Chapter 5

Implicit Space and the Geography of Land Allocation Practice on the Southern Gulf Lowlands of Cape York Peninsula

This chapter looks at the geography of land allocation practice in Kowanyama. This analysis is undertaken within the spatial constraints of a model of seasonally available space in the landscape similar to that developed for Pormpuraaw in the previous chapter. Representations of social space in the townscapes and landscapes of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama are then compared in order to identify and explain trends in the geography of land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands region in the 1990s and early 2000s. The chapter concludes with a review of the influence of the DOGIT tenure on local practice since 1987 as an illustration of implicit space and of the ways in which local and State, or ‘absolute’ and ‘abstract’ space (after Lefebvre 1991) have coincided to create ‘heterotopia’ and a suite of hybrid land allocation practices that are unique to the southern Gulf Lowlands in the 1990s and early 2000s.

5.1 Homeland allocation practice in Kowanyama

Kowanyama has a Land and Natural Resource Management Office (KLNRMO) which was set up by the Community Council in 1990 to coordinate community land management in response to State government interest in assigning pastoral and mining leases over community lands and to reduce commercial fishing pressure on community fisheries in the Mitchell River Delta, and then later on in the 1990s to coordinate homeland planning and construction. The office receives direction from the Community Council and a ‘Counsel of Elders’ (Sinnamon 1997). The latter comprises representatives of the main tribal groups in Kowanyama. As shown in Chapter 3, being part of Kokoberra, Kokoberrin, or Yir Yoront and Yir Thangedl, or Kunjen and Olkola ‘tribe’ is the main form of social identity in Kowanyama. When office meetings are held or committees are set up to review community land management issues in KLNRMO then their representation is usually divided between these populations. There is always an unstated quorum to these meetings where if there are not sufficient representatives from any of these groups present then business does not
proceed. The actual membership of the Counsel may change depending on the nature of the business being conducted. Different people from each of the tribal groups may attend meetings to discuss community natural and cultural resource management policy, Native Title, Cattle Company or homeland business (Monaghan 2003c). The day-to-day operations of KLNRMO are explained in more detail in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Kowanyama Council did not fund its first homeland until early 1998 and as of 2003 there are 20 homelands on DOGIT land. In all I have spent about 20 months of that time between 1998 and 2003 living in Kowanyama and working at KLNRMO, and returned there again in February 2004 to take up my current position as Manager.

The ethos of homeland development in Kowanyama, which is equally recognised by the Community Council and by traditional landowners or Elders, is one of promoting self-sufficiency. The council funds homelands where demonstrable progress has occurred in converting a location from an occasional dry season camp site to a more permanent homeland settlement. There are many such camp sites throughout the DOGIT which provide potential homeland locations. There are four or five places that are focal homeland sites for tribal groups where in past years people have gone for extended stays or ‘holidays’ in their traditional country during the dry season. Many others are in abandoned cattle yards where fencing still exists or timber is available from derelict yard buildings, or they are adjacent to lagoons. They usually comprise shelters constructed from ‘star pickets’ or fencing posts and blue tarpaulin, with bed frames or breeze-block bases and old sink units supported by timber frames providing the furniture (Plate 5.1).

Those homeland groups who demonstrate a clear intention to occupy their homeland sites are provided with council support in the form of tractors and trailers, and assistance in retrieving building materials from derelict houses in town to make their camps more habitable. Once a site is established, infrastructure support in the form of fencing and water supplies, and concrete foundations for more permanent residential structures are supplied as funds become available. The minimum infrastructure requirements for each site are stock-proof fencing, a shed for residence, water and solar energy supplies, and toilet and shower facilities. A sum of around $20 000 has
been allocated in the past for ‘start up’ costs for each site and CDEP (government-funded Community Development Employment Programme) labour is used in their construction and maintenance. CDEP ‘homeland workers’ are paid for four days a week if they continuously reside in their homelands during the dry season. Longer-term aspirations are for the construction of permanent homes at some sites with the provision of between four and six houses depending on the number of families who live there. Some groups aspire to permanent occupancy for between 30 and 40 people in their homeland and are looking at the development of cattle grazing or fisheries or aquaculture enterprises to sustain these new communities and for the development of infrastructure to service them in the wet season when they are almost entirely inaccessible due to prevailing flood conditions.

Plate 5.1: A dry season camp in Kunjen country (Kowanyama Collection)
As at Pormpuraaw, decisions about where to locate homelands on DOGIT land and who should have access to them have been based on local criteria and negotiation between traditional owners, and have not involved any mainstream government agency to date. Socially, homeland groups are invariably identified either by the name of their leader, the surname of the dominant affiliate family, or by the name of the place or country where their homeland site is located. Affiliation, based on mother’s country or father’s country, usually underwrites the setting up of a homeland and the endorsement of all of the people with these affiliations is always sought before a homeland group proposes to establish a site. The traditional owners of a proposed site may already be resident at a homeland site elsewhere, or have no interest in a current homeland enterprise. Nevertheless, their validation of a homeland proposal is required. Permission of this kind is like obtaining a lease in that it permits people in a homeland group to live at a place without any traditionally inalienable or primary rights to that place being ceded to them by its owners.
The homeland group leader’s immediate kin and those of any of their brothers and sisters, and the partners and offspring of any of their children are usually the people who will live at a homeland site. Otherwise, membership of a homeland group is by invitation. It appears that people do not put themselves forward and ask to join a homeland group. If there is a sufficient number of uninvited people, who are proximally related in both a geographical sense to country, and in a social sense to family, then they may form their own homeland group and look for a homeland site elsewhere within that region that is available to them. For instance, there are two homeland sites in Yir Yoront country and another six in Kokoberra country that are located close by to each other and which are a product of this process. Also, a homeland group may subdivide if it becomes too large, or because no consensus can be found between members of the group, for instance, on land use policy for their homeland. It is possible at any time that a person may be nominated for more than one homeland because of their popularity, or knowledge of the landscape, or because of their kin relationships. Ultimately that person has to select one of the sites available to them as it is universally accepted that it is not possible for a person to live in two places at the same time. Though there are some people who do drift between sites, for casual hunting or fishing trips, but they are rarely called upon when a homeland group is mustered, for instance for the lobbying of KLNRMO or the Community council for more financial support for their homeland.

Size and sociability, as well as family relationships are other important criteria in homeland group formation. The group must never be too big, no more than about 25 people, and everybody in it must get along with each other (Ezra Michael, pers. comm). As well as a stable and identifiable leadership and a corporate spirit based upon a reasonable number of reasonable people, the age and gender balance of a homeland group are also important to its success in Kowanyama. Chapter 3 discussed the significance of a demographic profile that includes high reproductive potential in the number of young women who are amongst its members and good dependency ratios in the number of adults of working age in relation to the number of children and old people for a viable homeland group. Successful homeland groups have enough members to ‘talk their country up’, in other words to make continuous assertions of authority over their homeland within the community. They also have personnel,
largely men and women in their 20s and 30s, who have the ability to coordinate a wide range of activities such as the ordering and delivery of homeland construction material or food supplies; the supervision of homeland site construction and maintenance; and, the confidence to act as spokesperson for their group. As a consequence of their demographic composition, some homeland groups have the capacity to exercise greater influence in community land affairs, or make more vocal demands for a greater share of available funding to develop their own homelands. One of the roles of KLNRMO is to temper these demographic inequalities. KLNRMO deals with homelands on a ‘first come first served’ basis and the allocation of funds for their construction is monitored continuously by community residents in order to ensure

‘nobody take too much .... everybody have a fair go’.

As well as financial support, local measures of the success of a homeland group include the moral support it has within the community and related to that, the degree of practical control that it exercises over its country. Whether, this is control of hunting and fishing, the exercise of ritual control over the landscape, or of community enterprises such as cattle or tourism operations that take place within their homeland area.

Hunting and fishing are largely regarded as communal rights in Kowanyama for local people and for long-term White residents. As a matter of courtesy, permission is always sought of an owner if hunting or fishing trip is planned in their country. This is invariably granted unless some past transgression has occurred such as camp debris or litter not being cleared up, wastefulness such as the dumping or the spoliation of a fishing catch, or failure to share any past successes in fishing or hunting. Homeland groups monitor their country with levels of surveillance that ensure the movements of visitors to their country are common knowledge in the township within hours of their arrival. Surveillance is maintained for two reasons: to make sure that fish or other wildlife are not being unduly taken and to ensure that places that have particular potency in local mythologies are not disturbed. There are certain places that if trespassed upon have powerful properties that have ramifications for the health and well-being of those people in town who are linked to these places by totemic affiliation. In some places the visitor or transgressor is also put in peril. There has been
some debate in both Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw about whether maps that reveal the location of these places should be issued to visitors to DOGIT lands or even posted at the roadside. The general feeling is that it is better for everybody if this was done. However, some people are reluctant to impart their knowledge of these places and commit it to maps, probably as it implies a surrender of the control that they may have over those areas of the landscape. Also, some people feel that maps or roadside signs may provide an invitation for the curious and otherwise uninformed to visit these places (Plate 5.3). The general procedure is that visitors to community lands must be accompanied at all times, except when they are staying on designated camp sites which are managed by KLNRMO and supervised by community rangers.

Plate 5.3: KLNRMO rangers and community road signage (Kowanyama Collection)

Homeland groups sometimes assert control of certain types of community land use in their areas. Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw each have a cattle herd that was inherited from the State administration at the time of the DOGIT transfer in 1987. A company with a board of local people administers the cattle operation in Kowanyama, and in
Pormpuraaw a manager employed by the Council runs the community herd. Both enterprises have been subject to the fluctuating fortunes of the North Australian beef industry over the years. The Kowanyama company barely covers its costs even though overheads are low and there is little infrastructure to maintain. Almost all homeland groups aspire to run a cattle operation, either for subsistence or as a commercial enterprise (for instance mustering or bull-catching services) to support their homeland, and this has led some owners to question the use of their lands by the Cattle Company. One group has contracted themselves out to muster Company cattle on their land and are making an income for their homeland from these operations. Others are considering payment for agistment rights to their traditional country, although the company does supply them with a ‘killer’ from time to time as a form of payment for these rights. Some homeland owners have acquired their own horse brands and have thus signalled a possible future intention to have their own cattle herds. Negotiations are under way between the Cattle Company and landowners in Kowanyama about ways in which community cattle operations can be devolved to their homeland areas. An outcome of this is that some groups have built mustering paddocks in their homeland country since about 2001.

Kowanyama also has a number of camps for recreational fishermen who visit the community. Fishing permits are limited and demand for them, for which payment of a fee is required, is always high and never satisfied. The traditional owners of each camp site are consulted before the start of the fishing season on whether sites should remain available and if so how many people may be allowed to fish there that year and a proportion of the fees that are received are paid into their homeland account. Sometimes the owners instruct KLNRMO that a camp area be closed for that year either for ritual reasons, such as the death of a person, or for conservation reasons if it is felt that fish stocks are insufficient to satisfy both visitors’ recreational and local peoples’ subsistence needs.

Ritual control of the landscape is most evident following a death in the community. This is a time when no person may enter the traditional country of a deceased person as it is assumed that the spirit of the deceased is residing there and ‘finding their way home’. Traditionally, this ban may last for up to a year (Sharp 1937) but nowadays it usually lasts for between three and four weeks to between four and six months.
depending on whether it is the wet or dry season and on demand for access to the area by homeland occupants or by Council work gangs. Sometimes these closures can cover large areas of country. For example, a death in early 2002 involved the closure of the person’s traditional homeland country, the country surrounding the camp where he spent the night before the day he died and the country surrounding the place where he died. All of these places are in widely separate locations and they were closed simultaneously. When the deceased’s family lifted the mortuary ban they had to ritually cleanse or ‘smoke’ each area before people could enter them again.

In summary, there are two levels of local authority over land in Kowanyama in the early 2000s. The first is in the area of land and natural resource use and this is held to be a regional authority shared by tribal groups in Kowanyama. Nested within this regional scale space are smaller enclaves, or homelands, where rights of ownership and of ritual control of the landscape are exercised. These two forms of authority are not entirely dichotomous and they intercalate in a number of different ways through the southern Gulf Lowlands region. Homeland groups in Kowanyama differ in terms of the kinds of the protocols that they use and the authority that they exercise over land use. Also, some homeland groups function as an autonomous unit where one family controls a homeland area; others have merged into corporate units that aspire to control large areas of the landscape. These corporations usually comprise members of the same ‘tribe’ or regional language group. They may not just confine themselves to looking after their own interests but may also sponsor other aspiring homeland groups. The relationship between these two scales of social space and the influence of proximity to traditional country and of access to seasonally available space in the landscape on land allocation practices within them are reviewed in the rest of this chapter.
5.2 Seasonally accessible space in the Kowanyama landscape

The procedures for developing the cartographic model that described seasonally accessible space in the Pormpuraaw landscape in Chapter 4 of this thesis are applied to Kowanyama and to the adjacent Mitchell River/ Alice River National Park (Figure 5.1). The latter area is included because it has been nominally transferred from the Queensland Government under the *Aboriginal Lands* Act (Queensland 1991) to Kunjen people who are the traditional owners of this country who live in Kowanyama. The transfer has not been formally completed because, as with other National Park ‘transfers’ in Queensland, no co-management agreement has been made that is acceptable to the traditional owners.

The Kowanyama model was initially created for an evaluation by KLNRMO of the economic and cultural significance of community wetlands (Monaghan 2001). It has also been applied to a mapping of cultural landscapes and their natural resource properties in the wider area of the Native Title interests of the people of Kowanyama in southern Cape York Peninsula (Monaghan 2003b). The only difference with the Pormpuraaw model, even though satellite images of the same date were used to map wetlands, is that simple combinatorial algebra rather than a logistical regression model
Figure 5.2: Wet season space in the Kowanyama DOGIT: February 1991 (Monaghan 2001)
Figure 5.3: Dry season space in the Kowanyama DOGIT: August 1994 (Monaghan 2001)
Figure 5.4: Accessible space and seasonal landscapes in the Kowanyama DOGIT (Monaghan 2001)
was used to create a dry season ‘timeline’ of surface water distribution from surface water mappings of different dates. This is because ‘wet-dry’ and ‘wet-wet’ transitions within wetlands between dates were much clearer in the Kowanyama landscape than in Pormpuraaw where many of these values were masked by more extensive dry season burning of that landscape (see Chapter 4).

Accessible space is defined geographically in terms of proximity to water in the dry season, and the distribution of areas of dry ground in the wet season. The latter were identified in a LANDSAT TM image of February 1991 (Figure 5.2); and, the former areas that are within a two kilometre radius of a waterhole in an image of August 1994 (Figure 5.3). It is a smaller proximal value than that used for defining accessible space in the Pormpuraaw landscape because there are more permanent wetlands in a smaller area in the Kowanyama landscape. Figure 5.4 is a conflation of Figures 5.2 and 5.3 and shows seven distinct regions that satisfy both wet and dry season accessibility criteria. An eighth region comprising the Mitchell River Valley is inundated by water in the wet season and acts as a barrier to potential movement between the other regions, and between the area of the Kowanyama township and the northern and eastern reaches of the DOGIT. After the wet season floodwaters have receded, movement between regions is still constrained in the early dry season by high water levels in the main river courses that intersect them.

Each of the eight regions comprises a distinct landscape with a unique suite of seasonal wetland types and territorial affiliations, seasonal constraints to access from Kowanyama, and cultural and economic values to the community (Monaghan 2001). In terms of territorial affiliation, 549 named places have been recorded in the DOGIT area (David and Cordell 1993; Sharp 1937; Strang 1994; Taylor and Sinnamon 1976; Taylor 1997, 1999). They include the location of traditional camp sites, and story places or ritual sites such as increase or conception centres and their concordance in terms of their language or tribal affiliation with each of the above landscapes is summarised in Table 5.1. This table also includes the core, proximate or peripheral status of each of these tribal groups in terms of the proximity of their traditional country to the Kowanyama township (see Chapter 2).
Table 5.1: Percentage number of affiliations of each language group in each landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANDSCAPE</th>
<th>Yir Yoront</th>
<th>Yir Thangedl</th>
<th>Kokoberra</th>
<th>Kunjen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kowanyama Hinterland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutland Boundary</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coastal Woodland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell River Valley</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell River Delta</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Park (Mitchell R)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Park (Alice R)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleman River</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proximity to township: Core, Proximate, Peripheral

The Kowanyama township is located in the Kowanyama Hinterland. This landscape has the widest range of territorial affiliations of all of the regions though it is largely Kokoberra country with tracts of Yir Thangedl and Kunjen country on its northern and eastern margins. There are territorial affiliations between Yir Thangedl and Yir Yoront speakers in the northern half of the DOGIT in the Mitchell River Valley and Mitchell River Delta landscapes; and between Kunjen and Olkola speakers in and beyond the eastern margin of the DOGIT, and in the National Park. The Alice River landscape in the National Park is primarily Olkola country though Kunjen and Olkola people present themselves as part of the same claimant group, as do Yir Thangedl and Yir Yoront people, in Native Title and Land Claim business. The landscape boundaries in Figure 5.4 do not entirely coincide with language boundaries. For instance, Yir Thangedl territory is spread across four adjacent regions, even though it has clear boundaries along the major watercourses within them. Yir Thangedl and Yir Yoront are closely related linguistically and each group of people considers themselves to be members of the same tribal group. Geographically, these populations are separated by the Mitchell River and by extensive wet season flooding. Neither Kokoberrin nor Olkola people have any of their traditional country inside the Kowanyama DOGIT.

If one compares the distribution of named places, or traditional sites, with the distribution of wetlands in the later dry season landscape (Tables 5.2 and 5.3), then there are discernible relationships between the potential area available for occupation and use, and the number of sites recorded and their relative seasonal proximity to differing types of wetland. In-stream lagoons are permanent water bodies within the course of the main river systems. Swamps are a prominent feature of the early dry season landscape and have mostly evaporated by the later dry season. Open lagoons...
are precipitation-fed water bodies and are found on higher ground, in particular Sand Ridge country, in the area of the relict drainage systems that bisect most of the Kowanyama landscape.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANDSCAPE</th>
<th>Instream Lagoon</th>
<th>Open Lagoon</th>
<th>Swamp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mitchell River Valley</td>
<td>262 (349.80)</td>
<td>33 (11.25)</td>
<td>511 (536.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kowanyama Hinterland</td>
<td>31 (37.06)</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>169 (70.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Coastal Woodland</td>
<td>4 (0.95)</td>
<td>2 (0.38)</td>
<td>140 (119.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Mitchell River Delta</td>
<td>269 (125.56)</td>
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<td>5. Coleman River</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Total Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>608</strong></td>
<td><strong>392</strong></td>
<td><strong>958</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| (Area) in hectares |

Chisquare = 1664.633, df = 12, significance = 0.000 at 95% confidence level
Likelihood Ratio = 1706.009, df = 12, significance = 0.000

Table 5.2: The number and area of wetland types in the later dry season landscape

All of the recorded traditional places are located within 1000 metres of a wetland in the later dry season (Table 5.3) and thus demonstrate a close concordance to the seasonal distribution of fresh water similar to that described for the Pormpuraaw landscape in the previous chapter. As with that population no consideration of site function is made in this analysis; though, there are probably differing types of territorial specialisation in the Kowanyama landscapes. Of the 98 places recorded in the Mitchell River Valley, 91 are covered by water in the wet season, and 80 are located within 250 metres of a wetland in the later dry season. These wetlands comprise mainly in-stream lagoons in the Mitchell River and its anabranches, and shallow water swamps that remain from the area of wet season inundation. This distribution implies seasonal mobility between wet and dry season places in this landscape. By contrast, 61 of the 187 sites recorded in the Hinterland region that is
Table 5.3: Proximity of named places to wetlands in the wet and later dry season landscape

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<th>4</th>
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<td><strong>DRY SEASON</strong> PROXIMITY</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

Proximity in metres

**Inundated in Wet Season**
Pearson chi-square = 52.679, df = 24, significance = 0.001. Likelihood ratio = 46.018, df = 24, significance = 0.004.

**Dry in Wet Season**
Pearson chi-square = 57.424, df = 24, significance = 0.000. Likelihood ratio = 49.451, df = 24, significance = 0.002

accessible from the Kowanyama township lie between 500 metres and 1000 metres distance of a wetland, many of which are permanent open lagoons. The number of recorded sites and the extent of permanent wetlands in this landscape complements early reports on how densely populated the area was at the time of European contact (Gribble 1933; Roth 1903; White 1917) and settlement may have been relatively sedentary compared to the other regions in this mapping. Regular year round harvesting of fish, eggs and lilies from the same wetlands in both the wet and dry seasons continues to be an important subsistence strategy for Kowanyama people today.

The most remarkable feature of the distributions in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 is the disparity between landscapes in the number of recorded sites that they contain. The Coleman River landscape is known locally as the ‘Wet Desert’ because of its groundwater and salinisation problems and does not have a single traditional place recorded anywhere within its extent. The distribution probably reflects actual geographical variation in the distribution of knowledge of places in the wider landscape, rather than differences due to historical mapping effort by ethnographers (Cordell and David 1993 in Yir Yoront)
and Olkola country; Sinnamon and Taylor 1976 in Yir Yoront and Yir Thangedl country) and more recently in mapping for the validation of land claims by the community under the Aboriginal Lands Act (Queensland 1991) over the Kowanyama DOGIT and the Alice River/ Mitchell River National Park (Taylor 1997 in Kunjen and Olkola country and Taylor 1999 for Kokoberra country). Apart from Sharp’s mapping, all of the other sites were identified by present day residents of the township. The gaps in knowledge of the landscape that are apparent in the above mappings are also complemented by gaps in the distribution of homeland sites and in the low frequency of hunting and fishing trips within these areas. Even though some of these tracts of country are very accessible from the Kowanyama township, they are little used. The nature of this unevenness in the apparent spatial distribution of knowledge of the landscape and its significance for current land allocation practice is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

5.3  **Seasonally accessible space and land allocation practice in Kowanyama**

All of the present day homelands in the Kowanyama DOGIT are situated within three of the regions identified in the above model. They are the Kowanyama Hinterland, the Mitchell River Valley and the Mitchell River Delta. Land allocation practice is reviewed within these three regions in terms of the kinds of authority in access to homeland sites, and to hunting and fishing, and in ritual control of the landscape that are exercised by homeland groups within them.

5.3.1  **Land allocation practice in the Kowanyama hinterland**

Almost the entire population of traditional owners of this landscape lives in Kowanyama. There are nine homeland sites with four in Yir Thangedl country, two of which are in close proximity to the township. Another four are in Kokoberra country and the remaining two are in Kunjen country. This landscape also encompasses the main community cattle operations with yards at Yalko and Red Lily. It comprises wide open grass plains in Kokoberra country that form large swamps in the wet and early dry seasons. The greater part of the landscape, within about a 15 kilometre radius of Kowanyama, comprises a series of smaller wet season swamps that are separated by low sandy ridges that support a mixed woodland of Coolibah, Eucalypt, Bloodwood and Nondah trees. These ridges also have a number of permanent lagoons within them.
and allow people to move around this landscape even in the most extreme wet season conditions.

The Kowanyama Hinterland might be viewed as a ‘Mission’ landscape in the sense that the patterns of land use and of authoritative control that prevail over it now are what the church almost certainly intended for Kowanyama in the years that it administered the community. There is an open space of natural resource use that is shared by all community members which also contains separate homeland spaces. These latter places are not totally exclusive, on visits to them over the past five or six years, people from all areas of community life who have no traditional affiliation to the country may be found, either spending the weekend there or helping in fence construction or in site maintenance.

Two of the Kokoberra homeland groups formerly worked together at one site where they had considered setting up their own independent cattle operation. The site is a former mission cattle yard and has a bore water supply. The intention was for it to become the base for a ‘tribal’ cattle operation and for the setting up of smaller satellite homeland sites. The group did not incorporate in any legal sense though this was under consideration for some time. Their homeland covered a large area between the South Mitchell River and Topsy Creek that includes the territorial interests of a number of other families in the township, who had, for the time being, had either ceded use of their country to the ‘corporation’, or who were consulted by them as the need arose. The venture lapsed. Reasons for the fissure of the group include its size, it was too large to accommodate at one place, and some disagreement over land use. One of these groups is now working largely on its own and the other has become involved with the two most recent Kokoberra homelands in exploring joint ventures such as cattle or crayfish farming. They act like a ‘mutual society’ and help each other in the development of their homelands; in land use planning meetings in KLNRMO they refer to themselves collectively as ‘family’.

Whilst the allocation of homeland sites within this area has been the subject of negotiation and prioritisation amongst Kokoberra families in Kowanyama, the exercise of ritual control has sometimes been based on the assertions or actions of one or two individuals, and has reflected differing personal notions of the exercise of ritual control.
authority in the region. For instance, one mortuary ban closed off large areas of the
country to everybody for a period of two months. When this ban was called there was
some disquiet amongst other homeland groups as it had been called over part of their
country as well, and hence an assertion had been made about ritual control of their
domains. The ban continued for some time after the burial and was lifted after
approaches from KLNRMO (from me whilst I was working there as manager) to the
person who had called the ban to convey the concerns of people in the township who
wanted to hunt and to fish in this country. Meanwhile, some people who were closer
kin relations to the deceased than the person who had called the ban had nevertheless
mustered cattle within the proscribed area after what they felt was an appropriate time
for mourning and before the prohibition was publicly lifted. A later mortuary ban in
the same country was preceded by separate instructions on the extent of the country to
be closed being received at KLNRMO from the two Elders involved in declaring the
above ban. The matter resolved itself when people, who were relatives of either men,
made it clear unanimously to KLNRMO which of the two Elders carried the greatest
authority in declaring the ban.

Yir Thangedl territory in this landscape encloses the area of the Kowanyama township,
and also the greatest area of wetland that is accessible from there in both the wet and
dry seasons. Kowanyama is not a traditional name. It is a Kokoberra word for ‘place of
many waters’ and is an apt description of this landscape as it contains numerous
permanent deep water lagoons in close proximity to each other. Temporary camps are
also a conspicuous feature of this landscape and they are invariably located beside
lagoons. They range from isolated hearths or ‘cupmurri’ pits to tarpaulin and star-
picket constructions. Most are places where people go fishing for a day or two. Some
are more substantial and are locations where families will stay for two or three weeks
in the dry season. The greater part of the region is regarded as a kind of ‘commons’
where local people can hunt or fish irrespective of their traditional affiliations. It
contains two homeland sites and the rest of the area is regarded as a ‘public space’ for
community use by favour of its traditional owners who live at one of these sites. Many
people, in particular those who do not have any claim to traditional land in the DOGIT,
camp there for recreational purposes as it is within walking distance of the township.
Some families, mainly Olkola people who have no traditional country in the DOGIT,
have camped at the same location for years. People are allowed to practice their own
forms of ‘ritual’ control in that following the death of a regular visitor to a lagoon or
campsite that place may be ‘closed’ as a mark of respect for the deceased, irrespective
of whether they have traditional affiliations to that place or not. Again, this provides an
opportunity for those Olkola, Kunjen or Kokoberrin people who have no homeland
country in the DOGIT to close country down when a family member dies. The extent
of closures of this kind is usually modest and may include the deceased’s favourite
camping place or the waterhole where they last went fishing.

The traditional owners closely monitor and discourage the formation of any potential
homeland groups with aspirations to develop a homeland site in Yir Thangedl country.
Their own homeland site is a place where one can only enter by personal invitation,
though in the past few years permission has been given to two groups, who have no
traditional land in the DOGIT but whose families have lived in Kowanyama for
generations, to set up homeland sites. The leaders of both of these sites are active in
the Community council and in civic life in Kowanyama.

5.3.2 Land allocation practice in the Mitchell River Valley
This landscape is only accessible from the Kowanyama township in the dry season.
There are currently four homeland sites in Yir Thangedl country and another on the
eastern boundary of the DOGIT in Kunjen country. Unlike in the Kowanyama
Hinterland, homeland sites in this landscape are often referred to by the identity of
individual leaders rather than by the main resident family. The southern and western
reaches of the valley in the area of the DOGIT are comprised of large wet and early
dry season swamps that differ from those in the Kowanyama Hinterland in terms of
their larger size and their intermittent tree cover. The northern and eastern reaches,
which are closer to the Mitchell River, comprise extensive tracts of Open Eucalypt and
Melaleuca woodland with dense Gallery Forest along the riverbanks. Other than the
area of the National Park, which is infrequently visited by people from outside of the
Kowanyama region and which has no infrastructure to suggest that it is a State
government controlled area, this landscape can be viewed as an ‘absolute space’ (after
Lefebvre 1991) in the sense that it is an entirely Aboriginal landscape and there is little
European influence in it.
Yir Thangedl homeland sites are well defined territorially and their occupants exercise vigilant control over land use. They also maintain a control of ritual, for instance in ‘rites of entry’ to camps or certain tracts of country where the spirits of ‘old people’ are warned of visitors by calling out or by the baptism of visitors at appropriate creeks or lagoons. These rites are practised throughout the DOGIT but they are a particularly prominent feature of the Mitchell River landscape. From time to time homeland groups will close roads and ban the movement of traffic through their country, or they will call upon the Community council or State police to enforce community bye-laws regarding trespass, or illegal hunting and fishing. The Kunjen homeland is located almost precisely on the DOGIT boundary with the Mitchell River/ Alice River national park. The leader of this site unlike the other homeland sites in this landscape is in her ‘mother’s’ country. Their location there is for two reasons. First, because ‘father’s’ country is an extremely powerful area of the landscape, about 20 kilometres to the west, and the ritual knowledge of how to control its natural and supernatural forces has died in recent years with its male bearers. Second, the present location of their homeland has afforded them a substantial role in the transfer of the National Park from the Queensland government to its traditional owners in Kowanyama, and hence a role in its future management. The Kunjen homeland is also a long established dry season site where people have taken their dry season ‘holidays’ from the township over the years. It is still a relatively ‘open’ place with a fishing camp for tourists nearby and schoolchildren from Kowanyama go and camp there in NAIDOC week every year. Visitors to the other homeland sites in the Valley appear to be less numerous, perhaps because these places are more remote.

5.3.3 Land allocation practice in the Mitchell River Delta

The Mitchell River separates Yir Thangedl from Yir Yoront territory, though people from both groups regard themselves as ‘one tribe’. Yir Thangedl people have their entire country within the Kowanyama DOGIT whereas Yir Yoront country is divided between Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama and is inaccessible from Kowanyama, other than by boat or by air, for up to eight months in any year. The landscape is a coastal plain dominated by Coastal Ridges that overlook broad grass plains. These plains are broken up in places by extensive Salt Marsh or by Mangrove forests.
The Mitchell River Delta landscape is one of the most inaccessible on Cape York Peninsula and Yir Yoront people in both Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama have little opportunity to spend much time there. Their families tend to be more aged and have fewer young people (see Chapter 3.4.2) and also have fewer of the kinds of boats and vehicles that are required to access their homelands. Despite this, many Yir Yoront people who are aged 60 or more were born into traditional lifestyles in the bush and did not come into the mission until they were in their teens and retain a detailed knowledge of their country and of the ‘custom way’ in which land allocation issues are dealt with. For instance, one area was the subject of a claim by a person who had left the community for the East Coast 20 years earlier and was planning to return to Kowanyama and set up a homeland in their mother's country; their father is not a Gulf Lowlands person. They intended to personally finance the whole homeland operation. The application was the subject of much debate amongst Yir Yoront Elders, some of whom were, at the time, implacable in their opposition to the proposal. The claimant did not ease people's discomfort by their assumption that by obtaining a homeland they were alienating that area for their own family's future use, and that other people came in only at their invitation. I was directly involved in the mediation of this claim, where Elders explained that such actions were not the 'custom way' and that a homeland was for anybody 'who belonged at that place'. A succession of Yir Yoront people came into KLNRMO to identify their ‘conception country’ or story place, mainly the sites of lagoons on digital maps and aerial photographs in the community land information system, and to insist that the proposed homeland must not encompass these places. The situation was resolved after weeks of negotiation in KLNRMO when the claimant agreed to establish the homeland site under the direction of a committee of Yir Yoront Elders.

There are seven homeland sites in all in this landscape. One has been long established, two were started in 2001 and four are planned for occupation over the next two or three years. The established site is on a ‘Katter lease’ (see Chapter 2.3) that is held by the traditional owner of that country; and his son, who is a resident of Pormpuraaw, has established another site further along the same ridge. The extensive grasslands in the lease area are occasionally rented to the Pormpuraaw cattle company for agistment. This homeland group had made invitations to closely related Yir Yoront people in Pormpuraaw, who had shared country between the Mitchell River and the Melamen
Creek with them in the years prior to the mission, to join their enterprise. The response from Pormpuraaw people was that they had already settled their homeland affairs within their community with neighbouring Kuuk Thaayore people (Ezra Michael, pers comm). Another person in Kowanyama has wanted a homeland site on the same ridge but was persuaded from doing so by the father and son. She had been invited to join a prospective homeland group in Kokoberra country in the Kowanyama Hinterland but because of uncertainty there over the membership and extent of the proposed homeland domain had declined that offer. A close inspection of her proposed site in Yir Yoront country was made by everybody with a homeland interest in this area. Maps of wet and dry season surface water distribution and of the distribution of traditional sites in the community land information system, showed that fresh water supply limitations in the later dry season and access difficulties at other times in the year, limited the amount of available space for another homeland, and that she and her group were also some distance ‘away’ from those traditional places which would have given them the moral authority to assert their right to a homeland. Another site was decided upon and Yir Yoront people including the owners of the above homelands who had discouraged her first interest accompanied her to inspect the alternative homeland site. This inspection was preceded by a lunch at one of their homelands. The trip clarified the acceptance of her proposed homeland by all interested parties in Kowanyama. In the weeks beforehand she had also approached Yir Yoront people from Pormpuraaw for their approval of her plans for the homeland site. The remaining prospective homelands in this landscape are on coastal islands, which are difficult to access from Kowanyama. Two homeland groups who might yet coalesce into one group for homeland construction and natural resource management planning purposes are discussing arrangements for these prospective sites and Yir Yoront people from Pormpuraaw who occasionally visit their kin in Kowanyama give moral support for homeland plans.

5.4 The geography of land allocation practice in Kowanyama

Authority over homeland allocation and land use is expressed at separate, but overlapping scales of social and geographical space in Kowanyama and resides in homeland and tribal groups respectively. Without exception, homelands are initiated by small groups of people and not by the tribe, but their establishment is not possible
without the approval of their peers within this wider social network. Tribal authority in Kowanyama is openly expressed in KLNRMO meetings when Native Title or natural resource management issues are addressed. Issues to do with specific homeland sites, or with homeland membership or affiliation are usually private business. For instance, the ratification of eight homeland sites at Kowanyama took place over a period of six months whilst I was relief manager of KLNRMO. The procedure was for people to declare their interest in a homeland to the office. As a request came in, I posted a map in the office window showing the location of the site and the name of the applicant. This was left for eight weeks so that people could register their interests or objections. I took each notice out of the window after that period of time had elapsed, and informally consulted my mentors and other key people amongst the Counsel of Elders for their advice, and then advised the Community council that the site ought to be included in financial plans for homeland development. With one exception, all discussion about homeland membership took place outside the office in the township and did not involve me or any other staff in KLNRMO.

As at Pormpuraaw, three or four homeland groups may combine to form a ‘mutual society’ of support for their members (see Chapter 4.5.2). These ‘societies’ prioritise homeland development plans between themselves and make plans for enterprises, such as cattle grazing, aquaculture or fish ranching, or tourist fishing camps to sustain their homelands in the future within the wider context of community natural resource management in Kowanyama. They occupy geographically contiguous areas, and share strong clan and family associations and also have the strongest corporate identities in community life either through the personality of their leader or through the dominant family name amongst them. Each of these societies also appear to have their territorial interests contained exclusively within each of the landscapes that have been identified in this chapter, as is the case with the Pormpuraaw homeland societies whose territorial interests appear to be exclusive to those landscapes identified in Chapter 4.

Homeland societies (this expression is my own and is not used by people in either Kowanyama or Pormpuraaw) expressed their aspirations for potential homeland enterprises at natural resource management planning meetings in Kowanyama in December 2001 and January 2002 (KLNRMO 2003). Some groups had been building
their own fences for cattle mustering paddocks in their homeland country. Other groups were discussing recreational fishing camps for tourists, or crayfish farming or crocodile egg collection as enterprises. At the time of the meetings, almost all of this activity was taking place in the Kowanyama Hinterland but similar arrangements were being considered for future homelands in the Mitchell River Valley and Delta landscapes as well. Homeland societies openly discuss their longer-term land use aspirations with each other and with other societies in public meetings. These discussions become quite heated but good-humoured where overlaps in the economic interests expressed by different societies, and hence issues of investment, arise during a meeting; nonetheless, consensus agreement is always sought from within the wider tribal group to which they belong before the plans of a single homeland group or of a homeland society are acknowledged by the rest of the community. The openness of land use negotiations and in turn, the privacy of homeland location and membership negotiations, are abiding features of civic life in Kowanyama.

The Kowanyama planning meetings clearly illustrated that the ratification of the sites that homeland groups intend to occupy and of the enterprises that they wish to undertake are done within the wider tribal group to which they belong, and the operational link between these two scales of social space in both Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in the later 1990s and early 2000s is the homeland society. Tribal and homeland group levels of authority at Kowanyama broadly correspond with the jural and proximal structures of Aboriginal land tenure described by Sutton (1996). He discusses a dual form of land tenure with an

‘underlying title held within regional jural and cultural systems which underpin proximate entitlements enjoyed by small groups of individuals’ (Sutton 1996, 18).

In Sutton’s model, there is no absolute right of ownership of land by any group of people, and its occupation and use is subject to review at any time by their peers elsewhere in the region who hold the ‘underlying title’.

‘Proximate entitlement entails the right to publicly claim the particular country concerned and to exercise the rights, and fulfil the custodial obligations that flow from such understanding …. The regional law, rather than a group of Elders or ‘tribal council’ is what has proximate land entitlements in its gift ….. ultimately all proximal systems are maintained by consent’ (Sutton 1996, 12).
All geographical space is negotiable, even though the traditional places and their clan and totem or kin-related affiliations are perdurable under the jural system; the way people are mapped onto them may change from time to time, or from place to place. In an analysis of the family histories of 35 people who are identifiable homeland leaders in Kowanyama, those in the Kowanyama Hinterland area contain a mixture of tribal affiliations over two generations and thus back to the earliest Mission days. To the north of Kowanyama, the Mitchell River Valley landscape has Yir Thangedl, Yir Yoront and Kunjen homeland leaders who each have a relatively homogenous suite of affiliations to their tribal country over the preceding two generations. These latter tribal groups are collectively referred to in Kowanyama English as ‘Top End’ people. The Delta landscape is almost entirely of Yir Yoront people and the affiliations of their parents and grandparents is also largely to Yir Yoront country. This distribution of tribal affiliations amongst present-day homeland affiliations mirrors those that were identified for these landscapes in the analysis of ethnographic mapping of traditional places and seasonally accessible space in this chapter (see Table 5.1) and, as at Pormpuraaw, the geometry of people-place relationships in the Kowanyama landscape that was recorded by Sharp (1937) does not appear to have been disrupted by the years of Mission time and Church time administration.

The three landscapes that are occupied by homeland groups in Kowanyama are contiguous and there are considerable overlaps in tribal affiliation between the Kowanyama Hinterland and the Mitchell River Valley as many people in Kowanyama have either ‘mother’ or ‘father’ country in alternate landscapes. Notionally, these people can exercise some authority over land allocation issues, such as the suitability of the location of homeland sites or of proposed land use strategies, in either landscape. Though in my experience, the flow of authority appears to be from outside to inside the Hinterland. To use a biological metaphor, this flow operates like a semi-permeable membrane. Somebody may elect to live on a homeland in their mother’s country in the Kowanyama Hinterland: that person then has little or no authority on issues to do with their father’s country if it is in Yir Yoront or Yir Thangedl country outside of the Hinterland. However, if the same person elects to live on a homeland in their father’s country in the Mitchell River valley or in Delta country then it appears that they may still make assertions about land use in their mother’s country in the
Hinterland. These conditions do not appear to differ whether mother’s or father’s country is adopted as the homeland. In turn, a homeland choice in the present generation does not appear to interfere with any rights of succeeding generations to their parent’s or grandparent’s country as the children or grandchildren of the occupant of one homeland may (and do) elect to live in another homeland.

The landscape model presented so far in this thesis adds a geographical dimension to that discretionary or negotiable space of proximate entitlements where people may cede rights to land within their generation to those in another homeland group but still continue to monitor and make assertions about it from time to time in daily community life. The Kowanyama Hinterland is the landscape where proximate entitlements are most widely exercised and most evident in the permission given to people who have no traditional country at all in the DOGIT to establish homeland sites there. These entitlements, unlike those described above for people who have their homeland inside the DOGIT, probably only apply to the present and to the individuals concerned, and not to future generations of these families: though one would have to wait another fifteen years or so to be assured of this as the widespread establishment of homelands in Kowanyama only started in 1998. Nonetheless, the impression given to the rest of the Kowanyama community at present is that these allocations to people whose traditional country is outside of Kowanyama are expedient and based only on current circumstances. The rationale for such allocations is never openly discussed.

The exercise of proximate authority is evident, from day to day, in land management meetings in KLNRM0 and also in trips around the country as people narrate their interests in homeland affairs or in natural resource use in the landscape and the other passengers in the vehicle acknowledge them at the time. It is evident in planning processes in the township where Yir Yoront as well as Yir Thangedl elders are consulted for the approval of any proposed development, such as the removal of trees, the excavation of drains, or the construction of houses. Both groups have close traditional ties from before the years of the mission. Yir Thangedl people ‘own the ground’ of much of the township yet Yir Yoront people are also consulted despite the distance of their own territorial affiliations from the Kowanyama township, kinship ties have allowed them to share the historical and geographical primacy of Yir Thangedl people in land allocation issues in the township. This merging of separate
tribal geographies within the same urban space, is more clearly understood, if the first, traditional set of relations is regarded as representative of the ‘underlying title’ and the latter formations as being representative of land allocation practice or the current ‘proximate entitlements’ (after Sutton 1996) in the region.

Kokoberra people also have authority in township issues because of the close proximity of their country [a matter of five or six kilometres] to the township and because of their historical primacy in Kowanyama life as the original Mission settlement was at Trabanamam within the heart of Kokoberra country (see Chapter 2). At the same time Kunjen and Kokoberrin people who have played major roles in the civic life of Kowanyama, in particular as community councillors, are also sometimes called upon to advise on township issues.

5.5 Social space and the geography of land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands in the early 2000s

Each of the landscapes that have been described so far in this chapter differs in terms of their seasonal accessibility from Kowanyama, and historically in terms of the seasonal land use strategies that may have been employed in them prior to the foundation of the mission. Even though these landscapes are not bounded or demarcated in any territorial sense, they do describe domains of cognitive space, of knowledge of people and places, in their traditional, historical and present day contexts, that are also illustrative of differences in present day land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands region. On balance, it seems that seasonal accessibility is a ‘generative principle’ (after Bourdieu 1977) which underpins these differences in practice, and that the location of each township within the seasonal landscape is a major feature of society and human geography in the southern Gulf Lowlands in the 20th century.

There was much deliberation in the selection of the site of the Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw townships in the early mission years (see Chapter 2). In terms of ‘human ecology’ (after Thomson 1939) and the spaces that are available in the wet and dry season landscapes and their proximity to natural resources, there are few areas anywhere else in the Gulf country where there is sufficient space available for
sustaining the population size and social relations of the kind that exist at present in the Kowanyama Hinterland. It may be that the missionaries selected that place because these social conditions already existed. A wide range of traditional territorial affiliations in the Kowanyama Hinterland that certainly pre-date the Mission have been identified in this chapter. McConnell (1939) cites Roth (1907) in describing the movement of tribes and of people between tribes as a feature of life in south-western Cape York Peninsula in the earliest years of the 20th century. Older Kunjen people at Kowanyama have told me of some of these wide-ranging social ties and of how their parents or grandparents were able to leave their home on Aboriginal ‘camps’ on pastoral properties in the Mitchell River valley, and walk over 100 kilometres to Kowanyama, in the earliest days of the Mitchell River Mission, and live with longstanding friends or relatives in Kokoberra or Yir Thangedl families (Colin Lawrence, pers comm). Sharp (1937) describes similar social mobility in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the Mitchell River Valley and Delta landscapes whereby people would travel over a wide ‘range’ in the dry season, or, marry into a homeland group at a considerable distance from their own country. In a topological sense the social properties of the Kowanyama Hinterland are those of the Kowanyama townscape that have been described in Chapter 3 of this thesis. In turn, the Mitchell River Valley and Mitchell River Delta landscapes are more like the Pormpuraaw townscape, which embodies an expression of territoriality in the landscape in the ‘classical’ idiom of distinct tribe and clan affiliations. These latter two landscapes became subsumed into the mission at Mitchell River [Kowanyama] at about the same time that the mission at the Edward River [Pormpuraaw] was being set up in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The location of the Edward River Mission at the present day Pormpuraaw township was a strategic choice by missionaries to accommodate the separate tribal interests that extend over the DOGIT area between the Coleman and Holroyd Rivers (see Chapter 2). The township occupies a more constrained geographic space than does Kowanyama where large areas of the landscape are accessible year-round. Pormpuraaw has an almost reef-like position in the landscape and is marooned in the wet season in the midst of a lake of thousands of square kilometres in extent, and is bounded by the sea, extensive areas of Salt Marsh, and largely impenetrable Coastal Ridge Woodland in the dry season. The geography of land allocation practice there appears to be based
around two axes, one aligned along the major tribal divisions in the southern Gulf Lowlands and the other along the seasonal properties of the landscape, and the affective qualities of ‘public’ and ‘private’ space on the Coastal Ridges and in the Inland Country which were first indicated by Thomson in his description of seasonal mobility strategies in the wider Gulf Lowlands region in pre-Mission times (1939). The latency in these landscapes, in terms of their seasonal accessibility and the mobility and land use that were traditionally practised within them, still resonates in present day homeland distribution in Pormpuraaw (see Chapter 4).

It seems that the first missionaries used political [tribal geography] as well as environmental [natural resource distribution and seasonal availability] criteria in their selection of the site of each mission township. The establishment of each mission was preceded by a number of reconnaissance surveys, from Yarrabah for the Mitchell River Mission [Kowanyama] between 1903 and 1911; and from the latter for the establishment of the Edward River Mission [Pormpuraaw] during the later 1920s and early 1930s. The location of each mission changed in the earliest years (see Chapter 2) until an optimal location that satisfied both political and environmental criteria was found. From time to time, I watch a video reproduction of an, otherwise unattributed, Australian Board of Missions film from the 1930s which shows the voyage of a mission supply ship, the ‘Francis Pritt’, a boat still remembered fondly by older people at Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw, from its base at Thursday Island in the Torres Strait down the west coast of Cape York Peninsula to Mornington Island in the Gulf country. One of its destinations was the Kendall River Mission at the northern end of the present day Pormpuraaw DOGIT. This place no longer exists and I can find no other reference to it – though its existence and location is clearly evident in the film. This site fills a gap in the distribution of church missions on the western coast of Peninsula which would have accommodated the population of ‘Mungkan side’ in present day Pormpuraaw in their own mission, with quite different consequences for the community and the regional geography of the southern Gulf Lowlands if it had succeeded. I do not know the reason for the demise of the Kendall River Mission but it is likely due to economic reasons as the church missions always operated with little financial support. The early days of the Edward River Mission were also a time of economic hardship (Taylor 1984).
5.5.1 Implicit space and land allocation practice
Seasonal accessibility of traditional country from the township is an important environmental determinant of homeland distribution and of styles of land allocation practice. Another closely related ‘generative principle’ which was discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis is a hierarchy of core – proximate – peripheral social relations based on the geographical proximity of traditional homeland country to the township and its inclusion or exclusion within State-assigned community boundaries. Comparable ‘inside/ outside’ relationships are recorded elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia (see Chapter 1.3.1) and were developed in the early years of the 20th century in the southern Gulf Lowlands as the region was colonised by missionaries and pastoralists, and European tenures and administrative boundaries were introduced. The coincidences of absolute [indigenous] and abstract [colonial] space of this kind (after Lefebvre 1991) also led to the creation of an implicit space in the sense that they also embody a suite of ‘taken for granted’ or generally unstated criteria that are used in local land allocation practice. The best landscape in which to observe implicit space is the Mitchell River Delta as it is part of an integral tribal (Yir Yoront) domain that is bisected by the boundary between Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, and the historical context within which it can be viewed is in terms of land management in the Delta since the transfer of the DOGIT tenure from the State to locally elected councils in 1987.

The Queensland government gave greater local control over the management of community land use by transferring the trusteeship of DOGIT lands ‘in perpetuity’ to locally elected Aboriginal councils in an Act of Parliament of 1984 (see Chapter 2). The Act permitted community management of the use of DOGIT lands but, as with most other forms of rural leasehold in Queensland, it did not remove the powers of the State over the allocation of pastoral, mining or forestry leases within DOGIT areas.

Community councils, which are elected every three years, are almost invariably comprised of local traditional owners and thus they are a point of contact between local Aboriginal and mainstream systems of governance. At Pormpuraaw there are almost always three councillors from ‘Thaayore side’ and three from ‘Mungkan side’ and one Bakanh or Olkola councillor. There is a more catholic mix of tribal affiliations...
amongst councillors at Kowanyama and many of them are ‘peripheral’, in a historical
and a territorial sense, and have their traditional country beyond the DOGIT boundary.
When the State government administrations left each community in 1987 they left
behind two other instruments in the community cattle herd and the 1985 ‘Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander (Landholding)’ Act (Queensland) by which they hoped to
influence future land allocation so that it was based more on mainstream than on local
practice. These instruments were meant to promote a sense of community rather than
clan or tribe identity and to assist in the development of the visions of the government
minister of the day, Bob Katter Jr, for a rural landscape of farming enterprises like
those that might be found elsewhere in rural Australia.

Each community supported a cattle herd from the earliest mission days, initially for
subsistence so that the local population could be fed. Later, herds were managed for
commercial purposes as a source of income and as a means of training people in herd
management so that they could then go on and work on cattle properties elsewhere in
Far North Queensland. The community herd was left in ‘in trust’ to each DOGIT
community council in 1987 and each herd is now managed by a registered company
which reports to a Board of Directors who in turn reports to the Community Council
and who are required to produce annual audits of their performance. Community herds
graze over homeland country and also over leases which have been assigned to
Aboriginal people under the 1985 Landholding Act.

The 1985 Act allowed for the excision of areas of DOGIT land by the State
government. Any Aboriginal person could apply for a lease over DOGIT land
anywhere in Queensland as the Act did not require the applicant to be a local
community resident or a traditional owner of the lease area. The Act was replaced by
the ‘Aboriginal Lands’ Act (Queensland) in 1991 but its consequences are still felt in
the southern Gulf Lowlands as leases that were created under the 1985 Act still
survive. There were six preliminary applications for special pastoral leases (widely
known as ‘Katter leases’) in the Kowanyama Hinterland in the late 1980s that were
ultimately not finalised, only one of them came from a traditional owner. Two Yir
Yoront brothers obtained a lease for the area of their traditional country in the Mitchell
River Delta in 1989. The brothers feel that the lease confirms their traditional ‘jural’
authority over their homeland area and will not let anybody question that authority
when other people, with whom they disagree, contribute ideas about how it might be best managed in planning meetings in KLNRM0. In such situations they invoke both their traditional authority and the authority given to them by the Queensland government; in their minds, one grant reinforces the other. They are occasionally teased, with reference to the lease, ‘old man, you would sell your country for a six pack’ : an opinion that demonstrates another widely held view in Kowanyama, that traditional rights to country are inalienable and are not for renegotiation through lease from government, or by any other protocol.

State-assigned grazing leases have also existed on ‘Mungkan side’ and ‘Thaayore side’ of the Pormpuraaw landscape since the later 1980s. Each lease, which is held by a Pormpuraaw person, occupies country where the lessee is not representative of the interests of many of its traditional owners. The justification that these enterprises make for their actions is that they are custodians who are taking care of the land; and also that their custodianship is one that has the authority of the government. That a lessee is actually using the land to graze cattle and hence fulfilling their duties of caring for the country through burning and cattle mustering operations are powerful arguments to the rest of the community in support of their actions. There is often a ‘use it or lose it’ ethos that underlies debates about land use in community planning meetings where people who are prepared to go out and actually work on country are given support, even though they may not warrant it on the basis of traditional land affiliation. Nonetheless, there is invariably an acknowledgement of the rights of traditional landowners to their country by the ‘Katter’ leaseholders, and the ‘proximate entitlement’ that they assert on the basis of their possession of a State-assigned lease is actually complemented by the conditions of their tenure, whereby each lease will be terminated on the death of the nominated leaseholder. In my experience, possession of the underlying traditional title, the ‘jural authority’ or ‘native title’ to land has never been assumed by any of these leaseholders.

It is apparent that people in the southern Gulf Lowlands deal with the duality in local [absolute space] and State [abstract space] land allocation systems quite readily. At a meeting in Pormpuraaw in September 2004 to discuss the homeland interests of a lifelong Kowanyama resident who wished to retire and live in her mother’s country in Pormpuraaw the proceedings opened with uncharacteristic
hostility. The Pormpuraaw councillors thought that the Kowanyama delegation was there to discuss the use of parts of Delta country by the Pormpuraaw cattle company. It was made clear that cattle issues were not for negotiation and that the country in question did not belong to Kowanyama anyway. The area does actually belong to Kowanyama but was originally part of the area of the Edward River Mission [Pormpuraaw] prior to a change in the boundary between the two reserves in 1942. The cattle company continues to use the area and has even built a block fence and cattle grid on it. This fence is not of great concern in Kowanyama as the area is only accessible from there for about four months a year and the Pormpuraaw Company pays an agistment fee to its traditional owners [and ‘Katter’ leaseholders] in Kowanyama. The sense of community ownership of this country by Pormpuraaw was set in the very earliest days of Mission time, and as exercised in the form of fences and payment of fees is an expression of perceived entitlement based on the initial position of the Reserve boundary. When it was realised that the purpose of the visit was not to discuss cattle but to talk about homeland business the atmosphere warmed with offers of financial and infrastructure support for the proposed homeland and declarations of ‘we all family’ and ‘gotta work together’. Though some councillors complained that Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw people, irrespective of how closely related they are or of the location of their traditional country, should only live in homelands within their community of residence.

Despite mutual territorial interests and the closer proximity of Pormpuraaw than Kowanyama to the Delta country, land allocation in this landscape is done almost independently of each other in both communities. Changes to the boundary between the Edward River and Mitchell River reserves in the 1920s and again in the 1940s had led to the relocation of Yir Yoront people between the two missions and to an alternate peripheral [outside the area of the Reserve] and proximate status [inside the Reserve but away from the township] in terms of the human geography described in chapter 2. The area of the boundary change encompasses country which is of great ritual significance to people in both Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw and which is also of considerable economic value by Gulf Lowlands standards because of its fisheries and the potential capacity of its natural pastures to support large herds of cattle. People in Kowanyama monitor proposed uses of Yir Yoront country in Pormpuraaw, such as a
prospective homeland or commercial fishing camp. Some people, even those who have no traditional attachment to Yir Yoront country, feel that the country still belongs to Kowanyama, as it was part of the Mitchell River reserve until 1942, and ought to be either restored as part of community lands or shared in some way with Pormpuraaw. Yir Yoront people have tended to join in with Thaayore [core status] families in their homelands in Pormpuraaw, and those people in Kowanyama visit their homelands infrequently because they are so difficult to get to from the township.

The issues that arose in the above meeting in Pormpuraaw, and the differing reactions to them, can viewed as a product of overlaps between European and Aboriginal notions of land tenure. Though the intention for the DOGIT tenure might have been for it to replace local systems of land allocation, it did not do so; instead it produced ‘heterotopia’ (after Foucault 1980; Lefebvre 1991). Country is closed or open to negotiation depending on whether community law or traditional law, or issues of land ownership or land use are under review. Perhaps the foremost expression of ‘heterotopia’ or of the hybridisation between local and State systems is the importance of community identity in regional scale land allocation issues. In some circumstances, being from either Kowanyama or Pormpuraaw may carry greater moral authority than traditional tribal or homeland affiliation when, for instance, Yir Yoront families, who share traditional homeland country in both communities, are negotiating mutual land interests. In other words, State assigned identity can, from time to time, carry greater weight than local indigenous identity in land allocation issues.

Relationships between homeland groups and the Cattle companies and Councils in either community are dynamic and rarely reach any point of equilibrium that endures for a long time, and in recent years in Kowanyama as the homeland movement has grown so have the assertions of homeland groups. Resentments and misunderstandings can build up and occasionally there is the need for a ‘clear the air’ meeting. At one such meeting in June 2003 which was called so that homeland groups could identify their land use aspirations for their country it became clear that the ‘open range’ use of community land by the Kowanyama Cattle company was going to be circumscribed by some traditional owners. Some homeland groups had already built fences and paddocks on their lands, either
singly or co-operatively as homeland ‘societies’, and had excluded Company cattle from their land. Fence-building is the most powerful, and at times most provocative, expression of land ownership. Other homeland groups demanded payment of agistment fees by the Cattle company for the use of their country and others demanded that the country be de-stocked of Company cattle and either their own herds be introduced or their country left free of cattle. Apart from asserting their authority over the land, the abiding concern that was expressed in one way or another by all of the groups was that they could look after their own country better than the Company, which was also being called to account for the effects of over-grazing and land degradation in certain areas of the DOGIT. The concerns that were being expressed by traditional landowners were for the condition of the country and wider community interests as well as their own autonomous land rights. All of the participants in this debate were Aboriginal but underlying it there was an insider [homeland affiliate]/ outsider [not from the southern Gulf Lowlands] dichotomy with corresponding appeals from either side to homeland or to community interest. Many Cattle company workers are from communities elsewhere in the Peninsula and Northern Gulf region.

As with other social technologies that have been introduced by the State such as health, education, legal and economic systems, the DOGIT tenure and the land allocation laws of the mid-1980s have been hybridised into local practice through a praxis or set of ‘practical logics’ (after Bourdieu 1977). The aim of this praxis appears to be the maintenance of Aboriginal identity and social organisation and at the same time the accommodation of State policy and associated strategies that have been introduced in attempts to engineer change in local society. The broader ways in which this praxis works in relationships between Aboriginal people and the State in the southern Gulf Lowlands is described further in Chapter 7, the final chapter of this thesis.

5.5.2 The properties of implicit space
Ultimately, township location is an important geographical determinant of implicit space and of the ‘practical logics’ that people use in land allocation practice to deal with the intercalation of introduced and indigenous land tenures. Whereas the effects of the location of a township or mission or cattle property on the centralisation of
Aboriginal populations and on their social organisation and behaviour is well
documented elsewhere in Australia (see Chapter 1.3.1 for a summary of this
phenomenon), the effects of seasonal accessibility on land allocation practice, apart
from Thomson’s landmark paper of 1939, ‘Seasonality and Human Culture’ (see
Chapter 4.2), are less understood. This thesis has also demonstrated that seasonal
accessibility is a landscape property that still has immediate relevance to the modelling
of landscape organisation and social practice both here in the southern Gulf Lowlands
and probably elsewhere in remote monsoonal Australia.

The topological properties of social space that have been mapped in Pormpuraaw and
Kowanyama may be compared for an understanding of regional scale land allocation
practice but they cannot be entirely extrapolated from one to the other. This is because of

physical differences in each landscape

differing spatial interactions between traditional and introduced tenure systems, and

the relative isolation of each community from each other during the ‘Mission
time’ and ‘Department time’ years of the 20th century.

To paraphrase Lefebvre (1991), the interpretation of social space is a reading of
history. Also,

‘... the total configuration or ‘strategy’ is an ‘historical’ product, the collective
creation of many minds, designed by no one, tinkered with and interpreted by many’

The process whereby the present day geographies have emerged is probably an
outcome of the social structuration that was described in Chapter 2 whereby local
people fashioned their own ways of reconciling their indigenous governance systems
with those introduced by the Church missionaries and State administrators in the early
and middle years of the twentieth century. It can be regarded as a ‘longue duree’
phenomenon and a process of ‘sedimentation’ (after Casey 1993; Pred 1984); an
accumulation of individual experiences and practices over many years.
The historical trajectories that Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama followed were quite separate from each other as both Church and State administrations were almost entirely independent of each community throughout the 20th century. The State influence of the Mission and Department years is perhaps more apparent in post-1987 ‘Community time’ in Kowanyama than it is in Pormpuraaw society. There is little history of ‘them old people’ and almost all memories or anecdotes of ancestors in Kowanyama today only go as far back as the foundation of the mission. Totemism is not as visible in township life there as it is in Pormpuraaw (see Chapter 3). The pre-mission past or ‘Wild time’, unlike in Pormpuraaw, is spoken of without feeling by almost everybody as somewhere distant and undesirable. For many people, the term ‘Wild time’ refers to the lack of social harmony that they feel prevailed then and some question why anyone would want to talk about it. Historically, ‘Mission time’ was formative in the creation of a community identity and of a ‘sense of place’ in Kowanyama, mainly because it has had almost 40 more years experience of church mission administration than has Pormpuraaw. Kokoberra, and some Yir Thangedl family groups whose traditional country is in close proximity to the township have up to three generations experience of ‘Mission time’. Other related Kokoberrin, Yir Thangedl and Yir Yoront family groups have only had the mission experience for two generations and the grandparents within these groups were born in the bush and recall a ‘Wild time’ before their relocation into the community in the late 1930s. Some members of Kunjen family groups only experienced the last years of mission time in school and dormitory life in the community in the 1950s and the 1960s and others, in particular Olkola people, did not experience it at all and came into Kowanyama in ‘Department time’ in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many of the parents and grand – parents of Kunjen and Olkola families recall life in the bush or in an Aboriginal camp on a pastoral property and are as familiar in their use of totemic idioms to describe their land affiliations as are people at Pormpuraaw in describing their own. There are many forms of ‘time-space convergence’ (after Giddens 1985) between people and the landscape as a result of these differing experiences and as a consequence Kowanyama is a much more diverse and socially heterogeneous place than Pormpuraaw and this is clearly expressed in their respective townscapes (see Chapter 3).
The pre-colonial past or ‘Wild time’ may not be entirely recalled in oral history at Kowanyama but in other ways, neither is it entirely forgotten. The totemic system of land allocation recorded by Sharp (1937) is barely visible in the social organisation of the present day townscape and many surnamed groups there have their identity in the Christian names of those apical ancestors who were the first occupants of the mission (see Chapter 3), though there are aspects of land allocation that Sharp described in the 1930s that still survive. Land allocation practice still allows the personal assertions of rights of land tenure and use that Sharp described for Yir Yoront people in the Mitchell River landscapes, and every person in Kowanyama today still seems to have their own unique constellation of homeland and kinship relationships. Marriage alliances are still made between people across tribal boundaries, whose respective homeland country may be at a considerable distance from each other, and choices are made about homeland group membership that may involve the personal surrender of rights to country in any generation, just as Sharp described 70 years ago.

Overall, the contingencies of geography and of 20th century history have created a variety of ‘heterotopia’ in the southern Gulf Lowlands landscape, some of which have been described in this chapter. These locales represent composite elements of an implicit social space whose properties are rarely fully explained by any of their occupants because their origins in traditional law and in colonial and recent history are complex. There is also the barrier of language to the communication of knowledge and ideas even with people who have a clear understanding of the historical and geographical basis of their actions and decision-making. These spaces are multivalent and complex, and embody differing leases, titles and values: they also embody a wide range of social behaviours, and differing notions of land and natural resource ownership or use may prevail over any of them at any time.

The many different convergences between geography and history in the townscapes and landscapes of the southern Gulf Lowlands represent a substantial accumulation of individual, family, homeland group and community experiences which even though they condition their behaviour and attitudes may only exist as a reflexive or heuristic or ‘that is the way it is because it is’ kind of knowledge for some people. This heuristic maybe a central element of a praxis that does not account for 20th century influences in any explanations of social practice, perhaps
because they are literally ‘taken for granted’. Also, almost all explanations of practice embody an assertion of Aboriginal identity which is almost entirely based on indigenous values. Assertions of the latter kind mediate any engagement with a White researcher and I will discuss these methodological issues more in the following chapters of this thesis. My first encounter with these phenomena was in Pormpuraaw (see Chapter 1.3) where the roles in community life or the land use rights that one would expect of people because of their clan affiliations or kinship relationships did not appear to correspond with their actual status or their day-to-day actions. People tended to describe themselves within the local idiom of clan and tribe affiliation and in terms of current relationships with other people in township life but these never provided a complete explanation for their status or behaviour. Township location and seasonal accessibility of traditional country are significant elements of this implicit or ‘unstated’ space and they have helped to fill the gaps in the reasoning that people use to explain their actions and also that apparent disjuncture between expected and observed behaviour that I first saw in the mid-1990s. Implicit and undeclared space stands in marked contrast to the explicit and declared space of traditional affiliation and immediate life experience that most people express when they talk about their land interests. The following chapters identify the spatial and social properties of explicit and declared space and the ways in which they are combined by local people with those of implicit and undeclared space.
Chapter 6

Explicit Space: Social Space and Land Allocation Practice on the Southern Gulf Lowlands

‘But if, as has often been observed, respondents do not agree either on the number of divisions they make within the group in question, or on the limits of the ‘strata’ and the criteria used to define them, this is not simply due to the fuzziness inherent in all practical logics. It is also because people’s image of the classification is a function of their position within it’ (Bourdieu 1984, 4).

So far, this thesis has demonstrated significant relationships between observed land allocation practice and social space in models of the township and the landscape in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw. Another important measure of the utility of models of this kind is their ‘signification’ (after Bourdieu 1984). How closely do the properties of social space that have been identified in these models correspond to actual understanding, by the populations that they represent, of the physical and social properties of their landscapes? In answering this question, this chapter presents a review by local people of alternate cartographic views of the landscape that have been composed in natural resource and land use assessment projects in the southern Gulf Lowlands (Monaghan 2001; Monaghan and Taylor 2003; Monaghan 2003a; Monaghan 2003b; Monaghan 2003c). The chapter identifies another social and geographical dimension in community land management that depends on personal knowledge of the landscape and on the interpersonal relationships or ‘aesthetic spaces’ (after Baumann 1983) that people create for themselves in township life. This dimension requires a range of spatial referents or ‘landmarks’ and scales of geographical space to be represented in landscape mapping to accommodate the differing levels of social aggregation whether clan, tribe or community, that are involved in various aspects of land resource management. Local interpretations of this mapping also reveal some of the ways in which the person-place-space relationships that are integral to Aboriginal land allocation systems are sustained from generation to generation despite the ongoing social change that has occurred in the region since Mission time.
6.1 **Implicit (undeclared) space and Explicit (declared) space**

Spatial relations in the form of proximity and the seasonal accessibility of homeland country to township of residence have formed the hypothetical basis in this thesis around which observations of land allocation practice have been articulated in terms of the present day geography of the southern Gulf Lowlands. These geographical phenomena and the historical experiences that have accumulated around them over the 20th century are presumed to underpin an implicit or ‘taken for granted’ dimension to present day decision-making about land use or homeland allocation in the region. Kinship models have formed a basis for this research as well, and some appreciation of their respective use by Aboriginal people and the researchers who have created them is instructive, before consideration of the relevance and use of geography and spatial analysis and of the specific models created in this research for Aboriginal land management. Longstanding relationships between anthropologists and Aboriginal people also provide some useful precedents for understanding the broader convergences between theory and academic research, and social practice and day-to-day life in Aboriginal societies.

Classification is a process whereby members of a population are arranged into categories that are meaningful in terms of an underlying property or theme that is shared by them all. The utility of a classification scheme for describing the characteristics of a population is usually determined by whether the differences in observed behaviour between classes of people are greater than those observed between people within each class. Besides the spatial relations that have been proposed in this thesis, the social criteria that have been used to classify people in models of social space have been derived from kinship models in Taylor’s ethnography of Kuuk Thayore people (1984), and to a lesser extent from Sharp’s ethnography of the Yir Yoront (1937). There are two issues to do with the use of ethnography in the kind of research that has been undertaken in this thesis. The first is the use of historical data to model current social relations. Historical data are those
that have been collected by people for another purpose at another time and which are then used in an application, such as a spatial model of land use, which was not envisaged at the time of their collection. Fortunately, both Taylor and Sharp emphasised the spatial referencing of people and of places in their fieldwork and the production of maps in their research. This has facilitated the integration of their ethnographies into the spatial models of the southern Gulf Lowlands landscapes and townscapes that have been produced in this thesis. The other issue is the practical relevance of models of social and spatial relations that are based on historical ethnography, such as have been developed in this thesis, for present day land management.

Some critiques have described ethnography as lacking in objectivity and having more in common with the historical novel than with science (Aunger 1993; Lee 1992). Ethnographies have been criticised for being largely descriptive, for being unreplicable, and in some cases for being so overburdened with interpretation that the separation of objective facts from any bias or values introduced by the ethnographer is not possible. Ethnographies reflect

‘local historically specific conditions and the situated character of the ethnographer, as traces of moments in trajectories of transformations filtered through the grid of theoretical objects and the presupposition of the writers’ (Keen 1997).

The reinterpretation or representation of historical ethnographic data can imply that an aspect of a past way of life is being reproduced. Some authors view the past with suspicion and regard it as something which can be constructed in a variety of ways, none of which need bear any resemblance to what actually happened but which might suit the particular motive, whether it be political or academic, which underlies the attempted reconstruction or its translation to present day contexts (for instance Hodder 1986; Said 1978). Ethnographies of hunter-gatherer or other aboriginal lifestyles have provided the basis for the reconstruction of prehistoric environments (Binford 1980, 1981, 1990; Winterhalder and Smith 1979) and rationales for many differing interpretations of human behaviour. They have provided an evolutionary
ideal, particularly to Marxist scholars, as representing a state of innocence that existed in social and economic organisation before the ‘fall’ of capitalism (Bender and Morris 1984). Some of them have used hunter-gatherers as models for a Romantic view of a state in which humanity was in harmony with the natural environment (Lee 1992; Sahlins 1972). The latter view is echoed in the ‘caring for country’ ethos that is often used to describe traditional Aboriginal land management in Australia (for instance Suchet 1996). The evolutionary ideal has also been reflected in popular imagination, in film and in literature or theatre since the mid-eighteenth century (for instance Daniel Defoe’s ‘Robinson Crusoe’ or the ‘Tarzan’ movies). Yet, it is not so long ago since much harsher views of the nature of traditional Aboriginal lifestyles have been also current, where the prevailing paradigm for describing Aboriginal land relationships in Australia was one of ‘survival’ (for instance Birdsell 1976).

Kinship has been the most important idiom used in the mapping of social space and of land affiliations in this research. Without some knowledge of local kinship systems, the identification of homeland groups and of how they intercalate in township life (as in Chapter 3 of this thesis) or in land use and homeland distribution in the landscape is not possible. Levi-Strauss in ‘The Elementary Structures of Kinship’ (1969), Keesing in ‘Kin Groups and Social Structure’ (1975) and Scheffler in ‘Australian Kin Classification’ (1978) have all discussed patrilineal kinship systems as structures which underpin most forms of social organisation and behaviour in aboriginal societies. Australian Aboriginal people rarely write about their social systems and both they and mainstream Australian society rely on anthropologists for their documentation. Anthropology has suffered from a conception that it is a form of academic colonialism, of ‘white fellas’ studying ‘black fellas’, with concomitant racist overtones. This perception has declined in recent years as Aboriginal organisations, whether regional land councils or community organisations continue to call on the services of anthropologists for cultural and land
Figure 6.1: Classificatory terms for a Kuuk Thaayore classificatory kinship system (Taylor 1984)
resource surveys, and for the preparation of Native Title claims. The use of historical ethnographic records to validate traditional and historical connections to land is an important part of the services requested of anthropologists by Aboriginal organisations. Such records are not used for ‘then’ and ‘now’ comparisons of social organisation but, just as in this thesis, they are used as a framework within which present day social and land relationships can be articulated (for instance Merlan 1998; Sutton 1998; Taylor 1999). After all, any social enquiry needs a historical starting point and human behaviour in any context can only be rationalised by what has gone before it.

Both Aboriginal people and anthropologists recognise kinship systems as constructs; that is, a way of organising their understanding of the world. They are classification systems that summarise a whole range of social practices and are not necessarily perfect or comprehensive in their explanation of human behaviour. Ethnography presents kinship systems in an idealised form. To be more specific

‘I don’t think ethnography presents an ‘idealised’ form of kinship, so much as a representational ‘ideal’ that is not only used by ethnographers, but by populations themselves’ (Veronica Strang, pers. comm).

Figure 6.1 is a graphic representation of one aspect of the Kuuk Thaayore kinship system that deals with the vocative terms that are used to describe classificatory relations (Taylor 1984). The language terms within Figure 6.1 that describe each category of the classification are part of everyday vocabulary in Pormpuraaw. Taylor has made the point to me that if the Kuuk Thaayore population were to persist in the parallel ‘cross-cousin’ marriage system exhibited in this figure then there would be no permissible marriage partners left within three generations. Taylor (1984) recorded 64 ‘straight’ and 37 ‘wronghead’ marriages at Edward River in the early 1970s. ‘Wronghead’ marriages are those that do not entirely accord with the patrilineal rules. He recorded a preference for marriage to people whose clan country is geographically proximate if a locally suitable MBD (mother’s brother’s daughter) or FZS (father’s sister’s son) was not available for a ‘straight’ marriage. Kuuk
Thaayore people preferred to marry ‘wronghead’ closer to home rather than ‘straight’ amongst more distant kin. Kinship systems are not ‘doxic’ (after Bourdieu 1977) in the sense that they provide an inflexible set of rules or laws that regulate the actions of people; they are models which people work around and provide a ‘space of suitable strategies’ (Bourdieu 1977). For instance, MBD is a desirable relation for a single male to marry within most patrilineal descent systems (Levi-Strauss 1969). This is not a rule. It is the relationship that has been most frequently adopted in marriage over time. It is a standard of what is deemed the most socially acceptable practice (after Bourdieu 1977, 1984).

‘On the surface Kugu-Nganychara [part of the Wik Mungkan group in Pormpuraaw] social organisation lacks readily identifiable units. Certainly there are families to which various individuals are attached on a short- or long-term basis, Moreover, there are named groupings. The latter, however, are hardly ever observable in social action. They are categories rather than social groups. Rules are only made to be broken. Marriages are contracted which rupture almost all possible constraints. And in matters of belief and knowledge there is no apparent orthodoxy. For any particular story, every one has the correct version: and they all differ’ (Von Sturmer 1980, 448).

Von Sturmer’s observations might seem polemical but I think that they illustrate an important point which is that people have an egocentric view of their position within society that is largely conditioned by their immediate experiences and lifestyles.

Both Bourdieu (1977) and Von Sturmer (1980) saw kindred groups or clans as categories, rather than as actual functioning groups, that provide another level of differentiation in social life in addition to other factors such as age, sex, or political and economic influence. The categories are only activated in a social sense for formal occasions such as the performance of burial or ‘increase’ ritual, or at times of crisis such as in a territorial dispute.

‘It would be possible to move on to the ground where talk of rules seems least displaced, that of custom or ‘pre-laws’ and show that ‘customary rules’ preserved by the group memory are themselves the product of a small batch of schemes enabling agents to generate an infinity of practices adapted to endlessly changing situations, without these schemes ever being constituted as explicit principles .... Customary
law always seems to pass from particular case to particular case, from the specific misdeed to the specific sanction, never expressly formulating the fundamental principles which ‘rational’ law spells out explicitly’ (Bourdieu 1977, 16).

Lefebvre in ‘The Production of Social Space’ (1991) and Bourdieu in the ‘Logic of Practice’ (1977) questioned the degree to which representations of social space and of ‘habitus’ are consciously formed by their occupants and reproduced by the social activity or practice that takes place within them (see Chapter 1.4). In other words, are people aware of the links between their actions and the social spaces that they occupy? Certainly, most people on the Gulf Lowlands have a worldview, which rarely extends beyond that region and assume their knowledge of the landscape and social relations is a common knowledge shared by everybody there. People tend to justify their land affiliations and related land use actions on the basis of traditional law and their present day family relationships. The spatial models that I have developed in this thesis to represent the habitus of land allocation demonstrate some of the implicit and ‘taken for granted’ ways or ‘practical logics’ (after Bourdieu 1977, 1984) that people use in land allocation practice. The historical and geographical contingencies that I have described do influence decision-making but not in a way where people declare them outright as objective criteria when arriving at a decision. The spatial models that demonstrate some of these contingencies in this thesis do not reveal anything remarkable to many of their subjects and sometimes it is the lack of reaction by people to them (a shrugging of the shoulders or a ‘so what’ facial expression), rather than any positive response, that endorses their usefulness, as it is the ‘taken for granted’ ways that are often the most difficult rules of practice to elicit. Of course, situations arise where the purpose of a model is not recognised at all as it is either too abstract or too complicated, or not realistic enough in its representation of a landscape: equally, in such situations, people then express their feelings about the validity of the work (a bemused or pained expression and an effort to change the subject of conversation).

The efforts and strategies required in the development of a spatial model or map to represent social relations or any other spatial aspect of Aboriginal social practice by a geographer, is not dissimilar to the experiences of an anthropologist in their construction
an ethnographic model of kinship relations and social practice. In turn, the ways in which Aboriginal people can work collaboratively with a geographer in addressing both research goals and practical day-to-day community needs are also comparable to those that are used with an anthropologist.

Maps of the kind presented in this thesis have at least two meanings in the representation of social space. The first is an idealised view of the spatial relations that local land allocation systems provide, which is of where people ought to be according to the models. The second is an actualised or explicit view of what is the outcome of local land allocation practice, of where people actually are. In some instances the two representations do not coincide. Land use and homeland choices that do not follow expected practice, that are not explained by the models are often illustrative of ‘praxis’ (Hodder 1992; Lefebvre 1991). For example, the spatial model of social organisation in the Pormpuraaw township (see Chapter 3) represents a suite of secondary rights to natural resource use between homeland tribal groups that are resident there, that are not reproduced at all in land use practice in the landscape (see Chapter 4). Praxis reveals the ways in which those elements in decision-making that depend on traditional clan or kinship relations and current circumstances in community life (explicit space), are combined with the geographical and historical relations of traditional country to the township (implicit space). Praxis fills the gap between theory or expected practice and actual practice.

The observation and recording of praxis allows models of social practice to be re-iterated or revised by the people whose actions are represented by them, or by the researchers who create them. In the context of community planning and decision-making about land management options these revisions are ideally undertaken by both groups of people simultaneously. In order for this level of engagement between a spatial model and its subjects to occur, visually enhanced models of social space are required that provide familiar referents in the landscape and in township life and which act as visual cues around which people can locate themselves spatially and socially; and, which allow them to make richer and more comprehensive statements about the organisation of physical and social space in the landscape. These referents depend on the age and experiences of the
viewer, their knowledge of the landscape and apart from any tribal or homeland group identity that they may possess, also their own personal sense of social and geographical space that has been acquired in township life.

6.2 **Personal space and landscape knowledge**

In principle, each person on the Gulf Lowlands has their own private map that describes their wider social relations to every other person. Rules of kinship determine patterns of interpersonal behaviour; and those of clan affiliation define the geographical location of land interests in specific places and estates in the landscape. Clan affiliation also defines roles in the stories that link people throughout the Gulf Lowlands and Peninsula in systems of obligation and reciprocity that transcend the local scale of land relationships that have been described so far in this thesis. Each personal mapping of this ‘aesthetic space’ (after Baumann 1993) is probably unique and it is unlikely that any people, whether in Pormpuraaw or Kowanyama would share the same ‘representational space’ (after Lefebvre 1991) if these idioms were used to map them.

‘When an Aboriginal identifies, say his clan totem and its sacred site, he is not ‘pointing’ to ‘something’ which is ‘out there’ and external to him, but ‘not him’: he is identifying part of his awareness as a human being, a part of the plan of his life in society, a condition of his placement and activity in manifold of existence in a cosmic scheme’ (Stanner 1976, 31 cited in Strang 1994, 109).

Unlike moral space (after Bauman 1993), which is a geographical territory that is shared by homeland group members with some degree of exclusivity from other homeland groups, and cognitive space, which is the domain of general knowledge, aesthetic space is both personal and public. It is the most visible form of social space in that it controls the flow of daily life in the community. It is evident in interpersonal relations in the street, in the community store and in the schoolyard. It is the space, which is available for people to make choices about who they want to be with, and occasionally landscape metaphors are used to express it. Knowledge of
places and their ritual association or names is often geographically conflated in
correlation in conversation in community life. A jocular exchange where an Olkola man referred to
his Kokoberrin companion, ‘that fella there he turned into a tree and lizard climbed
up him and lizard didn’t know’, mixes totemic metaphors for each other, and place,
the tree in question, which span across 200 kilometres of Gulf Lowlands country. In
another conversation with a Kokoberra lady, she referred to Brolga and Emu in order
to make a point to me. I had been on a brief ‘men only’ mapping trip from which
women had been excluded where I was told a different version of the Brolga and
Emu story than that which had been reported earlier to a female researcher. It was
sexually explicit and very ribald in its narrative. I feigned naivety and alluded to
some of the sexual adventures between Brolga and Blue-tongued Lizard, which are
part of the story, in my conversation with the lady. This was at first met with
blushes, she changed the subject, and then her conversation became more elliptical
with reference to landscape and myths mixed with the everyday accounts of events in
township life that she was relating to me. These kinds of elision between people and
places in the landscape and township life are common in day-to-day conversation.

Prior to the foundation of the missions, cognitive space and the distribution of
traditional knowledge of the landscape was subject to a variety of filters based
around the clan membership, age or gender, and kinship and sectional categories that
determined social identity. These mechanisms have become more attenuated in
township life over the years. In the present day, the distribution of cognitive space is
determined more by the personalities who hold such knowledge, their individual life
histories, and experiences of the landscape and the places within it and around which
their knowledge has been acquired.

6.2.1 Landscape knowledge and ‘unknowing’
A complete knowledge of place should include location, name, and the story or ritual
power that is attached to it, and who controls access to it. In Kowanyama people
often have two names for a place, a ‘ground name’ and a ‘story name’. Traditionally,
the ground name would also be the ‘bush name’ of the person who had authority
over that site and the story name would link that place into a network that included other places that shared a common story. For instance, the Baby Story starts in the country around the mouth of the Mitchell River and crosses the Kowanyama DOGIT in a north-south direction to the Topsy Creek and then continues eastwards for a considerable distance along the Mitchell River Valley. The full extent of the story traverses tracts of Yir Yoront, Kokoberra, Kokoberrin and Kunjen country. It is a widely known story that is shared by many people. It intersects a number of other stories at various places including the Taipan and Honey Bee stories which carry particular potency and the need for the careful exercise of ritual control over the country in which they are located. Though the locations and names of the places that comprise the latter stories are known, the death in recent years of a number of male Elders has led to the loss of ritual control over some very powerful poison places and these tracts of physically desirable country are now unsafe for occupation. One homeland group who have formal rights of access to such country would not establish a homeland there as ‘daddy’ was no longer alive to exercise ritual control over the landscape for them. This group has instead transferred their homeland interests to ‘mother’s country’, approximately 20 kilometres away, where male Elders from other patriline, for whom it is ‘father’s country’, have validated their wish to establish a homeland.

Knowledge of the physical and ritual properties of the landscape and of ownership of the places within it is largely the reserve of older people. ‘You were born in Cairns I was born in the bush’, is a taunt from a middle-aged man to a young person who was questioning his authority in the supervision of a Millennium Eve dance in the Pormpuraaw community hall. The Thaayore janitor had just stopped the festivities because of a demonstration of the Lightning dance that belongs to certain clans from Thaayore side, by a troupe of young dancers from Mungkan side. It is an exciting dance but it does not belong to them. The retort, heard daily in many other forms and contexts throughout the Lowlands, implied that the person at whom it was directed was not qualified to question the janitor’s actions because of the circumstances of their birth, and hence a large distance in time and space between
their respective experiences and knowledge of bush life and of the landscape.

Nowadays, all children are born in the Cairns Base Hospital.

According to Thrift (1985) there are five types of unknowing. One type is knowledge that is unknown and not possible to know, such as that which is lost on the death of an Elder in a patriline where there are no heirs to assume and continue the knowledge. This defines the state of knowledge in what is referred to in Aboriginal English as ‘orphan country’. Traditionally, if members of a clan died in the southern Gulf Lowlands then ownership of the estate went to someone genealogically rather than geographically proximate, such as a classificatory brother (Sharp 1937; Taylor 1984). This process might lead at any time, to a mosaic of land affiliations to widely separated estates in the landscape. This mosaic can change over time to a topology of more geographically continuous homeland areas. For example, with reference to Eastern Arnhem Land,

‘As soon as a clan had effectively ceased to perform its life-maintaining duty of tending the land it was in charge of, others had to fill the gap – and they did not hesitate. This did not result in a clan’s actually expanding its landholding. Those of the clan who were most closely affiliated with the new locality took over. However, within a few generations the ties between the two splinter groups and recognition of a common origin would disappear since actual genealogical meaning is traditionally very shallow’ (Kolig 1978:62-63 cited in Sutton 1996).

Genealogical memory is quite shallow in any society and usually comprises no more than three generations.

‘“The continuing present” of lived experience is underlined by the depth at which genealogies cease to be part of the constitution of new links in younger generations. This coincides with the depth of lived and shared experience – typically the grandparental generation’ (Smith 2000, 288).

According to Smith (2000), Aboriginal people in the central Peninsula township of Coen speak of generational links beyond the grandparental generation as the ‘background’, a temporal horizon beyond which it is assumed that everybody is related to each other. Nonetheless, a more permanent and fixed temporal horizon may be established in areas, like Kowanyama, where genealogies have been compiled from historical ethnographies and from recent Land Claim or ‘Native Title’
I have listened as people who refer to these sources justify their connection to country as far back as four or five generations. The implications of this permanent ‘instantiation’ (after Giddens 1985) of social relations and land affiliation in text or database form, for future land allocation in the southern Gulf Lowlands, is discussed in the following final chapter of this thesis.

Elsewhere, Sutton (1978) cites examples of populations that have been exterminated in massacres and where, as a consequence, the ‘mythic charters’ that underpinned their authority over country may have been revised to accommodate new owners within the space of a couple of generations. Most probably, after a while, unoccupied tracts of this kind eventually became ‘company country’ (after Von Sturmer 1980), the use of which is shared by the occupants of adjacent homeland areas. After a time, such unclaimed spaces may become subject to an assertion of ownership or control by one or more of the adjacent homelands. As yet, the process whereby this kind of country is brought back into public life and use on the southern Gulf Lowlands is not clear to me. At present, in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, such country is most obvious in areas where people do not go to hunt or fish where the opportunities to do so exist, even if they are easily accessed from the township. It is also evident in locales which are suitable for a homeland, particularly in the Coastal landscape of Kowanyama, but are not occupied because we ‘we do not want to disturb them old [deceased] people there’.

I have not seen any change of homeland boundaries or of rights of assertions of authority over country following the death of a homeland leader. Instead, in some areas of ‘deceased estates’ in and around the Kowanyama Hinterland, which I have now observed for seven years or so, any homeland or land use rights which had been granted as ‘proximate entitlement’ by the deceased owner of that estate or homeland to people without any traditional connection to it still prevail, and will no doubt not return to the entitled families until the present ‘proximate owner’ has died. Some homeland areas are taken over immediately by members of the family when a leader dies [by the son or daughter or by a brother or sister]. To my knowledge such
successions have always been uncontested. Looking at the present demography of some of those families who own homeland areas where no obvious re-occupation of the core homeland site has taken place, it might be another ten years or so before the heirs of the deceased have the ability to activate their rights of ownership. Many of these heirs are young adults in their 20s who first have to develop their personalities and sense of leadership in other areas of community life. Otherwise, I think that members of the broader ‘homeland society’ (see Chapter 5.4) which usually comprises three or four geographically and socially contiguous homeland areas may make their own assignments to the deceased estate from within their group. Over many generations such a process would lead to the submergence of smaller homeland areas or clan estates within larger homogenous blocks of homeland society country[ as has been described in other areas of western cape York Peninsula by Sutton (1978) and Von Sturmer (1980)].

In general, anthropological fieldwork has shown that a contraction in community knowledge of places in the landscape or of the ownership or control of some known places is a widespread phenomenon (for instance Merlan 1998; Smith 2000; Sutton 1978; Taylor 1984; Von Sturmer 1980). Taylor (1999) undertook extensive fieldwork in Kowanyama in 1997 and 1998 with traditional owners of the Kowanyama DOGIT and the Alice / Mitchell River National Park areas. Taylor surveyed some country that had been mapped 60 years earlier by Sharp (1937). He reported a marked loss of knowledge of the location or the name of many of the sites recorded by Sharp. As an example, Sharp mapped 89 places in one area, whereas the combined mapping efforts of Taylor (1999), and of David and Cordell (1994), only identified 25 places that could now be named by people. In other areas it appears that knowledge of whole clan estates may have disappeared from community memory over the last two or three generations (Taylor 1999). Nonetheless, even though knowledge of specific places may have passed away, the traditional affiliations to the larger homeland or tribal space of which they are a composite part still prevail in present day society.
According to Thrift (1985) there is also a type of unknowing that includes knowledge that is not understood, or that is known only in distorted fashion. On the southern Gulf Lowlands, these forms of knowledge are characteristic of people who have spent most of their life in the township and only understand the landscape and their affiliations to it from stories that are told to them. These are almost always young people and sometimes those who are mentally or physically incapacitated. The process of acquiring knowledge of this kind can be described in terms of primary learning or declarative knowledge (McDonald and Pellegrino 1993) that is acquired by instruction from parents or Elders in the township. Thus there are people who occupy a ‘virtual’ landscape based on social relations in township life. They have knowledge of the places in the landscape and associated stories and ritual responsibilities that form part of their personal biography or ‘map’ and can express very close relationships and empathies with them; but, may have little experience of the actual location or physical properties of these places, or indeed they may have never visited them.

Knowledge can also be hidden from certain people, this can include ritual knowledge such as of ‘love magic’, whereby certain places should be avoided in the company of a member of the opposite sex, or the control of poison places, or sections of stories that belong exclusively to particular age or gender categories. There is also the kind of knowledge that is never discussed because it is taken for granted by everybody that everyone else knows it. This latter form of ‘unknowing’ is the form encountered by the researcher when they first go into a community. This ‘taken for granted’ knowledge includes the mundane business of day-to-day life that is often the key to understanding local practice.

Comprehensive knowledge of places and of social and land relationships in a region that are associated, in a traditional sense, with an ‘Elder’, is not necessarily the domain of a homeland leader. Many homeland groups rely on the expertise of a person other than their leader to validate their territorial claims, and in some cases the knowledgeable person may have only relatively weak kinship affiliations to the group for whom they act as an advisor or spokesperson. This separation of corporate knowledge and of corporate authority is evident from time to time in Kowanyama.
when the people who take part in mapping trips in order to validate Land Claims under State law are different to those who propose the establishment of homeland sites in the same areas. Those people in community life who have the greatest knowledge of the landscape and fluency in a range of Gulf Lowland languages are not necessarily prominent people in civic life and can occupy marginal social positions. Some are considered as eccentric or lacking in social graces, others are people whose traditional country is a considerable distance away from the community and who thus have little direct investment in community homeland affairs. Irrespective of their background, they have high-level views of the landscape throughout western Cape York Peninsula. All of them are well travelled and can be away from the community for a number of weeks at any time. The reasons for these absences include visits to perform songs or dances at festivals or celebrations, or to deliver orations at funerals. They are all excellent public speakers. Sometimes some of them with the most carefully developed eccentricities or most unacceptable shortcomings in behaviour, properties that they all seem to share in one way or another, have to go away to ‘cool off’ when their personalities become too much for everybody else in the community to bear. ‘I know all that country’ is an assertion that is frequently made by such people, particularly at public meetings. Their knowledge does not imply any right of ownership over these places instead they frequently advise on the ritual significance of places. They provide invaluable advice to researchers prior to field trips on the location of poison or sickness places and who to consult in the community, or elsewhere, in order to obtain safe passage through them. I have had to travel between Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw on a number of occasions to obtain authority of this kind.

6.2.2 The landscapes of ‘knowing’

Whilst there are many forms of ‘unknowing’ in terms of knowledge of the traditional landscape, their distribution does not correspond in any obvious way to the tribal, homeland group, or proximity of traditional country to the township properties for social space that have been identified for the southern Gulf Lowlands in this thesis. Landscape knowledge appears to be a highly personal construction that is fashioned
by people in township life and in their personal life experiences. Nonetheless, there are clear generational differences in how people may compose or represent their knowledge of the landscape and this is evident in the kind of places that they refer to when describing the landscape.

Chapter 2 of this thesis identified a regional scale cognitive space or knowledge of the landscape in the southern Gulf Lowlands that is comprehensive amongst tribal groups irrespective of their historical experiences of assimilation into community life during Mission time and Department time. Colonial experience has promoted expressions of community identity — ‘we all Pormpuraaw mob’ or ‘we all Kowanyama mob’ or of regional identity, ‘we all one mob’ (see Chapter 2.4) without subsuming Aboriginal homeland identities such as ‘we all Scrubby Bore mob’ or ‘we all I’ygow mob’. Over the years of mapping and of land information system development and community land use planning in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama there have been two clear sets of spatial referents that are used by people to describe the landscape, the location of their country within it, and their relationships with other people in the southern Gulf Lowlands. The first is homeland country as it has developed around homeland sites that have been built in the region since the later 1980s. This is common knowledge to everybody irrespective of their age. Descriptions of affiliation to a homeland may comprise statements such as ‘we belong at place X, A from the other family belongs there as well and so does B whose mother belongs to place Y’. The other referents which are used by people are cattle yards and wetlands. These places are found throughout the whole of the western Peninsula and the Gulf country and are the basis of a comprehensive landscape knowledge, which has been acquired largely by middle-aged and older people in their years of working in the cattle industry in the region during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Wetlands are the dominant feature of the physical landscape; and cattle infrastructure such as fences, yards and homesteads which are the most visible features of the Mission time and Department time landscapes, are a cultural heritage that is shared by everybody in the region. Also, both kinds of place are often loci that were significant in the traditional landscape and thus provide nodes for the
entrainment of a wide range of local knowledge into spatial models of the landscape. Moreover, they provide core geographic referents around which people can create cartographic expressions [maps] of explicit space that their domain of knowledge and social, ritual and economic interests in the landscape encompasses. All of the above referents have been used to develop personalised representations of land and natural resource interests in the landscape [maps] in community planning in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama.

6.2.2.1 Wetlands
Stanner considered the effects of distantiation on knowledge of the landscape, and speculated on what questions might be asked of people who no longer directly occupy their traditional country so that they may be able to articulate their land relationships. He advised detailed mapping of the physical and ecological properties of the landscape, and then:

‘A single question – which way a group ‘walked about’ or ‘ran’ as distinct from where it ‘sat down’? – based on aboriginal concepts, may suffice ... One of the more interesting aspects of a map compiled in this fashion is that it can be made without any necessary reference to ‘tribal’ or ‘language-divisions’ (Stanner 1965, 13).

In effect, Stanner proposed that the information in topographical maps of the landscape could be used as metaphors for reconstructing its social properties. For instance, Schrire (1984) has observed that places in Aboriginal landscapes have two roles: first as landmarks in a physical landscape whose function can be explained rationally in terms of environmental processes, and secondly as landmarks in the minds of the people who use them or as ‘cognitive markers in a mythical world’. For instance, wetlands are major landmarks in the southern Gulf Lowlands whose environmental properties are germane to the ecological functioning and economic values of the landscape; yet at the same time many of them are ‘baby places’ or ‘spirit places’ or ‘conception centres’ which hold the key to clan identity and to the future propagation of society for their owners. Hence, a landscape can be viewed as a hermeneutic entity which embodies social and ritual values as well as a physical reality: in other words as something that is perceived and experienced by people
Seasonal wetlands provide a hermeneutic, a set of recognisable symbols and a property of the Gulf Lowlands landscape that integrate many environmental, social and cultural values. They have many roles including that of ‘memento mori’. They are places where past friends and relations are remembered, or where the qualities of life in the bush in early ‘Mission time’, or fishing tales of ‘the one that got away’ are recalled. Thomson (1939) in ‘Seasonality and Human Culture’ demonstrated that wetlands embody seasonal patterns of human behaviour in regional scale land use strategies and in manifestations of social space, in how people’s social pathways through the landscape intersected in camps and meetings at these places, in the years prior to Mission time. The significance of seasonal mobility and of wetland distribution in Gulf Lowlands lifestyles has already been discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis. Mobility is a theme that is also encapsulated in the songs and stories that describe the creation of the landscape. There are predetermined pathways through the landscape that link places in a sequence or route, depending on the ritual knowledge and the affiliation of a person to each place. Dry season lagoons form significant nodes in these networks as story places, as camps or meeting places, and also as food and water sources. In principle, each person can be mapped to these locations on the basis of their kinship and clan affiliations [just as people were mapped to household of residence on the basis of these criteria in Chapter 3] and idealised maps can be made that show the seasonal linkage between those lagoons that are prescribed for them by their position in local clan and kinship systems. Such representations are described in cultural anthropology in terms of ‘figure-ground’ maps (for instance Lakoff 1987 and Talmy 1987 cited in Zubrow 1994). There is an appropriate map or representational space for each figure, whether a person, family or homeland group. For each ground, that is place or area in the landscape, there are ‘one-to-one’, ‘one-to-many’ or ‘many-to-many’ social relationships that map people to one or more of those locations. The spatial and temporal relationships that are
implicit in a series of maps of this kind provide their content with a set of topological properties which are expressions of social as well as physical space. They include spatial relations such as contiguity, proximity, containment, connectivity and adjacency or overlap; and, temporal relations, such as before, after or contemporary with. These are universally recognised forms of spatial and temporal cognition (Zubrow 1994). They provide semantics, and a verbal and visual grammar for representing social space and for people to convey their knowledge of places and of their social relationships in the Gulf Lowlands landscape.

6.2.2.2 Cattle infrastructure
People also make frequent reference to another suite of landmarks in the pastoral landscape that includes cattle yards, bores, and fences and gates. Cattle yards are all significant places in a seasonal economy in which the majority of Aboriginal males and many women in western Cape York Peninsula took part in from the earliest mission years up until the 1960s when the introduction of an ‘award’ wage equivalent to that received by European Australian workers led to the exclusion of most Aboriginal people from the cattle industry. The introduction of the ‘beef’ roads in the late 1960s, major unsealed highways which support the traffic of articulated heavy goods vehicles or ‘road trains’ for the carriage of cattle, also led to the abandonment of the cattle droving routes that had been the highways for taking cattle from remote pastoral properties to the nearest railway terminal or to market. Cattle work took many men along seasonal droving trails that spread all over North Australia and imparted knowledge of landscape that extends over areas of thousands of square kilometres to many of them. This knowledge is anchored in features of the European landscape and represents those years of the most active engagement of Aboriginal people in the European economy of North Australia. For most people who took part in this industry it was a life-defining experience, and one that is almost always recalled enthusiastically. Strang (1994, 1997) in her accounts of European (pastoralist) – Aboriginal (mission) relations in the lower Mitchell River Valley, in and around Kowanyama, refers to this time as the ‘Golden years’. At present, almost all boys and young men still want to be a ‘ringer’ and country and western music, and songs of the cattle droving days in North Queensland [notably by Slim Dusty, an iconic Australian
country and western singer and through his songs, a social historian of those years] are played incessantly on CD and DVD players both by day and by night in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama.

Knowledge of the environmental properties of the pastoral landscape appears to be more comprehensive and more detailed and more widely distributed than concomitant knowledge when it is referenced to places in the traditional, pre-colonial landscape. As well as extending over thousands of square kilometres, cattle drives also involved Aboriginal people from a wide range of tribal backgrounds working together in droving teams. As a cattle drive traversed their traditional country people taught its features to the rest of the team (Colin Lawrence pers. comm). It was the only way in which many people could learn their country in Mission time and Department time in years when the church and State administrations of Aboriginal communities supervised the indenture of Aboriginal labour to the cattle industry. The older men at Kowanyama continually enquire about mapping trips to the cattle yards that still survive. They are keen to impart their knowledge of these places and their associated histories and lifestyles before they die; some of them see it as a priority as great as the need to record features of the traditional landscape. Both traditional and pastoral landscapes often coincide at these places with the location of many cattle yards being significant in the pre-colonial landscape (John Taylor, pers. comm); almost invariably, they are located at, or close by wetlands.

The significance of the pastoral landscape in Aboriginal constructions of ‘country’ and of person-place relationships in the landscape is also described by Smith (2000). The ‘run’ is a term used in Coen to describe the extent of country with which a person feels both connection and familiarity and which has largely been acquired through work in the cattle industry; there is no comparable word to my knowledge in either Kowanyama or Pormpuraaw English, though I have heard it used elsewhere in the upper Mitchell River valley, by older men at Chillagoe and Dimbulah, to describe traditional and tribal, as opposed to individual or historically assumed territorial interests.
‘The run has been shaped by personal movement and association with country and people, within a continuing but transforming system of tenures and knowledge’ (Smith 2000, 298).

Smith compared its extent and definition with those of the traditional ‘estate’ and ‘range’ (after Stanner 1965). The introduction of the cattle industry did not entail a radical transformation of Aboriginal connection to, and knowledge of country; instead it provided ‘new vehicles’ for the continuity of practice, the transmission of knowledge about the landscape and the development of personal and group identities in relation to the landscape (Smith 2000). In a spatial and temporal sense, seasonal wetland and cattle ‘run’ distributions share many topological properties, and this chapter goes on to explore the use of these ‘landmark’ properties in eliciting information from people about the social as well as the physical properties of the southern Gulf Lowlands in land and natural resource mapping in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in the early 2000s.

6.3 **Explicit space and representations of the landscape**

There are basic semantic components in the distribution of landmarks such as the dry season distribution of lagoons or of cattle infrastructure that can either be elicited or inculcated through visual inspection of maps. They are knowledge of place (landmark knowledge); knowledge of routes or connectivity between places, the sequence in which lagoons or cattle yards are visited at differing times of the year (route knowledge); and, knowledge of domains, that is broader knowledge of the landscape and people’s roles in it, and of the convergence or divergence in the different mobility patterns associated with them (domain knowledge). This hierarchical ordering of spatial knowledge from the recognition of locations, to their connectivity, and to an appreciation of broader spatial patterns borrows from concepts used in landscape architecture and in cultural geography (Golledge 1978, 1993; Golledge and Stimson 1997; Lynch 1960). Golledge’s ‘anchor point’ theory of spatial knowledge acquisition recognises that certain landmarks act as ‘critical organising nodes’ that dominate environmental knowledge in their vicinity (1993).
Maps of wet and dry season wetland distribution, of cattle yards, bores and paddock gates, and of tracks and of the location of pastoral properties and outstations in western Cape York Peninsula were used as landmarks and as a background against which local people in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw evaluated the work that has been done on their behalf in an inventory of community wetlands for Kowanyama (Monaghan 2001), landscape and natural resource mapping for Kowanyama (Monaghan 2003b) and Pormpuraaw (Monaghan 2003a), a natural hazard risk assessment study for Pormpuraaw (Monaghan and Taylor 2003) and a preliminary marine and coastal resource use plan for Kowanyama (Monaghan 2003c). Public meetings which were held to review the accuracy and utility of thematic mapping of landscape properties produced by the above projects gave the opportunity to explore the effect of the use of different landmarks on eliciting information about the landscape from people. Public review of the maps also allowed for the exploration of the relationships between geographical scale, from regional to local; and social scale, from tribal to personal, in community knowledge of the physical properties and uses of the landscape.

The landscape mapping projects (Monaghan 2003a, 2003b) aimed to describe the physical properties of landscape units over an area that covers all of the potential Native Title interests of the residents of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama and hence covered the greater part of south-western Cape York Peninsula. The mapping is intended to provide information for community land management, and for Native Title negotiations with other landholders in the region. The basis of the mapping was in the identification of a suite of 1:1250 000 scale landscape units from the interpretation of LANDSAT TM imagery (Figure 6.2). A ‘Land Systems’ approach to mapping was used whereby each landscape, which was identified on the basis of common image tone, texture and pattern characteristics, was assumed to have integral physical and biogeographical properties (after Aldrick and Gunn 1988;
Figure 6.2: Major landscape units of the traditional country of the people of Kowanyama (Monaghan 2003b)
Plate 6.1a: Desktop mapping of traditional country with Kunjen and Olkola Elders (Monaghan 2003b)

Plate 6.1b: Willie Banjo, Kowanyama head stockman, maps community fence-lines from a satellite image
Information on the biogeographical properties and economic values of these landscapes were then obtained from consultation with people in ‘desktop’ mapping sessions. This consultation involved the projection of landmark information, of the landscape mapping and of the source aerial photography and satellite imagery onto a wall-mounted screen. All three levels of information were visible at any time and could be changed and re-composed interactively depending on the area of the landscape under review, who was in the audience, and their knowledge of the landscape, and their ability to read maps or interpret images.

Meetings were held with groups of between 20 and 30 people in Kowanyama where, with reference to each landscape unit, the following questions were asked

‘What do you call this country’?

‘What does this country look like’?

People were asked to follow a series of specific routes between known places in the landscape, wetlands or bores or cattle yards, and as they traveled along them on the screen they called out the name of each place and described each of the mapped landscapes. These routes had been determined before the meeting so that they also provided transects across the mapped area which were as representative of as many different landscapes and landscape properties as possible. Where my mapping was acceptable, the response to both questions was essentially the same

‘We call all this country the same way’.

With this answer people acknowledged the mapped landscapes as being representative of their own understanding of the country. They also identified as a matter of course and without prompting, the territorial interests of their families and friends, and of people elsewhere in other towns and communities in North Queensland, in each of the landscapes. Many people had a detailed knowledge of the topography and physical properties of each landscape even if it was a considerable distance away from their own
‘homeland’ country. Those people at the meetings who had little to say were nevertheless attentive, with their eyes on the screen and listening to the descriptions of landscape that were unfolding around them. The meetings comprised a mixture of people declaring knowledge and of others absorbing knowledge. Digital mapping techniques were used, when necessary, to edit the content of each map ‘on the fly’ (plate 6.1b). Editing, whether it involved the spatial re-alignment of landscape unit boundaries, or a correction to the description of the cultural or physical properties of a landscape, was always done publicly and under the supervision of the appropriate traditional owners.

A detailed map of the landscapes within the community area was developed as part of the Kowanyama regional study for use in homeland site selection and in homeland land use planning. This map was based on Land System units from the above landscape mapping; on seasonal wetland mapping (Monaghan 2001); on CYPLUS mapping of dominant vegetation communities (Neldner and Clarkson 1995); and, on onscreen digitising from the interpretation of aerial photography and satellite imagery by expert groups from the different tribal groups within the community (plate 6.1a). The aim of this part of the project was also to develop a nomenclature of local names for the vegetation map units in order to replace unfamiliar botanical and geographical terms and to make the maps more amenable for use by local people. This work was done with smaller groups of people, each of which was representative of a tribal group in Kowanyama. Though these groups worked separately, there was a high concordance between them in the nomenclature that they used to describe even fine grain physical detail in the vegetation and drainage features of the landscape.

The response ‘we call all this country the same way’ clearly refers to a cognitive space, a common set of ‘domain’ level knowledge (after Golledge 1997) about the physical properties of landscapes over thousands of square kilometres which is not greatly affected by the country of origin or tribal affiliation of the respondents in this consultation. It was heartening to see the authority with which some men and women described the physical and environmental attributes of their country, which is 200 kilometres or more away from where they live in Kowanyama. The same people had expressed the concern to me in
conversation in the past that ‘we’ve forgotten it all’ with reference to their homeland country. For the most part, this knowledge of traditional places was not entirely forgotten, but was re-activated and declared as these people took ‘digital flyovers’, from landmark to landmark, of their traditional country.

Unlike Kowanyama, it was never possible to get large groups of people together for consultations about the landscape mapping in Pormpuraaw; and, only one or two people at a time were ever consulted for a natural hazard risk assessment study over a period of about six weeks in 2002 (Monaghan and Taylor 2003). The surface water model that was developed as part of this thesis (see Chapters 4 and 5) was used to provide maps of the extent of wet season inundation; and fire scar data from the Cape York Peninsula Development Association (CYPDA) were used to map early and late dry season fire regimes. Maps of these properties and photographs of coincident homeland areas and landscapes were displayed for people to review and comment on. The study asked people to rate the vulnerability of the Pormpuraaw township, and if appropriate, the vulnerability of their homeland to wet and dry season natural hazards. Responses were collected over a period of about six weeks. A modeled distribution of expected low/medium/high natural hazard risks based on satellite mapping and meteorological data (Monaghan and Taylor 2003), which was not displayed, and the estimated risk distribution provided by respondents to the survey coincided quite closely. In addition, almost all respondents showed a ‘domain’ level of knowledge in explaining their acceptance of these natural hazard risks in terms of the topographical and environmental properties of the wider Pormpuraaw landscape. Though, the same people would only make observations on the vulnerability of places and of appropriate mitigation strategies to reduce the risk, in areas of the township where they lived and by reference to their homeland area. Questions about the management of areas of the landscape beyond their sphere of interest were answered by directing me to the traditional owner of that area.

The Kowanyama wetlands study (Monaghan 2001) also dealt with the properties of specific places in the landscape. People were asked to confirm the accuracy of mapping of
the seasonal distribution of wetlands; to assess the condition of those wetlands that are known to them in terms of bank degradation, pig trampling and water quality; to make an assessment of their economic and cultural value to the community; and to define what they felt were permissible uses for them. The latter might include uses such as fishing, crayfish farming, or conservation because of their cultural or biological significance. This review took place intermittently over a period of three weeks. KLNRMRO did not have a data projector at the time and so consultation took place before a computer monitor. At each session one, two, three or four people were conducted on a tour of the landscape and information was elicited from them along the way. People were shown maps of the seasonal extent of wetlands with the location of traditional places and of infrastructure such as cattle yards and roads superimposed on them. Only those people who were current or former Community rangers or Cattle company employees demonstrated a ‘domain’ level knowledge of the distribution, condition and likely permissible uses of community wetlands. Most respondents’ knowledge of the name, location and extent of water holes throughout the dry season, and of the particular kinds of flora and fauna that existed at them was confined to specific locales in the landscape which invariably corresponded with their homeland interests. Otherwise, there was general ‘route’ level knowledge of the wetlands in the Kowanyama Hinterland (see Chapter 5), and in the vicinity of the major community cattle yards further afield. The latter places were invariably the organising ‘nodes’ by which people oriented themselves in the landscape when they first sat down to look at the mapping. They would invariably first ask ‘where is?’ questions, with reference to yard names, and then would proceed out from these places into the landscapes displayed on the screen. Though the names and locations of cattle yards were almost universally known, the naming of wetlands was more uneven and except where they coincided with homeland country, it appeared to decline with distance from the Kowanyama township.

Whenever the question of permissible uses for a wetland was raised in Kowanyama then, as in Pormpuraaw, reference was always made to the traditional owner of that place, even if the respondent had full knowledge of these issues, it was clear that this knowledge and
the authority that attached to it was a proprietary right that could only be declared by the owner of that place.

6.3.1 The properties of explicit space
The above mapping and community consultation exercises obtained a view of the biogeographical and land use properties of the present day landscape and of the ways in which knowledge of these properties is distributed and declared in southern Gulf Lowland communities. Moreover, these exercises gave insights into the ‘explicit space’ of decision-making and land allocation practice in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama. These explicit perspectives are largely symmetrical to those implicit properties that were obtained from the spatial analysis of historical ethnographies and models of seasonally accessible space and present day homeland distribution in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

The use of landmark and route information helped people articulate their knowledge of the landscape and identified variations in the declared knowledge of natural resources and their use that correspond to the traditional duality in land allocation between ‘range’ and land use and ‘estate’ and ownership (after Stanner 1965); and, to the differences in geographical and social scale in homeland group and tribe affiliations that have been described in recent land allocation practice since the mid-1990s in this thesis (see Chapter 5). In Kowanyama, there is a regional set of land or resource use rights vested in tribal polities that is reflected in community-wide knowledge of the (1:500 000 – 1:250 000 map scale) physical properties of the landscape and of environmental phenomena such as wet season inundation and dry season fire trends in the southern Gulf Lowlands region. Nested within this distribution are more localised areas of detailed (1:100 000 – 1:50 000 scale) knowledge of natural resource values, that are within the reserve of homeland groups, and which was declared in more detailed desktop mapping of community lands. Even if many people share knowledge of the economic or ritual properties of a latter area, only the locally acknowledged owner of a place has the authority to express it in any meeting or in any formal planning or management exercise. The distribution in Pormpuraaw has a more marked emphasis on the assertion of natural
resource values and rights of use of homeland groups and a lesser sense of common ownership by tribal groups than there is in Kowanyama. Hence, the use of landmark information in differing applications has also demonstrated important operational differences between Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in community land management, and in the kinds of community consultation that are required in land use planning.

Only a small set of a wide repertoire of possible ‘landmarks’ or spatial referents to traditional, historical and present day landscapes has been used in the natural resource mapping and assessment work that has been described in this chapter. Wetlands and cattle country infrastructure have provided ‘places’ which have allowed people to orientate themselves in the landscape and have been sufficient to cover the major forms of personal history and of ‘time-space convergence’ (after Giddens 1985) between township and landscape in community life that influence people’s knowledge and perceptions of the landscape. The landmarks allowed people, through digital desktop mapping techniques, to develop their own ‘figure-ground’ representations (after Zubrow 1994) of their own affiliation to, or, knowledge of the landscape.

The mapping highlighted generational differences in the knowledge of places that are used by people to reconstruct the landscape in mapping and also in their assertions of rights of resource use or homeland membership. Almost all of the respondents who have helped in the desktop mapping work in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama have been middle-aged or elderly, and mostly men: and it is my experience that there is a marked divide between the reconstructions of the landscape based on the traditional and historical idioms used by these men, and those that are based more on its physical and environmental properties, and on present day homeland distribution, in around the 35-40 year and younger age groups. The former generation and those that follow it were all born in Department time and unlike their forebears have less experience of life on the land and less exposure to the pooling and transfer of knowledge and the direct experience of country that were acquired on cattle drives. Many older men and women are capable of exhaustive descriptions of the landscape
based on the traditional idioms of kinship and clan affiliation. Younger adults often
find their lack of such a comprehensive knowledge embarrassing in desktop mapping
work, and require more visual cues in terms of photography of the landscape to
locate themselves and their places of interest within it.

Generally, younger people in Kowanyama only have detailed knowledge of the
township hinterland, of popular fishing spots and if they have an affiliation, of their
homeland area. Some young adults are the children and lieutenants of homeland
leaders who are being groomed for future leadership roles in the community.
Without exception, they are all teetotalers and are the most highly educated people in
their age range, and when I am in their country with them they share their
appreciation of its beauty or the abundance of its natural resources and their plans for
the future with me. Invariably, whenever I express interest in the traditional stories
that are attached to any places that we pass along the way, their elders or parents, if
they are present, are the only ones who actively respond to my questions. This may
be because the younger adults feel it inappropriate to impart the information to me in
their presence. Otherwise, the response is ‘ask Dad’. It is not just a case of
unknowing on their part, it as if they do not place as great a priority on these
landscape properties in their discussions with me and my role in the community as a
land use planner. The young adults who are aspiring homeland leaders tend to be
pragmatic people who are interested in the future development of their homelands
for their families and as potential places of remediation for addressing health
problems in their community. Other young people in the township also tend to talk
more about the physical appearance of the landscapes that they are familiar with
rather than their mythical or ritual or tribal properties; yet most of them can sing the
songs or relate the creation stories that belong to their tribal or homeland country,
and do so when any number of them are gathered together in the street or at parties
and want to ‘show off’ their use of their vernacular, Kokoberra, Kunjen or Yir
Yoront, language to each other (or to me).
Despite generational differences in landscape knowledge, declared or ‘explicit’ space is an individual and highly personalised form of social space. It is difficult to disentangle the meaning of explicit space in terms of land relations when it is expressed verbally in day-to-day conversation, even when it is recorded as text for subsequent analysis, because it encompasses such a wide range of other social relationships that are a product of the continuous shifts and changes in personal involvement in township life. However, when personal statements about connection to homeland country are elicited specifically through natural resource mapping and then spatially referenced to landmarks and digitally enhanced views of the landscape, then clear topological patterns often emerge when the maps that are produced are compared side by side. These patterns demonstrate an underlying society-wide strategy for the maintenance of person-place and social space [homeland, tribe] relationships in the landscape. This strategy also links traditionally endowed and present day land entitlements, over successive generations, to the same spaces in the landscape.

6.4 The topology of explicit space

The topological patterns [inclusion, exclusion, proximity, connectivity] that are reproduced in desktop mapping sessions embody person – place – space relationships where people – space [whether that space is the traditional clan estate of an ancestor, or the homeland country or tribal domain of a person in the present generation] geometries are immutable. Whereas, the places or landmarks which form ‘anchors’ in people’s minds for their own personal constructions of the landscape, and which people use to identify their domain and to express their land affiliation or homeland identity, can differ considerably, even within any single homeland or tribal group.

Explicit or declared space covers a wide range of issues beyond land management or land ownership and includes statements about interpersonal relations and affections or enmities in community life, ritual and mythology, and social obligations to family
and kindred. It is a continuously constructed phenomenon that changes in pitch and direction from day to day as circumstances change in daily life but it nevertheless contributes to the longer term historically and geographically based properties of implicit space, that have been discussed in this thesis in terms of the seasonal accessibility of tribal and homeland country to the township. The geographical and social links between these two forms of social space are embedded in landmark knowledge of the landscape and associated person-place-space relationships.

The specific places within those domains which people within any social group map themselves to may differ because of time-space distantiation effects on the ways in how they physically experience their country. These latter effects range from people born and raised in the bush, to those involved in the cattle industry, or to present day experiences through homeland residence or recreational use of the landscape in hunting and fishing, or in camping trips. All of these life experiences contribute simultaneously to differing patterns of ‘knowing’ and ‘unknowing’ about the landscape. Nonetheless, there is little difference in terms of social organisation, and corresponding homeland and tribal identities in the early 2000s, from those relationships that have been described entirely on the basis of traditional clan (estate) and kinship (range) affiliations in earlier ethnographies of the region (Sharp 1937; Taylor 1984). People-place relationships are renewed, modified or re-created in southern Gulf Lowlands landscapes but the spaces to which they are referenced, whether community, tribal, homeland or clan estate domains, never change or disappear.

Social space is exhaustive. For instance, when homeland country becomes ‘orphan country’, usually on the death of the male elders in a patriline, it does not leave a void in the landscape as that area is still part of a wider tribal domain and of that collective social identity. There has been some attenuation in the knowledge of the location of traditional places in Kowanyama (Taylor 1999), but it is clear that other landmarks, many of which are features of land use in the early and middle years of the 20th century, augment these. One of the more obvious transformations is in the
toponymy or naming of the landscape and in the adoption of English as well as vernacular place-names for ‘new’ places. This is particularly so for those vicinities where there are traditional places at the site of, or in close proximity to cattle infrastructure such as gates, or fence intersections or yards. Older people in Kowanyama use both names interchangeably when, for instance, describing the boundaries of ‘country’, or the ritual domain, that is to be closed following a death in the community. Notices that announce such a closure to the rest of the community invariably contain only Aboriginal English boundary names so that as many people as possible know their location. Place names, and whether they are used in their vernacular, or Aboriginal English or mainstream English versions, set the tone of any conversation and whether it is going to be directed, for instance, into homeland ritual business, or into community or tribal land use or natural resource management interests. The alternation in conversation of language and place name for the same location can often be a signal for other people who are present to either join or leave a discussion. Many places also have names in a variety of local languages and for instance referring to a place in Kunjen country by its Kokoberra name, can be taken as an, albeit misplaced, assertion of tribal authority and cause offence to Kunjen people if they are present. The language of social space, in particular the ways in which landmarks and related spatial domains are named, and its use for social inclusion or exclusion, is a worthwhile area of research for further understanding of the semantics of person-place-space relationships and their use in land allocation practice.

In a semiotic [symbolic] and topological [socio-spatial] sense, landscape domains can be conceived of as either ‘thin’ or ‘thick’ spaces (after Casey 1993) according to the number of known places that exist within them and to the roles of these places as foci of either community, or corporate tribal or homeland group interests. Places can in turn be either ‘thick’ or ‘thin’ in terms of their affective or aesthetic value that is their depth in traditional, historical and contemporary memory and experience; and, how widely these cognitive values are shared by people in the southern Gulf Lowlands. Irrespective of the relative thickness or thinness of social space in any
domain, its related landscape and every physical feature within such a landscape has an immediate immanence in personal or group identity to people in the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama townships. The social value of the land [social space] does not change, even though its symbolic content [places] may be transformed.

Figure 6.3: Network communication models (Adams 1998)
Conceptual models that are based on network theory (Adams 1998; Keen 1998; Sutton 1996, 1998) have been used to represent social space and the array of relationships that it contains between people, and between people and places in the landscape. For instance, Sutton felt that

‘neatly bound collective social universes in Aboriginal Australia do not exist, and that network-based models of sociality are much more appropriate’ (1996, 13).

Similar conclusions have also been drawn by Keen

‘As a research strategy I suggest that we start with an assumption of a continuous social network exhibiting gradual shifts in forms of practices, or a mosaic (of ceremony types, song styles, modes of kin classification, types of basket and the rest) whose mix subtly transforms across social space’ (1998, 269).

Networks are communication models that can represent individual people or places, or a mixture of both, at their nodes. Knowledge or information is transferred between nodes along links which join them together in a web of interconnected relationships. Networks provide topologies of social space, from an egocentric point of view by looking at the properties of a single node or person and its interconnectedness with other nodes or people in the network; or, from a sociocentric perspective by looking at the overall properties of the network, whether it represents a family, homeland group or community. Figure 6.3 contains a series of schematic diagrams that can be used to represent personal connectivity either between people or between people and related places. These network topologies are simple (thin) or complex (thick), depending on the number of people or places that they represent; they can also have varying degrees of connectivity, or openness and closure; and of structure. They can be radial and linked to a lot of people or places; or take more specialised linear, chain or loop forms that may imitate tribal or homeland networks; or they can be hierarchical trees with branches and up and down flows that are similar to kinship networks such as the one illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Adams (1998) argues that networks such as communication media can be ‘mapped onto the topology and the social structuration of physical places and processes’. He
uses the ‘Internet’ as an allegorical example of time-space distantiation (after Giddens 1985) and of the way in which it affects the distribution of information or knowledge and personal constructions of ‘place’. Giddens (1985) has described the behaviours that are produced as a result of economic globalisation where economies that were formerly local based, with a high ‘presence’ or physical proximity between people, are translated into modes of production and association which are conducted through the medium of telecommunications over global networks that are characterised socially by a high degree of ‘absence’. Phone, TV and the Internet have compressed both the temporal and spatial scales of communication so that people of widely disparate social and geographic backgrounds now exists in ‘virtual spaces’ or electronic ‘cyberworlds’ (after Adams 1998). In a public lecture at James Cook University in 1997, Marshall Sahlins described how Samoan migrants to the United States and Europe have close social relationships with each other and with home through the Internet. They occupy a ‘global village’ (after McLuhan 1964) whose purpose is the cultural and social maintenance of ethnic, kin and family identities. A similar conflation of spatial and temporal scales exists in community life in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw where a translation and compression of the geographic space of social interaction from the landscape to the streetscape has occurred within one or two generations for some families, and the tempo of social contact has changed from seasonal, as described by Thomson (1939), to daily encounters between people. In the context of the Gulf Lowlands, the townscape may be viewed as a virtual landscape where sense of place and of social identity, and of belonging to spaces in the physical landscape is fashioned by people in daily life.

6.5 Urban space and social change

It is important to bear in mind that the varying geographies of place that have been described so far in this chapter are not a consequence of acculturation or of assimilation with mainstream Australia: rather, they are the product of enculturation and have been acquired and transmitted between people in township life. Chapter 2 of this thesis describes some of the processes of social structuration employed by
people in the southern Gulf Lowlands throughout the early and middle years of the 20th century to accommodate the social practices introduced by mainstream Australia into their own indigenous worldviews. By any yardstick, Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama are among the most remote communities in Queensland. The combined effects of distance and of extreme seasonality of the climate and historically the lack of mainstream economic interest in the Gulf Lowlands region, meant that Church time and Department time administrations in each community worked almost entirely independent of each other, and in turn they experienced little direct supervision from Diocesan or State government administrations in Townsville and Brisbane. Other, more accessible Aboriginal communities in Queensland experienced far greater levels of government administration and of social dislocation in terms of either the forced removal of people from their community or with the introduction of Aboriginal or Islander people from other parts of the State into local society (see Kidd 1997). Hence, almost the entire world and social universe of most residents is contained within the townships of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, so much so that they are the complete locus of social space or ‘habitus’ (after Bourdieu 1977) for their inhabitants.

Community life in the southern Gulf Lowlands is characterised by the immediate physical presence of everyone around you. Everyone knows everyone else and one is rarely alone. Both Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw are high ‘presence’ societies where everyone has their own explicit space and unique sense of ‘self’ or of personal identity. In these circumstances, the ‘geographical self’ or ‘place’ is the immediate environment of the lived body (after Casey 1993); and the social orientation of that body and the properties of the place that it occupies, amongst other factors, are determined by a number of spatial or directional ‘dyads’ such as ‘left/ right’, ‘up/down’, ‘back/ front’ (Casey 1993). In addition, Casey (1993) describes three ‘body-centred’ topologies that describe the ‘here/there’ relationships between a person and other ‘people-places’. A feature of the here/there dyad is the ‘tensional arc’ with another person (or ’somacentric here’). With minimal tension between the two ends of the arc, where there are little social or physical constraints, then access or
movement is easy and people or places can be seen to be as near or close by, irrespective of their actual physical distance apart. The body in place is also the fulcrum of a ‘reachable arc’, which includes the immediate social or geographical range of a person's interests at that place. There is also a 'horizontal arc' or 'ultimate perimeter' of places or people that form the domain of total knowledge and relationships. Social space is embodied by, and cannot exist without, the tensional, reachable and horizontal arcs that are created by the people who occupy them.

Most often, the streetscape is the explicit space and the locus of emplacement for the body at any moment in time. Embodiment and emplacement are the same phenomena in that personality (who you are and how you feel) depends on location (where you are). As a person moves through social space then these properties change continuously, and relationships (or networks) crystallise or disappear, as person-places become characterised by physical presence or absence. This dynamic is most apparent as people enter or leave a room or join or turn away from a discussion. It is perhaps most obvious in posture and body language, in particular in the greetings or slight hand and eye gestures that pass between people across the room or street or when people leave or join the queue in the beer canteen or in the community store. Quite a lot of communication is non-verbal and is sited in bodily gestures.

Body-place relationships in southern Gulf Lowland townships are triadic with emplacement in the landscape also being expressed in many aspects of social life, whether in the street or at home. When people talk about different areas of the landscape then they may tip their hand or incline their head in that direction or to the person present who is most closely affiliated with it. The sky is often a topic of conversation and the movement of clouds and rain-fronts in the wet season and of bushfire plumes in the dry season are tracked from the street and estimates of their range and direction and of whose country is experiencing rain or fire are made throughout the day. These exchanges are expressions of explicit space and are often didactic and are meant to demonstrate simultaneously, personal location or
emplacement in the townscape, in community life and in the landscape. There is also
a temporal aspect to this spatial praxis.

Community circumstances change from Wild time to Mission time to Department
time but all of these epochs are part of a continuous present that is sometimes
referred to as ‘Now time’. Now time is the immediate moment and is also all of time.
People refer to events in ‘Story time’ or ‘Creation time’ that describe the formation
of the landscape by ancestral beings as immanent and immediate and ongoing events;
and there is always a sense in these conflations of space and time that there
was never any other way, and that circumstances now are as they always were and
probably ever will be.

The weather is an environmental medium through which many creation stories and
the associated roles of mythological creatures, all of which are related to place, are
articulated. There are many totems and concomitant personal ‘bush’ names that
relate to phenomenological aspects of the environment such as specific rainfall or
cloud patterns, the relative luminosity of the sky under different atmospheric
conditions; and the flight patterns of birds or the specific foraging habits of animals.
The people who bear these names always refer to them in the vernacular and the only
time that English has been used for them in my hearing is when I have asked for the
translation of a name. The sensual aspects of the environment such as weather and
wildlife behaviour, those aspects which are not susceptible to the geographic and
historical contingencies of State tenure or land use and which are independent of
immediate body location, still retain the latency of the pre-European world in
language and in personal expression. These person – environment relations are
occasionally projected into body [person]-place-space in the landscape and on to the
current expected behaviour of mythological creatures such as Emu or Brolga or
Flying Fox at their story places when two or more people with the related totems are
discussing the weather. There is always immediacy to the momentary present in
these discussions which are related to events that are happening now and which have
been ongoing since creation. These exchanges entail a continuous re-creation and
maintenance of the southern Gulf Lowlands; they are both metaphysical and
practical, as without these discussions and affirmations then the world in all of its physical as well as social manifestations would disappear.

A similar worldview has been described for the Lockhart River township where

‘Communities in this sense can be seen as encompassing the whole spectrum of Aboriginal existence, from the pre-contact past to the present’ (Chase 1980, 48).

Explicit space is an egocentric and compound view of the world where all of the properties of the world are conflated into one single plane or layer of meaning, and embodied in those people in the present, irrespective of their actual physical location or emplacement. This perspective on the social and natural world, and its practical connotations in land and natural resource management, will be discussed further in the following final chapter of this thesis.

The Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw townscapes also contain a sociocentric space of households and neighbourhoods, each of which is wholly unique in its social, cultural and topological dimensions (see Chapter 3). The parallels between the social and topological properties of the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama townscapes and the geography of homeland and land use allocation in each community, which have been summarised in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this thesis, are such each may be regarded as spatial analogues of the landscape. The townscape has to be considered as the core embodiment of social space as it is the medium which links the body and the landscape. It provides two sets of emplacement in social space in the independent assertions and choices that people make in explicit space in the present; and in their predestined or historically acquired location by tribal and clan affiliation and the historical and geographical contingencies of implicit space that have been described in this thesis. Casey describes architecture and streetscapes as ‘intermediate entities in the tale of topogenesis’ (1993, 112), or as media for the development of spatial expressions of social identity.
Plate 6.2a: A birth tree (whose foliage has been cropped in a Corella plague)

Plate 6.2b: A mortuary enclosure around a public bench and table
‘…. For it is by and with our bodies that we inhabit dwellings: that is to say, memories formed by slow sedimentation and realized by the reenactment of bodily memories. . . But in inhabitation the body is an engine of exploration and creation as well as an agent of habit. Thanks precisely to the familiarity established by habitual body memories, we get our bearings in a place of residence, the interior analogue of orientation in the open landscape, we are empowered to discover novel features of built structures or to create such features ourselves by rearranging the materials already present in a given residence’ (Casey 1993, 117).

Person-place relationships that are traditionally associated with ritual in the landscape are also visible to everybody at ‘landmarks’ in the Kowanyama townscape. Trees are permanent markers of birth ritual and areas of mortuary enclosure are more temporary markers of death ritual. The burial of the placenta of a new-born child beneath a tree is a longstanding practice and the erection of a barricade to close off an area where a deceased person may have usually sat either in the beer canteen or on a public bench, is a direct analogue of the closing of country in the landscape following a death. Both features represent, in their different ways, monuments or ‘memento mori’ which have a very high ‘presence’ in township life. Some mango trees which were planted in the earliest years of the mission have an additional, almost ritual, significance as they were planted by apical ancestors whose ‘christian’ names are preserved in family surnames (Plate 6.2). These trees cannot be disturbed in any way and all buildings and road alignments in the township have to account for them in their layout. The temporary barricades that are erected to close off areas of public urban space are most often only put in place for the time between the death of a person and their funeral, which is two weeks or so (Plate 6.3). It is unthinkable to transgress these places. Up until recent times the house of a deceased person may have also been closed but this is not such a common practice nowadays because of a housing shortage and domestic overcrowding in Kowanyama.

There is never any obvious sense of stewardship by a homeland group or by a tribe for either sacred trees or temporary mortuary spaces and respect for them appears to be universal throughout the community. I am uncertain of their role, in a cartographic sense, as markers of social space in the way that places in the landscape fulfill that role for many people in the descriptions and explanations that they give
about the physical or social properties of their homeland and tribal country. They occupy an area beyond the scope of this thesis which is one that deals with culture and personal identity and which is hence difficult to represent in geographic terms. Nonetheless birth trees and mortuary enclosures and their related declarations about birth and death are a material form of explicit space.

Other declarations of personal or explicit space which are also ‘unmappable’ are also evident, for instance, in day-to-day operations in the Kowanyama Land and Natural Resource Management Office. One of the most powerful of these is the ‘poison’ cousin or in-law relationship. This is a cross-gender taboo which separates men and women in differing age and kinship categories so that they do not communicate with each other. From time to time in assigning people to vehicles or work teams one is reminded that it is not possible for certain people to either work together or to sit in the same vehicle. Again, these relationships are not entirely based on clan, or homeland or tribe identity and hence are forms of personal ‘distinction’ (after Bourdieu 1984) that cannot be explained in the terms of this thesis. As I sit and write this paragraph a Kunjen man in his 60s has sat down beside me to apologise for leaving my company earlier on without saying anything. He had left the room because one of three teenage girls who had entered the Office was his poison cousin. Part of this relationship is that his cousin’s daughter, yet to be born, is his ‘promised’ wife. The Elder does not actually expect to claim a wife as the relationship is a classificatory one. His relationship with that future child will be the opposite of the one that he has now with ‘her’ mother who in turn probably has a cordial relationship with the Elder’s children. This entering and leaving of the room would have gone unnoticed to me if it had not been brought to my attention. On other occasions it has been much more manifest with people hiding under tables or escaping over rows of filing cabinets as a poison relation enters the room. This presence/absence or inside/outside dialectic to explicit space is a continuous feature of community life.
With reference to Katherine, a town with a large Aboriginal population

‘But this feeling for continuing psychic presence in distant places, on a basis of sometimes long-term absence rather than simply presence (contra Giddens 1990: 101-102) can only be felt once it is established as a ground of subjectivity. If it is not established early in the individuals’ formation through close experience, not just of the country but of it in terms of differentiated human relationship (‘one’s own and others’) to it, attachment must be psychically on a different basis’ (Merlan 1998, 93).

Urban space is the ‘generative’ space (after Bourdieu 1977) for the maintenance of personal identity and also of the social relations of all social action including land allocation practice. Kowanyama can be viewed as comprising a single cognitive space, a community space shared by tribal groups which is centred geographically on the township and its hinterland; whereas the corresponding space in Pormpuraaw can be viewed as comprising two separate spaces evident in ‘Thaayore side’ and ‘Mungkan side’, within which there are distinct lacunae of moral space or authority that are occupied by homeland groups who each have autonomous land ownership and land use interests. The Pormpuraaw townscape is a deliberately organised space that is a conscious expression of territoriality in the landscape in both the classical idiom of tribe and clan affiliation and in the post-classical idiom of homeland group affiliation. On the other hand, the Kowanyama townscape has the appearance of a social space that is not controlled in any deliberate or sociocentric sense as at Pormpuraaw. It can also be viewed as an egocentric space. It is a place where as any resident will tell you that ‘everyone is related to everybody else’ and mirrors those social relationships described for Yir Yoront people in the Mitchell River valley by Sharp (1937) in the earlier 20th century. The complementarity of townscape and landscape and the very distinct differences in them between the two communities, provide a form of confirmation, a convergence of evidence or ‘triangulation’ (after Aunger 1993), of the observations and conclusions that have been drawn so far about the human geography of the southern Gulf Lowlands.
6.6 **Social change and the geography of land allocation practice**

The explicit space that has been described in this chapter is similar to Lefebvre’s ‘lived space’ (1991) and Soja’s ‘thirddspace’ (1996). The latter is described in an account of urban lifestyles in later 20th century Los Angeles as

‘a knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centers and peripheries, the abstract and the concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in spatial praxis, the transformation of knowledge (spatial) into action (spatial) in a field of unevenly developed (spatial) power’ (Soja 1996, 31).

The ongoing mix of human activities that make up richness of everyday life, and also the differing modes of participation in the political economy of homeland and land use allocation throughout the southern Gulf Lowlands, are neither the products of independent or subjective decision making nor of ‘unseen’ laws but are a product of ‘habitus’ or social space (after Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu saw the mediating link between social structures or social practice and individual action in the *practical logics* which people follow in their lives, which are often only revealed in their actions.

‘... If the agents are possessed by their habitus more than they possess it, this is because it acts within them as the organising principle of their actions and because of this modus operandi(i) informing all thought and action (and thought of action) revealing itself only in the opus operatum(i)’ (Bourdieu 1977, 4).

Just so in this thesis, the *modus operandi* the passive or as I have proposed the ‘taken for granted’ ways of practice and the *opus operatum* or actively constructed ways of practice that have been described in explicit space in this chapter. The implicit space can be regarded as societal in that it encapsulates trends and practices and institutions in community life over long time-scales. The latter include the doxic practices that are associated with traditional law and also those that have arisen partly as a result of the location of each township within the tribal geography and seasonal environment of the region. The explicit space is egocentric and a more
immediate expression of those social relations and preferences that are current in community life. To use a geological metaphor to describe the nature of this relationship, implicit space comprises the sedimentary strata that underpins community life and explicit space the actions that continuously precipitate upon them and that accumulate over time. Lefebvre (1991, 86) uses a hydrodynamic metaphor of big and small waves and of corresponding movements and rhythms to explain similar trends in the social structuration of European cities.

Social change is a continuous feature of urban life in the southern Gulf Lowlands and only certain features of it are actively ever declared in land issues; usually they are those that relate to personal identity and to the status that people have within the classical systems of clan and kinship affiliation in Pormpuraaw and of tribe and homeland affiliation in Kowanyama. The historical and geographical contingencies that have influenced the political economy of land allocation in the 20th century (see Chapter 5) and which influence homeland and land use activity are largely undeclared, not because they are unknown but because they are usually taken for granted.

‘All human behaviour is the product of the intersection of such conscious and unconscious patterns. For social analytic purposes, we can draw a contrast between what is consciously avowed as a principle of membership, self-identification or prescription for behaviour in a community (for example “share with your kinsmen”, “honour your father and mother”, “don’t go near the men when they are talking business”), and what is passed on below the level of consciousness and cannot be expressed from within the community as a “principle”. The first is what gets passed on’ (Weiner 2002, 3).

The two spaces, personal and declared and societal or undeclared, are not dichotomous as they are linked through spatial praxis, the most active of which is the continuous maintenance of the person-place- social space topology in the townscapes and landscapes of the region, that has been described in this chapter. The strategies that underpin this praxis and how they are applied in local and regional land management in the southern Gulf Lowlands are described in the next chapter.
Chapter 7

‘Our way’: Reconciling Implicit and Explicit Space on the Southern Gulf Lowlands of Cape York Peninsula

‘praxis. n. 1. practice, esp. as opposed to theory. 2. habit; custom. 3. a set of examples for practice’ (The Macquarie Encyclopedic Dictionary: National Dictionary)

This chapter reviews those issues that this thesis has proposed as immanent to the present day geography of land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands. The implicit/explicit dialectic to social practice, and the inside/outside or centre/periphery suite of spatial relations that were created in the 20th century colonisation of the southern Gulf Lowlands and that are presumed to drive this dialectic are reviewed from the perspectives of

the strategies or ‘practical logics’ that people use to accept, modify or deny technologies that are introduced by the mainstream in local land management; and,

the influence of the DOGIT tenure as a technology for social change on local and mainstream perspectives of land ownership in the southern Gulf Lowlands in the early 2000s.

This chapter concludes that implicit and explicit properties of social space are combined together in land allocation practice in ways which are part of a wider repertoire of Aboriginal praxis for dealing with innovation from the mainstream and for the maintenance of Aboriginal identity. Also, that the geometry of social space, and hence of social relationships, that was established in the early years of the 20th century is likely to be immutable, irrespective of any future changes in land tenure or regional land management policy. Moreover,

there are numerous geometries of social space that may describe local land allocation practice and they are not tractable to generalisation to any larger regional scale models of social practice.
This thesis concludes with a review of the role of the geographer as both a researcher and service deliverer in Aboriginal land studies, and as a ‘bridge-builder’ in the integration of local Aboriginal and mainstream regional perspectives in land use planning in remote North Australia.

7.1 Bridging the gap

The present day geography of land allocation practice that has been described in this thesis has been largely conceptualised as the product of a suite of cartographic convergences between ‘absolute’ or Aboriginal and ‘abstract’ or mainstream Australian views of the southern Gulf Lowlands landscape (after Lefebvre 1991). The most marked local accommodations between these two perspectives that have been identified so far in this thesis are

- the distinctive land allocation geographies and sense of community identity in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama;
- the establishment of homeland sites on State-assigned community (DOGIT) land under local indigenous protocols and governance systems;
- the assertion of proximate entitlements to traditional country on the basis of State-assigned land leases;
- the accommodation of traditional social organisation and person-place-space relations in the landscape within the modern townscapes of the region; and,
- the continuous recreation and maintenance of indigenous person-place-social space relations as landmark knowledge of the landscape changes across generations.

Such accommodations with mainstream Australian society have been taking place ever since the arrival of the first Anglican mission at Kowanyama in 1903. Local people engaged with the ‘Mission time’ and ‘Department time’ administrations of the early and middle years of the twentieth century in a deliberate process of social structuration whereby the interests of the Church and State were acknowledged and incorporated into local practice but at the same time Aboriginal identity and local
custom was maintained (see Chapter 2.3). One of the most common Aboriginal approaches to initiating such dialogues, then and now, is to contextualise European researchers, staff or service deliverers such as police, health workers or teachers so that they become part of local society. This is done through acts of reciprocity such as the borrowing of money, the development of ‘buddy’ or joking type relationships, or in bonding on weekend fishing or hunting trips in homeland country. After a while, outsiders who have experienced this kind of courtship may be invited to assume a classificatory relationship to a local family whereby they become ‘sister’, ‘brother’, or ‘son’ or ‘daughter’ to the senior members of that family and then assume the range of relations to the rest of the family and the community that arise out of that invitation. Amongst other benefits, this relationship provides a basis for instruction in ‘Aboriginal way’ from the adoptive family and the community at large on how kinship and descent systems and ties to land work, that would otherwise be difficult to acquire.

Local people are at ease when the classificatory identity has been assumed by the visitor and they are more confident of the abilities of the recipient to act as an advocate for their interests with the mainstream world. Practically, such received identities also form the basis of working relationships that allow service deliverers to survive the pressures that many experience from ‘the bureaucrats in Brisbane’ to perform their duties to mainstream standards yet without the resources that are required to sustain those standards in a remote community. More so in recent years, service deliverers have to ‘cut corners’ in one way or another or occasionally work outside the ‘guidelines’ in order to get their work done and prevent their own personal ‘burn out’. Such actions cannot be undertaken without the active support of local people. In the lifetime of this thesis I have been called ‘that fella that works with John Taylor’ (who most people know) or even ‘John Taylor’ (by those that don’t know him personally), and as I took on roles in community life as ‘Jim the ranger fella’ (because of my mapping work and time in the field), ‘Jim the geography fella’ (by older school children)’ or ‘Jim the anthropologist’ (by older people). For most of the time I have also been referred to as a ‘Top End boy’, which
locates me as an affiliate to Kunjen country and also to a lesser extent to Yir Yoront country in the cultural geography of Kowanyama. Adopting this identity did not, as I first feared, preclude me from relationships with any other people in southern Gulf Lowlands society; on the contrary, it opened doors for me into Aboriginal society throughout Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf country. Even people who I have never met before in places as far away as Cairns or Townsville come up and greet me. I can sometimes tell if such an approach is about to be made because the person may be concealing a smirk with a hand across their mouth. When they have composed themselves they will approach and introduce themselves formally. I have a large shiny bald head which is a distinguishing mark of who I am but I am sure I am distinguished by other behavioural traits. Nicknames are very common forms of appellation. For instance, two of my ranger colleagues are called ‘Squeaky’ and ‘Aggro’. The first is so named because he has a cartoon voice and the other because he resembles a character from 'The Muppets’ television show. Nicknames are often acutely drawn observations on the character of a person; they are also important statements about individuality and ‘self’ which are at the core of Aboriginal expressions of identity.

The maintenance of the integrity of their social systems by Aboriginal people has required a continual accommodation with social technologies and institutions that have been introduced by the Australian State. At a strategic level, Merlan (1998) has written of accommodations of this kind in terms of a space that separates Aboriginal and mainstream Australian society which can be filled from either side by ‘mimetics’ or ‘imitative behaviour’ that one side presumes may emulate features of the opposite side. Strategies or institutional arrangements are put in place which either side feels will facilitate communication with the other. For instance, Native Title legislation (Commonwealth 1993; 1998) can be regarded as an example of a mimesis that puts mainstream concepts of what is presumed to be traditional Aboriginal land allocation practice into Australian law. The legislation provides a set of definitions, and a pathway or a bridge for traditional owners to negotiate their land rights with the Australian State.
‘For value to inhere in reproduction of culture, the condition of possibility must be that a space for imitation be left open, a space between the artificer and that which is reproduced, a space not filled or compromised by too-critical discussion of the economy of cultural values of such reproduction and of historical interrelationship’ (Merlan 1998, 236).

Chase reviewed social change by Aboriginal people in the later 1970s in the eastern Cape York Peninsula community of Lockhart River and observed

‘Throughout the contact and settlement process, Lockhart people held firm to beliefs about territory and society, both of which were essential to the retention of group identities. ... Changes in rituals, artefacts, resource use and language can all be seen as social strategies to meet physical needs and to accommodate to new situations’ (Chase 1981, 373).

Chase attributed the flexibility of Lockhart River people to the existence of implicit and explicit ideologies whereby the latter comprise indigenous systems of kinship, marriage and descent, and religion or totemism and the former are the contingent practices which people adopt to frame their identity and ideology within prevailing social and political circumstances. Chase cites the ways in which European residents are slotted into classificatory kinship relations, of the kind that have been described above, as an example of the latter (explicit) ideology. Material or economic technologies also play a role in this form of ‘bridge building’; the most remarkable example being the paraphernalia and infrastructure and working practices of the cattle industry which were embraced by Aboriginal people in the early and middle years of the twentieth century, and which still have a profound influence on personal identity and conceptions of ‘country’ in Cape York Peninsula landscapes whether on DOGIT or pastoral lease tenures.

Mimesis is not a practice whereby both sides come together to explore common ground, instead, it is initiated by one side or the other and as a consequence it may display an incomplete or tangential understanding of ‘tradition’. For instance, many of the varied forms of transformation and continuity in social practice that characterise contemporary Aboriginal society are not accommodated in the rubric of Native Title law: this means that Aboriginal people are often faced with a dual responsibility to fulfill the requirements of both mainstream and local law; and, in
principle, to use two corresponding sets of practice to satisfy both legal systems. This praxis does not entail any duplication of effort or complex concordance of differing laws and rubrics. Instead, it often reveals itself as a coherent or ‘seamless’ set of procedures – most of which may have never been formally negotiated or codified, but which have become the ‘way we do things’. It is not possible in most situations to objectively identify separate ‘traditional’ and ‘introduced’ strands to Aboriginal practice or identity and there is little point to undertaking such analyses anyway as irrespective of what form they take their constitution is almost entirely Aboriginal. This is why a methodology of explicit and implicit space has been developed in this thesis to represent social change and the intercalation of local and introduced European tenures in the geography of land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands.

The Kowanyama Land and Natural Resource Management Office (KLNRMO or ‘the Office’) is an Aboriginal form of mimesis that has been set up by the community to communicate its interests with mainstream Australia in an institution which combines elements of what are perceived as traditional and mainstream protocols for land management. The Office provides a bridge for Kowanyama people to communicate their interests to mainstream Australia and at the same time preserve their own identities and social systems. The Office is also a place where the implicit/explicit dialectic to social practice may be seen in its day-to-day operations. It is also a place which was established foremost to deal with issues of equity and any inherent inside/outside or inclusion/exclusion issues that arose from the intercalation of the State-assigned DOGIT tenure and traditional and indigenous land tenure systems.

7.2 **KLNRMO and the reconciliation of implicit and explicit space**

The Kowanyama Land and Natural Resource Management Office (KLNRMO) was set up in the late 1980s in response to land and natural resource management issues, some of which arose out of the conditions of the transfer of the DOGIT tenure
whereby the Queensland government kept control of minerals and natural resources, as it does with all forms of freehold tenure; and the 1985 *Aboriginal Landholdings* (Queensland) Act whereby residents in DOGIT communities were permitted to obtain leases over areas of community land. The possibility that land within the DOGIT could be excised by prospective leaseholders under the 1985 Act raised concerns about people who were not traditional owners claiming land and the consequences of such actions for community life (see Chapter 2.4). Issues to do with the management of the marine environment and the coastal zone of the Gulf of Carpentaria were also germane to the foundation of KLNRMO. The environmental threats to their traditional country from mining exploration leases to prospect for mineral sands on the coast and for gold in areas of the Mitchell River Valley led to KLNRMO being a leader in the formation of the Mitchell River Watershed Group in 1990 (Sinnamon 1997). Kowanyama hosted the Northern Fisheries Resource Conference in 1988. The community had also purchased fishing licenses for the Mitchell River delta in the mid-1980s and then surrendered them, and negotiated the closure of part of the South Mitchell River fishery to commercial fishing with the Queensland government. By 1990 Kowanyama had also established a coastal fisheries surveillance programme, one of the first community Aboriginal Ranger Services in Australia, and developed community regulations for supervising recreational fishing and camping by tourists on community land (Sinnamon 1997).

The Office acts under the direction of the Kowanyama Aboriginal Council whose seven elected members are trustees of the DOGIT tenure during their three year term, and a Counsel [sic] of Elders. The first has local government powers invested in it by the Queensland government and the other is based on the traditional affiliation of people to their country. The membership of both bodies is interchangeable though when somebody is elected councillor they tend to spend less time at KLNRMO but fully resume their duties as an Elder at the end of their elected term.
The role of the Counsel of Elders has been germane to the success of KLNRMO in community land management and in its involvement in regional planning issues (Sinammon 1997). The Counsel comprises representatives of the main tribal groups in Kowanyama. Being part of Kokoberra, Kokoberrin, Yir Yoront, Yir Thangedl, Kunjen or Olkola ‘tribe’ is the main form of social identity in Kowanyama (see Chapter 5). When office meetings are held or committees are set up to review community natural resource management issues in KLNRMO then their representation is usually divided between these populations. The Counsel is an institution where there are no formally recognised officers. Everybody in Kowanyama acts as an Elder at some time or other. The actual membership of the Counsel may change depending on the nature of the business being conducted. Different people from each of the tribal groups may attend meetings depending on the nature of the business at hand, whether it is to discuss Office policy, Native Title, Cattle Company or homeland business (Monaghan 2003c). Keen has described a comparable structure as

‘.... not reproduced social bodies related to fixed jurisdictions; who was involved in a meeting depended on the particular places and persons central to the issue. Part of a more or less continuous social network coagulated, as it were, around the nodal protagonists – who were nodal in one context and not others’ (Keen 1998, 270).

Business is conducted with people seated around a large table and there may be 50 or 60 people at some meetings. Those who are not seated directly at the table or involved in discussion at such meetings perform like a Greek chorus in a classical Athenian play or the backbenches of a parliament, in calling out the moral consequences of the lifestyles of people at the table, or voicing opinions on the proposals that are being made by them. Only one person speaks at a time during any debate. The order of business is maintained by members of a corps of senior citizens, the ‘nodal protagonists’ (after Keen 1998), who might also be considered as Elders in the traditional sense because of the respect that is held for them by the rest of the community. They ensure that the order of business is maintained; supervise who has the right to speak at any time; and admonish or shame any miscreants. Meetings are
held at least once every six weeks; and in the dry season, when people from
government agencies are able to drive to Kowanyama, more frequent meetings may
then occur. Negotiation is always undertaken on the basis of consensus agreement,
therefore some meetings may go on for a long time and some issues may take months
and many meetings to resolve.

KLNRMO has a brief from the Community council and the Council of Elders to
provide cultural and natural resource management services to the community and
also to promote scientific research and the use of the best available technologies and
management practices in its operations (KLNRMO 1994; 2000). In 1997 I was
invited by Viv Sinnamon, then Director of KLNRMO, to set up a community land
information system. A KLNRMO strategic plan had identified the need for this
system for the storage and archiving of the natural and cultural resource information
of the community; and to facilitate decision-making in land management and in
Native Title negotiations. The land information system is now routinely used to
provide information or presentations for meetings and for natural resource
management such as fisheries and tourism control, or pest and weed management,
and for planning purposes (see Monaghan 2003c). For instance, when people
nominate an area where they wish to set up a homeland then maps of wet and dry
season surface water distribution (based on the surface water models described in
chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis), of infrastructure, and of the location of traditional
places may be displayed, either alternately or superimposed on top of each other, and
then perused. People then explore the options that are available to them. Fresh water
supply in the later dry season and access difficulties at other times in the year may
limit the amount of space that is available for a homeland, or the proposed site may
be some distance away from those traditional places which might give them the
moral authority to assert their right to a homeland at a particular location. The same
kind of review of criteria is also made in community land use planning
meetings when a wide repertoire of images, photographs and maps may be
displayed. Also, people may compose their own maps at such meetings and enter
information onto the display and into the system on issues such as the preferred
Plate 7.1a: Colin Lawrence uses ‘stored’ land information to identify a prospective claim area in a Native Title Meeting at KLNRM (Kowanyama Collection)

Plate 7.1b: A Kowanyama family explores their options for a homeland site in the Kowanyama land information system (Kowanyama Collection)
location of fence lines or of fishing camps. Management ‘scenarios’ are sometimes
developed in this way and maps of alternative land use proposals are displayed
simultaneously and their relative merits discussed, and the content of the maps
amended accordingly, ‘on the fly’, until a solution that is acceptable to everyone at
the meeting is obtained (Plate 7.1).

There have never been any formal discussions at KLNRM0 about protocols for the
use of the information system even though concerns about unsupervised use, security
of data and the effects that such a system might have on social practice might have
been expected with the introduction of the technology. The biggest consequences
that the use of land information technology of this kind might have for current and
future land allocation practice in any Aboriginal community is as a result of the
storage of information, which is usually transmitted orally, in either digital or written
form. Giddens (cited in Cassell 1993) has pointed out the importance of the ‘storage
capacity’ of the written word or recorded knowledge in promoting time-space
distantiation. Appropriately worded text or composed graphics can replace the
physical experience of a place or the physical presence of a person who might
otherwise convey information about that location. The storage of information can
also render it susceptible to impositions of control or surveillance over its use
(Foucault 1980; Rabinow 1984). Information storage can also lead to hermeneutics
and unsupervised re-interpretations of information.

As well as the security and use of information, another concern that has been
expressed has been about the transformational role that information technology may
have in the instantiation of present patterns of authority over land. That is, a fixed
view of the world may prevail which can be justified by reference to the current
version of the world in a land information system and that patterns of ownership and
land use and land values that are currently represented in it will in some way become
fossilized as a kind of ‘official version’. This may cause ‘induced reflexivity’ as a
result of ‘the storage and continuous review of textual, photographic and
cartographic representations of their relations with land’ (Strang 2000). Strang was drawing on her experience of fieldwork and mapping of traditional places in central Cape York Peninsula with Olkola people from Kowanyama. She felt that

‘...the adoption of alien representational forms has transformative potential, possibly creating unanticipated changes in the cultural landscape undergoing ‘translation’ – removes storytelling. Another potential risk of reframing information in artefactual form – i.e. concretising it in time and space..... denies the more fluid reality of Aboriginal relations to land. The recording of a myth may give perceived authority and legitimacy to a version of a story which may in reality, exist in multiple variations’ (Strang 2000, 207).

On the other hand, the production of connection reports for Native Title work in Kowanyama has also included the compilation of genealogies which describe personal connection to country for many people which are up to five generations away and which would otherwise be well beyond the horizon of living memory. These genealogies are stored in databases which people consult to explore details of their family histories. Historical film and sound recordings of song and dance and photography of people which is stored in the community land information system also provide a deep reservoir of information for people who wish to explore their cultural heritage.

Any artefact or material representation of culture or of social values, whatever its provenance, has a role in structuring and in maintaining social practice. Text, images and maps can form ‘immutable mobiles’ (after Latour 1990). They are mobile as they can be rendered on paper and moved from place to place or even transferred electronically by e-mail. Anybody can look at them and make their own unsupervised judgments of their content. Paper maps represent one of the most standardised and durable, or immutable, of ‘mobiles’. Whether they are thematic summaries of the soil and vegetation properties of a landscape or topographic representations of landforms and rivers and human infrastructure, maps have a long life and can form enduring statements of the properties of the landscape or townscape that they represent. A cursory inspection of the ephemeris on maps of the Australian 1:250 000 topographic series shows that the lifetime of a map may be between 30 and 50 years before it is updated. This kind of ‘fossilisation’, which
occurs because of the cost of updating maps, is unlikely to occur in Kowanyama because of the ways in which land information technology is used in community land management. Maps are continually created and re-created at meetings. Few go into storage and most are never even printed but are viewed on the screen. Map content invariably reflects some physical property of the landscape such as fire scar or weed infestation trends, or road or fence infrastructure that has been used in land management discussions and these maps never carry any assertion about the ownership or control of land. Homeland or tribal boundaries are rarely rendered on paper or represented digitally; such information is invariably transmitted orally.

‘Native Title’ information about traditional places and their cultural values or ownership is only ever consulted by anthropologists and traditional owners for the design of field surveys; to record the location of places as they are mapped in these surveys; and to check on the ownership of such places as documentation for Native Title or Land Claims is prepared. Otherwise, access to this information is rarely requested. Native Title records embody facts of traditional title to land and are not open to interpretation or ever included in planning or management ‘scenarios’. It is not a matter of the use of the information being proscribed but one of its relevance to day-to-day business. For instance, the patterns of authority over homeland occupation that prevail at any time may not correspond with those that are recorded as part of traditional title. Authority at any place may be discretionary and based on agreement between individuals or families (see Chapter 5.4) and these negotiations are usually private business. A kind of proximate authority can also be assumed on the basis of the possession of a State-assigned lease (Chapter 5.4). In my experience, the only time that boundary information of any kind is rendered on paper is following a death in the community when country is closed. Then notices are put up which give the names of those places or landmarks that describe the boundaries of this closure. These boundaries often reflect more than Native Title interests and embody the range of the working life and recreational interests of the deceased, as well as those of the family and friends that are close to that person. A map showing the extent of a mortuary closure is rarely regarded as an assertion of the territorial
rights of the deceased or of their descendants. Otherwise, I have only ever seen one
demonstration of a map being used as part of an (unsuccessful) assertion to authority
over land when an ambitious young lieutenant of a homeland group in Kowanyama,
speaking on behalf of his Elders, and pointing to a photocopy of a topographic map
in his hand, made a sweeping reference to a large area of country in the Kowanyama
hinterland, claiming

‘these old fellas here they know all these waterholes they know all the stories’.

The use of information technology in community land management is not
transformative in the sense that it is changing the modes of social organisation and
forms of consultation that people use in arriving at land use or homeland decisions.
Practice does not change only the technology does so. There are many features of the
technology which reproduce patterns of communication and exchange of information
that are already established in community life. The separate treatment of stored and
oral, or public and private information has echoes of the rights that attach to the
traditional range and estate dichotomy between sociocentric and informal rights of
resource use and egocentric or formal rights of clan estate membership. Situations
arise when the question of whether oral knowledge ought to be stored digitally in the
information system and hence made accessible for other uses in community land
management. This conversion is always done under the supervision of the
appropriate Elders. This is a generally accepted practice, yet no meetings were ever
held or protocols drawn up for digital information management in KLNRM0. It is as
if present day protocols in information management mirror longer standing ones
from before the days of digital information technology; and also probably from the
time before the arrival of Europeans in Australia.

The nature of the above relationships between introduced technology, and traditional
and current practice was further clarified for me in Kowanyama when a visiting
ecologist explored questions of ‘traditional ecological knowledge’ and
‘contemporary ecological knowledge’ as part of a programme that was reviewing
wetland conservation strategies in North Australia. There was a generally low level
of interest and even antipathy by some people to the discussion of any traditional or modern dichotomies in forms of wetland use or management. Many people could not see the point of the questions. The majority of the people who were questioned spoke of wetland management in Kowanyama in terms of ‘Our way’ or ‘Kowanyama way’ or ‘Aboriginal way’ (Monaghan 2001). To me, these terms were another example of the ‘Now time’ spectrum or compound view of the world which I refer to in the description of explicit space and community life in Chapter 6 of this thesis. A whole range of practices including the maintenance of the ritual and mythical properties of wetlands through traditional practice and also some of the most progressive community fisheries and tourism management programmes in Australia are all instantiated in the present in natural resource management in the southern Gulf Lowlands. Floods and winds and tides and the availability of sea or freshwater life such as fish or crustaceans are all monitored by elements of ritual and mainstream resource management practice. This can involve elements of both remote sensing and of remote control of marine and terrestrial environments from those special places in the landscape, poison places or increase sites, where the ritual knowledge and belief systems that are associated with the management of country are located; and also with the aid of satellite images; or with aerial, field or sea reconnaissance and Global Positioning System technology. There is an abiding sense when new technology is acquired and accepted that this is the way in which it has always been done.

There was never any other way. My experience of Aboriginality is that there is an overpowering sense of the present moment and that this sense of immediacy compresses all human experience into ‘Now time’ (see Chapter 6.4 and 6.5); and in the southern Gulf Lowlands worldview, any attempts to persuade people to make chronological or cultural distinctions about the accumulation of experiences and traditions that contribute to the technologies and social practices that are in action at any time are pointless. Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw people have taken the introduced technologies; whether Mission time or Department time administrations and their policies to transform Aboriginal life, and amended them to their own ends
which are largely to maintain ‘Our way’. Strang (1997) has described this process in terms of ‘making use of the means at hand’. The introduced technologies or ‘modus operati’ come and go but the modes of social organisation within the Aboriginal domain of tribal groups and families, the ‘modus operandum’ that defines the key areas of land allocation practice and decision-making in community life, still resonates in many respects with Sharp’s descriptions of social practice amongst the Yir Yoront in the early 1930s (Sharp 1937). Social reproduction, or the ‘habitus’ after Bourdieu (1973), continues through personal connections and cycles of activity in day-to-day life and these in turn contribute to strategy building and longer-term goals in community life (see chapter 6). All of these connections and actions are maintained by a ‘continuous flow of human conduct’ (after Pred 1986) between generations.

‘Our way’ is a compound of the ‘longue duree’ of accumulated societal experience, probably stretching back many millennia; and of the ‘courte duree’, such as the acquisition of the most current land management and information technology practices; all of which is encapsulated in ‘Now time’. For instance, Smith describes the accommodation of the technologies, infrastructure and lifestyles of the Cattle industry with sense of Aboriginal identity and of place in the landscape in central Cape York Peninsula.

‘The introduction of new economic technologies, most importantly in the form of the cattle industry, led to their embedding with the Aboriginal world as part of the body of Aboriginal practices. As Chase notes of such introductions, contra, Sharp, they have rarely ... hacked away at the supports of the entire cultural system... (Chase 1981, Sharp 1952). Rather, introduced material culture, has in many cases, become a vehicle for continuing Aboriginal practice. The cattle industry was quickly recognised and accommodated as a new technology for living within and managing country, incorporating aspects of Aboriginal practice as diverse as burning, hunting and new forms of initiation and male activities. Other aspects of Aboriginal life – for example increase ceremonies – were continued within the new lifestyle. For generations growing up in the ‘cattle era’, cattlework had become part of the Aboriginal culture, a fact underlined by the aspirations of many of those involved in contemporary outstations to establish cattle enterprises’ (Smith 2000, 433-434).

In a paper entitled ‘Steel Axes for Stone Age Australians’ in ‘Human Problems in
Technological Change’ Sharp (1952) had foretold cataclysmic consequences for Yir Yoront ontology and society with the replacement of stone axes by steel axes with the coming of European material technology into the southern Gulf Lowlands. Sharp described the exchange and use of the former items as an integral feature of Yir Yoront ideology and of social practice

‘Any major change in physical or social worlds must be accompanied by a corresponding alteration in the myth and belief if the system is not to break down ... such a rigidly interdependent cosmic system proves dangerously brittle, so that if the system receives a few sudden jolts, the aboriginal will find this entire cosmos tumbling about his ears’ (Sharp 1952, 64).

Aboriginal society in the southern Gulf Lowlands has undergone many transformations since the above words were written by Lauriston Sharp and if he were to return today he would find considerable changes in land management and the kinds of technology that are in use by Yir Yoront people. Sharp would also find that the Yir Yoront language, social universe and cosmic system is still an integral and distinctive feature of life in the present day Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama communities; and Yir Yoront country is a domain that is actively defended by Yir Yoront people in all areas of public life.

Sharp (1958) has also referred to the Yir Yoront as ‘a people without history’. I think that Sharp meant that the Yir Yoront had no declared long-term aspirational goals and are only interested in the active construction and maintenance of society through social practice in the present. In this sense Sharp was probably referring to the immanence of Aboriginal life or ‘Now time’ (where all of time including the creation of the human race is in the present moment). Again, ‘Now time’ is the main cognitive strategy by which the explicit and implicit dimensions of social space are reconciled. Consequently, innovations, in whatever way they are transmitted, whether through invasion or ‘service delivery’, are either accepted immediately and uncritically and become part of the canon of day-to-day practice, or not at all. The success of an innovation can often be measured by the indifference with which it is accepted, whereas solicitous praise or encouraging words from local people can be
polite signals of the rejection of any proposed idea. Also in my experience, there is always a remarkable unanimity in the acceptance (or rejection) of ideas or technologies as they are offered to people in the southern Gulf Lowlands.

“Once a great hunt or other apparently complicated activity is under way, the native’s intimate knowledge of their land and of their weather and their thorough training in technical roles is sufficient to carry the operation through successfully. If events require a change of tactics in mid-course, the facts are stated and adjustments made accordingly. It is an impressive sight, after a sudden shift of wind, to see a whole line of hunters quietly improve their positions in relation to each other without a word being spoken for ceremonies, the more elaborate they are, the more formal are they and sacred the sisters’ husbands guarding the initiates and the men representing the totems or sacred ancestors know their parts, and coaching or direction are not needed” (Sharp 1958, 6 and a description of Yir Yoront social practice).

Innovations in land and natural resource management in KLNROMO in recent years demonstrate that changes may occur in day-to-day practice as a result of introduced technology; but also that these changes do not involve any re-alignment of social space in terms of roles and relationships or of land affiliation. The acceptance or rejection of introduced technologies does not involve any evolutionary process of experience or of exploring the relative advantages or disadvantages of what is on offer; instead, either outcome happens quite quickly and with unanimity, as it always appears to have done so in southern Gulf Lowlands society. This chapter will go on to demonstrate that there has been a similar pattern of responses to the introduction of institutional technologies, such as laws or government policies. It will also look further at the effect of the DOGIT tenure on social change and on the geography of western Cape York Peninsula, and its consequences for the development of land and natural resource management policy for the wider region.

7.3 The DOGIT tenure and social change in western Cape York Peninsula

The renegotiation of geographical and social space by people in the southern Gulf Lowlands, which underpins the present day geography of land allocation practice, started in the later nineteenth century as a consequence of the ‘dividing practices’ (after Foucault 1970) or introduced tenures that created Aboriginal mission and
European pastoralist enclaves in the southern Gulf Lowlands. Chapter 2 of this thesis proposed that systems of subjectification that were introduced by local people to deal with the introduced tenures established a hierarchy of core, proximate and peripheral roles in community life based on the containment or otherwise of traditional country within the reserve or mission area, and the proximity of traditional country to the mission township. The geometries of the State – assigned reserve and DOGIT boundaries and the tribal domains over which they were superimposed are such that in principle, the Kowanyama community has a far greater population of ‘peripheral’ people (the greater area of whose traditional country lies outside of the present day DOGIT area) than does Pormpuraaw. Even though no exact number can be given, perhaps about 35% of the residents of Kowanyama do not have a traditional claim to land in the community area but are members of families who came to live in Kowanyama from the 1940s until the 1970s as Aboriginal involvement in the cattle industry of the wider region declined. These people were not strangers. As they came to live in Kowanyama they went to live with the Kokoberrin, Olkola or Kunjen families with whom they had kinship ties. The country of these latter tribal groups extends over tens of thousands of square kilometers of the south-western Peninsula and the northern Gulf Country.

Geographically, ‘peripheral’ people in Kowanyama are in one of two situations in relation to the DOGIT boundary. There are those who have some of their traditional country within the community but the larger part of it is outside on adjacent pastoral leases or in the Mitchell River/ Alice River National Park. There are also community residents whose traditional country lies entirely beyond the DOGIT boundary and who have no traditional affiliations to DOGIT land. These include some Kokoberra people, Kokoberrin people whose land is between the Nassau and Staaten Rivers, and Olkola and Kunjen people whose country is to the east of Kowanyama along the course of the Alice and Mitchell Rivers. All of these people are frequent users of the ‘commons’ within the Kowanyama hinterland and some have obtained permission from traditional owners to establish homeland sites there (see Chapter 5.3).

Kunjen people have the greatest area of their country outside of the Kowanyama
DOGIT but nevertheless have two homelands within it, which are located almost precisely on the boundary from where they negotiate access to the rest of their country with adjacent property owners. One is located immediately adjacent to the Mitchell River/ Alice River National Park. The Park has been nominally transferred back to its owners in Kowanyama under the *Aboriginal Lands Act* (Queensland 1991) though the transfer has not been accepted by them because of the Park co-management conditions that have been attached to it by the State. The owner of the other Kunjen homeland, which is located in the Kowanyama hinterland, would like to move a short distance across the boundary to his traditional homeland on the adjacent pastoral property. At present, Kokoberra, Kokoberrin, Olkola and Kunjen families in Kowanyama are negotiating Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) under the *Native Title Act* (Commonwealth 1998) with neighbouring pastoralists. An ILUA may give them the right to set up small homeland sites or to occasionally camp in their country and to be consulted about any future development of a property that may affect their Native Title rights to visit places, or to hunt and fish.

There is a wide range of territorial interests of this kind in Kowanyama in pastoral properties across southern Cape York Peninsula such as Koolatah, Dunbar, Inkerman and Rutland Plains that are shared with people in Aboriginal towns elsewhere in the region such as Coen, Chillagoe and Normanton. Consequently, Olkola and Bakanh and Kunjen, and Kokoberrin people are part of wider social networks than are people who have their traditional country within the community.

Some of the above families have come together in recent years to deal with questions of purchasing pastoral properties or of initiating Land or Native Title claims and meetings to discuss such issues are held from time to time at Kowanyama. On occasion for instance, Kunjen people from Mareeba and Chillagoe have come to Kowanyama to elicit support from their kin for an application to acquire a pastoral property through the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) in their professed homeland country near Chillagoe, about 400 kilometres east of Kowanyama. From time to time, Kokoberrin people also come to Kowanyama from Cairns or Normanton for similar meetings. Family ties from common ancestors from two or
three generations ago are usually invoked by visiting families at such meetings. Urban cousins are usually articulate in Standard English and mainstream modes of address and discourse and are smartly dressed; have shoes on their feet and occasionally carry handbags or briefcases; and often have markedly light skin colour. The latter can be an important caste distinction in Aboriginal society (Cowlishaw 1987, 1988). Such people are referred to as ‘yellow bellies’ in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama English. The visitors are familiar with the protocols of negotiation and with the legal procedures such as are required under State law for incorporating people into the corporate bodies that are required in property purchases. Their conception of traditional country and the social relations and land allocation practices that adhere to it are more attenuated and are usually presented in general terms of ‘tribe’ and ‘country’ and their spatial referents are often the pastoral properties in the region rather than any specific places in the traditional landscape. They sometimes appeal to what they conceive of as a regional ‘tribal law’ for validation of their property interests. These groups, which may be based around one or two focal families, tend to be permeable in their membership and adjunct members come and go. The historical dislocation of knowledge and experience of homeland country that has been experienced by these families means that large tracts of country comprising the pastoral properties of the southern Peninsula and the northern Gulf region are ‘thin’ social spaces (after Casey 1993) in terms of the person-place- social space relationships that were described in Chapter 6.

According to some of their often-bemused Kowanyama kin, their urban relatives have no ‘custom way’. Engagements of a similar nature between traditional owners and their ‘diaspora’ relatives have also been recorded at Coen (Smith 2000). It is at such meetings that the enclave –like nature of the southern Gulf Lowlands is most apparent in the air of general unease, on the part of the Elders, when such issues are discussed with their diaspora kin; yet at the same time it is also apparent that Kowanyama is a place with a considerable sphere of territorial interests in country that extend up to 400 kilometres to the south and east of the township. This range of interests is reflected in the Native Title claim which is lodged by KLNRM0 and the
Cape York Land Council on behalf of the ‘people of Kowanyama’ and which extends over country up to 100 kilometres away on adjacent and other coterminous pastoral properties within the southern Gulf Lowlands. The Kowanyama claim is on behalf of the community and is not a tribal or clan group claim. Kowanyama is perceived by many Aboriginal people in the wider region as the ‘official version’ of Aboriginality or of the ‘tribal law’ for a large area of Far North Queensland. As such, it is a ‘reference community’ for many Aboriginal people in their assertions of traditional connection to country (John Taylor, pers comm). Kowanyama has an almost iconic status in towns, such as Chillagoe or Normanton, where nonetheless many Aboriginal residents hold rather attenuated perceptions of Kowanyama life and of ‘custom way’. For instance, many people have little idea of the actualities of social organisation and culture there and believe that Kowanyama people belong to one tribe and only speak one language (Philip Wynn, pers comm).

There are three degrees of ‘insidedeness’ which are evident in terms of sharing of Aboriginal identity with Kowanyama in the wider region of the southern Peninsula and northern Gulf country. These notions are coincident with geographic proximity to the area of the DOGIT tenure and are as evident in community life in Kowanyama as they are in the perceptions of Aboriginal people in towns in the wider region. They also coincide directly with the systems of social structuration proposed in chapter 2 of this thesis whereby

- core relationships are held by traditional owners whose homeland country is in close proximity to the township;
- proximal relationships are held by traditional owners whose homeland is bisected by the DOGIT boundary; and,
- peripheral relations are held by traditional owners whose homeland country is beyond the DOGIT and adjacent pastoral properties,

Some long-term residents of Kowanyama whose traditional country is outside of and a great distance away from the DOGIT have obtained homelands or proximate
entitlement to country within the community from the traditional owners. Such entitlements are usually for the lifetime of the occupant (see Chapter 5.4). These people invariably give obeisance to the traditional owners of their homeland on all issues to do with traditional law. The traditional owners also usually speak for the same country on land management issues in meetings at KLNRMQ. The lessees have all lived in Kowanyama for thirty or forty years or so; have married locally, and are established members of the community. It is possible that as their children go on to marry into the community that they may become ‘traditional owners’ of country.

The lessees all hold a high value for the economic and pastoral properties of their nominal homeland and tend to see the DOGIT as an extension of the wider regional landscape of pastoral enterprises. They are essentially ‘pastoral people’. This latter perspective on the DOGIT landscape contrasts with that which is held by many traditional owners who see the DOGIT as an Aboriginal enclave that is separate from the rest of the world. Just as with mainstream pastoralists, homeland lessees see the need to make improvements in the form of fencing or cattle yards as condition of their homeland ‘lease’ and as a demonstration of their current stewardship of the land. They see the DOGIT boundary as a permeable one which does not enfrain traditional country but instead augments it by giving it the same land use properties as the wider region. They all talk about homelands in terms of cattle.

‘A good property – a 1000 head’

is a statement of the value of an area of country by an aspiring homeland lessee which is often heard, in one way or another, in conversations in community life. The ‘pastoral people’ may be regarded as the heirs of Bob Katter’s vision (then Queensland Minister of Northern Development and Community Services) of Aboriginal society in Cape York Peninsula in the late 1980s (see Chapter 2.3.2). The promotion of ‘black entrepreneurs’ and the development of rural Aboriginal towns was a social engineering goal of the State and of the Minister. Two clear goals that were foreseen for Aboriginal people were ‘ownership of your own land and house’
(Figure 2.13) and the opportunity ‘to start a business’ (Figure 2.14). The latter offer included the provision of land leases for any Aboriginal person, irrespective of whether they held traditional title, under the 1985 ‘Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Land Holding)’ Act (Queensland). All of the present homeland lessees in Kowanyama applied to the State government for the excision of land from the DOGIT in the later 1980s. None of the applications were ever finalised. One application that was finalised was the only one that was received from a traditional owner who wanted a lease over his traditional country in the Mitchell River Delta country as a ‘stop gap’ measure to prevent another Aboriginal person from elsewhere in the region from leasing his land.

The homeland lessees in Kowanyama see themselves as ‘inside’ a region-wide container of social and land relationships and do not consider the DOGIT as a separate entity but instead, as was the Queensland government’s intention for the DOGIT tenure, they see it as an instrument of social change, as a means of transition from traditional to modern, and as a means of entry into the regional mainstream. These sentiments are sometimes expressed in the management of the community herd. Cattle herds were introduced in ‘Mission time’ for food and maintained in ‘Department time’ as an instrument for training people in mainstream work practice and for supplying the demand for Aboriginal workers in the North Queensland cattle industry. The cattle herd was given over to each Council at the time of the DOGIT transfer from State to local government in the late 1980s. There are only occasional traditional owners of DOGIT land on the staff of the Kowanyama Cattle Company and employees can act in roles which allow them the illusion that DOGIT land is a single pastoral property. From time to time, and if Company employees behave in an overbearing manner, traditional owners dispel this illusion and remind the Company of the local realities of land ownership and control. At other times, the illusion may be enhanced by attendance at musters on adjacent pastoral properties, most of the southern Gulf Lowlands is unfenced open range, when Cattle Company representatives negotiate with White pastoralists and stock agents over the exchange of branded and ‘clean skin’ cattle between properties.
A personal view of the role of the DOGIT tenure in engendering a sense of an overlap and of an accommodation of Aboriginal and pastoralist values for the southern Gulf Lowlands was described to me by a homeland lessee in Kowanyama. His concern was that impending changes to local government in Aboriginal community councils in Queensland between 2004 and 2008 so that they become mainstream Shire Councils were going to replace what he perceived as a socially and economically permeable DOGIT boundary with a ‘closed gate’ which would cut Kowanyama off from the rest of the region. He saw the DOGIT as a unique tenure, and almost as an unrealised eutopia that was different from other forms of local government in the State. The DOGIT allowed Aboriginal people in Kowanyama to work alongside and co-exist with their White pastoralist neighbours in the southern Gulf Lowlands. In turn, he regarded Katter’s unfulfilled vision for the DOGIT and State governments plans to reform local government as a broken promise to Aboriginal people.

Traditional owners in Kowanyama invariably view the DOGIT area as an enclave which is separate from the rest of the region and as a container of inside/outside relationships based on

- kinship and genealogy;
- classificatory relationships (such as ‘poison cousin’ or ‘promised wife’);
- clan and homeland affiliation;
- locally assigned rights of access to homeland country; and,
- locally assigned roles in decision-making about homeland country.

All of the above relationships can operate independently or in various combinations with each other. They add to the ‘thickness’ of social space at any location in the DOGIT landscape whose sense of ‘insidedness’ is far greater than any sense of inclusion in a common cognitive space that may be felt by Aboriginal people over the wider region of the southern Peninsula and the Gulf country. The homeland
society of three; four or five closely related homeland groups is a land management unit and a form of social organisation identified earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 5.4) that encompasses all of the above relationships. More than one homeland society can exist within any tribal territory. Their membership appears to be based in cognate family relationships and their territory is entirely contained within traditional tribe domain. Despite their common language and kinship ties, homeland societies can function as separate entities within any tribal domain, so much so that the expression ‘them people across the fence’ is sometimes heard to describe the social and physical boundaries that may occasionally prevail between some neighbouring societies. Most significantly in terms of the influence of the DOGIT tenure on social change in the 20th century, homeland society territory appears to transcend the DOGIT boundary. The declarations that families have made in Native Title meetings in Kowanyama show that there are nominal linkages, of the kind that prevail between homelands in a homeland society, between homelands within the DOGIT and those families who aspire to establish homelands in coterminous country on the adjacent pastoral properties.

The same ‘thickness’ of social space in terms of person-place-space relationships as exists within the Kowanyama DOGIT area is also evident on immediately adjacent National Park and pastoral properties. People make regular camping trips to homeland country on these properties and Native Title negotiations with neighbouring pastoralists have demonstrated that Kowanyama families hold a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the traditional places and topography of their homeland country. Negotiations invariably follow a format of the pastoralist asking for approval by traditional owners for a proposed economic venture such as a dam, or a tourist fishing camp or a fodder cropping area as part of the land use agreement. Such approvals are required under Queensland law for any change in the conditions of use of a pastoral lease. In turn, traditional owners talk almost exclusively about their expectations of the pastoralist in respecting and maintaining traditional places and in observing the protocols of death in their day-to-day cattle operations. For example
‘We want notification of any burn off by the pastoralist. Fire can upset the spirits. It is just a common courtesy and there is no need for a traditional owner to be present. Need to talk to the spirit people and ask them to move on or they will be restless’.

‘-------- [an Olkola elder] and the old fella [a deceased Olkola elder] upset when ---- --- [a deceased Kunjen elder] buried there because people were going into country even though it had been closed because of the death. When country disturbed old people here [in Kowanyama] felt bad – you are all in danger, your helicopter could be hit by giant flying fox or giant bird. You bring a gun to your property and let off a couple of shots to let spirit know you are there’.

These directions are meant to engender mutual respect and to accommodate both Aboriginal and pastoralist values for homeland country.

The intercalation of the DOGIT tenure and of indigenous tribal geographies in the southern Gulf Lowlands has produced heterotopia of land and social relationships which, like the other innovations described earlier in this chapter, are aimed at accommodating social change and at preserving Aboriginal identity. Though there may have been re-alignments of local land allocation practice in Kowanyama in response to the historical and geographical contingencies of township location and seasonal accessibility of traditional country [implicit space] the wider cognitive space of those person-place- social space relationships that define Aboriginality, are maintained in explicit or declared space throughout the southern Gulf Lowlands.

The core, proximal and peripheral hierarchy of spatial and social relationships that was proposed as a response to colonisation and Mission life in the early 20th century in Chapter 2 of this thesis is more evident in Pormpuraaw than in Kowanyama in the early 21st century; and, there is a clearer sense of a divide between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ at the DOGIT boundary at Pormpuraaw than at Kowanyama. The membership of the Pormpuraaw Community Council almost always reflects tribal interests and closely follows the land allocation geography that was described in Chapter 4 of this thesis and Native Title business is always conducted separately by each tribe there. Chapter 2 described the evolution of the community and the changes
in boundary that occurred from about 1920 until 1942. The latter seem to have been strategic decisions as there are fewer ‘peripheral’ people from the wider region in Pormpuraaw and there is a more marked ‘inside/ outside’ dichotomy to engagement in community land affairs, and a much more reduced sphere of geographical influence with the rest of the region, compared to Kowanyama. The Pormpuraaw township is also strongly resonant of the traditional landscape with residency patterns and the use of vernacular languages that closely follow traditional tribe and clan organisation within the DOGIT area (see Chapter 3). The entire extent of Kuuk Thaayore country is contained within the DOGIT; Wik Mungkan people share their country with some of their neighbours in the adjacent Aboriginal community of Aurukun, and Yir Yoront people have similar relationships with their neighbours in Kowanyama (see Chapter 5.4). The latter two tribal groups are ‘inside’ two Aboriginal communities, though a Yir Yoront Elder and Kowanyama resident described herself to me as being ‘in between’. This term arose in a discussion in which she asked me to negotiate on her behalf with the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama Councils so that Pormpuraaw would service her homeland needs in the Mitchell River Delta. Even though her homeland is inside the Kowanyama DOGIT it is more accessible from Pormpuraaw.

The relationship between the Pormpuraaw Council and traditional owners and the way in which community land business is conducted is different from Kowanyama. People at Pormpuraaw had resisted greater authority being given to them by the State government throughout the 1970s, either as councillors or policemen, as this provided levels of power over the whole community which were beyond those prescribed by traditional kin-based relationships (Taylor 1984). As a consequence, Taylor suggested with reference to the proposed DOGIT tenure that ‘the process of disengagement [by the Department] may be more complex than the planners of the exercise have revealed’ (1984). The Department did not leave a total vacuum in the wake of their departure as some people at Pormpuraaw, some of whom are now councillors of long-standing, had gained experience of civic administration in the Department-administered community councils, in roles as deacons in the Church, or

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in other experiences in employment in mainstream life outside of the Gulf Lowlands. Many Department officers also stayed behind and took up employment with the Community council in administrative jobs such as council clerk or accountant. In a sense, the present day administration of Pormpuraaw is still in modernity in pre-1987 ‘Department time’ and ‘Mission time’ with the Council staff looking after financial administration and local government services for the township; and with the traditional owners each independently looking after the affairs of their homeland country.

In Kowanyama, KLNRMO and the Counsel of Elders attempt to reconcile any ideological differences over notions of the ownership and control of land both within and beyond the area of the DOGIT tenure. Their aim is to maintain their own systems of land allocation and governance and to deal with the inherent inequities of traditional country being either inside or outside of community land. The Counsel of Elders is comprised of ‘peripheral’ people as well as the traditional owners of community land. All of these people sit together at the Office table at all times to discuss community business, to develop policy, and to direct the day-to-day business of the Office. An issue that the Office had to deal with in the later 1980s revolved around whether community land is a public space, in the sense that Bob Katter Jr envisaged in the transfer of the DOGIT tenure in the early 1980s (see Chapter 2.3), is subject to local government authority; or, whether it is a collection of smaller areas or homelands that are the private domain of the traditional owners. This dichotomy was resolved through the principle of open access to the natural resources of community lands for all residents of Kowanyama, irrespective of where they are from, and the recognition of the autonomy of homeland groups in the ownership and the direction of the affairs of their country. This arrangement is similar to the ‘range’ and ‘clan estate’ duality of traditional land allocation (Stanner 1965) whereby notions of commonality and exclusivity can exist simultaneously at any place. This resolution was probably achieved because it reflects longstanding properties of social space in the region that may even pre-date the arrival of the missionaries (see Chapter 2.2 and 2.3). KLNRMO almost certainly institutionalised an already existing
state of affairs and the Land Office in itself may reflect the conditions of implicit space as they were negotiated by local people in the earliest years of the 20th century when the State-assigned land tenure boundaries of ‘abstract space’ (after Lefebvre 1991) were inscribed over their country.

If one accepts the DOGIT tenure and the efforts of Mission and Department time administrations to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society as the underpinning of 20th century modernity in social policy in Cape York Peninsula, then KLNRMO is also a ‘post-Katter’ or ‘post-modern’ response to regional governance issues and to the land management problems that arose with the transfer of DOGIT administrations from State government to locally elected Community councils. The title, Counsel of Elders, is a carefully chosen nomenclature that is used by Kowanyama people to summarise their systems of governance; it is also one that accords well with popular mainstream perceptions of ‘tradition’ and of ‘Aboriginality’ and one which facilitates acceptance and understanding of the organisation by the rest of the world. Though there are no references to a comparable corporate pan-tribal body having ever existed traditionally anywhere else in Aboriginal Australia; tribal councils are referred to in the literature and popular media on indigenous societies in the rest of the world, in particular with reference to North American Indian societies.

The conditions of implicit space and of relative social inclusion or exclusion are largely the product of the setting of community boundaries throughout the 20th century. This thesis has represented an implicit form of behaviour through local variations in land allocation practice and homeland distribution in relation to the geographical constraints of the location of the DOGIT boundary and township, and seasonal accessibility to traditional country. Even though it is a relatively recent historical creation, implicit space appears to be immutable and it is hard to imagine any future change in the present-day geographies and sociologies of land allocation practice that have been described in this thesis. The properties of implicit space are set once at the time of contact between the indigenous and the introduced land tenure
systems and probably like the social responses to changes in material technology that were described earlier in this chapter, they were also established quickly. If the 20th century creation of implicit space is so embedded in the geography and society of the southern Gulf Lowlands then its persistence has considerable implications for the outcomes of any future attempts at social change in Aboriginal society in comparable regions in North Australia.

7.4 ‘Our way’ and the future geography of the southern Gulf Lowlands

‘Our way’, whether it is the body of practice that is acquired to deal with long-term institutional change such as the DOGIT tenure or with shorter term policy or technological innovations in natural resource management as described so far in this chapter, is inevitably a hybridisation of local and introduced mainstream practices, the product of which is a praxis which is entirely Aboriginal in nature. Moreover, in whatever form it manifests itself in the southern Gulf Lowlands, ‘our way’ is also reflected in a unique sense of community identity which is based around the geography of the DOGIT tenure.

Three mainstream views of the role of Aboriginal community councils in land use planning and in regional land management strategies in Queensland were identified in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The first is that councils are much alike, and operate in similar ways to mainstream local government bodies, and are thus amenable to regional policy and planning processes. The second is that they represent a diverse range of political interests within their local 'Domain', and thus their ‘modus operandi’ may differ from community to community. Alternatively, they are seen as token administrations that have little autonomy or influence in community or regional land affairs. The first of these views acknowledges the Queensland government's intention that the DOGIT tenure would provide a framework for the assimilation of remote Aboriginal communities into the mainstream. The second view sees each community as the container of diverse and traditional or historically contingent land interests, much as have been described for Pormpuraaw and
Kowanyama in this thesis. The third view is that community councils have no relevance at all in land issues, and that local homeland groups are the agents of land affairs. The first and third of these views still prevail in the early 2000s and are impediments to the participation of Aboriginal communities in policy-making on natural resource management and community governance issues by State and Federal governments and their agencies in Cape York Peninsula.

Cape York Peninsula has been the subject of natural resource assessment and land management planning under the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study (Connell Wagner 1989; CYPLUS 1993, 1996) and since 1997 under a Federal government funded Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) project to establish a Peninsula natural resource management plan. The Peninsula is one of 56 NHT regions in Australia. Each region is required to develop a natural resource management plan and a corresponding ‘investment strategy’ for the commitment of government funding to those priorities that have been identified in the plan. At this time of writing, the Peninsula appears to be the only region in Australia that has yet to come up with a plan or an investment strategy. The greatest impediments to regional scale planning in the Peninsula are in the misperceptions in the mainstream of the respective roles of tribal and local government authority in community life; and in turn, the acceptance of a myth of ‘pan-Aboriginality’ and of a singular regional identity for Cape York Peninsula around which land use policy and management strategies can be developed. Also, like its predecessor CYPLUS, the NHT process has been conducted through regional forums, mainly in Cairns, and has been beset by poor communication of its objectives to remote Peninsula communities (see Chapter 1.2.2).

Australian governments have been reluctant to deal directly with Aboriginal communities on their natural resource management interests. The notion of a common Aboriginal constituency in the region has also been encouraged by bureaucrats and policy-makers in the regional Aboriginal Land Council who have attempted to develop Cape York Peninsula as a constituency to further their political
aspirations. For instance, a ‘Heads of Agreement’ on land use policy was negotiated between the regional Land Council, conservationists and the pastoral industry without adequate consultation of Aboriginal communities in the western Peninsula. Consequently, this agreement was never ratified by Pormpuraaw or Kowanyama (nor was this requested of them anyway), not because of any disagreement with the aim of the ‘Agreement’ but because of the authority that was assumed on their behalf by the regional Land Council (see Chapter 1.2.2). Cape York Peninsula does not exist as a social, cultural or biogeographic entity in many Aboriginal worldviews in the western Peninsula; it has no tangible meaning in indigenous ideological frameworks and can be conceived of as another ‘abstract space’ (after Lefebvre 1991) that is a geographic and administrative entity created by mainstream Australia. There are many distinct regions within Cape York Peninsula; at least five have been identified in the western Peninsula on the basis of broad biogeographic, social and cultural criteria (Monaghan 2004). The differences between these regions are such that it is not feasible, with current consultation and planning processes, to develop common policy to cover all of their interests.

Poor communication has also led to occasional misunderstanding or suspicion about planning or policy objectives. Government representatives can rarely talk about policy to Aboriginal audiences in clear and unambiguous Plain English. At times, the inability to communicate is also a reflection of a poor understanding of the policy or planning objective that is being presented by a speaker. People in the western Peninsula are affronted by the technical language that is sometimes used and see it as an assertion of dominance by the speaker. For instance, there is a technical language that is used by NHT technocrats and planners whereby any regional differentiation within the Peninsula is referred to in terms of ‘sub-regions’. This term replaces the more specific labels of community or tribal country name that residents use when referring to their or other people’s home country or homeland interests. No precise definition has been available to communities, for instance in the form of a map, of the distribution of these sub-regions. The term is used probably because there is no clear understanding of the human geography and social spaces of the Peninsula. In
any of its uses ‘sub-region’ is a term that because of its crudity is one that is offensive to many of the community Elders that I know that have heard it. Sub-region is a term that implies centralised control of their country and it is particularly resonant because an ultimate objective of both CYPLUS and NHT, which has never been publicly declared by them at any Aboriginal community meeting, is to proscribe the Peninsula as a ‘World Heritage Area’ and thus subsume it under a centralised land management regime.

Unless government takes a more objective and detailed appraisal of the human geography and political realities of the Peninsula then there is the clear potential for a ‘dystopia’ of two incongruent and incompatible geographies to emerge in the future. At best, it may be a case of two parallel geographies, at least in the area of land management, with that of the Aboriginal domain functioning separately, in a cognitive sense, from that of the mainstream. Hopefully, the latter may not happen because 20th century history has shown that ‘bridge-building’ is an inherent feature of Aboriginal life and in some way or other Aboriginal people will continue to find a ‘via media’ for dealing with mainstream perceptions of their country and society that helps preserve their own culture and identity. A large part of the geography of Aboriginal identity in the southern Gulf Lowlands is now grounded in the features of ‘implicit space’ that have been described in this thesis. The present day geography of land allocation which is based around the mission reserve and DOGIT tenure boundaries of the 20th century now appears to be immutable – the re-negotiation of Aboriginal space and of modes of social reproduction to accommodate the introduced tenures has been of such a magnitude that it can only feasibly occur once, and government policy that fails to recognise this geography will not succeed.

NHT and CYPLUS have not recognised the composite nature of Aboriginal geography and have maintained a polar view of Aboriginal society in the Peninsula as one that is comprised of traditional owners and reference is rarely made to the elected community councils or to community institutions in their literature. This misconstrued view of Aboriginality and of local indigenous society is a form of
‘orientalism’ (after Said 1979) and is a profound misunderstanding of the nature of community life. Without any understanding of the consequences of their poor focus on the nature of local Aboriginal society, NHT and CYPLUS also undermine the measures, such as KLNRM0 and the Counsel of Elders, which communities have undertaken themselves to deal equitably with the needs of community residents who have no traditional land, and with ensuring community-wide participation in decision-making.

The CYPLUS and NHT attempts to bring Aboriginal perspectives into regional planning are examples of a recurring phenomenon. For instance, in a description of land use projects in the Lockhart River area of the east coast of the Peninsula, it was reported that despite the existence of formal planning processes that allow for their inclusion, that there was often only a limited recognition of local Aboriginal perspectives in them

‘The creation of formal planning structures should be the outcome of careful and detailed local ethnographic inputs; and an appreciation of local historical factors and, more importantly, detailed knowledge about the politics of relevant Aboriginal communities and domains’ (Lane and Chase 1996).

Future policy for the Peninsula has to include the myriad accommodations between Aboriginal and mainstream life in the Aboriginal communities and in the small towns of Far North Queensland. This diversity of social space is a valuable resource in itself and one worthy of promotion as much as the natural resource values of the Peninsula. More imaginative and sympathetic geographies are required of planners before regional policy-making can be regarded as inclusive of all social interests, and before the talents and aspirations of all people in the Far North, both Aboriginal and European Australians can be engaged. The notion of ‘bridge-building’ is one that underlies this thesis. It is one that has led to the development of ideas of implicit and explicit space as geographical as well as sociological phenomena and hence as properties that can be mapped. Models of explicit space containing ‘landmark’ information have been used to map and to represent the range of personal experiences of the landscape and means by which people orientate and emplace
themselves within it. The models have allowed the identification of personal connection to country, some of which in the Mitchell River Delta country still encompass direct experience of landscapes from the time of early European enclosure of Yir Yoront land, and other connections which are recent and have less direct reference to traditional places but which nevertheless retain a strong territorial association through contemporary landmarks, to traditional homeland country. As well as articulating some of the modes of social reproduction that underpin the perdurability of traditional person-place-space relationships (Aboriginal identity); the models have also allowed articulation of the family-homeland-homeland society-tribe-community modes of social organisation in land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands. The techniques that have been used to map these representations of social space were initially developed in community land planning in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, and this thesis concludes with a review of the practical application of these techniques to the reconciliation of mainstream and local Aboriginal views of natural resource value and preferred land use.

7.5 Community and regional scale mapping in the Aboriginal world

There are sociologies or anthropologies as well as geographies and histories of social change, all of which are linked and each of which is susceptible to analysis and all of them are likely to arrive, independently, at similar conclusions about the generative processes that determine social practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands. Social practice is spatially as well as historically variant. This thesis has demonstrated that the rationales that underpin present day land allocation practice are as demonstrable in the southern Gulf Lowlands over geographical space as they are, in any evolutionary sense, over time. Pormpuraaw or Kowanyama have numerous distinct ‘spatialities’ (after Soja 1985) or topologies, and geography is unique in the way that it can visualise socio-spatial change of this kind through maps or other spatially referenced media such as satellite images and photographs of landmarks or of the people who are related to landmarks.
As a geographer, I have taken a cartographic approach to modeling and representing the links between social space and the outcomes of land allocation practice in homeland distribution and land use in the later 1990s and early 2000s. Spatial modeling techniques have been used to explore the historical and geographical influences on present day social organisation and land use, and another suite of cartographic techniques to identity the spatial referents or particular places which people can use as ‘landmarks’ in orientating themselves in maps or images of the natural resource and seasonal environment properties of the landscape. The congruency between these two spatial domains and forms of mapping, has been demonstrated in reviews of land and natural resource mapping work in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw (Monaghan 2002; Monaghan and Taylor 2003; Monaghan 2003). In particular, in the relative distribution of place-route-domain levels of knowledge (after Golledge 1993) at homeland [1:100 000], community [1:250 000] and regional [1:1000 000] scales of mapping; and also in the various levels of emplacement (person-place-space) that people have referred themselves to in their descriptions of the social and environmental properties of the same scales of mapping (see Chapter 6). The overall aim of mapping has been to facilitate community land management by capturing the diverse criteria that people use in decision-making as simply as possible, and in turn to reduce the apparent ambiguities that sometimes arise between what people say about themselves and their actions, and between their expected and observed behaviours in land allocation practice. Community leaders instructed me that this transparency was to be such that appropriately composed maps, or ‘views’ of local perspectives of southern Gulf Lowlands landscapes could be conveyed, if the need arose, to the mainstream technocrats, planners and policy-makers involved in regional planning and policy development for Cape York Peninsula.

‘We got to show them people what we are thinking about’ (Colin Lawrence, Kunjen Elder).

 Appropriately designed maps that are clear in their meaning and that take into account the properties of social space provide a hermeneutic for both eliciting and representing landscape values. They can also help overcome the natural reserve and
shyness of many people on the Gulf Lowlands, and their unfamiliarity with mainstream planning processes. Such maps, and in particular those that incorporate landmark information have semiotic properties that allow a neutral approach to the elicitation of information on land ownership and use. Some people will not respond to, or are affronted by direct questions on land matters because of their connotations for other personal values such as kinship relations or ritual knowledge; others have an equally developed sense of personal space and will demur more tactfully. Maps provide a less confrontational medium for people to explore or explain the values that they represent than by other forms of elicitation such as the production of text from face-to-face interviews. Many people are not aware when you speak to them, despite explanation, that the reproduction of their words as text in a thesis or technical report means that their words are open to misrepresentation or use in other contexts which are not relevant to the personal experiences that they may be describing at the time (see Merlan 2000 for a discussion of these issues). Cartography on the other hand allows the abstraction or generalisation of the finer grain detail that people tell about themselves into larger scale trends, or blocks of colour, on a chloroplethic map that convey information about broader social themes such as proximity to the township or seasonal accessibility of the landscape. Participants in mapping exercises can then review such ‘abstract’ representations of their social space to assess whether they correspond with their worldview.

Cartographic techniques, such as those described in Chapters 6.3 and 6.4 of this thesis, allow people to compose their own individual representations of personal values for any area of the landscape and to communicate these notions to other people in the community, or to State land management agencies, who may have interests in the same region. Interactive mapping of this kind has been summarised in terms of a cartographic cube (Figure 7.1) with dimensions of ‘private’ and ‘public’, ‘high interactivity’ and ‘low interactivity’, and ‘revealing knowns’ and ‘exploring unknowns’ on each axis (Crampton 2001). People can make as many maps as they like in an exploratory or interactive mapping environment to convey as
Figure 1 The concept of ‘cartography cubed,’ emphasizing the continua of private–public, exploring unknowns–presenting knowns and high interactivity–low interactivity
Source: Reprinted from MacEachren and Fraser Taylor (1994: 6) with permission from Elsevier Science

Figure 7.1: The ‘Cartographic Cube’ (Crampton 2001)
wide an array of meanings as they choose to impart, as long as the landmarks or the spatial referents to the landscape that they and other people understand are there for these compositions to be made. Such maps are economical in their content but quite deep in their meaning. They can also embody differing degrees of ‘opacity’ (after Lefebvre 1991) depending on the amount of information or ‘knowns’ that the composer of any map wants to reveal. The meaning of a map can be either opaque in that it reveals nothing to anybody but the people who compose it. A map can be translucent in that all of its content may be evident to the composer(s) but only part of it is revealed to other viewers, or a representation may be transparent and its content and meaning is clear to everybody.

‘Visualisation is the process of representing information synoptically for the purpose of recognizing, communicating and interpreting pattern and structure. Its domain encompasses the computational, cognitive and mechanical aspects of generating, organizing, manipulating and comprehending such representations. Representations may be rendered symbolically, graphically or iconically and are often differentiated from other forms of expression (textual, verbal or formulaic) by virtue of their synoptic format and with qualities traditionally described by the term “Gestalt”’ (Buttenfield and Mackaness 1991, 32).

My first experiences of visualisation and interactive mapping were over a period of three weeks in 1997 based in an office at the Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Council where I invited people to review drafts of mapping of community landscapes based on land systems analysis of aerial photography and of seasonal wetland distribution based on digital image analysis of satellite data (see Chapter 4). Most of the respondents were women with their children or grandchildren, and invariably one or two old men who would peer quizzically through the doorway as the women asked me to display different parts of the landscape on the computer monitor. Occasionally a mutter from the doorway would direct the women to ask me to change the displayed view. Whilst doing this desktop tour through the landscape, the children were being instructed by their parents and Elders on the content of the screen in Wik or Thaayore language. At the end of the session I would be thanked and they would leave and I, unlike the children, had learnt nothing. I did gain my first appreciation of the importance of landmark information in this exercise. Almost invariably, the landmarks that were requested of me in these early trials in Pormpuraaw were the location of places in the
traditional and mythical landscape. When the latter information was not available I was directed to locations by ‘panning’ and ‘zooming’ around the screen over digital wet and dry season aerial photograph and satellite image mosaics of the landscape until they were located. I presume the instruction that was being given to the children by their mothers and grandmothers on these ‘desktop’ tours of the landscape was in the physical details of their own country. In terms of the ‘cartographic cube’ (Figure 7.1) the above Pormpuraaw mapping encounters were ‘private’, ‘highly interactive’ and involved the ‘revealing of knowns’ by adults to their children: whilst they had a transparent view of their landscape, it was completely opaque to me.

The creation of ‘public’ maps for land management is initially a two-step process. The first requirement is the acceptance of the digital mapping technology provided by a community land information system which can store and spatially relate all of the natural resource, cultural and landmark, and genealogical or sociological information that is required in natural resource assessment and land use planning. The issues to do with the acceptance of new technologies as a part of the wider repertoire of social practice, or of ‘our way’, were discussed earlier on in this chapter. In turn, the mapping objectives that the system is intended to address must be acceptable to the whole of the community. The actual process of map production is then one of conflating two contrasting representations of the world, the scientific or management view and the local indigenous view into one which is mutually comprehensible to the mainstream and to local Aboriginal society. The ways in which local people interact with this map, and the statements that they make about land ownership or principles of natural resource use during its compilation, also have to be included in the map ephemera.

Abstract space (after Lefebvre 1991) is the modernist and reductionist view of the landscape as comprising a set of rationally differentiated elements such as are described on separate thematic maps of soils, or vegetation, or property boundaries and one which is held by technocrats, planners and scientists (see Chapter 1.5). Maps of the latter kind are perplexing to many of the Aboriginal people that I know in the western Peninsula. People in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw often find it difficult to conceptualise natural resource distribution as a property that is
independent of the other social and cultural values that they have for the landscape. The best solution for integrating the two landscape perspectives is for primary mapping of natural resource distribution to be done with the active involvement of local people in related image interpretation and fieldwork and map compilation tasks. This approach was undertaken with the mapping of community wetlands in Kowanyama (Monaghan 2001). However, primary natural resource mapping is very expensive and where possible relevant mapping from other sources such as CSIRO Land Systems mapping (Galloway et al. 1970) or the CYPLUS 1:250 000 scale vegetation mapping (Neldner and Clarkson 1995) has to be used.

The large map units in the 1: 5000 000 CSIRO Land Systems map are recognisable to most people that I know in the western Peninsula. They fit intuitively into most people’s understanding of the organisation of the landscape over a large area of the Peninsula but are of too small a scale for community–scale mapping that, for instance, can describe the distribution of natural resources within a homeland area. Land systems mapping, at an approximate scale of 1:250 000, from available 1:100 000 aerial photography (for example see Figure 4.2) formed the cartographic base for natural and cultural resource assessment in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw (Monaghan 2003a, Monaghan 2003b). This larger scale mapping provided an interpretative framework within which the land system units helped discriminate trends in Neldner and Clarkson’s outstanding, but otherwise complex, vegetation map which could then be evaluated by traditional owners for land use planning at homeland scales. The latter is an ‘abstract’ representation of the landscape in the scientific nomenclature that it uses to describe the botanical properties of each of the many ‘000s of small units or ‘polygons’ that make up the vegetation map. The botanical classification that is the basis of the map is such that ecologists, land use planners, environmental scientists or cultural managers may adapt it for their various applications.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Landscape Term</th>
<th>Broad Vegetation Group (Neldner &amp; Clarkson 1995)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COAST</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach Ridge</td>
<td>Beach Ridge Woodland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Eucalypt Woodland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vine Thicket</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inside Ridge</td>
<td>Beach Ridge Woodland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mangrove</td>
<td>Mangrove Forest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marine Grass Plain</td>
<td>Swamp Grassland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tussock Grasslands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saltpan</td>
<td>Saltpan</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WOODLAND</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Ti-tree &amp; Boxwood Country</td>
<td>Low Open Eucalypt Woodland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boxwood &amp; Ti-tree Country</td>
<td>Low Open Eucalypt Woodland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti-tree Country</td>
<td>Low Open Eucalypt Woodland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leichardt (a landmark cattle yard)</td>
<td>Eucalypt Woodland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Low Open Eucalypt Woodland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low Open Melaleuca</td>
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<tr>
<td>River Front</td>
<td>Eucalypt Woodland</td>
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<td>Levee Eucalypt Woodland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Low Open Eucalypt Woodland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Riparian Gallery Forest</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Riparian Melaleuca and Tussock Grassland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tall Melaleuca Woodland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tetradonta Woodland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sand Ridge Country</td>
<td>Eucalypt Woodland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scrub Forest Country</td>
<td>Vine Thicket</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Low Open Melaleuca</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INLAND WETLAND</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Freshwater Clay Swamp</td>
<td>Tussock Grasslands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freshwater Sandy Swamp</td>
<td>Tussock Grasslands</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Swamp Grassland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Country</td>
<td>Swamp Grassland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tussock Grasslands</td>
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<td>Swamp Country</td>
<td>Swamp Forest</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tussock Grasslands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tidal Swamp Country</td>
<td>Tussock Grasslands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ti-tree Swamp</td>
<td>Swamp Grasslands</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tussock Grasslands</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Concordance between Kowanyama classification of ‘country’ and CYPLUS BVG (Monaghan 2003b)

To translate the Neldner and Clarkson vegetation map into one that local people can
understand and use in land use planning in Kowanyama it was necessary to reclassify the terminology used to describe each of the map units and also to look at ways of making the map more visually amenable. Reclassification involved the projection of the Neldner and Clarkson vegetation map and of colour aerial photographs and satellite images and familiar landmark information onto a screen and then systematically working through the map with groups of traditional owners who were asked ‘What do you call this’ (see Chapter 6.3). As replies to this question were given they were entered into a concordance table which related their description to the corresponding botanical description (Monaghan 2003b).

The Neldner and Clarkson map described vegetation at two levels of aggregation, vegetation association or species level descriptions which were nested inside larger broad vegetation groups. The broad vegetation group descriptions in Table 1 are abbreviations of much more comprehensive descriptions (see Neldner and Clarkson 1995) and the corresponding local landscape terms employ a land systems type of terminology that includes details about dominant landform or seasonal water regime as well as major vegetation type. The local descriptions are also of the kind that would also be used by a pastoralist anywhere else in the southern and western Peninsula. It was not possible to develop a comprehensive local nomenclature for the species level mapping as a range of local Aboriginal language terms and vernaculars were given by people for similar vegetation species and it was not possible to standardise them in any meaningful way at that time.

Issues of scale and of symbolic representation such as the colour of map units made it difficult for some people to participate in the above classification exercise; despite knowing the properties of the landscape, they could not relate to the cartographic media being presented to them. Some people wanted more landmark information in the form of ground photography of the landscape, ‘like you get from a car’ to assist their interpretation of the vegetation map. Cries of ‘turn them colours off’ so that the map is removed from display and the underlying source imagery is displayed, or ‘what is that?’ sometimes accompanied the display of the map. Other people were
Figure 7.2: Kowanyama community scale classification of ‘country’
(based on Neldner and Clarkson 1995)
Figure 7.3: Regional scale landscapes and fire frequency trends in the area of the Kowanyama Native Title claim (Monaghan 2003b)
more sympathetic

‘Jim make a map that them fellas on the outside can understand.’ (Colin Lawrence, Kunjen Elder).

A classification was developed (see Table 7.1 and Figure 7.2) and scientific and local perspectives of the landscape were merged so that the map was comprehensible to traditional landowners as well as to mainstream people. The identification of major land systems or landscapes over the wider region of the Kowanyama Native Title claim has been an ongoing desk-top mapping activity in which traditional owners have participated. It has been gratifying to them (and to me) to see the close concordance between this mapping and that of seasonal trends in fire frequency (Figure 7.3) and this has led to greater local acceptance of the validity of fire information that is collected from satellite data.

In general, the most transparent and ‘public’ forms of mapping, whose meanings are clear to mainstream scientific and management agencies and to local people alike, have been of environmental phenomena such as seasonal surface water or fire scar distribution (Figure 7.3). There is little doubt or ambiguity about the information that such maps convey and their content, unlike a vegetation map, is not scale-dependant in terms of its properties. The corresponding areas on each map are either wet or dry, or burnt or unburnt, irrespective of the scale of mapping. Maps of this kind have enabled the measurement of risks for wet and dry season natural hazards and the identification of appropriate risk mitigation strategies in Pormpuraaw (Monaghan and Taylor 2003) in a way whereby a high concordance in risk values was obtained from both local and mainstream scientific knowledge of these hazards. The binary properties of these environmental maps are important in land use assessment as when they are composited into time-series maps of dry season fire or wet season surface water trends over a number of years then people are able to build up very detailed descriptions of the expected physical and vegetation properties of the landscape on the basis of flood and fire frequency. With sufficient satellite remote sensing information it is possible to make monthly, or early and late dry season, or wet season, or yearly or five yearly aggregations of fire or surface water trends which
provide very informative visual summaries of landscape properties from local to regional scales (Figure 7.3).

Imagery of the landscape, whether in the form of enhanced satellite images or aerial photography has invariably been the preferred medium for people in the southern Gulf Lowlands to map and plan land use in their country as they enable them to express a finer level of detail about the landscape. Chapter 6 of this thesis referred to a ‘compound’ view of the world as a feature of Aboriginal ontology, where time is compressed into a single plane so that past and present phenomena are conflated into ‘now time’, and where each place in the landscape is multivalent and embodies many different personal and societal, and physical and economic or mythical or other aesthetic meanings. Compound representations of the landscape are available in the form of satellite images, and aerial and field photography. Whilst these are the source media for the creation maps, of composite or layered views of the world as represented in a land information system; separate maps of infrastructure, land use, vegetation, topography or drainage may be compiled from a single aerial photograph; they are also compound in that they represent all of these and other properties of any location in one single spatial plane. The latter property allows people discretion in the interpretation of their content. Images have provided an indispensable nexus in natural resource assessment and land use planning in the southern Gulf Lowlands between local knowledge systems and mainstream scientific and policy views of the landscape, or between ‘absolute’ and ‘abstract’ space (after Lefebvre 1991).

Lefebvre asks

‘How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents? It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question. The idea that a small number of maps or even a single (and singular) map might be sufficient can only apply in a specialised area of study whose own self-affirmation depends on isolation from its context’ (1991, 85).

Lefebvre is right in that successful mapping can only be created for ‘a specialized area of study’, this is so in any context, whether Aboriginal or mainstream. A good
map can only convey information about one theme, such as drainage or dry season fire hazard, at a time. Also, in land use planning in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw where the objective has been for instance the identification of areas which are suitable for new homelands or areas that are suitable for crayfish aquaculture enterprise, the resulting output is often not reproduced as a paper map or even saved to computer memory. A map is primarily a medium for negotiation and for establishing consensus in decision-making and is often not an end in itself. The process of creation is more important than the final product. Elements of decision-making such as the soil or vegetation criteria used in determining the physical suitability of areas for differing enterprises may be immutable and stored in digital format in the land information system, but other social values such as the precise location of an enterprise, or its size and membership are revisited and reviewed. The review of land use plans is continuous and is in itself an act of social reproduction which is a core strategy in the maintenance of social space and of civic society. The revisiting of land allocation decisions is one of the main features of the ‘our way’ of social practice that maintains Aboriginal identity, or person-place-space relationships. The map is endlessly re-created, even though its appearance and content may never change.

Community planning or map-making meetings can embody all of the properties of social space within a single room. The experience is of explicit space as all of the encounters are ‘face to face’ and the room can, particularly at large meetings, take on the properties of a ‘virtual landscape’. Casey’s model of person-place-space relationships positions the physical body as the locus of all social relationships (Casey 1993, 2001) with the ‘body in place’, by its location, acting as an ‘intentional body’ which is connected to other people or places that share the enmities, affections or interests for that locus. Casey describes these connections and values primarily in terms of ‘tensional’ and ‘relational’ arcs that radiate from the body and which change as a person moves through geographic space (see Chapter 6.5). This is a compelling metaphor as it describes the feeling that one has at a desk-
Plate 7.2: Young girls explore the land information system archive in the Kowanyama Land Office (Kowanyama Collection)
top mapping session – it seems as if there are antennae (including my own) probing all around the room as land use and land ownership issues are discussed. The antennae subside and connect with each other as common understanding is reached, and arise again as another issue is raised. Mapping sessions are physically exhausting as the responses of every participant have to be considered and evaluated both in terms of the mapping objective and the social status of the respondent to obtain representative and accurate maps. It can take months of preparation and then many weeks of consultation to create a map that reflects local values in a form that can be used by traditional owners and which is also communicable to the mainstream.

Apart from any personal sensibilities about mapping objectives that people may have, or considerations of their ‘landmark’, ‘route’ or ‘domain’ levels of knowledge of the landscape when it is interpreted from maps or images (see Chapter 6.3); it is evident that only part of a wide repertoire of local knowledge is ever transferred in community landscape mapping. Hence, a translucent view of local knowledge and values of the landscape that is relevant to the mapping is one that is usually obtained. This view is more detailed and transparent at some locations than at others as people apply their own personal filters in determining what ‘knowns’ they are prepared to reveal to the rest of the world. Nonetheless, the core media in natural resource mapping, that is the digital aerial photographs and satellite images, and the georeferenced photographs of people, places and landscapes that are embedded in them as landmark information, have a wide currency in community life. These media are available ‘on-line’ for people, including schoolchildren on lunch breaks and holidays, to browse through (Plate 2). These explorations of the landscape are inherently recreational in that apart from being an enjoyable pastime, they allow children to explore and re-create their own social space and suite of society-landscape relationships, and also those of their peers who are also gathered around a computer monitor at any time. The word games and the roles that they play at the computer appear to be all about learning about place-space relationships and the assertion of their developing personalities.
It is often the observer and outsider to local society, rather than the indigent agent or practitioner, who can identify the criteria that are used in decision-making and their related social or spatial properties, and then determine their significance in local practice. It takes time to gain such insights. Eliciting information on notions of ownership or rights of land use or of perspectives of ‘public’ or ‘private’ space from what people say at a meeting is not a form of academic voyeurism; it is an active expectation of the researcher or map compiler by the Aboriginal people whose land interests are being represented. This is so because Aboriginal people can rarely answer direct questions on these issues, partly because complete and unambiguous summaries of the subtleties of social practice are difficult to make in Standard English. The expectation instead is that the researcher will take time to listen and learn about the mechanisms of the ‘our way’ of social reproduction in land management. One has to observe, reflect on what one sees or hears, and occasionally receive patient instruction from a sympathetic Aboriginal Elder, or find another way of asking the questions that will help elucidate society-landscape relationships. This communication and learning is a two-way process and another form of bridge-building between mainstream and Aboriginal society. There is an expectation that the researcher will act as an advocate and convey local Aboriginal perspectives of their world to mainstream Australia. This expectation requires the researcher to articulate some of the possible roles of family, homeland, homeland society, tribe or community when mainstream land management planning affects these interests.

The assertions of ownership and rights of land use that are made in mapping exercises are more often based on the orthodox or traditional (or ‘Native Title’) mode of land allocation; whereas assertions based on the actual distribution of homelands and patterns of homeland authority and land use are made less frequently. The latter is part of the sometimes undeclared and at other times ‘taken for granted’ domain of implicit space in land allocation practice. This space has been partly explained in this thesis in terms of historical and geographical contingency arising from the introduced European tenures and proximity of traditional country to the home township. The orthodox and contingent dimensions of implicit space are not dichotomous and are never evaluated
separately by people in the southern Gulf Lowlands; instead they are integral and
dialectical parts of the ‘habitus’ (after Bourdieu 1977) of social space. In some instances
the orthodox and contingent properties of implicit space are not concentric and these two
interests may lie in entirely separate geographical and social spaces. Again, It is the
responsibility of the geographer to model and articulate these properties of social space
in such a way that apparent incongruities in land allocation are accounted for in the same
way that people deal with them, through the ‘practical logics’ (after Bourdieu 1977) that
they apply in their own land use planning.

Social space is not just a metaphor for describing issues of social organisation or of
social practice; it is a property of human geography that can be identified in the
landscapes, townscapes and personal spaces of remote Aboriginal Australia.
Moreover, social space can be mapped and reproduced cartographically, and is then
also susceptible to spatial analysis so that some of the processes that are germane to
the production of social space can be identified. The spatial integration of kinship
data and models with traditional places in the seasonal landscape (Chapters 4 and 5)
and with local townscapes (Chapter 3) has been a powerful medium for the analysis
of spatial and social behaviour in this thesis and one that has applications that are
more wide-ranging than land allocation practice. The same cartographic media can
also be a test-bed for exploring models and theories of social behaviour at different
scales from the individual to the homeland group, to the tribe, and to the community
or region of communities. An approximation of the ‘habitus’ or entire domain of
social space is apparent at the convergence of these differing social and spatial
scales, as is the ‘thirddspace’ (after Soja 1996) of those unique geographies that each
Aboriginal community creates to accommodate Australian mainstream land tenure
and governance systems and to maintain their own local modes of social
reproduction. Moreover, the dimensionality of cartographic models provides a
unique contribution to the study of the local and regional scale interactions between
mainstream and Aboriginal society in North Australia and human geography has an
important role to play in promoting informed and socially inclusive land use
planning in North Australian society.