales, are given there to confound the view that the European merely replaced indigenous forms. Chapter six rehearses the evidence of the Archibald family of New England, whose musical experience first prompted this study, and whose members aver that their musical culture, much of it cast in European structures, is genuinely indigenous. Finally, chapter seven argues that the concept of tradition may be theoretically re-interpreted to show how south-eastern Aboriginal

people can indeed fully participate in indigenous tradition, while involving themselves in music that has been heavily modified.

To allow a white historian to argue this view without giving offence to Aboriginal people, it must be emphasised that there is no attempt here to down-play the catastrophic results of the European invasion. In the broad critique of a western colonial power appropriating indigenous lands for profit-based economic gain, there is nothing positive to be seen in the English invasion and occupation of Australia. At this level of historical analysis, Australian Aboriginal people were deprived of their lands, their livelihoods and often their very lives. Freedoms of all sorts were severely curtailed, and indigenous social and cultural structures damaged. In judging the European action, it matters little whether the strategies used to achieve white ends were more-or-less peacefully achieved, or yet whether compensation was considered or given. In judging Aboriginal responses however, it is helpful to narrow the focus of examination somewhat. This permits the creativity of resistance, adaptation and accommodation to be better appreciated, so that the view of Aboriginal people as helpless victims of the white onslaught can be effectively questioned. Thus, while the murder, dislocation and injustice of every type must be constantly acknowledged, there are many stories to be told of the survival of Aboriginal society and culture, of successes in resisting annihilation, and of the triumph of the spirit of Aboriginal people in the face of often overwhelming adversity.

This revised narrative is not assisted by the weighting of the literature of black/white relations toward the irredeemably negative effects of the white presence in Australia (see Elder 1998). If such a bias were to remain unbalanced by a more hopeful interpretation, certain insidious generalisations would be allowed an undeserved currency. One example regards black and white world-views as

essentially incompatible, with ultimate competitive success possible for one system only. This was a tenet of most social evolutionary schemes, and has been given expression in quite recent academic publications (Dingle 1988). Another generalisation overemphasises the demographic impact of frontier contact, so that extirpation might reasonably be entertained as a possible consequence. A third marginalises the ability of Aboriginal people to modify their cultural expression without in the process diluting the integrity of its essence. All these portrayals suggest cultural loss as the defining outcome of relations between black and white.

A more creative story is often told by Aboriginal people themselves. Isabel McBryde, commenting on the familiar picture of violence, dispossession and cultural destruction frequently painted by white frontier historians, states that

> Curiously, it can at times contrast sharply with the more positive record that comes from Aboriginal writers recounting the same harsh events; they often stress the themes of initiative, courage and cultural survival (McBryde 1996: 6).

Not only Aboriginal writers, but parties to many oral historical enquiries have presented the same view of the indigenous historical experience. To formally trace the course of these successes is a challenging task however. Two significant methodological difficulties prevail: the need to produce evidence that demonstrates Aboriginal people to have possessed the opportunities to develop their culture within a restrictive European system; and the requirement that sketchy data be analysed so that meanings may lead in a direction different to that of previous scholarly interpretation. In probably every case where a white researcher sets out to attempt these things, it requires first of all the leadership of Aboriginal people themselves. Somewhat similarly to the work of Heather Goodall (1996) then, this thesis attempts

to interpret for an academic audience the complex historical experience outlined initially by members of New England Aboriginal communities.

It is one thing to say that a shift of historical emphasis is necessary, but quite another to reverse the action of a research paradigm which has long been ably supported by historical source evidence of its own creation (see below). Not only must the premisses which structured that programme be closely interrogated, it is also important to question its own deeper rationale, so that a dismantling might proceed all the more thoroughly. What follows is a comparative discussion of two significant strands of social theory — the first epitomising conventional nineteenth- and twentieth-century views of Aboriginal society, the second representing recent liberating advances in sociological and anthropological thinking. The examination of these strands is designed to show how theory has affected what can be known about south-eastern Australian Aboriginal music, and how it can alternatively bring new meanings to bear on surviving historical evidence.

Section two below will introduce the 'Doomed Race Theory', as identified by the historian Russell McGregor, and section three deals with the effect this ideology has had on research into south-east Australian Aboriginal music. The discussion of section four articulates around the idea of ethnographic research as personal relationship. Section five details the 'structuration theory' of Anthony Giddens, and explains its relevance to the present study. Section six will conclude the chapter.

Section Two. Nineteenth-Century White Attitudes and the Doomed Race Theory.

It should be said at the outset of this section that when Europeans first arrived in Australia, their ideas about Aboriginal people were to a great extent already determined by the social theories of the day. Even after residence of some years in

their new country, members of the policy-making classes had little opportunity to develop close enough relationships with Aboriginal people to allow for much of an empirical shift. Where such relationship was possible, cultural distance often confounded the interested observer. Watkin Tench expressed these frustrations to his private journal in November 1790:

> During intervals of duty our greatest source of entertainment now lay in cultivating the acquaintance of our new friends, the natives. Ever liberal of communication, no difficulty but of understanding each other subsisted between us. Inexplicable contradictions arose to bewilder our researches which no ingenuity could unravel and no credulity reconcile (Tench 1999: 160).

The same sentiment was later echoed for New England by Finney Eldershaw (Eldershaw 1854: 79), whose acompanying descriptions of local indigenous society betray a lack of empirical foundation. Indeed, the frequency with which the same unlikely cultural attributes recur in the contact literature strengthens the view that these were invented and merely rehearsed by succeeding annalists. They then assume the quality of theoretical archetypes, concerned more with affirming the superior character of European society itself, than with gaining any understanding at all of Australian cultures.

Aboriginal society, rather than being discussed in its own terms, was consistently viewed in comparison with the European. Of course, in ways that parallelled the invention and application of the doctrine of *terra nullius*, social theory served, in some quarters at least, to justify the expropriation of Aboriginal lands. If the confident assertions of the European programme were not to be undermined, constraints had to be placed on the possible ways in which Aboriginal society was

regarded. Research had therefore to proceed so that empirical observation could be trimmed to fit existing moulds, rather than that the vessel of theory should shatter. Les Hiatt, speaking of the eventual cultivation of formal anthropological study by scholars who 'regarded themselves as members of a culture at the pinnacle of human progress' (Hiatt 1996: xii), provides a useful analysis:

> The emergence of anthropology as a distinct discipline in the middle of the last century coincided with the publication of Charles Darwin's book on the origin of species. In the context of inescapable questions about the natural history of our own species, Australian Aborigines were assigned the role of exemplars *par excellence* of beginnings and early forms...In the last quarter of the nineteenth century European scholars bent on discovering the origins of social institutions began a rush on the Australian material that lasted well into the present century. From the ore was fashioned some of the most celebrated and influential works in the history of anthropology (Hiatt 1996: xi, xii).

Evolutionary theory was itself built on deep and stable foundations. The European doctrine of the 'Great Chain of Being,' a philosophy which had enjoyed currency for some centuries, organised all creation into a God-given hierarchy, placing inanimate nature and the lowest forms of biological life at its base, with humankind at the apex. Stadial or stage theory, an Enlightenment refinement of this belief, held that humanity itself could be seen as divisible into developmental stages according to primary modes of subsistence. These stages followed from 'savagery', characterised by hunting and gathering, through 'barbarism', represented by nomadic pastoralism, to the 'civilisation' of agriculture and commerce (Boyes 1993: 7). Russell McGregor supplies convincing evidence that most of the earliest written

descriptions of Australian Aboriginal society betrayed belief in stage theory as their conscious or assumed philosophical base (McGregor 1998: 1-18). When stage theory was later drafted into the social arm of evolutionism, its basic premisses, to all intents and purposes remained undisturbed. In the process, the concept of race as a biological entity was reified and married with the idea of progress, spiritual and material, which had become ever more compelling to nineteenth-century anthropological thinkers. This synthesis achieved its apogee in Charles Darwin's work, wherein, according to McGregor

> The idea of social progress was explicitly linked to the theory of the animal ancestry of humanity, Darwin arguing that because 'we have to consider the steps by which some semi-human creature has been gradually raised to the rank of man in his most perfect state', it was necessary to establish that 'all civilised nations were once barbarous' (McGregor 1998: 29).

Whatever the orientation of different strands of anthropolgical thought before their subsumption under the evolutionary aegis, all were unified by their predictions of the rapid demise of Aboriginal cultures. McGregor has identified, in the kernel of this unanimity, an attitude that he styles the 'Doomed Race Theory'. The nub of this position, born of the belief in both the biological foundation of race and fixed stages in evolutionary development, held that Aboriginal people were incapable of being elevated to successive stages in the hierarchy. Numerous opinions were published lamenting the perceived inability of Aboriginal people to respond to European experiments aimed at 'civilising' them. Even after showing an initial interest in 'improvement', these people seemed always to lapse into their habitual pre-European ways. It never occurred to theorists that an all-at-once experiment must of necessity

fail to prove any tenet of the stadial argument, nor was political resistance ever entertained as a possible reason for Aboriginal recalcitrance. Instead, failure was attributed to genetic mental incapacity, or at least an ingrained inability to adapt to a more elevated *modus vivendi.*

As stadial and evolutionary theories dictated that successive stages must supersede those below them, the eventual extinction of the 'savage' races themselves, not merely their lifestyles, was to be expected. Darwin predicted confidently that

> At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races (quoted in McGregor 1998: 30).

This belief was quickly and faithfully applied to the local situation by Australian anthropologists. The vice-president of the Royal Society of Tasmania opined in 1890 that

> following the law of evolution and survival of the fittest, the inferior races of mankind must give place to the highest type of man, and...this law is adequate to account for the gradual decline in numbers of the aboriginal inhabitants of a country before the march of civilization (quoted in McGregor 1998: 48, 49).

While specific causes for the apparent demise were often enumerated (McGregor 1998: 14), they were regarded, as this passage suggests, as the inevitable consequences of the meeting of a superior with a weaker race. As such, Europeans considered themselves just as incapable as Aboriginal people of reversing a trend decreed by the laws of biology. In some quarters, charitable programmes were championed to 'smooth the dying pillow', while other Europeans adopted a more *laissez-faire* attitude. Judge Barron Field's romantic analysis of the fatal Aboriginal

incapacity to accept civilisation, is just one variation on a commonly-expressed theme:

> May never we pretend to civilize,
> And make him only captive!
> Let him be free of mountain solitudes;
> And let him, where and when he will, sit down
> Beneath the trees, and with his faithful dog
> Share his chance-gather'd meal; and, finally,
> As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
> So in the eye of Nature let him die! (Barron Field 1825, quoted in McGregor 1998: 13).

It was mentioned above that certain European beliefs, unlikely to have originated from observation or experience, eventually assumed the character of archetypal racial attributes. While most causes advanced for the passing of Aboriginal peoples involved rocketing mortality rates (including the practice of infanticide, discussed further below and in chapter three), declining birth rates were also considered. An example concerns the 'observed' loss of power of Aboriginal women to bear children with Aboriginal partners. McGregor records the expression of this belief from early in the nineteenth century, and it faithfully reappears in New England writings of the 1850s:

> The intercourse of the black "gin" with the male of European origin...tells fatally also upon their powers of reproduction...although the female is enabled to bear children to an European father...they are thereafter completely incapacitated to bear offspring to any of their own race (Eldershaw 1854: 84-87).

This doctrine, exhibiting an almost incredible endurance, was rehearsed to me by a white resident of Glen Innes as late as 1995 (Bill Cameron 1995; pers. comm.).

The idea of the selective fecundity of Aboriginal women not only demonstrates the lacuna between observation and theory, it points up a crucial tenet of the Doomed Race proposition, that children of mixed parentage were not generally considered to be truly Aboriginal. McGregor points this out in relation to the writings of A.W. Howitt, seen to be representative of the general tenor:

> Howitt concluded his explanation by remarking that some descendants of the 'half-blood' would survive, although he anticipated that 'the number will be small, and in such a case become absorbed into the general population' (McGregor 1998: 53).

The prediction of racial extinction could not completely ignore the fact that Aboriginal people continued to reproduce. However, by henceforth regarding their offspring as non-Aboriginal, the validity of the evolutionary paradigm was preserved intact. This attitude towards children of mixed unions continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And not only the direct progeny of such relationships were to be embraced by this view, as even one liaison with a European was seen to 'infect' forever an Aboriginal line of descent. Olive Pink and other anthropologists and philanthropists of the 1930s wanted the term 'Aboriginal' to be officially denied people of mixed heritage, even suggesting that this be enshrined in legislation (McGregor 1998: 244ff.). The refusal to acknowledge the indigeneity of mixed-heritage Aboriginal people was buttressed by repeated denunciations, in a variety of publications and over a very long period of time, typified by the following editorial from the *West Australian* newspaper:

> The modern world has many problems to face. The half-caste is not one of them. He (or she) is merely a passing phase, an incident in history, an interesting event in what we call 'progress', a natural transmutation in what we know as cultural evolution. He will solve himself and disappear (*West Australian* 22-7-1933, quoted in Scott 1999: frontispiece).

It is clear from these expressions, that the Doomed Race Theory used the formulation of 'half-caste' and similar racial degrees as a measure of replacement of black by white blood, and hence of Aboriginal by European cultural identity. While it is undeniable that, in response to the European presence, the physical nature of Aboriginal society has changed, it is quite another thing to argue that the essential Aboriginality of the indigenous population has been diluted thereby.

In spite of the assertions of Macdonald (1842), Eldershaw (1854) and a host of others, that Aboriginal parents killed all their mixed-heritage children at birth, there is evidence that 'half-castes' were not discriminated against within the communities that reared them, and in which they played a fully-cultured role:

> By the mid-1930s one of Elkin's research students, Caroline Kelly, was conducting field investigations in part-Aboriginal communities in northern New South Wales and at Cherbourg in Queensland. Contradicting the well-established view that half-castes were as socially unacceptable to full-bloods as they were to whites, Kelly found that part-Aboriginals took an active role in the traditional culture and were integrated into the kinship system (McGregor 1998: 203).

Elkin himself found precisely the same situation obtaining in communities in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia, and on the central-north coast of New South Wales (McGregor 1998: 203). So did Gerhardt Laves and Radcliffe-Brown in their respective researches amongst north-eastern New South Wales communities (Laves 1929; Radcliffe-Brown 1929a). It will be shown in chapter six that 'part'-Aboriginals in New England came to play a crucial role in the maintenance and dissemination of indigenous culture there. More recent evidence from the Northern Territory lends the strongest support to these observations, T.G.H. Strehlow remarking that:

> the concept of "illegitimate children" could not arise in a Central Australian community. Even the lighter colours of the half-caste children who were born after the arrival of the white settlers...did not debar them from *full* acceptance into the religious and social life of the dark communities from which they had sprung (Strehlow 1978: 59. Original emphasis).

In the light of these examples, it seems absurd to argue that mixed-heritage Aboriginal people were and are somehow less Aboriginal — culturally or genetically — merely by virtue of their skin colour. The Doomed Race idea, which needed so badly for them to be excluded from its definition of Aboriginality, is seen on this score to have been constructed without recourse to open empirical investigation.

Also unsupported by observation was the Doomed Race Theory's conviction that, as Aboriginal people were becoming less visible to the European community-at-large, their population numbers were rapidly diminishing. The reasons for this social invisibility are legion, and will be discussed in chapter three, in relation to the populations of New England. For the moment it is enough to note McGregor's comment that generally,

> No comprehensive demographic data was available and no detailed demographic studies were conducted...moreover, what census data was available did not unequivocally indicate a race plummeting toward extinction... Anecdotal evidence of population decline abounded. Much of it could be reduced to the formulae: 'there used to be lots of blackfellows around here and now there aren't many' or 'there's King Billy, the last of his tribe' (McGregor 1998: 49, 50).

The influence of the demographic thrust of the Doomed Race Theory has persisted right up to the present, and at least partly informs the thinking of some respectable scholars. The latest edition of Tim Flannery's *The Future Eaters* includes a photograph, taken *circa* 1884, that is captioned 'Some of Victoria's few surviving Aborigines' (Flannery 1999: plates between pp. 264, 265).

Section Three. Research Into South-east Australian Indigenous Music.

The Doomed Race Theory suffused the attitudes, motivations and results of much European cultural research until very recently. As Aboriginal society was seen to be accelerating towards its demise around the close of the nineteenth century, so there was perceived in some quarters an urgent need to record its music. This was not merely for preservation's sake, but also so that music could be placed against other evidence in assessing the position of Aboriginal cultural achievement along the human evolutionary continuum. The colonial Royal Societies therefore broadcast a plea at this time

> for research to be conducted promptly, before this most primitive of races vanished forever (McGregor 1998: 57).

Just as children of mixed heritage were to be denied Aboriginality in the scheme that predicted its eventual evaporation, so the products and processes of the interrelationship between European and indigenous musics were ignored by nineteenth-century researchers. Given that the scholarship of the time could scarcely entertain the proposition that Aboriginal society was actually developing in response to the European innovation, Catherine Ellis displays a degree of naivety in remarking that:

> Strangely, researchers have often failed to collect modified tribal materials which would assist examination of the changes of structure in an evolving process; rather they have preferred 'authentic' forms (Ellis 1980:727).

Nineteenth-century ethnological projects were only ever backward-looking, lacking any foresight whatsoever. They were at once founded upon, and provided support for the view that Aboriginal culture was already a 'dead letter', and that local people themselves had all but disappeared in the van of European progress. As such, the only value that Aboriginal music was considered to possess was as support for social evolutionary schemes, which maintained European culture in its position at the apex of a rigidly stratified hierarchy.

As Ellis points out, this research programme concentrated with an unswerving focus on a theoretically unaltered suite of indigenous musical elements. She also suggests that scholars' attentions were captured by musical form, and the more sophisticated but less objective dimensions of Aboriginal musical expression were ignored. Aboriginal contextual testimony was to be discounted, as it was firmly held that only forms could utter reliably the truth about culture. Indeed, through the application of expressive structures to whatever particular cultural theories were felt

to be appropriate, white researchers could perceive their significances better than Aboriginal people themselves.

Other strands of thinking also contributed to attitudes towards the collection and analysis of Australian Aboriginal cultural products. One of these, emanating from the newly-developed discipline of folklore studies, involved theorising about tradition and the concepts of social change and stability. Some analysts believed, for example, that Aboriginal resistance to European civilising efforts was due more to the operation of tradition than to genetic predisposition. As Aboriginal society had remained unchanged for countless thousands of years, so the argument continued, the coming of Europeans in ever greater numbers rendered adaptation a clear impossibility. To a way of thinking that drew a strict correlation between the degrees of perceived stability and predicted change to indigenous lifestyles, the dismantling of Aboriginal society would inevitably be rapid and complete. In a brief review of anthropological attitudes to Aboriginal religion, Mircea Eliade outlines the character and eventual overthrow of such thinking:

> what was once highly esteemed as a static and 'monolithic' culture, an expression of a *'Naturvolk'* living somehow outside history, has proven to be, like all other cultures, 'primitive' or highly developed, the result of a historical process. And that the fact that the Aborigines reacted *creatively* with regard to external cultural influences, accepting and assimilating certain elements, rejecting or ignoring others, shows that they behaved like *historical* beings, and not as a *Naturvolk*. In other words, the historical perspective introduced by pre-historians and historically-oriented ethnologists has definitively ruined the image of a stagnant and elementary Australian culture — an image, we may

> recall, that was successfully popularized by naturalistic interpretations of nineteenth-century anthropologists (Eliade 1973: 190).

This notion of timelessness and almost geological stability agrees well with general nineteenth-century pronouncements on the nature of tradition. Folklore theorists such as Tylor and Sharp saw the operation of inflexible tradition as the explanation for cultural stability, and — in the context of the intrusion of modernity into timeless realms — as the primary agent for the destruction of its own folk and 'primitive' societies.

In European settings, folklorists saw a parallel need to document, from 'vanishing' peasant cultures, material that contained evidence of deep and archetypal cultural 'structures':

> As the idea of tradition took form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it tended to be confined by those who studied it to particular kinds of traditions: folklore, fairy tales, myths...ceremonies and rituals. It was connected with the transmission of expressive works which had not been reduced to written form. Tradition was sought in the culture possessed by strata which had little formal education and which were considered to be less articulate, less literate, and less ratiocinative. The founders of the modern discipline of folklore believed that in these strata there were at work some deeper mental processes which had been lost in the course of the progress of a rationalized civilization and that the results of the workings of these processes were passed "by tradition" i.e. orally, anonymously, and by example, from generation to generation, undergoing small increments of change but remaining

> substantially and visibly identical over long, unbroken stretches of time (Shils 1981: 18).

For many researchers, it was not enough that the classes from whom they recorded folkloric material should be less 'ratiocinative' than themselves. What was also required was that they had to exhibit a healthy insulation from mainstream societal progress. In the later nineteenth century, formal interest in English musical folklore achieved theoretical systemisation in the work of Cecil Sharp, the prime mover behind what modern scholars term the English Folk Revival (Boyes 1993). It was essential to Sharp's method that the people from whom 'authentic' folk music was to be collected had

> never been brought into close enough contact with educated persons to be influenced by them (Sharp 1972: 4).

Sharp accordingly recommended the avoidance of informants whom it was suspected might be influenced by education, thereby rendering them unrepresentative of tradition (Boyes 1993: 7). This could be most easily achieved by seeking material

> only in those country districts, which, by reason of their remoteness, have escaped the infection of modern ideas (Sharp 1972: 5).

Similarly to Australian anthropologists, doctrinaire English Revivalists were interested in musical *products* only, and any significant evidence of the social processes of music remained uncollected by them. E.V. Lucas, a colleague of Sharp's apparently found this attitude frustrating:

> I took all the opportunities I could of getting Uncle Jonah, the voiceless shepherd in the smock, to talk of old times; but always with the fear of the Director [Sharp] very lively in me. For anecdotage is nothing to him. His purpose in life is to fill blank bars with little

> magical dots; for this and this only does he scour the coloured counties. All conversation is therefore an interruption, if not a misdemeanour (Boyes 1993: 49).

As only 'authentic' material which conformed with preconceived notions about the nature of folk-song was to be collected and published, as musical items were to speak for themselves in analysis, and as little if any systematic sociological research was deemed desirable, whatever theoretical assumptions had already been made before collectors ventured into the field inevitably remained undisturbed by the material that was retrieved.

There is little doubt that nineteenth-century cultural anthropologists were influenced by folklore theory, and it is no coincidence that Sharp begins his major theoretical examination with an example of Australian Aboriginal song (Sharp 1972: 4). It has been demonstrated that Sharp and other revivalists, in order to validate their research programmes, invented cultures that had no history (Boyes 1993). In the same vein, interested researchers could be said to have invented Aboriginal peoples and cultures that had no history, had been totally isolated from the rest of the world, and who could therefore boast a unique cultural tradition of great depth. This interest demanded that pure cultural products only be collected from 'full-blooded' Aboriginal representatives, and that sociological research relationship be dispensed with, as interlocutors could not possibly enlighten the scholar as to the significance their utterances might bear to general theory. An alternative rationalisation of the nature of tradition will be outlined in chapter seven. It will be argued there that, far from exhibiting a deterministic inflexibility, tradition is a dynamic phenomenon, subject to the direction of those who invoke its operation.

The analysis presented above can be illustrated by the *praxis* of the scientific societies of the late nineteenth century. Typical of this was the sound-recording, by the Royal Society of Tasmania, of Mrs. Fanny Cochrane-Smith singing 'lingo' (Aboriginal language) songs at the Tasmanian Museum in August 1899. Three cylinders were recorded on this occasion, the first two only containing Mrs. Smith's singing. The third, presumably made while the singer was still present, comprises speeches read to mark the occasion by three officers of the Society. Two of the speeches are excerpted below, the first being that of the Vice-President of the Society and Bishop of Tasmania, the Rt. Rev. H.H. Montgomery:

> It has been my great privilege today...to have witnessed Mrs. Fanny Smith of Port Cygnet...sing and speak into the gramophone. I feel very glad indeed that the aboriginal language of these islands, together with its songs, however fragmentary the results may be, have at least been permanently registered and can be preserved and listened to in future years, when this, and the remaining representatives of the native race, have passed away...(Longman 1960: 81).

The Government Geologist then expressed his pleasure in

> hearing the songs of the native Tasmanians sung by the last of the souls...This will be of great interest to those who are studying the various races of mankind now (Longman 1960: 81).

Not only do these sentiments betray classic Doomed Race origins, their tone suggests a perception of Mrs. Cochrane-Smith as a provider of anthropological memorabilia, rather than as a performer in her own right. Circumstances surrounding this event also illustrate anthropology's desire to collect only material that could be authenticated as free from the influence of, in this case, European adulteration. Apparently the Royal

Society's belief that Mrs. Smith was the last remaining Tasmanian attracted criticism from the island scholar H. Ling Roth, who objected to her recordings on the grounds that she was undoubtedly of mixed parentage, and should not therefore be considered representative of Tasmanian Aboriginality (McGregor 1998: 50, 51). Again, it seems that a further song that Mrs. Smith wished to record was definitively marginalised by the Royal Society. This is described as having been sung partly in lingo, partly in English, and as bearing a 'hymn-like' quality. The song could have provided interesting evidence of the way in which contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal musicians were steering their culture, and even of their own appreciation of the continuing essence of musical indigeneity, but it was only partially and very poorly recorded (Longman 1960: 80). Clearly, the Royal Society of Tasmania was unwilling to defer to the notion of a developing Aboriginality.

Of course, enquiry into south-eastern Aboriginal music most often occurred *in situ*, and the use of the phonograph was therefore a rare event. Researchers typically recorded descriptions of events at which singing took place, their perception of singing styles, and perhaps the uses to which they were told the songs were put. Sometimes the texts of songs were noted and, in rare cases, rudimentary melodic transcriptions were made, together with some attempt at a preliminary formal analysis. A good example of the way these elements coalesced to produce what must be considered a simplistic representation lies in the notation of an Australian Aboriginal song (plate 1), originally published in 1825 in Barron Field's *Geographical Memoirs* (Roth 1888). Appended to the transcription is the following analysis:

> The song is sung by a few males and females, who take no part in the dance. One of the band beats time by knocking one stick against

> another. The music begins with a high note, and gradually sinks to the octave, whence it rises again immediately to the top (quoted in Ling Roth 1887: 425).

Field's perception of Aboriginal people as lacking the mental capacities necessary for the attainment of civilisation (McGregor 1998: 6), perhaps flows directly into this portrayal. Hindsight can be a harsh judge however, and it must be acknowledged that the research tools available in 1825 were greatly restricted in the results they were capable of producing. Over and again Catherine Ellis has shown how it is only in performance that the incredibly rich and complex layering of structure and meaning can be perceived by the observer of central Australian music. While the analyst's ideal of a complete and accurate graphic representation is obviously beyond reach, Ellis has spent many years refining her methods so that it might be approached. Her typical description of a complex set of indigenous performance principles is thus

> a long way removed from the simplistic assumptions that we have often made of a single-line melody, set to a constantly repeated rhythm (Ellis 1997b: 75).

Indeed, the difficulties of reducing indigenous melodies to western musical notation, which might truly be considered antithetical entities, dogged researchers through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, just as they continue to do. A stark example occurs in the field note-books of Gerhardt Laves, who in 1929, began anthropological research on the north coast of New South Wales. After one attempt at melodic transcription, Laves gave up the game, and thereafter recorded only the texts of songs (Laves: 1929). In the absence of effective and practical field transcription techniques, sound recording is a necessary device for the faithful reproduction needed in later analysis. Unfortunately, this type of research in the south-east has proceeded

spasmodically at best, and in that context, the recordings of Fanny Cochrane-Smith must be considered of inestimable value to modern research. As far as is known, further recordings were not made in the region until Peter Elkin's fieldwork in the 1930s (see chapter two), and then not again until the 1960s, with the creation of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Since that time, sound recordings have been made throughout the south-east by numerous collectors and scholars, details of whose work will be presented in the following chapters.

It must be said that, compared with other districts, the New England Tablelands has been under-researched by ethnologists. While missionary work produced early cultural studies of Aboriginal people to the immediate west of the area, it seems that Europeans did not begin research into the Aboriginal populations of New England until at least sixty years after initial contact. At the turn of the twentieth century, R.H. Mathews and John Macpherson produced a handful of scholarly papers relating to various local cultural matters including language, tribal boundaries and religious ceremony, but neither researcher made any specifically musical enquiries (Macpherson 1902, 1904; Mathews 1902, 1903a). Radcliffe-Brown visited New England for a few days in 1929, again without pursuing musical matters. These continued to be ignored by researchers until sound recordings were made of the Armidale singer Frank Archibald by Bill Hoddinott in 1964, and John Gordon in 1968, under the auspices of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies In both these cases, research was described as partaking of the nature of cultural 'salvage', and consequently comprised the recording of songs with little accompanying contextual material (Gordon 1968a; Archibald 1964; Hoddinott n.d.). Harry Creamer and Chris Sullivan carried out more work in the area during the 1980s (Sullivan

1988), producing some penetrating results, and my own fieldwork with local Aboriginal people has been ongoing since 1993.

Section Four. Research As Relationship.

The attitude towards Aboriginal people that has been styled the Doomed Race Theory declares, at base, the lack of value placed upon personal relationship in early ethnological research. By and large, researchers were only interested in the remnant products of what they considered to be a dying culture. They emphasised the collection of material, and the people for whom the music was still an important cultural expression seemed to matter little. Rather than setting their aim at the increased understanding of indigenous Australian cultures, research programmes laid out a generally positivist agenda for what information was sought, constructed evaluative procedures to detemine authenticity, then applied to the product one or other overarching theory concening the nature of humankind. One consequence of this method is that little of the evidence that was collected during the nineteenth century survives in a form that would satisfy the requirements of modern historical research. In too many cases the information gathered was shaped to answer only the questions of the day, and it was too often recorded and published without details as to provenance or cultural affiliation.

It will be seen in chapter two how seriously gapped is the indigenous musical history of south-eastern Australia, particularly the New England region. Not only is a lack of research interest responsible, but so is the insufficiency of the work actually produced, which betrays the flaws of an outmoded collecting programme. This has resulted in a present inability to see the south-east musical region in its proper historical and cultural relation to other areas; in the inability to trace the continuing

development of indigenous music through to the present; and in the inability to discern what might be considered by Aboriginal musicians to have been the enduring essence of their art. While the importance of the outward form of cultural expression should never be dismissed, a dialogue between researchers and their interlocutors would have better contextualised products, and provided modern scholars with a greater means of re-connecting evidential fragments.

Failure to engage at a relationship level in research with Aboriginal people had and still has the greatest ramifications, especially considering that Aboriginal cultures are themselves primarily relationship-based. So much in Aboriginal culture is founded on personal connection — with other people, with ancestors, with significant creatures, with land — that effective research must reflect relationship in its own methodology, or risk misrepresentation in its findings. Isabel McBryde emphasises this for historical work in commenting that

> To Aboriginal people a history that is grounded in personal and family histories or accounts of familiar territory (country) has primacy (McBryde 1996: 12).

Relationship is a theme running right throughout this study, and the relational indigenous strategy of accommodation, elaborated in chapter four, lies at the heart of an understanding of many aspects of Aboriginal musical culture and society on New England. Members of the Archibald family assert that while musical forms and contexts have there developed in response to historical change, the essence of their old-time culture endures. This is made possible by its transmission through people, rather than through disembodied cultural manifestations. Maisie Kelly, who has facilitated my relationship with her family, made the following point on the occasion of a seminar we held jointly at the University of New England. 'Archaeologists', she

said, 'can go and dig up all the sites they can, but they'll never find Aboriginal culture there'. For white people to begin to understand indigenous culture, she continued, it is first necessary to develop personal relationships with Aboriginal people (M. Kelly 1995: pers. comm.). This challenging and profound statement resonates with current issues in the literatures of history and anthropology. While not explicitly discounting the importance of material evidence to any branch of anthropological or historical enquiry, it does indicate that its significance is much reduced if it cannot be contextualised in relation to the overall historical relationship network of which living Aboriginal people are an integral part.

Modern research with Australian Aboriginal people is generally sophisticated in method, and even if not ideally so, it is based on a more equal, open and respectful relationship between researchers and their interlocutors. In large measure this is due to the direction of Aboriginal contributors, but it is also partly owing to changing trends in social science theory itself. Just as the form of nineteenth-century ethnological theory betrays the western industrial world's contemporary pre-occupation with the elevation of its own status, so recent theoretical developments towards a new attitude to indigenous peoples implies a concomitant revision of the west's self-image:

> The critique of colonialism in the postwar period — an undermining of 'The West's' ability to represent other societies — has been reinforced by an important process of theorizing about the limits of representation itself...Positions proliferate: 'hermeneutics', 'structuralism', 'history of mentalities', 'neo-Marxism', 'genealogy', 'post-structuralism', 'post-modernism', 'pragmatism'; also a spate of 'alternative epistemologies': — feminist, ethnic and non-Western. What is at stake, but not always

> recognized, is an ongoing critique of the West's most confident, characteristic discourses (Clifford 1986: 10).

Much of the positive direction that this questioning has taken is towards greater collaboration in research, so that meanings provided by Aboriginal parties can shape the way indigenous culture is represented in European discourse. Not only content, but also the form of ethnography can be directly modified in this way. While certainly indicated ethically, the overall quality and communicative value of ethnographic work also improves dramatically thereby. Modern methodologies' movement towards the current position owes much to the work of British anthropologist Peter Winch, who developed a professional outlook summarised thus by Tony Swain:

> Seriously to study another way of life is necessarily to seek to extend our own — not simply to bring the other way within the already existing boundaries of our own...The task Winch sets for anthropologists is a dialectical one in which we somehow bring our subject's view of apprehensibility into relation with our own, and hence create a new unit of intelligibility (Swain 1998: 86).

Winch's thinking has been taken further by Anthony Giddens, whose structuration theory, upon which the present study is based, will now be discussed at some length.

Section Five. The Structuration Theory of Anthony Giddens.

a). The Relevance of Structuration Theory.

The role that actors play in the sociological and historical analysis of their own experience is of great importance to Giddens. That they always have some degree of discursive penetration of the workings of their own society is given. The discounting of agent's rationalisations of their actions, which was a pre-requisite of evolutionary

thinking, and which may even be perceived in the work of modern theorists such as Bourdieu (Jenkins 1992: 73), is anathema to structurationism. Giddens characterises it as a stance

> not only defective from the point of view of social theory, it is one with strongly-defined and potentially offensive political implications (Giddens 1979: 71).

If theory can oppress, then logically it can also liberate. Structurationism is an essentially enabling methodology, which allows the language of empirical research to flow into an ever-expanding vessel of formal presentation with a much-reduced risk of distortion. This is made possible by the framework's radically abstract character and coherent flexibility, easily accommodating the different ways in which cultures speak about themselves. In contrast with nineteenth-century ethnological paradigms, which at bottom sought to validate and vindicate the ideas and actions of western colonialism, structuration theory is designed primarily for the *understanding* of particular social processes. For this reason it carries no empirical load of its own, and cannot predict or supply meaning without the contributing evidence of the particular subject with which it deals. To this end, structurationism insists that the proper method for understanding human social life requires agents' own testimony to determine to a large extent the parameters of research and its outcomes. In the present instance, it allows a broad scope for south-east Australian Aboriginal society to be discussed in its own terms. Furthermore, in its recognition of relationship as the nucleus of social formation, structuration theory is seen to be particularly suitable for application to Aboriginal history.

It should be acknowledged that the social science project often seeks to embrace a field of enquiry that extends beyond individual narratives. The

ethnographic researcher — by engaging with a variety of types of evidence, with a range of personal narratives and with the findings of other scholars — has an opportunity, not necessarily available to the individual agent, to notice regularities and trends across a particular domain. The recursion of the relationship between researcher and interlocutors in studies of social processes, is therefore, in Giddens' thought, very like that binding social structure and agency generally:

> That empirical inquiry in the social sciences must rely upon interpretative accounts justified by criteria participants use to recognise their own activities is accepted as a methodological necessity in structuration theory...But social scientists cannot rest content with issues regarding the elucidation of recurrent forms of conduct. They also must be concerned with procedures of reproduction and social transformation, as well as with the consequences that ensue from general kinds of activities (Ira Cohen 1989: 36).

Another contrast between structurationism and earlier theories is that, for reasons already rehearsed, the operation of the former need not be constantly invoked in technical terms during the presentation of its subject matter. While a sketch of structuration's elemental components is given below, and while there are points throughout this examination at which its tenets are applied more-or less discursively, for the most part, the theory operates as a silent ground upon which the study is built. It allows room, in other words, for careful common-language communication, and while the result may not always be ideal, it is felt that interlocutors themselves will therefore have greater access to, and control over, what is said by and about them. This has been raised many times as an issue of ethnographic theory, James Clifford welcoming a trend whereby

> In the wake of semiotics, post-structuralism, hermeneutics and deconstruction there has been considerable talk about a return to plain speaking and to realism (Clifford 1986: 25).

On the other hand, not everything in social life can be perceived by empirical or commonsense observation, nor expressed only in its terms. Explicit recourse to social theory is most clearly indicated in three eventualities: where there are confusing gaps in evidence; where uncontextualised or truly novel material requires interpretation; or where the operation of social structural entities is invisible. An example of the last is discussed in chapter seven, where the phenomenon of tradition, with the assistance of structuration theory, is presented as having so general an operation that its character approaches ideality. It was seen earlier in this chapter that Europeans were faced with all three empirical mystifications in their encounters with Aboriginal society. Recourse to illuminating theory was not possible, and the available evidence was squeezed into existing deterministic formulations. Residual anomalies either remained just that, were gathered up and bundled into an 'invention' of the Aboriginal world, or were totally ignored. In contrast, the direct utilisation of structuration theory may now allow previously opaque evidence to yield new and more coherent meanings.

It might be objected that to consider applying structuration theory to Aboriginal societies would be to assume the universality of the theory's application. While this is true, the argument of chapter seven mounts a reasoned case for the allowance of some universality in human affairs. The choice of theory is defended here on the grounds that the characteristics which structurationism presupposes all societies to possess are fundamental indeed, occupying a niche barely one step up from the patently biological.

b). A Summary of Structurationism.

Structurationism is a theoretical conceptualisation that adequately accounts for both the reality and influence of social structures, and for the autonomy of the individual in society (Lloyd 1986: 306-312). The theory has has been created by the juxtaposition of elements from many existing approaches (Lloyd 1986: 308), and much of its power lies in its grounding in eastern philosophy. Rather than subscribing to restricted western views of causality that allow evolutionary paradigms such freedom to range, Giddens borrowed from Buddhism the fundamental concept of the 'mutual arising' of social structures:

> The Buddhist doctrine of "dependent origination, or mutual arising" (*pratitya samutpada*) corresponds to this of Fuller's "synergy". When, on the occasion of the Buddha's silent flower sermon (which is regarded traditionally as the founding sermon of Zen), he simply held out to his congregation a single flower, the only one who understood was his foremost disciple, Mahakashyapa, who quietly smiled at him in recognition. In the symbol, which is almost universal in the Orient, of the universe as a lotus...the Buddhist doctrine is already implicit of *pratitya samutpad*..."mutual arising"; for the petals are not to be interpreted as in any way independent of each other, causal or consequential of each other. The whole system has simply arisen, "thus come" (*tathagata*), like the Buddha himself (Osbon 1991: 247, 248).

While not seeking to overturn the notion of causality itself, mutual arising acknowledges that in historical terms, it is impossible to trace causal threads into a past that is beyond perception, but which has an undoubted influence on the

disposition of present social systems. Causality is instead regarded as more complex, causes and effects 'feeding back' into each other over and again in a relation that could be characterised as endless. Giddens clearly recognised that not only are cause and effect in general radically entwined, but this is especially so of the association between social structure and agency. While Giddens occupies a position within a continuing western philosophical tradition, he has rejected the flawings of his immediate theoretical forebears. Formulations such as structuralism and functionalism were seen to accord too much primacy to the operation of structure in society, and those informed by phenomenology as favouring overmuch the independent operation of agency. Again, a conceptualisation that approaches Giddens' vision on this point has long been expressed in eastern thought, evidenced by the writings of the fourteenth-century Zen commentator Muso Kokushi:

> Causes are complex and have different time scales. The efforts of the individual are not the sole determining factor in the individual's condition in life, because everyone is part of the nexus of society and nature and the continuum of time. It is common for people to attribute causes wrongly because of misperception of real relationships (quoted in Smith 1999: 59).

This is not to discount the validity of agents' own rationalisations of their actions, but to acknowledge the role of structure and other entities in the constitution of social life, about which the agent will not always be discursively conscious. In previous formulations of the the nature of social structure, most often it was set in opposition to agency. No effective method had been found of merging something that was seen to have an objective, embracing and continuing reality with the comparatively evanescent and individualistic decisions of social actors. Giddens' unique contribution

is his reconceptualisation of the nature of structure as an integral part of agents' inner lives, continually reconstituted in the flow of actions within a collective. This conception ensures that agency remains central to an accurate appreciation of the nature of social life. Following is a brief explanation of the way Giddens has achieved this revision.

Structurationism, while recognising the reality of structures in society, argues that they have only a 'virtual' existence as rules and resources 'instantiated' in the structuration of social systems, and also in

> the memory traces (reinforced or altered in the continuity of daily life) that constitute the knowledgeability of social actors (Giddens 1979: 64).

Society and the individual are thus conceptualised in a non-dualistic way, with neither meriting causal primacy in a relationship that is radically recursive — a relationship characterised by the 'duality of structure':

> By the duality of structure, I mean the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices. Structuration enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution (Giddens 1979: 5).

Of central importance to structurationism is the imputation, to active members of society, of both 'capability' and 'knowledgeability'. The first refers to agents' individual and social power, manifested in their potential to engage resources and to always 'act otherwise'. Stated axiomatically, though not all of social life is best understood in terms of 'power struggle', social systems are constituted as regularised

practices 'involving reproduced relations of autonomy and dependence in social interaction'. The notion of relationship here always has a two-way operation, although the power of one party may be much less than that of the other (Giddens 1979: 6). Notwithstanding social inequality, Giddens proposes that all actors possess some power, however modest:

> Those in subordinate positions in social systems are frequently adept at converting whatever resources they possess into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction of those social systems (Giddens 1979: 6).

'Knowledgeability' is a more complex concept, and involves three levels of cognition. One is the unconscious level, admitted, but not extensively treated by Giddens; the next, crucial to structuration theory, is that of *practical consciousness* — 'tacit stocks of knowledge which actors draw upon in the constitution of social activity' — which every individual actor possesses to a great degree; and the last level is the realm of *discursive consciousness*, which involves the knowledge individuals can express about such constitution:

> All actors have some degree of discursive penetration of the social systems to whose constitution they contribute (Giddens 1979: 5).

'Practical consciousness' revolves around familiarity with those 'structuring properties' termed 'rules' by Giddens. 'Rules' in this scheme does not connote any necessary knowledge on the part of actors of their underlying principles, nor even of what the 'rules' are. In fact, rules should not be seen as aggregates of 'isolated precepts'. Rules have no separate existence and are not 'generalisations of what people do', or of regular practices. They are 'the medium of the production and reproduction of...practices' (Giddens 1979: 67). As such, 'rules and practices only exist in

conjunction with one another' (Giddens 1979: 65). The knowledgeability of actors thus resides in the knowledge of 'how to go on' in social life. In this way, the operations of practical consciousness 'enmesh rules and the methodological interpretation of rules in the continuity of practices' (Giddens 1979: 68).

A corollary to the concept of knowledgeability is that of the significance of the *unintended consequences of actions,* which allows for agency while at the same time not insisting on the comprehensive awareness of possible outcomes of action as a requirement for its operation:

> The escape of human history from human intentions, and the return of the consequences of that escape as causal influences on human action, is a chronic feature of social life. But functionalism translates that return into 'society's reasons' for the existence of reproduced social items. According to the theory of structuration, social systems have no purposes, reasons or needs whatsoever; only human individuals do so (Giddens 1979: 7).

Giddens emphasizes that 'social structures' and 'social systems' must at all times be perceived as fundamentally different entities. This is made clearer by the following sketch, which summarizes what has been said so far:

STRUCTURE Rules and resources, organised as properties of social systems. Structure only exists as 'structural properties'.

SYSTEM Reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organised as regular social practices.

STRUCTURATION Conditions governing the continuity or transformation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of systems (Giddens 1979: 66).

In commenting on this representation, Giddens explains further that:

> Social systems are systems of social interaction; as such they involve the situated activities of human subjects, and exist syntagmatically in the flow of time. Systems, in this terminology, have structures, or more accurately, have structural properties; they are not structures in themselves. Structures are necessarily (logically) properties of systems or collectivities, and are characterised by the 'absence of a subject'. To study the structuration of a social system is to study the ways in which that system, via the application of generative rules and resources, and in the context of unintended outcomes, is produced and reproduced in interaction (Giddens 1979: 66).

While social systems have existence in time and space, structures themselves, except in their 'instantiation' in recurrent social practices, do not:

> Structures exist paradigmatically..temporally 'present' only in their instantiation, in the constituting moments of social systems. To regard structure as involving (such) a 'virtual order'...does not necessitate accepting Levi-Strauss's view that structures are simply models posited by the observer. Rather, it implies the existence of: (a) knowledge - as memory traces - of 'how things are to be done' (said, written), on the part of social actors; (b) social practices organised through the recursive mobilisation of that knowledge; (c) capabilities that the production of those practices presupposes...(Giddens 1979: 64).

Time and space are concepts central to the theory of structuration, and it is in its discussion of these that the dichotomous nature of much thinking about society — which for example, would oppose 'individual' with 'community' — is highlighted. Giddens warns against notions that characterise time as either an idealised succession of moments or as a receptacle 'containing experience'. These interpretations fail to acknowledge the realities that (a) neither time, nor the experience of it, is composed of an aggregation of distinct entities; and (b) time (and space for that matter) can only be understood, in practical terms, in relation to objects and events.

> Time and space are the modes in which objects and events 'are' or 'happen' (Giddens 1979: 54).

Paraphrasing Heidegger, Giddens considers that an accurate concept of the experience of time 'is not that of a series of nows, but the interpolation of memory and anticipation in the present-as-Being' (Giddens 1979: 55). Again, action is to be regarded, not as a series of discrete acts conjoined, but as a 'continuous flow of conduct' (Giddens 1979: 55). These statements have obvious meaning for structurationism in their insistence on the mutuality of action and time and space,

none of which can exist independently of the other. Further — as 'action' cannot be understood as standing outside the social systems which pattern and are patterned by it — then time, space, patterns of action, and the structuring properties which inhere in the relationship between actors and social systems, are all necessarily and permanently engaged. If social life is to be understood at all then, it has to be understood, at its most basic level, in terms of 'historically located modes of activity' (Giddens 1979: 56). There is therefore no possibility of perceiving a social life loosed from its spatial and temporal moorings.

> The ontology which structuration theory provides proceeds from an insight that is part of the commonsense shared by social scientists and lay actors alike: all social life is generated in and through social *praxis*; where social *praxis* is defined to include the nature, conditions, and consequences of historically and spatio-temporally situated activities and interactions produced through the agency of social actors. As commonsensical as this insight may seem, in working out its implications, structuration theory departs from and challenges alternative traditions of theory and research (Ira Cohen 1989: 2).

Giddens is critical of both functionalism and structuralism for their attempt to 'exclude time (or more accurately, time-space intersections) from social theory, by the application of the synchrony/diachrony distinction' (Giddens 1979: 62). So, for example, the oft-employed device of describing a society by 'freezing' its patterns in time is seen to be contradictory. As Giddens points out, this practice assumes a conception of structure analagous to that of the girders of a building, or the 'anatomy of the body' — perceptually present in a sense in which social structure most definitely is not (Giddens 1979: 62). For such structure cannot ever be conceived

outside of time, in the 'persistence or repetition of behaviour, in the continuity in social life' (Giddens 1979: 73). Dichotomies related to that of synchrony/diachrony — those such as stability/change or text/context — must be judged, in the view of structurationism, to be similarly defective concepts in their inherent denial of the radical mutuality of social existence. This is not to say of course, that change, or any of the single concepts just-quoted, is not to some extent a social reality. It is to assert, however, that change, for example, should not be understood in terms of any putative opposition to 'stability', and that 'text' can never be profitably abstracted from its constituting milieu.

This is the point of articulation for Giddens' thinking on 'continuity', 'routinisation' and 'de-routinisation' in social life, which concepts are meant to replace those of stability and change. For stability is too passive and static an idea for structurationism, smacking, as it does, of the 'timeless snapshot' of functionalist anthropology, the backdrop against which change occurs. As is now obvious, structurationism regards social systems as existing only 'through their continuous structuration in the course of time' (Giddens 1979: 65). This naturally implies that continuity is an active process, generated by human choice, often on the collective plane. In some cases, the decision-making may take the form of consensual action, though Giddens regards consensus as unnecessary to explain collective structuration. 'Integration', a milder and more realistic form of the concept is sufficient to maintain structural dynamics (Giddens 1979: 76). Moreover, there is no need to view continuity as being always strongly and constantly motivated. Along the lines of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of *habitus,* Giddens gravitates towards the position that much of social reproduction, characterised as 'habitual' or 'conventional', is relatively unmotivated:

> many of the most deeply-sedimented elements of social conduct are cognitively (not necessarily consciously, in the sense of 'discursive ability') established, rather than founded on definite 'motives' prompting action: *their continuity is assured through social reproduction itself* (Giddens 1979: 218).

'Routine action', which is action strongly saturated by the 'taken-for-granted', and implies significant latent acceptance of practices by acting parties, therefore assumes importance in social reproduction (Giddens 1979: 218). 'De-routinisation', simply enough, refers to 'any influence that acts to counter the grip of the taken-for-granted character of day-to-day interaction' (Giddens 1979: 220). Given the fluidity that the 'duality of structure' allows in such interaction, 'change, or its potentiality, is thus inherent in all moments of social reproduction' (Giddens 1979: 114).

Section Six. Conclusion.

It is argued here that structurationism can be directly applied to a critique of oppressive nineteenth-century social theory, clearing the way for empirical evidence to overturn the detail of past prejudices. The Doomed Race Theory was founded on a perception of Aboriginal social structures as rigid entities. Giddens' tracing of the structuration process as dynamic, fluid and always subject to the flow of human action and decision-making allows a revision here in several directions.

It was outlined above that evolutionary theory represented Aboriginal society as timeless, unchanging and homogeneous, 'powered' by a sytem of social constraints that tightly bound individual action (Reece 1996: 29). This tenacious view still has some currency, David Horton confidently asserting the functionalist line that:

> Aboriginal society and culture and religion combine to ensure that Aboriginal society and culture and religion stay the same for all time (Horton 2000: 7).

Still more arrogantly, Horton maintains that

> Aboriginal people themselves believe, and have always believed, that they are an unchanging people in an unchanging land (Horton 2000: 33).

Even acknowledging the obvious fact that the rate of social change must have been far greater after the white invasion than before, the assertion that Aboriginal society lacked the flexibilty to adapt to major change is logically unfounded. Nineteenth-century observers saw the structural rigidity of Aboriginal culture as resulting in entirely predictable (and tragic) responses to external stimuli. Structurationism utterly refutes this predictability, Giddens establishing the agent's capacity to always 'act otherwise' as foundational:

> *There is no guarantee that agents will reproduce regularities of conduct as they previously have done.* For this reason Giddens makes it a matter of principle that: 'the concept of social reproduction...is not explanatory: all reproduction is contingent and historical' (Ira Cohen 1989: 45. Original emphasis).

A important corollary to this insight is that, contrary to nineteenth-century and some much more recent opinion, changes to Aboriginal society need not be apprehended as necessarily resulting from white coercion. Aboriginal people, in just the way described by Mircea Eliade above, had presumably always acted as 'historical beings', and after the European invasion, continued to make choices in response to white intervention. There is no doubt that the scope for this was often

limited to choosing the least of a number of evils. Indeed, at times it must have seemed to Aboriginal people that they were being offered nothing but a suite of constraints. However, short of their lives being taken from them, even constraint presented Aboriginal people with situations that needed decisions to be made:

> In saying that all constraints are complemented by enablements, structuration theory underscores the insight...that no matter how severe constraints may be they always establish opportunities for some more or less extensive range of activities which enables actors to intervene in social life (Ira Cohen 1989: 215).

In the confrontation of black with white societies, the evolutionary view predicted that the rigidity of Aboriginal structures must result in their breakage and ultimate fragmentation. Structuration theory's conception that all social structures readily dissolve and reform in response to change, suggests instead that genuinely indigenous structures may be considered to have persisted in modified forms without any sacrifice of structural integrity. In this way, indigeneity in Australia could be said to be characterised by a flexible continuity. This viewpoint is enriched by Deborah Bird Rose's discussion of customary Aboriginal accommodation strategies, outlined in chapter four.

Further insights follow rapidly from this position. Structural continuity implies the decision to retain cultural elements under conditions of change. One must then agree with William Bascom, who published over forty years ago, that 'continuity and change' should be seen as 'two sides of the same coin' (Bascom 1958: 10). Once Aboriginal society is seen to have continued flexibly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it becomes important to attempt to examine what was retained by

Aboriginal people as essential to their maintenance of indigenous identity and cultural integrity:

> In the works of evolutionary theorists, as indeed in the works of many historians, history itself is equated with change. This equation is repudiated in structuration theory...It must not be overlooked that the structural conditions that influence the course and outcome of even the most massive instances of change are themselves properties of institutionalised systems which were reproduced many times over in the preceding era. Of equal importance...no transitional change, regardless of how epoch-making it may be, sweeps away all of the institutional forms of *praxis* carried out in the past. The analysis of stable and highly routinised activities and systemic relations therefore is as much at issue in historical analysis as the circumstances and events through which change is brought about (Ira Cohen 1989: 278).

This chapter proposed that indigeneity has endured in Australian Aboriginal communities despite enormous pressures for change. That such resilience has been generally discounted in anthropological and historical literature, was seen as due largely to tenacious assumptions regarding the nature of traditional Aboriginal society, originally created by nineteenth-century social theory. Issues were canvassed concerning the effect of these attitudes on research into south-eastern Australian Aboriginal music, and the ramifications for future analysis identified. It was further argued that the proposition of cultural continuity, which echoes the assertions of many Aboriginal commentators, can be supported in detail by modern relationship-oriented social theory, in particular by Anthony Giddens' structurationism.

The specific purpose of this study is to examine the continuity of essential Aboriginality in the music of the New England Tablelands. In order to do this, the early nineteenth-century musical milieu will be described as accurately as possible, before the ongoing development of that culture is explored. This process will culminate in the findings of chapter six, where the evidence of the remarkable Archibald family is presented and analysed. Their testimony will also inform the argument of the final chapter, which reasons that contemporary south-east Australian Aboriginal people can participate in genuinely indigenous tradition without necessary reference to customary forms of expression. In this context, the Archibalds would readily agree with Oodgeroo Noonuccal that

> Much that we loved is gone and had to go,
>
> But not the deep indigenous things.

Chapter Two. A Survey of South-eastern Australian Indigenous Music.

Section One. The South-eastern Region.

a). Introduction.

While the present chapter comprises an analytical description of the indigenous Aboriginal music of south-eastern Australia generally, its main purpose is to introduce the type of musical culture likely to have been shared by New England Aboriginal people at or soon after first contact with Europeans. This is to enable as coherent a survey as possible of the way that indigenous music in this district has developed over the past 150 years. Not only is such a survey inherently valuable, but by applying to this contact base the developmental features exhibited by local indigenous music by the time of the Second World War — especially those relating to text and performance context — it may be possible to discern those elements that were retained by Aboriginal musicians relatively unchanged, and which might be considered by them to be important essences of indigenous cultural identity.

The rationale for examining so large a geographical region is that, with only scant evidence available for the lesser area, either related material is drawn from further afield, or the nineteenth-century musical history of New England must remain shrouded in obscurity. Some methodological justification lies in the fact that there were demonstrably greater similarities than differences between the musical cultures of New England and those of other south-eastern peoples, and as will be shown, between those of the south-east and the rest of the continent. These commonalities will be emphasised by the interleaving of appropriate New England and northern New South Wales examples amongst the broader evidence.

b). Issues Regarding Regional Identity.

In compendia of Australian musical styles, the indigenous musical map of the continent is normally divided into the following regions: Arnhem Land, the central desert, the Kimberley, the south-west, Cape York, and south-eastern Australia and Tasmania. While there are special musical characteristics that partly isolate some of these areas, others may be largely classifications of convenience. Logically, it is necessary to demonstrate that two conditions obtain in any argument for regionality — that the area in question is culturally homogeneous, and that it presents quite different characteristics to other divisions. Furthermore, these premisses require that the evidence drawn from the different regions will be directly comparable. There are impediments to meeting all these conditions in the assessment of cultural regionality for south-eastern Australia. These are summarised briefly below.

The musical region dealt with here is, unlike the others, essentially an historical categorisation, rationalised chiefly on the ground that indigenous performance traditions in the south-east had ceased to operate by the time the more remote geographical areas were being studied in depth. As a consequence, the broad thrust of research into the region's indigenous music has been historical, rather than performance-oriented. The picture that such an analysis presents is determined by the available evidence, which mainly comprises scattered nineteenth-century European observations and analyses, the musical products of cultural 'salvage' operations undertaken systematically here since the mid-1950s, and the rare and recently-elicited musical reminiscences of Aboriginal people themselves. In turn, the nature of this pool of evidence reflects, to a large degree, both the theoretical leanings of those who produced it, and the state of development of contemporary musical research methodologies.

As was outlined in chapter one, nineteenth-century mainstream approaches to ethnological research were informed by the various tenets of the Doomed Race Theory, which dictated both the selection of relevant information, and the way in which it was collected and presented. Furthermore, much of this evidence was gathered by non-experts using research tools that are now considered inappropriate for the recording and analysis of indigenous song. Working together with a typically impersonal, 'objective' approach to interlocutors, these conditions ensured that many of the more subtle technical and meaning-based aspects of south-eastern Aboriginal music escaped coherent European documentation.

Ironically, given the research programme's intense focus on the collection of 'pure' indigenous music, it is quite possible that by the time more reliable recording techniques such as the gramophone were introduced, much indigenous expression was already significantly modified by European influence. To the extent that such influence may have pervaded the indigenous system in a fundamental way, some of its features are now quite indiscernible. Chapter five describes how deeply this methodological confusion has affected the analysis of the indigenous south-eastern tonal system, eroding confidence in the ability of nineteenth-century research results to accurately reflect the south-eastern musical situation. This not only renders comparison with other regions very difficult, but also hampers any attempt to chart more recent local musical developments. Differences between the empirical methodologies employed in the south-east, and the more sophisticated techniques used in later-occupied localities, have resulted in the former region indeed presenting as discrete, but perhaps for reasons related more to European styles of cultural analysis, than to any particular mode of indigenous expression.

Not only do doubts shadow the question of the south-east exhibiting unique musical characteristics, it is uncertain whether the cultures within the region were sufficiently homogeneous to suggest it was ever a discrete cultural entity. Some justification for questioning regional homogeneity lies in the following example of local language-distribution, which shows that significant cultural discontinuities could exist within a restricted geographical area, while at the same time similarities obtained between widely-dispersed and isolated communities. This concerns the central New England language *Anaiwan* (*Nganyawana*), which was superficially so different to the languages surrounding it, that for many years it was considered by European linguists to be an essentially non-Australian tongue (Crowley 1976: 23). Terry Crowley demonstrated that it was in fact related to its neighbours, but had been modified to the point of near-unrecognisability by what he describes as a set of extreme phonological rules (Crowley 1976: 41). Interestingly, while the same rules have altered such widely-separated languages as *Anaiwan*, the Mbabaramic group of Cape York (Crowley 1976: 23), and the Arandic languages of central Australia (Crowley 1976: 45), those lying between these regions have remained unaffected. The *Anaiwan* case is typical of other evidence used to question the concept of culture-regions in Australia. Les Hiatt's study of themes in Australian anthropological discourse highlights considerable and significant cultural diversity amongst Aboriginal groups within geographical regions (Hiatt 1996), and Bob Reece asserts that the assumption of cultural homogeneity before the European era was largely an invention of nineteenth-century scholarship (Reece 1996: 29).

Any examination of regionalisation is of course a discussion about sameness and difference, two fundamentally relative concepts. There are coherent objections to the proposition that the south-east showed marked musical differences to other

regions, and also to the assertion that it did not. As one might expect, close musical analysis has produced results which could be used to support either position, negating the possibility of a simple conclusion. Practically speaking, sufficient similarity has been documented to enable analogies to be drawn between regions without running a serious risk of distortion.

Section Two. Instruments, Song and dance.

a). Introduction.

There are a number of possible approaches to the analysis of early south-eastern indigenous music, their selection depending largely on the understandings one wishes to educe. Two of these are suggested by the following comment:

> A large task for the future is to correlate a synthesis of what diverse early observers have to say about Aboriginal song and dance with the results of recent research into extant traditions (Clunies Ross 1987: 3).

One of the suggested paths (interpreting 'extant traditions' to mean only those of north and central Australia), involves the descriptive survey of characteristic south-eastern features such as musical form and content, performance contexts, and the nature of composition and instrumentation. Overall findings could be used for comparison with those for other regions, to determine stylistic similarities and contrasts across the continent, and to perhaps 'flesh-out' the historical picture with modern evidence. A second strategy (interpreting 'extant traditions' to include those of the south-east itself), is more complex, and seeks to reveal in greater depth the meaning that music has had for Aboriginal people in the south-east, the relationship between music and other Aboriginal cultural/spiritual entities there, and the dynamic procedure of Aboriginal musical practice through its continuing relationship with non-Aboriginal

innovations. This strategy presumes a quite different treatment of the historical material (much of which is *prima facie* unsupportive, having been designed for the first approach), and is based on the proposal that Aboriginal musical history displays significant continuity between older and more recent formal expressions. While any comparison of pre- and post-contact features must of necessity be artificial (as there is of course no pre-contact musical evidence), some discussion of this major issue will be found in chapter five. The ideal approach to analysis would combine these suggested treatments, and to some extent this is what is attempted below and in succeeding chapters. After presenting a brief survey of the documented evidence concerning older south-eastern indigenous music, some details of the less-visible aspects of music-making will be discussed, with reference to the findings of modern scholars in more remote parts of the continent.

Commentators generally agree that when indigenous Australian Aboriginal music is spoken of, what is meant is predominantly vocal music. In fact, Trevor Jones and other scholars consider that there was no performance of strictly instrumental music in 'old style' Aboriginal society (Jones 1965: 368). This seems to be borne out for the south-east, sound instruments probably being used in an integrated role only. Following a short historical survey of instrumentation, examination in this section will be made of musical contexts, types of song, composition and learning. Section three discusses the findings of formal analysis both musical and textual, and provisionally explores the stylistic relationship of the south-east with other Australian regions. Section four will deal with musical meaning systems — including the aesthetics of sound and tone, melody and rhythm — and with gestural and visual performance languages.

b). Musical Instruments.

The foremost musical instrument of the south-east consists of a pair of hand-held clapsticks, struck together to provide a highly percussive rhythm accompaniment. These sticks were often 'purpose-made' in a variety of slender cylindrical shapes, although boomerangs, clubs, and other wooden implements were also commonly pressed into service. Hardwood seems to have been the favoured material of manufacture, Leonard de Silva saying that in his area on the mid-north coast of New South Wales, sticks were made of ironbark or bloodwood. 'Easy wood' was also used however, newly-cut sticks being placed in a fire to 'take the dead sound out and put the (right) sound into them' (de Silva 1994). Leonard said that it was important to have each member of the clapstick pair sounding the same — loud and resonant (de Silva 1994; also Gummow 1992: 171). It seems that clapsticks were generally played either solo or *ensemble* for corroboree dancing, and provided performers with some opportunity to display instrumental virtuosity (McKenzie 1964; Gummow 1984:204). *Gumbaynggirr* musicians gathering at Corindi Beach in northern New South Wales customarily accompanied singing with yellow-bean war-shields, which produced a deep, hollow, powerful tone when struck together, and sometimes used small rocks and unworked driftwood sticks for percussion, these latter apparently in preference to manufactured items (Perkins 1998).

There is reason to believe that the stick-pair was predominantly a man's instrument (Gummow 1992: 171), women using possum-skin 'bundles' for idiophonic expression:

> When the possum skin is rolled into a bundle the hair surface is turned inwards, and, of course, the tighter the bundle, the better the sound it

makes. The bundle is struck with the hand, and is solely a women's instrument (Kennedy 1933: 148).

Apparently small shells were sometimes included in these bundles, so that when struck, 'they made a jingling sound' (Kennedy 1933: 148). Closely related was an instrument Jimmy Barker described as a 'pillow made of kangaroo skin and stuffed with possum fur' that was 'used as a drum' in western New South Wales corroborees (Barker & Mathews 1977: 37). In later years, ordinary kapok pillows and blankets were adapted for the same purpose (Gummow 1992: 174). Evidence from the north coast of New South Wales indicates that a further type of pillow-drum was used there, consisting of a woven reed covering stuffed with grass (Margaret Somerville 1998: pers. comm.).

The use of shell-string rattles has been inferred from the examination of rock engravings in the Sydney region (Kennedy 1933: 153), and rattles made of small bunches of leaves were widely used, either held in the armpit, tied around the ankles of dancers, or shaken by hand (Kennedy 1933: 154; Check 1895; Oates 1985: 118; Meston n.d.; Fraser 1883: n.p.).

Body-percussion was common in indigenous society, mainly taking the form of thigh-slapping and hand-clapping. In both cases, the character of the sound produced could be varied, cupped hands resulting in a hollow 'thud', the flat of the hand eliciting a 'crisper' tone (Morris 1994; Kennedy 1933: 148). John Hunter of the First Fleet made particular note of the use of body-percussion in the Sydney region:

> he was assisted by several young boys and girls who sat at his feet, and by their manner of crossing the thighs, made a hollow between them and their belly, which they beat time with the flat of their hand, so as to

> make a kind of sound which will be better understood from the manner of its being produced than from any verbal description...(Hunter 17/2/1791, quoted in Egan 1999: 227).

Tony Perkins details one more variation, in the use of a special foot percussion employed by seated *Gumbaynggirr* men while singing certain ceremonial songs (Perkins 1998).

Two further examples demonstrate the integration of instrumental- and body-percussion techniques, the first used by men in the following way:

> Their music consisted of two sticks of very hard wood, one of which the musician held upon his breast in the manner of a violin and struck it with the other in good and regular time...(Hunter 17/2/1791, quoted in Egan 1999: 227).

This example is extremely interesting, in that it most likely demonstrates the use of the chest cavity as a resonating chamber, in precisely the same fashion as may have been employed by old-time country fiddlers. A similar philosophy can be seen to inform a practice employed by women throughout the south-east, the following instance recorded from the western fall of New England in the 1850s:

> The women sat round in an admiring circle, chanting in chorus a sort of wild recitation, all the singers beating time, and admirable time too, with their 'paddy melon' sticks on a sort of drum made by a fold of their opossum skin cloaks, which was stretched between their knees...(quoted in Gummow 1992: 81; see also Kennedy 1933: 148, and Mundy 1852, vol. 1: 216).

While the drum proper is considered by scholars to have had no pre-contact Australian distribution outside Cape York, there is some evidence for its use further

south, although this may indicate European influence. Part of Harry Buchanan's description of a *Gumbaynggirr* corroboree contains the following information:

> One man and one woman singer sit at each of the two end fires, and a drummer sits at the middle fire. (Eades1979: 346).

Mr. Buchanan gave the *Gumbaynggirr* lexeme *buljurr* for 'drum', neither the word nor its components apparently having any other meanings in the language (Steve Morelli 1995: pers. comm.). Indeed, *Gumbaynggirr* elder Leonard de Silva considered the drum, which he also called *buljurr*, to have been an indigenous instrument, describing it as a possum hide stretched over one end of a small hollow log (Emily Walker and Steve Morelli 1994: pers. comm.). In the second half of the twentieth century, *Yarrawarra* elder Keith Lardner inherited from his old people the art of manufacturing drums by first forming a circular resonator from stripped bark, and then stretching a kangaroo skin over one of its ends (Lardner 1998). Keith did not know how venerable this practice was however. Other more-or-less supportive evidence exists – Victorian pioneer John Bulmer translates the word *boorinya*, drawn from a Gippsland creation myth, as 'beat the drum' (Campbell & Vanderwal 1994: 41), Gummow records the *Bandjalang* word *bulbing*, normally glossed as 'drum' (though it may refer exclusively to the possum-skin pillow), and Bell cites Taplin's *tartengk* as a *Ngarrindjeri* word for drum (Gummow 1992: 172; Bell 1998: 177). In the light of this admittedly meagre testimony, the depiction in Gardner's drawing (plate 2), of women manipulating drum-like objects at a New England corroboree is tantalising, especially if viewed in combination with the following observation of an indigenous performance, witnessed in the same area only a few years before:

> Picture yourself this number of blacks massed in a body, all elaborately painted white and red before the large fires lighted for the occasion...all

> at once, in time to their rude chant, opening out to the right and left into line with as much precision as soldiers on parade...while they execute a war dance, their spears pointed...as if for throwing, and their feet coming to the ground together, in time to the beat of the gins (White 1934: 226).

Although the objects in Gardner's drawing may represent purely domestic utensils, Finney Eldershaw, whose observations exactly coincide with Gardner's in time and place, stated that the local Aboriginal people he knew possessed no cooking gear of any kind (Eldershaw 1854: 90). Of course that assessment omits consideration of vessels for the collecting and preparation of vegetable foods.

But the picture's own internal evidence is more persuasive. Reasoning from White's representative description quoted above, women were unlikely to be occupied domestically during a corroboree, but should instead have been beating time for the dancers. In the drawing, the women are sitting at the fires which, under the circumstances, could definitely be considered 'corroboree furniture'. More interestingly, they are sitting on their skin cloaks, not beating them, so presumably they are either not participating at all, or are playing another type of percussion instrument. If they are not playing, then only the leaders of the dance, with crossed spears, are providing instrumental percussion. This is of course possible, though the use of spears to keep time has never, to my knowledge, been recorded for the south-east. Yet neither has any description of a drum, which remains the chief objection to any claim for a southern distribution of the instrument.

There is also considerable uncertainty about whether the 'bush leaf', a reed aerophone commonly played by Aboriginal people in recent times, was used in Australia before European invasion. The evidence so far seems to be fairly evenly-

balanced (Bradley 1995: 10). Dick Donnelly and other *Bandjalang* people (Gummow 1992: 176, 177), considered that corroboree music was played on the instrument by Aboriginal people in pre-European times, as did Tony Perkins (1998), Leonard de Silva (1994) and Maisie Kelly (1994). If pre-contact currency were ever established, it might be interesting to speculate whether the leaf performed anything of the same musical role in the south, as does the *yidaki* or *didjeridu* in northern Australia. Residents of the Oban district of New South Wales have described the local performance of Aboriginal music, heard at a distance, as a drone-like 'humming' (Ellis 1984; Newbury 1995). Of course this may have been the sound of singing or even that of the bullroarer, that most sacred initiatory instrument whose name in south-eastern Aboriginal languages is often cognate with the term for 'God' or 'the first man'. It is doubtful though, that the *yuludarra*, to use its *Gumbaynggirr* name, was ever used musically, *sensu stricto* (Berndt & Berndt 1988: 371).

c). The Corroboree.

It appears that the south-eastern Aboriginal musical occasion *par excellence* was the corroboree. This word entered Australian English very early *via* the language of the *Dharuk* people of Sydney, for whom *ca-rab-ba-ra* signified 'dance' (Donaldson 1987: 20). Although a more incisive semantics is no longer possible, the word has a long pedigree of subsequent use, amongst both Aboriginal and white people, as referring to chiefly non-sacred indigenous dance gatherings (Donaldson 1987: 20). The Victorian ethnologist A.W. Howitt puts the case succinctly:

> The songs and dances of the Australian Aborigines are usually spoken of by our own people as '*corroborees,*' and this word is also even frequently applied to any of their social gatherings. This application is,

> however, not correct, for the songs, the song and dances, and the assemblies for social and other purposes have each their own distinctive name. The word '*corroboree*' has been adopted by the settlers from some tribal dialect in the early settled districts, probably of New South Wales, and has been carried by them all over Australia. It may now even be regarded as an addition engrafted upon the English language. The word '*corroboree*' probably meant originally both the song and the dance which accompanied it, as is the meaning of the word '*gunyeru*' in the Kurnai languages (Howitt 1887: 327).

Typical descriptions of corroborees portray men dancing and clapping sticks, with women providing vocal and percussion accompaniment (White 1934: 226). Most other permutations of this organisation have been recorded however (Eades 1979: 346; Oates 1985: 117; Barker & Mathews 1977: 36, 37; Mathews 1985: 105), and both women and men had their own 'closed' ceremonies which featured music and dance (Mathews 1901: 62; Morris 1994). Detailed descriptions of these closed ceremonies are, by definition, either non-existent or unavailable.

It seems that it was common for a 'song leader' to direct musical performances in the south-east. This was no doubt necessary, given the complexity of indigenous music in performance. According to Ellis, such a song leader in central Australia would undergo many years of rigorous training, not only in the manipulation of musical structures, but also in the proper understanding of mythology associated with the songs (Ellis 1997b: 75). A representative description of south-eastern practice is here provided from the experience of William Buckley:

> The man seated in front appeared to be the leader of the orchestra, or master of the band — indeed I may say master of ceremonies

generally. He marched the whole mob, men and women, boys and girls, backwards and forwards at his pleasure, directing the singing and dancing, with the greatest decision and air of authority (quoted in Hill 1993: 32.)

A trait commonly ascribed to corroborees by both white and Aboriginal commentators was 'theatricality' (Donaldson 1987: 20; Gardner 1854; Gummow 1992: 82, 92), a characterisation that underlined both the close connection between music and dance, and the programmatic nature of the performances. Song and dance were often said to be organised 'act by act', each one presenting a stage in the event or process described. Margaret Gummow cites singers who state that corroborees from the north coast of New South Wales might contain up to thirteen such acts (Gummow 1992: 92). Taking an alternative view in his critique of persistent European failures to respond appropriately to Aboriginal communication, Paul Carter regards white observers' theatrical analogies as an intentional trivialisation of the corroboree's political meanings (Carter 1992a: 166). Whether or not it is correct in its detail, this important assertion will be examined in some depth in chapter four.

Occasions for 'getting up' a corroboree were no doubt various, as were their functions, individual characters and group-composition. Although corroborees might involve a very localised gathering of individuals or family camps within the one language-group, commentators often emphasised their 'inter-tribal' nature. This aspect is well-supported by the following paraphrased origin-story from the Richmond River:

long ago there were three brothers, all influential men, who had a difference about their sway in those parts. They were named Birrung, Mum-mor-ni, and Yab-brine. Having had a dispute, Birrung went

> north, Mummorni south and Yabbrine west. The latter introduced the corroboree and it was the means of uniting them all again. (Hewitt 1936: 24).

What Hewitt's account of the myth fails to mention is that the initial separation of the brothers represents the creation of Australian tribal groupings — the institution of social difference (also see Gummow 1992: 30, 31). It is significant that the corroboree is described there as having been created at the same time as the tribal unit, to provide a site for future productive relations between the groups. That corroborees *were* generally considered integrative is suggested by the following description, from the *Northern Star,* of a dance performed in northern New South Wales in 1910:

> It may be interesting to those who were present last evening that the man depicted was a representation of Yabbrine, who, according to aborigines' tradition, introduced the corroborees. He was the youngest of three brothers, the others being named Birrung and Mummoonie, among whom a better end arose. Yabbrine, by introducing the corroborees, brought all the people together in harmony. Hence, it is always a meeting of goodwill, and when, in old times tribal fights were engaged in, and disputes were settled, the corroboree was the finale, and the all dispersed in peace, so the meeting yesterday signified more than a mere performance...(quoted in Gummow 1992: 87).

Isabel McBryde demonstrates that songs and dances were indeed customary articles of inter-tribal trade in the south — often exchanged for material goods — and that corroborees were important features of trading occasions (McBryde 1984:135,143; see also Clunies Ross 1986: 232; Wyndham 1889). R.H. Mathews attests to their use whenever tribes met at initiations (Mathews 1898: 58), and

frequent mention is made of corroborees occurring at large gatherings arranged for feasting, fighting or the settling of disputes (White 1934: 227; Gardner 1854). Dick Donnelly describes how such a gathering might be conducted in northern New South Wales:

> Well, different tribe would show their corroboree you see, we finish ours first, tonight say. Oh, we'd show ours, *Bandjalang*. Well, *Gungari* tomorrow night, see? Somebody else next night. They might be there a month putting all these dances through. That's the way it was...Anyway, very fond...I am of a few of these dances I'd seen, and I learnt some of these songs belongin' to them (Gummow 1992: 189).

In this fashion, individual songs and song-styles could travel right throughout the south-east, often over very long distances. Howitt instances the spread of one song between South Australia, Victoria and the far north coast of New South Wales, involving a journey of perhaps thousands of kilometres (Howitt 1904: 414). It is clear that the trade aspect of corroborees endured for many years after white contact, and there are numerous reports of south-eastern Aboriginal people holding public corroboree performances to which admission was charged, and of performing for whites at the annual government blanket distribution, an important event in the cold south of the continent (de Silva 1994; *Armidale Express,* 28-2-1874; *Glen Innes Examiner*, 17-5-1881, 29-5-1888). This exchange dimension to the corroboree is positively identified in Carter's portrayal of an incident involving the Victorian squatter John Cotton:

> He observed how, shortly after he gave one of the Devil's River tribe a suit of European clothes, 'One of the tribes performed a corroboree or native dance' (Carter 1992b: 169).

The corroboree as a local Aboriginal expression is by no means entirely defunct in the south-east, and it seems that elders in the relatively isolated *Bandjalang* country of northern New South Wales possess the knowledge and skills to pass on their art. While yet other individuals are able to perform inherited dances, difficulty is sometimes encountered in organising suitable music (Maisie Kelly 1996: pers. comm.).

d). Types of Indigenous Song.

> They are numerous, and vary both in measure and time. They have songs of war, of hunting, of fishing, of the rise and set of the sun, for rain, for thunder, and for many other occasions...(Tench 1999: 262, 3).

While there has been a great deal more collection than analysis of the songs of south-eastern Australia, the occasions on which songs were performed and the uses to which they were put have been reasonably well-recorded. Diane Bell provides a handy introduction to this general discussion in saying:

> Music, Cath Ellis...contends, is the main intellectual medium through which Aboriginal people conceptualise their world. She writes:
>
> Through song the unwritten history of the people and the laws of the community are taught and maintained; the entire physical and spiritual development of the individual is nurtured; the well being of the group is protected; supplies of food and water ensured through musical communication with the spiritual powers; love of homeland is poured out for all to share; illnesses are cured; news is passed from one group to another (Ellis 1985: 17, quoted in Bell 1998: 180).

The following outline, which reinforces Ellis' view by demonstrating just how pervasive singing was in south-eastern Aboriginal life, does not attach too much importance to any putative taxonomic schema. In this regard, Diane Bell discusses typologies of *Ngarrindjeri* music, commenting that while different researchers have identified different categories,

> all the...researchers admit that their typologies of *Ngarrindjeri* songs are less than satisfactory, that there are variations within areas, and that they are frequently contradicted by their informants (Bell 1998: 177).

While also acknowledging deficiencies in any attempt at constructing an accurate and multi-purpose typology, Margaret Gummow does takes the process further in recording eight categories of *Bandjalang* songs which are recognised more-or less consistently by the singers themselves:

> *Yawahr*, Shake-a-Leg and *Burun* songs are all identified by their dances; Sing-You-Down, Blessing For Babies and Lullaby are identified by the functions for which they were performed; *Djingan* is identified by the content of the songs; and Jaw Breaker is identified by the language of the song (Gummow 1992: 74ff.).

Norman Tindale also divided the songs he gathered from South Australia into eight categories, none of which corresponds to Gummow's examples, however (Berndt & Berndt 1988: 369). Given below is a summary — comprehensive but not exhaustive — of the recorded evidence for south-eastern song-types. It must be said at the start, that this outsider's taxonomy fails to adequately consider essentially opaque levels of meaning in either the songs themselves (Gummow 1983: 205), or their performance contexts (Ellis 1980: 725). This particular topic will be discussed in greater detail in section three of this chapter.

Corroboree-singing was only one aspect of Aboriginal group musical activity, and as a category represents a cover-all description masking a number of distinct genres. Some of these primarily action-type pieces include: songs composed to describe and celebrate significant events such as frontier conflict with Europeans (Vale 1996; Norton 1907: 101), the first sightings of horses (Horton 2000: 47), sailing ships (Armitage 1933: 96), or railway locomotives (Archibald 1964, Dixon 1980: 53; Bell 1998: 179; Hercus and Koch 1996: 148); songs to make white men go away from Aboriginal country (Goddard 1934: 2 5; Carter 1992a: 166; Swain 1993: 124); songs composed with a didactic social aim (especially McKenzie 1964, where a corroboree-song depicts the unlawful actions of killing game after sunset); songs related to the dance itself, such as the many 'shake-a-leg' or 'shivery-legs' songs (Gummow 1992; Archibald 1964; de Silva 1994), and drinking and gambling songs (Gummow 1983: 249; de Silva 1994).

One other rather more difficult social genre is that of the song-series or mythical song-cycle, celebrating the creation and re-creation of life and landscape by animal-ancestors (Ellis 1980: 722). Strictly speaking, one should not assume, merely by analogy with cultures from elsewhere on the continent, that mythical cycles or 'songlines' must have occurred in the south-east. However, Radcliffe-Brown's evidence that mythical landscape creation was an Australia-wide phenomenon is convincing (Radcliffe-Brown 1929b: 415), and its ramifications for the existence of songlines suggestive.

Isolated songs about significant animals, unfortunately without extensive Aboriginal exegesis, have been collected in the region (Gordon: 14; Howitt 1887; 333; Gummow 1983: 205). While these may be interpreted as generally pertaining to totemic or ancestor relationships, they could represent rituals for species-increase,

totem-assignation at initiation (Radcliffe-Brown 1923: 440-443), or a number of other forms. Jones (1965), Gummow (1983), and Donaldson (1987) have all reasoned that the propensity for 'cycle-building' towards longer song-accretions is inherent in the structure of many southern songs however, and the present author's own research has come upon evidence of creation myths (without song) that seem to cross tribal boundaries in northern New South Wales (Cohen 1980; Laves 1929: 1250).

Although it is possible that south-eastern Aboriginal society sang no series, it is arguable that their existence had been entirely overlooked by early researchers. A parallel situation concerns Radcliffe-Brown's apparent failure to discover convincing local evidence for increase-singing (Radcliffe-Brown 1929b: 409), while other more relationship-oriented researchers were to fare much better in the region fifty years later (Gummow 1992). Tellingly, Radcliffe-Brown made so bold as to assert at the time that, while he did not discover certain particulars pertaining to totemism in his lightning survey of north-east New South Wales,

> It is of course possible that an intensive study of the mythology (which it is now too late to carry out) might have revealed some connection (Radcliffe-Brown 1929b: 414).

The irony here is that Gerhardt Laves was canvassing for mythological data, with considerable success, in the very same general area and at the very time that Radcliffe-Brown wrote (Laves 1929). Radcliffe-Brown's failure in the field seems due, in large measure, to his commitment to a personal version of the Doomed Race Theory:

> It must be remembered that these researches can now cover only a part of the continent. There are many tribes which it would have been possible to study twenty or even ten years ago that are now forever lost

to us, all memory of their former customs having gone (Radcliffe-Brown 1929b: 415).

The failure to record the occurrence of song series should not be borne by Radcliffe-Brown alone. Mathews did not mention them in his ceremonial researches thirty years earlier, and it is possible that, even by this time, the performance of song-cycles had ceased. Evidence from central Australia shows that for these to be properly performed, there is a need for relatively uninterrupted occupation of land by hereditary ceremonial managers. The process is therefore extremely sensitive to social disruption. A major consequence of the 1928 Coniston massacre in the Northern Territory, was that the murder of ceremonial managers left gaps in kinship lines that still confound ritual observance seventy years later (Vaarzon-Morel 1998: 44; C. Ellis 1993: pers. comm.).

A further possible reason for the failure to record songlines is that Mathews and other south-eastern researchers might never have been privy to such ceremonies (Ellis 1980: 723), or if they were, they might not have been able to reveal their nature to others. Again, it may be that researchers did not enter into sufficient relationship with Aboriginal people so as to gain more than a superficial perception of their musical cultures.

The phenomenon of social singing without dancing — in the form of inter-tribal song 'competitions' — has been recorded for the south-east by Radcliffe-Brown and Bootle (Radcliffe-Brown 1929a, notebook 6: 148; Bootle 1899: 4, 5). Other 'non-corroboree' social genres include: funeral and mourning songs (Martin 1964; Howitt 1904: 418; Gunson 1974: 47); marriage songs (apparently used to keep relations between celebrating families 'calm' — Laves 1929: 1269; Medhurst 1895; Holmer 1969: 63); songs sung in connection with 'feasting' (especially the *widji-widji* or

'grace' songs of the New England tablelands — Jay 1995); songs sung during initiations by ceremonial managers (Mathews 1899: 69; Gummow 1983: 90; Gunson 1970; 52; Perkins 1998); songs sung by mothers and other relatives during the process of separating from initiands (Mathews 1901: 62; Morris 1994); entertainment songs, including 'gossip' songs and others composed to pillory or provide social comment (Martin 1961; Dixon 1980: 85; Clunies Ross 1986: 244; Hercus and Koch 1996: 148; Berndt & Berndt 1988: 369); songs of pleading used during 'judicial hearings' (Gunson 1974: 58) and finally, songs which express some form of group solidarity or identity (Buchanan 1973; Gummow 1983: 26).

Most other attested song-categories indicate solo performances, characterised in the main by their potential to directly influence people, events and processes (Ellis 1993). Chief among these are songs or incantations used by 'clever fellers', the Aboriginal 'doctors' found throughout the Australian continent. Their performance highlights the indigenous transitive use of the verb 'to sing', and types include: songs to cure disease and disorders or to ensure future health (Elkin 1977: 39; Laves 1929:1239; Howitt 1887: 334; Gummow 1992: 134, 5; Perkins 1998); songs for ritual execution (Elkin 1977: 152; Gummow 1992; 138); songs 'to make dead men rise' (Laves 1929: 1246); songs to put individuals or whole groups to sleep (Laves 1929: 1243); songs to change from human form to that of an animal or bird for the expedition of travel (Perkins 1998); songs to communicate directly with spiritual ancestors (Elkin 1977: 129; Donaldson 1987: 26); songs connected with the sacred and very powerful quartz crystals (Laves 1929:1222), and songs to start or stop wind and rain (Gordon: 14; Barker & Mathews 1977: 32). Rain-making songs could sometimes have been sung by whole groups directed by the 'clever feller' (Enright

1934: 240), while associated songs to hasten the advent of spring may have been sung chiefly by women (Goddard 1934; Milson 1840; Moyle 1960).

Further solo songs represent a seemingly random variety of categories, some perhaps used only for personal expression, while others retained powers similar to 'doctors' songs, but which were presumably accessible to a wider group[1]. One important intermediate song-class is that for species-increase. Although Radcliffe-Brown, in his published survey of south-eastern totemism, denies the occurrence of increase-singing (Radcliffe-Brown 1929b: 409), his own field-notes seem to contradict him, as does evidence collected by Laves (1929: 1123), W.J. Enright (1934: 241), Tindale (Berndt & Berndt 1988: 369), McKenzie (1964) and Margaret Gummow (1992). Increase songs were said to be like 'hymns' to totem creatures (Radcliffe-Brown 1929a, notebook 6: 37), normally sung only by the individual to whom belonged both the creature and its increase-site, and who was accordingly responsible for their management. Remaining song types include those to stop a thief (Laves 1929: 1223; McDougall 1901: 63); songs to stop a kangaroo (or duck) while hunting (Perkins 1998; Radcliffe-Brown 1929b: 409); songs to cause dolphins to herd fish into shallow waters (Perkins 1998); songs to paralyse a man being pursued (Gummow 1992: 139); 'love magic' songs (Laves 1929:1225); lullabies (Kartomi 1984: 70), and love songs 'to sweethearts' (Laves 1929:1225; Howitt 1887: 334). Bill Cohen speaks of one such love song composed early this century by his father Jack:

> He then started to sing an Aboriginal song in Aboriginal language. The understanding of this Gumbangarri song: a young Aboriginal lad courting an Aboriginal girl and lifting her, with her long black hair

[1] Perhaps it could be said here that it is unlikely that power resided solely in songs themselves, but in the relationship between country, spiritual ancestors, singer, song and 'sung'.

dangling, onto a saddle and taking her home to his tribe (Cohen 1988: 10).

Also recorded are songs rejecting a suitor (Laves 1929: 1274; Gordon: 24); songs sung to express emotional or religious states, including songs to 'God' (Goddard 1934 246; Howitt 1887: 331; Eades 1979: 346; Hoddinott n.d.; Thomas 1905: 50); songs inviting tribes to initiation (Radcliffe-Brown 1929a, notebook 6: 141), and songs celebrating the coming home to one's people (Martin 1964; McKenzie 1964).

e). Song Creation.

Most modern researchers involved with indigenous Australian tribal musicians record the bequest of new material, by ancestors, to living song-makers *via* dreams (see Stubington 1979 and Ellis 1985). This is also well-documented for the south-east, perhaps representatively so by A.W. Howitt:

> The makers of the Australian songs, or of the combined songs and dances, are the poets or bards of the tribe and are held in great esteem...the songs...are obtained by the bards from the spirits of the deceased, usually their relatives, during sleep in dreams...The bard who composed this song came of a poetic stock. His father and his father's father before him are said to have been 'makers of songs which made men sad or joyful when they heard them'...There are other poets who composed under what may be called natural influences as distinguished from supernatural. Umbara, the bard of the Coast Murring told me that his words came to him 'not in sleep as to some men, but when tossing on the waves in his boat with the waters jumping up round him' (Howitt 1887: 329-31).

Margaret Gummow provides several instances of such dream-composition from the *Bandjalang* area, and cites similar accounts from elsewhere in northern New South Wales (Gummow 1992: 181, 2). Howitt also notes the complementary process of composing under more mundane circumstances, and this is again supported by Gummow, who details how Raymond Duncan and Jack Barron composed *Bandjalang* songs in the 'ordinary' way (Gummow 1992: 179). This apparently sometimes involved the composer lying on the ground, which may have an analogue in the compositional technique of Milerum of the *Ngarrindjeri* who,

> by lying on his back on the land...could make contact with the power of his country (Bell 1998: 193).

An interesting variation to composition-through-ancestors – that of songs being given by God – intersects with discourse relating to the existence or otherwise of a pre-contact south-eastern belief in a Supreme Being. Archdeacon Gunther of the central-western New South Wales Wellington mission made the following observation early in the nineteenth century:

> Nor must I omit to mention that there has been from time to time, *i.e.* every three or four years, a curious ceremony performed among the blacks, several tribes being assembled, which appeared to be a remnant of some religious rites. A song was sent for the occasion by Baiami or his son, which was sung by those assembled; a solemn procession took place, certain mysterious figures painted on pieces of bark of men and other objects were displayed at the time (quoted in Thomas 1905: 51).

The mention of *Baiami* indicates that this may have been an early example of a *bora* ceremony, which the historian of religion Tony Swain regards as a post-contact phenomenon. Further discussion of Swain's ideas will be found in chapter four, but it

is perhaps interesting to note here that Gunther's observation could illustrate the subtle re-fashioning of compositional protocol (or its discourse) in response to the European presence. The learning of songs following the visitation of God was also documented by A.C. McDougall for *Gumbaynggirr* culture. Speaking of the *Gumbaynggirr ngulungurr* or clever men, McDougall explains that they were visited by *Yuludarra* when it was necessary for them to learn certain healing songs:

> The Ulun-garras leave camp and retire to the tops of the mountains at certain seasons of the year...They are believed to actually swallow the bingi-burra (quartz stone) given to them by Uli-tarra, who visits them in their retirement and teaches them how to use the stone and to chant the necessary songs...(McDougall 1901: 64).

Another way that new songs and corroborees could be composed in south-eastern Aboriginal society involved the composer either travelling, or being taken to a special place to be 'shown' the song by minor deities. The following shorthand account was found in R.H. Mathews' field-notes, and relates to the *Gamilraay* of north-west New South Wales:

> The Wah-wee [and songmakers] – little creature lives in deep waterholes. Clever man can go and see him and get a new song. First must paint himself all over with red ochre. He follows after the rainbow some day when there's a shower, and the end of the rainbow rests over the waterhole in which is the wah-wee's abode. He contacts wah-wee who sings him a new song for the corroboree. He repeats the song after the wah-wee until he has learnt it sufficiently and then starts back to his own people. When they see him coming, painted red all over and singing, they know he has been with the wah-wee. This 'doctor' [bard]

> then takes a few of the other headmen with him into the bush and they strip pieces of bark off trees, and paint different devices on them with coloured clays. These pieces of bark, ornamented in this way are then taken to the corroboree ground and all the men dance and sing the new song. This is how new songs and corroborees are obtained (Mathews, field-notebooks Series 3 Folder 13. Original emphasis).

In another instance, the composer is taken under the sea to be taught the song and dance:

> my old man, grandfather, made a corroboree song there, you know...he was sort of a clever man, he was...Yeah you see, he was under the sea for a week...They come down here lookin' for him. They didn't know where he went, but, when they come back to Evans Head...they're feeding him on brandy...he was cold...They were feeding him on brandy, when he come back, and he got all right then and he made that song...You see, he seen 'em corroboreeing, all the women...he must have been under the sea – they must have took him – all the witches from the seaside like – under the sea... (Gummow 1992:115):

That this basic situation could be further complicated is shown by the following example of alternative *Gamilraay* practice, which seems to combine all the previously-discussed elements of dream-visits, God, and travelling to a special place to learn a song:

> Wallatu was the god who presided over poetry. He also composed music. He came in dreams and transported the individual to some sunny hills, where he inspired him with supernatural gifts (Goddard 1934: 244).

It is clear from the evidence given above that songmakers occupied a special place in Aboriginal society, and may have had powers akin to those of 'clever fellers'. Such an exalted status probably extended to song-owners generally, although this area remains obscure for the south-east. It is quite possible that the local situation paralleled that obtaining in central Australia, where profound song-knowledge brought with it

> private wealth, supreme social prestige, and political power (Ellis 1997b: 60).

f). Musical Education.

Unfortunately, very little is directly known of indigenous music education in the south-east, beyond the Wah-wee's evidence that the most fundamental mechanism involved in learning songs was probably imitative. However, it would be mistaken to characterise musical education as merely mimetic, and Ellis argues that while rote learning might characterise the earliest steps in a *Pitjantjatjara* child's musical education, the overall learning process

> is not one of memorising innumerable individual items and learning their appropriate groupings, but it is one of knowing the structural principles that are being deliberately and creatively manipulated in order to produce a living and energised performance (Ellis 1997b: 61).

As Ellis repeats often in her published work, this process takes many years of sustained effort, lasting well into adulthood. The well-attested role of song-leaders in south-eastern musical practice emphasises the importance of correct performance, and suggests that the learning of music was complex and protracted there also. The following description of musical skill in modern *Anbarra* society might well have applied to south-eastern song-leaders in the nineteenth-century and earlier:

> These performers are real specialists. First they have to keep in mind all the customary song words and melodic phrases appropriate to between twenty and thirty song subjects. Then they must be able to perform them, often for long periods, improvising their choice of customary phrases, rather like a jazz singer does, in short verses of set structure...Another skill the singer has to master is the creation of a continuous but variable rhythm for each subject, which he beats out on a pair of hardwood clapsticks...In some situations these singers may also be directing a group of dancers (Clunies-Ross 1994: 76).

The lack of detailed information regarding music education in the south-east is due chiefly to the structural shifts local Aboriginal society has experienced over the last fifty years. However, it can be inferred from the abundant evidence of music's significance in Aboriginal social life, that learning must have been a most important social process. Something of the nature of that process may be gleaned by examining stated reasons for its putative cessation. Diane Bell flags this heuristic strategy in her analysis of *Ngarrindjeri* history:

> The attacks on language and the attack on ceremonial life struck at the core of certain sorts of knowledge in an oral culture. While the songs were sung, the places and their stories were secure. But it was a long process by which one learnt the songs, and gained sufficient status to be able to sing them. It required time spent with the old people, time on site at sacred places, time in the country learning while doing (1998: 182).

Gummow says much the same thing when she canvasses reasons for what is described as a decline in old-time Aboriginal cultural expression:

> Singers often need to be at specific sites or places to perform the...songs that they...remember. Performance prerequisites and contexts for performances are, however, constantly changing as European influence increases...suitable performance contexts are becoming increasingly difficult to arrange, and this may be one factor in the decline in performances (Gummow 1995: 130).

But, as Gummow intimates, these particular factors are not entirely sufficient to account for a complex situation which Aboriginal people themselves have partly managed. Both in my own field-research and in the writings of others, examples abound of elders deciding against transmitting certain cultural knowledge to younger Aboriginal people. This has occurred for a number of reasons, many of which, while remaining obscure (see Gummow 1992: 64, 67), will be discussed further in chapter six, which touches upon the role young people may have played in keeping Aboriginal culture 'up-to-date'.

That situation does highlight the importance of mutuality in the educational relationship, where a desire to teach and a concomitant desire to learn are fundamental. It also underscores the seriousness with which Aboriginal people regard the dissemination of cultural knowledge. In her *Ngarrindjeri* survey, Bell emphasises that the protracted nature of music education, necessary to ensure that students learned well and thoroughly, was a direct consequence of fears that incorrect performances could lead to 'unwelcome' consequences (Bell 1998: 182).

Given the orality of Aboriginal musical culture and its orientation towards place and purpose, certain conditions must have been absolutely necessary for effective education to continue relatively unchanged. As Bell and Gummow both suggest, these would presumably have included some security of tenure in or near

one's own country, the opportunity for repeated 'hearings' of particular performances, and most importantly, sufficient reason to perform music, whether for ceremonial or other purposes.

Section Three. Formal Analysis.

a). Texts.

The main published textual work for south-eastern songs has been carried out by Tamsin Donaldson, who has explored both the nature of language-change in selected *Ngiyampaa* songs from western New South Wales, and the structural variation experienced by these songs during the process of their transmission. Donaldson has identified textual cues for dancers in songs from the far-west of the state (Donaldson 1987: 36ff), while Margaret Gummow has done the same for the east (1985, 1992). The latter has also isolated rhyme and rhythm patterns in New South Wales Aboriginal songs, including those with macaronic texts, and demonstrates that similar patterns were applied to lines in both English and Aboriginal languages (Gummow 1983: 99, 249). This indicates that English textual elements were able to be incorporated smoothly into basically indigenous musical structures, a reverse of the better-documented process whereby purely Aboriginal texts have been set to common European airs (Donaldson 1984: 231; Buchanan 1973; Donaldson 1995). 'Macro' textual structures have also been examined by Donaldson and Gummow, and both identify the two-section form as being endemic in south-eastern Aboriginal song. Singers have been shown to sometimes manipulate certain textual mechanisms, so that these typically short texts may be extended, by repetition, according to the demands of performance (Donaldson 1987: 36; Gummow 1987).

From the time of first European contact in south-eastern Australia, singers have told researchers that they do not understand the words to some of their songs (Dixon 1980: 54; Howitt 1887: 329; Gordon: 13). This textual opacity may be attributable to a number of factors. As already mentioned, the wide diffusion of songs throughout the region must have resulted in their performance by 'foreign' language speakers (Gummow 1992: 89). On the other hand, some songs are considered to employ archaic words from the home language (Dixon 1980: 54) or yet a special song-language whose meaning is purposely obscured from the uninitiated (Ellis 1980: 725; Clunies Ross 1986: 242). R.H. Mathews posits a further possible cause, based on a proposition popular with researchers up until quite recently. In presenting the transcriptions of several songs noted from the south coast of New South Wales, Mathews comments that

> It may be mentioned that the words of these chants possess no meaning to the present natives, having been handed down from one generation to another. They were probably in the language of conquering tribes in the past (Mathews 1901: 63).

In addition, it should be emphasised that the typically abbreviated and allusive expression of Aboriginal songs must rely, for effective communication, on a very closely shared cultural experience (Clunies Ross 1986: 242; Radcliffe Brown 1923: 440). Over the course of time, factors relating to transmission may introduce enough variation into a text — or social circumstances might change sufficiently — so as to reduce the transparency of an otherwise-plain meaning, even to members of the same or a very closely-related language-group (Donaldson 1984: 240ff.). On the other hand, because the meaning of songs could possibly have been conveyed by tone-production, gesture, pitch and rhythm (subjects which will be dealt with below) as well as by

words (Ellis 1997b: 59), perhaps there was a greater intuitive understanding of foreign-language songs than is commonly supposed. In spite of the general tendency towards obscurity, there is evidence that the language of imported songs was sometimes modified to accommodate local dialects, perhaps even investing them with a new and invigorated meaning (Jones 1965: 289; Donaldson 1984: 247; Howitt 1904: 414).

b). The Relationship of Song and Dance.

Regarding the relation of song to dance here, it is not known how far the immediate demands of the dance influenced song-composition itself. It has been said that dancers, at the level of the individual step, took their immediate rhythmic cues from percussionists, not the singers (de Silva 1994). While this would make sense when it is taken into account that sung melodic rhythms were normally much more complex than the single-beat rhythm of women's percussion, the patterns produced in Willie Mackenzie's recorded performances show that clapstick rhythms may at times have been quite intricate (Mackenzie 1964).

The case could have been different, however, regarding the subject-matter of the dances, which may have, to some extent, directed the technical aspects of the making of songs. For example, just as Aboriginal languages contain names for birds and animals constructed on principles of onomatopoiea (Dixon 1980: 106; Ellis 1985: 68-70), so might song-texts and melodies reflect, in their technical (including rhythmic) construction, local perceptions of creatures they portrayed. There is at least one recorded example of a south-eastern corroboree song known to contain onomatopoeic allusions (Gummow 1987: 3), while this and other songs are recognised as utilising verbal and musical cues related closely to the *structure* of the

dance they accompanied (Donaldson 1984: 37, Gummow 1992: 92-94). In this way, dancers may well have taken their cues from singers, but only at the structural level.

c). Music.

Developing somewhat the generalised conclusions given in the previous chapter, very early accounts of contact suggest that it was occasionally possible for Europeans to appreciate and to a limited extent understand the differentiated structures of south-eastern Aboriginal music. The following description, by New South Wales' Judge-Advocate David Collins, must surely comprise the first published European musical analysis of Australian indigenous singing:

> A party who went to the eastern shore to procure fire-wood, and to comply with the desire the natives had so often expressed of seeing them land among them, found them still timorous; but being encouraged and requested by signs to sing, they began a song in concert, which actually was musical and pleasing, and not merely in the diatonic scale, descending by thirds, as at Port Jackson, the descent to this was waving, in a rather melancholy soothing strain. The song of *Bong-ree*, which he gave them at the conclusion of theirs, sounded barbarous and grating to the ear: but *Bong-ree* was an indifferent songster, even among his own countrymen. These people, like the natives of Port Jackson, having fallen to the low pitch of their voices, recommenced their song at the octave...their singing was not confined to one air; they gave three (1789? Quoted in Gummow 1992: 78, 79).

Collin's references to western musical concepts here, will be dicussed further in chapter five.

There has since been much more extensive musical analysis undertaken of south-eastern songs, the main works being those of Torrance (1887), Moyle (1960), Jones (1965), Kartomi (1984) and Gummow (1983, 1985, 1987, 1992). After each of these studies is considered in its turn, some comparisons will be made of their findings. It must be said at this point that, as there is no consensus as to whether the use of fixed pitches operated in old-style Aboriginal society, and as Ellis considered Jones and Moyle to have assumed an adherence to a western-style pitch system, references to scale organisation in the following analyses should be treated with caution.

While Margaret Gummow's major *opus* comprises a detailed analytical survey for the *Bandjalang* group of northern New South Wales (1992), the work most relevant to the immediate examination concerns her close study of 69 separate song-performances, recorded from four widely-separated areas of New South Wales (1983). After analysing her material, Gummow made certain broad conclusions, summarised briefly as follows.

Melodies were found to be generally descending, exhibiting definite tonal plateaux and regular 'intoning' of the final keynote. Pentatonic, heptatonic and hexatonic scales predominated. Melodic progression was basically by step – both ascending and descending – and although some leaps of as much as an octave were found, these were typically placed between, rather than within phrases. Two types of tonal organisation occurred, one where the tonic was the lowest and final note of the song, and the second – considered by Gummow to be a special feature of the sample she examined – where material was arranged centrically around the tonic. Songs were found to adhere to two basic structures, the 'varied repeat' and strophic forms, while a minority appeared to be through-composed. Rhythmically, the sample was described

as predominantly syllabic, occasionally isorhythmic, and contains numerous documented examples of both isometre and heterometre. Gummow noted the occurrence of some rhapsodic, melismatic, highly-ornamented material from the *Bandjalang* area, which she believes may represent a women's style. Otherwise, the most common rhythmic types found were simple- and compound-duple, simple- and compound-triple, with additive rhythms occurring occasionally (Gummow 1983: 270ff). Margaret Kartomi's analysis of one *Bandjalang* lullaby produced features agreeing in principle with Gummow's findings. This song displayed a stepwise-descending melodic contour, followed a heptatonic scalar progression, but had no distinct tonic. Rhythmic organisation was isometric and isorhythmic (Kartomi 1984: 70-73).

Alice Moyle has analysed the music of the two Tasmanian songs, recorded from the singing of Mrs. Fanny Cochrane-Smith in 1899 and 1903. Moyle recognised each as belonging to a different genre, distinguished by her as 'corroboree' and 'legato' styles. The former she found to have a melody which first ascended before descending to a 'reiterated ground tone', with an anhemitonal pentatonic scalar structure set within the compass of an octave. Rhythm was syllabic and isometric, and notated in triple time. The legato song she analysed as having a basically downward-pushing ornamented melody, though organised centrically around the tonic, and bearing the same scalar structure as the corroboree. Its rhythm was found to be rhapsodic and melismatic. Moyle compared the two Tasmanian songs with corroboree songs recorded along the southern coasts of South and Western Australia. A significant difference was found in the area of melodic procedure, where the Tasmanian examples both ascended and descended while the mainland songs all exhibited descending melodies. After briefly surveying early historical descriptions of

Tasmanian music, especially Bonwick's characterisation that 'songs do not exceed the compass of a third', Moyle carefully concluded that:

> Tasmanian song styles were widely varied. It seems that they ranged from monotone reiterations to songs of a relatively sophisticated nature, such as the 'legato' or 'Spring' song' (Moyle 1960: 75).

In 1887, G.W. Torrance conducted a cursory analysis of the performances of William Berak (or Barak), a Victorian Aboriginal singer. Torrance found that melodic compasses in Berak's songs rarely exceeded a third, minor intervals predominating in a step-wise descent to an intoned keynote tonic. A brief melodic ascent was noted for one song in his sample. Rhythm was strongly marked and apparently heterometric, alternating 'suddenly' between 'duple and triple' times. Some explanation for the preponderance of narrow compasses noticed by Torrance (and perhaps by others, including Bonwick for Tasmania) occurs in the following notes to two of his transcriptions:

> This song was repeated...a third lower, and sung through to the same sound...This drone or chaunt is repeated *ad lib.* as long as the ceremony lasts, a tone lower each time, and accompanied throughout with clapping of hands and stamping of feet (Torrance 1887: 339).

It seems obvious that what Torrance classed as entire melodies, merely repeated a tone or a third lower, modern analysts would likely regard as verses or sections of a larger whole. Berak's material is therefore likely to have exhibited structures similar to other southern Australian examples.

The present author has undertaken summary analyses of the music of some *Gumbaynggirr* songs, for the sole purpose of increasing slightly the available south-eastern analytical sample. While his findings did not vary from those remarked upon

above, the songs of Granny Florence Ballengarry of the New South Wales central-north coast were interesting in the light of previous descriptions of a 'legato' style of singing (Ballengarry 1974). Granny Ballengarry's songs are sung slowly, in free rhythm, and their melodies, ornamented by portamenti and single and double grace notes, proceed melismatically. Considering the comments of Moyle and Gummow *supra*, it may be that the suggestion of a characteristic south-eastern women's style can be further supported, although the evidence for it remains slight. Again, while her seemingly European-influenced melodies may not render much further assistance on this point, the songs of another *Gumbaynggirr* woman, Junie Mercey, suggest the possible existence of a discrete and integrated women's repertoire (Mercey n.d.). It seems a short step only from the recognition of a women's repertoire, to the confident consideration of a women's style of performing it.

Trevor Jones has analysed the bulk of the sound recordings housed in the archives of the University of Sydney as *The Elkin Collection* (Jones 1965). Like Gummow, he arranged his sample according to geographical area, and of the twelve 'regions' he examined throughout the continent, two occur in the south-east. Jones' results do not differ materially from those of the other analysts, although something further will be said of his comparison of south-eastern with other Australian styles.

A very basic picture of the most general technical features of south-eastern Australian song can be traced from the foregoing descriptions. Although there is some evidence for regionalisation within the south-east, particularly in the occurrence of isorhythms in songs from the Corner Country of New South Wales (Gummow 1983: 274), it seems to be suggestive only, and stylistic unity is perhaps more noticeable. Having said this, Catherine Ellis did consider that the songs of south-eastern South Australia were also distinctive in their display of the following characteristics:

> (i) highly ornamented upper note which never occurs at the start of a song, but as a central or final climax; (ii) no clear tonic; (iii) free rhythm, with some changes of tempo; (iv) many ornaments, particularly on upper notes...(quoted in Bell 1998: 167).

It is not certain upon what material Ellis based this description, which seems to correspond with that of the 'women's style' recorded from elsewhere in south-east Australia. It might therefore provide better evidence for some south-eastern regional homogeneity than clear-cut intra-regional diversity.

Generally speaking, most south-eastern melodies have been characterised as descending step-wise, through intoned tonal plateaux, to rest on an extended final tonic. Scales used are described as predominately pentatonic and hemitonal diatonic, the latter consisting mainly of six or seven tones. Melodic compasses were perceived as typically moderately-wide (mostly around an octave), and melodic rhythm as primarily syllabic. Syncopation was noted to have been achieved through the use of various technical components (including glottal-stopping), and isorhythm and isometre seem to have been stable features. Simple times were most commonly transcribed — in two, three or four — with compound two and three occurring less frequently. Percussion accompaniment was characteristically 'four-square', with some evidence of stick-beating styles that employed considerable rhythmic variation. Songs as transcribed normally comprised short sections, most often two, that were presumably extendable to form longer cycles. Vocal styles may have varied widely. From the foregoing analysis, features that might be considered special to — without being necessarily definitive of — the south-eastern region, comprise centric tonal organisation, heterometre, and a 'legato' singing-style characterised by free-rhythm and a melismatic, ornamented melodic procedure. Presenting a slightly divergent

view, ethnomusicologist Linda Barwick, in commenting on one particular South Australian song, characterised as typically south-eastern its following features:

> The use of ascending as well as descending movement in the contour, the pitch range of more than an octave, the use of discrete pitches rather than microtonal subdivisions and portamenti (quoted in Bell 1998: 168).

The last of these quoted features raises important issues which will be discussed more fully in chapter five's examination of the possible European influence on indigenous melody.

d). Comparison Between the South-east and Other Australian Regions.

The basically comparative results of Jones' survey found that diatonic hemitonal scales predominated in the south-east and in many other areas, particularly in the north of the continent. Overall, Jones found six- and seven-note scales to be reasonably well-dispersed throughout, as were melodic compasses of around an octave. A generally descending contour was found in all 166 melodies analysed, the vast majority finishing with the tonic, but a few showing centric tonal organisation. In common with areas all over Australia, Jones found that the south-eastern region used duple and quadruple metres, with triple times (especially compound triple) being rare everywhere. Australian songs were classed as overwhelmingly isometric, heterometre occurring only once in his sample, in north-central Australia. Rhapsodic rhythm was also found to be very rare, while isorhythm predominated in all areas. Sectionalised structures were the universally-found norm, and Jones interpreted the predominant structural type to be strophic, assuming a tendency in even short sung examples towards repetition and 'cycle building'. Finally, Jones observed that there appeared

little difference in vocal quality or technique from one area to another (Jones 1965: 285ff).

After Jones published his findings, Alice Moyle prepared a general map of Australian song-features which illustrated significant stylistic similarities for the whole continent, really isolating only Cape York in the north-east (Moyle 1966: xv-xvii). This seeming homogeneity could reflect methodological problems in research such as the lack of a unified 'micro' analytical approach, the difficulty in obtaining indigenous taxonomies for all regions, or the bias of dominant analytical techniques towards eliciting stylistic similarity rather than difference (Nettl 1983: 320). It is clear however, that there are also non-technical continuities, such as those relating to performance contexts, the circumstances regarding song-composition (Stubington 1979: 20; Howitt 1887: 330), and the 'power-laden' qualities of songs throughout the country (Ellis 1993). Gummow certainly considered that

> the music of New South Wales has general characteristics in common with music from the rest of Aboriginal Australia (Gummow 1983: 277),

and the comparative situation is probably accurately described by Ellis when she says:

> tribal music has broad similarities through a region where there are many differentiations of style (Ellis 1980: 727).

Section Four. The Context of Musical Meaning.

a). Introduction.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, some undoubtedly important aspects of south-eastern Aboriginal music-making either escaped the attention of European observers, or were recorded with little understanding of their possible

significance. This situation can be mediated somewhat by referring the more simplistic European observations to the findings of researchers, most notably Catherine Ellis, who have worked with modern Aboriginal musicians in northern and central Australia. Although this type of comparative research has been widely discussed in the Australian archaeological literature and uncritical or careless analogies roundly condemned, it is felt that there is some justification for its limited use here, given both the lack of relevant local evidence, and the provisional conclusions regarding Australian musical homogeneity.

In the earlier discussion of the opacity of song-texts, the idea was mooted that language may not have been the sole medium through which music imparted its message to south-eastern Aboriginal people. Catherine Ellis here characterises the *Pitjantjatjara* experience of musical communication as a complex layering of meanings:

> The music cannot be fully understood without reference to the meaning of the extramusical information with which it is related...In this way many pieces of information are presented simultaneously. The rhythmic pattern and songtext can refer directly to one event in the story, and to others by implication. The body design on the dancers can signify a different aspect of the story. The dance step, which is tied to musical structure through the beating accompaniment, may depict yet another piece of information, while the dancers themselves represent the personality attributes and characteristics of those whom they portray. Melody, as well as indicating the nature of events taking place in the ceremony (painting, dancing etc.) acts as a constant reminder of the essence, the 'taste' of the ancestor (Ellis 1985: 92-94).

This description may well apply to an historical south-eastern situation only dimly perceived by nineteenth-century European observers. Before moving on to a fuller discussion of aspects of south-eastern musical meaning-systems, something should first be said of local Aboriginal aesthetic attitudes to sound.

b). The Aesthetics of Sound.

There is very limited evidence available for how south-eastern Aboriginal people may have perceived musical sound. Almost nothing is known of the singing-styles, tone-production or aesthetic preferences of south-eastern Aboriginal corroboree singers, although Leonard de Silva stated that it was important for performers to be well-synchronised, and that the singers make a good, strong, unified sound (de Silva 1994; see also sub-section c]. below). The situation is a little clearer for sounds produced by musical instruments. Many published vocabularies include words for particular sounds of all sorts, and Margaret Gummow has abstracted those that relate to musical percussion from various *Bandjalang* grammars. These include: words for the noise made by hitting two hard objects together; knocking sounds; clapping sounds; rhythmic sounds (e.g. of footsteps or boomerang-tapping) and rattling sounds (Gummow 1992: 172). It is not clear whether these *Bandjalang* words were formed on onomatopoeic principles, but that *Bandjalang* people did possess an acute appreciation of percussive sound and its production is suggested by Charlotte Page's description of the pillow-drum of *Gidabal* women:

> the sound it used to make – the sound used to go a long way. You wouldn't think it was a pillow, but they just knew how to do it. They clap that see – they held it like that and they hit it with their hand and it

used to make some lovely noise. *A real sound you know* (Gummow 1992: 174. Emphasis added).

The overwhelming importance of percussion instruments to south-eastern Aboriginal people is evident from the discussion of musical instruments at the start of this chapter. These instruments would seem to represent a sophisticated array of percussive sounds that, invoked in combination, could produce a richly-layered rhythmic texture. In the basic attested musical organisation of a south-eastern ceremonial occasion, combined percussion would be provided by the stamping of the dancers upon a specially-hardened earth 'dancing-floor' (Gummow 1992: 176), by stick-players and by pillow-drum beaters. Add to these the unison-singing of many voices, the possibly 'optional' sounds of rattle and body-percussion, and — all these practices contributing their own unique qualities — an impressive sonic picture results.

c). The Language of Sound.

Elder Tony Perkins has considerably expanded the available core of evidence for an Aboriginal sound-aesthetic in his discussion of the meanings of non-percussive tone in his own *Gumbaynggirr* society (Perkins 1998). Mr. Perkins spoke of the different relative emotional valencies borne by high-pitched and low-pitched tones – the former typically expressing feelings of fear, worry, grief or despair, while the latter evoked reassurance, peace and a feeling of control. This was further said to reflect the gender orientation of vocal pitch-production, a phenomenon noticed by John Currie, a pioneer settler in *Bandjalang* country. His description of an 1875 corroboree contains the following comments:

> First of all the men lead off with sonorous tones. Then the women, with their shrill voices, joined in at intervals (quoted in Gummow 1992: 168).

Catherine Ellis makes the connection between high-pitch, gender and intense emotional expression in recording her experiences in central Australia . In describing the women's 'wailing' that accompanied the death of a member of the group with whom she was working, Ellis says:

> It sounded unlike any other Aboriginal vocal production that I had heard. The pitch was very high...and great prominence was given to the top note of the wail...two years after the original incident, this wailing occurred during (a)... totemic ceremony. In the midst of a thrilling performance...one woman began to wail. I could hardly continue recording, so great was the shock I felt (Ellis 1985: 66).

Further emphasising the point that there were messages or meanings in the quality of sounds, Mr. Perkins instanced the always-negative connotations of the death-bird's 'high screech', and told of being taught never to throw a pipi shell, as the high-pitched whistle that resulted could generate harmful consequences. Again, as a young man, Mr. Perkins witnessed his elders singing to dolphins from a headland, directing the creatures to herd sea-mullet into shallow waters to render the fish easily-caught. He stated that when this occurred, it was obvious to him that the communication's power and meaning resided in the *sound* of the singing, and that the words, if merely recited, would not have had the required effect. In another case, Sylvester Ellis, who had significant relationships with Aboriginal people from eastern New England, stated that he knew there was some sort of 'signal' in the sound of the bull-roarer (S. Ellis 1984).

Despite Trevor Jones' conclusion that indigenous vocal production demonstrated uniformity across the country, earlier descriptions indicate that it may have varied between language groups and even amongst individuals within groups. While the evidence is suggestive only, individual south-eastern vocalisations have been variously described as soft and musical (Tench 1999: 98), harsh, grating, soothing (Gummow 1992: 168), sonorous and finally, shrill (Gummow 1992: 168). Ben Cherry enjoyed the 'soft' quality of Aboriginal singing on New England (Cherry 1987), while Watkin Tench demonstrates that Bennelong was capable of producing a variety of vocal timbres:

> It was observed that a soft gentle tone of voice which we taught him to use, was forgotten, and his native vociferation returned in full force (Egan 1999: 198).

In applying all this information to what was said earlier in regard to the learning of songs by Aboriginal people — despite a lack of understanding of their text-languages — it is likely that the sound of the song itself may well have resonated across language boundaries. George Taplin offers strong support for this view in his observation that

> The Narrinyeri are skilful in the utterance of emotion by sound. They will admire and practise the corrobery (ringbalin) of another tribe merely for the sounds of it, although they may not understand a word of the meaning. They will learn it with great appreciation if it seems to express some feelings which theirs does not. They may not be able to define the feelings, but yet this is the case (quoted in Carter 1992b: 36).

That the semantics of south-eastern Aboriginal languages may have been generally mediated by context and pitch-production, is suggested by the following nineteenth-century account from the New England region:

> The various expressions conveyed by the peculiar 'Ay, ay,' so constantly used by the natives in speaking, is perfectly indescribable. It is used doubtfully, positively, interrogatively, or responsively, as the case may be, and contains in itself a whole vocabulary of meanings, which a hundred times the number of words could not convey in writing (quoted in Carter 1992b: 34).

This observation is extended specifically to musical situations by the opinion of Mrs. Eliza Dunlop, who glossed her translations of the texts of a number of *Gamilraay* songs in the early 1840s with these words:

> Very much more is contained in the few words they repeat so often than I can properly explain. I understand them, but it is impossible to convey their full meaning (Goddard 1934: 245).

d). Melodic and Rhythm Languages.

Although there seems to be no evidence to suggest the existence of specific melodic and rhythm languages for south-eastern Australia — the perception of which may well have been too subtle for non-specialist observers — these have been positively identified for central desert musical cultures. Catherine Ellis points out that there, particular melodies or rhythmic patterns may retain an unvarying meaning, although sung to various language-texts (Ellis 1985: 106). The example below explains this in more detail, and also demonstrates the difficulty with which these insights are educed, even for the expert researcher:

> Rhythm may carry factual information. I have gathered, from field experience, that performers may learn the specific meaning of a song from the rhythm of the text so that either the text or the rhythm can convey the same information. The suggestion that this is possible arose when I was recording a long Dreaming songline which crossed a number of tribal boundaries, and I was playing back a recording of an earlier portion of the song to a singer who lived in a more northern area and who did not know the dialect of the recorded performance. He constantly maintained that a particular small song on the recording was about a claypan and that he knew it quite well. It was only careful analysis of his version which determined that he was drawing his conclusions on rhythmic and not linguistic grounds (Ellis 1985: 103, 4).

There is no reason to reject the possibility that specific rhythmic patterns also had certain meanings for south-eastern Aboriginal people, especially given the demonstrated sophistication of the rhythmic dimension to their musical culture. Tony Perkins certainly allowed for this possibility when he described a special foot percussion used to accompany particular *Gumbaynggirr* ceremonial songs, and which indicated rhythmically that initiands had now passed into manhood (Perkins 1998).

e). Gestural and Visual Languages.

There were yet other ways in which the meaning of songs might resonate with a foreign-language audience, one being through gesture. From the following and other descriptive observations, it is clear that south-eastern Aboriginal singing was very

often accompanied by a parallel gestural expression, which, as Howitt demonstrates, was learned together with the dance, as part of the whole-song 'package':

> With some songs there are pantomimic gestures or rhythmical movements, which are passed on from performer to performer, as the song is carried from tribe to tribe...A very favourite song of this kind has travelled in late years from the Murring to the Kurnai. It was composed by one Mragula, a noted song maker of the Wolgal, describing his attempt to cross the Snowy River in a leaky bark canoe during flood. The pantomimic action which accompanies this song is much fuller than the words, and is a graphic picture...(Howitt 1887: 330-332).

It seems that even the newly-arrived Europeans could sometimes glean meaning from Aboriginal singing, and David Collins' account shows his sensitivity to communication by both tone and gesture in a reasonably volatile contact situation:

> These people, like the natives of Port Jackson, having fallen to the low pitch of their voices, recommenced their song at the octave...which was accompanied by slow and not ungraceful motions of the body and limbs, their hands being held up in a supplication posture, and the tone and manner of their song and gestures seemed to bespeak the goodwill and forebearance (*sic*) of their intentions (quoted in Gummow 1992: 78, 79).

Lending tacit support (pun unintended) for the assertion that gesture was indeed important in Aboriginal society, Adam Kendon attests to the currency of sophisticated sign-languages in much of south-eastern Australia in the nineteenth-century. He cites

relevant historical references that include most of the New England language-groups, one white resident of Tenterfield saying:

> They also spoke on their fingers similar to the deaf and dumb (quoted in Kendon 1988: 41).

But musical gesture should be given an extended definition here, one not restricted to the upper-body movement that presumably comprised sign-language. While John Von Sturmer makes the claim for the whole-body significance of Aboriginal dancing in the north of Australia:

> Here the body speaks — directly and in its totality (Quoted in Carter 1992a: 183),

Watkin Tench describes the passion of indigenous dance movements closer to home:

> Some dances are performed by men only, some by women only, and in others the sexes mingle. In one of them I have seen the men drop on the ground and kiss the earth with the greatest fervour, between the kisses looking up to Heaven. They also frequently throw up their arms, exactly in the manner in which the dancers of the Friendly Islands are depicted in one of the plates of Mr. Cook's last voyage (Tench 1999: 263).

G.C. Mundy was also alive to the vibrant communicative potential of the dancers' movements in the corroboree he witnessed in Sydney in 1846 (Mundy 1852, vol. 1: 216ff). The fact that this visual communication implicated designs painted on the thighs of the dancers introduces the last category of musical communication I wish to briefly touch upon, that of painted decoration.

Ellis and others have documented the close relationship of song to painted body-design for central Australia, and both the *Wah-wee* and Wellington Mission

stories given above, suggest that designs for painting on bark were given to the songmaker along with the new songs and dances. Illustrations and photographs of south-eastern ceremonial occasions overwhelmingly attest to the importance of body-design to music (Sayers 1994), but there is unfortunately very little other information to which one can refer this evidence in order to gain a deeper understanding. It would be reasonable to assume that the dramatic dimension to the use of paint and other decoration was significant in itself. It has been often recorded that once painted-up, performers could no longer be recognised as their former selves. The transformative potential of body-painting may well have enhanced the power of ceremonies to actually transcend the reality of the present, to cement identification with ancestors and otherwise gain maximum emotional effect. Watkin Tench's description of the richness of dancers' body-decoration captures some of that ambience:

> I have already mentioned that white is the colour appropriated to the dance, but the style of painting is left to everyone's fancy. Some are streaked with waving lines from head to foot; others marked by broad cross-bars, on the breast, back and thighs, or encircled with spiral lines, or regularly striped like a zebra. Of these ornaments, the face never wants its share, and it is hard to conceive anything in the shape of humanity more hideous and terrific than they appear to a stranger — seen, perhaps, through the livid gleam of a fire, the eyes surrounded by large white circles, in contrast with the black ground, the hair stuck full of pieces of bone and in the hand a grasped club, which they occasionally brandish with the greatest fierceness and agility (Tench 1999: 263).

The foregoing descriptions are persuasive in their suggestion that tone, melody, rhythm and visual aspects all combined to present multi-dimensioned meanings in south-eastern Aboriginal musical performance.

Section Five. Conclusion.

This survey has attempted to provide a broad yet reasonably detailed picture of nineteenth-century Aboriginal music-making in south-eastern Australia. It has suggested that this culture was diverse, while exhibiting many similarities with indigenous Australian music generally. Music and dance were seen to occupy the very core of Aboriginal social existence, the integration of various meaning systems into the musical paradigm resulting in a cultural experience of considerable subtlety and complex richness. Unfortunately, defective methods of enquiry and a lack of research interest in certain areas have resulted in serious gaps in this musical narrative. Many of the less concrete dimensions of music-making escaped the notice of European observers, and even some major musical entities such as song-cycles remain unrepresented. Notwithstanding this partial obscurity, Catherine Ellis' assertion that any understanding of indigenous Aboriginal music must refer to both musical and integrated extra-musical information, seems to be well borne-out for the south-east Australian experience.

Succeeding chapters will build on the findings of this survey to construct their own arguments. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Aboriginal musical development will be surveyed in chapter five, while the analysis of chapter six will attempt to isolate certain of its enduring essential characteristics. Before that can take place however, it is first necessary to focus on the New England region itself, to examine

the implications of its contact history, and to introduce the social milieu within which important indigenous musical phenomena have arisen.