Aspects of
Governance and Public Participation
in Remediation of the
Murray Darling Basin

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Statement of Originality

Except where otherwise noted, this thesis is entirely the result of my research.

Brian James Dwyer
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Finally, I must acknowledge with gratitude the debt I owe to my interviewees and other informants in the district I selected for fieldwork. In particular, I wish to thank the Aboriginal people in the district for allowing me entry on to their land and into their conversations.
Confidentiality Statement

Every effort has been made to protect the confidentiality of every person encountered or observed during the fieldwork described in this thesis. Names have been changed in every instance, and a separate Name Code document provided for examination purposes. Further, the inclusion of public documents specific to the fieldwork area as integral parts of the report process makes complete confidentiality impossible unless these documents are excluded herein. Examiners are asked to respect the anonymity expressed in these volumes.
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the question, "What is the essence of the Murray Darling river system conundrum that is usually posed as an issue of environmental remediation?", following perceptions of problems in catchment strategy formulation regarding project selection and public consultation. The question is initially seen as having four facets (governance, public, participation, and remediation).

An initial literature review indicated that previous examination of these topics seemed insufficiently radical or comprehensive for the enquiry’s purposes, seeming not to attribute full humanness to the members of the public. As a consequence, a fieldwork program of a “quasi-anthropological” nature was conducted, including passive observations, conversations with individuals and informal small group, and large formal meetings.

Interpretation of the fieldwork reports focuses primarily on the lack of attribution of full humanness to members of the public. To do so in a sufficiently people-sensitive way, a number of interpretive techniques including a “phenomenological-style” process is applied. It is found that the district houses a number of unrecognized people (“nexors”) occupying linking or nexus roles who exercise personal skills and initiatives to underpin effective remediation outcomes.

Towards the end of the fieldwork program, further literature indicated that the initial four-facet nature of the enquiry should be reformulated, to include the overall nature of Western society as it appears in the district (in place of participation), and to reconstitute the concept of remediation more radically. A number of competing claims about the natures of both Western social life and social understanding in general are examined to assess their degrees of fit to the fieldwork outcomes. However, governance as a topic is broader than the ways in which it appears in the examined district, and suitable hybridizing of competing world view concepts remains unresolved in this thesis.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This thesis describes a journey in which I seek the essence of a Murray Darling Basin conundrum. The conundrum I refer to is usually posed as an issue of environmental remediation, implying a principally biophysical solution.

My perception of the conundrum stems from a personal experience in catchment management strategy formulation in 1995. During that experience, procedures for selecting remediation projects and the ways in which the catchment population as a whole was consulted about them seemed to me to circumvent significant sociopolitical aspects of the situation. I later noted that the Federal government seemed to be heading towards making substantial public outlays in compensation for past environmental errors, repeating a process I had observed in Federal decentralization projects more than twenty years earlier. A further aspect of the conundrum arose from the apparent passivity of the broader, i.e. national, population regarding such outlays.

The journey’s form was broadly qualitative, in a way specifically developed during the course of the work. Its pathway twisted and turned as I searched for longer-term “verities” behind observed “facts”. Concepts such as pre-modernity, modernity, late modernity and postmodernity appeared along the way, some contributing significantly to understanding but others less so.

I began the journey from a simple modernist stance, pursuing an “objective” search for the essence of a situation that seemed definable in terms of governance, public, participation and remediation (the “four key words”). However, this approach (considered mainly in Chapter 2) turned out to be only partly fruitful, and led me to realize that more intuitive interpretations on my part might offer a better way forward. In hindsight this was hardly
surprising, since current ways of thinking about such matters have left modernist approaches well behind. For example, notions of reflexive modernization now feature amongst ideas about social knowledge. These notions insist that the worlds we create, intentionally or inadvertently, have a propensity to turn round and confront us in ways we had not expected (or even imagined). Postmodern approaches question the nature of observation at the most radical level, introducing concepts of power and historicism that fundamentally influence interpretive directions. An imperative to appreciate the position and condition of the observer has become prominent, producing a clear-cut difference for many between ideas of quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

In the light of these present concerns, I consider an intuitive approach to be not unreasonable, viewing knowledge as something always conditioned, in the ultimate, by the historical and locational position of the knower. It is therefore at root a deeply personal matter. The same considerations apply to those people I spoke to during the fieldwork program, and inform the nature of the fieldwork and the interpretation I apply to it in these pages. Emphasis on the personal is the keynote of this thesis.

The intuitive approach points in two directions. Firstly, elements of my personal background subjectively influence the structure and content of what I have to say. I therefore begin this chapter by describing that background in section 1.3, as factually and relevantly as I can, omitting any explorations of real or perceived distortions of reality that I, like others, may believe or imagine I have.

Secondly, the approach implies that the basic natures of individuals should be explored. Explorations of this kind present a difficult enterprise, leading to reliance on the works of major thinkers about the deepest and most personal layers of the Self and its relationship to the superimposed levels of social life. Indeed, at its most basic level, this approach involves debates on the nature of consciousness, but I do not go that far in this document. I begin instead with the area of thought where philosophical and sociological ideas intermingle. In Chapter 5 I firstly outline the concepts of older writers (Husserl, Buber and Tönnies) and then move on to the concepts of Foucault and Derrida.

All these considerations are dealt with in detail later. In the balance of the present chapter, I continue by supplying details of the Murray Darling Basin in section 1.2. I outline my
personal background in section 1.3. Then follows, in section 1.4, descriptions of the initiating experiences behind this research program and the immediate triggers for its commencement. Development of the basic issue under investigation appears in section 1.5. In section 1.6 I set out my initial perspectives on the four key words and the relationships between them. Section 1.7 presents an exposition of pathways through the remainder of the document that connect the structures and contents of succeeding chapters, and section 1.8 summarizes and concludes the chapter.

1.2. The Murray Darling Basin as Locale

The first reason for choosing the Murray Darling Basin as the locale for the work arises from its national significance and general condition. If any catchment area in Australia warrants intensive investigation, it surely is this one. A million square kilometres in area, it covers 14% of Australia's total landmass (Crabb, 1997, p.vi) and is as large as Ireland. In global terms it ranks twenty-first in area amongst the catchments of the world, and contains its fifteenth longest river system (Crabb, 1997, p.2). It encompasses three-quarters of New South Wales, 60% of Victoria, significant parts of Queensland and South Australia, and all of the Australian Capital Territory excluding Jervis Bay (Crabb, 1997, p. viii). The core concerns of this thesis relate to elements that can only be addressed satisfactorily on a national basis, such as different State approaches and policies. The Federal Government recognized the need for such a national viewpoint by establishing the Murray Darling Basin Commission in 1991.

Noted for its flatness, low rainfall, extremely low run-off and great variation in water flows, the Basin has experienced nine major and at least thirty serious droughts in the last one hundred years. These natural events, together with floods, have exposed soil structures to wind and water erosion. In addition, the thin and fragile soils of the Basin require heavy applications of phosphate and nitrogen fertilisers for continued conventional farming (Lawrence and Vanclay, 1992, p.34), although more sustainable and organic forms of agriculture might lessen the problem. Driving around part of the catchment during my 1995
catchment management experience even I, inexperienced in agricultural matters, could see the degradation of the land.

The condition of the catchment has sparked many inquiries, some as old as Federation itself. The causes of the problem include nearly all those possible: wind erosion, dry land salinity, water erosion, irrigation-induced salinity, soil surface scalding, waterlogging, soil acidity, soil structure decline, nutrient loss, loss of biodiversity, and vegetation decline and degradation (including weed infestation and tree cover destruction). The CSIRO has recently issued a report (CSIRO, 1998) forecasting the environmental demise of the Basin without immediate and widespread remedial action.

The Basin is the heartland of Australian agriculture. In 1991 agricultural production within it accounted for 41% of the nation's total agricultural output, in excess of $8.5 billion (1991$) per annum. The Basin contains 42% of the nation's farms by number and 18% by area (Crabb, 1997, p.78). European perceptions of unpredictable climate patterns and unproductive vegetative cover have been met by the construction of dams, irrigation channels and other engineering artifacts, and also by clear felling of most of the region (Lawrence and Vanclay, 1992, p.34). The irrigated component constitutes three-quarters of Australia's irrigated farmland, and some 70% of all water used in Australia is taken for irrigation in the Basin (Crabb, 1997, p.98).

The second main reason for my choice of the Basin as enquiry arena comes from the nature of the nonphysical problems affecting it. These problems arise in a widespread social context in which electoral pressures play a central part, and in that respect they differ in essence from "point" remediation issues that occur with individual industrial, mining or corporate agricultural projects. The electorate as a whole is generally much less directly involved in these separated private sector cases. In contrast, the Murray Darling provides an acute example of a worldwide underlying governance problem posed by diminishing water resources and degenerative agricultural production encountered in many parts of the globe.

As a result of the national and international significance of the problem I perceive as presented within it, the Basin itself becomes only the vehicle for, and not the focus of, my interest. A more important issue arises from a view that remediation problems have their roots in contemporary people and present social practice, not primarily in biophysical issues.
As others (Furze, 1992, pp.77-79; Vanclay, 1992, p.94) have noted before, the problem is one of polity not projects, and I take this approach as the general theme of this thesis.

The Basin polity situation is as complex and significant as its biophysical circumstances. In 1991 it supported and housed 11% of the nation's population or 1.9 million people, a figure that had increased by 6% since 1986 (Crabb, 1997, p.270). At that time, farm families owned and operated about 90% of the farming properties in the Basin, but as much as half of its output was produced by only 25% of the farming population. This most productive quarter used half the land and 40% of the agricultural industry's capital. The least productive quarter of the farmer population produced about 10% of output using 15% of the total employed capital. Most Basin land was held under freehold tenure, in contrast to less than 13% held privately throughout Australia. According to Lawrence and Vanclay (1992, p.36), the government at the time had selected the upper 25% of owners as winners or likely winners, and later sought to “structurally adjust” the lowest fraction. The group of farmers left in the middle with only limited capital and few opportunities for off-farm work remain under great pressure.

Many farmers see clearing as the best route to improvement. Attempts by more successful farmers to improve their terms of trade by purchasing more productive machinery have often been offset by higher interest payments, presenting a barrier to further growth in farm capital. Further, an estimated 97% of wool, 80% of wheat and 50% of beef leaves the Basin unprocessed. The resultant exposure to bare commodity prices, often if not always exceedingly volatile in a world market, has caused widespread difficulty for Basin farmers in times of drought. They received on average a net farm income of only $2,100 in 1991-92, 30% less than in the preceding year, with a further 21% decrease in prospect for the next year. These conditions were expected to produce near-depression conditions for most farmers, with about 30% expected to depart within the following ten years (Lawrence and Vanclay, 1992, pp.37-38), although my later fieldwork observations demonstrated that intervening good years may have invalidated this forecast. In sum, the social complexity of the Basin as well as its biophysical characteristics indicate that it is an appropriate venue for my enquiry.
1.3. Relevant Aspects of Personal History

The personal history described in this section relates to the balance of the thesis in three ways. Firstly, as already mentioned, the thesis describes a journey of developing understanding, a process that has since gone beyond merely increasing personal learning to providing a potentially useful addition to the stock of public knowledge. The starting point of the journey is the relatively rigid perspective from which I began, and the end point is made evident in Chapter 8. Secondly, I address two principal audiences in these pages. The first is academic, but the second consists of members of catchment management boards and committees. In my experience, these members are frequently farmers, accompanied by a sprinkling of engineers, biologists, planners and similar professionals. As such, they are likely to be in a transitional state between my personal starting and end points, that is to say between preconceptions and a fresh understanding. This personal history is intended to indicate the similarities of my circumstances to theirs, at least in the beginning. Thirdly, my personal pathway of understanding moves from a pre-modern stance to a postmodern one as the journey unfolds, following later parts of this thesis in broad terms.

To begin then, I am a civil engineer, steeped in mathematics and physics from early high-school through to university degrees in engineering and science. A later Master of Business Administration degree introduced me to human science studies, but only at about first-year undergraduate level.

My experience after engineering graduation began with fifteen years in the construction industry, followed by management consulting on project management and financial matters. In 1984 I joined a major Australian bank, where the experience gained over the ensuing nine years was as linear as that already mentioned, heavily competitive and essentially non-reflective as far as broad social issues were concerned.

These events formed the framework of the “relatively rigidified perspective” referred to in the first paragraph of this section. The framework consisted of my beliefs at that time regarding the nature of the “real” world, and the assumptions I held about how humankind comes to know about the world and makes sense of that reality. In the kinds of choices I would have made at that stage in attempting to explore the world around me, reality would
have been uncompromisingly objectivised, made up of entities distinctly ("naturally") different to and separate from me. These entities included society, which was subconsciously thought of as including me physically but not mentally (that was a matter of individualism), and was regarded as not even particularly human. It was an abstract entity, an independent vehicle driven by mechanisms of industry, government and money accompanied by frameworks of health, education and welfare, with religion playing an odd off-centre role. The most powerful way one might understand the world was through precise logic, ultimately through the symbolic language of mathematics. One (again unconsciously) was most likely to search for new information about the real world as though the enquiry was a physics experiment, accompanied by if not embodied in a mathematical or statistical format.

1.4. Initiating Experiences

The concrete starting points for my journey were two episodes I call “initiating experiences”, together with an announcement by the Federal Government.

The more distant initiating experience (the “decentralisation episode”\(^3\)) occurred in 1973-5. Over eighteen months, on contract to the Commonwealth Government, I managed a “task force” charged with tasks preparatory to the establishment of the Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation.

The more recent (the “catchment management” episode) occurred in 1995, when I joined a three-man consulting team engaged to develop a first strategy plan for a Catchment Board overseeing a significant part of the Murray Darling Basin.

The sensitivities emerging from the decentralisation episode concerned:

- Interdepartmental interferences from government departments producing *policy fragmentation*,

• Local management tunnel vision, more generally expressible as *local administrative focus*;

• Impersonal treatment of people significantly affected by the project (including with respect to their relocation), more generally expressible as *treatment of people as ciphers*; and

• The *inadequacy of social theory* to forecast or deal practically with the consequences of that impersonal treatment.

Read together these issues left me, still a beginner in these fields, bemused as to how the whole of the Australian socio-political structure had:

• failed at the larger political/bureaucratic level;

• not been informed by social theory adequate to the occasion; and

• not appeared to take into account, in any deeply thoughtful way, the natural responses of people affected by the project⁴.

The memory of this mixture of confusion and frustration persisted in my mind for the next twenty-five years, diminishing progressively but never quite vanishing. In time, a fifth sensitivity emerged to accompany the four already mentioned. As the decentralization episode wound down in failure, the land bought under an artificial land-pricing regime was eventually sold back to the public. The resales took place at greatly reduced prices and considerable loss to the public purse. The more general expression I choose for that phenomenon is *great waste of public money*. No less surprising than this outcome was the lack of substantial public reaction (as distinct from political posturing) that accompanied the failure of the project.

These four concerns came to form a general conundrum for me. How could the government fail so extraordinarily when its decentralisation policy could claim to be part of the Whitlam government’s apparent widespread mandate that existed at the time (though terminated abruptly in 1975)? And how could the public accept that wasteful outcome so meekly? (I later call these two questions the “section 1.4 questions”. Their statement in this paragraph is underlined for ease of future reference.)

The sensitivities emerging from the catchment management episode related to:
an unfocused planning process, for which I choose the term *inadequacies of project selection*;

- the consequences of a departmental merger (*survival tactics of discarded bureaucracies*);
- The lack of external public participation planning and general public participation (*public participation shortfall*);
- The unusual nature of the in-house participation exercise (*uncertainty of representative participation*);
- The success of a local secret ballot (*secret ballot usefulness*);
- The ignoring of a junior officer’s article on the nature of the catchment’s population (*document blindness*);
- The *powerlessness* of the chairperson of the Catchment board’s communications committee (no more generalised term needed);
- The more or less casual dismissal of low-level entities, such as Landcare (a government-initiated program for drawing local people into relatively small scale remediation work) and river management units (*lack of subsidiarity*);
- The low level or absence of real attention given to lower income and/or elderly farmers (*inattention to marginalised groups*);
- A problem perceived in an encounter with extension workers (*extension worker role conflict*).

These further experiences re-enlivened the conundrum. Then in 1997 the Federal Government announced a proposal to direct the balance of Telstra sale proceeds towards funding the National Heritage Trust (“the NHT”) into a program of environmental remediation. Immediately it seemed to me that another great waste of public money was impending (a foreboding ultimately justified in 2001), and that the conundrum may be more than just personally felt. It became for me a research topic that not only could but should be explored. As it happened, this general motivation was increased by a conversation with a middle-ranking Canberra government agency officer (anon, 1997) in the early stages of my enquiry program, before its topic became fully crystallized. She remarked that government was slowly realizing that remediation of the Basin was slipping beyond its capabilities (an idea I subsequently found in earlier literature (Martin et al, 1992)). Her comment had the
effect of turning my interest towards the possibility of a wider marshalling of the rural populace through a more radical approach to the matter of individual motivation. The motivational theme does not persist explicitly in this subsequent enquiry, but had the effect of focusing my attention on the interests, circumstances and roles of the private person in the environmental discourse at the individual or domestic level.

1.5. Development of the Basic Issue

The concerns identified in the two preceding sections crystallized into three generalized core issues:

- Policy bureaucracy disuniformation, the falseness of the project selection process and the administrative focus of local bureaucracy all contributed to the idea of systemic shortfall, which then combined with the survival tactics of threatened bureaucracies to produce Great Wastages of Public Money;
- The survival tactics of unwanted bureaucracies, the land pricing policy surrender, social theory inadequacy, and document blindness combined into Governmental Ineptitude;
- Public participation shortfalls, events such as the communication chair's powerlessness, the general inattention paid to marginalised people, the secret ballot episode, the forms of representative participation, and the extension worker role conflict all became symptoms of a Chronic Propensity to Treat People as Ciphers.

The great wastes of public money and governmental ineptitude are basically outcomes of conscious inventions of collective human activity. They are problems arising from social artefacts. As such they combine to form part of a larger problematique presented by governance, under which label I consider them here (recognizing that the problem in its entirety may also present topics for investigation by individual disciplines such as sociology and political science).
However, the *chronic propensity to treat people as ciphers* is a different kind of issue. The people involved in such circumstances are not artefacts in any sense, and should come forward as more organic entities if thoroughness is to be taken as a goal. I take a view in this thesis that, for wholeness, they cannot be considered adequately through the lenses of individual disciplines, including psychology, even when those disciplines are combined into multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary studies. They require a more fundamental or macroview approach such as that taken in philosophy or the broader writings of leading “macrosociologists” such as Habermas and Giddens.

Thus the three core concerns emanating from the fourteen issues listed in section 1.4 were of two distinctly different kinds, firstly those concerned with governance and secondly those concerned with public participation. The two pointed to an out-of-jointedness or lack of fit that characterised my general conundrum and the fundamental question I address in this thesis.

1.6. The Initial Point of View

As just noted, the core issues emanating from sections 1.3 and 1.4 are basically concerned with governance and public participation. The phrase “public participation” itself contains two notions, participation and the public or publics engaging in it. The concept of remediation also enters into consideration as a consequence of the later initiating experience and the immediate trigger to the work (the Telstra/NHT funding proposal).

The enquiry thus involves four key issues or *elements*, which I show in the form of Figure 1 (next page) to emphasize that the relationships between the four are as important to their individual definitions as what might be said about each in isolation. In other words, Figure 1 describes a particular situation defined by these relationships. The relationship between governance and public is shown as a pair of relationships (1 and 2) because the two groups do not share the views held by each other, a point I develop further below.
None of the four elements are fixed in their natures or attributes. All four may change or be changed, i.e. are variables. Further, the relationships they hold to each other shown in Figure 1 imply the possibility of dependencies between the variables, that is to say some may be independent, but others may then be dependent on them.

![Diagram](image)

FIGURE 1 INITIAL FRAMEWORK

At the beginning of this research, I would have defined their conditions and the relationships between them, as follows:

- Governance in Australia is the way government, in the three tiers at which it operates, forms and applies rules and regulations that impose intrinsic moral imperatives on the people to whom they refer. The rules reflect "the greater good". Individuals amongst the populace sometimes do not observe the rules, but that practice is generally thought to be reprehensible because for the most part the rules are basically well designed. The relationship between Governance and the public, from the Government's formal view, is that the government tells the public what to do, subject only to a four-year accounting/electoral process that does not focus necessarily on all topics connecting government to the public. Thus government sees the public in terms of "themness". Government is connected to participation through the idea that the government will help with remediation, but will not provide everything. Governance is connected to remediation through the view of government that it alone should devise the program.

- Remediation is a program of repair of environmental damage, determined as the most suitable on solely biophysical grounds. Participation is related to remediation in a
partial sense. Not all remediation calls for participation, the relationship being dependent on perceptions of immediate self-interests, which may go beyond the simply economic. The basic relationship between the public and remediation is that the public is available to be called into remediation action. The relationship between remediation and governance has already been noted.

- Public participation is a necessary part of the process of determining the biophysical program. Government should not assume that it is competent to address all the details of the situation, for it needs public participation and support. The public is related to participation through being willing to participate, provided what is intended is meaningful to individuals or groups personally and does not owe allegiance to non-government interests. The relationships between participation, governance and remediation have already been noted.

- Public means everyone, not merely representatives of everyone, because participation is a fundamental democratic right. Further, the term is not simply confined to the electoral franchise, but is intended to include all people free to take environmental or participatory action. It therefore includes, for example, schoolchildren and as-yet un-naturalised residents. The public is related to governance through an attitude characterised by skepticism and suspicion. In other words, the public reciprocates the "themness" attitude of government. The relationships between participation and the remaining two elements have already been noted.

From this initial standpoint, governance and remediation seemed relatively independent variables that might be set or set themselves independently of the other two. The public as a whole remained a dependent variable whose final state could be determined through a combination of guided participation and education about the issues under consideration. However, the position was clouded for me by a view that the innermost personal mainsprings of action of individual members of the public were not being adequately taken into account.

Although the descriptions of the four entities and the descriptions of their inter-relationships within the four paragraphs above appear to be simple, I would not have asserted at the start of the inquiry that the entities themselves (as distinct from my descriptions) were not complex. The literature associated with entities and relationships alike is considerable and no conclusion to research interest in any of them is in sight.
The two-dimensional display in Figure 1 is useful but does not fully represent the conundrum I explore in this inquiry in its entirety. The general conundrum for me remains the apparent phenomenon that the government could fail so extraordinarily when its policy could claim to be part of an apparent widespread mandate, and that the public could accept that wasteful outcome so meekly (to express more generally the statement underlined in section 1.4). As mentioned in the penultimate paragraph of section 1.5, “I take a view in this thesis that, for wholeness they (the people) cannot be considered adequately through the lenses of individual disciplines, including psychology, even when most disciplines are combined into multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary studies”.

It seemed to me even at the start of my enquiry that Figure 1 represented an absence as much as a presence. The “area” bounded by the four sides of its rectangular shape was not filled or satisfied by arrows 3 and 7, nor by any other of the four elements and seven relationships singly or in combination. Something else seemed to me to be involved in it, as though the diagram lacked a third dimension. As a geometric metaphor the Figure seemed deficient, but I stayed with it for the time being because non-alphabetic graphical signs were more “meaningful” (by which I partly mean available for manipulation) for me as an engineer than textual material.

It seemed to me there was a spirit of organisation inherent in the Figure 1 arrangement that was not evident in any combination of its parts. In short, I held an underlying idea at the start of the inquiry that an essence informed Figure 1, the capture of which in appropriate terminology might add considerably to an improved understanding of situations such as the initiating experiences described in section 1.4, and might even point towards better approaches to their management. My main focus in this thesis is to find out what can be said about this essence if it is discernible, but not necessarily to define, identify, and/or describe it in full.

Insofar as the “system” of entities in Figure 1 is concerned, the lack of recognition of an essence as posited here seems to me to reflect upon the final large funding interventions of the government in two ways. They become either a kind of sledgehammer blow aimed at forcing a creaking or inactive arrangement into movement, or a final act of desperation to
clear away the entire "device" so that "life" (in political or operational terms) may go on. But why should the populace at large submit so easily?

1.7. Structure Of This Thesis

The enquiry program as a whole consists of two major stages, an observational stage and an interpretive stage. Prior to and during the fieldwork observation period I reviewed literature relevant to the elements shown in Figure 1 and the relationships between them.

In Chapter 2 ("Catchment Management and Associated Literature") I describe that literature review, beginning with an explanation of the way in which I designed it to accord with the focus of my interest outlined in the preceding section. In that Chapter I demonstrate how the nature of this literature stream seemed to change during the course of the fieldwork and its subsequent interpretation, bringing about a progressive change in my attitude to Figure 1. As a consequence, I now view this stream as falling into four basic types of material which I term "localised, non-directive", "localised, new approaches", "national, non-directive", and "international, radical".

In Chapter 3 ("Fieldwork") I describe the process of choosing the fieldwork process, calling upon relevant literature to support the choice. I go on to show how the pattern of fieldwork events and encounters developed. In broad terms the pattern took the form of two streams, the first concerned with the humanity of individuals and consisting of encounters with particular people. The second related to the idea of the populace "as a whole" without specific reference to the humanity of individuals, and included observations of events in which people appeared in various "acting roles", i.e. at various stages of social engagement.

In Chapter 4 ("Fieldwork Outcomes"), I display the outputs of the fieldwork program in the form of a number of "stories" that convey the contents of fieldwork reports or "raw narratives" written during or after fieldwork observations. This rewriting in the form of stories is intended to remove ethical difficulties contained in those narratives, as discussed in section 3.4 of the Fieldwork chapter.
In Chapter 5 ("Interpretation") I turn to the interpretive process, the second major stage of the enquiry. In the first part of the chapter I set out the first steps along the broad methodological pathway through which the interpretive process developed. The steps consist of outlines of the concepts of Buber and Tönnies, whom I draw upon for basic notions of the individual and the beginnings of Community and Society that relate particularly to the notions of intuition and community at the heart of the approach I adopt. I then move to the notion of Discourse Analysis, from which I draw two initial methodological endeavours based on structuralist and phenomenological ideas (these terms are explained in section 5.4 and 5.5). Finding both inadequate, I reassess Figure 1 and transform it into a different arrangement. In the remainder of Chapter 5, I identify and describe aspects of a number of conceptual approaches I refer to thereafter as the interpretation proceeds, expressing them through brief descriptions of the concepts of relevant writers. (This material is delayed until this point so that the issues of method and fieldwork outcomes raised in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively may indicate reasons for choosing the sources included in this chapter.)

The interpretation itself appears in Chapters 6 and 7 ("Interpretation of Populace and Governance Evidence" and "Interpretation of Operational Milieu Evidence" respectively), before the thesis as a whole concludes in Chapter 8 ("Conclusions and Findings ").

As the preceding paragraphs indicate, the enquiry program in actuality pursued a somewhat unsystematic pattern during its early phases. The causes were my basic unfamiliarity with the canon of literature involved in exploring the history of ideas, and a need to modify the initial mindset described in section 1.3. However, I have not endeavoured to show the historical pattern of work in the thesis, especially certain circular pathways where cross-fertilization occurred between the streams I have described. Instead I have resolved all such peregrinations during production of this document, a general guide to which now appears in Figure 2 (next page).

1.8 Conclusion

This Chapter began with an acknowledgement in section 1.1 of the relativistic nature of current ideas about social knowledge, and a statement of my intention to shape the
investigation process to an intuitive approach, consistent with the current academic discourse of pre- and post-modern interpretation.

**THE FRAMING OF THE QUESTION (Sections 1.4 & 1.6, and Figure 1)**

- Existing catchment management literature (Chapter 2)
- Fieldwork method literature survey (Chapter 3)
- Interpretive literature (Chapter 5)
- Fieldwork investigations/encounters (Chapter 4)

**Approaches:**
- *Localised*
  - non-directive
- *Localised, new*
- *National, non-directive*
- *International, radical*

**Reality check**

**Polity/“Politics”**

**People**

**Ideas**

**Fieldwork outcomes**

---

**OBSERVATION INTERPRETATION**

Application (then Abandonment) of Structuralist, Phenomenological methods (Chapter 5)

Acceptance of “product” notion, Transformation of Figure 1 (Chapter 5)

**Insights into individual**

and group living incl. governance (Chapter 6)

**Interpretations of Operational Milieu** (Chapter 7)

---

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS** (Chapter 8)

**FIGURE 2: PATHWAYS THROUGH THIS DOCUMENT**
I asserted the importance of Murray Darling remediation at the national level in section 1.2, which concluded with a brief indication of the apparent complexity of that situation for residents in the Basin at a personal level.

In section 1.3 I described relevant aspects of personal history that informed my viewpoint at the beginning of the work. That perspective may be described as modernist and scientistic, governed by an approach that basically viewed the world in the mechanistic way attributed to post-Enlightenment thinking. From that perspective, or perhaps despite it, I identified concerns or questions of interest that seemed to emerge from two substantial experiences from which my interest in this enquiry first stemmed, as described in section 1.4. These questions were, “How could the government could fail so extraordinarily when its policy could claim to be part of an apparent widespread mandate?”, and “How could the public accept that wasteful outcome so meekly?”

In section 1.5 I condensed my concerns into three core issues: great wastes of public money; governmental ineptitude; and a chronic propensity to treat people as ciphers. A consequence of the last of these is that, to repeat the penultimate paragraph of section 1.5, “I take a view in this thesis that, for wholeness they (the people) cannot be considered adequately through the lenses of individual disciplines, including psychology, even when most disciplines are combined into multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary studies”.

To begin the exploration of all of these matters, I summarized the “dimensions” of my concern at the beginning of section 1.6 in the form of Figure 1. That diagram shows four entities and seven relationships between them, but I went on to stress that my concern does not lie with either the elements or the relationships, singly or in combination. It lies in a less evident “wholeness” or essence that seems to me to pervade the Figure 1 situation and from which the elements and their inter-relationships derive their particular characteristics.

Finally, I outlined the structure of the thesis as a whole in section 1.7, where I presented a “map” for the journey or search I mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter. In following that map I move now to a review of relevant catchment and associated literature in Chapter 2.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1 The term "intuition" is used in this thesis much in the way ascribed to the French philosopher Henri Bergson, for whom "living" was more basic than "knowing", "intuition and instinct" more important than "intellect" (Matthews, 1996). He described intuition as "the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible". For Bergson, it is meant to signify an approach drawn properly from the basic self, the "me" devoid of solipsism or biased idiosyncrasy, an approach that focuses on "the deepest and most personal layer of the self....the self that has had the particular life history which I have had" where "my thoughts, feelings, wishes etc are so intensely mine that they are essentially incommunicable to others, inexpressible in the public language which we use to communicate with each other for practical and scientific purposes" (Matthews, 1996, p. 21). It addresses the fundamental basecourse of the many layers that make up the human psyche.

2 A Royal Commission was held in 1901 (Crabb, 1997, p.122).

3 I use the term "decentralisation" rather than "regional development" because the latter term is frequently used in connection with general programs undertaken by many governments without particular focus other than electoral palliation. By contrast, the Whitlam government's decentralisation policy was a specific and major initiative with a considerable ideological basis.

4 I do not intend to convey an inference here that anyone involved acted immorally or unethically under the circumstances presented to them.

5 "Subsidiarity" is a term emanating from ecclesiastical usage, where it means "relegation to the lowest level capable of carrying out the task". I understand that it has come into increasingly common use in European Union debates about the most appropriate levels for decision-making.

6 In rural non-urban areas, the notion of "domestic" may include property workers residing on the property as well as owner households. In urban areas such as the three settlements I examined during the fieldwork program, the locus of motivation is more likely to be limited to individuals or households, except possibly - because I have no real understanding of the black situation - in the Aboriginal context.
2.1 Introduction

In the latter part of Chapter 1 I stressed that the core of my interest in this thesis lies not with the elements and individual relationships shown in Figure 1 or any combination of them. Rather, it is to explore an essence I posit as standing behind the arrangement shown in the diagram, and to ascertain some or all of its characteristics. I also noted in section 1.6 that the literature stream associated with each of the elements and relationships in Figure 1 is extensive and far from concluded.

As a result of these considerations, I do not set out to review those extensive streams comprehensively or in detail in this Chapter, but to pursue three particular concerns. The first is simply to indicate the general nature and lines of approach of these streams (which I collectively term the “conventional program”), with the intention to inform readers unfamiliar with my topic about their general contents, and to demonstrate that I am not alone in perceiving many (though not necessarily all) of the concerns listed in section 1.4.

My approach to the conventional program starts with 1992 sources. Those readings that relate to catchment management and participation associated with it are discussed in section 2.2, and those that relate to participation in general in section 2.3.

My second concern is to show that the failure of the conventional program to resolve the broad issue of environmental remediation has been recognized even within the conventional program itself. The approach it has pursued did not appear to be moving in directions that might lead to appropriate contributions toward that end. I consider this issue in section 2.4.
However, a new investigative direction appears to have emerged in recent times. I found that the tone of the sources I consulted began to change around 1996, moving in a significantly new direction in and after the year 2000 (although many continued in the earlier vein). My third concern in this chapter is to describe this new direction, which seems to me to hold out promises of better outcomes. Sources in which the change began to appear and then developed are described in section 2.5.

In section 2.6 I refer to a source that led me into a first reconsideration of the structure of Figure 1, and discuss the implications of that reconsideration, before summarizing the whole of this literature review in section 2.7.

Not all literature I have drawn on for this thesis appears in this Chapter. I discuss interpretive sources in Chapter 5, and other lesser elements appear in later chapters in places where their connections to the surrounding text is more direct. For example, literature describing the history of the district selected for fieldwork observations is considered in Chapter 4.

2.2 Current Practice in Catchment Management and Participation

Two sources particularly seem to confirm the concerns I drew from the initiating experiences described in Chapter 1.

For Vanclay, "Landcare, far from being the bottom-up, community driven, self-facilitated and empowering process that rhetoric would have us believe, was a classic example of hegemony at work" (1994, p.1 of Internet record). He asserted that governments used it to "manipulate community thinking and community action", and to pass responsibility from government to farmers for land degradation. He agreed with a view I developed from the 1995 catchment experience, that Landcare funding was being transferred into an alternative income stream for various agencies, to compensate for reductions in older streams and a decline in agricultural services. To him, Landcare was nothing more than a disguise for a continuation of top-down
thinking, with local decision-making merely legitimising decisions made elsewhere and subtly manipulating social attitudes and beliefs in the process.

Vanclay did not mince words in commenting ironically on many aspects of a national Landcare conference he attended, notably the theatrical public relations style of several of its events. More significantly, he asserted that ground rules established for the workshops of the conference prohibited critical comment. He called the conference "politically correct", complete with "token greenie and token black".

Spriggs (1998) puts forward a complementary view of the fractured nature of current catchment management and associated programs. In August 1997 she began to observe the progress of a River Management Committee exercise in New South Wales, a community decision-making event involving seven committees, about half the members of which were from the public and the other half from government departments.

She found that community consultation was "time-consuming and expensive for the participants; participant expectations on 'influencing policy' were first raised then dashed, escalating community tensions between "community" folk and the government, and duplications between groups often occurred, hamstringing one group or another" (p.1). She reported that:

- Committee members were drawn from already existing organizations, not directly from the general population (pp. 22, 64, 66);
- Regional agency heads selected them all, and agency officer membership was common (pp. 24-25, 64);
- A Support Package prepared for members' information did not appear until nine months after the committee's inception. Some members did not discover until then that they had signed up for five years, not just a six-month initial decision period (p. 65);
- The Support Package delay also left committees struggling to reach full consensus, when majority decision was all that was required (p. 81);
• The main problem for members was to come to grips with the technical and socio-economic complexities they were called upon to face (p. 66);
• Members felt the Minister could be lobbied behind their backs (p. 79).

She concluded that “surely widely adopted new ways of thinking and acting must be the ultimate goal of such participatory exercises - that is, adopted more widely than just by the committee participants?” (Spriggs, 1998, p. 2).

More broadly, Lawrence Vanclay and Furze (1992) presented a book of readings that dealt largely with Basin life across a widely varied range of topics, from aspects of history to the diffusion of innovation amongst farmers. In many ways Chapter 17 by Cock (1992, p. 304) summarized the whole set. Cock exhibited an acute awareness of the nature of the problems of the Basin, notably that an ideologically distorted view of the meaning of participation had caused contradictory practices, that practices had suffered from a lack of will in regulatory application and/or great difficulty with policing, that Landcare and the governmental approach known as Total Catchment Management had come from different beginnings (with the result that problems had arisen with their individual identities and the relationships between them), and that the state of degradation was now beyond the capabilities of government to repair (thus confirming the Canberra officer’s remark noted in section 1.4). He goes on to add that the technocentric and scientistic orientations of government agencies had produced significant barriers to the recognition of rural people as competent partners in resource management. But while Cock also proposed ideas of the nature of desired solutions he, like many other writers in this volume, set out no clear or comprehensive trajectory through which the circumstances might move from the present to the preferred future, particularly in the face of entrenched and powerful counter-interests, not least those of bureaucratic gatekeepers’.

These ten-year-old writings contained a considerable amount of useful detailed information. Their findings were individually valid, interesting and useful, but collectively remained essentially fragmented in direction. The historical contributions were aimed at specific issues of institutional history or current controversy but failed to address the full range of historical circumstances that constitute the catchment’s
The writings generally did not appear to follow a consistent or strategic research agenda and their prescriptions for change often seemed clearly impractical. The whole set constituted only a loosely connected collection of studies generally based on conventional sociological research practices not structured around any holistic perspective. In particular they continued to treat catchment people as ciphers, with only occasional references to the overall nature of their essential humanity, and generally they collectively represented the very concerns I am seeking to resolve. Only Vanclay’s contribution (1992, p. 94-121) pointed to wider ramifications, digging more deeply into the attitudes and values of farmers and their families than most of the other writers, but he did not go on to relate his views to, or to propose, a framework such as the one I have described in section 1.6.

This tone continued in large part in the literature until relatively recent times. Pannell (1998), for example, applied theories of innovation and diffusion to the adoption of Landcare by farmers, and proposed a set of changes that essentially revolved around high farmer risk aversion and the dominance of financial schemes, while at the same time acknowledging extension failures.

Baker (1997) noted the possibility that governmental impositions of top-down structures might undermine Landcare’s ethic of community ownership. He pointed to the concept of partnership as fundamental to Landcare, but also saw the problem of that term having different meanings to groups with different viewpoints. He noted that Landcare had generated a bureaucracy involved in government implementation of policy as well as the assistance of Landcare implementation of policy to meet its own aims (p.63). But again, no solutions were investigated, only a general call made for changes.

Buchy and Race (2001) endeavoured to establish a conceptual framework for analyzing public participation in natural resource management. They began by asking whether participation was to be considered as a means to an end or an end in itself, and distinguished between instrumental and transformative forms of participation. In the instrumental form adopted by professionals, only data gathering and other non-decisive stages of project planning might be involved. Transformative participation, however, was tied strongly to the reconstruction of power structures and the
questioning of hierarchies (p. 295). They pointed out that examples of community control over participatory processes remained rare, and that empowerment was not about transfers of power but challenges to existing power structures. While describing Landcare as a possibly hijacked participatory program (pp. 302-304), they repeated positions adopted by other writers I have already mentioned, adding that a key challenge to Landcare groups seemed to be the attraction of good facilitators.

Curtis, Lockwood and McKay (2001) endeavoured to establish baseline information on key variables at the “land management unit” level. They asserted that governments had assumed that poor adoption had arisen from landholders’ unawareness of important land degradation issues, lack of skills, or short-term economic preferences. They found that most landowners were not likely to be prepared for some of the increases in problems forecast by the Murray Darling Basin Commission. Further, these writers also noted the disparity between positive attitudes towards best-practice and actual behaviour, the relative financial incapacity to engage in remedial practices, the high turnover of ownership (65% turnover in the catchment over the preceding 10 years, 45% forecast for the next ten) and certain limitations imposed on best-practice by high part-time farmer proportions (29%) (p. 87). “Solutions” included government intervention in the property transfer flow to impose covenants on titles, and more awareness of landholder characteristics (as distinct from attitudes) in government educational practices. The authors acknowledged that best-practice take-up was slow and indeterminate.

Davis, Finlayson and Hart (2001) presented a case study in which the involved community did not accept scientific expertise in the form of a technical report. They reported that the reasons included the “forcing” of technical recommendations onto the community, a conflict between the recommendations and the community’s expectations, the lack of a formal mechanism for supporting implementation, the release of the technical report without adequate formal or informal avenues of notice of release or possible response pathways and, somewhat surprisingly, the existence of excessive locked-in funding which led the community to believe that high cost structure proposals should be used instead of the report’s lower cost management recommendations. These writers proposed that technical work should start well in advance of project planning, and that community consultation should be positively
planned, not simply assumed to be “naturally” in place.

Johnson and Walker (2001) followed up on the theme of scientific communication, stating that “science was often more comfortable in providing advice on what ought to be done and why, rather than practical advice on how it might be achieved” (p. 88). They believed the focus should now change to “how”. They applied six propositional statements to the issue of technology transfer to guide their analysis of the real-world situation (p. 84), noting that the effectiveness of government initiatives was often blunted by data sparseness at scales relevant to participative decision-making, limits to the data processing and analytical capabilities of the participants, poor understanding of key issues, and “the historical inability of research providers to embed research outcomes in the operations of NRM (natural resource management) agencies” (p. 84). They ended with a substantial list of recommendations, the most relevant in the present context asking for (p. 88):

- Improved attention to the ethics of participative approaches;
- Improved understanding of the appropriate balance “between science push and client pull”;
- Critical analysis by scientists of their own practices for better entry into dialogue with stakeholders;
- Improved understanding of the role of information-technology tools and participatory learning processes; and
- Introduction of more flexible budget, recruitment and project management practices.

Curtis (2000) forecast an end to reasonable expectations of Landcare possibilities. Starting from a view that management of volunteer program required a significant input of time and could benefit from specialised training, he noted that Landcare in reality had been only loosely co-ordinated. He found Landcare leaders had high administrative workloads averaging 17.2 hours per week. Grant applications and expenditure reporting made the greatest claims on time, often more than on-ground activity. Leaders also believed that funding was insufficient, 30% of groups receiving less than $2000 per annum. Many volunteers had limited time available for Landcare,
the median on-farm and off-farm commitment to normal activities being 59 hours per week. Changes in workload were reported as a significant cause of change in Landcare involvement. Priority setting and catchment management issues had also been problematic for over one-third of the respondents. Social interaction seemed to be a significant motivator but was disappearing (p. 25). Leadership positions were sometimes vacant for long periods. Administration of the National Heritage Trust program was a problem, and Curtis recommended simplification of the project application form as the minimum improvement required to the “critical deficiencies” in NHT program management. Groups needed assistance with leadership succession planning, priority setting and member recruitment and retention. A dismantling of State extension services was exacerbating the situation. Co-ordinator positions were funded only on a project basis without cost overheads compensation. NHT, says Curtis, “reflects an outdated view of the realities of life for most rural Victorians” (p.26).

To sum up, this stream of commentary became increasingly pessimistic in tone. The stream did not seem to have evolved a broader framework within which various perspectives might be accommodated. In a first attempt to view the issues more broadly, I turned to writings concerned with the topic of participation in Australia in general.

2.3  Writings Relating to Participation

Dalton (1996) and Hogan (1996) extensively reviewed aspects of participation and advocacy respectively, with recognition in passing of a contribution by Reich. I consider advocacy first.

Hogan noted that advocacy was inherently part of governance, which he defined as “the process by which we collectively solve our problems and meet society’s needs” (p. 157). Advocacy itself was the representation of citizens’ needs as part of that process, and worked by developing and enlarging the ways in which individuals
accessed power, opportunity and benefits. He quoted Reich as saying that interest
group intermediation by administrators and regulators in the bureaucratic, corporatist,
or managerial state led to the under-representation of poor and diffused interests.
Complexity in governance led to discouragement of a large range of participants,
whose concerns were thereby rendered illegitimate. The role of the advocate was to
overcome this problem.

Sometimes Ministers and agencies established formal advisory councils, but these had
been criticised as tokenistic, unbalanced, unrepresentative, unaccountable, and under-
resourced. Further, said Hogan, the infrastructure in general for citizen and
community advocacy was not well developed.

He believed that key decision makers such as Ministers and agency personnel were
indifferent and hostile to advocacy because it could challenge, embarrass and erode
power bases. But without it, avenues for review or redress might be severely limited,
not least because much legislation was framed in terms of broad discretions rather
than specific duties or rights (p. 173).

Advocacy could also lead to tensions: between social, political and funding ties
between advocates and decision-makers; between professional or ideological points of
view; between client empowerment or over-dependency on advocate representatives;
and between individual benefits and public benefits. To assist with this problem,
Reich (1988) had proposed that advocacy should be looked upon as pursuing a
process of "civic discovery", through which public values and ideas become revealed.

Dalton, the second writer considered in this section, dealt with participation in a more
direct sense, ie without the intermediation of advocates. He quoted the Civics Expert
Group (1994) as saying that two-thirds of Australians participated in voluntary
service, at least 40% in two or more ways. According to that source, McAllister had
also reported that 50% would collect petition signatures, and 30% would go on a legal
protest march. The same fraction had also worked on, or contacted government about,
a community problem.

However, the Group concluded that civic duties were narrowly defined by people and
excluded voluntarism, and in fact citizenship was only an abstract topic for most. Only one in three trusted democracy, and only one in 10 believed that the Federal government was run for all people. The political system ranked last or near last in public confidence concerning important institutions. Dalton also reported a high level of community ignorance about how Australia's system of government works.

He took a general view that individuals formed their views on issues through communications with others in group settings. When communication occurred, it had led to individual developmental outcomes for participants as well as more general instrumental outcomes. He supported the use of Arnstein's ladder (1969) as a means of evaluating participation programs.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Exhibit 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arnstein's Ladder</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Citizen Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Delegated Power</td>
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<td>6. Partnership</td>
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<td>5. Placation</td>
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<td>4. Consultation</td>
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<td>3. Informing</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Therapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Manipulation</td>
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(Arnstein, 1969)

With respect to policy formation, Dalton took a less accepting, more radical view than Hogan, claiming that participation in policy-making had become more constrained and less legitimate in recent decades. Policy was now developed through networks "that zigzag through the unclear boundaries of the state and civil society" (p. 183), his implication being that such processes lacked transparency.

He emphasized a need to view participation in the organizational context and the broader political culture. The organizational context contributed to individual identity formation, and might be or become rigidly hierarchical/bureaucratic. The political macro context was expressed through ideas and beliefs about authority.

However, the broader political culture currently presented a number of difficulties. In the 1970s, questions critical of participation began to arise, such as how participation
could relate to older ideas of representative democracy, and a concern that local
debate could focus too much on localising issues to the detriment of broader
perspectives.

A third problem had grown from the introduction of new forms of corporatist
management in government practices, despite the objection that they led to
inflexibilities in programs and systems. The roller-coaster ride of the 1970s had
disrupted national economies, particularly in Australia with its inefficient industrial
sector and reliance on commodity exports. In the emerging debate on how
restructuring might occur, the economic liberals had emerged as victors (for reasons
Dalton did not elaborate upon). The effects had been profound, particularly a reversal
of the previous trend to increased regulation and a greater reliance on negative market
mechanisms. The contest that arose over participation and the role of the state had
caught proponents of increased participation by surprise, so quickly had the economic
liberals moved. All mention of human activity in policy debates had become
economics-oriented. Even where real markets for Governmental activities were non-
existent, quasi markets had been established with the major consequence of separating
policy-making from service providers. Perhaps more than before, people often
referred in general conversation to the system of government as a monolithic “they”
quite separate from civil society. In Dalton’s view, this separateness stunted
possibilities for extending participation and changing the ways power was exercised.
As a result, he began to argue for “in situ civics analysis” to be installed to explain the
myriad of intra-governmental connections.

A further complication within policy networks had occurred in the field of inter-
governmental relations. Centralisation of economic power at the national level in
Australia had constrained portfolio resources, and led to formation of national policy
networks. To a degree, the States had thus been somewhat nationalised. According to
Dalton, national policy networks had then tended to assume dominance.

In summary, boundaries between the governed and the governing were hard to
distinguish, leaving conflict and/or opportunity in the “grey zones”. Here networks
existed that allowed subtle power interplays, one such subtlety used by the governing
possibly being a “synthesising” of citizens capable of accepting regulated freedom.
This last remark in particular seemed to me to embody a continuation of the air of pessimism that I noted at the end of section 2.2.

2.4 Signs of Discontent

Both of the two preceding sections have ended on such a pessimistic note. The introductions to two associated anthologies of papers on similar topics, spanning most of the period I have addressed, by Walker (1992) and Walker and Crowley (1999) crystallized and confirmed this feeling of pessimism, showing sanguinity in the first (1992, p.253) but disappointment in the second (1999, p.225). The stream of enquiry described in sections 2.2 and 2.3 did not seem to have managed to evolve a broader framework within which the various perspectives adopted might be accommodated. In the next section I report on newer initiatives that appear to hold more promise.

2.5 Recent Investigatory Approaches

2.5.1 Cameron's Report

Cameron, Macpherson and Gomez-Fort (1996) examined the integrated catchment management (ICM) concept in eight different ways. They aimed at naming the basic ICM concern to be addressed. They concluded that none provided a satisfactory perspective, and that the central concern behind the establishment of ICM was social as well as environmental disorientation. From that, they reached a larger conclusion that integrated catchment management “represents in part a search for an element of stability in decision-making about the environment - a consistent reference point not so subject to intellectual fashion as ordinary social movements, and not so subject to manipulation as electoral politics” (p. 197).

These writers identified three traditional themes that they understood to underpin ICM: the land ethic, managerial accountability (administrative rationality), and a
special environmental form of public participation (which they did not equate to representative democracy) (p.5). Of the three, they preferred the last. Elites, the champions of systems, were not the only, nor even the best or most prolific, sources of lifeworld wisdom in their view. They said of public participation that “The study of public participation often tries to work out the rules for working against what cannot be put into rules - except when it was used to work out how to make the community behave properly and follow the rules” (p.202). As a result, they moved to reconstruct ICM “explicitly” as a form of communicative rationality, a system within which participants might share a theoretical stance. However, they acknowledged immediately that many ICM participants did not feel a need for an explicit common framework for thinking about society, and then concluded that “a reasonable response....is to convert ICM explicitly into a learning system which tries continually to clarify its own nature at the same time as it tries to get things done” (p. 200).

They then turned to Habermas (whom I consider in detail in section 5.11), who defined communicative rationality as a desirable property of debates over claims. This viewpoint became the core of Cameron’s preference, after which the remainder of his report centred on the rules and agendas through which the debate might occur. However, in my view, Cameron and his colleagues took Habermas’ theory and applied it as a kind of bandage to the concept of ICM, when that concept itself seemed to me to have been brought into existence through a governance and managerial perspective that fundamentally viewed society as an already-controllable structure.

A second concern I hold involves the extent to which technical knowledge should be included in the process, and a third is that, although the need for action planning appeared in the text, the Cameron report ran a risk of replacing the “common expectation that it is more important to do than think” (p. 201) with another, that it is more important to think than do. If the process of rational communicativeness is to be a longer-range program than present forms of public participation, then some attention should be directed towards the maintenance of a long-term positive form of motivation for participants, to maintain involvements. Spriggs had pointed out the dangers of individual participants dropping in and out of the meeting cycle. And clarifying the nature of ICM is not necessarily identical to working for its improvement in the real world, where catchment management boards have been
established by managerial government and constrained by statutes. However, any minor cavils I have vanish in the face of the real advance inherent in the Cameron approach, namely its acknowledgement of a requirement to take into account the basic nature of the broad social context surrounding the ideas and practices of catchment management. Whether that variable is independent, mainly but not wholly independent, or even wholly dependent is another question, but not one that might be left simply out of sight or mind. Cameron and his associates have presented a starting point from which I expand later in this thesis to consider other possible concepts of the social context.

2.5.2 Trend Towards Discourse Analysis

By now writers seemed to be starting to pursue more dynamic agendas, but their subjects still remain varied and only loosely connected. However, a different tone became apparent in this literature stream at the recent turn of the century, when a more comprehensive form of qualitative research featuring discourse analysis began to emerge.

Butteriss, Wolfenden and Goodridge (2001) employed a form of discourse analysis in a region not dissimilar to the fieldwork district chosen for this thesis. Their intention was to address the print media discourse as an indicator of differences in perception about irrigation-environment interactions in the Namoi Valley region of Northern NSW. They explored the question that constructive tension might replace animosity and destructive conflict if the underlying values, beliefs and attitudes of the community were taken into account, notwithstanding the heterogeneous subcultures "that make up any community" (p. 50). Their preference was for adaptive environmental conflict management rather than conflict resolution, and their approach recognised metaphor as a central tool for subjects trying to "make sense of unfamiliar environments by transferring information about relatively familiar subjects to a relatively unknown subject" (p.50). Their approach focused on method, and produced a "conflict map" that did not relate particularly to my fieldwork reports, but may serve as an additional parallel possibility worth taking into account at a later stage.
Liepins (2000) believed that recent trends should treat past accounts of community life as problematic because they viewed “community” as a relatively stable and homogeneous phenomenon. She favoured a research approach that treated community as a discursive and material phenomenon of social connection and diversity, and reinforced the view that I had formed from earlier literature that rural geography, sociology and anthropology had treated community research sometimes inappropriately in a neo-positivist fashion using modernist social scientific research approaches.

She asserted that the ideal of a “community” had tended previously to ignore heterogeneity, the social control of boundaries, and practices of closure and exclusion that frequently (if not always) occurred. Often rural community studies might still be written without due regard to fractures between classes, ethnicities and genders, but more recent writers (she mentioned Halfacree) had shown that rurality could be addressed as social constructs, especially social formations of power and discourse, that were grounded in the discursive and material conditions of particular districts or settlements.

For Liepins, community came from collective interaction and enactment of “community” by the residents. People developed shared meanings about their connectedness via local discourses and activities that might also expose diversities, silences and marginalisations between competing social notions and different social groupings within a particular community (Liepins, 2000, p.327). The practices people used to connect with key activities, institutions and spaces might be accepted generally, or contested (p.328). The connections with spaces became significant through providing organizational identity to specific groups within a community. Liepins proposed that the interplay of four forces (people, meanings, practices and spaces) formed the fluidity of community life. But it was also important in her eyes to consider the processes through which the elements simultaneously constituted, translated, shaped and challenged each other.

Liepins and her associates found that one theme emerging from their work drew on understandings based on the surrounding rural areas and the activities performed there
that were perceived as "rural". Another of her themes took notice of how communities formed across, or in spite of, social differences. In the first, key topographic differences such as large nearby hills or the nature of the river played a part. The residents still perceived the places as built on agricultural heritage and the stability of farming populations. They saw the old farming families as being the backbone of community life because they continued to turn up to all community events. They tended to see the town as a service centre, although its function as a direct export earner itself through activities such as tourism was also slowly becoming recognised and farmers were beginning to organize economic contracts and relations more broadly, beyond the immediate community. They were coming to believe that the local town was not needed so much any more.

Liepins also noted particular differentiations of class, length of residency, economic activity, life cycles, interests, ethnicity and lifestyle, with the greatest differences revolving around socio-economic position and material quality of life. She saw community as inherently expressed in these more remote communities through constructions of “core” and “other” groups (p.333). The more materially successful seemed especially conscious of the existence and inroads of socially marginalised people. Liepins identified this aspect as the defining of boundaries and the construction of “othernesses”. A cause attributed often to the marginals by the “cores” was that they failed to assimilate or “support their community” (p.332). But other writers considered that incomers constituted threats to the agrarian meanings of rural communities².

She believed that rural community notions were formed through practices that produce random encounters, such as Post Office visits, sport, leisure, church and service activities, and less frequent or annual events (p.334). Practices such as clothing style reflected class difference, and others reflected other power relationships, e.g. gender.

Community was also a matter of buildings, land forms, large infrastructure artifacts such as bridges, and social spaces created by key institutions. Sporting venues were instances, with the school being perhaps the greatest connecting force. These sites were places of interaction, but some became sites of contestation if proposals for
change threatened routine activities or affected a perceived community resource.

Community remained as an organizing structure for rhetoric and relations (p.336). Liepins’ case studies showed that meanings and practice were mutually constitutive, and might coalesce or challenge each other. Economic practices still held importance, joining with social practices to “enable a continual circulation and maintenance of beliefs” about community (p.337), but these meanings might change and some spaces might become uninviting, over-protected, or not neutral in some other way. These places became attempts at social control by certain segments of the population, with originally free-flowing processes becoming reified into permanencies. Some marginal groups might then retreat into silence or derision (p. 339).

Many of Liepins’ findings were reflected in my fieldwork outcomes. Her work stands as a major harbinger of the enquiry I have carried out, particularly in demonstrating the value of a broad pathway of discourse analysis.

2.6 Writings Relating to Remediation

A considerable amount of literature exists on the topic of remediation, but nearly all is concerned with “point” remediation, i.e., the treatment of environmental degradation in relatively confined areas. Examples are sewerage outfalls, mine sites, industrial facilities, or discharge points from individual irrigated landholdings in response to forms of action taken within those landholdings. However, current understandings of the causes of the major form of degradation affecting the Murray Darling Basin, notably salinity, indicate that broad or systemic remediation poses a set of issues that are more pervasive than the biophysical remedies dominating point remediation literature, and less easy to address.

References to broad remediation in the literature, on the occasions when it was mentioned at all, merely problematized the concept without offering much by way of solution. It seems to me that the concept of broad or systemic remediation has not
been well examined. It may perhaps have been extensively argued, but remains basically undertheorised.

A major issue seems to relate to authenticity, the searching for a biophysical condition that would reproduce or at least resemble the historical state onto which degradation had been imposed. Robertson (2001) drew attention to the long-running debate about whether remediation was a matter of ecological reconstruction back to a primordial state or whether, in the light of the apparent (or at least claimed) impracticality of doing so, it should strive to respond to the socio-political context in which the formative degradation had become an issue. Robertson took the point of view that the debate might never be resolved, and was in any case a red herring. Using a Borges short story as an instrument, he likened the landscape to a text, saying that “the text you read in the present year was radically different from an identical text read by someone else, or even ourselves at a different time....in 1900 people looked at wetland and ‘read’ wasteland. Now we read ‘valued resource’” (p. 39). Thus there was no such thing as an original or copy, simply a world image based on a “dichotomy that we restorationists seem to carry around in our heads” (p. 39). By abandoning even a theoretical possibility of some kind of authentic ecological retracement, ideas of success or failure became meaningless and an entirely new kind of debate (which he did not go on to delineate) opened up.

Robertson concluded that “thoughtful social scientists...have argued that restoration sites were social products, reflecting social forces, and that we should use our awareness of this to construct more just future natures” (p. 37).

It seems to me that one substantial implication of this conclusion was that Robertson saw remediation as it actually occurred as a variable dependent on the nature and structures of governance, participation and the public. In other words, all of the four elements in Figure 1 were not of a like kind, as I had first assumed unconsciously. Some set the scene, so to speak, and at least one, remediation, was a response to that setting.
2.7 Conclusion

In section 2.1 at the beginning of this chapter I restated that my interest in this thesis does not lie with the parts of Figure 1 singly or in combination, but with an essence that seems to me to underlie its arrangement as a whole.

In section 2.2, I reviewed a selection of writings relating to catchment management and public participation in it. The selection seems to me to reflect the kind of research attention that the Murray Darling Basin attracted until about 1999. In section 2.3 I did the same with respect to public participation in governance of a more general nature not specifically tied to catchment management. In both cases I have not attempted to provide a complete overview of these research streams, but simply to indicate its tone and broad objectives, insofar as they exist.

I contend that the form of research epitomized by these two selections shows a modernist approach, primarily pursuing the scientistific attitudes of various disciplines. Although several writers appeared to have moved towards or within some unstated form of broader framework, few if any designated one formally. In section 2.4 I showed that confining the view of the Basin to within this scientistific, essentially unidisciplinary perspective had been recognized as unsatisfactory even within the confines of the perspective itself.

In section 2.5 I reviewed a second selection of later writings that may have better application to Basin circumstances. This second selection, written since 1996 but mainly closer to the present, had pursued a different view, focusing on less scientistific approaches. I particularly selected papers that showed leanings towards these broader contexts, discourse analysis being the most prominent, because directions such as these seemed to me to accord more with the nature of the overall approach to the work that I pursue in this thesis.

I isolated a paper by Robertson for special consideration in section 2.6. The reason was that it seemed to me to impact on the nature of remediation in the context
provided by the other three elements of Figure 1 and thus upon the goal of my enquiry with singular relevance. In doing so, it led to a new way to view those elements, by revealing an aspect of the nature of each as a part player in the ‘structure’ shown in that diagram. In other words, Robertson’s paper appeared to me to be the only literature source I encountered that reflected, at least in part, on the entity I have termed the essence of Figure 1.

The general outcome emerging from this Chapter is that there seems to be only a limited inventory of literature of substantial relevance to the question of essence that concerns me. Before I consider the pathway leading forward from this juncture into consideration of further new appropriate ideas, I turn in Chapter 3 to the fieldwork procedures I adopted, and to the outcomes of that fieldwork in Chapter 4. The contents of these two chapters provide further pointers to the way in which my enquiry continues, leading into the interpretive issues I consider in Chapter 5.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1 As some of my own fieldwork outcomes show, these interests continue to be locked in debate over details of revision without addressing transformation issues in any way.

2 The "agrarian meanings" were not defined, but for me seemed particularly dependent on local histories.
CHAPTER 3
FIELDWORK

3.1 Introduction

The site I chose for fieldwork activity for the purposes of my enquiry was a district within the Murray Darling Basin containing three human settlements, which I label the Town, the Village and the Hamlet. In this Chapter I describe the processes through which I chose the district, identified respondents, determined the opening question for interviews, and selected methods for recording. All of these topics are addressed in section 3.1. Section 3.2 outlines the ethical practicalities I adopted for the fieldwork. Section 3.3 then contains a brief statement of the nature of the fieldwork records that follow in the next chapter.

3.2 Fieldwork Method

To seek the essence of Figure 1, I considered it would be appropriate to pursue as ab initio approach as possible. Anthropology attracted me as the social discipline most aligned with that general intention.

Australian anthropology is replete with small country town research. I adopted a study of Kandos NSW by Oxley (1978) as the basic source on fieldwork. On the place of ethnology/anthropology in complex society Oxley wrote:

“Wolf points out that the "formal framework of economic and political power" in complex society harbours a host of "interstitial, supplementary and parallel structures within it. These are the small scale and highly personalised groups which serve, and may specifically exist, to circumvent, manipulate,
make workable, or merely render palatable the impersonal order of large-scale institutions. They include such things as "old-boy networks", cliques cooperating and feuding within bureaucracies, patron-client dyads and persuasion. They include kinship and neighbourhood groups. They also include small voluntary associations and committees where internal relations are more likely to be guided by interpersonal allegiances and obligations than by any written constitutions." (p. 5)

He said of his own method:

"The study gets its approach from the tradition of social anthropology. That is to say it derives relatively little from formal interviews or questionnaires, and very much from informal discussion and participant observation. One hopes that this approach makes up in useful insights for what it too often loses in statistical exactitude.

I installed my family in a Kandos house from late 1962 to mid-1965... In all this time I attended as many meetings as possible, joined in working bees, went to fund-raising entertainments, visited and received visits, and joined the gossip circles at the bars... In short, I participated." (p.4)

I followed Oxley's approach closely but my fieldwork did not follow his procedures in full detail. The most significant residential period (3 months) was shorter and my family did not accompany me. Further, I am not trained in anthropological fieldwork techniques. As a consequence, the approach I adopted may best be termed "quasi-anthropological".

The locale for the fieldwork was chosen firstly because it lay on the border of two States, one of which was already known to be taking an approach to water management different to those of the other three States in the Basin. I assumed that this would leave the matter of environmental remediation a more open question in the public’s mind. Secondly, at the time of the pilot studies one of the two States was
approaching a State election and I thought that discussion would be more widespread within the community as a result. It turned out to be also approaching a Federal election, which proved rather more helpful in that regard. Thirdly, I had an acquaintance in the Town who, I thought, might be useful with introductions or provide other forms of access to community behaviour. This was the least reason but, as things turned out during the main visit, a productive one in the end.

In keeping with the ab initio intent of the enquiry, I chose an opportunistic approach to respondent selection, allowing them to “identify themselves”, so as to speak. I started with an anonymous entry into the Town, followed by a simple question about public Internet access at the tourist information bureau. The answer I received led to an encounter with a person I identify as BF, who in turn directed me to two other respondents, BE and BT. Both BE and BF provided lists of people to interview, and the range of potential respondents then grew almost exponentially. BT helped me to make contact with the Aboriginal community resident in the district. By the end of the main visit, something like three per cent of the entire district population of 5000-6000 had become involved in the incidents I encountered.

In all of this, no formal survey pattern was followed. The acquaintance who had been one of the early reasons for choosing the district was not approached until well into the pilot visits. Eventually she phoned me, having heard from an interviewee that I was in Town (I had leaked my presence intentionally by that stage, fearing embarrassment at an accidental encounter). The only relatively systematic form of inquiry developed later as a result of this contact in the main visit part of the programme, when attendance at a Community Reference Panel meeting led to invitations or requests from me to attend a set of further meetings that took place in larger regional centres distant 1-1/2 to 2 hours’ drive from the district.

Kellehear (1993) has no problem with this approach in general terms: “In ethnographic-inductive designs, researchers often take the view that the theory, the explanations, the connection between action and interpretation should be suggested by the social system itself” (p. 21). However, he places literature review before
fieldwork, a practice only partly followed in the present instance since I considered that too rigid a sequence of that kind might develop into a meta-narrative governing the idea of the research process itself.

Simultaneously with the first interviews, I began a parallel set of observations, some involving discussions with opportunistically encountered people and others involving observations of streetscapes and community activities.

A late part of the fieldwork program arose from an advertisement inserted by a governmental trade education organization in the district newspaper. The organization sought the services of a project officer on short-term contract for an investigation into the wishes of the local Aboriginal community about education of the 12-18 year age group, which had largely fallen out of the school system. A program of community consultation activities was planned, and I contacted the organization’s regional manager to see whether I could attend these activities as an observer. That enquiry produced a rather unexpected set of outcomes, as described in the next chapter (section 4.12, especially section 4.12.4, “The Black Education Dilemma”).

The fieldwork was carried out in four tranches: two pilot visits followed by a main visit about a year later, and then a brief return (the Aftermath). The main visit involved continuous residence in the Town for about three months. The pattern of development of the fieldwork programme is summarized in Figure 3 (next page).

_The opening gambit for interviews took the form “What do you think of the river?”_ I intended this question merely to introduce the broad field that I wished to discuss, and not to act as a specific question posed for precise consideration. The question was made as open-ended as possible to maintain the preconceptionless state of the enquiry and to avoid any leading of respondents. At the time of site choice I knew very little of the detailed environmental state of the region, apart from the obvious fact that the river flowed through it. I assumed that the river would be suffering visibly from difficulties often encountered in the Basin: high salinity, reduced flow, possibly high
phosphorus and nitrate concentrations, perhaps a tendency to algal growth. I also assumed that the respondents would be concerned about this circumstance.

**FIGURE 3 FIELDWORK PATHWAYS**
None of these assumptions turned out to be valid except the possibility of insufficient flow. Nearly all of the respondents interviewed during the pilot visits were bemused by the question itself. It would seem that they rarely thought of the river at all, and many answered as though the question was more general: “What do you think of the environment?” The most beneficial outcome of the question was that most respondents accepted it as a trigger to start them off, perhaps being flattered that a researcher was seeking their opinions on any topic whatsoever. Investigators of any description (except possibly from social control agencies) were not frequent visitors to the region as far as I could tell. In view of this outcome, the question was retained unchanged for the main study. I consider the responses received to it in more detail in section 4.6.

I initially preferred tape recording and auxiliary note taking as the method of recording, but most occasions arose too informally to introduce tape recording satisfactorily into the free-flowing form of response that was sought and usually occurred. One or two respondents refused taping outright. In other cases the presence of a notepad from the first moment of introduction allowed note taking, but on many occasions the need to maintain eye contact in order to keep the sometimes intimate conversational flow going meant that the record of the event had to be produced immediately or as soon as possible after its conclusion. While this procedure had obvious shortcomings, I should say that the intent behind the encounter nearly always made me highly alert and sharply perceptive, and one common outcome was a quite vivid long-term retention in the mind’s eye of facial expressions and overall settings. Certainly the “hinge points” and significant silences of the unfolding narrative were seldom if ever lost — what may have been missed or forgotten was much more likely to have arisen from my own blind spots, or to have been fine-detail material of the kind Barthes called “catalysers” (1977, p.93) (although I note Barthes’ comment that nothing is dismissible).

One reason for preferring tape-recording over note taking, and on-the-spot note taking over delayed note taking, is the possibility that something may otherwise be omitted. To worry about omissions is to worry about comprehensiveness, but compre-
hensiveness is not the goal. In the light of the aim of introducing the individual person into the enquiry, intimations of essence (or its derivative, meaning) were the objectives of the fieldwork programme. Comprehensiveness (in one of its senses) might in fact be read as actually a denial of the ability to reach the essential nature of things, a denial even of its possibility, and a willingness to accept the sub-optimality of supposed comprehensiveness as a substitute.

Another reason for preferring taping was that distortions in the base data might arise through error or subjectivity. The concern about error is real, for even consistency with internal and external evidence is no guarantee of accuracy - the apparently inconsistent item may be just the piece of data that becomes significant. However, both of these concerns are offset partly or completely by the disadvantages and sometimes impossibility of using a tape recorder as already noted. In discussing his own writings, one commentator on forms of ethnographic writing remarked that he rarely used a tape recorder (van Manaan, 1988, p.56), making the conversational data he recorded only as accurate as memory and ear permit. His comment comes as a further and independent justification of the technique I used in the district, which was in fact somewhat more direct since coincident notes were, more often than not, written as informants spoke.

Efforts were made to keep handwritten notes of conversations as verbatim as possible, in the main I think successfully. However, occasional lapses occurred, usually through the action being too fast at the time. On one or two indicated occasions, the handwritten versions were too cryptic for clear conversion into typescript, and the results are correspondingly approximate.

3.3 Immediate Fieldwork Outcomes

I initially recorded the fieldwork events and encounters that occurred during the four field visits in the form of 92 reports (which I also call “narratives”). In broad terms,
these reports were written in the order in which observations were made. A review of local newspaper contents, a summary and initial commentary on the answers received to my interview-opening question ("what you think of the river?") , and an overview of records of district history since European settlement collected during the fieldwork period supplement the narratives. The narratives follow a discursive style, except for three that are mainly tape-recorded transcripts accompanied by short discursive notes. An associated narrative or introductory note outlining pre-and post-interview events and other aspects of the incident not picked up by audio taping usually accompany the record of each taped interview.

I do not deem the raw narratives suitable for broader publication in this or other public documents. Many contain remarks made by individual respondents about other respondents, revealing or alleging insights into motivations that may stir antagonisms. They also contain a considerable number of impromptu value judgments of my own, both about respondents and what seems to be going on. Many if not most of both kinds of comments are highly subjective. As a result, the descriptions of events and observations they contain have been reassembled into the form of condensed stories, and are included in this form in Chapter 4. In the transition, the proper names used in the raw narrative copies have been changed into alphabetic forms (e.g. AD), with additional care exercised to minimize possibilities of location identification. Attributions of gender or other contextual descriptors to individuals have also been altered as far as possible. As well as "anonymizing" the fieldwork outcomes through this process, I have also "sanitized" them by using the conversion process to remove all subjective comments, whether made by individual respondents or myself.

3.4 Ethical Precautions

I carried an introductory University letter into all fieldwork excursions, showing it to respondents before commencing premeditated unstructured interviews. As the fieldwork progressed the terms under which I attended fieldwork events became
widely known amongst people with whom I was mingling, not least through introductions at various meetings. Further, some of the events were public in nature, requiring no special introduction in light of me being present as a member of the public.

Raw fieldwork reports have been kept private, with their contents not disclosed to any district resident. They have been sighted by my three University supervisors, and discussed at length with that group during the progress and after the end of the fieldwork period.

3.5 Conclusion

In this brief Chapter I have described the processes through which I chose the fieldwork district, identified respondents, determined the opening question for interviews, and selected methods of recording. In establishing all these aspects, I have striven to continue the pursuit of the most open-minded perspective as far as possible. I have also described the measures I have taken to maintain confidentiality, not least by converting the raw field reports to an number of condensed stories centred on themes I saw emerging from the raw material. I now present these condensed stories in the next chapter.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1 First pilot visit twenty-seven, second pilot visit eleven, main visit forty, and aftermath visit fourteen.

2 I have provided the raw fieldwork narratives under separate confidential cover to the examiners of this thesis, with all names changed for places as well as people. A code list was supplied under separate cover to the examiners as evidence that all really exist. One purpose in providing the raw narratives at all is the evident need to cross-reference the later stages of reporting and interpretation to the original raw data. Another is a less obvious desire to allow their contents to present, through their transparencies and resonances with everyday life (at least in Western cultures), a sign of reporting authenticity.
CHAPTER 4

FIELDWORK OUTCOMES

4.1 Introduction

Even if the raw narratives were suitable for publication in this document, the randomness of their sequence would cause reader difficulty in capturing the overall story emerging from the fieldwork. For this and the confidentiality reasons mentioned in the previous chapter, I have extracted a number of themes entwined within the original raw narrative set, following a plan described in the next section and thereby reducing about three hundred pages of raw narratives by one-third in the process. However, the condensed stories presented here still contain extensive passages of detail that may cause reader ennui, and I faced problems in selecting inclusions and exclusions. Further reduction runs a risk of possible loss of nuances of anxiety, bias, skepticism, enthusiasm, resignation and similar factors that I consider to be essential contributions to the tones of the overall picture I wish to present. For that reason, I do not feel that I may discard many parts of the raw narratives simply because their ordinariness or banality makes for tedious reading. Too often minor voices or non-verbal elements are deemed to be of lower or insignificant order and left unheard or overrun, and to include them is an essential feature of the approach I follow in this thesis.

In the following sections I occasionally refer to formal government entities (agencies and political figures individually or collectively) as public governance, and to the district entrepreneurial segment of the populace as private governance, for reasons that become apparent as the stories unfold.
4.2 Themes in Fieldwork Outcomes

4.2.1 Theme Types

I have extracted ten themes of four types from the original narrative set. The first type of theme contains contextual or introductory stories that set the stage for the stories of the later types. The first two stories of this type describe the physical and built environments of the district, and its history as reported by various sources. The third describes the formal modes of communication within the district and to and from other places. It includes a review of its local newspaper, because it provides a window on some of the ways in which the district populace represents itself to itself. The fourth presents the responses to the question I chose to open encounters with respondents,” What do you think of the river?”, through which some showed the first indications of the nature of their humanity.

The second type of theme concerns the implementation of public policy and practices through State agency bureaucracies and their client bodies. The stories of this type describe contacts I witnessed between various non-local public agencies and the local constituencies they endeavoured to deal with. They are not termed “public” because the incidents they describe occurred in public view.

I call the third story type “semi-public” because the stories it contains concern issues where non-local and local politicians met with constituent bodies for purposes only partially related to formal public policy. Semi-public incidents considered under this label were sometimes open to public view in the normal sense. Meetings of local representatives for the generation or consideration of policies and practices with only local implications, or where localised or isolated events were discussed between agencies and client bodies in a non-policy setting, are included in this type.

I call the fourth story type “private”, but may equally have called it “ordinary life”. It contains two stories that describe the concerns, attributes, qualities, patterns and practices of “ordinary people” i.e. those not participating in public policy or practice discourses of any kind (although they might have liked to).
The four types contain the following stories:

**TABLE 1: CONDENSED STORY TYPES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>STORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Contextual Stories | 1.1 The Physical Context Story  
|                    | 1.2 The History Story                              |
|                    | 1.3 The Local Media Story                          |
|                    | 1.4 The Responses to the Opening Question          |
| 2. Public Stories  | 2.1 The Public Water Story                         |
|                    | 2.2 The Public Race Story                          |
|                    | 2.3 The Sacred Site Story                          |
| 3. Semi-public Stories | 3.1 The Catchment Management Story                 |
|                    | 3.2 The Village Resident Group Story               |
| 4. Private Stories | 4.1 The White People Story                         |
|                    | 4.2 The Black People Story                         |

In all stories I include references to the raw field narratives by including the report number in the section heading when the reference is of a general nature. If a more specific reference is appropriate, I show it in the form (37.15), where the number before the decimal point is the report number, and the number after is the paragraph number within the report. The stories are often written without close reference to the texts of the raw field narratives, but on other occasions segments of the raw texts are included verbatim or near verbatim, so that voices and details may be heard and recognized to an appropriate degree.

### 4.2.2 Contextual Stories

The “Physical Context” story, the first story of this type, describes the natural and built landscapes around and within the district, as I perceived them to be. It sets out my observations of the countryside, and the buildings, streetscapes and infrastructure provisions of the Town, Village and Hamlet that constitute the three human
settlements in the district.

*The History Story* is based on three sources. The first is a statement of Town history published by the Town Council (Report 25). The second is a collection of about 300 copies of correspondence, newspaper reports and other articles, compiled from public sources by an ex-resident of the district. The third is Milliss (1992) on the topic of the Waterloo Creek massacre, with an additional input from Clark (1973).

*The Media Story* looks at all forms of significant communication media operating in the district. It includes the review of local newspaper content mentioned near the beginning of section 4.1, since I take the view that this organ constitutes a significant contributor to the “tonality” of life in the district. (In this I follow Geertz (1983) who has pointed out that tonality is an important outcome to be determined in any ethnographic approach: “like grasping a proverb, catching an illusion, seeing a joke.....reading a poem - than it is like achieving communion” (Geertz, 1983, p. 70).

### 4.2.3 Public Stories

The first public story, the “Public Water” story, concerns the interactions between water users and the State agencies controlling the allocation of water to them. The story begins with an interview with a well-informed respondent from the water user side that occurred during the pilot visits (Report 14) (“water users” are those involved in intensive water use. Town supplies and rural landowners drawing water only for domestic and stock watering purposes are not included in this term). It reaches a high point during one of several meetings I attended during the main visit (Reports 50 and 51), and concludes with a second extensive interview in the Aftermath stage held with the same well-informed respondent interviewed during the pilot visit (Report A 10).

The second public story, the “Public Race” story, concerns the interactions between the district Aboriginal population and the State agencies involved in their welfare. In the original narrative set, it began with another climactic incident in the Town about 20 years ago (Report 38), but in reality it appears to have had its real genesis much further back in district history. It includes the findings and consequences of a State
investigation, and concludes with the appointment and early actions of a State coordinating officer in the Aftermath phase (Report A 13).

The third public story, the "Sacred Site" story, describes a debate over the eviction of recreational water users from a district lagoon, and the efforts to restore it to the status of an Aboriginal religious entity. The mentions made of it in the pilot and main visit reports are peripheral to other topics at that stage, but the matter came into substantially sharper view at a public meeting I attended during the last days of the main visit (Report 75). A description of the outcome of that meeting one year further on concludes this story (the "Broadwater story", Broadwater being the substituted, not real, name of a suggested alternative recreational lagoon).

To me, the first and second stories centre on the same kind of fundamental issue, namely the application of formal public governance policies and practices to a controversial matter, and the ensuing relationships between State and local agencies and the affected people. The Public Race story has produced a longer post-climax consequence than the Public Water story, and hence perhaps holds a possibility for forecasting the general nature of the future of the latter, should basic change not occur.

4.2.4 Semi-public Stories

The two stories in this group relate to catchment management development, and the experiences of a Village Resident Group.

The *catchment management development story* deals with the ongoing stories of local Landcare activity and the progressive development of the district’s Catchment Management Association. Both unfolded at a relatively calm pace through the time frame of the four visits, and the story draws upon a number of field reports.

The *Village Resident Group story* concerns damage to property as a result of State agency river management practices. It begins with a taped interview with some of the members of this group during the pilot visits (Report 16). It reaches a moderately
tense peak during an agency/group meeting that took place during the main visit (Report 55), and ends in a site visit and interview during the Aftermath phase (Report A8). It is notable in the overall scheme of this thesis because it relates the story of a successful remediation event brought about through the perseverance of local “lay people”.

4.2.5 The Private Stories

Two stories are included in the “private” group. The first relates to ordinary life observations pertaining to the white population, and the second to similar observations of the black population. In broad terms, these are observations of the Town (which is predominantly white) and the Hamlet (exclusively black) life respectively, but the two strains mingle in the narratives describing aspects of Village (mixed black and white) life.

4.3 The Physical Context

4.3.1 District Spatial Relations

For present purposes I define the Australian urban hierarchy as consisting of four levels. These levels are: 1: metropolitan; 2: major regional centre such as Coffs Harbour or Cairns; 3: lesser regional centre such as Narrabri or Wangaratta; and 4: Murray Bridge or Blayney, for example. I rate the Town in the field work district as lying above but close to the fourth level of that hierarchy.

The three settlements are far in time and distance from any major centre. One of the two relevant State capitals is an eight-hour drive away. The other can reportedly be reached in three to four hours by road, but coming by air from inter-State otherwise entails a five-hour bus ride from a distant Level 2 centre. Intra-state scheduled air services are available to a Level 3 town 120 kilometres to the south. Buses do not
meet this service, and an overnight stay is required in each direction when travelling in this way. Another Level 3 town lies about two hours' drive towards the nearer capital city. Even the nearest Level 4 towns are about an hour away by road.

All three district settlements lie on the river. Except from the north, driving into the district is a lonely and somewhat unsafe procedure for newcomers, particularly in view of the heavy truck and trailer traffic on at least one main link (15.5). The road to the intra-State airstrip town carries abnormally high semi-trailer traffic. Only the road from the nearer capital through intervening regional centres is really satisfactory, and even then its orientation makes it occasionally precarious in early morning and late afternoon. Otherwise, public transport to the larger distant centres is by bus, the railway passenger service having ceased long ago. Public STD call provisions were obsolescent at the time of the initial visit (15.4), and mobile phone communication limited.

The "natural sphere of influence" of the district appears to be an area extending about 50-60 kilometres from the Town in each direction (31.11, 42.5), although some administrative concerns such as Landcare co-ordination (39.7) stretched further out. The isolation of the place had reportedly discouraged the immigration of some classes of high-skill people into the district (37.5).

4.3.2 Land Form And Riverine Environment

The whole of the district lies on a plain so flat in all directions that it appears to have no slope at all, although presumably it falls at perhaps 1 in 2000. Protuberances appear only rarely, none more than 10 metres high in my estimation. The flatness extends for hundreds of kilometres in all directions except towards the northeast, where it encounters gradually rising country overlying metamorphosed rock about 100 kilometres away (Report 9). In general the climate is hot, causing an average evaporation rate of nearly two metres per year (20.19). Most of the land is cleared, with trees appearing only along river and creek banks or as occasional windbreaks or paddock boundaries.
The soil of the plain is deep (possibly 10 metres), with a considerable clay content that produces precipitous riverbanks and causes the ground to crack deeply when dry. According to one respondent, the cracking produces a self-mulching capacity that is the source of the soil's richness. The softness of the banks allows the river to change its course fairly readily. It thus traverses the landscape in a twisting fashion, carving a high-walled trench through the deep soil overlay (10.9) and leaving meanders across the countryside, some isolated as oxbow lakes. A profusion of secondary waterways has created a kind of mini-delta about 80-100 kilometres downstream, with many of the secondary streams failing to rejoin the main river and disappearing into the ground. The river supplies only a small fraction of the total Murray Darling system flow (11.9, 11.44, 28.7), and local intensive water use was removing only a portion of that fraction at the time of fieldwork, if some reports are credible (14.63). Little or no local surface salinity was evident (11.37).

The region is sometimes subject to considerable storms. Although the river system contains a number of dams and weirs, the district still floods from time to time. When the river breaks its banks in flood, it spreads as a vast sheet of slow-moving water over a very large area well over a hundred kilometres in length and breadth (43.5), distributing fresh layers of sediment as it passes. A local engineer informed me that the flooding was shallow “sheet flooding” that caused no physical damage provided the velocity did not exceed 1.0 metre per second (43.4). The sediments deposited by the floods have not been uniform, and the riverbanks contain layers of different material. Lenses or strata of gravel and finer coarse material penetrate the main body of the deposits at various depths, causing groundwater to drain out quickly under river drawdown conditions, sometimes with severe impacts on bank stability (16.29, 40.12).

Though the main water user representative I interviewed expressed general satisfaction with the present information situation, river water quality data was insufficient according to the most knowledgeable person I talked to on this topic (14.6, 14.40). In chemical terms the available information base might have been adequate, but the biological base was practically non-existent (40.12). Very little was known about groundwater quality, but pesticide contamination was suspected in some locations. Not much was known about groundwater movement patterns (54.9).
somewhat alarming report about artesian water also indicated that the Great Artesian Basin’s recharge capacity may be much less than previously thought (54.9).

Not much was known about riverine conditions below the waterline (Report 51.51). Although the river reportedly ran clear historically (10.7), it is now generally turbid, due to carp according to most observers. The deleterious impact of cold water plumes from dam releases on fish life was noted more than once (11.32, 5.10). The river’s fish population appeared to be adequate, although carp was generally thought to be a problem (perhaps questionably, according to leaflets provided by the Shire Council engineer). Fish species previously thought to be under threat (such as cod) seemed to be recovering. A Catchment Committee respondent who was particularly informed on fish matters stated that food chains near the Town were smaller than in upstream areas (11.13), and that fish diversity was good despite the high number of carp (11.30). The same respondent told me that many forms of fish appeared to have been imported at various times over the last 100 years by recreational fishermen (11.30).

While most of the agrarian landscape has been cleared of timber and scrub, riparian reservations along both banks of the river appeared to contain many patches of old-growth forest, and remnant patches remained within the Town itself (for example, outside the flat I rented (61.10)).

During the main visit I attended a meeting between agricultural research scientists and extension officers on the subject of the adequacy of communications with farmers on biodiversity issues. The whole of the meeting (Report 62) was based on a premise that fauna biodiversity was damaged or in difficulty in farmed areas. While the focus was more on the adjacent region, there was no reason to believe that the situation was different in the district I studied. However, no respondent from within the district commented adversely about fauna biodiversity during the fieldwork. Superficially, respondent BE’s reported sighting of platypus below the Town weir (39.27) in my presence would have indicated adequacy, at least outside farmed areas. But I failed to recognize the animals as conclusively as he said he did – he seemed to be looking at a stationary yellow stick caught in the riverbank.
4.3.3 *Built Environment*

The Town had an air of order and quietude. It was widespread, with a total area of 16 square kilometres (22.5), and spilt over into the Shire beyond the municipal boundaries. Like the countryside surrounding it, the Town was flat except for a slight promontory on which the Catholic Church sat (13A.2). Historical records indicated that the site of the Town was originally extensively lagooned (25.9), in which case the settlement rested entirely on filled ground with a well-manicured upper surface. Older housing was generally of timber frequently raised on stilts above ground level, with new housing similar to metropolitan project homes. A more affluent area on the river bank to the west of the Town centre contained housing which was individualistic and affluent, most of it on five-acre blocks. The main street was not ornate, lacking even a War Memorial, but was softened by a line of palms and a grassed median strip down the centre. The last expression of notable architectural style appeared to have occurred in the 1930s with construction of the Art Deco municipal Town Hall, except for the two largest churches (Anglican and Catholic).

Retailing activities in the main street were low-key, with a few of the less attractive shops vacant on the northern (sunless) side. The atmosphere was active enough, with parking places always filled from soon after opening time till late in the day. However, the nature of developments that emerged towards the end of the main visit, coupled with up-market tenancy changes on the sunnier side, signalled a process of change from old-fashioned agricultural community service trading to more modern and affluent activities. This change process appeared to be reinforced by the development of a new supermarket centre in a parallel street in the year between the main and Aftermath visits (39.21, A2.6). The extent of impending change in the Town was also illustrated by a degree of industrial development, mainly for service industry, that was occurring on both eastern and western sides of the Town during the main visit (39.28).

Retailing facilities on the whole made the Town relatively self-sufficient in consumer terms, with most things buyable although not necessarily of the best quality. Three hotels and two or three clubs provided various day-to-day socializing opportunities
for most levels of the population. The Town contained several motels ranging from
two stars to three-and-a-half stars in standard, together with three or four relatively
upmarket restaurants. A number of takeaway food outlets operated in the main
shopping area.

A secondary retailing centre, over a mile from the main shopping area and possibly
built to service the western Town overspill into the Shire, had few facilities and was
not well patronized. The remainder of the Town apparently relied on only one
convenience store near the old railhead on the northern fringe of the Town.

The Town seemed well catered for in infrastructure terms. Street widths up to two
chains (20 metres) reflected a now-old-fashioned rural municipal standard, far over-
supplying traffic needs in most cases but producing an atmosphere of spaciousness,
peace and order. Most intersected at right angles, creating a number of crossing
problems since traffic travelling down the wide roads was sometimes fast. However,
in several other cases they intersected at flat angles, often several at a time, in ways
that had been "roundabouted" curiously and somewhat ambiguously.

The main highway had been diverted from the centre of Town to its edge (3.1) in a
bypass development constructed about ten years prior to fieldwork. The diversion had
cut off a small fragment of the Town, and featured a McDonalds's restaurant, a
truckstop worthy of its inter-State border status, and the largest roundabout in
Australia, or so I was told (3.2). It formed a small, late-modern precinct well
separated from most of the Town itself.

The Town water supply weir was only three or four feet high and barely seemed to
interrupt the flow of the river. According to a respondent well qualified to know,
water and sewerage treatment provision for the Town were "state-of-the-art" (21.26).
In fact, infrastructure provision seemed to have occasioned a degree of over-
enthusiasm not always sympathetic to the environment (61.10). In addition, the
flatness of the landscape was a contributor to high night noise levels from the main
road and railway shunting yards.
The Town enjoyed generous sporting facilities: an Olympic-size swimming pool, Rugby League fields reportedly constructed as part of the main road diversion (Report 27), Rugby Union fields on the other side Town, a large Showground surrounded by extensive stabling and service buildings (40.2), and even a skateboard ramp. Both public and private schools were well served in terms of surrounding grounds, and a base hospital stood near the river. An airstrip adjoined the golf course. The cemetery was located outside the northeastern corner of the Town, separated from it by the main highway.

The Town was relatively well served in cultural building terms. A fairly new community centre provided a large cavern-like theatre space, and a Municipal Library and Arts and Crafts Centre formed part of a new modern precinct near the old bridge. A courthouse and the police station adjacent to the main shopping centre were substantial but not particularly evident. The Town Park next to the Olympic Pool was extensive and well maintained, as was an unusual Botanical Gardens feature out beyond the built-up area. The Town was surrounded by an inconspicuous levee bank and did not suffer during normal floods, not even in the supply of most services coming from elsewhere although some occasionally failed (32.6). The appearance of the Town as a whole was an occasion for modest civic pride (14.149).

The Village also lay in a flat landscape, but without protection from the floods that overflowed the riverbank. About eight kilometres from the Town, it was too far away for it to seem a natural outpost although the road between the two was of highway standard. Other things being equal, it could have become the major settlement in the district in the early nineteenth century because the river was most fordable at that point.

The Village's streets followed an old-fashioned width criterion too, but intersected at right angles. The overall shape of the Town was longer parallel to the river rather than square. Housing was more scattered, either through adoption of larger building blocks or underdevelopment. Housing standards varied from weatherboard through to quite broken down, most of it directly on the ground (and thus possibly floodable) except for two houses on stilts on the riverside road and the police station on the main road. The Village stood unprotected and sprawling, the opposite in all major physical
respects to the Town. Only the straightness of its roads and the central positioning of the police station and courthouse overtly expressed aspects of power and control.

The Village’s retailing facilities were limited to two shops, one a mini-market carrying a necessarily limited array of goods and the other an isolated butcher shop. At least one unused timber-framed shop had been extensively damaged. The inconspicuous weatherboard Post Office and the rather more obvious police station completed the main street picture. The main street itself was the main road from the Town to the intrastate airstrip town, heavily trafficked by semi-trailers although speeds seemed to be fairly well controlled. Night-time noise was not checked but would no doubt have been a problem, particularly from the turn out of the main street as trucks braked for the corner and changed gears.

The train once ran to the Village to service grain silos (48.4), but I did not check to see whether the rail lines were still in place. There was no local bus or taxi service. A dark, almost sinister hotel catered for the more extreme, generally Aboriginal drinker, but was not patronized by the broader community. Both black and white residents visited the Country Club, a relatively modern building open to all that contained a Chinese restaurant. Two roadhouses on the outskirts of Town, generally beyond walking distance from the centre, catered for travellers. A caravan park on the other side of the Village was well away from most housing.

The most impressive structure in the Village by far was a combined High School and trade education centre on the south-eastern corner of the settlement, but it was comparatively out of sight. Its grounds were extensive but did not seem to include formal sporting facilities. The Village also contained a community health centre and a small courthouse, still regularly in use. The only religious facility physically in evidence was a now-unused weatherboard Anglican Church. The only park was small and generally littered and overgrown for most of the fieldwork period (but not all -- see Report 34). Infrastructure in general was minimal for most of the fieldwork period, below modern criteria for satisfactory country town development, although the picture was set to improve with the introduction of a piped sewerage scheme.
I estimated the size of the Village population to be about 900, fairly evenly distributed between black and white residents. Walking distances were larger than normally comfortable in white middle-class terms, and the densities of population and meeting places too low to make personal encounters frequent.

The Hamlet was 20-30 minutes east of the Village by car, along a reasonably satisfactory road. It lay at the end of the bitumen, at the very edge of the river surrounded by deep dry watercourses, and had been cut off regularly by relatively minor flooding until the recent construction of a new entry bridge (8.6). The internal road pattern was circular, and all internal roads were sealed. Housing was suburban domestic in style, and ranged from well kept to somewhat aged and littered. New houses were under construction during the fieldwork period.

The Hamlet had only two communal structures, one a shop that opened to a curtailed timetable (45.11) and the other a large galvanized iron shed on the edge of the settlement that acted as a community hall. Its “CBD” consisted of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) project office and a corrugated-iron building that contained a papermaking factory for most of the fieldwork period. The Land Council office and the community health centre were some distance away. A small untidy park existed in a corner of the Hamlet near the river, and there seemed to be some kind of additional unfinished communal facility in the centre. The only formal outdoor recreational facility was a football ground several hundred metres away from the Hamlet’s edge, under construction for most of the fieldwork period but completed by the time of the final visit.

A large primary school stood in the centre of the Hamlet, with a pre-school next-door. Both were of an architectural style appropriate to the hotter months (although not necessarily to colder winter days), and were relatively new. Infrastructure including sewerage provision now appeared to be reasonably satisfactory, after a chequered history (Report 38).
4.3.4  *Ex-Urban Built Environment*

Widespread intensive farming provided the most significant features of the built environment of the district outside the three settlements. Its most dramatic expression was the weir adjacent to the Village, but it also showed itself in long and occasionally high intensive water use dam walls that appeared frequently along the rural roads. I was told that some of the dams were large enough for skiffs to be sailed on the water surface.

4.4  *The History Story*

4.4.1  *Local Official History*

I first encountered the history of the district history through a Town Council handout sheet picked up at the Council office (Report 25). I reproduce it below almost in its entirety, with appropriate name substitutions and exclusions to maintain confidentiality:

“Years before (the Town) existed, three grazing properties joined at a spot near where the town now stands. They were Colonial Downs, Wagonsfield and Old Bastion, all settled between 1838 and 1848. Food and mail for these remote unfenced runs came by bullock team from (a place 500 kilometres away). Rather than return without a load, the teamsters would turn their bullocks out to graze and would take any jobs offering at stations, to fill in time until enough wool had been shorn in the district to provide them with back loading.

The owners of the three properties allowed the teamsters to camp on the river, where the runs met. Gradually the tents and makeshift huts gave way to small cottages until by 1882, several people had settled permanently at the camping site. By the 1870's the tiny settlement had acquired a store, courthouse,
blacksmith shop, Chinese market garden, boarding house and even a private school.

In regard to the original property of Old Bastion, this was sometimes spelt ..... in old records. It is known that the original selector of this property was Collins and Son, a partnership of Daniel Lyons and Harry Burchill. They settled in this district somewhere around the 1840s.

On the 12th April, 1858, a petition was forwarded to the Minister for Lands and Public Works by twenty persons who were inhabitants on the surrounding Country, begging that the Minister would cause to be surveyed for building purposes, various areas which now constitute the town. A photostat copy is held in the Council Chambers. As a result of this petition, on 7th ..... , 1860, after the survey had been carried out, a public auction was held, “Four Country” Blocks being offered for sale between 34 and 37 acres each and 56 half acre blocks as residential sites. The Government of the day considered that this was a highly successful action as only “Two Country” Blocks were not taken up and six town blocks were not sold.

For Local Government purposes, this area was part and parcel of the ..... Division and on the twelfth day of ..... , 1888, an Order in Council was issued which appeared in the Government Gazette, Volume xx, No. yy, dated 20th ..... , 1888, which declared this area a Municipality.

The Council at that time was not known as a Council of the Town of ..... , but was known as the Council of the Borough of ..... It consisted of a Mayor and six Aldermen and the first election was held on the 17th ..... , 1888. The first meeting of the ..... Town Council took place on the 21st ..... , 1888, and was held in the Court House.

This Order in Council was issued as a result of a petition signed by 70 residents who requested the Governor in Council to declare this area as a Municipality. It is interesting to note that the boundaries of this Local Authority area have never been altered.
The (Town’s) name ...... comes from the Aboriginal word “......” which means “…………..”. It would appear that this name was first given by the Aboriginals to a spot near the present site of the District Hospital. Before the ...... River was weir'd, the river was little more than a chain of waterholes connected only in good seasons. One big waterhole was near the hospital and there was a very large lagoon around the area where ...... the Imperium Hotel now stand. These points were favourite resting places of hundreds of ...... and hence the name.

It is interesting to note that the first Bank opened in (the Town) ...... was opened by ...... on 18th ......, 1877, and the first Manager was Mr ......

For many years after the town was formed, there was no bridge over the river and all traffic coming from (across the river), unless it crossed near (the Village), was pulled over by a Mr. ...... in a punt, a rope being stretched across the river. The first bridge was built by the Government, an arrangement was made between the (one State) Government and the (other State) Government by which it was agreed that (one State) would build the bridge at the town and the other State Government, the one at (another town downstream). The old wooden bridge at (the Town) was a very great blessing and it was constructed prior to the 1899 flood which it withstood. It would appear that this bridge could have been built between the period 1875 and 1878. The bridge itself was designed by a Mr. ......, the then Road Engineer for (one of the States). The bridge was replaced with the present structure in 1914.

The first birth registered as having occurred in the township took place on 13th ......, 1863, and the first death registered took place on 29th ......, 1883.

The explorer ...... discovered the ...... River during an expedition in 1827. He named the river after ...... The (nominee's) family had provided (the explorer) with horses and drays for the 1827 expedition and (the nominee) had guided (the explorer) across the ...... Ranges.
Some other interesting dates:

Railway Line 1908
Reticulated Town Water 1925
Electricity 1925
Civic Building was opened 1937
Sewerage 1941/1942
Weir 1941
Levee Bank Construction 1957/1958
Olympic Swimming Pool 1963
Implementation of Master Drainage Scheme 1967
Town Plan 1970
First Local Authority in (the State) to carry out TV Survey of Sewerage System 1970
Sewerage Rehabilitation Scheme as result of above survey commenced 1971
New Water Tower & Reticulation west portion Town 1973

4.4.2 Milliss' Version

The local version of history presented above is an anodyne record compared to Milliss' account (Milliss, 1972). An early respondent had recommended Milliss' book to me (39.11), on the score that the Waterloo Creek massacre it describes was probably a more appropriate model for the history of the district in the early years of the 19th-century. The Waterloo Creek event, in which a Major Nunn had ordered troops to kill a large number of Aboriginal people, had occurred about half a day's drive away (within a radius of say 400 kilometres) from the district.

According to Milliss, the massacre at Waterloo Creek was the outcome of Aboriginal raids on stock after white shepherds took black women. The perpetrators of the massacre were mainly stockmen and station residents, i.e. members or agents of the local white entrepreneurial group of the time (the "merinos" or "squatters"). Milliss describes the ensuing debate in the Colony as Governor Gipps endeavoured to apply
instructions from London that blacks and whites should be treated as equals before the law. Gipps responded by having the perpetrators of the massacre arrested, brought back to Sydney, tried and hanged. White killers of black people had not been hanged until then. The squatters and their city associates complained to London, eventually arranging for Gipps to return to England before the scheduled end of his term.

Gipps' instructions were mainly an outcome of new liberal pressures in England emanating from Wilberforce and Wollstonecraft, although Kendal (1997) indicates that they may also have arisen from a drive by the English Colonial Office to replace Roman forms of colonization with Hellenic forms. According to Kendal, the Roman form had simply established military outposts from which goods and taxes were extracted from surrounding cultures, without any attempt at cultural transformation. The Greek form had endeavoured to convert the surrounding population to Greek culture.

4.4.3 Informal Sources

Later in the fieldwork period I encountered a person who had once lived in the district and had taken a special interest in its Aboriginal affairs. This source provided a considerable dossier on the district's history (about 300 pages photocopied from original historical evidence). The material included numerous newspaper cuttings and letters to various editors during the 1840s describing Aboriginal depredations on stock and the general difficulties encountered by settlers in dealing with the indigent population. It also included copies of documents characteristic of the debate, many containing accounts of violent events. A particular aspect of these events is that they were not without innocent victims, people entirely unassociated with the claims or causes the events sought to redress. Exhibit 2 shows a sample of the dossier consisting documents justifying the squatter/stockmen versions of their actions, and other documents in which those versions were substantially, indeed officially, contradicted.
EXHIBIT 2

Journal Extract*

"The next notable happening, as I recall only too well, was the "Waters' Murder" and its ghastly (sic) consequences. Being only a few miles away, it put us all in great terror. Old Mr Waters was a hater of aboriginals and would shoot any seen approaching his property; I believe he was intensely afraid of them; this was foolish, as it was far wiser to try to make peace. One day Mr Capfield, on an adjoining station, killed a beast and sent three of his native boys over with fresh meat to the old man. Just what these boys did to upset Mr Waters, was never disclosed, but on their return to Mr Capfield's company, they were followed by Mr Waters and his stockmen on horseback, and shot two of the boys dead and kicked their bodies into hollow logs out of sight, so he thought. This left one boy, who escaped and lived to tell the tale to his own tribe; he did not return to Mr Capfield. This event put all the white settlers in danger, as the natives became very hostile, and out for revenge, as they always do. They waited and watched Mr Waters home day and night, always hiding, using their bushcraft. One day Mr Waters' two sons went out with a mob of sheep, giving the natives their long awaited opportunity; they killed both boys and their horses, ruthlessly cutting up the two bodies, putting the severed heads and remains in hollow logs and stumps along the Caterwaul River. This tragic happening sickened us all. Mr Waters became a sad case, demented with rage, and out for revenge. He went all over the district asking all hands to join his shooting every native on sight. Henry (the writer's husband) flatly refused to take part in this organised massacre, as he considered Mr Waters had brought this tragedy upon himself, by his own ruthless shooting.

Shortly after, Mr Waters and a team of men he had gathered arrived at our home, also Broadwater, shooting every native in sight, even our station aboriginals, even my house gins, one of whom was my faithful Anna, my loyal friend, who had shared so many experiences with me, in the first hard years at "Wagonsfield". As these two gins were unarmed, and one was blind, they both had no chance of escape. Anna dropped beside the house, and the other girl ran to the river and dived in, staying there all night, dying from cold as well as wounds."

(Extracts from journal lodged in the Oxley Library by the writer's granddaughter. The writer arrived in the fieldwork district in 1845.)

* Anonymized.
4.4.4 The 1980s Hamlet Investigation (Report 38, Parts D and E)

The report of an investigation of Hamlet conditions in the late 1980s described more recent aspects of district history. In 1912 the government agency then responsible for Aboriginal concerns had located people from three tribes to a point somewhere near the Hamlet. The 1980s report is silent on whether these three groups were compatible. According to respondent AI, one of whose forebears was amongst this group, the black people were simply dumped at the roadside without shelter, food or any other resources (49.5). The community (if that is the right word) was then relocated twice, in the final instance to an Aboriginal reserve on the present site of the Hamlet in 1937.

The land ceased to be a reserve in 1975, when freehold title was transferred to a new State government Aboriginal management agency. That agency delegated management of the land to the Hamlet’s Aboriginal Cooperative. In 1984 the freehold was transferred to the Village-Hamlet Land Council, but the Cooperative continued to operate, holding a 99-year lease. The Federal government funded the Cooperative, and the State government funded the Land Council.

Life under the reserve managers up to 1975 was very tough. Everything was controlled. Written permission was needed to leave the reserve even to go shopping or to the hospital. When the last manager left in 1977, the community suddenly became responsible for the running of the place, at least in theory. The chairman of the Land Council at the time of the 1980s investigation told the Investigator: “We were told to run things but not given the power or resources to do so. We are held responsible for results but usually have had no say in government decision-making about what will happen at the Hamlet......... Hamlet people are very shy about voicing their opinions. This is the result of years of not being listened to at all.”

A final word on district Aboriginal history came from respondent AI. Towards the end of the main visit, I mentioned to this respondent that I would like to find some of the men who had been involved in a so-called race riot in the Town in 1987 (the occurrence and consequences of which I consider shortly). AI said that would be no trouble. A brother had been one of them, and in a later meeting AI told me that a fight started by white men had caused it. AI knew the white men, who were the sons
of the shearers AI's uncles had worked with in the shearing sheds a generation earlier. AI said that the white men there used to set upon the black men even then (49.10).

4.4.5 District Agricultural History through Local Eyes

During a discussion on broadacre tree clearing, another respondent presented an interpretation of the history of agricultural development over the last 60 years (76.9). At the start of the period all the surrounding lands had been covered with prickly pear. Farmers had "been able to buy land for two or three bob an acre, and they had then put the moth through", turning it into good grassed grazing country. As time went on, they had benefited from the wool boom with "pound a pound" prices. When that had finished they put the plough through the land, turning it into wheat country. The consequence had been that large fortunes had been made in the district, but at the same time it had been almost totally cleared. Then followed, said the respondent, the era of the bank manager who pointed out to the farmers that things should be done more commercially. But still present-day farmers thought that if they simply did a bit of bank contouring, and continued to follow other practices of their grandfathers, they could continue to get by.

4.5 The Media Story

In this section I take the word "media" to include all electronic and mechanical means of communication; in fact all forms of communication other than face-to-face. The gamut extends from simple services such as telephone connection, through public broadcasting media, to considerations of local artistic expression
4.5.1 Communications Generally

I described the transport service situation for the district in section 4.3.1. From car radio and public space broadcasts, I found that public radio broadcasting was limited to Radio National and one local pop station, together with a radio station given over entirely to horseracing, apparently on a twenty-four hour basis (15.10). Later, however, I learnt that at least one State's private and public classical music stations were available to wealthier residents. Perhaps they required enhanced antennas. Regional stations were available on TV.

4.5.2 Public Performances

I heard of two live theatrical performances that had visited the district, both staged at the Community Centre around the time of the first pilot visit. Both were from the Victor Borge/Anna Russell genre of the sixties, and at least one was not up to much according to respondent BE (15.7). I learned later from the Artist (see section 4.5.4) that the Town had a dramatic society and a choral group (15.8), but saw no other sign of either at any stage of the fieldwork period. The cinema had returned to Town a few months prior to my first trip, reoccupying old art deco premises built in the thirties. In general its programs were not far behind metropolitan releases.

All metropolitan papers from the nearer capital city were available first thing every morning, and drew many people to the main newsagency. Metropolitan newspapers from the other State capital did not reach the Town, but arrived in the Village just prior to lunchtime (usually but unreliably). A local district newspaper, which I consider in detail shortly, was published weekly in the Town.

A very large newsagency traded in the centre of the main street shopping strip. Its new book section held the following stock (15.13):

- two bays of pop culture novels;
- one bay of sport;
• one bay of references and dictionaries, sparsely populated but with a number of crossword dictionaries;
• a row of doggerel humour (e.g. Footrot Flats);
• one bay of what could be non-pop culture books, dominated by feminist writings and subjects except for a small selection of titles relating specifically to Weary Dunlop.

The only second-hand shop in Town devoted fully to books was a charity shop, although similar shops carried a few books in a secondary way. The titles in the charity shop were an old and mixed bunch, with a lot of Mills and Boon. I asked for a dictionary and was told that they went quite quickly when they came in (possibly to schoolchildren) (15.12).

The Town was home to two Councils, one for the Town and the other for the surrounding Shire. At the time of my first visit the public library had just moved to a new building, a joint venture between the two. The librarian was a new arrival in Town apparently on transfer from the State Library Service when I visited the library during the first pilot visit. She had not had time to profile borrowing preferences, and her only comment was that she was asked most frequently for business books (not agribusiness but general business), and less frequently for craft or do-it-yourself topics such as home brewing (15.16). A shelf survey indicated that not a lot of books were carried in the adult non-fiction category. Those that were there had an emphasis on sport and foreign countries (15.17).

4.5.3 The Town Museum

The Town museum resided in an ancient weatherboard cottage dating from the 19th-century, across the road from the public library. It seemed to be the only active tourist attraction the Town had to offer.

I found it to be much richer than expected, in both depth and breadth of exhibit, with displays not limited to a single version of an implement or mechanical device. In
many cases, several exhibits showed the development of the device during the late nineteenth century and into the early part of the twentieth, in some cases from hand-driven beginnings to later mechanical versions.

The woman looking after the place at the time of my call was informative and helpful. Although the Museum was a Council venture, she and her husband had put considerable effort into collection and amateur curation. I asked her about the river and she produced a single sheet of paper with a photo on it showing residents at the time of World War I re-enacting a European war scene on it, with the accompanying text:

“OUR YESTERDAYS: This picture, showing a carnival on the River to celebrate the opening of the Bridge, was taken in 1915...A mock battle was staged, with firecrackers for ammunition...... Photograph from Mrs. Doreen Magnum of Jonson Street.”(names changed)

4.5.4 Informal Interview with Local Artist (Report 12)

The Town had no specialist Art Gallery, but the two Councils had provided a bright new arts and crafts centre in their joint venture library building. The centre contained several paintings, and was staffed on a rostered basis by interested residents. I interviewed one of these people, a person (BD) recognized locally as an artist, during the first visit.

This respondent was unexpectedly unresponsive to the opening question, “How do people think about the river?” Hardly seeming to understand what I meant, the Artist volunteered that art is what you do without thinking about it. The conversation then became so non-committal that I finally asked in desperation, “What sort of painting do you do?” At that, the Artist led me around towards the back of the centre, to a pair of quite small pictures of a sugar bowl and two coffee cups. Along the way I caught sight of the other pictures on display. In general, they seemed to be based on cubism and other European art genres. Some also involved a use of unusual materials, including fabrics. They all appeared to be reasonably well-executed works in a
technical sense, but lacking any real inventiveness or relationship with the district. There were no Aboriginal works.

BD's interest in the conversation centred on past and future places of personal exhibition, all of which were outside the district. When asked about painting the river, the respondent said it formed part of the landscape phase that everyone went through, and then mentioned the name of a local woman who specialised in landscapes but had recently moved to Lismore.

The Artist said I should have come a month earlier, because the Town show, held in May, included an art show. There were only five artists in Town, but plenty came in from elsewhere for that event. The Shire had run an exhibition called "The River", also about a month ago. The Artist took me back to the paintings to show me one of the entries in this exhibition, which might have been the winner. It had apparently been inspired by a flood two or three years earlier, but if so it was a strange depiction. In the first place, it showed the flood as a catastrophe, in contrast to most opinions I had received from other residents, who had seemed to consider it as a benign nuisance at worst. In the second, it was a close imitation of a classical Japanese woodcut (Hokusai's "The Boat") that shows a huge white-crested wave about to engulf a completely dwarfed longboat. The only apparent differences were that the boat was missing and the palette was red rather than the blue-black of the Japanese model.

After giving me the names of a half dozen other artists, BD said the Town was a sporty place for men and women, surrounded half by intensive farming and half by wheat and "grainy things" and cows. The industries in the Town, such as agricultural machinery and welding and tyres, were all growing.

4.5.5 A Local Art Exhibition (Report 26)

At a later phase of the fieldwork, I was invited by one of the wealthier residents of the Town to attend the opening of an art exhibition at the new local library.
The library building had three major rooms, the first being the Library itself, the second the Tourist Information Centre where I had gone on the first morning in Town, and the third the Arts and Crafts/Gallery section where I had spoken to the Artist. They surrounded a spacious foyer that had double doors opening onto a large covered porch. The exhibition was staged in the foyer.

I turned up about ten minutes after the starting time, to find the function already in full swing. The entry porch and the foyer were both crowded, and four artists were on show. The first was the person who had invited me to attend, and a second was a younger member of the same family. The other two were out-of-town men who presented unremarkable forms of sculpture not far removed from advanced craftwork, in the form of timber artefacts such as small portable writing desks.

The person who had invited me was exhibiting a series of fairly highly coloured still life pictures of floral settings. They were conventional in European style and content, although certainly well painted technically. They bore relatively modest prices, some with red stickers already attached. It later turned out during conversation that friends had bought some of these sold items, and perhaps the transactions were partly a form of gift exchange in which the gift was recognition.

In contrast, the younger family member’s timber sculptures occupying the centre of the lobby were quite confronting. They made no bones about strong biological subjects in an indirect style that could be politely ignored and therefore was, but only just. While they seemed to be very well executed with high finishes, another family member told me later that the Sculptor intuitively saw the final result in the raw tree part, which was then attacked with a chainsaw. I was also told that the Sculptor had travelled alone in Vietnam a few years previously, and no longer lived in the Town.

The Sculptor was lost in a group of friends in a burst of boisterous local adulation. After touring the exhibits, I moved out to the porch for a breath of fresh air and saw a group of well-dressed men off to one side. They were standing around a respondent I term the senior water user representative (AA), who seemed to be holding court.
4.5.6 The Local Newspaper

As indicated earlier the district was serviced by a local newspaper, apparently not one of a chain but with an owner/publisher/editor who lived in the Town as one of its wealthier residents. The newspaper was published weekly and contained a number of inserts, each devoted to an adjacent but different district, possibly as a result of takeovers in the past. The inserts were mainly concerned with agricultural or farm machinery issues, but the main local paper dealt with a broader range of district concerns. I examined thirteen weekly copies issued during the fieldwork period in detail, reviewing about 300 articles. The distribution of topics is shown in Table 2 on the next page.

Items 6 and 7 taken together indicated that stories about local "personalities" amounted to over 12% of the total, lifting this combined category to second place in frequency.

An idea of the approach taken to these various topics may be gained from the following front-page headlines, each item coming from a separate edition:

- School Chasing Cool 120 Grand and Who's Going To Open Our New Library, ... And Whose Names (If Any) Should Be On The Plaque;
- We All Live In One Community and Hot Bread Shop Open Next Week;
- Challenge For Debate: Our ... Search For The Missing Candidates Of (a local electorate); The Man With The Golden Arm, and Governor Agrees To Start Spring Festival Duck Race;
- Gourmet Day Just Delicious! and Plans Lodged For New Supermarket;
- Bloody Idiots! 22 Drink-Drivers In Court After B And S;
- We've Had Enough: Angry Victims Gather At Court, and Festival Gets Into Top Gear;
- Whodunnit? Someone Must Know Who Torched The Old Grandstand;
- Are We Ready For High Rise?
### TABLE 2 – DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL NEWSPAPER TOPICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Local events, either past or forthcoming.</td>
<td>16 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agricultural topics.</td>
<td>8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Imported political articles, generally of State political interest.</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Educational topics of all kinds, including school news, articles about pupils and articles about parent difficulties.</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Regional economic development.</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Awards given to locals by external agencies.</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Local identity story, e.g. as unrewarded hero.</td>
<td>6.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Local crime.</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Locally generated political articles.</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Environment.</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Entertainment and recreation (other than a regular film column).</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Council commentaries.</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Communication and transport.</td>
<td>4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Health infrastructure.</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. GST-related</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Warnings of various kinds, e.g. about impending fire season, road safety etc.</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Electric power difficulties.</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Infrastructure generally.</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Accidents, usually on the road.</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Government Departments as community educators.</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. The Village and The Hamlet.</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of editorial content are shown in Exhibit 3 on the next page. It appears from these newspaper statistics and material that most of the content was concerned only with district matters. The range of topics was diverse and eclectic, the “heroism” of various community members received frequent mention, and the tone of the paper was ironic and idiosyncratic.
EXHIBIT 3

DISTRICT NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL CONTENT AND TYPICAL COMMENT

May 20, 1998: an open letter to Our Member
About school air-conditioning. "Keep your peepers shut for two minutes and you'll feel the heat searing your eyeballs ... we know that you've been beavering away quietly (as is your wont) with the relevant Biro jockeys in their (air-conditioned) offices, albeit without much success ... Tony old mate, we're about to have an election."

May 27, 1998: amalgamation the real answer?:
About town and Shire Council another nation. "The real issue is liaison and communication - or lack of it - between Shire and Town ... He (one of the Alderman) says that he doesn't feel amalgamation is the answer, but the notion of a town of 5000 and the Shire of 2900 being served by two Councils does seem ludicrous when one local authority seems adequate for places far bigger - in terms of area and population ... the issues are far too important to be subject to the whims of petty empire builders and egos. In spite of the "town versus country" views of some councillors, most of us consider that we live in one community with similar aims and objectives. We're not here to gain an advantage over country cousins or vice versa, we're here for the common good."

June 3, 1998: would you vote for any of 'em?:
About politicians in the state. "Why would you vote for the National Party mythic (Candidate) to continue as member for (the local electorate). ... Think Coalition and some of these names are likely to spring to mind: ... Minister A: minister for prisoner escapes and duck shoving the blame onto someone else. His motto: the buck stops with someone else. Minister B: the minister for fine dining and snouts in troughs. His motto: charge it to the government. Ministers C had to fall on his sword after his wife claimed ministers were conducting liaisons on the government expense-account. His motto: that's my affair. Minister D: concealed his relationship with a murdered prostitute. His motto: she was just a family friend. Minister E: minister for getting her foot stuck in the mouth. Forced to apologise not once but twice to Parliament. Minister F: his motto: a two-fingered salute to the people of the State. ... But just look at what he's (the National Party candidate) up against: a One Nation candidate without experience, a couple of well-meaning misguided independents, an Australia Reform Party (whatever that is) man and ... a 26 year-old unemployed inner-city dwelling secretary, a (Labour Party) apparatchik who needs a map and compass to even find the electorate ... What else can we say? You make up your own minds. "
4.6 Responses to the Opening Question

Many respondents did not answer my opening question ("what you think of the river?") directly, but turned immediately to other topics. A few others responded as though they had been asked about the broader environment rather than specifically about the river. The reason may have been that the fieldwork programme took place during in the flood phase of the flood-drought cycle (51.43), leaving the subject of minimal river flow, the only major environmental issue in the district, as a non-critical topic at the time. I noted that observations on the broader issue of the environment were not unrelievedly negative; for example, while the sole environmental poem in The Writing Competition was negatively phrased (35.5), a long prose article on running through the forest was substantially otherwise (35.9). The writer in that case seemed to see and enjoy the countryside simply as it was. However, the few specific responses I received show no significant trend and are set out below.

The Second Shopkeeper replied that the river belonged to everyone, to the nation (3.1). The First Aboriginal Respondent BT said there wasn't much to say about it, but went on immediately to show that the river was known in detail, as it stood and as it flowed (8.2, 8.3), in an almost unconscious but not forgotten fashion, part of BT's ever-present lifeworld. However, to the Aboriginal Spokesman BU it was a matter of cultural technology (ie a transport vehicle for trading) and a boundary to the residues of tribal land. Its intrinsic mobilities was a problem, but an understandable natural one (8.13). Pakeha Lagoon held religious significance for him (8.15), but not primarily because it was part of the river system.

To the Village Postmistress the river was primarily a source of contention in its potential for others to exert manipulative dominance (10.3). As a secondary issue, it was a recreational facility (10.4) for a small settlement of people to whom society was not generous. In this respect it may have been a site for communal accidental encounter (cf Liepins) as well as joint enjoyment.

To the Catchment Committee Member AJ the river was a collection of social
inventions developed for the purposes of control (11.8), despite the fact that AJ was one of only two people encountered during the fieldwork who were deeply familiar with the biophysical content of the river. This respondent went on to say explicitly that the river was an abstract construct for many people, thought of only in terms of self-interest (11.29).

For the Artist BD, the river might as well not have existed at all (12.4). For local artistic purposes, it was either a technical means (4.6) rather than a subject in itself, or positively misrepresented as far as available evidence indicated (12.7), except in the sense that it may have been generally genuinely perceived as a threat (4.8).

The senior water user representative AA was extensively aware of the river as a resource (14.31) and in symbolic terms ("we're a river town as distinct from a non-river town") (14.34, 14.36), although the exact nature of the symbolism was somewhat unclear. But AA was not unclear about its local specifics (14.5), had not seen any deterioration over the long term (14.38), and had extensive though incomplete (14.59) scientific data available on that score (14.42, 14.44, 14.55). Carp was the only problem in AA's eyes (14.45). In any case, AA read the river as an overall equation between resource usage and environmental quality (14.98).

The spouse CX of respondent BE, raised in the town on the banks of the river, saw it aesthetically (19.23). Drawing on youthful memories, CX had accepted the river into part of the personal life world. At first I had thought that CX had seen it as a mythical boundary (19.23), but that impression later turned out to be wrong (39.13). One of the first Village group members recalled how deep the water had been below the Town bridge before the Village Weir had been constructed. The grazier BH, also raised on the river's edge, talked about it firstly in economic terms (20.7), and only later (and then offhandedly) in aesthetic terms (20.14). Later also, the Aboriginal Teacher Aide AI remembered life as a child by its banks as one of the happiest times of life (49.3), in an aesthetic way similar to CX's recollection. The Toastmaster president was indignant at the aesthetic damage she perceived (71.7).

A local fisherman BJ, the first of two I interviewed, knew the river in detail (21.9), but actively, not passively as the first aboriginal respondent BT had seen it. It was also a
recreational facility, or so BI said, for the vast majority of town residents (21.79), although I saw no confirmatory evidence. The river is “clean”, but only “technically” (21.26), and current forms of weir operation are destroying its banks (21.33). Both local fishermen reported the river running backwards when irrigation demand was high (5.16, 21.10).

The first trade education centre principal/district manager (not CN) saw the river as not particularly adversely affected locally (28.7). For the reportedly environmentally minded schoolteacher CV it was damaged, but by carp not industry (57.2).

The Aboriginal teacher aide AI saw Pakeha Lagoon as the significant river issue (28.11) to the exclusion of all others. That part of the river was religious, and in contrast the rest did not matter.

4.7 The Public Water Story

4.7.1 The Opening Interview (Report 14)

This story begins with an interview of the senior water user representative mentioned in section 4.5.5 (respondent AA). Like several other people I encountered, AA had come to the district about a quarter of a century earlier, and had watched the Town develop from a relatively stable backwater into a new vigorous economic entity.

The respondent extolled the virtues of the introduction of intensive water use into the district as the mainspring of general community economic and social progress, pointing to:

- the introduction of a Community Representative Panel (CRP), established by Government to draw the district community into a form of participation (14.110 -- 14.116);
- a reportedly high level of government-community interaction on water matters
the creativity of Landcare activity in the district (14.93);

- the high level of environmental responsibility exercised by intensive water users (14.98);

- the long term satisfactory management of the district water scene by locals (by which he seemed to mean the water users themselves) (14.109);

- the development of a comprehensive strategy for water use in the district (14.63, 14.112); and

- the incipient development of a computer-based model through which all parties, including the water users’ association in conjunction with Government, would be able to control stream flows and take-offs optimally (14.120 -- 14.130).

Nevertheless AA appreciated that the government would have the final say: “Well, he who has the gold makes the rules. That's the golden rule isn't it? The Departments are still the regulators and they have the final say. It's a political government imperative, type of thing.” (14.132). AA conceded in an aside (14.114) that nobody understood the Community Representative Panel process very well, and that it was proceeding slowly. The respondent also acknowledged that pest control through spraying might have caused problems from time to time, although not to the extent sometimes claimed by members of the public. AA saw the problem coming under control as progressive improvements in biological control processes appeared (14.140).

The overall tone of AA’s evidence was one of optimism, pointing towards a rosy future where economic benefits would arrive for all as a result of effective collaboration between Government and water users, in a context of ever-improving technology. AA consistently indicated that, wherever problems might continue, the water users were and would be essentially on top of them. When I made an adverse suggestion (based on Albury-Wodonga experience) that the computer-based system might prove ultimately unworkable, AA seemed reluctant to agree (14.123 -- 14.126), although the respondent complained about the lateness of the system’s delivery and failures of government agencies to keep to promised timetables.
4.7.2 The Community Reference Panel Meeting (Reports 50 and 51)

I attended a formal meeting of the Community Reference Panel with senior policy bureaucrats, held over two days in a large room at a Town hotel.

The “presentation-mode” layout of the room was a quasi-lecturing arrangement in which standing principal speakers addressed audience members whose seating half-faced the front, leaving only sideways views of other participants (51.2).

The facilitator AB introduced a number of bureaucrats more senior than those the community representatives were apparently used to meeting (51.9). Their presence as observers immediately indicated that the meeting was not routine, but of considerable interest to higher levels of both State Governments. (It transpired that it was taking place simultaneously with a meeting of State Ministers in one of the capital cities (51.32). The two meetings were intended to interconnect, with a press release by the Ministers to be issued at the end of the two days. As the meeting progressed, it became evident that the agencies intended the press release to include an announcement of an agreement by the water users to a new plan for reduced water allocations.) Other introduced people included representatives of other agencies interested in the environment in general but not primarily in water management, and myself as an interested University researcher.

The facilitator next indicated that face-to-face contact between senior Government and district representatives in the Community Representative Panel context had been uncommon. Although the Panel had existed for three years, a meeting had not been held for nine months. It also became evident, to a much stronger degree than AA had indicated, that the role of the water users in the interaction process had not been clearly defined.

The facilitator went on to say that the group was no doubt “tired”. It had faced conflict at the start of its three years of life but had decided not to resolve that conflict, merely to agree to “accommodate” it. AB stated that the die for the meeting had been cast when the agency officers had briefed the consultant beforehand, a remark that
signalled to me that the meeting itself might be intended as no more than a ritual camouflage of a fait accompli.

The facilitator reminded the gathering that a number of recommendations had been made at the last meeting. The flow management plan, which was the basis of the computer-based model previously mentioned by respondent AA, would no longer address water quality. It would be confined to quantity only, except where the Technical Advisory Panel (apparently a sub-committee of the Community Representative Panel, but more directly under agency control) indicated that a relationship between quality and quantity could be found. In other words, the problems I had expressed about large-scale computer models to AA (see section 4.6.1) were beginning to show themselves. The facilitator also mentioned the impending preparation of a Social Assessment Technical Report, but I heard nothing more about this report during the balance of the fieldwork period.

The meeting continued with a senior State policy officer (AC) presenting a series of slides. The first eleven were basically concerned with recapitulations of past statements, expressions of goals for future efforts, and agenda statements for the present meeting. The twelfth, however, landed in the meeting like a bombshell. It contained two statements (51.26):

- There would be unacceptable adverse long-term ecological impacts from current water use levels, particularly at the end-of-system; and
- The environmental impact of current water use had not become fully evident.

From here on it became plain that a majority of the community representatives, especially the verbally active ones, were water users. These people burst into uproar, since both Slide 12 statements apparently flew in the face of all they believed they had been led to understand. Two were immediately on their feet, asking whether the Reference Panel would be able to continue meeting in the face of such statements. However AC's answer was that governments had to make these decisions, even though they might seem to subvert the Panel's role in doing so. The facilitator
appealed to the community representatives to wait before coming to a conclusion, shocked though they might be at something coming out of the blue.

After morning tea, and the restoration of a calm that was really more like a silent seething, the meeting moved on to presentations of technical reports by middle range technical officers. The two topics presented concerned the ecological status of the river, and its general hydrological capabilities. In the first case, the two ecologists had only had an opportunity to inspect the river within the preceding 12 months, a period of relatively high flood time. They were therefore unable to make firm predictions of the condition of the river's ecology during other parts of the flood-drought cycle. In the second case it became abundantly evident that enough data for satisfactory input into hydrological statistical modelling was not available. Again the material available had been collected over too short a period. At least a few of the committee members had some familiarity with hydrological principles, and the presenter was successfully challenged about these inadequacies. As a general point, some of the presenters merely lacked adequate presentation skills, but at least one also appeared to speak in a patronising way to the committee members, apparently taking a cue from AC's earlier insistence that the government would move in the direction indicated with or without committee members' agreement.

At the end of the first day the agencies held a dinner in a Town motel. Practically no discussion of the day's events occurred at the table where I sat, although alcohol flowed freely and the chance to express dissatisfaction was available. However, it became evident during the second day, as discussion on the draft press release to be put the Ministers took place, that some kind of change had occurred overnight in agency thinking. They no longer seemed fixed on the tentative wording they had been insisting on at the end of the previous day, and were now a little more malleable.

The morning of the second day was taken up with a further technical presentation, this time on farm economics. A small agency task group had been set up to model a typical farm's typical accounting statements. The agency representatives again came under criticism from water users, who considered that the interim model was not sufficiently practical in, for example, the selection of crop blends. It seemed even to me that the matter was being approached quite primitively. For my part, I thought it
was suboptimal in not including the value of water rights as a farm asset. In the end the agencies admitted that this process, like the hydrological work, was also not yet fully developed, and the discussion on it was finally abandoned just before lunch.

After lunch, the executive officer of the water users association gave a lengthy slide presentation on general district development. In the course of his talk he mentioned that, if commodity prices for the present intensive water using agricultural product fell below sustainable levels, district farmers would simply move to a new intensive crop. The district's massive water resource would still be available to them.

From this point forward, the meeting moved to a quiet ending, with its last phases taken up by yet another inconclusive re-draft of the press release. The local Aboriginal and the more distantly based conservation representatives attempted to have issues of interest to them considered during the closing phases, but were ignored to all intents and purposes (one of the Aboriginal representatives had left in barely-disguised disgust at lunchtime on the first day). Later in the day I spoke again to AA, who told me that the agencies' "betrayal" would be considered at the water user organization's board meeting in a few days time. A vigorous response could be expected, most probably through direct approaches to local politicians.

4.7.3 Other Government-Sponsored Meetings

A few days later I attended a meeting of the Aboriginal Reference Panel mentioned by the Community Reference Panel facilitator in a different town just outside the district (Report 52). The venue was lower in quality, and the chairman/facilitator was a lower ranking bureaucrat (AD) who had in fact retired but had returned to work, presumably on a contract basis. Both AD and the assistant facilitator or secretary AE were evidently English, more than usually unfamiliar with the culture they were dealing with. The meeting suffered a considerable setback when AF, the most dominant elder present, claimed to have been slighted by AD in a cultural matter at the Community Reference Panel meeting. The meeting really failed to recover from this incident, but after the formal meeting had closed the facilitator introduced the water quality officer from the Catchment Management Association (AG), who renewed a request for new
Aboriginal representatives for the Catchment Management Committee. This young woman seemed to establish a solid rapport immediately with the Aboriginal audience. To me, the reasons for this rapport were that she showed no signs of paternalism in her presentation method, had a detailed knowledge and deep concern about river water that resonated with the audience, and (finally) sat down and spoke to her listeners face-to-face.

On the following day I attended a workshop organized by one of the State water agencies in yet another distant town (Report 53). The audience was drawn from a broader constituency than the Community Reference Panel, and included a few people who had driven from the adjacent State for several hours to be there. The meeting was intended to be a trial dialogue sponsored by the community development branch of the particular agency. Its aims were to explore a way forward in view of community disenchantment at slow water management progress, and to look for the best form of support for community development at local, regional and State levels.

The meeting lasted for half a day, and took the form of a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) analysis, for the purposes of which the meeting audience was broken into groups of 8 people. A strong-minded facilitator drove the tight timeframe quite stringently, as a consequence of which it seemed to me that the process had little chance of being creative. The emphasis on time and process limited audience inputs to little more than commonly voiced complaints. These inputs were taken away for further processing elsewhere, with the process to be used not stated.

4.7.4 The Water Users Meeting (Report 58)

Later on in the main visit I was able to attend a meeting of the water user association, called to review a proposal from State agencies about new methods for administering water allocations. This meeting was remarkable on a number of grounds. Firstly, the changes proposed by the agencies appeared to be extremely complicated. Secondly, the application of the attendees to these complications was impressive. Some appeared to have come straight from the fields and may well have been tired, but all applied considerable effort and intelligence to the issues at hand. Thirdly, it seemed
to me that the complications added significantly to the standing of the association's executive officer, who appeared to be the only person on top of the matter and was thus placed in a teaching role, with all skills and authoritativeness that role entailed. Finally, and perhaps most disquietingly, the meeting seemed to me to carry a strong assertion of rights to the whole of the river's water, with even the requirements of towns pushed to an unfortunately necessary but certainly secondary position.

4.7.5 Progression of the Debate (Report A 10)

A year later I went back to the district to see what had transpired, fully expecting the water users to have launched into a full-scale conflict with the agencies that may have ended by the time I returned. Instead, very little seemed to have changed in principle. The agencies from one of the States had managed to fragment the overall catchment problem. Now each tributary to the river system was to be treated separately, requiring its own detailed hydrological database. Each tributary situation was to be resolved in sequence before moving on to the next, starting at the uppermost end of the catchment and proceeding downstream from there. The hydrological information for each of the tributaries was as unknown as it had been on a larger scale a year previously, and the impasse seemed to have taken on an even stronger form of entrenchment on both sides.

The Public Water story set out in this section deals only with the interactions between State agencies, the water users (primarily) and other community members (secondarily or worse). Canberra-based agencies were not encountered in the district as primary actors in this story. However, I include a comment made to me by a Canberra-based bureaucrat (AH) during the interval between the pilot visits and the main visit. Commenting on public participation in the Basin, this respondent stated that it was a pretty simple matter really -- "if you went and spent an afternoon with them and filled them in properly, they then came around quite well" (37.6). AH also informed me that the Murray Darling Basin Commission "had met with its Community Advisory Council and had emerged surprised at the magnitude and complexity of the public response picture .... and how little it knew about these things. In particular, the differences in attitudes and .... culture in different parts of
the catchment came as a surprise" (37.3). The respondent was, excited at the time at the possibility that demographic information on property ownership and turnovers might provide new forms of community understanding for the Commission. In a much later encounter with another Canberra-based respondent (not recorded in the narratives), I learnt that in fact the Commission had not met with its Community Advisory Council for a period of nine years prior to that meeting.

4.7.6 Public Water Story Summary

The Public Water story describes a situation in which State water management agencies and water users had sought to resolve a situation that time seemed to show as being almost intractable in practical terms. Both main actor groups appeared to take up entrenched positions, and neither showed any sign of willingness to retreat. For each, a sharp change in policy might have produced a considerable impact on its standing. For the agencies such an action would have meant great loss of face (one agency in particular was reputed to have caused the original major difficulties with water allocations by distributing licenses equivalent to about 150 percent of the river system’s capabilities). For the water users, a retreat would have caused great loss of income, probably a loss of individual farm viability and eventually a loss in district economic sustainability. For people less interested in economic outcomes, such as Aboriginals and conservationists, such an outcome may have been a primary preference, but in practice both groups had little say in the matter.

Progress as far as the agencies were concerned seemed to occur during the first three visits. One respondent during a main visit meeting remarked that environmental flows were slowly creeping up (53.23). The apparent acceptance by the agencies of the need for a degree of change that seemed to occur overnight at the Committee Reference Panel meeting appeared to be another straw in the same wind of slow change. However, the strong stances re-encountered during the final visit a year later seemed to have moved progress away from possibilities of gradual change, back to entrenchment in defence of “principles”.
4.8 The Public Race Story

4.8.1 The Beginning

The Aboriginal Reference Panel meeting description in section 4.7.3 is as much part of the Public Race story as it is of the Public Water story, but is not the best starting point for it. A better beginning lies in a so-called “race riot” incident that occurred in 1987, mentioned in passing during one of the pilot visits and reported in several issues of the local paper at the time of the event (Report 38, Parts A, B and C).

The riot was in fact a fight that occurred in a lower-grade hotel in the Town. A convoy of Aboriginal men had driven into Town around noon on a Saturday and set upon white customers, inflicting significant injury on at least one. The event aroused considerable passion amongst white social leaders. The Town mayor was reported as saying the Town “has been written up as a racist town but we all know that it isn’t” and “I've heard many people say they (the police) should have fired a few shots in the air” (38.7). He also said that the Aboriginal Hamlet “is a government-sponsored breeding ground for violence” (38.5). The Town Council and other community representatives met in concert to address the matter, but nothing seemed to flow from this initiative (38.9).

The police later charged a number of people from across the river, most from the Hamlet, a few from the Village, and some from a town about 100 miles away, but no charges seem to have been taken ultimately to court. The incident led to a government investigation into conditions in the Hamlet.

4.8.2 The Investigation (Report 38, Part D)

In section 4.4.4, I mentioned that conditions in the Hamlet had been investigated in the late 1980s. The Investigator, appointed by the state government and working in and about 1988, had found that living conditions in the Village were “unacceptably
poor”. He concluded that “a degree of racial discrimination had resulted in the people of the Village being disadvantaged.” The ensuing report was a catalogue of harsh conditions and governmental failure, with probably the most central physical problem being the lack of water supply. An earlier academic investigator had found the most appalling shortcoming to lie in the failure to purchase readily available good quality bore water to maintain the supply. The later Investigator now added grimly, “eighteen years later, little substantive progress has been made” (38.17).

The lack of water had led to other serious problems. For example, a sewerage scheme had been thought to be impossible, despite the fact that raw sewage had been seen ponded on the ground adjacent to living and playing areas. The community had obtained money for a pre-school but the relevant Shire Council (a distant one, with headquarters about a hundred and twenty kilometres away) had refused the building application because water had been unavailable.

These had not been the only physical problems. The unsealed state of roads connecting the Hamlet to shopping, educational and health facilities had also been a major problem. The inability or unwillingness of relevant authorities to express the living patterns of Aboriginal home life in housing design had been another. The nature of government-imposed arrangements for funding housing repairs had been a third. In the Investigator’s opinion, no rent should have been charged on any housing in the Hamlet, so bad had the general conditions become (38.19).

The whole of the Investigator’s report told a sorry tale of abandonment and dereliction on the part of governmental agencies. It showed a wish not to be involved on the part of the distant Council camouflaged by a pretence that the Hamlet was on private property. It also highlighted the inability of the local untrained Aboriginal people to cope with white man’s rules or to lobby effectively. In one attempt to deal with these rules, a matter of improvement of road access to the Hamlet, the community had claimed racial discrimination against the relevant State’s Department of Highways, saying “were we a white community, the 7 km..... would long ago have been sealed”.

* This and other quotations drawn from reports in this section and section 4.6.1 come from documents identified in the confidential package passed to this thesis’ assessors. The documents are not listed in the Bibliography.
The Department had settled, agreeing to provide $800,000 to the Shire Council to seal the road, but five years later less than half had been finished. The Investigator concluded, “No explanation has been offered for this neglect” (38.20).

Treatment of the matter by government at all levels had been insensitive and uncaring. Human rights had been ignored. The situation had persisted for decades, despite authoritative attention being often been drawn to it. The State Education Department had inexplicably tolerated unsatisfactory secondary schooling facilities for Aboriginal children for years in the Village. The result had been severe discrimination against the Aboriginal students attending school in the Town and a high drop-out rate. The State Education Department had permitted the Town’s public High School to become overtly racist towards Aboriginal children, contributing in major part to racial tensions, unhappiness and stress.

Inter-governmental conflicts on policy and funding responsibilities had been a fundamental and direct cause of these conditions. The Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs in particular had failed in its obligations. Despite considerable dispute, the various levels of government had made little attempt to clarify or define responsibility for the delivery of essential services to the Hamlet. No government authority had provided adequate information, consulted the community effectively or coordinated the three tiers of government in the delivery of services to it. The State Department responsible for Aboriginal affairs had abdicated its responsibilities, and the agency responsible for Aboriginal development had pursued policies that directly impeded and obstructed the community’s interests.

As a consequence of this investigation, promises had been made to provide a secondary school in the nearby Village together with a trade educational facility, replacement houses at the Hamlet, bitumen for the last stretch of road to the Hamlet, new water supply and sewerage systems, and programs to build good relations locally. However, the Investigator had been unable to feel confident on a number of other issues. These included the supply of sufficient housing, house maintenance, a health clinic and staff, an adequate pre-school, the sealing of internal roads, and maintenance of the roads and sewerage systems.
Ten years after his initial Inquiry, probably around the time of my first pilot visits, the Investigator returned to the Hamlet to find that very few if any of his recommendations had been put into effect, particularly the promises listed above. He was vocal in his criticism of the lack of progress and work then seemed to have started, but in a fairly lethargic way.

4.8.3 Final Observed Position (Report A13)

Between the main and last visits I saw metropolitan press reports that the Village high school was being credited with a very high truancy rate. When I returned for the Aftermath visit, I learnt that the State Premier had recently visited the district following these newspaper reports, and possibly also in response to comments from other sources that the problem lay in poor handling of Aboriginal matters in the district. As an immediate consequence, a co-ordination officer had been appointed immediately on a three-year term to deal with the multiple conflicts between the (presumably still about 20) government agencies involved in administration of the Hamlet.

I met this person, a consultant from a background associated with town planning/community development rather than the Public Service, during my final visit. The consultant was under the control of the Premiers Department regional office at the nearest State regional centre, and had been in place for about six months. At least two meetings had been called with the multiplicity of agencies involved in the Hamlet’s management. The attendance at the first had been encouraging, with the majority of the agencies in attendance, but the second had produced only a small number of attendees (A6.1).

The consultant did not seem to be aware of the possible significance of this lower attendance, which from my experience I interpreted to mean that the agencies had come to the first meeting primarily because they felt they had to in order to see what was intended. However, they may now have felt that the heat was off, and at the best believed that they no longer had any necessity to be involved. At the worst, they may
have been starting to resist the organizational invasion threatened through the consultant.

From another respondent I learned that the coordination consultant had produced a network diagram showing the organizational relationships for the Hamlet that either did or should be in operation (perhaps both). This respondent likened the diagram to the "cats cradle" picture produced by one of the political parties describing its plan for a Clever Country (A 12.6).

4.9 The Catchment Management Story

4.9.1 Initial Contact

During the first pilot visit I went to the joint Landcare and Catchment Management Association office for a list of potential Association and Landcare contacts (Report 7). At that time the office seemed to be occupied by a number of young people operating without adequately experienced technical supervision. The Landcare coordinator was a fresh graduate on a National Heritage Trust contract and not a local. The executive officer of the Catchment Management Association, who appeared to have some local connections, had public relations skills and was (I was later informed) from a political advisory background (11.35). The main source of local knowledge lay with the administrative assistant, who seemed to occupy a position of unusual centrality in office activities as a result. With respect to Landcare members, the administrative assistant made a remark (enigmatic to me at the time, and not subsequently explained) that the people whose names I sought "do not always want to be identified" (7.4). A water quality officer (a man at this early stage) was also in place, and later came to have a more central role in Catchment Management Association activities, but I saw him only fleetingly at the time of this first visit.
4.9.2 First Committee Member Interview (Report 11)

I held a long unstructured interview with a Catchment Committee member (AJ) shortly after the first office contact. According to this respondent, the intensive water use industry was bending over backwards environmentally, e.g. in the introduction of tailwater dams. Careless crop dusters were now the only problem. Intensive water use producers were improving their environmental controls. Helio was getting on top of pesticides, but a hitherto promising form of genetic control was not turning out to be as successful as expected. Predatory biology, harbouring and sacrificial crop techniques might now be necessary, and might be about to start in the Ord River (11.16).

This respondent was a local Landcare office holder, and provided a detailed description of activities in that arena. Initially individuals in the Landcare group had wanted cash to plant trees. Projects had since expanded, but so had controls. The Commonwealth now looked only to groups rather than individuals. As a result, the grants went to catchment groups, and more to the State than to local groups, i.e. to State-associated or State cooperative projects. Some of the Departmental projects were “bulk” in nature and up to $1 to $2 million in value (11.20).

The selection task for project funding went first through a regional assessment panel, then through a State assessment panel, then to the State Minister. The proposal format was voluminous, “like a Tax Pack”. Firstly projects had to be thought up, then tested to fit in with the catchment strategy, then perhaps tailored for a better fit. Fairly detailed planning was required, firstly by Council, then with the farmers contributing input, and finally by the Council again for implementation. But the process was not always straightforward. An appropriate method had yet to be developed in AJ’s opinion (11.21).

AJ cited the case of a local remnant vegetation management plan. The money to put it together had been knitted into local Council planning, but Council had refused to give the money unless the community agreed. Through consciousness-raising via meetings, public consultation provided the mandate but then the money situation had changed and further funding promises had been needed to get it back into Council
planning (11.22). All this was fitted into the catchment strategy, but had been sent back by the main State agency involved. It had turned out that this year’s grants were required by the Federal government to have “substantial on-ground content”, and the Landcare group had not been ready for this. The State coordinators gave only one week for the group to produce twelve people prepared to set aside portions of land to collaborate with the Council. “Jerrying up” agreements would blow the chance. The project missed out on the first round (it succeeded on the second), and AJ had not been able to discover the reason but had begun to ring around more broadly to uncover it. It turned out that the “bucket of money” the project was included in was very important. The project had been put into a bush care category with many others around the State. The categories had been sorted into an alphabetical list without any real prioritisation, and the Federal Minister had then rejected the whole list at first sight because the first item had become an arboretum (for a very distant Council). The project ultimately failed to gain funding due to lack of the twelve-farmer agreement problem just described (11.22 – 11.23).

The respondent then turned to the regional assessment panels. The State people had a fair bit of say in that process. There were six catchments involved, and the first step was to go through all projects to decide on the strategic fit. If insufficient funds were available, some of the projects would be dropped, not via formal cost-benefit analyses but through agreement/negotiation (11.25).

The Landcare coordinator for the district was being employed on a National Heritage Trust grant to one of the district’s Landcare groups. The State Government had recently committed to amalgamating Landcare and Catchment committees, but the details were not clear at this stage (11.19).

With respect to the Catchment Management Association and the Catchment Committee, AJ said that initially it had produced high hopes that it might act as a fount of wisdom, but not enough had happened except “words on paper”. It was becoming increasingly fragmented because of a lack of achievement and perhaps a lack of resources (11.11).
The respondent had just spent a week chasing it all up. He was not a regional assessment committee delegate, but felt strongly about catchment work (11.26). The respondent could be involved only because his wife worked and he was not dependent on his own earnings (11.5). (At that stage of the conversation, his wife intervened to say that the respondent’s work was very important because Australia is a dry country and she had an environmental interest. She took the view that without community you had nothing (11.12).)

AJ went on to say that the catchment plan was now up. Its production had been a time consuming experience, working with the relevant State agency, with “lots to read”. Last year the Catchment Committee had opted out of drawing administrative services from the relevant State agency and had employed its own staff, which had led to tensions (11.17). The respondent was not sure how the money for the joint office I visited had been arranged, because management (i.e. the Executive Committee, a subgroup of the Catchment Management Association Committee) had kept the matter to itself (11.18). Management communication in relation to the Committee as a whole had not been as open as it was now, but ironically there was not as open a line of general communication as before. Meetings now had a fixed agenda characterized by reports, with not enough real feedback happening and very little discussion of significant issues (11.33). An earlier coordinator had been highly interactive with the committee in developing points of view, with meetings sometimes taking two days, and had been highly efficient in other ways, but now there was a whole bureaucracy and a fence had risen between management and the committee (11.34).

I asked how the Executive Committee had been formed. Was the process set out in Articles of Association or the like? The respondent didn’t know and suggested I ask at the office. Getting hold of the money was the big problem (11.36). Some of the Catchment Committee projects were big and some small, bigness being measured in money terms. A water quality monitoring strategy had been developed at a cost of $30,000. Other projects included pesticide, land use, and fertilizer audits, with a total price tag of about $100,000 (11.14). The sources of funding were the National Landcare Program and the National Heritage Trust.
Catchment Committee membership was decided by the State and, in the district case, included Shire representatives (the respondent was one because of his Landcare connection), urban centre representatives, people from Local Government, representatives from relevant Departments, and the coordinator. The chairman had been elected by the Committee three years ago and had been the only candidate. It was almost a group consensus. When I asked whether it had been an active or passive consensus, meaning power seeking or equilibrium seeking, he said it had been both.

The Committee was generally cooperative because of the common interest in the environment, but introduction of any proposals for water allocation caused the most dissension. Committee operation was cumbersome because of its thirty-five members, and a facilitator would be useful. There were no subcommittees (11.40).

In this respondent's opinion, the personal qualifications of the water quality officer were critical. He/she needed to be good with both computer and communication skills. The respondent had been involved in that selection process, and had made sure that those criteria were satisfied, but was by no means certain they would have been otherwise (11.38).

About half of the committee came from a tertiary base and the other from successful farming families. Six to nine people were showing the same degree of commitment as AJ. Lots of people were on the lookout for the big stick, particularly water users. The respondent saw his professional and administrative experience and education as tools for dealing with the bureaucracy.

There was a lot of public participation, but there needed to be some sort of threat or opportunity to fire people up. They would stay on board as long as they felt they could get ahead through it. The river was an abstract concept in many ways, but for a fairly solid 30% of the population it was very real because of its horticultural and agricultural benefits. The percentage was growing fairly rapidly.

AJ remarked that the various attitudes of the local people could be summed up in, ""Why can't I keep all the water that falls on my land?", or "We're more important because we grow food", or "There's no water shortage, just a bit of a drought". The
respondent said that the area where we were holding our discussion contributed very little water to the Murray-Darling, and that many district residents consequently believed they could use it all themselves (11.44). However, people had suddenly realised that there had been a local over-allocation of water, so the current water management plan (which managed supply rather than demand) had been put on hold until the current water allocation management proposal produced some results (11.10).

In answer to a final question about what he thought might be the situation in ten to twenty years, AJ said he was optimistic. In his view, environmental change would be generational, not overnight. The respondent would not have imagined the present level of environmental interest twenty years ago. It was probably driven by the threat of climate change and water shortage, stimulating more awareness. Industry would adapt (11.43).

4.9.3 The Catchment Management Association Committee Meeting (Report 54)

Just after the State agency workshop meeting described in the Public Water Story, I attended a meeting of the Catchment Management Association’s Committee. The Committee meeting was held around tables arranged in a hollow square. The President (different to the President of the pilot visit) and the (also new) executive officer sat across one side. The executive officer was the water quality officer I had seen in passing during my first visit to the Association’s office. The members sat around the other three sides, in a layout as formal as the Community Reference Panel meeting (54.2). Although Aboriginal representatives were entitled to be the meeting I attended, none appeared while I was present.

The President adhered firmly to the agenda published for the meeting, with the first part of the morning taken up with the reception of various reports. The first report concerned the already-mentioned Murray Darling Basin Commission Community Advisory Committee meeting held the previous month. A Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats discovery process had been followed, but the decisions were
not yet known. One question raised had been “where to from here?”, to which the answer had been that responsibility now lay with the State or Federal government.

Routine reports of other meetings or encounters with relevant agencies and politicians outside the catchment followed. Many of these reports included views that certain politicians and senior bureaucrats might not be as receptive to direct overtures as the Committee might like.

The Community Representative Panel was now concerned that the States had seized on imperfect and not-yet-analyzed information for political decision-making purpose. The State action had pulled the mat out entirely from under the Community Representative Panel. The distribution process had turned into a destruction process, and was now totally politicized. The two most senior State speakers had said at the start of the Community Representative Panel meeting that the extraction limit had been reached, but the ecologists present had reported that the river was not showing any signs of distress. The computerized catchment management idea had been let down by one of the State committee representatives not accepting the “end-of-system condition” (a particular preference of one of the States) as the determinant.

Another questioner asked what relation existed between this matter and a State-of-Environment (SOE) report that had indicated that river water would not be potable beyond 2020. The response was that the report was only a snapshot of the river, not a detailed review. The responder believed that the SOE report had been very bad and that no one else believed in it either. The senior water user representative said that it was not so much the decision being questioned as the process through which it had been reached. The problem was that the officers had known about the government decision the day before the meeting, but had not told the meeting. The senior water user representative added that the press release had also contained semantic plays, and that “therefore we have to play the game as hard as the politicians do”.

The presenter continued his report by saying that the Great Artesian Basin monitoring system was being expanded to see if, for example, recharge bores were working. The local State agency representative then said that the pressure decline was increasing, which caused one of the farmer members to say somewhat querulously that one of the
States had capped bores elsewhere and increased the pressure, but “here we have a decline”. The local State agency representative AK reported that pressure had fallen at a particularly fast rate near the border, a matter perhaps tied to one State's intensive water use practice. A member thought that some bores in that State may be in recharge areas, but the agency representative said that the thought now was that the Great Artesian Basin only recharged during macro events, i.e. Ice Ages, not merely through heavy rains.

AK continued on to talk about river remediation funding. The Department was still awaiting confirmation of matching dollars coming from one of the States. The money from Canberra was already in, and he said the second round of on-ground projects was now on course. He thought the river remediation program was a very good thing, but the chairman intervened to remark that he thought some stalling had occurred.

The next report came from a man who was apparently another government officer. He said that feedback was sought on the level of agency professional who should attend meetings (whether they should be senior management or directors-general). One of the committee members commented that next time whoever attended should go out on to the ground to see some grain or sheep issues. The chairman commented that too often agencies did not send out information in sufficient time for response by the due date.

The next point concerned the monitoring of nutrients in a large dam at the edge of the catchment. The dam had an algal problem that was difficult to monitor, and also had to cope with extensive stock watering. A farmer member said that monitoring of the dam was complex., and “Why couldn't the people at the dam itself do it?” The salinity situation was OK because it was managed on each property, by which the speaker seemed to mean that direct local management was simpler. Another added that there were proposals for caravan parks right on the dam, even though Town water was drawn from it. The third member asked why they couldn't irrigate with the sewage effluent, but another replied that if it was done on land draining to the dam it would go straight into the water anyway.
Another member said that she had told an influential man at a Murray Darling Basin Commission meeting that there was a need to hold a round-robin meeting of Murray Darling Basin Commission people with, for example, Ian Viner. He had agreed, but nothing had happened. The member said the committee also needed to know more about other funding outlets such as the Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation (LWRDRC). The Murray Darling Basin Commission should also be involved in funding. A farmer member remarked “We don’t want the Precautionary Principle thrown out there to lock it all up. The government has to throw money at the problem. Everyone sees the problem but no one will pay for solving it”. The senior water user representative commented that salinity had highlighted the issue, but not added to the science of what to do. The member originally raising the matter said that the great danger was that the wrong message would come out of it all. The LWRDRC had stacks of money.

Reports and associated discussions ended at this point. The next agenda item was a formal presentation from a visiting government officer about a new State planning Act and the opportunities it might present for integrated catchment management. The presenter used a number of slides, each of which seemed to me to contain too much information for easy audience assimilation of a complex topic.

One slide showed a triangular diagram with the phrases “protecting resources”, “development economics”, and “the well-being of people and communities” at the vertices. The idea was that, if a proposal related to one of the three issues, the other two “would have to be taken into account” in some way. But the speaker then posed a question of his own: “how will planning relate to social and community issues?” Perhaps it might be covered by how people dealt with each other, for example in meetings.

After morning tea the executive officer restarted the meeting by talking about comments to be made to the MDBC Community Advisory Committee by the Catchment Committee. One of the members said that the focus for the main part of the Murray Darling Basin was salinity, but the weed problem was seen as probably the best way to get some mileage for the local catchment. A member asked what the advantages and disadvantages of each proposed monitoring regime (end of system or
whole of catchment) were, to which AA replied that control of diversions might be
different in each case. If system end-flows went out of control, how would that relate
to actions taken upstream? Median flows were favoured over mean flows because
they avoided flood effects. The representative thought the end-of-system method was
harder to manage.

AA asked committee members for their views on volumetric metering everywhere.
One member replied that all extractions should be metered to get a proper handle on
what is being used and where. AA then asked whether the Executive Committee
would endorse the water user organization policy of volumetric extraction and
metering, but I failed to catch the answer to that question. A member pointed out that
200,000 megalitres a day at the Town produced only 20,000 megalitres at the end of
the local system, which indicated the high level of flood plain attrition. He thought
that end-of-system measurement was very important, because it affected the rest of
the river, and therefore it should remain as a factor.

The local State agency representative AK thought it was necessary to run various
scenarios through the model to find out their effects. The other State’s system might
show up unexpected anomalies. However, another member said that metered water
was only going into ring tanks, and someone else wanted to know what happened to
overland flows, to which the Committee as a whole more or less replied that that the
problem remained to be answered and was on the agenda now. The State agency
representative added that if you did not manage overland flows, the rivers would just
dry up. A member remarked that if everything became more tradable, some
communities might suffer, and therefore trading zones would be necessary. AA
commented that each sub-catchment should have a right to determine its own trading
rules.

The meeting then moved on to the next item, salinity auditing. The executive officer
and one of the members both thought there was a need to follow up with the
LWRRDC and various government representatives at the next MDBC meeting, since
the next two or three months would be critical for the next year. Another member
added that the House of Representatives was running an inquiry into catchment
management. Both the local arm of the MDBC and the State government agency
most involved with the catchment had sent off submissions. The Chair of the former had been called before the inquiry, but no one had seen the submission. It was understood that an intervening meeting had edited the paper, leading to two Executive Committee members of the Association Committee making a separate presentation to a senior Federal Minister and two Members of the House of Representatives. One reported that it had been basically only a question and answer session. The other thought it had gone quite well, but the State agency representatives preceding them had danced around some of the catchment management issues. The main focus had been on institutional and partnerships arrangements. They said that ownership of the issues had been low, though knowledge levels had appeared to be satisfactory. Roles and responsibilities needed clear definitions. There had been a lack of clarity about the roles of the Regional Strategy Group and the Catchment Management Association, and catchment co-ordination was most necessary. Community input was the most valuable element, and money was not necessarily the way to do things.

The second member commented that the Government’s submission had glossed over some of the Association’s concerns, such as the much longer travel distances with which it had to deal. Furthermore, the Parliamentary panel had believed co-ordinators were using up too much money. It posed a question: “Should not Local Government take over this role?” to which both Executive Committee members had given a resounding no. A problem with that idea was that use of Local Government in this way would stop direct community involvement. Further, no Federal funding to Local Government was being proposed. The other member said the meeting then began to turn into a National Heritage Trust “bash session”. One Parliamentary panel member had suggested that ten-year instead of three-year funding was desirable, an idea with which one Executive Committee member had agreed because it would avoid the political cycle. The draft report of the Parliamentary committee would not be available for about a year, a period which the Committee members obviously thought made the whole thing both ineffective and procrastinated.

Matters for the local arm of the Murray Darling Basin Commission other than salinity then came up for discussion. The first was economic sustainability, which the executive officer said the Executive Committee of the Association had discussed. There was a need for its widespread adoption, and therefore a need for an easy generic
farm property planning process, as was available through the Superprofit program. However he was told that idea would go against the Superprofit adult education principle. AK thought that a tree cover management plan would be more appropriate than a property management plan. But two Committee members said that a regional property plan should come first, and then individual property plans under that regional umbrella. Another member recommended a particular person in the State agency as “understanding what farmers want”, while yet another commented that this was a deeper issue with great detail involved in it, and not the end of the process.

A conservation member, not a Committee member but present as a representative from the Community Representative Panel, said that resources might be too constrained. Conservation agency maps were not sufficiently small-scale; there was very little available at 1: 25,000. Where would the expertise come from? There were not enough scientists around who could recognize vegetation types accurately enough (as the scientist-extension worker meeting I describe in the Public Water story also indicated). One farm member said that he had tried to use a computer to plan his property, but private property planning programs were very difficult to operate. AK added that most people needed property planning, but there were not enough computers around anyway. Another participant said that in some areas outside the catchment people have to put in a land and water management plan, pretty well like a property management plan, to get a water allocation.

The next agenda item, the last before my departure, was presented by a visiting State government representative on the subject of Parthenium weed. The presentation was slower and more understandable than the planning presentation, but very basic - rather like an extension lecture. It did not seem particularly appropriate for farmers as senior as those sitting around the table. Further, there was no apparent urgency regarding the problem within the catchment as far as I knew - it was merely creating difficulties in a far-away coastal catchment. The only point of local interest was that it might be worthwhile to start a general awareness programme to avoid importing it into the catchment via trucks and stock. Nevertheless, when invited, almost the whole Committee stood up and gathered round his exhibits for a considerable length of time, asking questions and showing a strong degree of interest.
4.9.4 *The Landcare Annual General Meeting (Report 72)*

Towards the end of the main visit I attended the annual general meeting of a local Landcare group held in a broad parkland setting on the edge of the Town. The meeting started at 6 pm in a picnic shed, with about a dozen people present, nearly all strangers to me except for the Landcare coordinator AL and one other.

The meeting began with a report from AL, who talked about a new Landcare group being formed at a centre well outside the Town. The coordinator was also keen to promote a forthcoming Rural Computer Software Exposition to be held at the Town Community Centre on the following Wednesday. This was an initiative of the group in the joint Catchment Management Association/Landcare coordination office, flowing from perceptions of demand for computer education in the region. Eighteen exhibitors would be presenting at various stands, and the Internet session was already fully booked. AL concluded by remarking that the Landcare group could and should get an Australian Business Number for GST purposes, because it attracted more than $100,000 revenue per year.

The next topic was a Main Roads project proposed for a substantial intersection on the road to the nearest regional centre. It was not entirely clear how Landcare related to this issue, but the Main Roads Department had approached it directly.

Another man, who appeared to be a second governmental officer, was concerned about a forthcoming funding programme offered by the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Development, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Forestry (in the role of financial controller). According to this informant, sums of up to $200,000 had become available for strategic planning matters such as the development of a regional social cohesion plan, or up to $3000 for lesser topics such as Internet access. The agency officers concerned were looking for action rather than simply office work, and for things considered too hard for present Landcare funding.
The discussion raised the suggestion about a skill improvement program, but the chairman spoke against being involved. It then transpired that he had in fact decided to step down after many years in the chair. He said he was “sick and tired” of having to conform to double audit practices imposed on Landcare activities by multiple State and Federal agencies. In the end it was decided that the amounts of money involved were too large to pass over lightly, but AL said that help would be needed to prepare a sensible application in the few days remaining before the offer closed. A later review of the full documentation for the application soon indicated that it was so detailed and voluminous that there was no chance of preparing a conforming response in time.

The next item concerned a proposed link with another Landcare group. All members were keen for that to happen. One then spoke about overland flows, pointing to a new move towards integrated catchment management covering both States.

The next two agenda items were set-piece talks. The first was from a visiting government officer on the bore-piping situation in the Shire. A young woman who had been standing outside the group during the second half of the meeting presented the second. She had been previously involved with Landcare, but had just returned from her second trip to the Middle East, where she had taken a close interest in the forms of agriculture followed in that region. The group showed particular interest in her description of an ancient Middle East intensive water use system that involved underground tunnels dug deep under mountains.

The final item on the agenda, the election of office bearers, was postponed to next meeting, partly because of the unexpected standing-down of the chairman. A barbecue was set up and the group stood around for another hour or so. During this period I talked with two graziers, both of them independently enthusiastic about recent training they had received in animal management through a short course held in the Town. They said their practices had been revolutionized by the programme, and they were now far in front of their neighbours who were still “operating the same way as their grandfathers had”. They also expressed considerable interest in Internet possibilities.
4.9.5 Discussion with the River Planner (Report 47)

Near the end of the main visit, I conducted a further interview with a river planner (AM) in an adjoining major river catchment within the Murray Darling system. I found him in a Departmental office in a nearby regional centre, and began by asking about the nature of the river planner role. He said he was on a three-year contract to distribute $3 million of National Heritage Trust funding to Landcare groups in the catchment, and was already well into the project. He was leading a team of three extension workers, whose main task was to educate Landcare groups about what was to be done, while at the same time guiding them in the preparation of proposals for small grants. The stakeholder group comprised two hundred and twenty groups, some of them River Improvement Trusts, some Councils, some Landcare and others Aboriginal groups. Apparently a similar but not quite the same devolved grant programme co-ordinator position was to be advertised for the fieldwork district.

Regarding the district’s Catchment Management Association, about which he had some knowledge, he said that its Committee people generally wore two hats. They were there to monitor general catchment management as an overall issue, but on a personal basis they were also there to become aware of incipient government regulations such as tree clearing at an early stage. Individual members of the Committee were located at different points between these two interests. He said that the kind of strategizing that had gone on in the Catchment Committee situation really didn’t have a lot of meaning unless it was converted into action plans. Many had been quite woolly. He added that catchment management people now needed to move into what he called Phase 2, which had to do with the formation of a real strategy, and one of the things involved in that was the development of a proper funding base. Funds had to come from sources other than the National Heritage Trust. In his view everyone had tunnel vision about NHT funding and had not gone on to broaden their viewpoints to consider industry, Local Government and other sources.

He said that, with respect to riverside easements, there was a need for both riparian and buffer zones. He defined riparian zones as riverside land containing types of vegetation whose roots extended into the water table. Buffer zones were areas of land
reserved to sort out overland flows by acting as filters. The new guideline for buffer zones stated that they should be five metres wide plus the height of the bank.

AM used the term “gold rush” in connection with intensive water use, and talked at length about what he called the “new ecology”. He said there had to be some way for avoiding the problem of going back to hoping for, say, a pre-European settlement condition as a remediation goal. The new ecology should include consideration of such matters such as “when a weed is not a weed”. To him, a weed was a plant in an undesirable place, but it may provide a benefit in holding back a bank. The cost was either social (looks ugly), environmental (kills species) or productive (threatens grain or stock). People had to start considering weeds as a part of the new ecology. He said also that one now had to work toward something like a 30/70 diversity mix, which seemed to be what people said was the best you could do within reasonable working limits. You had to work pretty hard to achieve even that.

I asked whether he had much contact with peers operating in his field. He replied that he could not say whether those people agreed with his approach, because the topic held political overtones. When asked about accountability for the money being expended, the respondent said that he had no knowledge of Federal Treasury being involved, but there was no doubt that some system he didn't know about was going on behind the scene.

We talked about the proposals that came in from the various groups in his area of operation. He went through an explanation of the fairly detailed cost estimates required in proposals. When I asked him what happened when it came to the benefit side, he said that estimation of the public benefits was really a matter of his informed judgment, bearing in mind that he was looking at whole stretches of river and not just short individual pieces. So he had a fair input to make it into what ultimately transpired. One also had to distinguish between public and private benefit, he added.

I asked him what the overall goal of his National Heritage Trust programme was, and he said that as far as he was concerned it was education. His three assistants were involved in awareness raising as well as extension work. For the politicians and other like-minded people, what counted was length of fencing installed or numbers of trees
planted. For him these things had very little meaning because their importance differed from location to location. Twenty thousand trees might be a lot on the metropolitan city scale, and would have some meaning in regional centres, but it had no meaning at all out in the West. His own way of gauging progress was to take photographs from set points. He could then tell from the photographs what degree of diversity had ensued between recording dates. He did not have to go around measuring how much the grass had grown. Regarding more general remediation goals, he was really only talking in terms of a relatively minor rebound in diversity to the 30/70 ratio mentioned earlier.

He said that one of the first things to be done when the funding devolution programme was initiated was to work out an implementation procedure. Ultimately they had adopted a project management approach with a steering committee to which AM put his recommendations. A variety of other implementation measures had followed.

He mentioned that the Aboriginal people were keen on the establishment of an easement down each side of a river. It would not only give them access to the water, which was important to them in cultural terms, but would also allow them to reach burial and other sacred sites, which they could not do at the moment. But of course there was a problem with the property owners.

4.9.6 The Scientist/Extension Worker Meeting (Report 62)

For completeness, I include notes from a meeting called by an agricultural science research organisation to bring its agricultural scientists and senior officers into contact with field extension workers. The purpose was to address apparent problems in communications between extension officers and farmers.

A riparian protection officer working with the water quality officer in the Catchment Management Association office had alerted me to this meeting, which was held in a nearby regional centre. He seemed to think, as I did, that the conference would be about leading farmers across from traditional methods to an ecologicistic viewpoint, but
the letter of invitation described the purpose of the workshop as “understanding and using landscape thresholds in property planning”.

When I arrived at the meeting place I was asked by the senior research organization participant (AS) not to sit in the corner simply as an observer, but to join in as a full participant. An assortment of odd tables was arranged in a hollow square, with one or two in the centre, a much more informal arrangement than, for example, the Catchment Management Association Committee meeting. The relationships within the audience were also pretty informal, with many people knowing each other well. I saw two familiar faces, but sat with a pair of unfamiliar extension workers.

The facilitator was a marketing person from the agricultural economics school of a distant rural university. The audience was made up almost entirely of agricultural extension workers, mostly in the 30 to 40 year old age group, with three or four people a little older. We were told that there had been 120 applicants for the 75 places.

I took a brief glance at the booklet set as preparatory reading, and wrote the following comments:

- It seemed very anthropocentric, as though sustainable development was not to be considered;
- It contained a number of statements I thought dubious, such as the catchment being important because it was the primary landscape element. For me, a catchment is significant only because its effluent (river flow) is an indicator of landscape health. The definition seemed like defining an animal by its waste products.
- It contained too many possibilities for semantic confusion.

The session began with the statement that we would be talking about grazing enterprises on grassy woodlands, with some cropping. The first ten minutes was to be spent mingling and dealing with the questions “what do you want take away?”, meaning broadly how could ecological principles, information and viewpoints be put
before farmers. During the mingling session it became evident that this was a very bright group with high morale, very different to a glum collection of extension workers that I had encountered in a different part of the Murray Darling Basin a few years earlier. Someone asked how the participants had been selected, and the answer was that they were mainly tertiary graduates with science backgrounds.

As the discussion began, one participant queried the background booklet as a whole, saying that farmers might have greener values than expected. However, the research organisation people thought that getting ecology concepts across to producers was a distinct problem, and the specific object of the workshop was how to find out how the training model implicit in the brochure could be improved. It was also recognized that different audiences looked at things in different ways, and another objective of the meeting was to work out the best future communication process for use between extension workers/advisers and producers. As an example, the senior scientist AS mentioned bringing about a change in views on the usefulness of various plants.

The agenda for the meeting consisted of a series of set presentations on the chapters of the booklet, each by its author. In general, the values of the presenting team appeared to be quite scientistic, and the speakers’ common starting point seemed to be that the audience was not in tune or informed in detail. Some of the comments made during these presentations by various audience members included:

- Farmers tended to try to make bad country good, possibly futilely;
- Translation was a major problem and hard work. It required a strong commitment towards helping;
- Would the bank manager allow an ecological approach?
- The emphasis on conservation in the book was perhaps too high;
- Some other concepts were too abstract for producers, for example the phrase “energy balance”;
- Producers might have a pragmatic interest in biodiversity and the concept of sustainable development;
- Monoculture had previously been pushed by the same agencies that were now pushing ecology.
These presentations reinforced the view I had developed during my initial scan of the booklet. They contained too many possibilities of semantic confusion. For example, they tended to use “biomass” as equivalent to “biodiversity”, adding to the complexities of some of the explanations. Also, the extension workers thought that the “change of stance” problem was considerable. As previously mentioned, the speakers seemed to emphasise scientism, but the general difficulty for most of the audience was social communicativeness.

The extension workers did not receive the speakers’ words uncritically. The imposed authoritarianism of the situation was reinforced by a strict timetable, the body language of the speakers, and the highly expert grasp of agricultural science held by the senior scientist AS who was chairing the meeting. Near me two older men disputed the use of the term “tussock”, both in principle and in the specific way it was being used by the current speaker. Their concern, which seemed to me to be reasonable, went unrewarded by the research organisation people. The audience also clearly thought that the issue really was one of empowering producers to join in a dialogue, i.e. to de-mystify the words. One of the extension workers said that “producer language” should be used.

The research organisation people then introduced a game designed to show the effects of connecting tree belts and undergrowth to provide corridors for various kinds of animals. Apparently designed by the senior scientist, the game used a 14 x 14 checkerboard, with a somewhat complicated double-dice-throwing procedure. The idea was to assign values to various squares according to how the dice fell. The degrees of connectivity suitable for various species were set by rules about the adjoining squares and their values.

The audience’s support for the game was high. They thought it could show that a planned approach to tree cover could work, but it seemed to me to present a number of problems. For example, it contained definitional uncertainties, such as the meaning of “habitat”. Another problem raised by an extension worker concerned the method for introducing the game to farmers -- individually or in groups? Most people at the workshop seemed to think that the group approach would be best, for example
through Landcare, but at the same time thresholds would have to be applied dependent upon pest control procedures and existing soil erosion. The people from the research organisation who had tried the game in the field said that farmers on heavily cleared land tended to throw in the towel in the face of it, and needed to be supported.

One presenter commented that there was difficulty with farmers regarding the degree of land sacrifice they would be asked to make. They would see it as a public good that they had to provide, but of a kind not required from other community segments. A 20% sacrifice of land (which was one of the figures mentioned) was untenable for many farmers; but further discussion about the effects on profits fell into uncertainty.

Other comments made by audience members included:

- Biodiversity as a policy statement was poorly articulated from the point of view of the end acceptor. How could this be dealt with? Could the situation be reversed?
- The problem was seen as being really a lack of long-term vision. Short-term vision and large-scale consolidation drove the whole of the business sector.
- What was the likely final target for the agricultural scene: small-scale or larger corporate farmers?
- Was the group fully aware of the socio-economic impact of biodiversity education?
- Was the purpose to keep small farmers up with the corporates, i.e. defend the former against the latter?
- The form of technical content offered to farmers was sometimes seen to be too intensive.

After lunch, the discussion moved to information needs and the use of information generally. Audience comments included the following:

- The information needs of farmers were all physical, e.g. about soil types;
• The university-based facilitator mentioned the success of scenario demonstrations in other places in the field, but added that, while many people were knowledgeable on global issues, they could not really act locally;

• What were the processes of adoption of opinion in rural/urban areas?

• There was a mismatch between detail and importance, information needs and available resources;

• The high-risk nature of extension work, sometimes entailing possible loss of credibility, was a real extension worker concern.

• Some fallback into individual specialization could occur in extension work, leading to farmers receiving confusing or conflicting advice from several extension officers from different specializations.

Perhaps as a result of lunch, the discussion became fairly desultory and less interesting. Someone asked questions about the use of geographical information system material for overlays. Another commented that the preferred farming situation would be:

• Less than 30% under crops or sown pasture;

• More than 70% in low intensity land use, of which greater than 30% would be in woodland and less than 40% in cleared native pasture.

A third person asked about the percentage of farmers currently responding to proposals for property planning. Another mentioned a need for regional trade-offs — perhaps the whole scheme should be managed on a community basis rather than through individual properties. The suggestion raised another question about the role of extension workers in regional planning. According to the senior research organisation representative AS, individual management and decision-making formed the problem. A public policy issue could thus be caught up in the matter.

The workshop finished with the usual feedback requests and a rushed closure as people left to drive back to their homes, in some cases many hours distant, before sundown.
4.9.7 The Executive Committee Meeting (Report A9)

Finally in the Catchment Management Association story, I report on a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Catchment Management Association I attended during the Aftermath visit.

On the appointed morning I turned up a little early and encountered the executive officer talking to a past Association chairperson in the foyer of the office. When I asked the latter where the catchment story was up to, I was told that it was worse than two years earlier. The chance of an integration of the catchment across the State border had gone backwards. Funding was being reduced by the practice of cost-sharing, under which State departments under pressure were picking up the available Federal funds for their own projects. That way they only had to provide 50 per cent of the total. Also the funding process itself had become extraordinarily complex.

When the meeting began, I found that it consisted of three members of the catchment committee, plus two government officers from one of the State agencies (neither of whom I had met before), the new executive officer AN, the new water quality officer AO and the new administrative assistant AP. One of the two agency officers (AQ) was evidently located in the immediate area, but the second (AR) came from a relatively distant regional centre.

The principal matter for discussion was the proposed amalgamation of the catchment across the State borderline. The present Catchment Management Association received money directly from the Federal Government into its own coffers. The equivalent body for the catchment portion on the other side of the border put in for money successfully, but the money itself stayed firmly with that State's water management agency. The issue of the moment was a forthcoming Cabinet submission to the government on how this difference should be handled. The conflict between the States concerned whether the forthcoming joint management body would or would not receive its funding directly without intervention by the centralised agency. A series of meetings was taking place between the two States' water management agency officers, and difficulties seemed to be emerging from a particular person from the other camp.
(who later turned out to be relatively junior in the scheme of things). During this discussion AR, the more junior of the two government agency officers present, seemed to be better informed, more environmentally engaged and somewhat at odds with his senior AQ, who appeared to operate in a smoother, more politicized fashion.

The discussion moved on to a problem the new water quality officer AO was experiencing. AO was sending raw field measurements to the other State’s water management agency but would be unable to get them back in processed form until that agency published its own report in say 14 months. This was occurring even though AO, if allowed, could probably personally process the raw data in any case. The other State’s representative involved in this difficulty was the same person who had negotiated for that State government with the Village Resident Group (see section 4.10.2).

On the matter of the devolved grant arrangement, the executive officer wanted to engage a trainee to replace the administrative assistant’s participation in the process. One of the Landcare groups in the catchment was currently paying 25% of AP’s salary and the group wanted to know what the assistant did. In considering the issue, the committee began a discussion of all of the administrative assistant’s activities in general, which then bogged down. The assistant (by far the most junior person at the table) pursued a minor issue far beyond the point where she should have given up. The extraordinary part of this event was that the older and more senior members of the Executive Committee seemed unable to extricate themselves from the assistant’s concern. The debate dragged on until I left the meeting.

4.10 The Village Resident Group Story

4.10.1 The Initial Meeting (Report 16)

During the first pilot visit, one of the early respondents mentioned to me that I should talk to the Village Resident Group. The group, it was said, had a serious complaint
about management of the river. I was given the names of the President, his wife, the Deputy President (AT) and his partner. As reported in detail later (section 4.12.10), I had previously met several, mainly elderly, Village residents, and had a broad idea of Village river concerns.

I sat down initially with the President and his wife around the back room dining table, in amongst the ironing, but only a couple of minutes passed before the Deputy President arrived. He lived next-door and had been the founding chairman until very recently. The current President deferred to him immediately. I set up the tape, and the meeting began.

The Village is the only place above the weir where houses stand near the water’s edge. A large weir constructed several years beforehand just downstream of the Village was the main concern of the group. The members claimed that poor management of water drawdown activities at the commencement of operation of the weir had caused the riverbank on their properties to subside. Two or three public meetings had been held after the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the weir was put out, but some of the things required by the environmental impact statement had not been done. For example a management plan required before the weir began operation had yet to be implemented. The engineer who had worked on the original environmental impact statement had been reengaged in February 1998 to write a further report on what had not been done.

Complaints to politicians had produced only standard acknowledgments. The Catchment Committee had said that it was not really involved in matters such as this. The group thought that the Catchment Committee was only a pressure group for irrigators anyway. They had no idea how it was formed, and in their eyes it only shuffled paper.

About nine people normally came to the group’s meetings. The other people in the Village thought it was only to fight for those people whose backyards were affected, but the Deputy President thought that the river was being hurt. There was now a big sandbar behind the weir, and the ecology of the river was being affected far
downstream. The Local Environment Assistance Plan group had been planting melaleucas to control erosion.

In early March the Landcare group had applied for $10,000 from the National Heritage Trust for bank rectification, but would not know the outcome until October. In the eyes of the members, the group secretary (who was not present at the meeting) knew how to get things done in terms of making submissions to potential funding bodies in the proper way. The amount had been sought mainly for consulting advice and the planting of a few trees. The group understood that a fraction of the National Heritage Trust money could go to consultants, with the balance being split 1/3:2/3 between the residents and the government. The residents’ share would be provided as labour.

The group needed real answers from the authorities on the matter, not comments like “you shouldn’t live here on the edge of the river”. The Deputy President stated that one man from River Management had said “if you make too much noise we’ll wipe you out”;

The Village did not lie within the Shire whose headquarters were located close by in the Town. The distant Shire Council within which it lay did not want to know about the issue, and had told the group to go to the weir operators. The distant Shire Council was the same one that had been included in the Hamlet Investigator’s scathing commentary (see section 4.10.2). The nearby Town Council had received $1 million for levee bank repairs, but the Village did not have a levee bank.

The group was sarcastic about the intensive water use growers’ claim that overspraying was only a smell and didn’t really carry chemicals. When the Environmental Protection Agency man (said to have had poor English) had been contacted in a distant regional centre, he had told them to take a photo of the plane. The President’s wife said that she had developed a facial itch from the Town water at the same time of the year “when they defoliate”, i.e. to take the leaves off the intensive water crop before picking. In the eyes of the group, intensive water use growing was basically a hydroponic business. In its present form it ruined the soil structure, did away with trees and left the land soaked in chemicals.
The Deputy President AT explained his understanding of the cause of the problem in the following excerpt from the (partial) tape record of the meeting, mildly edited to remove hesitations and other speech interruptions:

"AT: This is only me, I can’t speak for everyone here, but I think that where the problem started was when the weir was first finished and they had the weir at full level. They were playing around with the operation of, and they dropped it from full level to empty level in, not very long anyhow, I think as quick as the gates could open. ... it meant we had a seventeen feet drop in a matter of a quarter of an hour or half an hour. I was actually ... probably a quarter of a mile downstream from the weir, and there were...what?...three foot high waves coming through down the river and they washed banks, they washed boats away down at the Town and everything. That started a lot of our damage, especially from the weir up, because the banks being saturated for quite a while.... Then they pulled the plug and it went phrrrt and then three foot diameter trees, quite a few of them, sort of fell in the river and stripped all the topsoil off that which was our riparian zone normally, so that there was no topsoil left. So that took any vegetation away that could hold the soil together and it’s exposed seams of sand and gravel. I don’t know whether you’ve seen along there....

Me: No, I’ve seen the bank from this side but not the other side...

AT: So that it seems to me, from being down there and looking at those seams of sand and gravel a day or a couple of days after the water’s been dropped down, you can still see water running out of there, particles of sand and gravel and of course that undermines the rest of the bank and it’s got to slump. It seems to me that if it hadn’t have been stripped of topsoil vegetation in the first place by that first pulling the plug out, we wouldn’t have so much of a problem, we’d still have a clay blanket over those seams and that’d perhaps hold it together. I don’t know, I’m only guessing, but I think that’s what started it. We’ve got in touch and said you’re letting the water down too quick, so they’ve cut the rate that they drop the water level back from a metre a day
to half a metre a day, which is great but it’s not really addressing the problem. ……They probably should bring it back to something like fifty millimetres or a hundred mm a day so that the water’s got a chance to come out before the water level drops down, so you’re equalising the pressure instead of having a heap of water pressure in the bank."

In providing this explanation, the Deputy President showed a clear understanding of the dynamics of bank collapse, gained principally from his day-to-day observations while living in a shed on his present site for a number of years prior to building his house. His interpretation was verified later by a similar explanation from one of the Catchment Management Association technical officers (when recounting an episode that was also remarkable for its provision of a window into the procrastinations of bureaucratic action in the region).

All told, the meeting lasted about two hours. No one seemed very interested in dinner. The Deputy President and I eventually left together, and talked for another twenty minutes in the dark out the back. AT taught carpentry at the Village trade educational centre and had once taught Permaculture. He said that he learnt a lot from reading up on Permaculture and added that the older Aboriginal people learnt a lot from it also, but it had lost funding because it was classified as a hobby course. He went on to say that the older Aboriginal people who wanted to bring peace were frustrated by younger ones still on the grog smashing things up, and added that it was not just the river that engaged his protective interest. It was also aroused by the fact that one can “clear 1000 acres of grass and scrubland, plant a monoculture” and “twenty five years of profit for one person leaves a 2000 year recovery programme”. But although this was said with the best of intentions, it came over as a bit of an added-on justification.

I had raised the group’s bank collapse problem with the senior water user representative at the first interview I had with him, as described in the Public Water Story, but at that time he said he knew nothing about it.
4.10.2 The Government Offer (Report 55)

On the night after the Community Representative Panel meeting during the main visit, another meeting occurred between the Village Resident Group and government agency representatives. About a dozen people representing the ten households affected by bank collapse attended, including partners. I recognized the Deputy President AT, the President and the President’s wife from the first meeting eighteen months ago. Also in the room were a number of people whom I first thought to be only observers, but who later took active parts in the meeting. The senior policy maker AC from one State and the regional manager from the other State’s water management agency were there, although both took little part in the discussion.

The main presenter (AU) was a middle-ranking officer from the head office of the State’s water management agency. He was an affable but not well-trained presenter, presumably an engineer, who began by describing the basic cause of the problem, closely paralleling the explanation the Deputy President had given me eighteen months earlier. This explanation also confirmed the general structure of the riverbank and the nature of the bank problem that the Catchment Association technical officer had given to me.

A handout was distributed, and AU said that the purpose of the meeting was to put a “first cut” of preliminary ideas to the group. He conceded there was no excuse for what had happened, nor for the agency’s slowness in dealing with the matter. He introduced the agency officers present, and various observers such as the Aboriginal representative. He said that the Department had engaged a middle sized engineering firm as civil engineering consultants for the remedial work.

He then outlined several alternative ways of dealing with the riverbank, starting with what he called a “heavy engineering” option costing $3.2 million. This entailed a full-height structural armouring of the failing bank with rock. The second was armouring up to the top of the sand layer and/or the top water level, and then provision of a flatter batter. Things moved too quickly for me to record option 3. Option 4 was rather like 2 but with the top part of the bank restrained by a stepped retaining wall, with “spear points” (vertical slotted pipes driven into the ground and attached to
surface pumps) behind to lower the groundwater table. Option 5 was for full acquisition of the properties at a total cost of $1.4 million, and the last option relocated seven houses and bought 70 metres of riverside land for a riverside reserve, at an estimated price of $550,000. The last was the option preferred by the Department. The purchase distance was set by the consultants' view that a full “slip circle” failure would not go further back than the seventy-metre line.

One resident complained that the top of the bank could still keep on falling in under the department's preferred option. AU said that the seventy-metre setback should last 50 years and perhaps up to 100, when the weir might be gone. Another resident complained that the bank between the houses and the weir could also retreat. According to the Deputy President AT, the consultants had said the water was coming from 200 metres back. Would a seventy-metre setback therefore be enough? The toe of the bank should also be properly anchored. Some undermining below the water level was also occurring.

When the most affected resident (whom I had not met previously) and the President’s wife tried to indicate other preferences, AU seemed to me to become almost desperate and his motivation rather transparent. The President’s wife said moving her house back 70 metres towards the road could expose her to greater risk of break-in. It seemed plain that AU was very concerned not to let the meeting move towards one of the more expensive options. He said that in fact four blocks were really not affected, because the houses were already set well back, and only six were too close to the bank. Weir management had sometimes not done the right thing, but automatic operation fixed for slower drawdown would have less dramatic effects. Water would be down in winter, up in summer, and kept down lower for longer.

He went on to say that, if the reaction to the preferred option was too bad, the government would think again but not simply bring in defensive legislation. He pointed out that acquisition would leave permissive occupancy rights to the house owners over the reserve area. The general amenity and use of the block would be left for the occupants, together with the emergency accommodation in Town during flood. At this point another resident said that moving houses back could move them into another less obvious watercourse.
One of the non-governmental observers (AV) asked whether decommissioning of the weir had been costed. The head office policy maker said that it had been, at $20 million, which included for loss of water, but the bank problem would still remain. A possibility of complete sale (presumably to the water users) was also negotiable. Another affected householder said that the offer did not contain enough proceeds for the householder to buy elsewhere, but AU replied that negotiations over price would include this issue. He added that the oldest householder needed to think more quickly than the rest, because his dwelling was only ten metres from the top of the bank. At this, the oldest householder suggested that the bank might be pulled out into a smoother curve, but AU did not pick up this suggestion, merely saying that the agency has acknowledged that it was going to do something.

The Aboriginal representative asked about the repair of the river further upstream, to which the policy maker replied that it was only that length of the river directly affected by the weir that was under consideration at this stage. Asked by another attendee how long the remedy might take, AU said that negotiations could start straightaway, but it might be up to three years before the whole process concluded. The non-governmental observer AV and another both questioned the need for the weir to exist at all, but the Department representatives did not appear to understand the questions, perhaps intentionally.

The presenter stated that another meeting could be held if the residents thought it necessary. The agency would inform the (distant) Shire council on how things were progressing.

On a later trip to the Village near the end of the main visit, I ran into the Deputy President AT and asked him about his group's attitude towards the agency offer. Basically he was not too impressed. He thought the agency had tried to get away with the cheapest possible answer as far as the landowners were concerned. He also questioned its ethics, pointing out that it really had no care for the riverbank itself (a point also raised elsewhere at another time by the non-governmental observer AV).
The landowners had not come to a conclusion as to how to respond to the offer. Some like the Deputy President were not prepared to accept the seven-metre setback from the top of the riverbank. Not only would it mean that they would lose their enjoyment of a close river frontage, but it could also mean the intrusion of strangers onto the riverbank out of their control. He did not feel inclined to go through the whole relocation process for the relatively small sum to be paid, which in any case was recompense for lost land. In other words he was not receiving AU's message that they should come to the negotiating table, where some provision could presumably be made for relocation. He felt that the proper answer was to go through the $3 million full repair option, but even that would not be sufficient. When full river regulation via the weir recommenced, with sharp drawdowns, the bank would still be under threat in other areas where it was not going to be protected, assuming the protection worked adequately anyway.

However, AT said the group was not unanimous. One recent owner who had been in occupation for only two years wanted to make the most of the Department's present offer. The Deputy President was not too impressed by this approach, claiming that the man had had his property on the market for sale anyway, and was now probably going to withdraw it temporarily in an attempt to raise its selling price from, say, $160,000 to $250,000.

I asked whether they had taken any outsider advice, and he said they had gone to the Town's welfare agency where they had held a telephone conference with a lawyer in the regional centre. The lawyer had indicated that they might have a reasonable case because the government had resumed a two metres wide strip along the riverbank before the weir had been built, indicating that it had anticipated bank problems later. They were also trying to approach the Environmental Ombudsman, but the Deputy President did not know where that move stood at present. They hoped to arrange a new meeting with the agency soon.
4.10.3 The Outcome

Towards the end of the main visit, I attended a meeting of the water user organization group, as described in section 4.7.4. At that meeting, an oblique reference was made to circumstances that may have had implications for the Village. The senior water user representative AA had apparently now heard of the earlier events recorded above, and said that a Land Board hearing in the Village scheduled for next May was likely to lead to a recommendation supporting a grant application for a 4000 megalitre licence (58.4). However, he had spoken to the director-general of the relevant water agency, who had told him that association members would have nothing to fear from this recommendation. The licence would not be granted, as the agency was not obliged to follow the Land Board. While the matter did not specifically relate to the riverbank collapse issue, the water user association was evidently confident in its ability to approach senior bureaucrats, and possibly to influence the responses of the latter beyond public gaze.

Whatever expectations the water users may have been held, the Village Resident Group story had taken a different turn by the time of the final visit, during which I went to see the Deputy President AT again. He lived along a turn-off from the main road that soon became simply a dirt track, lined with three-strand post and wire fences on one side and vacant land on the other. When I entered through his gate, I drove for fifty yards until I entered a clump of trees. The clump at first seemed to house a series of chicken houses, where a woman was feeding the chickens.

I parked the car under a tree and told the woman why I had come. She said that AT was interstate and took me to see the riverbank. On the way we came across the house, which was unexpectedly lavish, almost up to the style of the grazier's house (Report 20). When we came to the riverbank, it turned out to be the outer bank of a large river meander.

At the base of the bank was a stone revetment extending to or above high water level. The bank needed re-vegetation above the revetments, a task that, according to the woman, the residents were about to start. Materials for this work would be supplied by the government water agency. She told me that the whole project had cost about $1
million, but had not followed any of the seven options considered at the offer meeting I had attended.

After that meeting, the residents had taken legal advice, but the lawyer had told them they would be in for a lot of money, the process would take two years of heartache, and they would probably lose in the end. However, when negotiations took place in the local club with, amongst others, the presenter AU from the earlier meeting, the solicitor attended. In the woman's eyes, his presence had implied that the residents meant to be taken seriously. The agency, slightly on the back foot anyway because it had previously indicated that it had some awareness that the problem was of its making, eventually caved in.

In the end, the bank work had been finished last September, and the Resident Group was now dormant. The President I had met originally was still President, but had not called a meeting for a very long time. Some other members at the time of the initial government offer had wanted to take the money and leave, but in the end all had stayed. The woman didn't say explicitly whether cash was offered as part of the finally agreed option, but I gained an impression that it had not been.

The river bend now looked better than anywhere else locally, except perhaps at the western end of the Town. The woman said, however, that land values in the Village still remained a considerable problem.

4.11 The Sacred Site Story

4.11.1 First Encounters

When I first visited the Hamlet during the first pilot visit, the main Aboriginal representative (AW), in response to my initiating question "what you think of the river?", had mentioned that the Pakeha lagoon was much more important. It was, he said, "part of our religion", and he was pleased that water-skiing and swimming on it had now been banned (8.15).
When I returned for the second pilot visit and interviewed the Aboriginal teaching aide AI on my first trip to the high school, AI had turned immediately to the Pakeha lagoon issue. For that respondent, continuing use of the lagoon by water skiers was a desecration of something like a church to the Aboriginal people, as though someone was driving a tractor down the aisle. I asked him what he meant by “church”, and he said that it was a place where you went to get things back together again. These were not his exact words, but he did not use terms like “meditation” (28.11).

I said that I thought the water skiers had been banned, but AI disagreed. It was access by cattle that had been banned, but even these were now back. A report had been prepared on the matter for the relevant Federal Minister but had become stuck there, awaiting his signature. A court action was scheduled for the next month to make the Minister decide on the matter.

According to AI, the water in the lagoon came from an artesian bore (although when I saw it later, the lagoon seemed more likely to me to be an oxbow lake). In normal times it “looks like the sky”, but now brown river tail water was flowing back into it. Further, cattle drinking around the privately owned 80% of the shoreline had left it destroyed at the edges, and no marine life was left. However, travelling cattle from the stock route were the real cattle problem, not the local stock. The people who owned the adjoining properties were actually in agreement with a proposal to erect fencing 100 metres back from the edge, if an alternative water supply could be found, for example from artesian windmills. But money was the difficulty with windmills, though not much was needed. AI also mentioned money for the fencing but in a somewhat muffled way.

4.11.2 The White Land Councillor’s View (Reports 60 and 66)

I later had a discussion with the non-government observer AV who had spoken at the meeting where the reconstruction offer had been made to the Village Resident Group. This person, though white, had apparently been a member of the Hamlet Land Council for a time.
I asked him about his involvement with the Pakeha lagoon issue. He talked lengthily about the adverse activities of water-skiing, stock watering and pumping around the edges. Pumping in particular had brought about bank destruction and erosion. I thought at first he meant pumping for stock watering but in fact there had apparently also been a water licence operating out of the lagoon to irrigate about 18,000 hectares on a nearby farm. This situation had been resolved more or less fortuitously in 1995, when one of the leading local intensive water use entrepreneurs brought the property in question from its previous owners mainly for the water licence, which he then transferred to the main river.

Water-skiing had now stopped, but the order referred to above, although recently signed by the Minister, had had a life of only two years. AV was concerned that there might be some sign of water-skiing development now beginning at another lagoon further to the east. This lagoon had in turn had been expressly precluded from water-skiing activities by another government agency that controlled it because it was Crown land. However, the development activity (building of a boat ramp) might only be a personal initiative of the local property owner, not an attempt at a more extensive club recreational use.

The stock watering issue was a different matter. The lagoon lay within a State stock route and travelling cattle were the problem. This had become a sticky matter through the resistance of the Rural Land Protection Agency, the chairman of which was a local grazier who happened to be a water skier. The State water management agency was also proving to be a stumbling block.

I asked what was thought about the Minister, and he called him “a goose”. He said that the Minister had spent two years placating 30 boat owners and the attitudes behind them. I asked him what these attitudes consisted of, and he said “no recognition of its (the lagoon’s) religious significance”. There was now an undertaking for expenditure of $3 million on the Broadwater (another oxbow lagoon on the edge of the Town), an average outlay of $100,000 per water-skier.
4.11.3 The Broadwater Meeting (Report 75)

About two weeks before the end of the main visit, I saw an advertisement in the local paper for a public meeting to be held on the following Tuesday evening at the Community Centre, on the topic of a development proposal. The advertisement gave no details about the nature of the development project, nor where its location might be. When I called round to the Council Office on the afternoon of the meeting I spoke to an elderly man who seemed to have some authority, but he said that he did not know much about the proposal himself. However, he took me back to the entry hall, to a pair of photo mosaics of the Town and its surroundings, then telling me that the proposal was to do with a new water ski facility on the Broadwater.

Only twenty people were in attendance when the meeting began in the cavern of the Community Centre auditorium. Seated in the middle of the front row was a man who had once been a very senior State Minister. Twenty feet in front of the audience was a long table where a group of five people was sitting. It transpired that the group comprised a senior member of an out-of-town consulting firm (AX, presumably a partner), the meeting chairman (AY, a prominent local), a less senior consultant (AZ, perhaps an associate), another consultant who acted as principal presenter (BA), and finally the man I had met in the Town Hall.

I entered the hall only a moment after the presenter BA had begun by holding aloft the first of a number of diagrams. These diagrams showed plan views of the Broadwater area northeast of the Town, augmented by two proposed man-made channels. The area was located between the solid waste dump for the Town in the south, and the cemetery in the north. The presenter informed the meeting that excavation on one side of the Broadwater would strike clay and, on the other, a well-graded gravel and sand mix that had been reconstituted in the laboratory after drilling and found to be quite watertight. Thus leakage would not be a problem, but eight hundred megalitres of water would be required each year to compensate for evaporation. Three hundred and sixty megalitres could come from sewage effluent and the balance from a deep bore, which would produce heated water. The quality of water from both sources was dubious. Surface runoff, including the runoff from the dump, might need to be trapped in pollution traps. No input from the river was possible; in fact river water
would be embargoed. But BA then stressed that what he was really looking for was input from the community and public about the proposed layout of the development rather than water quality.

The meeting chairman called for questions, and the first to his feet was the ex-State Minister BB, whose question had to do with the timing of the development. I did not know the content of the order that the controlling Minister had signed a couple of months earlier, but it seemed to me that BB was saying that the new facility had to be ready within about six months of the present meeting. His first comment was that $3 million had been allocated for water-skiing to replace the Pakeha facility. However, the Broadwater project was likely to spend six months in the Planning Court, and the proposed end of June date could not be honoured. His question was therefore: what time was planned for the project’s development?

The presenter tried to guess an answer to this question but was swiftly interrupted by his senior AX, who said that no guess could be given. BB's next question was then: how could the water be guaranteed? AX's response was that all of that issue would be worked out after the configuration for the development had been “confirmed by this meeting”.

The next questioner was a man who introduced himself as a spokesman for the water skiing club (BC). He asked whether the removal of snags been considered. The presenter replied that this would have to be done but had not yet been looked at in detail. $3 million was not much for the scheme.

The meeting chairman said that the Minister had called him up and they had discussed the matter between the two of them, but with only a day to guessimate costs. The Minister had come up with the figure. It was not a concrete number and no one really knew where it could go.

The senior consultant AX said the main sources for water were the sewerage treatment plant (which could not supply enough anyway), the river, and underground sources. It would be better not to mix in the sewage effluent, which would usually be over the limits for primary and secondary contact, i.e. for falling into. It was high in
phosphorus, nitrogen and chlorophyll, and algal growth would be likely. The meeting should remember that there was no flow anticipated through the Broadwater that might cleanse it on a regular basis.

Another member of the audience then said that there seemed to be a big question mark still over the scheme. Shouldn't the water be found first? AK replied that, no, the concept should be determined first. Perhaps an underground source would be the best, but finding it would be an uncertain process.

At this point the local water management agency representative AK chimed in. In AK's opinion only river water would be of adequate quality, allowing for the Town Council's general duty of care. There would also be a licensing question regarding any underground source, in view of the agency's current capping policy. Nine hundred megalitres seemed to AK to be not on, although the representative stressed here (and later) that that view was only a personal opinion and not necessarily that of the agency. The consultant AZ then added that groundwater was of a totally different quality to the existing water in the Broadwater, and its use would have a strong environmental impact on the present flora and fauna. AZ added that “if the ecology of the Broadwater died you would just have to walk away from it. You would want to walk away from it.”

At this stage it became apparent that the whole of the river was committed to other uses. The only way of accessing river water would have been to buy existing water rights from intensive water use growers. The ex-State Minister BB said the water rights for nine hundred and seventy-two megalitres would cost $1.5 million. AK then expressed concern about the gravel layers in the bank structure. In drier times, the water in the Broadwater might just leak out under the beds unless the whole of the basin was to be fully clay-lined.

The male consultant said that the project could be constructed for $3 million satisfactorily, but he couldn't guarantee the water. BC asked “Can we carry over river rights?” to which AK replied, in a statement not fully clear to me, “Yes, but not for long”.
Another member of the audience queried whether water rights would be available. BB replied, “Yes, if you've got the money”. Another audience member then said that the limiting factor was water, and the cart was currently being put before the horse.

Yet another member of the audience said that surface run-off from a wide area could be diverted into the Broadwater with the construction of only one or two banks, and asked whether Pakeha water quality had been tested. Consultant AZ said no, but added that Broadwater water quality was pretty terrible.

Ski club representative BC came back in to the discussion to say that the majority of people in the meeting were water skiers, at which everybody looked around and decided that was true except for AK and another agency man with him. He then said that the area planned for the skiers was OK, but the extent of the powerboat-accessible area should be increased to encompass more of the Broadwater. He estimated that, on top of the purchase of the water rights, the actual purchase of water itself would cost $10,000 a year. The ex-State Minister asked who would pay for the operation and maintenance costs. One of the consultants said that there was no answer to that, and the senior consultant said that issue would have to be addressed later. The ex-State Minister commented that the previous cost-free use by skiers was now to be replaced by an expensive alternative.

At this stage the meeting chairman came back into the discussion, saying, “we know the local community would be up for the cost”. The Pakeha situation (by which he meant closure of water-skiing access) was just about dead and buried as far as he knew. There had been encouraging noises from the government, but whether the promises about a replacement project would stick “remains to be seen”.

The ski club representative asked whether water entry and exit levels from the Broadwater related sufficiently well to river levels to allow or make the river flow through it. Apparently this was a naive question for those in the know, drawing some laughter and a quick denial.

The presenter asked whether the meeting had any revenue-generating ideas. The meeting chairman added, “What does the Ski Club want to do? Proceed or not?”
which the ski club representative responded that it would move from Pakeha once a suitable relocation site had been found. To the chairman’s next question, “When do you have to move?” he said, “When a suitable replacement site is found.” During this exchange, it seemed to me that a slight note of truculence, a slight overtone of threat, crept into the ski club representative’s tone.

A member of the audience asked whether the project could be staged, to which the senior consultant said it could be, but all money would have to be guaranteed before the first stage commenced. The meeting chairman stated that the project must cater for the community - it must contain community-based elements. The Minister needed that for Cabinet. Recalling his earlier comment that “we knew the local community would have to meet the cost”, this remark caused me to feel that the Town ratepayers might end up paying the operating and maintenance expenses. The chairman went on to say that there would be another public meeting later, facilitated by someone from Canberra.

Another meeting member asked whether everyone at the meeting being a Ski Club member was an issue (except the two water agency people; my presence seemed to pass unnoticed). Consultant AZ said that normally a roll call sheet would have been passed around, and that would happen at future meetings. The meeting chairman said that the whole community needed to be behind the project because it would be for all the community, and could also provide tourist potential. AK said that wider notice of the meeting should be circulated in future, for example to the Catchment Management Association, and on that note the meeting ended.

4.11.4 The Outcome

The final stage of the Pakeha lagoon story emerged when I returned on the final visit a year later. One of my earliest stops was at the Town newsagency to collect the previous week’s issue of the local paper. The issue carried the headline “Red Tape Ties up Water Park”. Under it, the chairman of the meeting I had attended was complaining heartily about a hold-up of progress on the Broadwater proposal because the water management agency had been objecting to the removal of some trees for a
considerable period of time. The Town Council had spent $1.3 million on land acquisition and planning and design work, and at one stage had been obliged to meet an interest bill of $1,000 per week. It had taken up to 10 weeks to bring bureaucrats to the conference table. The Council had had to apply for an extractive activity licence, and felt that it was wading through a minefield of applications. Part of the “problem” was also coming from the State’s Environmental Protection Agency (A3.2).

4.12 The White People Story

The White People Story begins with two typically arbitrary incidents, both of which occurred in shops in the Town at the start of the first pilot visit. I reproduce my field notes on each, modified for confidentiality, in sections 4.12.1 and 4.12.2 respectively.

4.12.1 The First Shopkeeper (Report 1)

“The shop is in a side street. It is a long shop, probably twenty feet wide. Across the back is a long counter. The woman stood most of the time behind the counter.

I had never used the service the shop offered before and didn’t know the rules, so I asked her what to do. She told me. A sign said that it would be a dollar if she were to help out herself.

No sooner had I started than she asked me if I would like a cup of coffee. Not in a way that said “everyone gets a complimentary cup”, but in a way that said “you might like one”. “You” was a person, and “like” was an open-ended statement of non-obligation.

I sat on one of the customer chairs spread inside the shopfront window with its back to the street, right at the other end from the counter. A little boy was playing in the shop. She gave him a spray bottle of window cleaner and he
started to clean the glass doors of a stand-up refrigerated drink cabinet. He did it like an artist, having a spray, having a wipe, standing back. I’m not sure he saw any result, but he saw the importance of the job without seeming self-important himself.

She said he was four and a half and about to go to kindergarten, but didn’t go on to say that she would miss him. It was just a statement of fact. It was not uncaring either, it was just the way she was. She talked about the cost of sending him to school, even to so-called “free” State school, but again not in a complaining way, just as an item of concern to her husband and herself.

She was about forty I guess, in baggy old cords, thongs and a sloppy joe.

Two other customers came in. She dealt with them plainly, as equals (or perhaps as slightly more reliant on her than the other way around).

She called me “lad” throughout the conversation, which she didn’t force along. We merely related as talking entities. In fact, I was reading a book (with my back to the street) when there was a loud crash outside. It was an accident between one of those short-wheelbased high-perched pickups you see everywhere here and a red sedan.

The pickup had been backing out from angle parking and the car had been going down the street. I had seen a similar (but slight) accident a few days earlier, and just stood up in the doorway, still half in the book, to have a look. But she pushed past me and ran straight out to pull a child from his seat in the back of the car. It wasn’t until I went out into the street that I saw how bad the crash was. The car’s engine had been pushed under the front seat and the whole thing was half written off. She had seen that, and had taken off immediately.

When I got to the car she was asking the driver whether the child had been wearing a seat belt. I didn’t register the answer. He had only a sore shoulder, which seemed pretty amazing until I realized he had been wearing a seat belt.
Both drivers were out on the street but there was no rancour. In fact there was hardly any conversation at all, which I took to be shock, although neither actually showed any outwardly.

Later the woman told me that the car driver was a policeman (which she knew from before, not because he told her) and the pickup driver had been edging out cautiously. From the state of the car I thought that it must have been travelling pretty fast. The answer to her seat belt question had been that the driver had reached back and released it straight after the accident in case of fire, which did not seem to be a manufactured answer.

We stood around for a while without anybody making any accusations. Another policeman, this one in uniform and much tougher looking than the one in the accident, turned up and began to walk around the crashed cars taking notes. The other driver went to the phone at the back of the shop and began a low-toned conversation with someone, not seeming to be too worried, but rather wary. Then I went home.

I haven’t fully expressed the impression the woman made on me. She was just completely open, like Studs Terkel’s waitress (I forget the reference, but think it is Hard Times) but without her perfectionism or fussiness. It was as if she had no boundary between the world and herself.

Incredible.”

4.12.2 The Second Shopkeeper (Report 2)

“Next to the movies is a rather dowdy second-hand shop.

It is run by the (charity organisation). I thought I knew what the (charity organisation) did, but asked the woman behind the counter anyway.
She told me it was an outreach activity of the (*one of the mainstream churches*). I then asked her whether the churches played much of a social role in the Town.

I think she said they did. She went on to say that she was a member of the (*mainstream church*) herself, and we fell into a discussion about Christianity in which she told me, for a reason I can’t recall, that she had gone on a course with a nun who was a friend of hers. It had to do with Enneagrams and she had discovered that she was a perfectionist. I told her about the Catholic Mass I had attended the previous Sunday (*another story*).

I asked her about the river and she said simply that it belonged to everyone. To Australia.

She was a small woman with a steady gaze. She told me that, although she was a member of the (*mainstream church*), she didn’t go to church much. Then she said that eighteen months ago her son had died of multiple sclerosis. He was thirty-two. Just like that. No emotion.

I began to tell her of a similar experience in my immediate family many years ago, but then realized the stupidity of making such comments to her. All the while she stood looking at me, not sardonically but quite evenly. Then she said she no longer went to church because the people there had kept saying she should pray for a miracle. “They don’t know the meaning of life and death,” she said.

When you meet people who have experiences like that, it is easy to say that they have repressed their emotions. She did not seem like that. Rather, she gave the impression that she was somehow on top of it all, in a way that might be insulted by the word “transcendent”.

Despite it all, she said, she remained a Christian. We kept talking, and she said she was the wife of a prominent figure in the Town, but not in an officious way. She went on a bit about his long involvement with politics.
She said the Lion’s Club was to meet that night and I should see the chemist in the shop across the road about going (I didn’t). When I left I said to her ‘Goodbye Mrs Politics’ and she held out her hand with a smile and said, ‘Nell’.

4.12.3  Main Street Observations

Later during the first pilot visit, I sat in a cafe/coffee shop with a large view across the Main Street and noted the apparent prosperity of the passers-by, including a number of young women obviously on their way to office or shop work in smart business clothing. However, I noticed after a while that a number of other people in the cafe were not as prosperous (3.10). The place in question was not the best in Town, in fact it was partly a fast food outlet rather like the old-fashioned Greek establishments that used to be features of country towns. While some of its customers were middle-class travellers attracted to the place by its central position, others were far less well off. Some were shaggy-headed, bearded individuals who ate with their heads down in a furtive manner (3.9). Having noticed them in the cafe, I then began to see them in the streets. It was only later that I realized that these were most probably itinerant farm workers, passing through before moving on, and (I later found out) starting work in the fields at four in the morning under 30 degree temperatures for ten hours a day, six days a week (61.11).

The cafe also attracted Aboriginals who ate relatively silently, generally in multigenerational groups. Outside at the same table, on some mornings I saw an unchanging group of elderly white men in cowboy hats or baseball caps, and elastic-sided boots or sneakers (3.8). One, taller than the others, seemed to dominate the group, which I took at first to be the local Seat of Knowledge, a group of elders who would implicitly claim guardianship of the conventional wisdom of the place. Later I was told that the Seat of Knowledge was actually further down the street, on a bench outside a supermarket (19.18), but I saw people at that point only once and they did not act like regulars. The Town Council had recently installed a separate covered seating arrangement on each of the four corners of the second major intersection on
the Main Street, but although it was set in attractive island landscaping, it too was not much used by the populace.

The central shopping part of the Main Street seemed to be the normal main meeting ground for the townspeople. Shops did not extend far up the side streets, and the whole centre fitted quite neatly into my understanding of the main design criterion for stand-alone shopping malls, that a shopper should not be asked to walk more than eight hundred metres. As a result, most people parked and then walked, meeting others as they went, sometimes on the grass median strip down the centre of the road. Crossing a street is usually a serious impediment to retailing in metropolitan circumstances, but it was not here. The quality of shops on the northern side was not significantly lower, nor was the intensity of trade. The newsagency at the centre of the strip on the sunny side was a particular attraction, especially at the hour the local paper came out for sale, and so was the Post Office even though it was at the end of the shopping strip.

One respondent told me that the local farmers had a dress code (19.24). The cattlemen were said to wear RM Williams boots, blue check shirts, moleskins, jackets, and 10-gallon hats. Intensive water use men were said to wear caps, boots with scalloped tops, football socks and shorts. Sheepmen, much lower on the social scale than cattlemen, were said to wear a downgraded and less expensive version of the cattlemen’s uniform. I saw nothing of this supposed custom. The nearest to it came from a fairly central shop window that displayed a complete range of country hats, from the squatter’s to the cowboy’s. An adjacent larger display showed pseudo football jumpers and checked woollen lumberjackets (3.12).

Uncertainty about the Seat of Knowledge and the dress code caused me to doubt the local acceptance of other so-called myths. For example, the Town was said to identify itself through its association with a long dead famous racehorse, which in fact had never visited the district at all. In another case, a large roundabout connecting the highway bypass to the Town's main street and described as the largest in Australia was claimed as a symbol of “fame” (3.2). But the only encounter I had with either of these ideas was a faded newspaper article taped to a shop window telling townspeople of the racecourse connection as though it was lost history.
4.12.4 Reported Local Attitudes

The respondent (BE) who described the dress code told me that all the local graziers thought only about the weight of their cattle, and were not at all interested in the quality of the meat (19.8). BE also said that the Protestant work ethic was alive and strong amongst the district population (19.9). I found a degree of confirmation of the existence of that ethic when I interviewed a recent agricultural graduate who told me about the rigours of local agricultural work practices (61.11).

Another respondent (BF) advised me that the 3% unemployment rate in the district was about the lowest in Australia. Anyone who was out of work was said not to want it. One consequence was that the cost of housing in the Town was very high. But despite that, poverty and violence were still endemic, with one in three women subject to domestic violence (4.9). (Again I began to feel hints that, although they were made with the best of intentions, these remarks might be “programmed”).

A more complete view on these issues came from respondent BG who had researched the Town thoroughly after arriving relatively recently, talking to people around Town in much the same way that I was doing (42.1 - 42.17). This respondent appeared to be a thorough sort of person, with almost a professional sociological approach. When I asked about values in the community, the response was that the dominant ethic was “I did it my way”. “If you’ve made it you’re OK, but if you haven’t you’re nowhere”, reflecting the view that “I can make it here, and if you can’t you’re not really trying”.

BG went on to say that the Town as a whole was very much a do-it-yourself community. For example, the Town levee had been built in 1952 by the Council without government assistance, and had been raised bit by bit as new flood peaks occurred (the record had been in 1992). The Town’ effective hinterland was approximately circular, with a radius of about 60 kilometres (although the Village and the Hamlet were certainly outside Town residents’ perceptions). Everybody thought the Town was a pretty comfortable place to live. BG said that the Inter-Census change
in permanent population had been only 28% over four years, i.e. 7% pa, which was low in BG’s opinion.

The district and the Town were both very rich because they drew income from diversified products (intensive water use products, grain, beef, wool), isolating both from single-product downturns. Townies thought they were superior to farmers. Sometimes BG felt they were cliquey. The social gradient in the Town was:

- Intensive water use farmers and professional people at the top; then
- Graziers and grain growers; then
- Townies; then
- Farm labour, which still constituted a large fraction of the population, with many people in Town working on farms (as distinct from itinerant seasonal workers).

The value system was bound so closely to the dollar as far as the elite people were concerned that, in BG’s opinion, people were working very hard to the exclusion of real life in order to be included in local society. At this stage I asked this respondent whether there was much domestic violence. The cautious reply was that there was, but it remained hidden and hard to quantify.

Town life still centred very much on a traditional view of relationships between men and women. If I wanted to inquire further on this issue I could talk to the Lifeline consultant who worked out of the local social welfare agency one day per fortnight, or to people associated with social work at the hospital. BG thought that separation was the really big issue, meaning that both the man and the woman in a family relationship went to work, causing difficulties and conflicts with childcare. On weekends the man did his own thing while the woman did what she had to do, including running the kids around between sporting fixtures. I suggested that this was a kind of informal divorce, to which BG replied that Australia had always been “the land of the absent father” right back into history, from the time a convict became a ticket of leave man and went droving. The man/woman divide was pretty great, but families were still the thing in the Town.
The respondent thought delinquency was high. Until children turned 11 or 12 they continued to live locally, but many went to boarding school for secondary schooling. Of 850 kids in primary school, only 400 at most would go on to the local high school. Academic ability then dropped there, and social problems increased because those who stayed on came from lower income groups.

Alcohol abuse showed up in the children. BG was very down on binge drinking, and particularly against the B & S Ball, thinking it did more harm than good despite the community’s opposite view based on the profits going to charities. The question for the respondent was “which charities?” BG thought that some may be simply sporting clubs.

Housing was very expensive, with prices equal to those in the State capital, confirming BF’s remark in the last sub-section. A quarter acre vacant block cost about $32 - 35,000, and people tended to build very big houses, exacerbating the borrowing issue and the need for both partners to work. The house BG was renting cost $180 per week. When I asked about public housing, I was told that the area behind the Catchment Association’s office was more or less the wrong side of the tracks. Centrelink looked after that area by way of welfare and pension provision, with emergency relief from the shopfront social welfare agency in the Main Street. BG made no mention of St Vincent de Paul or Anglicare.

The respondent did not believe that religion acted as a voice in setting values. People went to church to be baptized, married and buried. All the religious ministers in Town met and enjoyed each other’s company, without competition or argument, but the attitude should be how they could be of service to the community. Some time ago an incident had occurred in which a mainstream church minister had written to the local district newspaper in a positive way about a particular issue, while another had written negatively on the same topic. The paper appeared to have taken great glee in running the two letters side by side.

At this stage I raised the question of district leadership. BG said that the businessmen, certainly not the Council, constituted the leadership in the Town.
I asked whether there was a clear indication about where they were leading the Town to, no answer came other than a shake of the head and a smile. I then stated that I was thinking of the typical leader being a unifier, not necessarily as a visionary exercising power, but BG thought that no real unification pressure existed in the community. Finally, I asked if a red light district existed in Town, and the answer was no.

Three other incidents shed light upon local attitudes. One concerned respondent BF, whom I had met early in the first visit and who had lived in the district for about a decade. The respondent occupied a middle management professional role, and had expressed doubts about the structure of the organization for which BF worked. On later visits I learnt that BF had voiced these complaints to the management, but they had been rejected and BF had resigned. At about the same time, BF's spouse had made similar complaints to the management of another organization and had encountered similar resistance, resigning also. The person who told me the story intimated clearly that both were thought to be a bit too big for their boots. The spouse found another job inside the Town, but BF was forced to seek work in another town over an hour's drive away (39.10).

A similar tale of social ostracism arose with the President of the local One Nation party branch, a body with only two or three members inside the district. This man, an agricultural machinery operator, told me that he had been unable to find work in the district and had to travel to another town over an hour's drive away for work. From a comment by another respondent I presumed that he was more or less being sent to Coventry for holding political aspirations thought to be out of place locally (30.14).

The third instance, which did not involve ostracism, arose when I visited the local medical clinic. Here I found the doctor to be straightforward and helpful, but the waiting room presented an extraordinary form of activity in which the administrative staff, brooking no nonsense and with no sense of customer service, ruled from behind a large reception centre. Scores of patients meekly accepted their instructions (59.5).
I gained access to the results of an informal household survey that had been carried out in the previous year. A thousand doors in the Town (presumably nearly every second house) had been knocked on, but only 25 per cent of them had produced a respondent, two-thirds of whom had been female (it had been conducted between 9.30 am and 5 pm). Age breakdown had been fairly uniform across the range 18-65+ years, but a peak between 25 and 35 years of age contained a quarter of the response group.

The questions to the survey (which had a religious theme) had been set but not the answers. The answers had been written down free form from what people actually said and then categorized, in both cases by relatively untrained surveyors. The first question was “what is the greatest need in the Town?” to which one third or more replied “supervised activities for teenagers”. Otherwise 15% said there were none, and 12% wanted a sporting complex. Beyond that, the need was seen as better-supervised activities for children, better crime prevention and better council facilities, each drawing about eight percent support.

The second question was “do you actively attend Church?” Three-quarters did not. Two-thirds of this subgroup were over 45. Of the attending quarter, 60 per cent were over 45. Question 3 was “why most people don't attend Church?” 31 per cent replied that Church was not interesting, 29% that they were too busy, and 29% that Church was not relevant to life. Remaining answers, each attracting 5% or less, were that Church structures were inflexible, peer pressure operated, or the partner became angry.

The next question was “what would attract people to Church?” The answers were, to an almost equal degree (15 to 19%), that the messages should be relevant to life, people should be put first, the music should be upbeat, the Church should be involved in community activities, and there should be a non-judgmental attitude. Secondary answers attracting about 7% each were that the Church should be seen as positive not negative, and should have a minister who visited people.
Finally, the last question was “what advice would you give the Church?” Twenty eight percent said it should be friendly to outsiders, and 20% that it should be involved in the community and available when people needed help. A further 15% said it should play more modern music, 12% that the messages should relate to the nineteen-nineties, and 5% repeated that the minister should be friendly and should visit people.

The person responsible for the survey took the view that, if there was any problem, it probably lay in religion not being constructive or positive enough, by which was meant (I surmise) that it should not impose too much guilt on people.

4.12.6. Public Social Life

The Town's main street held three hotels, two conforming to early 20th century rural Town standards with minor upgrades. The third aspired to higher quality, and went through a process of considerable renovation during the course of the fieldwork. It had modern extensions and a new façade even at the time of the first visit, offering either motel rooms with ensuite, or an older style of hotel room with the bathroom down the hall. One of the new parts of the building housed a large convention/dining room at the back, which drew brisk business and seemed to be the place to hold your function or wedding. However, even with its aspirations to higher quality, it drew a mixed clientele. Here, for example, is an excerpt from my field notes describing happenings in the public bar, edited for confidentiality and removal of obvious subjectivity as elsewhere in this report:

"The public bar put on a counter lunch that I sometimes bought. Only three or four people were normally in the bar at that hour. One day I was entering through the street door trailing behind a woman and two small children when a man with what I can only describe as a freshly smashed face came out. He knew the three in front of me and took one of the girls, aged about seven, off to one side to talk to her. Later he came back into the bar alone and asked for a drink, but the young barmaid spoke briefly to the publican who had just come in from the back. The publican then forthrightly told the man he would not be
served and he didn’t want him or the other three men he’d been drinking with back in the hotel.

Ten minutes later another customer, a little the worse for drink but obviously a local, ordered a bottle of wine but then said he had only $11 of the $18 price and would pay the rest later. Again forthrightly, the publican said he could have an $11 bottle or nothing at all.

The bars close at 1 am on Saturday and Sunday mornings, with the same street theatre each time: incoherent shouting, loud engine revvings, sudden tyre squealings, and roars off down the long straight street into the distance. No sign of police -- perhaps there’s no one to hit at that hour.” (24.5 – 24.6)

On another occasion I went to the Club Bar to watch a football match on television. The bar was full for the occasion with groups of young men, mixed groups of young men and women, twosomes and a number of parties consisting solely of young women. I sat at the bar close to a serving point, and every now and then a young woman from one of the all-female groups would stand next to me to order. It was only after the first two or three instances that I noticed she was buying only soft drink. Furthermore, these groups were not paying much attention to the football, nor were they eyeing off any of the men in the bar (24.9). In fact there was not much intermingling going on at all. It occurred to me that occasions such as this provided the only opportunities for young single women to have any public social life to speak of, and that no comparable venue existed in Town. I do not mean that the newly-arrived cinema or the coffee shops did not offer socialisation opportunities to women, but they were obviously not strong alternatives, particularly at night.

I stayed at this hotel again on a later trip. It had been renovated once more, and a poker machine lounge holding about 20 machines had been constructed off the bistro space in response to a recent change in State gambling laws. I understood that the owner and his family had come back to manage the place, the man I had previously seen being only a paid employee. Now the public bar door had a sign reading “ID
REQUIRED BEFORE ENTRY”, while on the saloon bar door another said something like “NO SWEARING” but in stern language (39.6).

One evening I entered the hotel to attend a meeting. On the way through the door I ran into BE who told me that the meeting was already over. We went into the public bar, and he introduced me to the publican/owner. When we ordered a second beer, the young barmaid, a self-confident type, showed us a map supposedly illustrating the intentions of Indonesia towards Australia. The whole of New Guinea and the full width of Australia as far south as at least Rockhampton were to be taken over. She was both outraged and convinced by this map, which she said had come from a credible source - I think the local National Party member. While we were in the bar, BE talked a lot about a party candidate for a nearby electorate who, at 29, would become a senior Cabinet officer if the current ruling party lost at the next election. He had originally been a shearer, and my respondent was aghast at the possibility. He was also bemused by the way the Australian public, in his view, were able to focus on only one thing at a time, either East Timor or the Republic but not both (46.7).

On my first trip, the hotel housemaid, who looked after all of the rooms on her own, seemed to be able to stay cheerful and friendly all the time. As part of my inquiries about weekend activities I asked for her opinion, but she simply smiled and said “nothing much happens here over the weekend” (24.10). Before leaving the Town at the end of the first pilot visit, I traversed it by car to gauge the level of weekend social activities as best as I could for myself. However, that Saturday fell on a long weekend, with horseraces some distance out of Town, car races somewhere else and two weddings due that evening, so by all accounts it was untypically quiet.

I toured the Town twice, just before noon and then at about three in the afternoon. On the morning tour I visited the Rugby League ground where I found the Town’s Under-14s playing a team from another town. Perhaps 60 spectators were present, many in cowboy hats. The Rugby Union ground showed no sign of life, but fifteen to twenty boys about ten years of age were using a combined skateboard and bike course. No parents were in sight. About twelve cars were parked at the Botanical Gardens, with more arriving. Most were mums with small kids, with some adult picnickers. About thirty cars were parked outside the Golf Club. At 3 pm, both the League and Union
fields were empty. The skateboarders had gone. Only about six cars remained at the Botanical Gardens, but thirty were still outside the Golf Club. Very little traffic was about, and the streets were deserted (Report 27).

4.12.7 Rural Landholders (Report 20)

I received an introduction from an early respondent to one of the oldest grazing families in the district, and spent the best part of an afternoon with its head (BH). The referring respondent told me that the family had been amongst the earliest settlers in the district.

My phone call seeking an appointment was answered by a reserved female voice that set an image of a high-culture Establishment pastoral family. I thereupon assumed that it would probably receive me in a formal lounge room opening out onto a wide verandah from which lawns would run down to the river.

However, the road towards the place finally became not much more than a rutted track and I found the main house hidden amongst trees and sheds. A youngish man with a grazier-like appearance was climbing down a ladder from the roof when the car drew up. To my surprise, he directed me to a second house, which was totally invisible behind the garage. A much smaller house was indeed there, but it seemed I was approaching it from the back door, outside which an older man in an old beach hat, jeans and a work jumper was painting a piece of furniture. Thinking he was another tradesman, I enquired for the grazier, but in this case it was him.

BH was about 65 years of age, with a weatherbeaten face. He introduced me to his wife and, after arranging for afternoon tea with her, took me for a walk around to the front of the house, where indeed the river lay at the foot of a twenty feet vertical bank about forty feet from the verandah.

This respondent gave the impression that he was not interested in being interviewed in any even remotely formal way. To each question I put to him, he gave a kind of cursory grunt and then continued with the topic he had been previously been talking
about. In the beginning this was the family history, as though he was following some kind of practised agenda. His family had been in the district since 1830. They had trekked from Sydney in the early days, and settled somewhere else before moving to the present property, which was now 40,000 hectares (100,000 acres) in size. He thought the present management of the river was appalling because “they have given all the water away”. He had taken up water rights when they had first been made available, but had sold them some years ago for just under half a million dollars. They would now be worth about 30% more, but he showed no regret when repeating this story. Indeed he was more interested in recounting how he sold them than anything else. He had advertised them for sale by tender in the local press, but a local entrepreneur had rung him to offer $20,000 higher than the highest tender that might be received (even though tenders had not yet closed). The deal had been finalized precisely on those grounds in the end.

We then went in to have tea with his wife on the verandah of the smaller house. At that point the mystery of the two houses became clear. BH had retired from running the property in the last year or so, and he and his wife had moved out of the main house to leave it to one of his sons and his growing young family. The respondent had sold the whole of the property to the sons interested in the land when he retired, and the payments presumably constituted his superannuation. He still had some kind of working interest, and lent his labour at peak times.

The conversation during tea was fairly stilted and again little effort was made to respond to any specific reference I made to the river. The couple mentioned the 1968 flood, saying that it had stopped just short of the floor level in the house, and showed me aerial photos of the homestead area during that time. BH also mentioned the renovation of a large river bend on the property, and after tea we went off to see it.

When we reached the site after driving across the paddocks, I could see that the water management agency had straightened out the bend to direct flow away from the far bank, where a thirty feet vertical black soil cliff remained. It turned out that BH’s sons had done the work on contract to the agency. BH claimed the master-minding of this contract, saying that he had used the same tactic that had succeeded with sale of his water rights. He had rung the man controlling the tender process and told him that his
sons would do the work for $20,000 less than the lowest tenderer would. The "boys", he said, had worked eighteen hours a day, six days a week to get the work done, and had made a tidy amount of money out of it.

He seemed to think that the main purpose of the occasion was to drive me around the property, not to respond to any interest I might have in the river. We went to a place he described as the prettiest part of his property. It was indeed, with cows finding their ways down steep tracks in the banks to the river. At that point the water was crossed by a concrete ford, and he said that he frequently had calls from people wanting to camp there. When asked if that bothered him, he said that if they were courteous enough to ring beforehand it was OK. It was the ones that didn't ring that worried him. There had been one occasion involving bikies when he had had to call the police.

We drove quite extensively around the property for more than an hour, possibly close to two, with him explaining various features of its operation. On a couple of occasions he pointed out overspray from a neighbour's intensive water use operation. This was obviously a matter of concern to him, but the affected areas did not seem great to me. BH did a little dryland intensive water use crop farming from time to time with his sons, a business that was susceptible to the timely arrival of summer rains. If they sold the crop ahead, which appeared to be a reasonably frequent practice, it could be a high-income but also high-risk venture. This year they had sold ahead at too low a price, but again he showed no sign of regret.

Finally we came back to the house and the invitation "you'll have a beer". He, his wife, one of his sons and I sat down in the kitchen. All trace of stiltedness left the meeting as we discovered that both families had educated children at comparable schools, under equal financial duress. At this point they began to refer to upmarket suburbs in metropolitan centres and to their various trips overseas. Despite the remoteness of the property, their horizons seemed well spread around Australia and beyond.
4.12.8 *Local Fishermen*

While wealthier district residents might occasionally pursue their recreational interests elsewhere, those less endowed sought their pleasures locally. For at least one kind of resident, it seemed that river fishing was an attractive outlet. According to the next respondent I report upon, 90% of Town backyards would hold a boat and motor. (My casual scanning of backyards failed to show anything like that intensity of ownership.)

I received introductions to two local fishermen, one a building tradesman (BI) (Report 21) and the other a minor Local Government officer (BJ) (Report 5). I interviewed the first at his house and the second at his place of work.

BI lived in a house on a one-acre block. It was one of an isolated dozen or so lining the riverbank that was still part of the Town but on the far side of the highway from it. The block was flat, grassed and without shrubs or trees. On one side stood a large shed, and on the other, set back from the front, a long row of large wire mesh cages with a fibro roof, about four feet above the ground. The shed was the man's trade workshop. The cage structure, which held about fifteen compartments, housed an extraordinarily colourful collection of large parrots from a wide range of species.

Like the previous respondent, BI felt there was a lot wrong with present river management practices, quoting the differences between it and the normal run of the river during floods. An unobstructed flood could start out with a fifteen feet rise. The river would then run for three or four weeks before dropping back to normal, but if the water management agency shut the weir down, it might drop ten to twelve feet overnight. This suddenness was pulling the banks in. The water management agency seemed to exercise no responsibility when closing the weir down.

Further, intensive water use was a ("the") problem. The water using farmers used very large pumps, sometimes up to three feet in diameter in gangs of up to nine. He had seen the river run backwards past his place when the pumps were in operation. There were pumps all the way downstream for 100 km. He went on, "the farmers think they
own the dam. They may have paid for it out of their levy, but they don’t own the river -- everybody does”.

A big fish kill had occurred a few years ago. Thousands of fish had died. It had been due, the respondent said, to chemicals in the river, and it had taken about two years for yellowbelly of real size to reappear. Cod had also came back, but in smaller sizes.

The intensive water use weir was thirty feet high (compared to the Town water supply weir, which was only three to four feet high). The river management agency released intensive use water from the weir by remote control, on demand from any intensive water use grower who had any allocation left. The growers could not carry allocation unused in one year into the next, and BI did not know whether an allocation would be cut back in the next year if it was not all taken in the present year. (Nor did the local river management agency manager when I visited the local office later. However, I received further information by mail from him on my return to Sydney.) The river management agency would not tell people anything. Some growers left with unused allocations simply pumped the water out onto the ground.

One man had had a bore (by which BI meant a solid wave of water like a mini-tidal wave, not a drilled hole) go up a creek. Considerable damage to the man’s property had ensued, but he had received no compensation. On the other hand, one of the irrigators had grossed $24 million out of 20,000 acres.

An environmental scientist from one of the State capitals, presumably the same man mentioned by the Village Resident Group, had told him that the plumes of cold water released from the dams only flowed down the centre of the river, with the sides and bottom layers of water left unaffected. BI thought that was rubbish, because the fish certainly went off when releases occurred. According to him, the intensive water use farmers had engaged the environmental scientist.

For this respondent, the catchment committee was “all the intensive water use mob. Just a fix really”. Landcare was not mixed up in the river issue, and seemed not to get off the ground. Technically the river was clean. No Town sewage effluent flowed into it. Council did a pretty good job. The Shire engineer could pull rank with the
farmers. But BI remained pessimistic, thinking his grandchildren would not be able to use the river. There was virtually no chance of doing anything about it; no one would listen.

This respondent also gave vent to broader environmental concerns. In his view, dams and European carp were the two problems. Couldn’t get rid of carp. If European carp were rabbits there would be an outcry. He had seen six to seven hundred carp in one net. They damaged the river, pulling the mud out of the bank. With carp there were no waterlilies. A carp mill had been established at a distant location on the river system for fertiliser production. Groundwater bore drains were full of crayfish where they were still running, but the respondent asked rhetorically what would happen when pipes replaced the open drains. There could be six feet of evaporation per year. You caught yellowbelly on the natural rise.

A large local dam on one of the river’s nearer tributaries was allocated only for the intensive water users in one of the two States, but licences could be transferred to the other State. The corresponding farmers in that other State currently drew their water from another dam much further away. The river management agency from one of the States managed the whole of the river, although the State boundary actually ran down the centre of the waterway. Inspectors from the managing agency could get you on a boat but not on the far bank.

The Aboriginal people wanted no cattle or fishing on the river. They wanted to fence it all off, a chain back from either side.

Although BI’s understanding of fish and the river seemed more profound than that of the next respondent I report upon, both were equally difficult to draw off into other topics. But at the end of the discussion, without provocation, BI ruefully admitted that it would be hard to get rid of intensive water use because it brought employment to the Town.

The other fisherman I interviewed had much the same kind of ironic views of the intensive water use growers and government agency behaviour patterns, and a similar depth of grounded knowledge of river conditions. This respondent (BJ) claimed to
have initiated a local fish-restocking scheme, which at the time of interview I took to be a unique enterprise. However, I later heard of a similar initiative elsewhere, and ultimately came across a Murray Darling Basin Commission advertisement offering funds for local fish restocking schemes broadly throughout the Basin. According to BJ, the locals bought fingerlings with help from the Lions Club and the Town’s Football Club. The State agricultural agency had given them a pat on the back for this, but so far had not contributed much by way of live fingerlings itself. In contrast, local clubs had been more generous, the Village Club giving $4000 to the Village fishing club, and the Town fishing club receiving a boat ramp and light from the Town Council. The Council had also given the club access to land behind the bowling club, and made the fishing club members social members of the club. The intensive water use industry had only given the club $500 for one year for fingerlings. BJ believed fishing licenses should cost $5 per week, with the proceeds recycled straight back into local needs. Cod fingerlings cost $1 each and yellowtail 20 cents.

Expanding on the topic of the irrigators, BJ said that intensive water use had cleaned its act up a lot, but was too powerful, was king. No fines had been levied for a big chemical spill into the river a few years ago (presumably the same spill as that mentioned by BJ). Aerial spraying was now prohibited in America, but was still allowed in the district. Intensive water use planting needs determined the water releases.

The river management agency drew water from the Village weir for the benefit of farmers as far downstream as 70 km away. Without the weir operating, water came from the upper dams. Everybody took some along the way so that hardly any reached the end of the run. Fish were pumped out of the river by intensive water use drawoffs. The twelve pumps just outside the Village had, on occasion, stopped the river and made it flow the wrong way, sometimes with a whirlpool at the pumps. Water from the weir put fish off biting, because water even 12 to 20 feet deep was cold water.

The respondent believed that the area could not take any more intensive water use. BJ pointed out that one irrigator, now dead, had held rights to 22.5 % of the major nearby dam’s water. Water now sold for $350 per megalitre, although originally the licences
had been free. Further, BJ believed that the intensive water use farmers directly lobbied Members of Parliament and got let off on any problems they caused.

Like the previous respondent, this respondent had additional environmental comments to offer. For example, one could kill carp with low voltages, which did not kill cod or yellowbelly, although “it might leave them shaking their heads a bit”. Fish kills had sometimes been blamed on lightning strikes, but that was ridiculous.

4.12.9 Further Casual Encounters (Report 6)

Going out for coffee one morning, I stopped in front of a bric-a-brac shop, attracted by the smell of camphor and a few old books in the centre of the window. The shop was just opening and the proprietor BK was sweeping the doorstep.

I went in to see if the shop held anything worthwhile in the book line. There was nothing, but it was an interesting shop. In a corner near the window I found a few women’s hats of a vaguely Edwardian style.

I asked the proprietor where the water management agency office was and said why I was in Town. The proprietor thought there were two water management agency offices, and did not know which would suit my purpose best. When BK proposed ringing another person for directions, I mentioned the Catchment Management Association executive officer’s name, and it turned out that the shopkeeper, a part-time milliner, was making a hat for her. At that point in the first pilot visit, it seemed to me to be a bit strange to find a market for women’s fancy hats in such a relatively small country settlement.

As I was leaving, the shopkeeper, out of the blue, told me of a slightly handicapped daughter who had just graduated as a PhD with a thesis on the regional politics of an Asian region. But if this excursion into upward social mobility was surprising, an equally surprising excursion downwards occurred shortly afterwards.
I was driving just outside the Town boundary looking for a drover that a previous respondent had said I should talk to. I had so far found a saddled pony tied to a tree, a trailer with two or three dogs sheltering under it and lots of cattle, but no drovers. After searching for a while, I was heading back to Town for the next appointment when, turning right at the highway turnoff, I caught sight of the Camel Man's caravan out of the corner of my eye. It consisted of two gypsy-like caravans linked together and pulled by three camels, with two others tied to the stern. One of the trailing beasts was playing up. It was a totally unexpected and quite exotic sight. As I stopped the car, the driver of the caravan got down, turned around and started to walk away. I caught up to him, and asked if he had seen the drovers. He said he hadn't, but one of their cows was on the road and he was off to the stock office. I offered him a lift and, once he was in the car, asked what was with the camels. He answered, "Just a way of life". If he had added "man" (perhaps he did) it would have been entirely natural. He was not eccentric nor particularly old, and in fact looked like a drover himself. He said that he and his wife travelled up and down the Darling Basin, so I asked him my standard question as to what he felt and thought about the river. He laughed and said simply that intensive water use "had stuffed it, with all the insecticides and everything".

The short ride to the stock office ended at that point. I dropped him off and headed back towards town, passing the caravan again. An appointment was starting to press, and I couldn't wait for the man to return, but over the next couple of days it seemed more and more necessary to go back and talk to him and his companion. Finally I went to the riverbank where they had said they would be camping, but they had gone. The stock officer told me they were heading upstream. They came through every three or four years, travelled about thirty-five kilometres a day, and had taken the river road. I went after them, but mistook the road and did not find them again.

4.12.10 The First Village Group

One of my earliest respondents recommended that I should talk to the postmistress at the Village post office. Like everything else in the straggle of shops along the stretch
of highway forming the Village's main street, the post office was not easy to find, turning out to be a weatherboard shack with a small verandah.

A man and woman were working behind the counter dealing with customers. At the first break, I introduced myself to the woman, saying I was here to talk about the river. "What about the river?" "Everything". "Well you can start with the weir", she said, giving me a hard look. "What about the weir?"

The postmistress did not know who built the weir, but the man behind the counter with her (who turned out to be her father, helping out) said it was the intensive water use people. Neither of them knew who owned or controlled it, but their first reaction was one of annoyance. Their complaint was that it had destroyed the sandy beaches above the weir, leaving everything muddy when the water went down. They thought the weir gates might be controlled by phone, because there was a hiatus when the telephone line went out.

According to the postmistress, one could not actually get to the weir. There was a gate across the access road that shouldn't be locked but was. If anyone went past the gate or onto the weir, someone unknown nearby rang the police, who turned up pretty promptly.

At this point more customers came in so I went to look at the weir myself, finding that arrangements at the gate were not quite as described. The gate, supposedly locked, was open but carried a sign saying "Private Gate". I did not consider it appropriate to trespass, and thus did not see the weir on this occasion. However, I made an attempt to look at some of the sandy beaches on the way back into Town. Although the track leading in to them proved very difficult for an ordinary sedan, I could see the attraction.

Returning to the Post Office, I found the postmistress and her father having tea outside in the sun with a couple of locals. Both newcomers were elderly, a man and a woman, the man with a beard and cowboy hat. I informed the two strangers of the purpose of my visit to the district, whereupon the elderly man immediately said the problem was greed, intensive water use. When the bridge (presumably the new
bridge) had been built, there had been over 40 feet of clear water beneath it. Now, when the rains came down, practically no water reached the Town. The intensive water use farmers, whom he called the “mafia”, took it all out. In fact, the river occasionally ran backwards now. They also talked about bores being put down everywhere, generally without permits. They had no answer when asked whom they could complain to.

At the postmistress’s father’s invitation, he and I went a short way upstream to look at the river. He led me off the road to a point where the bank was badly eroded and collapsed. In the distance one could also see twenty feet high “cliffs” of exposed soil. When asked whom people could sue for their backyards falling in, the father didn’t know. He was amazed that one man in his eighties was still buying up land for intensive water use.

4.12.11

Church Activities

During the first pilot visit, I attended a Mass in the Town's Catholic Church, which sat on top of the Town's only prominence, in itself no higher than thirty feet. I found the church almost empty at the advertised time. An elderly woman near the door told me that Mass was to be an hour later that day, because First Communion and Confirmation ceremonies were going to be held simultaneously.

The church was about two thirds full by the time the ceremony began, with about three hundred people in attendance. I presumed that this number was more than usual, because a number of grandparents and sponsors would have come from elsewhere in recognition of the special occasion. In addition, there would have been some spillage from the other weekend Mass on Saturday night.

Notwithstanding the special occasion, the ceremonies seemed to me to be relatively low key. The parish priest conferred Confirmation, to my knowledge a thing unthinkable as recently as fifteen years ago. There was no bishop, no crook, no mitre, and no attendant junior priest as bishop’s secretary. There was no particularly high ritual, at least compared with what used to be the case.
A few days later (and subsequently on several occasions), I was surprised to see that the church door stood open, contrary to now-general metropolitan practice, despite the priest having left for the week for a Diocesan conference.

I interviewed the parish priest during the second pilot visit. He was readily available, meeting me within half a day of my phone call. He lived in an unadorned low-level weatherboard house between the handsome sixty-year-old church and an almost shanty-like op shop, in a block-sized campus that included the parish primary school. Internally, the house was a comfortable bungalow, much better than its exterior implied. He was probably in his early fifties, and his clothes gave no indication of his function. Without taking me into the house proper, he led me to a corner of the enclosed verandah that apparently served as an office.

To start the discussion, I said my wish in meeting him was to pay closer attention to the ethical and introspective dimensions of Town life, neither of which I felt had been sufficiently addressed in the first pilot visit. The statement produced a silence that was neither stunned nor, it seemed to me, particularly reflective, possibly because I had stated the question too academically. Finally the response came that there were fewer church-going people in this Town than in the town he had come from two years ago, but that nevertheless there were many good people in the Town. Nothing more.

When asked about youth suicide, he referred me to a nun working at the hospital as a social worker. This was also the response to a question about the frequencies of single mothers and domestic assault. He said that about four or five people called at the presbytery door each week for assistance, but mainly for cash for petrol, i.e. they were transients. I asked about the general response of the churches in Town to social welfare needs, and was told that there was nothing else like the St Vincent de Paul Society, but the Blue Nurses of the Uniting Church were both numerous and active. He thought the Town’s population might contain a fair proportion of short-term residents, with permanent residents retiring to the coast. He ended this line of questioning by saying that clergymen were no longer in the forefront of social work in the district.
While talking about the welfare worker at the Hospital, he mentioned two other nuns who were currently living in Town but were planning to move to the Aboriginal Hamlet. They intended not to work as social workers but merely to “establish a Christian presence” in the settlement. Very faintly, I gained an impression that this was said ironically, that he really didn’t expect their plan to produce anything worthwhile. (In the Black People Story, I describe another interview directed more specifically to this topic – see section 4.13.11.)

The meeting had not been as successful as it might have been. In hindsight, I believe I had approached it too strongly, as very much the interviewer, clipboard in hand. Too many questions had been “set piece”, starting from a point that may have been too ethereal for a possible pragmatist. As I walked out to the car, I wished I had asked him what he thought his role in the community was.

A short time later I rang to make an appointment with the Anglican vicar in the Town. The phone call was answered by a machine, which described a busy schedule for the next few days over a radius of maybe fifty miles or more. However, the vicar rang back a day or so later, and we made an appointment for the afternoon of the following Saturday. During the phone call, I told him about the general thrust of my questions as I had described them to the Catholic priest. The slight pause before his “OK” implied that he might not find them too easy to answer either.

The vicar’s house was like the priest’s except that it had a cross outside. The church next door was beautiful rather than merely handsome, with a fully stained glass semicircular choir and a particular English style that was inviting, rather than architecturally powerful. The vicar was surprisingly young, probably in his early thirties, and wore black trousers and a white shirt with a cross on each collar tab. Conscious of the difficulties of the priest interview, I had come without clipboard or preformed set of questions, and the discussion was relatively free flowing.

In summary, the vicar answered the questions about community ethical attitudes and his role in the community with long scriptural quotes which, in the absence of a notebook, I could not recall later. At the time, however, they seemed to be standardised answers without any particular attachment to the Town situation. When
this was not so, he drew on his own personal experiences, again usually in non-Town situations.

For example, a question about views of dying elicited a story about his recent return from a European holiday. It appeared that one of the plane’s engines had caught fire during the flight. Many of the passengers had turned to him for advice: “what will we do, Andrew?” Many of them had produced rosary beads, and one of the cabin attendants had panicked and needed restraint from the others. When the fire was out and he had time to examine his own reaction, he had found himself unfazed, confident in the belief that all of his life was in God’s hands.

In response to the question as to how he saw his role, he spoke about bringing Christ to the parishioners. When I asked him whether he thought he was being successful, he referred to the retirement home and said that about eight people were now involved in presenting Anglicanism there (equally young and old, more women than men).

A question about Aboriginal people brought a response that most were across the State border and therefore in the next diocese. There was no resident Village vicar, although the Village still had a church. He agreed that this arrangement seemed inefficient, and said that things were moving to correct it. Village people came to the Town to be married and buried, and he added that he never took a fee for such occasions due to canon law restrictions between dioceses. However, their donations in lieu of fees were usually generous (in fact the community seemed to support the church quite well).

Regarding the church’s social role in the community, he advised that Anglican cases were all funnelled through the Catholic St Vincent de Paul society. I think he added that the Anglican parish contributed to the funding of that outlet.

4.12.12 Young People

At the start of my second pilot visit, I mentioned to one of the respondents that I wanted to look at many more streams of local life than I had the first time. These
could include, for instance, police, teenagers, ministers of religion, bereaved people, and even undertakers\(^1\).

At the mention of teenagers, the respondent referred me to an impending school-leaver as a suitable person to talk to, and went on to speak about schooling in the Town in general terms. Apart from the Catholic systemic school, there were no private schools. The State high school did not like private schools at all, because it believed they demoted it to merely a repository for residue students. The girls flirted with the teachers, and the boys tried to excel at sport. If you didn't like or make it at sport, you became a bit of a nobody. There was no point in going on to University, because there were no graduate jobs in the Town.

Over the phone, the teenager seemed a bit bemused by my general inquiry and hesitant as a consequence, but he agreed to come in for a talk. Unexpectedly he brought a friend with him, who presented something of a contrast in both appearance and personality. The first (BL) was tall and bulky. He looked the sort who would enjoy a barbecue and might try to use his size as a persuader later in life—although, as the conversation went on, he turned out to be too much of a thinker to need that kind of tactic. By contrast, his mate (BM) was relatively slight, not as tall, and slim but not weedy. Where BL was self-possessed, BM was shy. We all sat down on the visitor's side of a desk in a cramped borrowed office, with the two boys side by side and me at a slight distance from them. From the beginning it went badly: the perception of a large age difference was too great on both sides. Both boys fixed their eyes on a far corner of the desk.

My first question was what is it like to live in the Town. "Alright", "It's a good town", "It's got everything you need" came the mumbled answers. Not much mileage in that one, so I raised the topic of an article critical of school life that the referring respondent had told me BL had written. BL didn't see it in anything like the serious light the referring respondent had. In fact the article, once I had had a chance to read it, showed a much more accepting approach than I had been led to suspect.

The eyes of both boys would switch from the corner of the desk to my face while they answered, but would swing back to the corner in between. By and large, BM seemed
to parrot BL's answers. Trying to keep the conversation alive, I remarked that there were apparently very few Aboriginal kids at the Town's school. That produced a little bit of life, with both boys saying that the hard thing to take from the few that were there was the reverse racism (I felt a slight element of political correctness in this view).

When asked what they intended to do on leaving school, BL said he expected to go forward to University, travel to the nearer capital city and beyond (perhaps overseas), and finally settle down in a country town that may or may not be the present place. On the other hand, BM hoped to be accepted locally as an apprentice, but was not too precise about the particular trade -- perhaps as a mechanic.

The referring respondent later told me that the slighter boy was in fact a distant Olympics choice as a sprinter, although of course he lacked an adequate trainer in a place like the district. This astonishing comment seemed to receive later indirect confirmation in a metropolitan sports page report.

The question of athletics resonated when I came to examine the Year 11 winning entries in the Town's writing competition. In my estimation, by far the most creative came from one of the two male finalists. The second most creative also came from a boy. By contrast, the entries from girls were mainly in the form of poems, most of them disconcertingly on the subject of suicide. A sample appears as Exhibit 4 on the next page. I am not sure whether this apparent gender distinction is valid or not. The evidence is slight, but the feeling left by the writing competition sat uncomfortably alongside the impression I gained when watching the State of Origin football match in the club bar, that the young women of the Town are socially disadvantaged.

4.12.13  One of the Social Support Services

As indicated earlier, church support for social services was generally funnelled through the Catholic Saint Vincent de Paul Society. I visited that Society's hostel, held an unstructured interview with its President, and attended two of its meetings.
The visit to the hostel occurred during one of the pilot trips. A few days before, I had witnessed a situation where a long haired, black-bearded man with a half-feral appearance, apparently an itinerant, had approached a woman in a shopfront to ask about this form of accommodation. The woman was middle aged, and I later came to know her as a volunteer who was not well trained but earnest, considerate and well meaning. She gave no direct help or indication of feeling, but merely referred him back out the door to the hostel in the next street, adding unhelpfully that it was not open at the moment.

The mere fact that the Society had a hostel in a settlement as small as the Town came as something of a surprise. I had seen enough of hostels to know that the provision of “hotel” services to disadvantaged people is not a matter for casual attention. The Society sign stood outside a rundown weatherboard house that was in need of paint and nearly hidden by oleanders. Off the verandah, in a room made gloomy by the bushes outside, I found a thin bespectacled woman in her sixties sitting behind a desk in the centre of the carpet. At the end of the desk was a white-haired man probably in his seventies, with a ruddy countryman’s face. They sat waiting silently, but it was obvious to them than I was not a client.

They heard out my introduction of myself but still stayed silent, the woman with a nervous smile. One gained the impression that they sat there quietly each afternoon, waiting for God-knows-who to walk in. This impassiveness forced me into a set of floundering questions that led to a fitful and meandering discussion.
They told me that the hostel no longer operated as such but was now a flat, which was more useful for families. Most of the assistance given was to out-of-towners, not locals. The man said that he was amazed at the number of people on their way to other distant parts of the country who seemed to run out of money half way. The service offered was not funded so much by local contributions, but from cash supplied from St Vincent de Paul groups in other towns in surroundings regions of the State.

The Town held a fair population of single mothers, but they themselves did not deal with them. I first interpreted their reply as meaning that that no one helped these people, but then realised that presumably the normal St Vincent de Paul group did – or (perhaps more likely) the Town's street front social agency, which I will come to shortly. Otherwise, although the atmosphere had thawed considerably by the time I left the couple to continue their lonely vigil, this initial encounter did not produce much information.

The discussion with the Society President about local Society activities took place shortly after the start of the main visit to the district. It began with him confirming my understanding of the central position of the Society in delivering welfare to the district. He told me that the weatherboard hostel had gone, and a crisis centre and op shop would replace it. The existing op shop next to the Church would also go. The President thought the op shop relocation would improve local funding, which was currently provided by contributions from an adjoining region. The new location would be bigger and closer to the main street, in which I had seen two other shops of a similar nature already operating.

The original hostel flat for single men had become too difficult to operate, and in addition the use of the old cottage as both a crisis centre for women and kids and a single men's hostel was a contradiction in terms. The Society had therefore entered into an arrangement with one of the cheaper hotels to take the men in at the Society's expense. A proposal for a new men's hostel capable of taking four men plus a caretaker was in the planning stage but was attracting resistance from the other residents in the street every time a location was chosen.
I asked him if the society's activities extended south of the river, and he said they had no boundaries. In fact many Village people helped or worked for the Society. The hostel had once been used for an elderly black man from the Hamlet who had had to stay close to the hospital for a while. He had left it in a mess, but the President had mentioned the problem to some Aboriginal women, who had come in and cleared it up quite well. As we concluded our conversation, I asked whether I could attend the society's meetings.

Although I subsequently attended two meetings, I recorded the events at only one. The meetings took place weekly, late in the afternoon in a small weatherboard building at the base of the small hill on which the church sat. The building had in fact been sold just prior to the meeting, and was to be moved off the site about three weeks later. I arrived a minute or so late, and found the President in the chair, with the Catholic priest and half-a-dozen elderly ladies sitting around a table. One was the nun with an interest in the Hamlet, whom I interviewed later (see section 4.13.11). Two others were support workers who kept the centre open almost every weekday.

The first agenda item had to do with a scriptural reflection guided by a set of readings sent out from the regional office. The priest was putting the first question to the meeting, which was what each had done in terms of the Christian message in recent times. Stunned silence. To fill the gap, he rather tentatively put forward the story of a drunk who had called at the presbytery during the previous week. In this case the priest had thought the man was too far gone to be sent to the hotel, so eventually he took him into the presbytery. The man had left the next morning, after which it was found that he had soiled the bed during the night. The priest thought that the taking in of such a person was a suitable example.

The facial expressions in the room seemed to indicate that this was all too much, and perhaps a mite repulsive. One lady asked whether the police could have been called, but the President said that the days when police cells were used as a flophouse were long gone. Again silence, with no one else prepared to volunteer anecdotes. Only the same lady again, asking why something couldn't be done to stop people like that "pestering Father".
The next agenda item concerned cases. Only one was available, involving a woman with three children who had asked for accommodation to escape her husband. She had been particularly worried about car visibility, because her husband would see her car parked outside the emergency housing. The President said she must be informed that the flat was a crisis centre, not a refuge, and therefore only available for a month or so. (After the meeting, he told me that they could send her off to another town later.)

One of the ladies present raised the transient worker problem in the light of the drunk turning up at the presbytery. 1500 transient workers were known to visit the Town annually. They had been costing the Society up to $22,000 per year until, at the President's initiative, the society, together with the Anglicans and the Uniting Church, brought the intensive water use growers, the transient worker contractors and the Commonwealth Employment Service people to a common table. It was then found that the “problem” people for the Society were also problem people for the growers. The outcome was a change in Commonwealth Employment Service rules postponing dole eligibility. The financial problem then disappeared after about three meetings. In the President's view, the matter had been a case of the entire community working the problem out within itself with a very good outcome, although there would nevertheless still be genuine cases.

The President had also arranged for the Shire to consolidate the earthworks for the new op shop building, at a cost of only $60 to the Society. Being closer to the middle of town, the new centre was expected to increase the Society's income considerably. He said that the Shire had agreed to this kind of use for Shire labour provided it did not interfere with other programmes or costs. Since he had been associated with the Shire it had expended about $2 million on such actions, another good thing in his view.

Regarding the woman seeking shelter, I asked whether she could rely on the local police for protection. The answer was that she could complain, but would not receive real protection. However, under new State law, police could pursue the husband if he stalked her. At that time the State did not have an apprehended violence order (AVO) system, but there was an alternative that sounded like the arrangement in another State
prior to introduction of AVOs. One of the ladies thought that process would not be much good because it would involve a dreary day waiting outside court.

In the later part of the meeting the hospital social worker and the about-to-relocate principal of the primary school entered the room. They made no direct contribution during the remainder of the formalities, but seemed to caucus with the President after the meeting, leaving an impression that there was a sort of executive sub-group in existence.

The main focus of the group as a whole seemed to be on the building project. The parish priest told me that the parish had benefited from the bequest of a sizeable property from a parishioner in recent years, which was obviously helping to fund the construction programme.

4.12.14 Support Services More Generally

Although the St Vincent de Paul Society seemed to be a reasonably active operation in the Town, a more visible form of social welfare agency existed in a shopfront in the main street in shared accommodation with the district promotion office. When I made my first overture to this agency, I was told that it reported to a management committee drawn from the community. All members of the management committee were volunteers who took legal responsibility for the activities of the centre. According to the person I first spoke to, the organization employed twenty-eight people full or part time, organised on the basis that four different functional managers reported directly to the management committee. It seemed that the centre relied for funding on project grants from various governments (mainly the government of the State in which the Town sat). I surmised that it shared accommodation with the District Promotion office because the grants usually provided only salaries, without rental or administrative allowances.

I noticed that the pamphlet rack at the entry to the office was extensive, containing papers on a wide range of current social issues with an apparent leaning towards women's concerns. I called again at this office on a number of occasions, speaking to
two of the female social workers, and entering into a somewhat deeper programme
with a male drug and alcohol officer who later became a parole officer in the district.

The occasion for calling on the first female social worker was an advertisement in the
local paper forecasting a meeting of parents having problems with teenagers. The
relatively young woman was at first a little wary of the newcomer from the city, but
agreed quite readily when I asked whether I could sit in on the meeting as a silent
witness. She said that I should also come round to the office on the following Monday
evening, when the mother whose call to her had been the spur to form the group was
coming in to discuss the first meeting. She was not sure how many would attend the
meeting itself. When I asked to tape the meeting, she thought that might be too much
for newcomers on the first occasion. It might be better to defer it to a later time when
their confidence had grown. However, when she met with the initiating mother, the
latter objected strongly to the presence of any outsiders. I learnt later from the family
project officer that only about four people turned up, all mothers no fathers, not of all
of whom were experiencing the problem personally. Further, one had brought her
daughter, which rather stifled the discussion.

When I asked how I could get in touch with youth groups, the family project officer
referred me to another social worker in the office. This second woman was also 30 or
so years old. She was only on a 19 hour a week basis with the State government and
interested only in the Town, not the Village or the Hamlet. Her role concerned
schoolchildren between 12 and 17 years of age, and she did not have much contact
with older ones after they left school. The only exception was a young mums' group
for girls between 18 and 25 with children. She said that if I wanted to speak to
someone about the Village, I should talk to the youth, drug and alcohol counsellor,
who would not be back until the following Monday. Like another respondent, she
mentioned the prospect of a backpackers hostel, possibly in the Country Women's
Association hostel. She knew nothing of the condition of the Country Women's
Association or of its hostel (which I later found in a back street, apparently unused)
but thought it could be worth exploring. She also thought a backpackers hostel would
be of most use to itinerant workers and, if I remember correctly, mentioned another
hostel somewhere else in the Town.
Her real function was to arrange recreational opportunities for kids, for example trips away during school holidays. However she was quite pleased with the success of one of her recent initiatives, the construction of a motorcrosse track near the process plant about a mile out of Town. She had called a meeting to consider this development and over 70 people had turned up. A club had subsequently formed.

She had even tried to initiate a resurrection of school cadet corps, which she thought might engender self-reliance and a “proper use of firearms”, but the response had died away. I did not ask whether this was before East Timor blew up, or whether the Army had shown any interest in managing the idea as it once might have done.

At this point I mentioned to her my interest in identifying topographical influences on communities, and said that I had concluded that the flat landscape around the Town had led to the development of an urge towards self-containment within the Town itself. In turn that had caused everyone in the community to want to become involved in things like the motorcrosse track. During her response to this hypothesis (which I did not hold strongly) she came out with the totally unexpected remark that the Village lacked a leader. Even the Hamlet had some. It seemed to me that, if the word “leader” was interpreted to mean unifier, she may have hit on a significant insight. The Town was self-contained within its levee embankment (leading to or caused by a general unconsciously defensive attitude towards life). The Hamlet was self-contained as a result of its administrative origin, the continuing external control exercised over it, and the riverside gullies that surrounded it. But the Village simply straggled into the open plain without any apparent boundaries. So perhaps there was a topographical influence to consider.

This second social worker seemed a good deal more knowledgeable about a wide range of things than the first. However, both had a similar slight air of either defensiveness or glibness that seemed to add to the impression of political correctness I had gained from the leaflet rack at the office door. This may have been due to gender or age or some other difference (reaction again to a blow-in?), or perhaps all three causes. On the other hand, the impression of superficiality may well have arisen because I talked too much or asked too many questions.
I also called unannounced on the nun/social worker at the local (non-religious) hospital. She had a meeting scheduled for half an hour or so later, but we had a short chat before arranging for a further interview (that did not occur).

She was a well-dressed and self-assured woman probably in her late forties. I began by asking her about the mental health position in the Town in view of another respondent's comment that this was the one medical specialisation not well serviced in the district. She denied this vigorously, pointing to a notice inside her door advertising a visiting psychiatrist who attended from out of Town regularly.

I went on to explore minority issues such as single mothers and domestic violence, at which she became (I thought) slightly defensive. It seemed almost as though it might be an affront to suggest the Town harboured poor people who might not be quite up to scratch socially in terms of image or perhaps morals. I do not mean to say that she was uncharitable, but rather that she seemed to dress to and come from a solidly middle-class position. I said I realized that unemployment in the Town was low, but presumably there were some marginalized people, and that in fact I had met one or two myself. She responded by saying that unemployment was very low and the Town was quite wealthy, as could be seen in the style of clothing in the shop windows in the main street.

Before the meeting concluded, shortened by another engagement she had, I told her that I was about to introduce myself to the manager of the shopfront social welfare agency. She told me that the manager had just left because of a family death in the capital city. The agency was without a manager, “again” she said, and the committee was in the process of searching for a new one. I later discovered that she herself was a member of the committee.

On my later visit to the shopfront agency, I took the opportunity to ask the family project officer about the domestic violence level in the Town. She said that she could not put a figure on it, nor report on family breakup. She said most of her problem work was concerned with disputes over children. When I asked her what she did about those, she said she got on the phone “to any one”. There was no Department of Community Services support, the nearest office in a distant regional centre being
ineffective. She often received legal inquiries that she could not answer, and was glad that the office now had a videoconferencing facility through which people with problems could talk directly to solicitors in the capital city or other major towns.

Nearly all her clients were white. She had had only one Aboriginal client on a real family matter, and that had been domestic violence. All the other Aboriginals she encountered were simply looking for money. She had no idea about tribal situations.

I went on to talk to the youth, drugs and alcohol officer for the first time, telling him that I had already made contact with two or three of the Town's High School kids, but found it hard to meet more. He said that he only knew about four or five himself, and it transpired that his main interest was focused on the Village and the Hamlet. He invited me to the latter to attend the last of a 10-week programme of counselling sessions for young parolees, which turned into a considerable encounter in its own right (see section 4.13.7).

4.12.15  Forms of Entertainment

It was plain from reading past copies of the local newspaper that the Town had a number of annual social events. These included a Show, the B & S Ball, a gourmet picnic day, the art exhibition that formed part of the Show and others. However, none occurred during the fieldwork trips.

Shortly after the beginning of the main visit, I saw an advertisement for a Camp Draft at the local Showground, and thought this was an opportunity not to be missed, expecting a large turn-up of the general population. I found the Showground a little hard to find, hidden behind a gaggle of sheds, and it was only after going a longer way around via the north road that the camp draft event could be found. The attendance was far smaller and much less diverse than my expectation.

Only a part of the ring was in action, fenced of away from the main grandstand. Those stands that were in use were unroofed and only a dozen rows high. On a day of blazing heat, the rooflessness was a real consideration, because the only tree shade
was already taken up by the small bar tent. Otherwise the only shade available was under the steps to the elevated broadcasting box. For a while I stood in the sun, conspicuous in a straw hat amongst a community of akubras of varying vintages, but eventually the heat on bare arms (I was the only person not in long sleeves) drove me into the shade of the broadcasting box stairs. Here I stood for some time in uncomfortable proximity to a three-generation family that studiously ignored me. Eventually unable to stand the situation any longer, I took myself firstly to the edge of the bar tent (where the social ostracism continued), before going back into the sunlight to lean against the car bonnet.

This new position placed me nearer to the horse yards, on the pathway to the ring. While only about a hundred people were present, there must have been at least two hundred and fifty horses. These were the most beautiful horses I had ever seen; many surely aspiring racehorses at some time. Their elegance was quite opposed to what they were required to do in the ring, which was to chase cattle around markers in some predetermined order within a given time. The process seemed rather like yacht racing, although only one horse at a time did the rounds. I could see no clear pattern to the scoring method; some people appeared to do quite well but were given low scores, and vice versa.

As each horse passed me it looked me straight in the eye. That was more than could be said for the riders, none of whom returned eye contact. All were heavily bronzed, and certainly not Townspeople. The whole event was serious, even technical. After a while it became rather boring, interrupted only by the unloading of new cattle from a semi-trailer that involved electric prods and a lot of shouting and whistling that certainly entertained the children. I left after an hour or so, obviously an interloper at what was something of an in-group event.

On another Sunday afternoon, I went to the Town cinema to escape the heat of the day in its air-conditioning. About a dozen other people wandered in, no more. They included one or two couples, a group of half-a-dozen late teenagers or people in their early twenties, and a few singles like myself. The cinema was very comfortably furnished, and the movie a recent metropolitan release. The programme began with a series of advertisements for local merchants. An announcement preceding them really
caught my attention. It said: “just a few rules for the comfort of us all - no feet on seats, no talking and please place all rubbish in the bins.” The time was peremptory, leaving a strong impression of inescapable authoritarianism.

On a more enjoyable note, I also attended two meetings of the Town's Toastmaster club, following an introduction arranged by a next-door neighbour. As we entered the club where the first event was to be held, the neighbour and I met two women members and the Toastmaster President (BO) sitting at a table outside the meeting room. After introductions I showed the University letter. At this the President more or less exploded in indignation at the effect of the Village weir on the state of the river as it passed through the Town. It had never had green scum on it before the weir was built, and the proper site for the intensive water use weir was down beyond the Town. But the two others pointed out how wrong this expression of indignation was (at least in their eyes), and the President, a self-admitted uneducated (but impressive) person, finally calmed down.

Contrary to my expectation from meeting the President, the whole of the meeting was not elderly. Apart from the two women, the rest consisted of four men, four women, and a boy not yet old enough to join but quite able to keep his end up. The chairman for the night (the masculine form was used irrespective of gender) was an extroverted woman (BP) probably in her late 30s. A 50-ish man (BQ) who was intellectually handicapped occupied the sergeant at arms role, a semi-permanent position. The remainder were farmers, women who did not specify their occupations (but one was a teacher), and a man BR whose calling was not initially clear but who turned out to be a fashion shopkeeper in the Town.

The first agenda item was Table Topics, in which the Topicmaster (not the chairman BP) introduced a theme and called for an impromptu two-minute response from each individual. The theme referred to the Australian Broadcasting Authority inquiry into 2UE. BP, the first speaker called by the Topicmaster, saw no problem with the making of money, being personally in the business of making it. That was the nature of being in business.
The President BO was asked a question about sponsors insisting on alcohol advertising on the bottoms of flyers for a local event. No trouble with that idea, said BO, on the grounds that it would not affect non-adults, partly because they could not buy alcohol anyway. The third and fourth speakers gave similar answers. However the sergeant of arms, the last to speak, when asked about his response to a (theoretical) mayoral bribe from a sponsor, said that if he had been involved he would have given the money to a charity such as the Flying Doctor Service.

The next agenda item was a fifteen minutes speech by the President on Toastmaster procedures for speaker evaluation. Though supposedly uneducated, the President spoke cogently and interestingly to the topic for the full allotted time, emphasizing a primary need not to criticize but to encourage the speaker under evaluation.

A fifteen-minute recess followed, during which a farmer member of the group introduced me to the club secretary in the corridor. On hearing about my environmental interest, the secretary was keen to say that the club was one of six involved in the introduction of fingerlings into the river.

After the recess, two speakers gave thirty minute prepared speeches. The first produced a simulated sales pitch for cordless electric drills. The second was the sergeant at arms, who spoke about Simpson and his donkey, in halting phrases full of clichés. This man also had a stoop, which meant that he seemed to be talking to the carpet. From sotto voce comments made by the President to me during his talk, I gathered that the group had consciously sponsored an educational approach to bringing the sergeant at arms into the world of public speaking, and that he had improved significantly over the time he had been involved.

From here on the meeting became a series of evaluations. A little paternalism seemed to colour the evaluation of the sergeant at arms’ talk, but not much; and everything was done in the friendliest possible way. I had not been to Toastmasters anywhere before this particular meeting, which had moved slowly from an apparently formal and pretentious start into a sort of helter-skelter, tightrope-performance parlour game full of good humour. After the meeting another farmer member told me that other Toastmaster groups took things a lot more seriously. The people of this group,
however, seemed patient, friendly and supportive of each other in a quiet but impressive way.

Four weeks later, the neighbour and I went off to the club's Christmas dinner. This gathering was much larger. About 20 people attended, including several visitors from other places or regional office bearers. The sergeant at arms BQ opened proceedings, passing the meeting immediately to the local President BO who was to be the chairman for the evening. The agenda followed the same pattern as before, but in a looser and more entertaining way interrupted by the preliminary courses of the meal. The Table Topic master, one of the visitors, was quite ingenious in the topics presented to the various participants. At one point two of the visitors were on their feet trying to sing a song by alternating the individual words between them. There was also an episode where another visitor, who appeared to be mentally handicapped, sang in a good voice. In an aside BO told me this young man had been a star footballer who had fallen wrongly in a tackle. He was not mentally handicapped but brain damaged -- his motor functions were in a mess. Once again, the group seemed to be in the business of helping those whom they thought needed some kind of encouragement.

Then followed speeches from the visiting office bearers, praising the group and passing on Christmas greetings. After that, the dinner itself took over from the proceedings, except for an episode where two of the local farmer members were on their feet acting out a dialogue. In this dialogue one took the part of a wheat farmer (which he was) trying to draw some kind of efficiency from the contract truck driver played by the other. Both showed considerable comic improvisation skills, the more so because the real wheat producer was currently experiencing a wet harvest that was significantly reducing the value of his crop. He had had recent a sharp experience trying get his crop into the silo before the daily storm arrived. BR also showed himself to be a fluent speaker and something of a star turn, stealing the show through his quick wit and preparedness to take the floor at any time, no matter how unexpectedly.

I sat next to BO and BR. Obviously a person of some significance locally, BR lent the local group a place in Town society that I had not otherwise perceived. The regional
chairman was on my other side. A retired man, he talked at length about croquet, his
main recreational interest. I had seen enough of that game to know that it was not a
gentle activity played by elderly ladies in formal settings, but a skilled and highly
competitive (sometimes aggressive) affair. All in all, the two Toastmaster episodes
seemed to me to have been the most civilized aspect of Town life that I had
encountered during the various trips.

4.12.16 Uncomplimentary Attitudes

Occasionally I encountered uncomplimentary attitudes towards various public figures
or institutions. For example, I mentioned to one respondent (BR) that a particular
woman had spoken out quite forthrightly at the Community Representative Panel
meeting. The respondent, a man, said that she was trying to come to grips with living
fifty miles out town by trying to turn herself into someone involved in public affairs.
That was why she was so prepared to give up the large periods of time I had observed
her devoting to the environmental meeting programme. I also mentioned a second
woman who had impressed me at the Catchment Management Association Committee
meeting with her detailed knowledge of bureaucratic needs and actions. This led BE
into a somewhat diffuse and prolonged statement about the roles of farming husbands,
saying that by and large they were dumb in the processes pursued by their wives,
probably because their interests lay elsewhere. He used the husband of the woman’s
sister as an example. The sister’s husband had arrived in the district about twenty
years before, as a share farmer who had shown himself to be a very astute and
adventurous operator, particularly in the matter of buying land. BE told me how this
man had sent his wife to an auction to bid up to $2 million, without being interested in
attending himself. Apparently he had such a view of the property being sold that he
was going to top the bidding no matter what. BE went on to say that this particular
entrepreneur had much more business acumen than anyone else in the Town.
Occasionally I encountered comments from white people residing in the Village about life there. None were unfavourable except those from a policeman stationed there on a three-year stint and about to leave. The most extensive report came near the end of the main visit, during a conversation with a local small businessman. When I asked him what living there was like, he said it was no problem; the place had a lower crime rate than the Town. He and his wife had moved out from the capital city where the crime rate had been quite high, and they had not experienced anything adverse here.

I told him that the policeman respondent had said that the kids go through the houses. In response he said, “one bloke tried to steal my car, but that guy was apparently a bit of a case because that night he tried to steal five cars, doing $3000 worth of damage to them. He was picked up at a traffic accident down the highway where, instead of helping the injured people, he was looting the cars. But when he went to court he only got twenty hours of community service, and he didn’t even have to turn up to that”. He said the problem was that the government was just dumping money into the place. Three million dollars had recently been spent on refurbishing houses in the Hamlet, new carpets and new stoves and so on, “but the money just goes in and disappears”. A number of people had set up businesses in the Village, but the Aboriginal people themselves had killed them as soon as they had become profitable because “they just don’t keep their money in the business. Money goes in, but nothing comes out”.

I asked him what the murder rate in the district was like, and he said there was none. He spoke about guns in the Town, and said that when he went into buildings there he frequently found guns under furniture as he moved it. But he said no one ever got shot, or at least only very infrequently in accidents. However, the Aboriginal issue was a real problem, and there had been a case of 14-year-old Aboriginal boys raping a six-year-old girl at the school. The matter had been hushed up, the girl had moved to another town and nothing had ever happened to the boys. About the police, he said “Oh well, what can they do?” But later on he said there was a 95% clean-up rate in the Village, which had five police officers. He said that “what they do is keep on watching and watching and finally they get the perpetrators”. But then the court
became simply a revolving door - the kids and criminals just went through it and out the far side. He finished by saying that the average life expectancy for an Aboriginal male was 53.

I found a more direct window on white life in the Village when I visited its club on a night that, according to one of my earlier respondents, “was the night everyone went there”. Prior to the night visit, I called in to explore the club beforehand in the middle of the day.

There was no one behind the reception desk. One simply filled out a chit, leaving a carbon copy of name and address behind. In fact, there was practically no one evident in the club except two drinkers in one bar who left shortly after I arrived, and a woman behind the bar with nothing to do. She sold me a drink and I sat alone at one of the tables. Three TV’s were hung above the bar, each tuned to a different race meeting (one as far off as Western Australia).

I came back at about 7pm. By then a burly young man was behind the reception desk to ask for proof of age, identification, and address, and to write the chit, but there was no barrier to entry. He sent me down a side passage to a large lounge at the back of the club. At a small bar just inside the door stood half dozen elderly men of various shapes and sizes in shorts. The barmaid was far more brusque and offhand than the midday woman had been. A request for a glass of white wine caused some confusion.

Several four to six-person tables, most of them occupied, surrounded a small dance floor with a small stage at the far end. A large annexe off to one side housed several rows of poker machines, nearly all in action. Most of the people around the room were white, but several tables had mixed white/Aboriginal or totally Aboriginal groups. At a table near me sat three plump middle-aged black women, not facing each other but arranged around one side of the table so all could view the room. They did not appear to be talking much, although the other groups were. The room was not rowdy, just busy with conversation. I glimpsed respondent Al drifting in and out of the poker machine aisles, glass in hand and cigarette smoke trailing behind.
Shortly after I sat down, a man came out from the screen next to the stage and began to organize an electric guitar unit. The entertainer for the evening, he was in black Country and Western dress. In time he began to sing Vietnam War songs, in a voice that was quite professional. The songs were all pessimistic/hopeless/forlorn. As he sang he walked amongst the tables, his flat-crowned black cowboy hat foursquare on his head and pulled down hard over his eyes, which glittered in the dark beneath the brim. He seemed to think of himself as an imitation of Richard Widmark but he reminded me more strongly of Darth Vader. People seemed only to half listen to the singer, and the applause was only a patter. I gather he appeared frequently at the Thursday night gatherings.

Sitting alone as a stranger in a crowd where everyone knew each other so well was a bit too nerve-racking. All eyes seemed to turn to the newcomer, sometimes surreptitiously but occasionally bluntly. When the drink and the singing were finished, I went over to the poker machines. The machines were all low coinage, not many more than five cents.

The club had a “restaurant” or dining room run by a Chinese concessionaire. (The only Chinese I saw during the fieldwork were workers or owners in the three Chinese restaurants in the district.) The standard was low by normal Chinese restaurant standards, the room was unadorned, and the waitress was over-talkative. Only about six other people came into the room while I was there. Others may have been in earlier, but the room did not give that impression.

I spoke to no one but serving staff during the two visits, and briefly again to the burly doorman as I left. The respondent who had suggested the visit had not been there, and I saw no one else I knew except AI, who had disappeared by the time I went into the poker machine annex.

4.12.18   Social pressures

Early in the pilot visits I encountered a woman who told me that she me could not speak about local matters with any authority because she had only been in the Town
for eight to nine years. At about the same time I spoke with a local professional (BS), who expressed a critical point of view about local management practices. When I returned for the main visit, BS was no longer in the same job. I found that the respondent had expressed the critical point of view to the management, had not received a sympathetic hearing, and had thereupon quit. The spouse of the respondent had followed a similar path in another job situation, with much the same consequence. Both had been resident in the district for only about eight years. The spouse had managed to find another job in the Town, but BS had been forced to travel a considerable distance to another town to find work.

A similar form of ostracization seemed also to have occurred in the case of the local One Nation President. This person was an agricultural machinery operator, possibly not much more than an agricultural labourer. From the tone of comments made about him, I gained a distinct impression that aspiration to local political life was considered to be above his station.

4.12.19  Local government in action

I did not attend any Town Council meetings, but the local newspaper recorded the proceedings in an apparently verbatim form. In the following extract, all names have been changed and other minor editing changes made to maintain confidentiality:

"Councillor Kenebone believes the Town must expand or perish"

"Town councillor Kenebone wants the Town boundaries expanded to take in the 300 residents in adjacent areas of the Shire. He claims that unless the Town expands from its present area of just 16 sq kilometres ...... its days are numbered.

Cr Kenebone has written a series of letters on the Town boundaries to both Town and Shire Councils. They will be further discussed at a joint meeting of both Councils next Tuesday. Cr Kenebone says he would like to see "real discussion on this issue, not just politicking."
He says it is simply inefficient to have two governments and two sets of rules over such a small area. He suggests the formation of a committee for town planning of the Town with representatives from both Councils. He also suggests the Town Council boundaries change to “encompass the real Town, not just its centre.”

Cr Kneebone also raised the subject of amalgamation, although he said he didn't believe it was the answer. It's a ticklish subject and came up at the Town Council meeting on Monday night, as well as at the Shire yesterday.

Cr Theo Wilson suggested forming another division as a ring round the Town. He said people who lived in the area felt they weren't being represented, they felt they couldn't get on to Council and their interests would be served better by the Town Council.

Cr Kneebone said he disagreed with statements from Shire mayor Cr Mark Waugh that the two Councils worked well together. “The Town, with a budget of around $5 million appears very much the poor cousin to the Shire with $22 million. My own feeling is that it is like 'pulling teeth' to get money from the Shire, and when we do receive it for facilities and services that Shire residents use, we have to put up with the attitude of 'aren't we good to you' or 'you owe us big-time' (as was re-recently written on the bottom of a memo sent from the Shire)“.

But at the Shire meeting yesterday, Cr Ron Mcdonald said he was sick and tired of paying fifty-fifty with the Town Council when nothing comes the other way. Cr Kneebone's letters were sparked by an application to build a storage facility on the edge of the Town in which he outlined a number of concerns.”

The following then appeared in a later issue of the local paper:

“We All Live In One Community”
"The Town and the Shire Councils should meet more often to benefit the community, Cr Kneebone argued at a joint meeting of the Councils in the new library yesterday.

"We don't own the Town and you don't own the Shire," he told the meeting. "We all belong to one community. I've been accused of just stirring but we can't sit around with our heads in the sand. We have to deal with the issue," he said.

Town boundaries, amalgamation, the provision of water, sewerage and garbage services, the siting of the new bulk storage facility and other issues of mutual interest were discussed at the meeting.

There was plenty of debate, but the "boundary amalgamation" debate was by far the most vigorous. Cr Kneebone raised the issue by saying it had to be faced. "We have a lot of duplication of services, in computer systems and the like. We're advertising for an accountant, for goodness sake, in a Council the size of ours.

"But we can sort out these problems with communication. I haven't seen a lot of that in the 14 months I've been on Council. We should have one town plan to cover both areas, we need to co-operate in the provision of services like water, sewerage and garbage. We need to talk about common issues like street lighting and cleaning. For example, we'll soon be able to buy our own electricity. Do we dilute our bargaining power by going alone? I'm aware that the Shire does contribute generously to Town sporting facilities and the like. But according to the Bureau of Statistics, the Town is shrinking. Does anyone believe that, or is it drift to the Shire? We don't own the Town and you don't own the Shire. We all live in the one community".

Cr Kneebone quoted Council expenditure of (about $90,000) for Shire delegations and attendances at conferences against (about $30,000) for the Town Council.

The Shire Mayor, Cr Mark Waugh: "It has paid wonderful dividends."

Cr Kneebone: "But I question whether people need to spend that much on politicians and bureaucrats."

Cr Ken Farrell: "I travel 120 km to get to a meeting. Most of my expenses are taken up in travelling. The press are here and they'll pick up these figures".
Cr Kneebone: “Do the fringe dwellers of the Town have different aims and aspirations because they live in the Shire? Do they get a say? They feel that they’re more related to the Town. The largest concentration of population in the Shire lives on the outskirts of the Town.”
Cr Farrell: “So what?”
Cr Kneebone: “They’re divided up into two divisions, but they deserve to be represented as one community. It has been said that they could get themselves elected to the Shire. But do people whose interests are attuned to the Town want to go to a monthly meeting on a Tuesday and talk about levee banks and other rural matters?”
Cr Farrell: “It’s time you sat down.”
Cr Kneebone concluded by suggesting an expansion of the Town to the old parish boundary. “The other thing we can talk about is amalgamation,” he said. “Personally, I’m against it”.
Cr Sam Worrall suggested the Shire be broken up into three rural divisions and one urban division. “I represent these people as well as I can, but I can see their point”, he said. “I think that the people of areas round the Town should have their own representation on Council”.
Cr Ron McDonald: “Each ratepayer is treated fairly and equally as far as I’m concerned. The local retirement Village is a pensioner community and more money is spent there than is collected. We subsidize the retirement Village to give them the quality of life enjoyed in other places. I’d be insulted if anyone claimed they weren’t being represented fairly.”
Cr Matt Brampton: “We shouldn’t stick our heads in the sand on this one. Sooner or later, government is going to force amalgamation on us.”
Cr Theo Wilson: “I don’t want to see amalgamation, but I could live with it if it happened. We can say what we like about representing these people who live on the fringes of Town, but if you live there, you feel you belong to the Town. You should be represented by the Town.”
Cr. Deslie Kling: “I think it all comes down to finances. If we had one Council we could chop the number of people meeting in half. Roadworks could be done together. There’s too much doubling up. Maybe we should ask the people on the edge of Town how they feel about their boundaries”.
Shire President, Cr Waugh: “Cr Kneebone says it’s like pulling teeth to get money out of the Shire. But the Shire has put millions of dollars into the Town and I would hope that we can continue working together. I don’t know what improvements could be made under amalgamation. I will be loyal to the people in the Shire who don’t want amalgamation. It’s pure ignorance to talk of amalgamation when they don’t know the facts.”

Cr Kneebone: “At the Town Council meeting on Monday, we agreed that we wouldn’t get personal. I don’t like being talked to like that. I said that I wasn’t for amalgamation. I’m also loyal but, unlike some people, I actually had to go to the ballot box. (Cr Waugh was elected unopposed.)

Cr Farrell: “Don’t quibble, it was still an election. Sit down, sit down.”

Cr Kneebone: “I’m not trying to be confrontational, but Cr Waugh is. We don’t need grandstanding. This issue must be addressed.”

The Town Mayor, Cr Terry Brew, declared himself opposed to amalgamation and moved to wind up the debate. It was, after all, time for morning tea.”

Towards the end of the final visit, I took advantage of a break in schedule to spend an hour at the Shire Council meeting. Sitting alone in the row of chairs at the back of the room (which was not a traditional Shire Council meeting chamber but an ordinary conference room), I was so conspicuous as to raise a degree of suspicion, I think, in the minds of some of those present. Occasionally one would glance over his or her shoulder, as though he/she thought I might be taking surreptitious notes. Spectators at these meetings were evidently rare.

Most of the time was taken up with a long conversation about Council’s finances, basically concerned with mismatches between historical accounting and accrual accounting procedures. Detailed explanations of relatively small activities, such as the repair of a short stretch of shoulder on one of the Shire roads, filled up some of the time.

Many of the officers (the Shire Engineer, the Finance Officer and possibly even the Chief Executive Officer) were apparently attending their first meeting. However it also seemed evident that the President's informal agenda was to use Council activity to occasionally stimulate direct community participation through partial Council funding, with the balance made up by labour from those beneficially affected.
When it came to the matter of Council's investment programme, those present decided that the previous policy of investing surplus Council funds in one of the five local bank branches was no longer worthwhile. They stated that investments through these channels had circulated the money back into the local community, but now the money left the local branch and was circulated through capital city funds management processes. This seemed an almost quaint old-fashioned view, and a rather belated realization of modern banking practice. The last issue before I took my leave was a mention that the foremost local entrepreneur had undertaken a job for the Council on which he had quoted or estimated $8,000. However it had only cost $3,000 and that was all that he had charged.

4.12.20 *White Views of Blacks: 1. The Policeman's Story*

Remarks made by a policeman during the second pilot visit, a real estate agent at the beginning of the main visit, and a house cleaning contractor at the end of the main visit also contributed to the Public Race story. These remarks provide both direct opinions about Aboriginal behaviour, and indirect pointers towards the sources of these opinions. The policeman's comments fall mainly into the latter category, describing attempts at controlling crime in Meadow, most of which he said was property or drug related (29.5). He took the view that most of the crime was caused by a failure of the Department of Juvenile Justice and by lax and lenient court sentencing. For the most part (but not totally), he did not appear to be intrinsically racist in his view of the black people, in the sense of hating for skin colour or direct class reasons, but spoke mainly from the viewpoint of a strong upholder of the law.

He told the story of a black youth, 17 at the time of my interview, who had been sentenced to a term in the nearby juvenile detention centre. The youth had escaped from the detention centre and had made his way to a nearby regional town, where he stole a car. The policeman was phoned at 2 am to hear that the car was headed his way, and he finally found the youth and two others crashed near Drummer. Responsibility for issue of a warrant had lain with the Department of Juvenile Justice, but two months later nothing had happened (29.6). The youth had become a chronic offender, with two months detention here and two months there, with repeated "break
and enters” while on bail, but was still not being dealt with. The policeman was not surprised at the 30% truancy rate at the local school, because the Truant Officer was located a hundred miles away and could be nothing but ineffective.

The policeman continued by saying that they had absolutely no concern about breaking in. He had encountered kids aged eight on grog and marijuana. Nothing was sacred (29.8). The young Aboriginals actually didn’t mind going to jail, because it fed them, dried them out, and gave them the chance to do woodwork. Two weeks after they come back, however, they are caught up again with the grog (29.10). The main local drug was hemp, but the marijuana was mainly imported because the local Aboriginals were “too lazy” to grow it for themselves. It added to the general mayhem, he said. The kids threw rocks at cars, power insulators, anything. They scaled on trucks turning around the main bend out of the main street (29.11).

Apart from property and drug problems, however, the community was relatively free from serious crime, certainly violent crime. The policeman told the story of a recent incident at the Post Office in which an Aboriginal man had got behind the counter and threatened the postmistress with a knife. He had escaped from the scene but, apparently as surprised as everyone else at what he had done, later gave himself up. It sounded comical, but I understand from another conversation that the postmistress had been quite severely affected by it.

4.12.21 White Views of Blacks: 2. Finding A Flat

The comments of the real estate agent were more aggressive in terms of direct opinions about black behaviour patterns. This respondent began the discussion on the topic by saying, “I don't want to even think about the Village”, apparently through bad experiences with Aboriginal tenants. The problem was that they “go walkabout after awhile and the rent stops”. The Village was in the hands of nine to eighteen year-old black male kids. The girls were all pregnant by the time they were 15 and needed protection from the boys. “The police tear around in their four-wheel drives, but everyone can see them coming.” The kids stole cars, and the cars were then found
burnt out south of town. Friendships with Aboriginals were pointless, because all they told were lies. "They were chronic liars" (41.3).

The real estate agent claimed that the so-called race riot did not start from anything in particular. The participants were all just drunk on a Friday night and could not find the person they wanted to get next day. The Investigator was the whole problem, because he gave the Aboriginals everything they asked for: primary school, secondary school and trade educational centre. The white kids had now left the Village (this statement carried an inference that they had been driven out) (41.5).

4.11.22  White Views of Blacks: 3. The House Cleaner's Story

A house-cleaning contractor provided evidence that, on the one hand, seemed to confirm and even worsen the picture presented by the real estate agent yet, on the other, painted a somewhat rosier picture of life as it was actually lived in the Village, where he himself resided. Apparently all tenancy leases included a clause saying that the house or flat should be cleaned professionally at the end of the lease period at the tenant's cost. The cleaner reported that it could take up to $20,000 to restore a rented house back to something rentable again if Aboriginals had been in it. "Well, sometimes the places we go into are in an incredible mess, with all kinds of rubbish on the floors and faeces and urine in the carpet" he said (78.2).

The cleaner's more positive comments about the Village were reinforced in a discussion I had with a woman who was standing in temporarily for the postmistress while she was away. This woman said she had lived there for 35 years, and had had no trouble throughout all that time.
4.13 The Black People Story

4.13.1 Introduction to This Section

I have already recounted a number of aspects of black life in the district in previous sections -- historical aspects in section 4.8.2, the views of a real estate agent and housecleaner in sections 4.12.21 and 4.12.22, and my observations of a night at the Village Club in section 4.12.17. The last three of these four sections are basically descriptions of white attitudes towards black people. A continuation of that thread on a more sympathetic note forms the start of the Black People story. In that respect the dividing line between the White People and Black People stories is not clear-cut.

The Black People story begins in section 4.13.2 below with the description of a relatively trivial incident in the Village, in which a well-meaning white person endeavoured to improve the lifestyle surroundings of the Village black/white community. As will be seen, this exercise succeeded in the short-term but failed in the long term. The story ends with a similar scenario in which a well-meaning person, nonwhite but also nonblack, made a similar effort with another unsuccessful outcome.

In section 4.13.4 I describe circumstances involving the Village high school. The high school was a major channel through which the Village and the Hamlet interacted, and a substantial element in black life in the district as I observed it.

The rest of the stories in section 4.13 do not show a further strong connective thread and are recorded in an order determined mainly by the sequence of observation.

4.13.2 Graffiti in the Park (Report 34)

Across the road from the police station, in the centre of the long run of the Village’s main street, stood a toilet block. I had been dimly aware of it as a graffiti-spattered symptom of the Town’s general dishevelment, surrounded by long grass and apparently abandoned.
Two days before the scheduled end of the first pilot visit I noticed three or four people painting the block with undercoat, and later that day I saw respondent BF near the scene. It transpired that BF was just leaving a community volunteer group that had undertaken to rejuvenate the park. I hadn’t realized that the area actually was a park, thinking it was just a vacant block because of its overgrown condition. BF told me that the park and toilet block were in fact a memorial to an Aboriginal man, now dead, who had achieved a certain military fame and status during World War II. The grass had been cut and the block was to be repainted by professional local artists the next day. BF didn’t know what was going to go on it, but thought it might be a weapon of some kind.

I was taken aback at that. A weapon, with all its overtones of high violence in a white man’s war, seemed to be the least appropriate symbol for the local Aboriginal community to live with. Nevertheless BF seemed quite convinced that the initiative was a good deed.

I mentioned that I would like to speak to women’s groups. BF said I could come back for tomorrow’s sausage sizzle and meet the men. For women there was a pottery group in the Hamlet and another in the Village. I said that I would probably have to sit under a tree until the Aboriginal community decided to accept me. BF pointed to a large tree overhanging the road next to the rundown pub and said that was the tree to use. BF added that there was probably more antagonism between the Village and the Hamlet than between the Village and the Town. A policeman later commented that the Aboriginal people fought more amongst themselves on a family basis than with anyone else (there were only three families, according to another respondent).

Just before leaving Town on the last day I drove past the park again and was relieved to see that the block had been painted with traditional Aboriginal stick figures. I was interested to see how long it might survive the graffiti people, and found it defaced again when I came back for the Aftermath visit.
4.13.3  First Black Contacts

I was introduced to my first Aboriginal respondent BT at an early stage in the first pilot visit. BT, about 50, seemed to be a little wary at first, but opened up when I said that I was interested in people's interest in and feeling for the river. The respondent started by saying there was not much to say about the river, but the floods were good because they renovated it. Places where cattle came down to drink and consequently set up bogholes became revegetated and the cattle moved on to other spots.

The Aboriginal people could also talk about the history of the river. They knew which tree cattle were eating and, said the respondent, BT's mother had been able to remember everyone's birthday without writing them down. For an unremembered reason I made a remark about going down the river, and BT replied that the local people had no real concept of going down the river; they just knew the place they were at.

These refrains started to be repeated two or three times and it began to appear that we would not hear anything more of substance except contact names from BT, who was intelligent but seemed overcome with a kind of smothered-up shyness.

In the end BT told me that I should talk to BU and BV. I would find it hard to contact BU directly, and should ring the manager BW at the Hamlet office to arrange a time. But BW also seemed to uncontactable, and after several fruitless phone calls I decided to go straight out to the Hamlet and play it by ear.

The Hamlet was at the end of the sealed portion of the main road from the Village to another town outside the district. From the main road it showed up as a line of low buildings amongst trees. The side road to it crossed an arm of the river over a long, obviously recent one-lane concrete bridge just before entering the Hamlet.

BW was on the phone when I arrived at the Hamlet office in mid morning, and took nearly half an hour to finish the call. In the meantime, I made idle conversation with three or four people who just seemed to be hanging around the office, and an efficient black receptionist invited me to make myself a cup of tea. The people hanging around
the office did not seem to be drunk or otherwise irresponsible, merely filling in time, but occasional shouts from nearby houses indicated that drinking was in progress.

When the phone call eventually finished, BW turned out to be a non-Aboriginal Australian with an impatient, almost angry air, who really wasn’t prepared to spend much time on me. There was nothing personal about it; BW just seemed to be irritated generally. I learnt later that the manager had only been on site for about five months and was involved in the general infrastructure program, of which the bridge and a number of new houses were parts. The overall impression was that the whole affair was a source of constant frustration to BW, who told me that BU was most likely to be at the Land Council office and gave me directions how to find it.

The road led around through the Hamlet in a circular fashion. Houses along the way could be described as very run-down, single storey suburban in style. I had been told that new housing was being built to an improved two-storey design that would allow get-togethers and the better keeping of dogs. New houses under construction had begun to appear near the Land Council office, but they were still single story, and so big they looked like duplex villas.

The general area of the Land Council was recognizable from the directions, but not the building itself. I stopped to ask directions from a man walking along the side of the road, and then saw, too late, that he was with a second man carrying a bottle of beer. The man I spoke to was close to falling-down drunk, and was into the front of the car in a flash.

I later started the field notes for this visit by writing “I don’t want to write about the Hamlet”. The reason was that the man’s sudden entry into the car reminded me vividly of other encounters with dangerous drunks in darkened streets (although it was actually broad daylight). From that point in that first visit I just wanted to leave the place. However, the drunk got me to the Land Council office, which we found deserted. After I had left a note asking BU to ring the hotel, my new friend said he might be at BV’s place. He insisted on taking me there, so off we went again. BV’s house was near the Hamlet office and although BV wasn’t there himself I met his wife, who turned out to be something of a surprise -- a matronly white-haired woman
with dignity who was certainly not drunk, and a contrast to the rundown dwelling she lived in.

Having done all he could, my passenger lurched off up the street and I was able to escape. Two days later BU rang and we arranged another time at the Hamlet office. This time he wasn’t there again, and one of the (different) group of hangers around made the alarming suggestion that he might be up in one of the houses drinking. However, when he was eventually tracked down he appeared to me none the worse for wear.

When questioned about the river, BU said we should go and have a look at it, and guided me to a point on a riverbend about half a mile away from the settlement. He said that point of the river was important because it was on the trade route to other tribes, and he pointed towards a large nearby but invisible tributary of the river. Where we stood, the riverbank showed the usual signs of erosion of the outer edge of a bend and he said that he was also concerned that nothing was being done about that problem. He went on to say that about 50 acres of the Hamlet was now in the State on the other side of the river, meaning that the river had shifted its course that much in relatively recent times. He said that he was on the catchment board, but that “they don’t have much of an interest in Aboriginals”.

Apart from these remarks, he didn’t have much to say about the river. When I tried to get him to comment on it in some ecological or Dreamtime way, he repeated that it was an important trade route. He said that Pakeha lagoon, about 20 km away by road, was much more important, “part of our religion”, and was pleased that water skiing and swimming were now banned there.

Finally, when asked about the issue of the chain-wide reservation each side of the river, he said that it was just a matter of getting back to how things used to be. At this point, about ten minutes to the hour, he was looking at his watch saying that he had to go to a meeting, and drew to a close what had been a fairly unsatisfactory first meeting from my point of view.
Three other aspects struck me about the visit over the next couple of days. Firstly, the office hangers-on appeared to be neither drinking at the time nor drinkers in general. Secondly, some Telstra people were laying new cables and digging pits across the road from the office about a hundred feet away, but there seemed to be absolutely no contact between them and any Aboriginal person — neither casual greeting nor chat, nor even eye contact. The Telstra people gave every impression that they might as well be on the moon. Finally, someone said to me in Town that the elders were in fact very concerned about the amount of drinking going on amongst the younger people in the Hamlet, but did not know what to do about it.

4.13.4 The Black Education Dilemma

I now introduce events and encounters that involved various educational authorities interested in the Village and Hamlet. This part of the story begins with an account of my first visit to the Village high school at the start of the second pilot visit that I referred to in the last section (see Report 28). The purpose of the cold call was to see if an appointment could be arranged with the principal. The receptionist first asked whether the school or the trade education centre principal was required, since the two shared the same administration. I said we might start with the school principal, to which she replied that he was with a class but wouldn’t be long. She invited me to wait in the staff room.

The staff room was a large square sunlit room. A long table stretched across one side, with an equally long settee bank facing it from the other. A man and a woman were already talking at the table. I sat down on the settee and tried not to eavesdrop on their conversation, but it was impossible not to hear some of it. The man seemed to be some sort of regional supervisor, and the woman a senior teacher talking about teacher difficulties in adjusting to the Aboriginality of students, particularly on the part of new teachers. They went, so she said, out of their minds at first with the problems of dealing with such things as the entry of Hamlet culture through the school gate. They did not understand, for example, that homespeak was a dialect more or less of English, not an attack on schoolspeak. She said that in some other school in
the broader region there had actually been a concrete attempt to outlaw homespeak inside the school grounds.

The receptionist came back to say that the school principal had actually left the school grounds, so I asked for the trade education centre principal. While I continued to wait, the conversation at the table ended and two Aboriginal women came in for coffee. I joined them and chatted slowly, and for my part carefully, with the older of the two about the floods of the previous fortnight. Like a number of other people spoken to on that topic, she did not seem to have been greatly fussed by it.

When the trade education principal arrived, he began by saying that he was not just the local principal but was responsible for a number of trade education establishments over a wide region. I began to explain that, while my initial interest had been in local relationships with the river, the matter had broadened into a wider community overview with the added aspect of experimenting with relatively new information-gathering methods. I was now interested in particular in gaining a holistic view of the community that would include, for example, its ethical attitudes and even its spiritual values.

Just near the end of this spiel, the school principal and another teacher entered the room. It appeared that he had not left the school, and on hearing of my arrival had gathered up the other teacher (CV) because he was their geology/Landcare-interested person.

To say the school principal simply entered the room is something of an understatement. He was a tall, vigorous, sportsman kind of individual in shorts, short-sleeved shirt and long socks, who was on his own territory and had absolutely no doubt about his authority. He dominated the group from the moment he swept in, not in an unfriendly way but with the maximum of self-assurance. He was overwhelming in his briskness and energy. I could not help wondering what sort of impression such a god-like white figure might make on a small Aboriginal child.

I repeated the intro just finished with the trade education man, who then led off with a statement that a lot of nonsense was said about the adverse effects of intensive water
use. I mentioned, perhaps a bit too casually, that intensive water use seemed to be running into a bottleneck of ever-increasing problems despite the continual appearance of temporary cures. Both he and CV said that, if you actually asked the farmers, the recent mono-gene treatment for helio was not working, despite the great publicity to the contrary it was receiving. However, other techniques were working and were really fixing the environmental issue. As far as the river was concerned, irrigators were using 98% of the 25% of the total river flow that they took, and were not taking 98% of the river flow itself, as popular opinion sometimes seemed to have it.

This respondent was starting to become quite energetic on this topic, and he left when I tried to turn the conversation back to the broader issue. The school principal, who had not entered into the exchange, did not appear interested in the broader issue either and also departed a minute or so later, though not so precipitately.

He left me with CV, a muscular, bearded man who, in shorts and sandals, looked like a park ranger. He at least seemed to be able to accept the broadening of the topic I was after, but his contributions were not significant. Apparently realizing this himself, he soon suggested that I should “talk to AI”, whom he then left to find. AI was an Aboriginal teacher aide, and the short meeting that ensued is described in the next section.

The next episode (see Report 63) took place shortly after. An ad appeared in the local paper for a part-time project officer who would assist over eight weeks up to Christmas. The project was an inquiry and consultative program aimed at Aboriginal families and teenagers to determine the courses the Village trade educational centre should offer to adolescents. In the week after applications closed, I asked at the trade educational centre about who was in charge of the program. They referred me to CN in a town about 200 kilometres away, whom I subsequently rang. I began by saying that my interest was in sitting in on the consultative sessions as a fly on the wall. After a little wariness, CN began a long dissertation about what the trade educational centre was up to, for which I was quite unprepared. It dealt with more than the subject of the ad.
According to CN, the first problem facing the centre was that a number of courses provided eligibility for Abstudy and additional funds. People therefore turned up to get Abstudy as a career (ie source of income). With the age structure in the Aboriginal community as it was, teenagers were left out, with older people taking their places. A second problem was that it was all very well for the centre to run training courses, but there were no employment opportunities at the end of line. There was nothing for Aboriginal kids in either the Town or elsewhere in the district. The centre was trying to combine with the school to overcome this difficulty, by identifying local chances or by interesting the kids more. CN also made a comment along the lines that Youth Allowance people received more money if they attended.

The third problem was the reason for the ad. The centre felt it had to contact the 12-15 year olds who were not attending school to get some kind of feedback from them on the issue. The very high official truancy rate did not reflect the real rate, because many kids might never have enrolled for school in first place. The first job for the advertised project officer was to define the extent of the gap. The second job was to try to identify those things the kids would like to do. CN mentioned welding, computers and bush culture, saying that basically the centre was just trying to interest the kids.

CN went on to say that the student support officer at the Village was on two months leave, but an Aboriginal girl was working on identifying the issue as well, supported by the placement centre in a Town halfway between his office and the Hamlet. I could talk to the manager there, a white man, although he would be away until the end of October.

He also mentioned CS, a white with an ATSIC background who was the new CDEP business manager at the Hamlet. CS had established a paper making activity at the Hamlet using wastage from intensive water use cropping. I mentioned that I was not seeing much by way of Aboriginal art. CN then mentioned a teacher of apparently award-winning quality who taught art at the Village high school, but added that the teacher’s interest was “going down a different path to traditional art”. I do not think he meant that the teacher was not interested in Aboriginal art, but that the teacher approached the topic from a more modern stylistic direction.
CN was coming to the Village two days later, and we agreed to meet at the trade educational centre office at 3pm. However, CN was not there at three - he had gone to a meeting in the Town and had not come back. He was there when I called again just after four and led me into the high school staff room (the centre and the high school shared the same administrative block). He then went off to find CR, the new high school principal.

At first CR wanted to know all about the Town meeting. It had been called to bring together the trade educational regional officers from both States (of which CN was one) so that they could come to some arrangement about a possible technical education presence in the Town itself. As present the Town people would not come to the Village, but a single-state presence in the Town could: (a) impact on the Village attendance by drawing people away; (b) fail to make the most of the Village infrastructure; and (c) confuse the public generally.

CN was a very confident man, versed in bureaucratic manners such as a deep unbroken conversational manner without ums or ahs, and he rather dominated CR. In general, though actually not with CR, CN was very much on the competitive front foot. (CR was part of a previously different (i.e. solely primary and secondary schooling) State department with which the trade education people had recently been merged.)

The meeting had been wary but an agreement had ultimately been reached on the setting up of a joint shopfront operation in the main street of the Town, probably offering computer courses. CN felt that, even if it drew no students, it would be a cheaper and more effective form of advertising than ads in newspapers.

The conversation then turned to me. CN started by showing an interest in the environmental aspect of my activities, thinking Aboriginal kids might be attracted through environmentally oriented courses. He seemed to want to treat me as an applicant for the project officer job at first, although I told them both I had no professional educational background at all, especially in curriculum development which was one of the main requirements. But at the same time he seemed to go off the
idea of my taking part in the consultation process unless he could draw a quid pro quo of some sort from me, or perhaps even from the University.

The conversation moved from that misconception towards another approach, under which AI and another high school person would do the work, with the trade educational money being given to CR to fund part-time personnel to take their places while they were away. This last position struck me as the best answer anyway. CN had no problems with it because, having advertised, the trade educational centre had done the right bureaucratic thing and could now ignore all the responses to the ad or say they were inadequate. It could then make an appointment or arrangement at its own discretion.

That pretty well wrapped things up. My request to sit in on the consultation process had dropped out of sight and I had become superfluous to CN's plans, at least for the moment. There was no request for contact details from either bureaucrat, and the whole affair had finished rather unsatisfactorily from my point of view. However, it seemed to me that a number of possibilities might remain if I treated them carefully. I could contact AI or try to revive the contact with CR in a week or so. Another possibility was to offer CN a Kelly Repository Grid survey of adolescent Aboriginal interests free of charge. Such a survey would have been a worthwhile exercise for me in itself, although probably difficult to introduce to Aboriginal youths in view of the cultural and age differences, unless I went through BK or the resident Aboriginal social workers in the Hamlet.

Nevertheless, CN, CR, AI and I met later in CR's office some days later and decided that the Repertory Grid approach was worth pursuing because we had to get inside the teenagers' heads somehow. At that meeting, CR said that we probably should have sat through part of the meeting he had just come from with some of the teachers and teachers' aides. They had said that the problem should be approached in a way that would coordinate several government Departments, including the police, recreation people, and the juvenile justice people, as well as through the school.
The two problems we foresaw with the Grid idea were (a) corraling the kids in a room to begin the process, and (b) keeping them there while the process took place. In order to check the boredom potential of the programme, we decided to have a trial run on the following Friday with some of the Aboriginal teacher aides.

During the following week, I spoke to BU and one or two of the Aboriginal delegates at the Aboriginal Reference Panel meeting about the problem. I also spoke with two white respondents whom I felt would be knowledgeable on the matter. BU told me that one difficulty would come from the kids’ practice of sleeping all day and only coming out around 2am. The other Aboriginal people told me the kids had been sexually abused and that the worst offender was schizophrenic. It was suggested that the boys needed to be taken on some kind of adventure trip, like a safari down to the delta area a hundred kilometres downstream and then around to another distant town, with people showing them Aboriginal sites and other places of interest along the way.

In the light of all this advice, the situation seemed to need a mediator who could introduce us directly to individual kids. If the boys were really traumatized and dissociated, coordinated hand-eye-mind activities seemed to be desirable as an integrative tactic, with schoolroom activities right off the agenda. It also seemed to me that contact would have to be more carefully developed than first thought, and that someone would have to commit personally to long-term close contact with the boys.

Not knowing how to deal with any of these matters, I rang AI on my return to the Town. We agreed to meet at 10:30am on the day for the aides’ trial Grid run. However when I turned up at the school at the appointed time I had to go hunting for AI. CR told me he was probably at a community building on the far side of the school. He was not, but sitting on a bench outside was an Aboriginal woman who introduced herself to me as CT.

CT was a 30-something teacher aide with a sharp no-nonsense glance. She told me she was doing a teaching course at a metropolitan University, about which we spoke for a while before AI turned up. When that happened, AI and CT began to discuss a linguistics course she was thinking about. Run by a missionary outfit, the course apparently went into the basics of phonetics, training people before they were
launched into strange territory in Africa and the Pacific where they would have to
teach themselves the local language unaided. AI went into a monologue about the
local Aboriginal language, pointing out that Aboriginal kids did not order words in the
English sentences they used but could still clearly understand each other. I gathered
that the local Aboriginal language was unordered in this way for all speakers.

I had previously said to CT that I was interested in the non-written nature of
traditional Aboriginal languages, and wondered whether this would lie at the bottom
of the black/white conundrum. I mentioned that “Before-Contact” Aboriginal people
would have not seen the landscape as nihilistic, which was how I increasingly felt the
whites saw it. When AI turned up, without any prompting from me, he pointed to a
distant tree and said that was a 5000-word essay to the Aboriginal eye, but only one
word to a white.

AI seemed to be very knowledgeable on language and linguistics. We sat quietly
while he talked lengthily on this topic, but without showing any sign or mention of the
teacher aide program he and I were supposed to be there for. Eventually it ended
when AI said he had to put a couple of finishing touches to a painting he was doing.
CT left, and I followed AI into the art room. The painting was a straightforward
traditional sort of picture, quite well done but a strange work for a person with AI's
Westernized background. As he worked I raised the idea of hand-mind integration and
the proposal for adventure safaris, and mentioned the need for an introducer and long-
term mediator, even suggesting sailing lessons on Pakeha lagoon. He was quite
against the last idea, but his objection sounded a bit pietistic.

Then he suggested that CP, one of his cousins, was the right man. CP was an ex-
boxer and a security guard at the Hamlet who had, AI said, good contact with the
teenager group and would be just the person to get the kids involved. He could, for
example, get them started growing hemp, to which the government was trying to
convert intensive water users because the pesticide need was more or less non-
existent. This initiative would involve learning all about propagation and so on, and
would be a great way for introducing broader learning topics. I asked whether hemp
grew into marijuana, but AI said there was no threat there.
I mentioned that we might strike trouble with CN if we leapt to such conclusions, instead of starting with the basics. But AI, not to be dissuaded from his newest thought, got on the phone to CP and arranged to meet him in half an hour or so. He then went through a lengthy set of departure arrangements before departure, leaving me to hang around watching a few teachers and a number of very small Aboriginal children who had started to wander about.

The section of the school I stood in may have been its disciplinary end. Whether it was or not, the authoritarianism of the signs and the continuing negative calls from the teachers ("Jason, you know you're not allowed to go around there") seemed to me to be inappropriate. It was as though the children were to be forced through the white man's system of order (and systemic punishment if necessary). A nearby sign read (more or less):

- First playground offence: Five minutes on steps;
- Second playground offence: Ten minutes on steps;
- Third playground offence: Teacher's office;
- Fourth playground offence: Principal's office;
- Fifth playground offence: Principal's office & parents called in;
- Sixth playground offence: Suspension.

Eventually we left for the Hamlet and arrived at CP's house. The yard was littered and the front verandah had small piles of rubbish on it, but it transpired that the latter came simply from an interrupted clean up. CP certainly was an ex-pug, with a small black beard and a six-inch scar around one cheekbone. We shook hands - first the white version and then the Koori, gripping the thumb - and he invited us inside.

It was the first time I had been inside a Hamlet house. It was much neater that I had expected, particularly in view of the front yard. There were two free white cockatoos in the lounge room and free-range chooks among some litter out the back, but the house was clean and the furniture was orderly and not down-at-heel.
CP introduced us to his partner as he led us through out to the back. She was fair-haired and looked white, but the encounter was not much more than a passing introductory wave of the hand really. Out the back CP was in the process of building a wire chicken run. Standing round it were a dozen of the kids who at first seemed to be from the group we thought we were interested in (the 12-15 year olds), but on closer inspection were more in the 15 to 18 year age group. CP finished the last part of the task quickly and then led us back into the house, so the encounter with the kids was very brief and not verbal. I really noticed only one detail, the dreadlocks on a very wide (not fat) kid standing immediately next to CP as he worked.

Back in the house we sat down at the dining-room table while CP took some cold water out of the fridge and complained about the kids not refilling the jug. It could have been suburbia anywhere. Then he sat down, and AI explained to him what we were on about. In the ensuing discussion we agreed that what was needed was an ongoing program of outdoors activities within which small segments of schooling could take place, say for fifteen minutes a day with a whiteboard in the bush, for example. The incident that most struck me during the conversation was that, when we talked about teaching the kids to read or write, CP said with apparently real earnestness that he could do neither and it was the one thing he really wanted to do.

CP said that some of the surrounding property owners could be sympathetic towards overland journeys. I said the stock route might be useful, but he only laughed at that and said there were too many snakes in summer, making a wavy motion with his hand across the table top as he spoke. AI talked about $7000 available through the technical education centre, having previously mentioned to CP on the phone that there might be some money in it. However, CP showed no noticeable reaction.

We agreed that we would meet at midday on the next day (Saturday) at AI’s house to plan the programme, which should then start on the Monday. Handshakes all around again. CP picked up a broom to finish sweeping the front verandah, AI headed across the road to a group on another verandah, and I went down the street to call on the elder CF, in fulfilment of a promise I had made the previous week.
CF heard me out about the plan just arranged, but then said there was no way CP could be involved -- he was a drug dealer. This set me totally aback and left me with nothing to say. Eventually I said that there was nothing more that I could do - if CF wasn't going to come with me, I was not going to go on.

We talked about the situation for quite a while. CF said that CP had been elected to the Co-op but had resigned shortly after -- the next day, I think CF said -- because he had been challenged about drugs. He was a leader, but the drugs meant that he could not be used. CF was adamant, but later on, perhaps after absorbing how halted in my tracks I had become, began to say that I could go ahead if I liked but CF was not coming with me. This concession was not made grudgingly. CF later added that one never knew, perhaps CP might get something out of it himself. CF said Al knew all about this, and that was why he had not come down the street with me to see her.

CF also mentioned CM, the Hamlet football star, and the recreation group people who lived at the Village. CF complained that they were too busy in the wrong direction, fixing up sheds and sporting fields, without making any contact of real meaning with the kids. As we stood on the driveway finishing up, AI appeared next to me. After listening to my report of CF's stance, AI said that CP had just got his licence and could be mending his ways. He might draw more improvement from involvement in the program, and Al would have a word on the side with him to tell him that he would have to straighten up his act.

So it was all left somewhat undecided. As we went back to the car, AI asked if a couple of others could travel back to the Village with us. On agreement, he headed back to the verandah across the street, and came back with two men. One was carrying a half empty bottle of Johnnie Walker, and was obviously under the weather. That was the second shock of the day, two drunks in the back seat who had to be told to buckle up as we came back onto the main road. I drove back totally lost for words, despite the drunk man's occasional attempts at conversation. We dropped them off and then drove to AI's house, where we had a few non-committal parting words that nevertheless reinforced my understanding that we were still going to meet on the next day, as arranged with CP.
Driving back to the Town it struck me that the drug and alcohol worker BK could advise me on this now-confused matter. I finally caught him on the phone at about 4:30pm, when he told me BU and the recreation group people were planning to take the kids on the day trip described in section 4.13.9. He said I was welcome to come if I liked, although he warned that there might turn out to be no room on the bus. This previously unknown arrangement highlighted the co-ordination issue raised by the teachers' aides right at the start, and left me more confused than ever.

4.13.5 The Aboriginal Teacher Aide (Report 49)

I had met AI initially when I first visited the Village high school, as described in the last section. That encounter had introduced me to the Pakeha lagoon, which AI had likened to a church under desecration (28.11). After that short interrupted meeting I rang the teacher aide at the school on a later morning and we arranged to meet at 2 pm that afternoon, which seemed to be AI's lunch hour.

To start the conversation, AI asked me what I was on about and I said that I was interested in finding out what people thought about the river. He said that he had lived by the river at the Hamlet until he was 11 years of our age, and that it been the best time of his life. He had had no concept whatsoever that he was poor or that there was anything possibly wrong with the river, even when it flooded.

He was pretty scathing about the role government played in the care of the the Hamlet community, and quoted the introduction of piped sewerage as an example. The lines had been laid and commissioned, but no instruction had been given to the community on how to operate a water-borne system. The result had been ceaseless blockages of the lines, through whole toilet rolls and sometimes rocks being put into the WCs, generally by children. A blockage in one house blocked the whole line, producing highly unsanitary effects in upstream dwellings.

He spoke about how his mother, together with the other survivors of the tribe, had been dumped initially at the "old site", some 40 kilometres away from the present settlement. Here the tribal remnants had simply been put out of transport without any
infrastructure at all, and left to fend for themselves. His mother was still alive but his father had died a year or so ago, well into his nineties.

AI reserved his fiercest criticism for alcohol, which he called an ogre. He said that before free access to alcohol had been given there had always been a few alcoholics around the Hamlet, but they had not been common. Free access had produced a situation where the problem had become widespread. The women of his mother's generation had not been involved with it, but real damage had been done when the women of his own generation had taken to the grog. At that point the management of the community, which was or had been basically matriarchal, more or less collapsed.

His various uncles had worked as shearers in the country surrounding the Hamlet. Because the sheds paid equal wages to black people and whites, the family became relatively middle-class and moved into the Village. His grandmother seemed to have had some kind of power in the Village community at that time, and she and his mother decided that AI would be the first recipient of a scholarship given to Aboriginal kids in the Village.

The result was that AI was sent to a school about 300 kilometres away at the age of 11. There he was housed in a hostel, one of five Aboriginal boys in a total of about 200 boarders. The school itself had about 1000 kids. Taken aback at the trauma he must have suffered at this kind of treatment, however well meaning it might have been, I asked him how he survived. He said he didn't know, he had just got through it somehow.

AI's life story took a lot longer to say than the above description takes to read. At the end of about an hour he said he had to go, and in a hurry I said that I wanted to find some of the men who had been involved in the so-called race riots in 1987. He said that would be no trouble - his brother had been one of them. In a later meeting he told me that a fight started by white men had caused it. He knew the white men. They were the sons of the shearers his uncles had worked with in the shearing sheds a generation earlier, and he said that the white men there used to set upon the black men even then.
At the end of the first successful meeting with AI, a second meeting took place at two o'clock on a Friday afternoon. I arrived at the office and was led away to find AI by a young man who seemed to be no older than a final-year student, but who turned out to be a physical education teacher. We found AI in a woodworking room and were soon joined by the environmentally oriented teacher CV I had met on the initial pilot visit to the school. AI introduced me as someone from the University interested in the river, and the conversation moved immediately to turbidity and carp. When I said the river was not so much the problem as pesticides from irrigation farming, they were quick to agree but turned back to carp almost immediately. The conversation was not moving along too well because CV seemed to adopt a rather confrontational stance towards me.

A man introduced as CW then joined us. He turned out to be the drover I had spent a day looking for during the pilot trips, as a result of which I had met the Camel Man (section 4.12.9). CW was an older man and, although obviously uneducated, much more mature in behaviour than the teachers. He spoke of introducing fingerlings regularly into the stream, and described what was being done at the coast to protect fingerlings from larger predators, by building artificial reefs from pipes too small for the larger fish to enter. I would have liked to continue talking to him but we left him behind because AI and CV had volunteered to make picture frames in another room for the pre-school. The physical education teacher had already left.

When we moved to the other room a dangerous-looking power saw was produced. AI and CV began to cut pieces of pine to length for the frames, a process that went on for the best part of an hour. The result was a fractured and desultory conversation interrupted at regular intervals by the howl of the saw, but it nonetheless produced some recordable output.

Slowly CV began to respond to questions. The situation improved when the physical education teacher returned. When I asked CV whether his environmental interest involved formal membership in any group (the answer was no), the other man said
that CV and the deputy President of the Village Resident Group were probably the only two greenies in the Village. CV’s activity had been the planting of trees around the school and the giving away of trees to Village residents for planting. Only about three of the trees now evident around the school had been there before he started.

When I asked AI what subjects he taught, he said carefully that he was a teacher’s assistant, there “to teach the teachers how to teach”. He told me that the principal at the time of the pilot visit had been a physical education man, which perhaps partly explained his rather dramatic appearance at the time. CV scoffed at the notion, first put forward by the senior water user respondent AA, that fish had been intentionally killed to incriminate irrigation farmers. When I asked if any students were interested in the environment, both he and the physical education man laughed and said they were interested more in destroying it than in anything else. There were also a number of remarks about the new technical education centre man CN, which I took to arise from the recent amalgamation of technical education activities into the Department that had previously looked after only primary and secondary schooling. It seemed to me from these comments that others might share my feeling that CN somehow dominated the new high school principal CR. There was also laughter at the prospective arrival next year of a young woman physical education replacement teacher who reportedly played Rugby Union.

The conversation wound on its tired and sticky way. AI, who in general was better spoken than any of the others, although capable of occasional profanities, seemed to be conscious of lameness of the situation and made attempts to keep things moving along more smoothly. In fact at the end, in an apparent effort to make things up to me, he said that he would be away next week until Wednesday but we could talk again after that.

4.13.7 The Youth Drug and Alcohol Clinic

I gained further insight into the elders’ concern with youthful drinking when I met BX, the youth, drug and alcohol officer working out of the shopfront welfare agency in the Town. He told me about a 10-week drug and alcohol-counselling program in
the Hamlet that was now nearing its end. He agreed to me attending the last of the sessions in a day or so.

On the due day, while travelling to the Hamlet in BX's car, I asked him why he could go south of the border when the other social workers could not. The answer was that he was funded through a Federal community initiative grant. He was a short nuggety man about 30 years old, a quite different style of person to the two women social workers. He had not trained professionally in any way as a social worker, and had begun his working life in a variety of minor sales and hospitality jobs outside the district, of which he was a native. In one of these distant locations he married a girl from another medium-sized but more remote country town, to which they both later returned. While there he had answered an advertisement for a youth worker to assist with local suicide problems, a somewhat endemic problem in that place. To quote his own words, he got the job "because I lived there". They later moved back to the fieldwork district, where he had been able to draw on the experience of the suicide job to gain his present position.

BX gave every impression of being a straightforward, reliable and open person. He was a footballer and occasional security guard. At one stage of the journey he told me the story of a dance for white teenagers he had arranged at the Town's community centre. It was a "lock-in", but one drunken kid had found a way in under his guard. The problem was that the fire exits had had to stay unlocked.

BX had not picked up the smell of grog when he first questioned the boy (16 to 18 years old), who had straightened up when approached. Later on, however, he had caught hold of a chair on which someone was sitting and had whirled it around, scaring the dance floor deeply (one has to see the community centre to realize how seriously this damage would be taken.) To sand the gouge out, the flooring had to be lifted a centimetre or more. The Council had been slow (six weeks) in charging BX $600, and the parents of the offending boy had then told him to get lost.

The next dance would be held in the Town's Catholic church hall. The security issue was expected to be easier there. All the kids would be breathalysed as they come in, which BX thought they would treat as fun, a novelty. The breathalysing would be
done by police officers, and BX also thought it would be a good public relations chance for the police.

On the way to the Hamlet we stopped first at a house in the main street of the Village. It was an old-fashioned weatherboard place, decrepit but not tumbl edown. No one seemed to be home. BX knocked on the door a few times and, when I next looked, he was talking to a seated Aboriginal woman. He came back to say that the boy he had called to collect had argued with his mother and had cleared out last night — he hoped not back to the pub. Then we stopped at the butcher shop for the meat for the sausage sizzle, and finally at the Aboriginal co-op office just past the dingy pub at the start of the road to the Hamlet. (I was not game to go into the pub by myself during the fieldwork, and even BX said he had only been in there once and did not want to go again. It was a very dark two-storey building that seemed to have a solely Aboriginal clientele.) Whoever we had stopped to pick up wasn't there either.

So we went on to the Hamlet, arriving at about a quarter to ten in the morning. First stop was at an unidentified building where I was introduced firstly to BY and then to BZ. BY was a small woman, maybe in her late thirties and energetic in a constructive way, who was the family support worker resident in the Hamlet. I do not know which agency employed her. BZ was the resident youth worker. When he shook hands it was with the soft almost boneless handshake you sometimes find with Aboriginal men. During the fieldwork, I wondered about this softness. It was very different from the sometimes-conscious iron grip you strike from a white rural man. It was not limp, although that might be the impression it gave at first.

BZ said practically nothing for the next 45 minutes. By contrast, BY was a constantly smiling talkative woman whose voice seemed continually on the edge of breaking over into laughter. Her good humour was extraordinary. She was not gar rulous, just one of those people whose openness to the world seemed to turn thought into speech without any internal censorship. I would say she found her life very interesting. She was currently enthusiastic about a debutante ball she was arranging for a month or so away. She had about 30 girls interested, and the current problem was bussing them to the distant regional town to buy dresses. I incautiously asked why, given the number of customers, the regional town people did not come out to the Hamlet, but she and
BZ indicated with smiles that life was not like that here. She said it was a bit harder to get the boys interested.

She spoke about how there was now a shop in the Hamlet. It only opened till 2pm and not at all on Sundays, which seemed to give her simultaneous pleasure at having it in the first place and disappointment at its trading hours. She said it provided work for some of the CDEP workers. The CDEP situation was that people who worked for two days a week were paid at the dole rate. A problem developed if they worked for more days in a week, because those who worked even for five days received only the same money as those who worked for two.

A current problem had arisen with the CDEP about housing maintenance. The contract had just been re-tendered, and CDEP had missed out - by either $40,000 or $400,000 according to another (white) respondent. The lowest price had come from a Town-based contractor who intended to use his own men, not Hamlet people currently working for CDEP. BY said the CDEP price was realistically based on CDEP performance rates.

BY and BZ then began to talk about a recent visit by a psychologist/drug and alcohol counsellor from a distant regional centre, and how impressive he had been. However, BX made the point that the visitor had been an advocate of complete abstinence, while he (BX) favoured controlled drinking without insisting on a complete ban.

Shortly after BY was called away. BZ began to talk about a plan to send the under-15 football team to a large Aboriginal carnival coming up soon in a large distant city on the coast. They were $100 short for registration fees, and they sat down together to write a request letter to the Town's shopfront agency for the money. BX wrote out what sounded like a good, short and to-the-point application, at one time asking BZ whether the carnival was to be drug and alcohol free. BZ didn't know and the poster didn't say.

Soon afterwards, BX declared that it was time to move on to the main business of the day so, leaving BZ behind, he and I drove a hundred or so yards to the Land Council office. As we pulled up he told me that the problem that had led to the departure of
the shopfront welfare agency manager a few days ago had arisen from disagreements within the management committee. He thought the committee members were trying to interfere in the day-to-day running of the service even though they were not trained in any form of welfare work. In his view they should act as committee members, by which I believe he meant as a board of non-executive directors.

Two white women, CA and CB, arrived shortly after the time set for the meeting. CA, in her early thirties, was the drug and alcohol officer and CB, a young woman who seemed to be only in her late twenties, the parole officer. I had previously imagined the parole officer, whom I knew to be female, as a severe looking woman with a prickly manner in spectacles and a business suit, about forty years of age. CB could not have been further from this image, and turned out to be a graduate in business (which did not seem to me to be particularly appropriate for parole work).

No one was there when we went into the office except a rather dour looking Aboriginal woman to whom no one introduced me. It was only when she came to pin up a notice on the door next to where I was standing that I introduced myself, at which point she gave me a most brilliant smile but did not introduce herself back. She went back to her desk, resumed her dour expression, and continued on as though we were not there. It was nearly 45 minutes before the group assembled enough for proceedings to begin.

During that period the following people drifted in:

- CC, a shy but stylish Aboriginal woman probably in her early forties who cast her eyes down and did not respond when I first introduced myself;
- CD, a young Aboriginal woman with two or three missing front teeth, who turned out to be one of the clients;
- CE, a very young Aboriginal woman who looked no older than 16 and whom I first mistook for a boy. She was also one of the clients;
- CF, a small slight elderly Aboriginal lady in a broad brimmed straw hat, with a permanently bright expression and an equally bright sense of humour, with whom it was easy to fall into conversation;
• CG, an Aboriginal man in his sixties who turned out to be a drug and alcohol worker from the same town as the visiting social workers;
• CH, a white man in his late thirties who was a mental health worker with an added interest in alcohol rehabilitation, from the same place;
• CI and CJ, two young Aboriginal men who came and went when they saw the group inside the room. Both turned out to be clients.

Someone made a remark that the meeting seemed to have been afflicted with “Murri” time. We moved into an adjoining room with a long table so that proceedings could begin.

The topic was art therapy, about which BX had expressed some reservations during the drive out. The idea was that CA and CB were going to show everyone how to make plaster of paris facemasks and hand gauntlets, for decorative painting afterwards.

I had already begun to feel self conscious, and tried to fold down on my haunches in a corner of the room. CD and CE came in without demur, with CI appearing at the doorway and then disappearing again from time to time. CJ was not seen after his first appearance at the outer door half an hour earlier. By this stage there were seven social workers and myself in the room with the two clients.

CA explained the process. CD volunteered first, putting her hand palm down on the tabletop. CG and CF did the same, and a process began of dipping strips of bandage into liquid plaster and moulding them on to the hands. CA and CB applied the strips while CH cut up the bandages. A minute or so later CE decided to be in it too, but rather than putting her palm face down on the table, she decided to make a closed fist with the thumb sticking up from it. A lot of self-conscious laughter from her at this.

Away it all went with a great deal of chatter and giggling around the table. Shortly after, CG decided that both of his hands would be done, a choice that tied him into immobility but did not stop him joking. Throughout the process CF didn't say much, but CG kept up his shyaking.
CH seemed to be a somewhat unlikely mental health worker. In a way he came from the same mould as BX but his interest in football, for example, was more of the hill barricader type. He was a keen river fisherman, and had a lot to say about the restocking work his fishing club carried out. He kept on cutting bandages for about 30 minutes, after which he and BX disappeared to start up the barbecue. Feeling self-conscious at not doing anything, I took over the bandage-cutting role.

The two girl clients observed the casts growing on their hands silently but with great curiosity, plucking occasionally at loose threads. Eventually the hands were done but had to stay lying on the table until the plaster dried. Then there was a call for volunteers to have their faces done. To my surprise, young CE, who had gone through the process so far with hardly any expression, agreed to this (CD had shown much more liveliness up to this point). She tipped her face back and, with great patience but still little expression, endured the lengthy plaster application process for probably 20 minutes without moving. Halfway through the process CI reappeared at the door and was coaxed into coming in and having a hand done, without any utterance whatsoever on his part.

By this stage the chatter and laughter had died down. No more bandage cutting was needed, so I went back to sitting on my haunches in the corner. The room became silent as people worked on, and a strange kind of peace seemed to settle on the scene. On the one hand one could describe the activities as childish kindergarten stuff, but on the other an impression began to form that this was a quite profound situation, the way in which people really should relate to each other. There was an atmosphere of people tending to others in an unpaternalistic way, with the recipients calm and somehow exercising almost a form of entitlement. In very large part this was due to CA and CB, two of the most unlikely “bureaucrats” (if that could possibly be the word) one could imagine.

Finally CA said she would have her face done too, but while this was going on people began to drift back into the outer room (myself included) or off towards the barbecue. While I was standing out there BU suddenly appeared from where the dour receptionist had previously been sitting and came up to me. I failed momentarily to
recognise him, and he re-introduced himself while I tried to make amends. It was a different BU to the first visit. Smiling and well dressed, he told me that he had now successfully completed a three-year University commercial law course that he had been doing, and was now in the process of applying for a job in the town the two social workers had come from. I asked if that would take him away from the Hamlet, but he said he would be coming back home every weekend anyway. I asked him how things were going generally, and he said they were much the same. Then he went back to the word processor to continue with his application, and I found myself standing next to a self-confident young man dressed in imitation Bronx clothing including shades and baseball cap. Though not tall, he was very solid indeed, a good Rugby League hooker if ever I saw one. He turned out to be CE's brother, and he set out to engage me in conversation. Neither of us had much of substance to say to each other, but it was noteworthy that he seemed to be as interested in keeping the conversation going (limping along) as I was.

When CA's facemask had dried off enough to be removed, the last of us set off for the barbecue. I walked over with CC, who turned out to be the sexual health officer, presumably from the distant town also. She told me that she had been involved with making sure that sexual health advice observed the proper cultural formats. On this walk I found her to be nothing like the shy person reported earlier. I do not know what her level of education was, but she was a ready and informed conversationalist. I enjoyed the stroll in her company.

The barbecue was set up near a couple of trees but there was not much shade. Only a few people wore hats though the temperature was probably in the upper thirties. We all stood around in the sun queueing for food. When everyone had a plate, I found myself standing next to firstly CB and later CG. This was when I found out that CB was the parole worker. It seemed that CB had 40 clients, for 10 of whom a report had to be written each month. If all of these situations were handled in the same way as with the Hamlet people, then perhaps parole worker would a better term than parole officer, because the latter seems to carry a much more controlling overtone. It was hard to imagine CB as an authoritarian person.
With CG it was a totally different story. My conversation with him turned into a good-humoured but nonetheless direct admonition against the white man's (including specifically my) general philosophy of life. "All money, power and destruction", CG told me several times. He described what it had been like in his youth when he could wander anywhere to go swimming in the river. The river water had even been drinkable but now it was not. One time in recent years he had gone a few miles upstream and had crossed from the road to the watercourse in the way he used to do as a boy, only to be told by the property owner that he was trespassing. He felt like telling the property owner that it was the owner who was trespassing on his (CG's) ground, not the other way around, but he could see that it would lead to a fight.

We parted on good terms, but CG had not retreated an inch from his point of view. On the way back to Town later, BX simply snorted when I told him about "all money, power and destruction" and said that CD was a reformed alcoholic. Like the visiting psychologist who occasionally came to the Hamlet, he was on the side of complete abstinence, contrary to BX's and CA's preference for moderate controlled drinking.

I also found myself close to CI who to my surprise initiated a new discussion by asking where I fitted into the welfare scene. He spoke with a very soft voice. When I told him where I was from and that my interest was in the river, he asked me what I myself thought about the river, rather catching me out. We didn't talk for long, but it was reassuring that he would speak to me at all.

We went back to the Land Council office after lunch for the painting of the plaster casts. CD got off to a good start, decorating her closed fist with a red Aboriginal sun radiating black rays on the back of the hand. Everybody else seemed to be moving along to one degree or another, although CG was having a bit of difficulty dreaming up a suitable image and finally settled on a black bottle and a black stick. The one stand-out was CE, who said that she had always had this trouble at school. When she was asked to do something creative she had to sit and think for half an hour. Finally she got underway, but I do not recall what she painted. The high point of this period was CD saying into a working silence that she had now been off the grog for two months.
Eventually it was all over, and BX and I drove back to Town. During this journey he gave me most of the information about individuals that has been included above, but in addition said that CI had gone off the grog as a result of becoming involved with the Anglican church in the Village, where he was now a member of the choir. As we drove back into the main street of the Town he asked me whether I had found the day worthwhile, and I had to tell him that it had surpassed all my expectations.

4.13.8 The White Land Councillor's View (Cont'd)

As noted in section 4.10.1, I had first encountered AV at the meeting where the government offered a remediation package to the Village Resident Group. We arranged to meet a few days later. Part of the conversation that then took place has already been described in the context of the Sacred Site story in section 4.11.

Fifty-two years old, AV was a white ex-member of the Hamlet Land Council. Widely read and well-travelled throughout the major Basin States, AV told me that Wilcannia and Brewarrina in NSW were probably the last two places where Aboriginal kids could grow up without a feeling of white dominance. This was due mainly to numerical superiority, though whites still ran these places.

I told AV that my experience with Aboriginal people had related only to metropolitan conditions. There I felt the family situation to be less robust than it was said to be in rural areas. The ties were less because the extended family for the metropolitan individuals I had met was usually in Dubbo and Kempsey rather than nearby. But AV disagreed with that point of view, saying that the obligation to reciprocate fell down when say 20 per cent of the people were alcoholics and incapable of reciprocating. The system simply could not stand that level of default.

AV said four hundred people now lived on a very small area of flood-free land in the Hamlet. A new form of settlement was needed, perhaps spread over 20 miles in each direction where three or four communities could be established and interact. The relevant Federal department was good but the State department was a disgrace. Recapitalisation was needed rather than piecemeal spending on things like housing.
There was a spectrum between land rights at the macroscopic end and personal activities at the microscopic end, and so far organizations like ATSIC had been looking at the wrong, central section of the spectrum. It would only be through recapitalisation that emphasis could then turn to the personal end, to address issues such as alcoholism and a re-establishment of Aboriginal culture in general.

AV spoke with feeling about the impact of alcohol on the Aboriginal people. He said that Aboriginals drank to get drunk, while whites or other had established rituals to limit drinking. In his eyes alcoholism was a sickness of the spirit, and an ogre in its own right. Religion was the most accessible method for overcoming it, but he said that alcohol workers in the system did not follow Alcoholics Anonymous' twelve steps. Agency officers changed too frequently to be really effective personally. Only the system continued. He held a view that Christianity was useful in this issue because it led to control of drinking first. When people had gone through that phase they might return to their original religion.

He said that the idea of a role model in the white heroic sense did not operate in Aboriginal society, where the dominant value was sharing. There the appropriate role model was a person who served, and that was why he was a great admirer of BU.

He also referred to the investigator's report on the Hamlet. The investigator had outwitted the political arm of government by foreseeing all possible stalling tactics, and providing good reasons why they could not be followed. The Minister had then sent a negotiator who tried to mediate in the way preferred by the political arm, but the Aboriginal communities eventually said "no" -- they felt they could not mediate with him. I could ask BU about this episode, and the communities' solicitor would have all the correspondence about how the mediation attempt had been resisted.

I asked him what he thought of a recent statement by Noel Pearson that Aboriginals should be taken off the welfare system, to which his response was "what would happen next?"

At a later meeting, AV told me that a senior Aboriginal woman had gone into one of the Town's better coffee lounges, but had ultimately left after not having been served
for a considerable length of time. The incident was first thought to be a matter for the Anti-Discrimination Commission, but it was later decided to make a different informal report rather than a formal complaint.

I told him of the trade education centre notion of asking the kids what they wanted to do, and asked how he thought they could be contacted best. His reply was that the juvenile justice or some other system should arrest the boys when appropriate, and then put them through the victim-confrontation process. In his view they were all victims of sexual abuse within the family situation. About twelve were involved in the Hamlet case, and their rampaging constantly through it threatened to destroy the community.

The prevalence of sexual abuse in the Hamlet was known through the reports of teachers and health workers, who were legally obliged to report such cases. If the matters were reported to police, others blamed the victims and protected the perpetrators. The practice of blaming the victims was widespread there, he said.

He also thought that some form of adventure episode could be a good idea – such as walking and camping between two adjacent Towns. Some way was needed for breaking into their life scripting in a new way. I asked why there were no “strong men” in the Hamlet who could control the kids. He replied that the present police liaison officer (who did not have to be a policeman) did not seem to be very effective, but the previous one, now dead, had been a larger than life character who had seemed to know who was into everything.

AV returned to the topic of alcohol, saying it was the great problem. They should have Al Anon in the Hamlet, so that people affected through their relationships with heavy drinkers could find an outlet, rather than just being caught up in the drinkers’ ambience. Alcoholics Anonymous may have once been in the Hamlet, but only on a spasmodically basis. He spoke of the Hamlet diaspora, the dispersion of previous residents all around the region. They had been unable to live with the family feuding, the origins of most of which had by now been forgotten. Part of the problem also was the continual population growth in a small area. He spoke of the Reconciliation Council, the local expression of the National Reconciliation Council, which now had
a few local white members as well as black, including himself. Referring back to the case of coffee shop discrimination, he said the local Reconciliation Council could start an award for the most discrimination-free coffee shop in Town. The Council had run an information booth at the last Sunday market in the Town park.

AV was quite scathing about ATSIC, saying its idea of human relations was to report, appoint a coordinator or, in the case of Aboriginal alcoholism, a drug and alcohol worker, and then go down to the pub after work.

He thought the idea of asking the teenagers what they wanted to do was too romantic, as were suggestions from the trade educational centre manager about safe-sex counselling or training as bartenders. The teenagers may really want to do what the older people have forgotten about, perhaps just live by the riverbank. They were interested in cars, and the horse thing may have something going for it too. But it was not an educational issue, it was a social thing to stop them destroying the community.

The Hamlet-Village divide was only the superficial face of the problem. Family feuds were the real problem. The kids fought because of the insults between groups. When I concluded the meeting by asking him why the whites considered the Aboriginals to be unreliable, he replied that it was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

4.13.9 The Youth Excursion Day (Report 69)

The youth, drug and alcohol worker BX had said I could join a group of black youths from the Hamlet that he was taking on a day outing if I wanted to. I turned up back at the Hamlet just before the set time of nine o'clock on the due day. BX had said that the bus would be leaving from the family centre, but I didn't know where that was and went to the Land Council office to find out.

Inside, BU was on the phone. Since I was becoming concerned about BU's attitude towards my continual turning up at functions like this -- I felt that I might seem to be forever horning in -- I waited until the call ended. This took about half an hour, but it
seemed more important for me at that juncture to make sure things were clear with BU than to catch the bus with the teenage kids.

It never became fully clear whom BU was talking to, but I think it was an Area Health Board representative located in a nearby regional town. The issue was the use of the local health clinic's car to take people from the Hamlet to the hospital in case of need. Apparently the Area Health Board's policy was that only the health sister or the Aboriginal health worker was allowed to drive the car, and it was not to be used by others. BU was explaining that no matter what the policy was, the car was being used for personal reasons, I presume by some of the people attached to the health clinic, even for going to the pub.

BU went on to say that he was now secretary of the Land Council but had previously been an Aboriginal health worker attached to the clinic for five years. While health worker he had frequently had to take people such as pregnant girls about to give birth to the hospital at three or four o'clock in the morning. He was trying to explain to the person at the other end of the phone that the Hamlet was 30 kilometres away from the hospital, and that most Hamlet people did not have transport of their own.

BU didn’t win the argument - as far as I could tell the other person promised to look into the matter and ended it at that. In fact, listening to BU, it was hard not to avoid the feeling that the Hamlet was an invisible place to the person on the other end of the phone.

I was just explaining to BU what I intended to do when BK and BZ (the Hamlet youth worker) came in the door, already half an hour late and without the bus. They had a brief word to BU, who said he was too busy to come at the moment (there had apparently been a death on the roads) but might drive out to meet them later. It turned out that neither BK nor BZ knew where the actual destination for the outings was - they had been there before but with someone else driving and they didn't remember the way. I happened to have a map of the area in the car and we found it was about 80 kilometres away.
I followed BK in his car around to the pre-school, where the bus was waiting. After a few minutes he came back to my car to say that eight youth workers were present but no kids. We started the long wait needed with Murri time. After a while we crossed the road to another building where a local black sporting celebrity of State-wide fame (CM) and two or three other black youth workers were waiting and yarning on the veranda. All were casually dressed, in baseball caps and newish Reeboks. After a while another bus turned up with two or three more youth workers. After a brief talk, they all went off to round up some of the kids who had signed up for the trip.

By this stage a couple of kids had started to play cricket in the yard of the pre-school and BK felt that his passengers were slowly assembling. But we still had to wait for a while, so we moved further down the street to the playground of the primary school. Some kind of presentation was going on in the school hall, presumably to do with the end of the year. While we stood outside in the roasting sun, I talked to BZ about weed removal, which seemed to me to be an incredibly difficult job in this climate. I suppose I thought that because Fijians seemed to be able to handle it better and are black, Aboriginals might be able to stand it as well; but it was evident from BZ’s responses that they found it just as difficult as I would. He said some people worked for up to ten hours a day in the fields.

It was 11 o’clock or so before the bus left the school precinct with two or three teenagers on board, heading off to collect as many of the rest as possible. In the meantime, I had a fairly long chat with BK about what could be done with the kids, and it seemed quite evident that he and CN (the trade education regional manager) should join forces to present a united front. It was also quite evident that any attempt to run a Repertory Grid session with any of these kids would not succeed until BK had reached a fair degree of friendliness with them. BK was quite aware of the need for follow-through and continuity in the whole matter, and more importantly had his own source of funding. The impossibility of me doing much by way of follow-through in the time remaining to me in the district was so obvious that I told BK that I would not go on the trip after all.

As the bus pulled away I found myself left with a youngish woman who introduced herself as CO. I had heard of CO before as a teacher at the pre-school. She told me
that she was on the point of finishing her bachelor's degree. She told me that only
about 30 people in the Hamlet had licenses to drive, out of a total population of about
400. There was a bus, but it ran only once a week. Otherwise people had to catch a
cab to go to the Village, or pay neighbours to drive them in.

CO was very concerned about the kids who continued to the end of their secondary
schooling, and also for those who inexplicably dropped out but did not become
troublemakers. She pointed out a boy walking past who, she said, had done extremely
well for part of the way through high school but had just now given up, and simply
spent his time wandering around the Hamlet. He was about 15 years of age. There
was no work available for any of the kids who finished high school anyway (about
five had apparently done so recently).

She took me into the pre-school building, which had an interior as tidy as a childcare
centre anywhere else. She told me that three teachers looked after about 30 kids aged
from 0 to 5, with four at 0. The building had been built in 1992, but a pre-school
facility had been available for a number of years before that.

I mentioned to her the problem that had arisen with CP, the Hamlet security guard,
and she too said that CP was a drug dealer. She also mentioned that the other security
guard was definitely a dealer in her eyes.

There had been various start-ups of basic educational processes in the Hamlet, but
they had not lasted, sometimes stopping within the year. She was not clear about the
reasons. She said that five cases of sexual assault on children had been identified in
the recent past.

A day also later, BK reported that about ten kids had finally gone on the trip with the
health and youth workers, including the sporting identity CM. The kids included the
one thought to be the greatest problem. The boys and men had got on well, and all the
kids had seemed to enjoy it. There had been no trouble with any of them. He thought
he had managed to pass a mild drug and alcohol warning across. He had arrived back
home at eight that night.
On the day after BK’s field trip, I felt it would be proper to re-contact AI to let him know what had happened and to discuss where we might go to from here.

When I rang the school, AI reminded me about a health exhibition to be held that day at the Hamlet (at which I knew BK was going to run a stall). AI suggested that I should come out to the school at about 10 am so that we could travel out to the Hamlet together. Before leaving, I rang the bureaucrat CN to see whether he was back from sick leave and he told me that he had only just got off the phone from someone who was apparently connected with the recreation people at the Hamlet. CN was not aware of my partial involvement in the day trip of the day before, but he knew about the trip itself from the recent telephone caller (CQ). The caller had made an indirect reference to an unnamed person who may have been the security guard CP, and was basically phoning, as far as I could tell, to try to co-ordinate the recreation group and trade education centre overtures to the teenagers. I told CN of my view that he and BK should meet, and we arranged a tentative meeting between them.

No one knew where AI was when I arrived at the school, but I met the school principal CR in the vestibule. I outlined briefly the events of the last two or three days to him, and he listened with interest, but objected when I said that the recreation group people were basically undirected, telling me that CQ seemed to be able to handle things properly.

I went off to track AI down again, and found him in the art room starting another traditional Aboriginal painting on which the penciled outlines of fish had already been traced. As we walked to the car I began telling him of all the events since we had last spoken. I explained also that the University did not want me to get involved in all this local politicking, and for that reason I felt I had to go through CF and wait for CN's view of the matter as well. He then said that, reflecting on the matter, he really thought that we should still use CP to deal through, but only for the next fortnight, in order to bring the kids quickly to the table while I was still around. He was also
rather dismissive of the recreation group's focus on the preparation of the playing field, saying as we passed it in the distance that they should be fertilizing the minds of the kids rather than the paddock. The conversation went on in this vein until we pulled up outside the Hamlet community hall, where the health exhibition was just getting under way, starting with a concert featuring totally discordant singing from quite tiny children.

4.13.11 The Foreign Sister (Report 68)

I had heard during the pilot meetings about two religious sisters who were proposing to live in the Hamlet. That had not happened, but I made an appointment during the main visit to interview one of them at the house they still occupied on the western side of the Town.

Only one of the two was available, a small Asian woman perhaps in her forties. I asked her how long she had been in the Town and what she was there for. The answer was that she had come to work amongst the Aboriginal people and had been there for three to four years.

She said how hard it had been to build contact with the people in the Hamlet. She had been trying to teach the women sewing, macramé and handicrafts of that kind, but only two or three had ended up coming regularly.

The picture had not always been like that. The two nuns had started in the shed now used for papermaking, and had had a reasonable but not large response, although without young ones. But the shed had been taken over by the papermaking venture, and they had moved to sit out under a tree. This had become much better, and many more people had turned up, including young ones. Then around Christmas time, the people decided they would move into one of the other buildings, but the numbers fell off. It may have been that being under a tree had made the group visible to all passers-by, and people had joined it on the spur of the moment from curiosity as much as anything else.
The reason for moving into the building was not clear. It may have been the midsummer heat. Now she spent her time between patients in an aged care facility in the northern part of the Town jointly run by the Catholic and Anglican churches, and public hospital visitation. She said she was currently visiting two Aboriginal long-term patients in the hospital, one paralyzed except for one arm and the other “not too clear in the head”. She thought that the second might go home sooner or later, but the paralyzed person might be there to the end because of the difficulties of dealing with paralysis in an Aboriginal setting.

She was not aware of fights between Aboriginal families, but sensed that tribal distinction or discrimination operated in the Hamlet, with members of one tribe not being too keen on mingling with those of the others. However, she didn’t know the names of the tribes. She was finding the whole Hamlet experience quite frustrating. She still went out there two days a week, but felt she was no longer making any ground.

4.13.12 Final Meetings at the School (Reports A6 and A7)

At the first of these meetings held during the Aftermath visit, the principal CR told me that the State’s Premier’s Department had installed a community co-ordination consultant in the Town to co-ordinate the multiplicity of State agencies dealing with the Hamlet. Quarterly meetings of all relevant agencies were being held, and two had occurred so far. Twenty-five people had attended the first, and not all relevant organisations had been represented. The second meeting had attracted only about six participants.

He had started a teacher and teacher aide programme at the Hamlet, with courses in jewellery and small motors. Both were going well. He had also lodged an application for establishment of an early childhood pre-school for 0 to 5-year-olds and a family centre. He understood that the application was well up on the list and looked likely to succeed.

CN had left the scene and was now running Agriculture at a far distant trade
educational centre. He might return in the following year, but in the meantime there was no principal at the Village trade educational centre, only a head teacher. CR "more or less" (by which I presumed he meant administratively) now looked after both it and the high school.

I went in search of AI, and we sat down to a cup of coffee in the staff room. AI seemed rather down and upset. I was not aware of recent deaths that had occurred in the Aboriginal community at that juncture.

AI began by telling me, to my utter astonishment, that the security guard CP was now President of the Land Council, and that $400,000 was supposedly unaccounted for from CDEP funds. The previous manager CS had gone but had not been chased. AI then became quite bitter about the chairman of the local ATSIC Council, who resided in a distant town on an income of $80,000 a year. To my further astonishment, he even included BU in his criticisms, saying that BU and the ATSIC chairman had let the side down for their own selfish ends. It appeared that he thought that BU had pocketed $10,000 from a local readymix concrete company for allowing it to take gravel out of the river alongside the settlement.

The shop at the Hamlet was now closed. It had never been a properly used facility. It had had a lot of space and built-in cool rooms, but had only sold fish and chips and very basic food lines in a fraction of the space available. The paper making enterprise had moved to the Village, and there was no employment available at the Hamlet now for anyone.

The Hamlet housing program was jammed for some reason he could not explain. Only one house was currently planned although $5 million was available. A white contractor was involved but apparently all the workers were Aboriginal.

The teaching project CR had mentioned was apparently a second attempt. A first attempt had lasted for only a few weeks, with the appointed Aboriginal teacher aide walking out after two weeks, saying she couldn't handle the kids. This was a woman who had been described by others as a good social worker and a friend to the community, but who had seemed to have "stepped down" in recent times. Another
respondent mentioned a general exhaustion amongst community workers.

An attempt had been made to start up new employment opportunities recently at the Hamlet, one being a jewellery making idea that AI thought came from someone elsewhere (possibly CA, the distantly-based female drug and alcohol worker who had come to the art therapy clinic). However, AI thought the new attempt at education was also disappointing. It had been going for a month or so and the teacher was a mate of his. A woman otherwise thought to have been reliable had become the local black aide, but now seemed only interested in booking time.

The football star and his friends had finished the football field and the lighting arrangement was great. However, while touch football took place each afternoon, no teams had been fielded in any competition. Government money was not coming into the recreation group any longer, and in AI’s view six to eight people had had a job for a while, but that was all it had meant. In finishing, he voiced his despondency at people ripping money out of the system and the continuation of a welfare attitude amongst the locals, who were “too lazy to get themselves moving”.

At a second meeting with CR the next day, I was told that AI had probably seemed down for reasons than other simply the Hamlet elders’ deaths. Perhaps these were to do with his own family situation (which seemed unlikely from other observations). I asked CR whether there had been a change in the black response pattern and he said no, it was still about the same. He had told AI and another aide, the main black drivers on the committee he had set up, to bring the black response up since he could do nothing as simply a white administrator.

4.13.13 The New Parole Officer (Report A12)

When I came back for my last visit, the shopfront welfare office in the Town looked much the same as it had before. I went to there to find BK again, and found the interior of the building considerably changed when the receptionist led me out the back. On the earlier visits he had worked in a kind of attached site shed, but now the back yard had been converted into a full extension of the main building.
BK was in one of several offices surrounding a large general space and had now become a State parole officer. The change had occurred because the Federal money for the earlier job had not been renewed. As a result BK's field operation was now limited to the side of the river away from the Village and the Hamlet.

Although supposedly constrained in this way, BK occasionally still visited the Village/Hamlet side on drug and alcohol issues related to parole activities. Speaking of the new situation at the Hamlet, BK said that one of the worst offenders had been picked up again recently with fifty outstanding charges against him. He was likely to go up for a couple of years and, in BK's view, his disappearance would make a real difference. A second ringleader was also in the process of going up, so the situation could be expected to improve.

While back in Sydney, I had viewed an ABC TV show on the Village that featured a kid who had said his job was busting up houses. The kid was now under BK's treatment and appeared to have corrected himself. Kids were no longer on nightly rampages through the Hamlet, and things had quietened down. CP, the new Land Council President, had said to BK that he was really interested in the kids and the old people. As parole officer, BK had fewer cases than seemed to have been occurring two years ago, so that was another direction in which things seemed to be improving. When I asked him what had happened to CN the trade education manager, BK didn't know but thought the replacement was OK.

BK told me that the new coordination consultant's plan for meetings, committees etc had been accidentally discovered at the Hamlet. BK said it looked like Barry Jones' Smart Nation diagram -- a cat's cradle.

4.13.14  The Co-Ordination Consultant (Report A13)

I called on the newly appointed coordination consultant (CU) during the final visit. It turned out that the Premier's Department had been aware of the need for action beforehand. In fact, it had developed a regional priorities framework from which a
regional services programme had been designed. The upshot had been that CU had been engaged by the Premier's Department as a co-ordination officer for a period of about two years, reporting to a District Office about 200 kilometres away. CU had been in action in the Town for about six months, perhaps longer, and appeared to be an energetic person who might possibly have been partly Aboriginal. Holding a master's degree in a discipline associated with town planning and a first degree in communications, CU was very much aligned with urban planning in the social sense, with a primary interest in community development.

CU's view was that the Town retained the character of a few similar old country towns. It was a typically rich town with the power elite still in place, supported by a strong professional layer. The elite people in the Town invested back in their community, not into the capital city or other distant places. CU was very caught up with the idea of power, emphasising its ubiquity and the three forms it took, which seemed to me to be an updated version of those cited by Lukes (1974). CU saw anthropology as lacking in that regard through not putting forward any ideas about implementation.

I told CU that I had developed a view from my repeated contacts with the public water and catchment management situations that, no matter what the topic, sooner or later I would be assured that:

"We are in (or are moving into) control;
Here is a fresh stack of paper;
It's all going to happen tomorrow".

4.14 The Stories in Summary

In this section I reduce most of the stories from previous sections into more concise summaries. The exceptions are the White and Black People stories, for reasons I set out at the end of the section.
In physical landscape terms, the district is a flat, featureless plain through which the river carves a winding way, gradually modifying its path as it goes. The river is itself not visible until one is close upon it, its path only identifiable from a distance by dependent tree lines. These tree lines may not be natural in their form, but the residues of an “invented” clearing of the ground. The climate of the plain is hot and its deep soil cracks when drying after wet weather. In the wet, a shallow sheet of slow-moving brown floodwater occasionally covers it. Many consider these floodwaters to be life giving, but others apparently perceive them to be threatening. The general emptiness and silence of the view may present a mythic quality to some observers, especially at night, as it did to me (9.7).

Three human settlements other than rural residences exist in the district. At the time of the fieldwork, the largest one, the Town, showed a range of buildings that illustrated a progressive transformation from premodern to late modern in architectural styling. The main centre of the Town was predominantly early modern, while late modern influences were visible in side streets and off-centre locations. Its cultural buildings and physical infrastructure were of high standard. The second settlement, the Village, showed ordered street layouts but considerable dilapidation and/or abandonment in its building inventory, except for the high school and the police station. Its one commonly used cultural building was the Club. Its service infrastructure was lagging behind conventional standards at the start of the fieldwork but may have improved by its end. The smallest settlement, the Hamlet, inhabited entirely by Aboriginal people, was in the process of “improvement” to white standards in both housing and infrastructure terms.

The history of the district was publicly described locally as a series of benign events that introduced English institutions and modern technologies into the district. Only hints of environmental impacts appeared in this history, without negative comment. Beyond the locality, broader historical sources indicated that the introduction of white life into the district had brought catastrophic consequences for the Aboriginal people. Evidence existed that indicated that governmental edicts from the capital were ignored in two ways. Firstly, settlement occurred beyond the Limits of Settlement then prescribed by central government and secondly, black deaths were considered to
be a non-punishable offence. An attempt by the then-Governor (Gipps) to overturn the situation led to short-term success but eventual defeat, in the form of the Governor's recall following political overtures to London by Australian-based agricultural entrepreneurs. Private governance confronted central public governance successfully in the end.

Over the intervening years, agricultural entrepreneurs had serially substituted excessive forms of exportable commodity farming, generally accompanied by extensive environmental impacts such as land clearing. Only remnants of Aboriginal tribes now remained, under circumstances that central public governance deplored but found hard to remedy. Part of the difficulty arose through flawed behaviour on the part of its own agencies and those of local public governance. Underlying attitudes of hostility to black people appeared to survive, but were now generally expressed less violently.

Access to the world beyond the district was limited for less wealthy district residents compared with their metropolitan counterparts. Broadcast electronic media were relatively available, though in confined and sometimes seemingly distorted forms. Public live cultural performances were apparently well below metropolitan standards in both quality and quantity. Local artistic activities appeared to be conventional, verging on the banal. Field evidence indicated that artistic ability might still bloom amongst the young, but more adventurous aspirations seemed to lead to artist emigration.

The “adequacy” of communication services to the district for non-entrepreneurial residents remained problematical -- it was not clear whether it arose from lack of supply or lack of demand. Certainly the local news agency seemed to respond to demand situations, but less costly forms of print media access other than newspapers, for example through the public library system, seemed to remain untended by comparison. The district newspaper seemed to focus mainly and understandably on district matters, but the editor was not averse to trying to stimulate broader local discussion. For this he was labelled eccentric by some. However, the overriding impression left by the newspaper is that, willingly or not, it contributed to a form of cultural introversion in the district.
All of the above (physical, historical, media) formed the context for the enquiry I began. The threshold for the enquiry was the opening question, "What do you think of the river?", to which only a few respondents replied specifically. The specific responses covered a wide range, from the most direct and immediate of perceptions to the most abstract, with no apparent convergence of opinion. Only one black and one white respondent (BT and CX) saw it in aesthetic or broad lifeworld terms. Respondents who responded non-specifically seemed to be surprised by the question, answering only in terms of general environmental concerns; as though the river seldom entered their consciousness.

Eleven stories describe the core of my fieldwork results. They appear in sections 4.3 to section 4.13 in order of public, semi-public and private significance. The Public Water Story, plainly relevant to my enquiry, addresses the most dominant aspect of the formal social life of the district. The Public Water Story describes encounters between the public governance agencies and a number of bodies they had created from district residents and actors. The most central of these encounters to my concerns occurred between the agencies and a body dominated by local agricultural entrepreneurs. (whom I sometimes term "local private governance"). Local public governance in the form of Councils had no relevance for this group, a view that may have arisen as much from Local Government behaviour as from the values of the entrepreneurial group. Local Government certainly appeared to be erratic and verbose, but some of its actions nevertheless seemed to foster feelings of community, a concept I consider in detail in the next Chapter.

The private governance group, seeking to retain its economic interests through the water rights mechanism, faced resistance from the public government agencies. The ensuing confrontation may have been nominally about water resources or more deeply about district power. The significant outcome of the Public Water Story is that resolution of the conflict moved forward so slowly that the situation seemed to become effectively static, caught in an impasse. Part of the reason appeared to lie with the use of technology as a decision tool, without adequate recognition of the slowness involved in data accumulation.
The second core story, the Public Black Story, is not so evidently but (as I show later in section 8.2) nonetheless no less relevant to my enquiry. It depicts a starker view of district Social life. The confrontation between local black and local white populations had not concluded in an effective stalemate, but had undergone protracted catastrophe as far as one of the parties was concerned. As in the History Story, the successful party had been on the side of private governance. The men hanged by Governor Gipps had been employees, not entrepreneurial owners. The entrepreneurs had not shown their faces on that occasion, except as protestors against the executions. Now most of the white community (at least in the Town) seemed to be against the black people. Public governance, at least within the confines of my enquiry, failed to assert itself satisfactorily, this time with the difference that flawed behaviour by its agencies had produced a confused and inept approach (to put it most kindly), which had not been the case for Gipps.

The Sacred Site story brings together another aspect of local white attitudes to black values and public governance. The issue at stake was a recreational loss stemming from local (and perhaps temporary) black value ascendancy. The affected local white people endeavoured to hold public governance accountable for reparation or restitution of the loss. The centrepiece of the story was a meeting that, ostensibly public, was advertised curiously and was not broadly attended. The meeting foundered as technology failed to come up with an answer that might shield affected whites from personal costs. A year later the issue was still alive but unresolved, apparently through public agency dilatoriness or possibly covert opposition.

The fourth core story, which is the first semi-public story, describes episodes I observed relating to catchment management. Revolving around Catchment Management Association and Landcare events, with side references to extension worker and river planner procedures, its standpoint is closer to grounded field action. The story mainly presents a picture in which public agency practices impinged on gatherings of selected district residents.

In the case of the Catchment Management Association, the Resident Group was selected largely by public governance. The actions of this group to provide planning/policy information or advice at any level above direct supervision of, or
involvement in, on-ground works seemed to be progressively eroded by State government agency strictures as the fieldwork program progressed. In the Landcare case, the Resident Group seemed to have been more self-selected. In this instance, the residents appeared to have been subjected to increasingly extreme bureaucratic obfuscations and hurdles, with accountability taken to levels so detailed that participant commitment may have been close to failing. In the extension worker case, the agenda concerned individual interactions between extension workers and farmers, rather than group interactions. The problem of different “languages” between scientist, extension worker and “end-user” operating farmers at the ultimate workface formed the topic of a scientist/extension worker meeting I observed. In the end the meeting seemed to produce neither new directions nor effective deeper understanding regarding the problem, but at least the issue was recognized. I do not know how far further towards solution the matter then progressed.

The Village Resident Group story describes an episode that reached a substantial remediation conclusion within the fieldwork timeframe, the only observed situation to do so. In contrast to earlier set-piece observations with controlled agendas, the episode reached success through a series of apparent accidents. A key contribution to its success appeared to come from the persistence of a particular local person. Although technology also came into play, the person referred to and his colleagues were able to take the technological high ground through protracted personal observation of biophysical processes, and social and political nimbleness.

Two stories I term “private”, the White and Black People stories, conclude the condensed stories. Each presents a pastiche, without strong polarizations of social power (for example, government agency versus water user group, scientist versus extension worker) brought about by unusual events in the preceding stories. I do not provide summaries of these last two stories, for reasons I set out in section 4.15.
4.15 Conclusion

In this chapter I have condensed the ninety-two “raw” narratives and associated commentaries emerging directly from field observations into ten stories. In these transformed versions, the random nature of the fieldwork and elements of subjectivity in the raw narratives have been substantially suppressed. The purpose has been to present the reader with a manageable and ethical picture of the situation in the district as I perceived it to be. All but the last two of the condensed stories are based on clusters of events or situations based on a “straightforward” sense of “natural connection”, through which I have identified “themes”.

The chapter has introduced a degree of interpretation. Through the raw field narratives and the condensed stories I have introduced two levels of subjectivity / interpretation, sometimes of an unconscious nature, between my direct perceptions of events and the present reader. In preparing the summaries provided in the section 4.14, I have installed a third superficial interpretive stage. However, I have left two condensed stories, the White and Black People stories, not “themed” or summarized in section 4.14 because they present pastiches rather than relatively polarized situations. Minor polarizations presented in these last two stories are generally of a routine or repetitive nature, not of a major unusual character (with the possible exception of the bureaucratic tale included in the Black People Story).

I call these interpretive stages “superficial” because they derive directly from the modernist stance characterizing my initial point of view, as described in section 1.2. The connectedness of events that I refer to above arises from an exercise of subjectivity on my part, an exercise that many others might repeat but a display of subjectivity nonetheless. It seems to me that to continue with this kind of interpretive approach would result in simply a repetition of the statement of a commonly accepted feeling of dissatisfaction, as some of the literature considered in section Chapter 2 has already indicated. If I am to arrive at the essence of Figure 1, which has so far remained undisclosed under my initial modernist stance, different interpretive approaches seem necessary. I consider alternative interpretive approaches in the next chapter.
NOTE TO CHAPTER 4

1 I didn’t actually meet any undertakers, but heard different reports of their activities in the Town. The Anglican minister said that funerals were done by out-of-town directors but some days before I had passed a rundown shop with an appropriate awning sign near the Golf Club. Another respondent had told me that there was indeed an undertaker in Town, but that he didn’t take a primary role in funerals, merely assisting the out-of-towners from time to time.
CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter by presenting a schema for a broad classification of the raw narratives underlying the condensed storied in Chapter 4 in section 5.2. However, the core concern of this chapter lies at a deeper level, in the identification of an appropriate interpretive method that will accord with the general strategy I have selected for my enquiry.

From the beginning of this thesis I have adopted an ab initio or "naive" approach to the conundrum with which I am concerned. My primary purpose has been to dig as deeply as possible into the essence of the Figure 1 problem, as first mentioned in section 1.6. It has not been to attempt to forecast likely outcomes for various issues contained in the stories, nor to "solve" the Figure 1 problem in a fully definitive way in order to produce immediately "practical" plans for participant action. Insofar as the process may produce practical plans, they are merely byproducts of secondary interest in the present context.

To begin this task, I repeat that my initial approach involved a kind of scientism that I now see as a form of modernism. Such a background included, at least in my case, little or no familiarity with the social science or humanist canons. Further, in discussing the approaches I take, I endeavour to satisfy the two audiences for this work that I mentioned in section 1.3. For the academic audience, my intention is to illustrate that I interpret the approaches properly. For the catchment management organization audience, my intention is to introduce the ideas intelligibly into the stream of this thesis.

To begin this process, I proceed firstly, in section 5.3, to a consideration of the individual in his/her most basic form, following the concepts of Martin Buber. Buber's ideas seem to me to straddle the boundary between the isolated individual and the first
comings-together of people into community. In section 5.4, I pursue the development of aggregated living further by examining ideas of community, principally those of Ferdinand Tönnies. Tönnies’ notions present a developed concept of Community and distinguish it clearly from the idea of Society (from here forward, I will capitalize Community and Society when referring to the formal Tönnies notions, leaving the lower case community and society for less formal use).

Having established these basic ideas, I move towards ways in which real communities may be described, beginning with a discussion on discourse analysis in section 5.5. That section also reports my first attempt at interpretation, in which I endeavoured to apply structuralist techniques proposed by Barthes (1977, pp. 79-124, 155-164) without adequate success. Since the focus of my inquiry was the essence of Figure 1, I then turned towards phenomenological forms of interpretation, seeing phenomenology as intrinsically connected to questions of essence. These efforts, which also produced inadequate results, are described in section 5.6.

Despite their inadequacies, these two attempts are recorded in this chapter because, as well as being worth noting in their own rights, they unexpectedly produced a new insight into ways in considering the conundrum I address. As a result of them, I re-examined Figure 1 in a more pragmatic light. In an interim note on interpretive method in section 5.7, I set out the grounds on which I reconstruct Figure 1 into a different form that seems to be more attuned to the apparent practicalities of the situation observed in the field. The new form led me towards further directions for interpretive ideas.

These directions concern notions of public action and policy, firstly pragmatically through an inspection of neoliberal approaches that I report upon in section 5.8. I then consider other such notions through reviews of Giddens' Late Modernity ideas in section 5.9, the postmodern concepts of Foucault and Derrida in section 5.10, and the approach of Habermas in section 5.11. In section 5.12 I summarize the material in sections 5.8 to 5.11. Then, in section 5.13, I describe the development of the interpretive method I finally adopted for use in Chapters 6 and 7.
5.2 Broad Characteristics Of The Narrative Set

The narrative set may be categorized in several ways. After a number of trials, I found the most effective for my purposes to be a schema in which four dimensions are applied to each report. These dimensions are:

(a) respondent group size (which varies from zero in the case of my solitary observations, to about fifty at the State water agency SWOT workshop);
(b) whether speech is involved or not;
(c) whether an agenda is set and if so what kind (procedural or issue-based); and
(d) the directness or indirectness of observation (whether I see or hear it myself, or whether I hear others report on saying or hearing it themselves).

Application of these four dimensions divides the narrative set into eleven classes:

1. *I speak privately to an individual, with no really set agenda* (treating the opening question as an inconsequential direction setter). The respondent participates in a single role, that of being him/herself;

2. *I speak privately to an individual, with a particular agenda* that is maintained reasonably consistently throughout the discussion, but which admits respondent expressions of Self. In other words, the respondent participates in more roles than one;

3. *I speak to small groups, with no really set agenda*. The group responds to perhaps more than one issue but spontaneously, as the conversation is allowed to wander;

4. *I speak to small groups with a set procedural agenda* not based on a particular issue;

5. *I speak to small groups with a set agenda based on a particular issue*;

6. *I hear others describe their encounters with others*;
7. I hear others describe their opinions of others;

8. I observe records, without comment from others;

9. I observe "without speech" situations in which humans play no dominant role (except perhaps by their absence);

10. I observe "without speech" situations in which human actors are in evidence;

11. I observe, without intervention, speech situations between individuals in assemblies of various sizes.

I stress that these distinctions do not constitute a pure classificatory system. In some instances more than one form of encounter may arise within a particular report. For example, the Aboriginal side meeting to which I was admitted immediately after lunch on the day of the Aboriginal Reference Panel meeting seemed to me to be a small group encounter within the larger group context of that day in general. The group around the table at which I sat at the State water agency SWOT workshop is another instance of a small group encounter within a larger group context. Further, the classes are not watertight. A particular narrative, or even a contained subplot of the kind just mentioned, may be a member of more than one class.

The listing of classes should not be taken to imply that I intend to follow a step-by-step procedure, but only to indicate a trend in interpretive process, a "pressure" that moves the interpretive text in a particular direction. The listing per se is not intended to be a part of the interpretive process, as might happen if it were used rigorously in a step-by-step process or set of hard-edged divisions. The classification process is simply a differentiating method through which I see the social world I report on as made up of particular "objects", but at the same time I recognise that those "objects" themselves appear in context and continuity with others, all as integral parts of a two-way process involving me and the so-called "objects" I observe in a transcendent form of integration.

While the four dimensions are useful in establishing the classes, it seems to me that the most concentrated characteristic of each narrative, in terms of the intuitive approach
that governs my perspective, is the degree of intimacy involved in the event(s) it
records. The degree of intimacy depends on the four dimensions, and in Figure 4 on
the next page I draw the eleven classes into five levels of intimacy, also showing the
relationships of the eleven classes to the key words of the initial framework shown in
Figure 1 (excluding remediation):

5.3 Martin Buber and I-Thou-It

Buber has been called a poet and a mystic, and his concepts often seem to verge on the
inexpressible. I include them in this survey for those very reasons, for it seems to me
that a proper intuitive approach should begin at or near the basic level of personal
existence to which he draws attention. The idea of Otherness that frequently colours
current social discussion has a foundation in his concepts which, despite their apparent
abstraction, best underpin the interpretation of the “individual in the community”
encounters I consider later in Chapter 6.

Buber (1970) proposed that the basic relationship between an individual and the
external world boiled down to two “basic words”, I-You (or Thou) and I-It. He called
these word-pairs “primary words” to emphasize the essentiality of the relationship
embodied in each. Although the “I” existed as a different entity in each, it was only
when joined with Thou in the I-Thou Relationship that it achieved real existence.

He asserted that a person’s experience of the world was an experience within him or
her. “The world does not participate in that experience....The world as experience
belongs to the basic word I-It.” (1970, p. 56), and “Every It is bounded by others; it
exists only through being bounded by others”. But “Thou has no bounds...when Thou
is spoken there is no thing”...."the primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the
whole being”(1958, p.17). On the other hand, “Wherever there is something there is a
also another something; every It borders on other Its, it is only by virtue of bordering
on others” (1970, p.55). In other words Buber described the phenomenon of the mind
FIGURE 4 - CLASSIFICATION OF NARRATIVES
going out beyond the individual to encompass and absorb aspects of the world without any feeling of separation from them.

Buber stated that no thing was a ready-made part of an experience. A thing only became part of experience through being acted upon. Further, the encounter with the Thou contained suffering and action combined in an indivisible whole. Another problem arose in that a person who had related to another in the I-Thou context in the fullness of love would ultimately face the reversion of the Thou to an It as soon as the situation became involved with means of some kind or another. "Love itself\(^{,}\) said Buber, "cannot persist in direct relation" (1952, p. 32). The other, be it a person or nature itself, became once again a sum of qualities with a certain shape; in fact every Thou was "by its nature fated to become a thing, or continually to re-enter into the condition of things" (1952, p. 32) with a will-o'-the-wisp volatility that Buber likened to "the eternal butterfly".

As an illustration, Buber quoted the Zulu expression for the English "far away", which is "there where someone cries out: 'O mother, I am lost'." (1958, p.32). Buber read this situation as concerned with the true original unity of the lived relationship, not a product of analysis and reflection. He used the illustration to explain a spiritual element of more primitive cultures that Western culture seemed to have forgotten. He called it super-sensuousness or supernaturalism, saying that it became quite natural for primitive man to be convinced of, say, visits from the dead because, living predominantly through his senses, he had a sensuous appreciation of that possibility, not merely an abstracted one. Magic was available to primitive man not because it was set in the middle of his world image but because human magic was only one of many aspects of the general magical power that was the source of all effective action.

For Buber, the primary word I-It only became possible because "I" splits out from the initial naturally formed I-Thou relationship discovered early in life, that was to say, when the I first takes on a separate existence. The I-It arises in the form of the young child's experience of the separation of the human body from its surrounding world, when the whole of the world is no longer intrinsically part of him or her.
Since the environment is a key consideration in this thesis, Buber's views on man's relationship to nature are worth noting: "there the relation sways in gloom, beneath the level of speech. Creatures live and move over against us, but cannot come to us, and when we address them as they are, our words cling to the threshold of speech" (1958, p.18).

Buber returned again and again to natural metaphors. He used the sentence "I see the tree" as a case where the newly emergent isolated I no longer saw the relation between the speaker and the tree as a Thou relationship, but established a barrier between them, converting the tree into an It and speaking the primary I-It word. In an echo of Cameron's approach, he said that a tree might be considered as a picture ("a stiff column in a shock of light"), a movement ("breathing of the leaves, ceaseless commerce with the earth and air") (1970, p.57), a classification as a species, an expression of the laws of nature, a pure numerical relation as it became dissipated into the numbers of a forest. All these points of view simply maintained the tree as an It. However, "if I have both will and grace", the tree might also be viewed as something else, in which all the categories just mentioned combined indivisibly and united in a concept of wholeness "bodied over against me" in a Thou.

5.4 Ideas Of Community

The context of this enquiry, a small town and its surrounding district in the Murray Darling Basin, would be called a community in most common parlance. However, a number of writers have examined the concept of "community", and exploration of their ideas is valuable at this juncture.

A current trend in community ideation arises from an interest in community action, empowerment and development. Hawtin et al (1994, p.33) presented a version of this view in their response to the question "What is this thing called 'the community'?" After removing semantic negotiations and emotional overlays, the central defining
element for them was a commonality of bond. The bond might flow from commonalities of location, demography (e.g. age), problems, working environment, politics or religion (p. 33). Bonding processes might even involve people living outside a particular geographical area housing a "community", such as those who work there, or groups of professionals.

Ife asked "how can there be community based services if there is no community in which to base them?" (1995, p.14). In addressing this question he drew upon concepts developed by Tönnies, who described the change from Community (Gemeinschaft) to Society (Gesellschaft) as a fundamental societal change occurring with the development of modern industrial life. (As noted earlier I will capitalize Community, Society, Communal and Social when referring to the relevant concepts in Tönnies' terms. The lower case equivalents will have the looser connotations of ordinary speech.) In a summary he called "grossly over-simplified", Ife described a Gemeinschaft population as one in which individuals interacted with a relatively small number of people whom they knew well in many different roles (for example postman, cricket player, church warden), and a Gesellschaft population as one in which individuals interacted with many more people but only in single instrumental ways (for example, the bus conductor/stranger).

According to Tönnies' interpreters Loomis and McKinsey (1957), the distinction between Community and Society was expressible as a series of action orientations an actor addressed before acting with determinate meaning. Parsons presented five of these orientations, and Loomis and McKinsey added another two drawn from Sorokin and Weber (Tönnies, 1957, p.25). The final seven are shown in Table 3. However, Ife's oversimplification and Table 3 both fall short of investigation of the nature of human will that Tönnies set behind the nature of the distinction he drew. His more detailed views become useful reminders of the inherent humanity of people in ways that sometimes seem no longer widely remembered, but remain significant in the present context through their resonance with data elements from the fieldwork.
TABLE 3: Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft Distinctions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gemeinschaft</th>
<th>Gesellschaft</th>
<th>Source*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affinity (emotional life)</td>
<td>Affective neutrality</td>
<td>Parsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particularism</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
<td>Parsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascription of qualities</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Parsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffuseness</td>
<td>Specificity</td>
<td>Parsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivity-orientation</td>
<td>Self-orientation</td>
<td>Parsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familistic</td>
<td>Contractual</td>
<td>Sorensen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Rational</td>
<td>Weber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* according to Loomis and McKinsey)

Tönnies painstakingly unravelled the nature of the human phenomenon, starting from its most basic levels. He defined natural will as something emanating from the whole living being, body and mind unified in a way akin to, but not identical with, the automaticity of animal instinct. It was involved in all activities and was inborn in the human being. At any time the natural will grew from all preceding acts of the will back to the embryonic state, and was determined in part by previous generations. These prior bases set possibilities and “probabilities which under given conditions become necessities” (p. 105). In general, Tönnies saw natural will as really comprising “everything, first and last, all that one has and knows” (p. 106), and in this sense his concept seems to me to share the lack of barrier with reality that characterizes Buber’s I-Thou concept.

However, the determining characteristic of the human organism was its capacity to think, which was the source from which rational will sprang. Rational will was part of the action it related to, and action was its realisation, although rational will itself was a matter of images. Close to Buber’s I-It, the rational will concept was explored in different and more extensive detail by Tönnies. While natural will was predominantly an expression of the past, he saw rational will as focusing on the future. The exercise of rational will centred on pleasure yet to come, and a concept of “happiness” as simply “the favourable and agreeable circumstances which make work and life easier, ensure the success of any undertaking, and safely guide one through all danger” (p. 125). (In Tönnies’ view this state “could not possibly be brought about” but was
nevertheless pursued as a goal that must be attained.) Rational will always had an imagined end in sight, and through the ends just mentioned it established standards. The end of pleasure yet to come dominated all other considerations, with many other ends degraded into subservience to it and turned into means, in a hierarchy of secondary ends.

According to Tönnies, thinking about the future developed a seemingly independent existence, and came to be the source and cause of will. Such self-interest took specific form as greed for profits, which was more a desire for an increase in wealth than a matter of absolute quantity. Tönnies then defined ambition as “the control of available human wills”, the most control emerging through “science”, which promised superiority. It also became detached and self-contained, and was essentially a form of vanity (p. 128). The “egotist” mind stressed individuality and was indifferent towards “the weal and woe of other people” (p. 130). “Masters of men” overcame any feeling of shame that might attach to this attitude: “For the person who knows what he is doing, who weighs his actions... shame is nothing but silliness” (p. 161). Shame was not a characteristic of the educated or scheming classes.

Tönnies’ long dissertation on the nature of will may seem dated to modern eyes, but it seems to me to describe basic human values that respondents echoed frequently in my fieldwork reports. As a result of the review in this section, I now recognize three forms of distinction between Community and Society, namely Ife’s “gross oversimplification”, the comparative table attributed to Loomis and McKinsey, and the distinction between natural and rational will just outlined. In dealing with the humanness of people as expressed in their participations in community and social life, I henceforward make no significant distinction between these three approaches, using them interchangeably in the interpretive process. Finally, I note that neither Tönnies nor any other major sociologist looked on the Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft dimension as existing as a polarized range. Both were thought to be idealized states, and in any real system only a blend of the two might be claimed to exist, not one to the exclusion of the other.
5.5 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a phrase with a wide range of meanings (see Exhibit 5). I began my involvement with it by focusing first on the work of Roland Barthes, who is included in Exhibit 5 as a post-structuralist literary scholar. The reason for my choice lay in Barthes' anatomy of the symbol, the basic form of which in terms of sign and myth is shown in Figure 5 (on next page) (Barthes, 1973, p.115). At an early stage of my enquiry I extended this basic form into a cascade of symbols applied to the integrated catchment management concept, as shown in Exhibit 6 (also on next page).

EXHIBIT 5

SLEMBROUCK FORMS OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

1. Analytical philosophy
   • Speech act theory
   • Principles of information exchange
2. Linguistics
   • Structuralist linguistics
   • Register studies and stylistics
   • Text Linguistics
   • Pragmatics
3. Linguistic Anthropology
   • Ethnography of speaking
   • Interactional Sociolinguistics
   • Natural Histories of Discourse
4. Post-Structuralist theory
5. Semiotics and cultural studies
   • Semiotics and communication studies
   • Cultural studies
6. Sociology and social theory
   • Pierre Bourdieu
   • Conversation analysis
   • Ethno-methodology
   • Jurgen Habermas
   • Michel Foucault

This extended form of cascade seemed to contradict Barthes' view that his symbolic structures could not or should not extend beyond two rounds, after which the process introduces "metalanguage" out of contact with reality (1973, pp.137ff). This comment rendered my seven-round cascade untenable and I abandoned it, but not before noting that the untenability was possibly a significant comment in its own right. Applying Barthes' diagnosis, integrated catchment management may present a conundrum simply because it relies unduly on overdrawn symbolism. However, despite coming to this conclusion, I continued with another aspect of
Barthes’ approach that presented a temptingly systematic possibility for review of my raw fieldwork narratives.

**FIGURE 5 BARTHES’ BASIC CONCEPT OF SIGN AND MYTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTIFIER/FORM</th>
<th>IDENTIFIED/CONCEPT</th>
<th>MOTIVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Individuals</td>
<td>Common Interest</td>
<td>Fear of isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Community</td>
<td>Catchment as identifying element</td>
<td>Technical tidiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visible physical boundary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Catchment community</td>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Publishable evidence of “democracy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Catchment committee</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Perceptions of order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities for control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Catchment management committee</td>
<td>Catchment “Integration”</td>
<td>Unification enhances control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Integrated catchment management committee</td>
<td>Local freedom to choose</td>
<td>Face of “democracy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Economies of scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXHIBIT 6 INTEGRATED CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT - HYPOTHETICAL CASCADE OF CONCEPTS**
Barthes' overall view was that, after a description of reality had been written down in the form of a text, the reader was no longer in a position to encounter the writer's perception of reality because the language of the text intervened. The reader then experienced an encounter with language, not the underlying reality (Campbell, 2001, p. 258).

Barthes set up basic rules for narrative analysis as he conceived them to be (Barthes, 1977, pp. 79 - 125) that described how one might dissect narratives in the same way that a linguist dissects sentences. Under this approach, the meaning of the text was dependent upon the degree of "resolution" of the text that one used. Thus an inspection of the field reports sentence by sentence might lead to a different view of its meaning than a paragraph by paragraph or sequence-of-paragraph by sequence-of-paragraph review.

These views led me to two possibilities. I could either arbitrarily select a particular level of text resolution, or select several levels of text resolution and check whether the meanings that then emerged differed from each other. Barthes appeared to favour the second. He viewed a narrative as more than simply the sum of a number of propositions and said that a sentence, which in its own right was a level of description, allowed the enormous mass of elements contained in a narrative to be classified. He then asserted that "a unit belonging to a particular level only took on meaning if it can be integrated in a higher level" (Barthes, 1977 pp. 86-86).

However, this last notion produced difficulties for me. It seemed to me that, at one extreme, a raw narrative in isolation might be reviewed and summarised as a single entity without detailed consideration at any lower level, in a sort of coup de l'œil approach. At the other, it might sometimes be appropriate to take the level of scrutiny down to words or phrases when a strong chord was struck, as when the Second Shopkeeper said "they don't know the meaning of life and death" (2.7). Of course, the coup de l'œil approach runs the risk of overlooking relatively critical details, while the more atomistic word or phrase approach runs an equivalent risk of losing meaning through taking single language symbols out of their contexts. To take the latter road as a routine practice runs a risk of destroying the integrity of the observed event. In addition, its uncritical use would generate a large workload with no apparent
equivalent benefit because of the loss of meaning. (Repeated verbal criticisms by colleagues of the NUDIST computerized grounded theory package supported this view).

To begin to come to grips with these Barthesian complexities, I embarked on a series of experiments following various facets of his concepts. In my experiments, I firstly focused on the broad segments into which each narrative fell. Exhibit 7 shows a sample outcome. By extrapolation from the sample the whole narrative set may possibly contain about 450 segments, a considerable number in terms of the correlation of potential signifieds, particularly since these signifieds drawn from still-composite segments will be relatively large-scale and will require further correlation to substantial arrays of subordinate signifieds attached to more detailed signifiers.

I then reviewed each fieldwork report from a different direction, identifying signifiers identified more individually within the narratives and a range of corresponding signifieds for each signifier so identified. When each narrative had been examined in this way, I endeavoured to identify sets of associated narratives (ie narratives containing common elements or contributing to credible sequences), linking appropriate signifieds to other related signifieds in other narratives. My hope was that consistent believable alternative ("commonsense") themes might emerge from this procedure, in the end developing into a final phenomenological lifeworld description for each respondent through an iterative process. However, this process also became excessively complicated very quickly.

I went on to try to draw meaning on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis, with the same result (see Exhibit 8). The paragraph-by-paragraph review was time-consuming even for the report used in Exhibit 8, which contains only 13 paragraphs. The review produced considerable detail, but its most evident usefulness appeared to be the carrying out of the process rather than its content - the concentration applied to the task created mental space within which broader concerns emerged. Further, there had been no search for signifiers, signifieds, signs or symbols in the Barthes sense. And finally, the process seemed to be accompanied by the kind of instrumental approach decried by Lash et al (1996, pp.3-4).
# EXHIBIT 7

## SAMPLE OF ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY SEGMENTS OF INDIVIDUAL STORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REPORT</th>
<th>SEGMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 21 (Interview with a local fisherman) | BI’s social position  
River and fish knowledge  
Cotton practices  
Government/governance practices  
BI’s accuracy as a respondent  
Town infrastructure and its impacts  
Attitude towards future |
| 28 (Visit to the Village High School) | Overheard conversation between people in staff room  
The two principals  
Encounter with aboriginal woman  
Interview with respondent AI |
| 29 (Conversation with Policeman) | Mention of resident policewoman  
Policeman’s appearance  
Complaints against legal system  
Descriptions of crimes  
Attitudes of Aboriginals  
Attitudes towards Aboriginals. |
| 30 (Local political meeting) | The audience  
The branch officers  
The candidate  
The newsman  
The party in the club bar. |
| 31 (Conversations with two district clergymen) | Meeting with priest  
Meeting with vicar. |
| 33 (Conversation with two Town teenagers) | BL  
BM  
The newsman  
The editorial. |
| 35 (The school writing competition) | The poems  
The single girl’s story  
The boys’ stories  
The competition in its own right |
| 41 (Finding a flat) | Encounter with agent  
Encounter with stand-in postmistress  
Event at caravan park  
Residual events |
EXHIBIT 8
FURTHER PARAGRAPH-BY-PARAGRAPH ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report Paragraph</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. The new bridge is actually part of the highway bypass, and a left turn to the west is needed to reach the town centre. This is accomplished via a giant roundabout, billed by the town as the largest in Australia (or perhaps in the Southern Hemisphere). The town boasts formally of only two things, the size of this roundabout and the (false) residency status of the famous racehorse.</td>
<td>These two town boasts reveal a borrowing of icons. The roundabout is a by-product of the highway deviation and no more than a designer's conformity with a standard (possibly associated with road train size and allowable speeds). The area of land purchase required for it would have been constrained. It features a central ornamental lake and occasionally trails of ducklings cross the highway, but no one in town ever mentions these matters. The claimed famous racehorse, according to a newspaper report posted in a local shop window, never resided in the Town and only visited it once or twice. Its name more accurately reflects the Town ownership syndicate, of which the local newsagent was a member at the time. The statue of the horse near the only bridge is not large, and is now quite off centre to the town axis. The use of a racehorse as a community icon also indicates a relatively low educational level (perhaps intellectual starvation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The long gunbarrel road after the left turn is lined with houses for most of the way, with a few motels and shops starting to appear as the traffic lights, the only set in town, are approached. The retail outlets around the traffic light intersection are mainly institutional, the Post Office and a bank, the lights being there because the cross street leads to the old bridge.</td>
<td>The traffic lights are no longer needed, but still operate. All other intersections across the retail strip lack them. Institutional buildings occupy three corners of the traffic light intersection, but the fourth (on the main retail side) struggles for a tenant, because the whole is now quite off-centre. Incidentally, several shops scattered along the main retail strip also lack tenants (not mentioned in the Report).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, disassembly to the paragraph level seemed to me to be the most fruitful, but paragraph construction is a device of the observer, and thus suspect on the grounds of introducing subjectivity. All the experiments I have described seemed to fail on grounds of either over-complication and/or loss of human “contact”. Some also seemed to return disconcertingly to forms of detailed analysis. Of these two reasons, I
considered the second to be more significant, for I wished to retain human groundedness as the keystone of my overall inquiry.

5.6 Phenomenology and Phenomenological Interpretation

The theoretical literature on phenomenology is complex and intensive. A full survey, starting with the initial works of its originator Husserl, would include works by many if not most of the European philosophers who wrote during the 20th century, including Merleau Ponty and Sartre. In this review I adopt a shorter approach by moving immediately to a recent commentator on the subject, Mohanty (1997).

According to Mohanty, the central point of Husserlian phenomenology was the idea of consciousness reaching out to “intend” (or grasp/encompass within consciousness) its object. The object was independent of the “intending” consciousness, but the consciousness was able to intend it in a process that was essentially two-way (Matthews, 1996, p. 7). The essence of the object was its most reduced form, that beyond which it could not be reduced further. It was grasped essentially in a speechless way, and its expression in speech was then termed “meaning” to distinguish it from essence (Mohanty, 1997, p.8), in recognition of the limitations of language. The intending consciousness arrived at the essence through a process of “bracketing”, in which the non-essential aspects of the object were excluded from consideration.

The practical conversion of speechless ideas of essence into spoken or written meaning is not straightforward, and I found differing approaches in the available literature. For example, the Dutch writer M van Manen (1996) emphasized that phenomenology required an unwavering focus on “real thinking”. He also issued a reminder that phenomenology was not poetry, journalism or opinion, but a disciplined approach to thinking through the particular phenomenon under investigation. However, I found van Manen’s personal phenomenological descriptions to be not as convincing as his ideas, and other examples he called upon, such as one by Langeveld that he quoted, not much of an improvement. Here is an example of Langeveld’s description of an aspect of the
inner world of a small child (both van Manen and Langeveld work in the pedagogical field):

“The phenomenological analysis of the secret place of the child shows us that the distinctions between the outer and inner world melt into a single, unique, personal world. Space, emptiness, and also darkness reside in the same realm where the soul dwells. They unfold in this realm and give form and sense to it by bringing this domain to life. But sometimes this space around us looks at us with hollow eyes of disappointment; here we experience the dialogue with nothingness; we are sucked into the spell of emptiness, and we experience the loss of the sense of self. This is also where we experience fear and anxiety. The mysterious stillness of the curtain, the enigmatic body of the closed door, the deep blackness of the grotto, the stairway, and the spying window which is placed too high to look through, all these lead to the experience of anxiety. They may seem to guard or cover an entry way or passage. The endless stairway, the curtains which move by themselves, the door which is suspiciously ajar, or the door which slowly opens, the strange silhouette at the windows are all symbols of fear. In them we discover the humanness of our fears. .... Thus in this void, in this availability, the child encounters the “world”. Such an encounter the child may have experienced before in different situations. But this time it encounters the world in a more addressable form - everything which can occur in this openness and in this availability, the child must actively fashion or at least actively allow as a possibility .... In this secret place the child can find solitude. .... something positive grows out of the secret place as well, something which springs from the inner spiritual life of the child. That is why the child may actively long for the secret place.” (van Manen, 1996, p. 8 of Internet version)

I found this material introspective and based on a long-term personal immersion and exposure of the writer to the world of small children that did not replicate my exposure to the objects of my investigation. By contrast, J van Manaan (1988), an American ethnologist, though saying “there is no sovereign method for establishing fieldwork truths” (p. 138), seemed to me to prefer (pp. 119, 139) a more impressionistic approach.
In a search for a better illustration of a focused but not excessively introspective form of phenomenological description, I encountered Nagel and Williams (2000). This source described the phenomenological circumstance of a buyer in a clothing store (The Gap chain of department stores in America):

"The perceptual centre of gravity in the store was about one-third of the way in. Standing there, it is difficult to see past racks to the mall beyond, and the Muzak played inside the store drowns out the different Muzak in the mall. In any given direction the brand image of The Gap is revealed, but moreover, the brand images and posters are directed towards that focal point in the store. Occupying that central place, you stand in the middle of a kind of exploded Gap ad - not merely among its images, but the focal centre of those images. You are in The Gap's milieu, to be sure, but also and more significantly you are surrounded by images that refer back to you as the central figure of a Gap ad. The store constructs your presence as the leading role in the ad/brand. You are the medium and the message; in that space in interaction, you become The Gap. ... By entering The Gap store you enter the centre of the milieu, the meaning-complex that The Gap itself is. Your role in this meaning-complex is, like all the other elements, determined within the referential totality. As the central reference point, your position in the totality is as its subject - you become The Gap shopper. In that position, as The Gap shopper the ads call to and the store design anticipates, the meaning of your actions enters into the brand meaning's total milieu. Through your action, through your consciousness, the brand meaning of The Gap is made complete. To cite a recent Gap tag-line, when you "fall into The Gap," you become The Gap in being, the medium of the self-presentation or self-presence of The Gap, and it may be fair to say that at that moment you yourself are not actually present at all." (p. 8 of Internet source)

It seemed to me that this writer had arrived at an approach that might work in the present case. However, in reaching this conclusion, I relied on van Manaar's view that the selection of style in phenomenological writing is a matter of personal choice, and my particular technique may not accord with more widely held phenomenological
views. To the extent that I have endeavoured to use it, I describe the technique I adopt as no more than "phenomenologically-styled", and do not consider the result to be an unqualified success.

5.7 Review Of The Interpretive Framework

The inadequacies apparent in these interpretation attempts produced two outcomes. Firstly, the attempt to adopt Barthesian techniques, a time-consuming process, led me deeply into concepts of symbolism. I started to see Figure 1 as a symbol in itself, a map that might lead me to the goal of discovering the essence of the problem developed in section 1.4. It then occurred to me that I might be using the wrong map. Secondly, I went back to Slèmrouc'h's list of discourse analysis approaches for a third time.

In section 2.6 I pointed to the implication in Robertson's article (Robertson, 2001) that remediation may be a dependent rather than independent variable in the Figure 1 situation. This notion of dependency reminded me of a commercial approach I had encountered in business activities that was sometimes used to design a new product to fit into a segmented marketplace. As far as I know, the approach has no profound theoretical basis. It simply postulates that the proposed characteristics of the new product, if it is to be successful, are dependent on:

- the known characteristics of the proposed consumer segment;

- the existing state of the relevant industry, particularly the offerings of and relationships between the competing entities within it, and

- the general commercial context, usually described in terms of economic and social situations and trends.
In the transfer to the present circumstance (which seems to me to be a quite acceptable form of research approach), I consider remediation to be equivalent to the “product”. The equivalent to the characteristics of the consumer segment becomes the attributes of the district’s “populace as a whole”. The individual is basically “defined” as a consumer, in the way illustrated by the Nagel and Williams quotation in section 3.2. The equivalent to the “the relevant industry” in (3) above becomes the “remediation industry”, ie organisations already actively providing proposals for remediation products, and their programmes and practices. These organizations, such as the government, become “proximate strategic forces”, a term I consider better fitted to the present context than “industry”.

In sum, the relationship between the original and the now proposed frameworks is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1 Element</th>
<th>Equivalent New Element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Governance</td>
<td>A’ Remediation Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Participation</td>
<td>B’ Operational Milieu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Public</td>
<td>C’ Populace in General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Remediation</td>
<td>D’ Remediation Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The method emerging from these considerations flows from the arrangement shown in Figure 6, a significantly modified form of Figure 1 in section 1.6. It depends on redefinition of the remediation product in terms of new understandings of the four entities shown in Figure 6, and of the relationships between them.

![Figure 6 Revised Framework](image-url)
The commercial model I draw upon here often uses modified forms of sociological and anthropological research to identify social situations and trends. The equivalent in the model shown in Figure 6 model follows a similar approach but should be interpreted on a grander scale, becoming the general operating social ambience surrounding and containing the whole of the situation under investigation. In the present instance I term it the "operating milieu" of the district, a notion I consider to be much broader than its commercial counterpart.

In my return to Slembruck's list resulting from the failures of the Barthesian and phenomenological approaches, I began to focus on the approach called Critical Discourse Analysis, basically as proposed by Fairclough. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) asserted that Critical Discourse Analysis should follow assumptions about the nature of social life. These assumptions might be intellectually explored by following a critical pathway attributable to Bourdieu, in which social life was examined as both constrained by social structures yet simultaneously working actively to transform them (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, p.1). They then located their focus specifically within contemporary life, in the process of which they considered various general accounts of it. I draw on several such accounts that I consider relevant to my enquiry in the remaining sections of this chapter.

The ultimate point proposed by Chouliaraki and Fairclough was to ground Critical Discourse Analysis in linguistics, specifically systemic functional linguistics (p. 2), but I do not carry my application of their ideas that far. I merely adopt the multi-faceted overview they took of the various claims to the character of modern life. Further, I do not overtly adopt any of the more ideological approaches (e.g. Marxist or neo-Marxist) that inform the field of Critical Cultural Studies in the ways described by Slembruck (p.17 of Internet record), although traces of them are inevitably embedded in ideas put forward by some of the writers to whom I refer.

I have already considered the distinction to be drawn between the terms "Community" and "Society" in section 5.4. I now turn to conceptual frameworks more relevant to public affairs in sections 5.8 to 5.12.
5.8 Neo-liberalism

Dalton's potted history of participation in section 2.3 briefly introduced neo-liberalism under the guise of "corporatist management in government practices". The term neo-liberalism is in relatively common use in current political discourse, and in this section I review sources that (claim to) describe it in detail.

Self (2000) summarized neo-liberalism as assigning "a central role to the markets system along three interconnected dimensions - economic, social and political. Economically capitalist markets were seen as a rational system of resource allocation, and the dynamic engine of prosperity in an increasingly globalised world. Socially the market system was claimed to underpin a robust individualism that defined individual rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Politically the theory required the state to provide an efficient legal system for market operations, but otherwise to confine itself to those limited functions that should be provided collectively rather than as the outcome of individual market choices" (p. 159).

Self went on to say that few people thought about neo-liberalism in these terms. However, Gottfried (1999) noted that any arrogance or unsatisfactory ideology behind the view should not be read as political weakness. According to Gottfried, nineteenth-century concepts of liberalism, essentially directed towards the "unencagement" of the individual, moved gradually to a support of managerial state-ism, driven by a mass desire for security after the First and Second World Wars. Then, in the 1990s, government intensified its controls, despite no longer having socialism as an excuse. The electorate allowed this transition to occur because it led to perceived improvements in material well-being for both underclass and middle class (Gottfried, 1999, pp 48, 53-55, 68).

Through manipulation and a gradual but accumulating decontextualisation of terms such as liberal (p. 69), public sector managers moved progressively into a position in which they were no longer challenged. Citizens of liberal democratic states had become more amenable to being ruled than to rule themselves. Most people remained
apolitical, uninterested in their civic existence, forming a "captive public" that allowed
government to do things for and to it (p. 124). The underlying justification had been
"progress" (usually under cover of technology) towards a general goal called
democracy, led by supposedly experimental-scientific oriented managers in a process
Gottfried called "administrative engulfment" (p. 55).

In addition, a notion of therapeutic politics had been tied to liberal democratic
pluralism, and moral truths had been reduced to value choices (p. 85). Pluralists said
that their value preferences were the only alternatives to a war of everyone against
everybody else. In practice, this view became a renewed insistence on management by
the managerial state. There was no longer a shared concept of truth embedded in
reality, but merely one of enforced community delivered through (hopefully)
sensitized administrators (p. 91).

Gottfried asserted this form of politics was attractive to agrarian communities. These
especially despised distant forms of metropolitan and governmental commerce and
culture and the elites that favour them. They sought direct forms of voting such as
referenda (p. 111) and other ways of evading centralized power. For their part, elites
viewed democracy in terms of globalised and managerial premises not fully accepted
by the rest of the population (p. 64). In contrast, the Right, taking an increasingly
archaic view of society that combined a belief in the nuclear family with well-defined
gender roles, called for communal local control of moral and social matters (p. 125).

In sum, bourgeois culture had been appropriated by a new class of managerial state
operatives, which insisted that everyone should follow the same political model (p.
129). In doing so, these people allied themselves with multi-national corporations and
deluded or compromised intellectuals who opposed human particularity and the idea of
community, both of which interfered with consolidation of power.

I make no general comment on these assertions or on the validity of the neo-liberal
viewpoint at this juncture, leaving the fieldwork outcomes to indicate their
applicability or otherwise to the circumstances under examination. However, it seems
to me that Gottfried described neo-liberalism as basically a social arrangement in
which a particular mode of power had achieved dominance through a process in which
communication between those who aspired to govern and the governed had lost authenticity. In Habermasian terms (see section 3.7), the current situation might be described as a triumph for "strategic action".

5.9 Late Modernity

The concept of neo-liberalism, despite its substance and significance, seemed to me to be a surface behind which deeper forces may be operating. To explore that possibility, I turned to the works of several writers whom I call "meta-sociologists", the first of which is Giddens.

Giddens (1990, 1999) distinguished three dominant sources behind the dynamism of modernity. He labelled them distanciation, disembement, and the reflexive appropriation of knowledge. Distanciation was a separation of time and space. The development of disembedding mechanisms lifted social activities out of local context.

The reflexive appropriation of knowledge was a process through which systematic knowledge about social life became the centre of system reproduction techniques that moved social life away from the fixities of tradition. Giddens regarded Late Modernity not as something essentially different to modernity, but as an acceleration of its processes, particularly with respect to distanciation and disembement. He likened living in the modern world to being on board a careering juggernaut that we may steer but not control (Giddens, 1990, p. 53).

The major disembedding mechanisms he identified were the rise of symbolic tokenism and expert systems, and new formulations of the idea of trust. Late Modernity had produced changes in the formats of power, leading to a situation in which the modality of power operating in a social system was "in all cases" the time-space modality of the system in question. For example, tribal situations operated through face-to-face interactions where people were co-present (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, p.80). More complex societies depended on interactions in which people were separated in time and space. In them, presence and absence were intermingled, and societies differed in the ways they intermingled them, e.g. through the media they
Giddens (1999) argued that in modern times risk had assumed a new and peculiar importance, in which our very attempts to control the future seemed able to rebound upon us. Where human beings once worried about external risk, coming from nature, we now worried more about what we had done to nature. Marriage was once akin to a state of nature but now, as tradition dissolved, people thought more and more in terms of the risk embedded in relationships. The nature of risk itself had changed, being no longer amenable to actuarial prediction, and the practices of politics had developed a new moral climate where accusations of scaremongering and cover-ups alternated.

Giddens saw no easy way of dealing with paradoxes of this kind. In a similar way, where once scientific knowledge had been opposed to tradition, it had paradoxically became a tradition of its own. The engagement of most people, including politicians, with science and technology was much more active than it used to be. As a consequence, the individual now became obliged to make decisions in the face of sometimes conflicting or changeable scientific information.

It seems to me that an important part of the essence of the Late Modern viewpoint (and one relevant to this inquiry) centred on the acceleration it involves. The pace of change became so fast that existing institutions (tradition, the family, etc) could not adapt, but were torn from their places before mouths could be opened to defend them. Along the way the deficiencies of their hidden assumptions were exposed. While they might be defensible, changes in reality now occurred so quickly that rearguard action by their supporters might easily turn into rout. Claims by the supporters of the change might be rebuffed on occasions but by then the debate might have moved on, leaving the rebuffs irrelevant and simply hanging in the air.

Being sucked willy-nilly into the slipstream of a particular change became unavoidable. Those who became caught in it fell into the severely disadvantaged state of not keeping up, a state that worsened each day thereafter. This condition became an anxiety for those without sufficient momentum. To them, where it would all end became as worrying a topic as the pace of change itself. Even the current chasers after change might experience this anxiety as they felt the first faint signs of fatigue, and
came to realize the long-term impossibility of continuing in a state of increasing acceleration. The whole circumstance would provide fertile ground for the growth of personal meaninglessness.

5.10 Post-structuralist / Postmodern Sources

5.10.1 Foucault on Power and Governance in History

In this section, I limit the discussion of post-modernism to its focus on the non-privileging of metanarratives, and to Foucault's concern with historicism.

In Questions of Method Foucault (Baynes, Bohman and McCarthy. 1987, p. 102) named the target of his analysis as being not institutions, theories or ideology but practices (p. 75, his emphasis). In other words, he was concerned with how situations came about, rather than their "intrinsic" nature or abstracted causality, ie their underlying "metanarrative". His aim was to grasp the conditions that made practices acceptable at a given moment. In like vein, my concern in later chapters is the exploration of how the truncated form of public participation witnessed in the two initiating experiences is "allowed" to be acceptable.

Foucault identified three entities requiring investigation. They were: the elements brought into relationship; the relationships concerned; and the domains of reference in operation (1972, p. 77). He set out four governing rules for the investigations themselves:

- Examine the overall circumstance as a complex social function;
- Regard it as a political tactic;
- Search for a common matrix ("epistemologicalo-juridical formation") through which the technology of power could be read in terms of the humanization of the circumstance and "the knowledge of man";
- Search for transformations that might be in sight in the way in which power
relations invested the citizenry.

(1979, p.23)

Most concisely, he proposed a study of the microphysics of power in the populace under review, that is to say the networks of relations constantly in tension or activity (p. 24). These, he said (p. 25), were not located in the relations between state and citizens, or between classes, but at the level of “individuals, bodies, gestures and behaviour” (p. 27).

In Powers and Strategies (Foucault, 1977a) Foucault agreed that power was always in operation, but said that this did not mean absolute privilege of law or unavoidable forms of domination. He suggested a number of hypotheses to explore:

- “That power is co-extensive with the social body; there are not, between the links of its network, any golden sands of basic freedoms;
- That power relations are intermingled with other types of relations (of production, kinship, family, sexuality) where they play both a conditioning and a conditioned role;
- That these relations do not obey the unique form of interdiction and punishment, but that they take multiple forms;
- That their interweaving sketches out the general facts of domination, that this domination is organised in a more or less coherent and unitary strategy; that the dispersed, heteromorphous and local procedures of power are readjusted, reinforced and transformed by these global strategies and all this with numerous phenomena of inertia, dislocation and resistance; that one must not therefore accept a primary and massive fact of domination (a binary structure with on one side the “dominating” and on the other, the “dominated”) but rather a multiform production of relations of domination which are partially integratable into the strategies of the whole;
- That relations of power do in fact “serve”, but not at all because they are “in the service” of an economic interest taken as primitive, but because they can be used in strategies;
- That there are no relations of power without resistances; but the latter are all more real and effective to the extent that they are formed there where the
relations of power are exercised; resistance to power doesn't have to come from elsewhere in order to be real, nor is it trapped because it is a compatriot of power. It exists all the more insofar as it is there where power is; it is therefore, like power, multiple and integratable into global strategies." (p. 55)

Foucault (1978) located the commencement of modern ideas of governmentality in the 16th century at the juncture of a double movement, on the one hand towards diversity and dissent in religion, and on the other toward centralisation of the state. "Reasons of state" became an independent idea at the turn of the sixteenth century, based on the notion that governance had developed a similar inner logic to that which nature had always possessed.

He asserted (1979, p. 139) that a microphysics of power began to emerge in the eighteenth century through a myriad of untraced details. It passed through armies, schools and hospitals to institute a discipline, internally policed within the psyche of the individual. This new political coercion "implied an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its results" (p. 137), and gradually became a general formula for domination. It applied to every detail, through a meticulousness and fussiness that Foucault called a "mystical calculus of the infinitesimal and the infinite" (p. 140).

As sovereignty diminished, the role of governance became "the perfection and intensification of the processes which it directs" (p. 95, my emphasis) and the instruments of governance turned into a collection of multiform tactics. Rulers became required to practice patience rather than simply to kill. Patience became the wisdom of governance, which was in turn a knowledge of potential and practical objectives and the disposition of things required to reach them.

Foucault went on to assert that the population began to relate to the government as being "aware....of what it wants, but ignorant of what is being done to it" (1979, p. 100). The new target became "the interest of the population regardless of what the particular interests and aspirations may be of the individuals who compose it" (1979, p.100). Political economy conceived as science began to emerge from new understandings of the dynamic relationships of population, territory and wealth, and
was accompanied by a growing governmental intervention in the economy and the population 1979, (p.101). Now discipline became important in managing a population (1979, p.102) in depth and in detail. Through the mechanism of the penitentiary arrangement known as the Panopticon, the darkness of the dungeon was replaced by the visibility of the individual in his individual space. This device ensured that the circumstance of power was always visible though its actual exercise became invisible. Foucault said “power has its principal not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, services, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (1979, p.202). Through his/her consciousness of surveillance, the captive became his own captor.

Foucault went on to call the historic process the governmentalisation of the state, a process that had permitted the state to survive (p.103). “This state of government....could be seen as corresponding to a type of society controlled by apparatuses of security....The pastoral, the new diplomatic-military techniques and lastly police....made possible production of this fundamental phenomenon in Western history, the governmentalisation of the state” (1979, p.104). As the fieldwork outcomes illustrate in many places, these historical trends appear to resonate through to the present day.

5.10.2 Derrida’s Spectral Proposal

My main concern in this sub-section is to bring forward views expressed by Derrida about an enigma he explored and the nature of enigmas in general. The latter topic in particular seem to hold relevance for the enigma that interests me. I stress at the outset that any Marxian bent that seems to inform this subsection arises only from the primary Derridean source I have chosen (Derrida, 1994), and should not be considered as a particular point I wish to make in this section.

The enigma that Derrida specifically addressed (1994, p.152ff) related to Marx's differentiation between the economic concepts of user-value and market value. In dealing with that differentiation he spoke of “spectres”. To explain this concept it is necessary to explore his ideas about conceptualisation in general.
He was particularly concerned with tendencies to “phantomalize” the conceptualization process, by which he meant the representation of concepts generally in what he termed “the Negroid state”, “the night in which all cows are black” (p. 137). Marx had complained that this could lead to mystery becoming mystification and mysticism, and Derrida thought that concepts in this form should be more properly called “pseudo-concepts”. They lacked real autonomy and internal necessity and were merely objects for the service of men. Hence Derrida labelled such concepts as “spectres”, apparitions.

For him the number of such spectres loose in the world was innumerable, with the parade headed by Capital, for which Derrida’s synonym was Man, with the parade formed up as a hierarchy. Derrida then asserted that the hierarchy began to dance before the eyes, opening up “the dimension of secrecy, mysticism, and fetishism” (p. 142).

Thus, for example, the powers of old Europe were out to conduct a kind of holy war against communism as propounded by Marx, seeing it as a spectre. But such spectres ultimately took on a body, became materialized, corporalised. Thus the pursuit became “life”, outside of which was death. The concepts became indistinguishable, supplementing and passing one into the other. In the process, which Derrida described in detail, Man became Man-God, more spectral than merely spectral, as a result of which “man makes himself fear. He makes himself into the fear he inspires .... the ipseity1 of the self was constructed here” (1994, p.145). More importantly, Man saw every other man as something to be feared. In this dance, the hunter became the prey, and tried to distance the prey from him/herself by making it run away (p.140), thus giving rise to the enjoyment of the chase, getting close to (but not catching) the prey for as long as possible. To prevent this universal fear from producing social chaos, a revenant-survivant, a ghost-survivor, was taken as the centre of a foundational social story. Marx chose the spirit of the people as this revenant-survivant.

1 ipseity: bare assertion of authority, cf ipse dixit: "the master says". (OED)
Derrida asserted that all these discussions of spectres lent false authority to speculative thinking, which speculated (uses a speculum, a mirror) on spectres (p 146). At this point, he turned his attention to interpreting Marx’ notion of economic use and market values. According to Derrida’s interpretation, use-value was the value imparted to an article in terms of what it was at first sight (phenomenologically, so to speak). He used the example of an old table, “worn down, exploited...set aside, no longer in use, in antique shops and auction rooms ... a little mad, weird, unsettled, “out of joint”. One no longer knows, beneath the hermeneutic patina, what this piece of wood.... is good for and what it is worth” (p.149). Although it was no longer in use, it had become a commodity standing outside of use, with an exchange value. The exchange value was then set mysteriously, becoming a dramaturgical entity, a spectre on the ghostly stage of the market. In Derrida’s word, it had become “a thing” without phenomenon (p.150). The situation surpassed the senses, even though the article maintained the bodily silhouette of a table. The thing became “haunted” by its commodification, a second ghostly non-corporeal silhouette that, coming alive, socialized and entered into competition with other such entities. It was a case of the material becoming non-material, in a way reminiscent of animism. The material became peopled with spirits and in its new state a little mad, “out of joint”, in a dance that Marx said was to encourage others of its kind to challenge, seduce, provoke, and combat.

The market thus became a place of confrontation, a stage where the commodity acted as a mirror but threw back an unexpected image. Those who looked for themselves in it no longer saw themselves. In particular, they no longer recognized in it the social character of their own labour (p. 155, Derrida’s emphasis), and became ghosts in turn. Men and their labour became commodities to themselves, with men becoming objectified, achieving an exchange-value but losing their basic use-value (ie their humanness). In this commerce, use-value had no place, no voice, and was of no interest to commodities (p. 157).

After interpreting Marx this way, Derrida went on to question the Marxian idea that the wooden table, in the first place an object of use, “comes on stage” in the market and in the process (or more precisely, at a moment of entry) became a commodity. Derrida questioned the certainty that the use-value in a pure form prior to entry actually existed. It was the purity of use-value that Derrida questioned, not that use-
value existed at all. If the purity was not guaranteed, then the phantasmagoric change receded back to the threshold of the idea of value in general. The basic form of the table should always have promised at least a minimal or embryonic exchange-value, an out-of-use (though not uselessness) condition.

Thus use-value was always “exceeded” by exchange value and, according to Derrida (p. 160), exchange value (indeed value itself) was exceeded by the promise of gift, an idea beyond value as a whole. Use-value was only a limit-concept, an idealized edge to the value discourse; an unattainably pure state. Use-value always remained “haunted” by commodity form and the dance of the commodities².

I have considered Derrida’s views primarily through the prism of the reference I quote (Derrida, 1994) in this section for two reasons. The first reason is that that particular source exemplifies, in a practical way, some other basic notions put forward by Derrida generally. In particular I mention the ways in which that which is not present but informs the present through its absence should be taken into account. The second reason is that part of the enigma I am exploring relates to the value of water rights in the Murray Darling Basin. In that instance, the water of the river, previously public as far as ownership was concerned, was passed into private ownership at no initial cost (5.21, 20.7). Now it has a higher value leading, it would seem, to future high governmental outlays to regain partial control over that which the government previously controlled fully. For this reason, I consider Derrida’s thoughts on value to hold relevance to my inquiry.

These comments conclude my review of postmodernist concepts. Post-modernism is said not to have a clear definition (Chouliarakis and Fairclough, p. 89), but Giddens has supplied a comparison of post modernism with his ideas of late modernism that I find both concise and useful (see Table 4 on the next page).
5.11 The Habermas Project

The Habermas "project" is Habermas’ proposal for acceptance of a notion of communicative rationality in place of strategic action. By strategic action, Habermas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LATE (RADICALIZED) MODERNITY</th>
<th>POST-MODERNITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifies the institutional developments that create a sense of fragmentation and dispersal.</td>
<td>Understands current transitions in epistemological terms or as dissolving epistemology altogether.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees high modernity as a set of circumstances in which dispersal is dialectically connected to profound tendencies towards global integration.</td>
<td>Focuses upon the centrifugal tendencies of current social transformations and their dislocating character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees the self as more than just the sight of intersecting forces; active processes of reflexive self-identity are made possible by modernity.</td>
<td>Sees the self as dissolved or dismembered by the fragmenting of experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argues that the universal features of truth claims force themselves upon us in an irresistible way given the primacy of problems of a global kind. Systematic knowledge about these developments is not precluded by the reflexivity of modernity.</td>
<td>Argues for the contextuality of truth claims or sees them as &quot;historical&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyses a dialectic of powerlessness and empowerment, in terms of both experience and action.</td>
<td>Theorises powerlessness which individuals feel in the face of globalising tendencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees day-to-day life as an active complex of reactions to abstract systems, involving appropriation as well as loss.</td>
<td>Sees the &quot;emptying&quot; of day-to-day life as a result of the intrusion of abstract systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regards coordinated political engagements as both possible and necessary, on a global level as well as locally.</td>
<td>Regards coordinated political engagement as precluded by the primacy of contextuality and dispersal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines post-modernity as possible transformations moving &quot;beyond&quot; the institutions of modernity.</td>
<td>Defines post-modernity as the end of epistemology/the individual/ethics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Giddens, 1990, p.150)

**TABLE 4: Giddens’ Late Modernity/Postmodernity Differences**

meant "depending only on the current evaluation of possible alternative choices, which result from calculation supplemented by values and maxims", a statement that seems to echo Tönnies’ definition of rational will. He outlined his case by examining four
forms of sociological action, calling on Popper’s idea of three worlds (the world as it is, the world in the head, and “our” world of society) (Popper, 1974, p.144).

In the first form, “teleological” action, an actor means to bring about an end successfully by choosing between alternative forms of action in a way that relates to an overall strategic model. Habermas said that at first sight only the teleological appeared to be rational or “practical”, but this first impression was deceiving. Teleological interpretation presupposed only one of Popper’s worlds, the objective one. Success in action, one of the key teleological constructs, dependent on an “egocentric calculus of utility” (1974, p. 88) held by each actor.

In the second, “normatively regulated”, the central concept was of complying with a norm. Groups of actors directed their actions to common values, each moving to fulfill a generalisable expectation of behaviour but not goal prediction. Normatively regulated action presupposed relations between an actor and the first and third Popperian worlds, the objective and the social. He/she appeared as role-playing, subject only to a legitimised set of interpersonal relations notionally expressed though commands or “ought-sentences” (1974, p.88).

With respect to the third form of sociological action, the “dramaturgical”, Habermas referred to participants in interaction as constituting a public for one another. Each actor provoked an impression of him/herself in his/her public by disclosing elements of his/her subjectivity. The central concept was a presentation of self. Participants then used these revelations to interact through regulation of mutual access to their own subjectivities.

Encounter and performance were key elements of the normatively regulated and dramaturgical modes. In their negative forms, both elements might sit parasitically on goal directed action, with style being controlled in order to achieve certain purposes.

Habermas termed the fourth mode of sociological action “communicative” and asserted that it was the form within which the preceding three should be subsumed. He described the idea of communicative action as applying three modes of communication
to the domains of reality through various proper (ie not negatively or instrumentally influenced) forms of speech, satisfying three validity claims as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains of Reality</th>
<th>Modes of communication: basic attitudes</th>
<th>Validity Claims</th>
<th>General functions of speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The” world of external nature</td>
<td>Cognitive: objectivating</td>
<td>Truth</td>
<td>Representation of facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Our” world of society</td>
<td>Interactive: performative</td>
<td>Rightness</td>
<td>Establishment of legitimate interpersonal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My” world of internal nature</td>
<td>Expressive: expressive</td>
<td>Truthfulness</td>
<td>Disclosure of speaker’s subjectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Habermas, 1979, p 68)

**TABLE 5: Communicative Rationality Structure**

The core of Habermas' position is his great insistence that all three validity claims should be satisfied simultaneously.

Habermas' project seems to be utopian in many respects, apparently aiming for a perfect condition, but it seems to me that it should not necessarily be discarded automatically on that score. It essentially seeks a diminution of concentrated power, and draws attention to the most likely possibilities for distortion in that reduction process. The utopian endpoint may not be achieved, but the process itself may nevertheless warrant pursuit. I include the Habermas viewpoint in the set of worldviews considered in this enquiry for the generally wide acknowledgement that it currently enjoys, one instance of which is its positive local adoption in the Cameron report.
5.12 The Later Readings in Summary

Giddens was the first of the later meta-sociologists reviewed in section 5.8 to 5.11 inclusive. This writer viewed the life world or operating milieu as an accelerating form of modernity. The second meta-sociological viewpoint I have considered, neoliberalism, is a reaction to historical catastrophes such as the major wars of the 20th century, and an attempt to redress social weaknesses that some see as threatening new outbreaks of a similar nature. In these terms, neoliberalism is an “applied” concept of the operational milieu, stemming from a historical and seemingly conscious intervention of people holding significant levels of power. By contrast, Giddens’ Late Modernity appears as a “less conscious” operational milieu form emerging “naturally” from technological innovation and appearing as an acceleration of modernity. This distinction aside, it seems to me that both Giddens and the neo-liberals implicitly accept the existence of a meta-narrative, of a different kind in each case.

Foucault resisted any idea of metanarratives. He saw power as present at all levels of social encounter, through the phenomenon he called micro-capillarity. However, he did not see power as a metanarrative, but as a basic ground for social coexistence. For me, this view expresses both an ambiguity and a higher level of abstraction than offered by the Giddensian or neoliberal worldviews.

Derrida went further on both grounds, challenging the metanarrative that appears to be behind both the Giddensian and neoliberal views at its most fundamental level. Insofar as both views stemmed from a utilitarian/empiricist/materialistic perspective, and thus from the concept of value, Derrida proposed that a flaw existed at the very basis of that standpoint in the “phantomalized” concept of value itself. The radicalization of view put forward by Derrida appears to me to present the kind of radicalization that I sense to be required to resolve the enigma I am exploring, and has been included in this chapter for that reason.
As Giddens' comparison shows (Table 4), the Giddens/neoliberal modernist position contrasts sharply with the Foucault/Derrida postmodern position. Successful hybridization of the two in the way suggested by Fairclough seems to me to be difficult if not impossible, and the epistemological gulf may be unbridgeable. The basically epistemological explorations of Habermas appear to present a way through the impasse but seem to me to be utopian, or at least long-range in their potential for real-world applications.

5.13 Development of the Final Interpretive Method

5.13.1 The Populace and Governance Evidence

I have earlier indicated in section 5.6 that phenomenology, at least for me, is a difficult, complicated and obscure topic, but that I recently found that Nagel and Williams (2000) offered a form on phenomenological reporting that seemed to follow an adequately grounded style. I repeat the second part of the excerpt from their article previously quoted in section 3.2:

"By entering the Gap store you enter the centre of the milieu, the meaning-complex that the Gap itself is. Your role in this meaning-complex is, like all the other elements, determined within the referential totality. As the central reference point, your position in the totality is as its subject - you become the Gap shopper. In that position, as the Gap shopper the ads call to and the store design anticipates, the meaning of your actions enters into the brand meaning's total milieu. Through your action, through your consciousness, the brand meaning of the Gap is made complete. To cite a recent Gap tag-line, when you "fall into the Gap," you become the Gap in being, the medium of the self-presentation or self-presentation of the Gap, and it may be fair to say that at that moment you yourself are not actually present at all." (p.8)

This passage, particularly its last sentence, seems to me to be very evocative, and particularly useful in its direct reference to the commodification of the consumer's lifeworld and its present-day commercial emphasis on brand names.
I see inner life as undifferentiated, in the same light as Tönnies’ presentation of natural will. However, most if not all of the modern world presents itself to the individual as differentiated into brand names, diminished and limited in the same way as rational will was in Tönnies’ eyes. Branding is a distinctive feature of modernity, in my view extending well beyond most modern peoples’ current perception of it as labelled tins on supermarket shelves. Institutions have been similarly branded, diminished and limited in the modern world. For example, I see formal education outside the family is a form of brand (the equivalent generic form or commodity being the general socialisation of the young, or the self-reproduction of society), as are also the various denominations of religion (the equivalent generic form or commodity being spiritually-driven commitment). It also seems to me that a broad reading of the fieldwork reports indicates that the Aboriginal people mentioned in them clearly feel that brand-name consciousness is at the root of the white way of being, as expressed in the life of the Town.

Branding is an assertion of control, ownership, quality or similar preferential (i.e. partial in the wider scheme of things) construction. Through this preference or partiality, institutions become brand names insofar as they are invented. To the extent that professional disciplines are established from axioms via rules (sometimes called “laws”), they too are brands. Their status as brands became reinforced as they move from of the ready-to-handedness of familiar physicality (normally, though not necessarily, expressed as physical tool use) to abstracted theoretical constructions, in the same way that rational will supplants natural will. Further, as attention moves from the purely personal through the intimate small groups to the less intimate groups down the spine of Figure 4, an increasing brandedness emerges as technology begins to intervene, particularly as it moves more into abstract theoretical realms.

The interpretive approach I finally adopt for Chapter 6, where I examine the evidence relating to consumers (the populace in general) and the remediation industry (the proximate strategic forces), first addresses the high intimacy encounters from which initial inferences of the Bergson nature are drawn. Inferences I draw from other fieldwork fragments are used to inform in essence, though not specifically, the more complex situations described in less intimate reports. In the process natural will as the underlying attribute for phenomenological interpretation recedes, to the point of almost
disappearing by Level 11. By that stage a different form of interpretation becomes applicable, but phenomenology still seems to retain a foothold even when distant bureaucrats are concerned. In the events I witnessed, nearly all of the distant people appeared in face-to-face and at least partial known-by-name circumstances (though not with the same degree of familiarity as the locals).

The phenomenological interpretive approach inverts a common approach to the gaining of social knowledge, namely the “from-the-top” basis that applies to downward impositions of power. As Lukes (1974) expressed it, three forms of power exist, namely direct power, the power to set agendas and, most subtly, the power to set the climate in which the agendas are set. The progress from most intimate to least intimate encounter that I have just described is counter-directional to Lukes’ sequence. It does not take for granted the formal power structure, with its attendant role-playing and communicative arrangements, although it reflects the impacts of that structure on the people it affects. In pursuing this counter-directional process, I trust to the “reality” of all the narratives and the condensed stories in Chapter 4 to generate balance and credibility in the emerging outcome, not least through the needs for consistency it introduces.

5.13.2 The Operational Milieu Evidence

Since the humanness of the “populace at large” is the main issue I address in my enquiry, the application of the methods described in the preceding sections constitutes the core of this thesis. The other two relatively independent elements in Figure 6, the “remediation industry” and the “operational milieu”, receive less attention in terms of both methodological innovation and subsequent interpretation in Chapters 6 and 7.

The treatment I develop here and apply in Chapter 7 for discerning the “operational milieu” element of Figure 6 is only indicative of the direction such an inquiry may take. I do not claim that the results of my method development or interpretive application provide sufficient fullness or interconnection.

To this juncture I have used the idea of “operational milieu” without clearly stating
how the various models or claims on worldview or the nature of social knowledge may relate to it. The idea is concerned with the structure of the entire social world as it impinges on consciousness in the district. However, it is not concerned merely with perception, but also with the actualities of that social world as it combines as a whole across all of its levels. In the end, its specific interpretation in a particular context becomes a matter for judgment by the observer/interpreter.

To apply these ideas, I looked through the fieldwork reports for evidence of conformity with particular worldviews. The search process was straightforward, a simple scan of the reports with no need for intermediary work, because individual data items, for example those showing a Gemeinschaft tenancy in the case of the Tönnies perspective, were simply collected together. The number of such items was then used to justify statements about Gemeinschaft presence.

In the case of the Habermasian worldview, I conducted my enquiry in two ways, firstly by assessing the degree to which evidence of strategic action and rational communicative action appeared in the fieldwork narratives. This procedure replicated the pattern just described for the Tönnies approach. The second procedure I then followed was a search for ways in which evidence of factors necessary for introduction or enhancement of rational communicative action in the district appeared in the narratives. This search included judgments of potentials rather than actualities; in other words, a second more abstract intermediary step took place. A similar merging of observational identification and judgment applied to my review of the place of Late Modernity in the district’s “outwards perspective”.

This intermediary process strengthened in the postmodern/post-structuralism case, where my first concern became the identification of the number and nature of the metanarratives that may or may not be in operation. In this process I limited my attention to metanarratives that appeared to me to be plainly in view, without relying excessively on subtleties that may stem from excessive or biased judgemental niceties. I consider this limitation to be necessary in order that any further subtleties applied through interpretation from Derrida’s perspective should not descend into an exercise in pyramid building of nuances.
5.14 Conclusion

I began this chapter by describing a narrative classification scheme centred on the degree of intimacy of the observed incidents. I then addressed the main business of the chapter by firstly recording the bases and outcomes of two possible interpretive methods (Barthesian analysis and phenomenological writing) that failed to produce completely manageable procedures for me. I think it important to note for future reference that they seemed to be highly difficult to implement effectively. Their apparent ineffectuality led to a reappraisal of Figure 1, and recognition of its apparent inadequacy as a guide towards resolution of the questions asked in section 1.4. This ineffectiveness led to production of a new "map" in section 5.7. In turn, the new map pointed towards the desirability and availability of different, and in general deeper, forms of insight to those I had previously entertained.

In the latter part of the chapter, I considered four such deeper insights. The first referred to aspects of the element I now term the remediation industry, through a quasi-political science exploration of the term "neoliberalism". The second and third referred to alternative notions of and implications for the operational milieu through broader ideas about public action and/or policy perspectives arising from more basic "meta-sociological" viewpoints proposed by Giddens, Foucault and Derrida. These viewpoints do not coincide and, according to Giddens, the postmodern Foucault and Derrida viewpoints differ significantly from his concept of Late Modernity. Finally I drew attention to the ideas of Habermas, less conflictual but perhaps utopian, as a fourth possible prism through which to view operational milieu hostilities.

My purpose in presenting these four meta-sociological views together arises from a suggestion from Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, pp. 59,93) that advantage may lie in the successful hybridization of these strategic concepts as expressed in types of discourse. If successful hybridization is to be attained, it may be that some of the elements of Figures 1 and 6 may be irreconcilable (at least for the time being) if one element accords with one meta-sociological view and another follows another. If
successful hybridization in practice is impossible, then this irreconcilability may lie at the heart of the enigma I am exploring.

All of these considerations have led to the interpretive procedure I finally chose for application to the fieldwork outcomes. The significant elements in this procedure are:

- a recognition that different interpretive approaches may be required for different kinds of fieldwork observations; in particular, that phenomenological-style interpretation has some, but not complete, applicability;

- a recognition of the influence and role that may be associated with the idea of branding in the quasi-commercial (Figure 6) concept that I developed in section 5.8;

- the applicability of branding considerations to fieldwork data that is not amenable to phenomenological-style interpretation; the comparison of fieldwork data applicable to the ideas of “remediating industry” and, more especially, “operational milieu” to the various forms of worldview explored in section 5.8 to 5.11 inclusive.

From this basis I now proceed to fieldwork interpretations in Chapters 6 and 7.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1 Giddens defined power as the transformative capacity of social action. Domination was a particular kind of power where an agent seeks to transform the world via the agencies of others.

2 The transformation occurring at the moment use-value supposedly transformed into commodity value as it came onto the stage of the market was Marx' enigma. My enigma is that public participation, the notion of democracy, appears to undergo a similarly mysterious transformation when it enters onto the stage of governance. (An alternative but apparently not relevant formulation could be that governance undergoes a transformation when it enters onto the market place stage of democracy). The Derridian view was that no such transformation occurs, the idea is too mysterious, a spectre. According to Derrida, the reality was that the prior state always contained a haunting by, an embryonic potential for, the later state. For my enigma, by analogy, the prior state of democracy always contained the embryonic potential of governance (with all its pursuant phantasmagoric commodification/objectification of the person).
CHAPTER 6

INTERPRETATION OF POPULACE AND GOVERNANCE EVIDENCE

6.1 Introduction

I have hitherto distinguished between the populace in general and the remediating industry, but it is clear from Figure 5 that this distinction cannot be considered "pure" as far as the fieldwork outcomes are concerned. The levels I designated as 2 to 11 inclusive in Figure 5 all impinge on the notion of participation, an arena in which the populace and the remediating industry are entwined. For that reason I consider them together in this chapter.

My main purpose is not to interpret the whole of the fieldwork data relating to populace and governance, but to indicate the general applicability of the methods developed in the previous chapter. I implement this approach by pursuing a stream of interpretation based on those ideas through various fieldwork narratives. I do not apply a statistically oriented sampling process, nor does the stream necessarily align with the themes that come to mind during a complete reading of the narrative set and are expressed in Chapter 4. I simply move from fragment to associated fragment, frequently between narratives, in accordance with the intuitive approach that directs the whole of this enquiry.

I do so through three levels of encounter interpretation. My approach basically starts with an application of the brandedness and other issues mentioned in section 5.13 to the more intimately confiding respondents. In the first level of encounter, considered in section 6.2, I explore the evidence in the narratives concerning the "populace in general". In the second, considered in section 6.3, I examine the first informal encounters of the populace
in general with governance, an arena where the intimacy of the first level meets the lesser intimacy of local aspects of governance without yet encountering the low intimacy level of the formal governance meetings. These formal meetings, the final form of encounter, are then interpreted in section 6.4. In section 6.5 I identify intimations of neo-liberalism that then seem to emerge, before summarizing and concluding the chapter in section 6.6.

6.2 Exploration of the “Public”

I begin the interpretive stream with the narrative of the second shopkeeper, shown in its entirety in section 4.4.12.2. This encounter was accidental and unstructured, unexpected by both parties, a situation in which speaking inadvertently (“from the heart”) was a real possibility. The shopkeeper seemed to stand with only one foot in the community. She no longer identified her inner self through connection to her familiars, but had gone off to explore her condition through the Enneagram programme (2.4). She was dissatisfied with the conventional advice from her peer group (“rational” in their eyes presumably, but not “natural” in hers) (2.7). She seemed to have accepted me into her I-You context, and I had become instant Community for her. She appeared to feel that she could talk to me as though she was talking to herself. It may even be that she had re-sought a form of community in divulging her family circumstances to a total stranger, once he had shown interest in the inner affairs that concerned her (2.2). Yet even there, the matter fell below the level of speech (2.7, 2.8).

In other words, there was no “brand name” she was prepared to adhere to or recognise any longer. More deeply, she believed she was in a situation where the partialness, the artificial emphasizing of some attributes over others in what she sought, had no meaning. She was in the midst of a “no name” commodity called life where branding carried no weight.

A further inability to express the fundamentals of individual interest emerged in the encounter with the teenagers (section 4.12.12 and Report 33). Here the respondent BM
became inarticulate when trying to express his life plan (33.9). It appeared that he could not divine the future stretching before him, but that may not have been the whole picture. It seems to me that he was trapped and may have known it (and was not willing to face it). What trapped him was the apparent scarcity of alternatives and a lack of resources to overcome that scarcity. Perhaps he also sensed a barrenness of life once the school situation that surrounded him came to an end. One might interpret the school behaviour described by respondent BE (4.12.12 and 32.5) as an expression (recrudescence?) of natural will as a long-enforced regime of rational will neared its end, and the powers (differences) of teachers began to wane in the face of impending adulthood. The students found no landmarks, no leaders, and no communal framework in which the need for individuals as leaders had passed to the self-energizing “automaticity” of communal institutional procedures. They were basically unequipped for the unbranded circumstance facing them, which in most respects presented itself paradoxically as a bewildering cacophony of brand names.

An associated form of isolation appeared to occur in the case of the woman who called on the social worker to set up a peer group to deal with teenager development (section 4.12.14 and 44.9). She had no one to talk to whom she felt she could rely on, no surrounding intimate community. In this vacuum she turned to the social worker as representative of the Town's shopfront welfare agency, which to her might have been a brand name with apparent power. But the social worker was a facilitator, not an authority on the problem the woman faced, and could only try to find a communal authorisation format that might help. None emerged.

Although hardly anyone with the woman's problem turned up at that meeting, the survey I described in section 4.12.5 (Report 42) indicated a widespread concern with the issue. I recognize that the survey was an apparently amateurish affair by “scientific” standards as far as sampling, question formation and response interpretation were concerned. Despite these failings, perhaps even because the possible bias in interpretation meant that the local interpreters themselves sensed a gap (in which respect they were themselves a part of the survey group, if not the real whole of it), there seemed to be a broad underlying
concern about teenager development. The process through which the community was reproducing itself did not seem quite right. The generic commodity flow, in the form of family life, had broken down to a large degree in the Community sense. It had disappeared in the same way that real-world empathy had disappeared for the Second Shopkeeper, leaving her confronted only with the various branded offerings of religious denominations.

Matthews (1996, pp. 62-63, 142) asserted that philosophy came to be taught in French schools when religion was outlawed after the Revolution, as an attempt to replace religion with generic rationality. The fieldwork district had not been so lucky. Whatever revolution it might have experienced (primarily with regard to the black people) did not outlaw religion, which persisted under a wide variety of brand names in the district. Of the three explicitly mentioned in the reports, one brand was thriving while the other two seemed to be declining or at best remaining relatively static. The most fundamental denomination seemed to me to be growing, possibly because it emphasized the entertainment aspect of its services, which it broadcast rather than confined (61.17). It placed no apparent emphasis on exclusivity. Whatever doctrines it preached, it conveyed them under cover of a loud commodity flow that, pleasurable or not (and respondent BK, a Catholic (31.7), said it was (61.18)), seemed to demand no deep brand loyalty.

In contrast, the other two religious brand names addressed in the field reports packaged their offerings in practice around leaders. The Anglican Church seemed to be growing slightly at the time of the Aftermath stage of the fieldwork (Report A3). The Anglican vicar's report of an airline incident (31.15) revealed people in a crisis as frightened searchers for brand reassurance. The Catholic Church seemed to have reached a stable condition, but a relatively low one compared with its likely historical levels (Report 13). The St Vincent de Paul members (Report 67) were taken aback at an apparent affront to their leader although the more worldly wise, i.e. those more led-out-of-themselves (educated) from natural to rational will, understood the new realities better (67.4). And the leader himself saw no affront, taking the incident as an opportunity to show that charity should be purged of all self-interest in a statement which, though less spectacular,
was as incisive in its own way as that of the Second Shopkeeper.

We see the branding phenomenon in full flight in the interview with the senior water user representative (Report 14). Here everything, even the settlement itself, was described as a form of brand name. Everything was devoted to economic betterment, as though this was the only end of human existence in the district. It even underpinned the Town’s somewhat self-conscious effort to establish the social welfare agency that shared accommodation with the district’s promotion office and was partly identifiable through that sharing, as the tourist information officer had indicated at the start of my first visit. The symbolism of this cohabitation seemed to pass unnoticed.

Perhaps the sense of not belonging infected even the First Shopkeeper to a degree without the respondent being conscious of it, leading to the offer of coffee. Yet the shopkeeper seemed embedded within Community, expressed in the child’s presence in the shop and the openness offered to all who entered it. This included the policeman, whose official (rational will) status did not affect the respondent in the known-by-name (or –face) relationship to him and the common humanness of the respondent’s concern for the boy in the car seat.

People in the Town seemed to fall out of community. There seemed to be an inadequacy of communal leadership, as the respondent BG indicated (see section 4.12.4). The only strong form came from the less-than-whole-of-life economic direction (42.17). The local newspaper might have been trying to instil one, but its emphasis on individualism may have been precisely the difficulty. The lack of connection to others, the loss of individuality, the absence of a personal pressure to be an individual, the hiding in the crowd, the release from straitjackets, the escape from the strictures of rational will — all may have been the ultimate causes of semi-explosions like the B&S Ball (39.7). It showed itself in the crowded pub bar scenes, for example on the State of Origin night (24.9) and in the late night hotel closure incident (24.7).

The notion of inner loneliness became almost a parody of itself in the Camp Draft
narrative (section 4.12.15 and Report 40). Here mature, even elderly, men lacked the williness for eye-to-eye contact. In the end some locals simply drifted away, as the Camel Man had (section 4.12.9), presumably to take advantage of the sole remaining benefit of living in the countryside, the open bush itself. The Camel Man had travelled far to enjoy that benefit. The particular landscape around the Town seemed to provide few opportunities for personal renewal, as the Hamlet excursion seemed to indicate (69.6). However, that instance may have also indicated that opportunities were there, and that the failing lay really in a lack of human williness to seek it out. The landscape itself seemed to emphasise the sense of loneliness, the otherness, the intrusion into a differently privatised world where only the native beasts of the open plain had a right to be (9.7). In another sense this otherness was worsened more concretely by the private property exclusivity that surrounded the place. The Grazier BH controlled campers, even though the bikers challenged him (perhaps intentionally on a class basis) (20.14). The elderly Aboriginal CG (45.30) only barely held his temper over this exclusiveness. By this stage in the interpretation process, new implications of brandedness (its I-Itness) were coming into view, namely Otherness and the anxieties it brings.

Another one-on-one encounter without a fixed agenda occurred in the case of the Artist BD (section 4.15.4 and Report 12). I found this respondent sitting in a fresh new building, surrounded by evidences of the pastimes of the well-to-do of the district. The setting was in contrast to the fairly shabby shop in which I had found the Second Shopkeeper, but the outcome was equally as unexpected.

This respondent was not outgoing, and certainly not offering anything, even passive trust (12.4). There was no I-You note in this meeting, only a suspicious I-Itness. BD’s interest was in artistic work but not, it seemed to me, in the natural will sense. The respondent’s whole approach appeared to be externally oriented in a way that implied a strong need for recognition, a way that I read as a rational-will concern - shown, for example, in the focus on exhibitions external to the district (12.6). Equally so was the choice of artistic subject matter. To BD, subjects related to natural will were “part of the landscape phase that everyone goes through” (12.6). BD was now interested in subjects that were not
natural in their own right, but chosen for the opportunities to illustrate isolated aspects of
technique. BD was a proponent of brand names, not of the broad stream of life in which
the respondent actually lived. The exhibits of the other artists were also derivatively
(brand name) driven, sometimes to the point of imitation. BD’s personal dislocation
from the natural was epitomized in the respondent’s apparent lack of comprehension of
the river’s very existence (12.4). The Artist’s relationship to the social setting in the
Town as a whole was also one of dislocation, in this case apparently voluntary (12.9). All
told, the art BD pursued was no reflector of the district at all, only a reflector of artistic
attitudes imported from other places in an uncanny imitation of the transference of
foreign agricultural processes to the Australian native landscape. The only representation
of the district that these attitudes appeared to offer concerned the distant, not local,
preoccupations of the local well-to-do.

These well-to-do preoccupations were on full display at the Art Exhibition (Report 26).
Here the propensity of local artists to pursue technique was again evident in the still-life
works of the older artist. Nothing could have been further from the hot, dry, dun-
coloured, barren nature of the local environment than the rich indoor colorations and
hothouse topics of the floral paintings. And while the ladies bought those works, possibly
in expressions of status, friendship and local loyalty as much as art appreciation, the men
gathered at the side of the porch outside for serious business (26.7).

Then, in a considerable surprise to me, I encountered the works of the younger sculptress,
who expressed the rawness of life in a universal (and therefore local) artistic language,
not only in the choice of topics but in the materials used. Her father later told me that she
first attacked her raw material, usually windfall timber, with a chainsaw (26.6). But the
author of this rawness and vigour had moved away from the Town, like the more
talkative teenager BL (section 4. 12.12).

In attempts to cope with this feeling of personal isolation, gambling seemed to be a
popular outlet. There were few places constantly open for face-to-face encounter,
particularly at night and especially for women. Only the pubs and clubs seemed to fill
that role, and all were saturated with gambling paraphernalia, from poker machines to the perpetually roaming TV race broadcasts. An escape motive seemed to lie inevitably somewhere beneath this constantly reinforced phenomenon.

An inability to organize or manage personal discretionary time pervaded the Town. I found the place empty on Saturdays, confirming the room maid’s report (27.1). Discretionary time was a resource available for use, but it pointed in no direction itself. The drug and alcohol worker seemed to realize this in the trip he organized for the youths of the Hamlet, and the Rugby League people followed it in their programme to build a playing field, but their motives may have been mixed.

6.3 Informal Encounters with Governance

I begin this section by considering the meeting with the informal Hamlet group (section 4.12.10 and Report 10). This group saw governance as entirely silent. It told them neither what was going on nor how they could find out about it. It simply acted. The group found nothing but a furtive threatening secretiveness behind agency action (10.4, 10.5), which had already disturbed their common consciousness of the river as one of the places they might enjoy (10.4). In turn the secretiveness imputed guilt on the government’s part in the eyes of group members. It imputed guilt because the group members were already blaming the outer world for bad faith, self-interested motivation and questionable intent (calling the water users “the mafia” (10.7)).

The law as it actually displayed itself was a mystery to these people. It was rational will, not natural will, and they recognized only the latter. They had an intuitive, “natural” idea of the law in which it protected those innocent of social misdemeanour. The motivations of people who went to the limits of rational will, such as the 84-years old man still buying land, were beyond their understanding (10.10). They felt themselves to be offended/injured with respect to a public good that they felt they “owned”. They confused
“encounter directly” and “enjoy” in their definition of ownership, failing to see that it really means “control”. It was a distinction that, pursued unsuccessfully, sought to privilege lifeworld (natural will) from contract (social will). To them it was an I-You issue, but others saw it (and for that matter, them) as an I-It issue.

In the Village they still sought Community to deal with problems such as these, since in general they could not find other means of redress. The little community was turned in on itself, but seemed to find equality and peace in the process, for example in their Club nights (Report 65), despite the mayhem reported in the streets (39.16, 41.3). Almost all the residents I encountered, including the otherwise highly critical house cleaner, reported it as a peaceful place to live (41.6, 78.2). The Village Residents Group President remarked that he and his family had come to the Village to escape rates, but one also sensed that they had come to escape rational will as well, and for this reason were prepared to put up with floods and even more basic inconveniences (18.7). The excesses of rational will (Tönnies’ “greed for profits”) and the desire for security had driven the Town housing market into local inflation (4.9), causing problems for families such as his.

The manner of my encounter with the Village Residents Group was noteworthy in its setting (“in amongst the ironing” (16.3)). A friendly person, or at least one who seemed to be neutral, had referred me to the Group, and as a result I seemed to have entree immediately into an I-You circumstances as far as they were concerned. The meeting began in essence with the arrival of the Deputy President. If the Second Shopkeeper had stood with one foot in retrospective solitude and the other in Community, the deputy President stood in a similar stance. He had one foot firmly planted in natural will but the other at least on the boundary with rational will. His description of riverbank behaviour (16.29) was a significant event in the progress of the meeting. He appeared to have developed his knowledge through sheer sharp-eyed personal observation, without reliance on any formal scientific method. He was vindicated in his interpretation of natural processes by the later evidence of a Catchment Committee officer, who complained at the lack of understanding about this issue held by more distanciated powers with over-full in-trays (40.14, 40.15).
The next step in this intervention episode occurred at the Offer meeting (Report 55). Here the distanced powers were in full display. The meeting was formal compared to my private encounter with the Residents Group, though less formal than at the Community Reference Panel (Reports 50 and 51). It was in fact a more genuine encounter between governance representatives and the public than the latter. The meeting was smaller, the room less spacious and more crowded, and the face-to-face nature of the encounter more close-up. Further, observers such as the white ex-Land Council member seemed to be admitted freely— the so-called “privacy” of the situation was less. Perhaps the informality arose because repair, not profit, was the primary (though not necessarily the only) concern of the disaffected locals. It may also be that the meeting was not an arena for contesting district social management, a matter I discuss later. It was somehow a more “primitive” encounter, with natural will in evidence on the local side in their domestic style of contribution to the discussion.

The government agency seemed to be on the back foot from the start, despite the power it appeared to hold (16.14). At this stage, the agency was admitting its error (55.3) and offering several remedial options (55.4). However, its general handling of the meeting in tactical terms was inept. The presenter was again untrained, and spoke only from a specialist engineering background. The offer consisted of technologically sophisticated answers that appeared to be weak in the face of resident objections (55.5). The agencies’ desire for the cheapest option indicated a less-than-optimal concern that was not lost on the residents and led them to a later charge of unethical conduct (70.4). The engineering technology was impressive but the accompanying social context was ignored. That omission left all government suggestions incomplete.

The third episode in the history of this affair occurred in the Aftermath period. I encountered the Deputy President’s partner in perhaps the most natural setting a Western person can be found in (A8.1), exceeded only by the Camel Man encounter. Like all the Meadow people I met, she showed no sign of a need or desire to prevaricate. She told me that the group took advantage of the newest technology to phone up a lawyer, a person
well-trained in the niceties of the rational will. The lawyer gave them good rational reasons for not proceeding, but they elected to go ahead. The lawyer nonetheless attended their meeting with the government. Again the government tactically misread the situation, and made an assumption. That final action was, by rational standards, as irrationally based as the idea of placing several options in front of the Offer Meeting. The Village Group, it seems to me, prevailed in the face of all rationality through a dogged reliance on their natural will concept of law (in which respect, see also my earlier comment on the First Meadow Group).

The two fishermen respondents provided other windows on governance-populace informal contacts. The first, BJ, had no hesitation in identifying where the heart of power lay in the Town (5.9). Those holding this power circumvented the system at will (5.20), and were quite capable of reversing the normal flows of nature (5.16). The agencies were only the servants of the water users (5.4), and were nowhere near as interested in the environmental condition of the river as more local organisations (5.8).

The second fisherman respondent BI held similar caustic views of river management procedures (21.9). In his eyes, the agencies were irresponsible (21.9) and secretive, and the water users possessive (21.13). Environmental expertise applied by agencies to the river appeared to be dubious (21.18) and he was not optimistic about the river’s future (21.27), contrary to the view of the Catchment Committee member AJ (11.43). He acknowledged that the water users held the power over district water matters and that complaining was pointless as a result (21.27), but ended up by taking the view that local economic survival demanded subservience to this regime (21.37).

The Catchment Committee member AJ, who stood astride the edge of the more formal district conversation, provided insights to the operating methods of the local power-wielders. The development of the Catchment Committee itself had been a mystery to him (11.34). It had seemed to start well, but had fallen back into a degree of secrecy before improving itself again (11.18). Membership had been determined by the State, and the
chairman had been elected through a process that the Committee member was either unable or unwilling to explain (11.39).

From the Committee member’s perspective, government planning action was foundering through an emphasis on “words on paper” (11.11). Examples included the complications, even inanities (11.23), of budgeting in a three-tier governmental system (11.21-11.25); the production of the catchment plan (11.17); and the procedural rigidities of Catchment Committee meetings that appeared to lead to a certain silencing (11.33). Opportunities were lost in the process, as in the case of the Committee member’s own Landcare group (11.23). The result had been fragmentation at the Catchment Committee level (11.11), which the Committee member was inclined to relate to “a lack of honest commitment on the part of government”. It had caused things to happen in a strange way, leading him to conclude that the environment might simply be left “to rot” (11.27). The State agencies would become the winners (11.20), an opinion reinforced later (A9.2). This situation may have been accentuated through State agency people being part of the assessment process (11.25), particularly since the assessment process did not seem to depend, even nominally, on objective calculations (such as cost-benefit analyses) but on agreements and negotiations (11.25).

(As a further example of local social management practices, the Grazier BH presented another window on the exercise of power in the district through the way he arranged his contract with the government (20.4). He had a cavalier attitude toward any criteria that lesser people might perceive as rules (20.7), and was hard to dissuade (20.13). He seemed to have had little interest in any exercise of countervailing power that might require him to expand upon or revise a position he had already adopted (20.5)).

In order to deal with all of these complications, the Committee member saw education as the way for dealing more effectively with bureaucratic obstacles. With an extensive personal bureaucratic background (11.6), AJ had a capacity to deal with bureaucracies in a way that, for example, “successful farming families” (11.28) may not have had. In fact, the respondent thought that part of the motivation for resisting bureaucratic initiatives
may arise only as long as such people "feel they can get ahead through it", with "some sort of threat or opportunity to fire people up" (11.29). Money remained the big problem (11.36).

Notwithstanding the somewhat pessimistic nature of these responses, the Committee member was optimistic for the long term (11.43), deriving that optimism from a comparison with twenty years ago and a witnessing of similar environmental campaigns in other places. AJ believed in gradualism.

Like the catchment committee member, the Shire Engineer also stood astride the edge of the formal arena. Not surprisingly, given his profession, he saw physical infrastructure requirements as needing their own sets of laws (43.3). He favoured by-laws and similar formal instruments of governance as the proper modes for expressing governance requirements (43.3), being permanent, informed and unequivocal in communication. Relative permanence was to him a necessity for such a system. As a member of both the Community Representative Panel and the Catchment Management Association Committee, he was critical of the National Heritage Trust contract system that offered no one a career path and turned positions over on a three-year basis (43.8). He brought his predisposition for formality and his organizational expertise into play in his private involvements, firstly in the catchment committee where, as we have seen, things bogged down, and secondly into his St Vincent de Paul activities where it presented considerable advantages as far as could be seen.

In the Catchment Committee member and the Shire Engineer, both locals who demonstrated a capacity to get things done and an understanding of the complexities and opportunities of bureaucratic systems at the local level, one of the few possibilities for remediation in actuality became visible.

The senior water user representative AA stood somewhat more inside the edge of the main formal arena. He spoke in the governing "we", quickly claiming high intellectual/moral ground ("We've always had a holistic view about economic
development. To us the community is an important component” (14.13)). This “we”, presumably made up of the members of the organisation he represented, brought real benefits to the community in his eyes (14.14). But his comment about reported fish kills, “they knew who did it” (14.6), carried implications of both secrecy and universal surveillance in operation in the district. And he was somewhat dismissive about the conditions under which lower-paid workers might operate (14.26).

It would seem that he considered “progress” of an undefined kind to be a key component of his perspective, requiring “faith in the future of the town” (14.28). A sense of order seemed to be part of his vision, as when he noted the Town’s second place in the Tidy Towns competition (14.149). His view that the river had not deteriorated during his time in the Town (14.38) did not accord with the views of others, such as the Toastmaster President (71.7) and the people standing outside the Village Post Office (10.7). As far as he was concerned, whatever deterioration might have occurred was caused by defects he could not control (such as carp (14.45) and the run-offs from areas further upstream (14.57)).

AA was a keen advocate of the benefits of technology (14.65), and of documentary detailing (“the first Landcare plan -- very, very creative and innovative plan -- thick folder” (14.93)). His enthusiasm for technology extended into the biological field (14.135-14.140). He held a mild degree of scepticism towards the progress of hydrological technology instrument then under preparation (14.120), but was certainly not willing to be influenced by my more pessimistic view (14.125, 14.126). He keenly awaited the possibility that “we” would be able to model any river flow management scenario desired (14.130), but in the end had to concede that “he who has the gold makes the rules” and that the final say lay with the government (14.132).

AA’s more significant contribution to the study of governance in the district came from his comments about the informal local exercises of power. He spoke of “our” familiarity with officers of the various departments represented in the Town, the opportunity thus offered to them to “work closely with water users”, and his recognition that peer pressure
was the most powerful local motivator (14.72). More incisively, he said that “Basically power and authority are words that don't rest terribly well in (the Town)” (14.74). But it seemed that, although all issues might be debated and the solutions pretty well thrashed out, the forums in which the thrashing out took place might contain only those people who were members of established organisations within the Town (14.89). He described no occasion of consultation with others not willing or able to be part of such organisations. Nevertheless he indicated at the end of the interview that the position occupied by his group of water users might not be optimal, and that still more influential levels of power brokerage might be available elsewhere in the Basin (14.7).

These reviews of the Shire Engineer and AA encounters introduce my recordings of the operations of the district Councils. On two occasions, one significant (the amalgamation question) and the other trivial (the library opening), an incapacity to reach a conclusion within any measure of reasonable time, if at all, was evident. The Town mayor's concluding comment on the amalgamation issue (23.37 and section 4.12.9) was interpretable as a stand against replacement of the old regime by a larger, more progressive one. The older intended to persist even though its capacity to effect real change for its residents appeared to be slight (14.77).

A further and more explicit expression of the role of the establishment in the governance of the district arose at the public meeting concerned with water-skiing (Report 75 and section 4.11.3). Here even the idea of full public access to a local power discussion seemed to be denied by the obscure way it was advertised. The Council representative remained subdued, present mainly in a formal role. The special interest group (which seemed to have an assured alliance with the local Establishment through the political weight of the senior politician BB (75.3)) assumed the right of free access to all local resources. Ironically, the disturbance to this form of local "freedom" came by way of the external imposition of water rights, which the local agricultural entrepreneurs had driven into a competitive market format. The water-skiing group found that system rebounding on them in a completely unexpected way, in a clear example of the reflexive risk ideas of Giddens (1990, pp. 36-39) and Beck (1993, pp. 27-43).
The Shire Council appeared to be less rigid in many respects, and more capable of moving more with the times. For example, the Shire Engineer seemed to have a broad regional perspective, and moved usefully to employ Council equipment on a local social service activity (67.8). The Shire President, reportedly a relatively wealthy local businessman, seemed on top of his tasks at the Aftermath meeting I attended (Report A11).

However, the most remarkable comment on local government in the district came from the AA statement: “If councils or other organisations act unilaterally they get jumped on” (14, 77). This remark summed up both the repressing stance of the local establishment and the repressed role of statutory local government. Not the least of the outcomes was the inability or unwillingness of local government to go beyond its roads-rates-rubbish agenda in a really significant way when dealing with the local Aboriginal question. It favoured abstract technology (the flood plain model, the high-tech sewerage and water supplies) at the expense of socially cohesive activities, against which the mayor’s wish to seek communal benefits from the Broadwater development appeared as relative tokenism. (Of course, a far worse case occurred across the border in the more distant Shire Council’s treatment of the Hamlet’s difficulties.)

Behind the scene, it seemed clear to many that the business establishment leaders brooked no interference from local statutory power and had successfully neutralized it. The evidence of the Catchment Committee member AJ indicates that an episode of that nature occurred when the Catchment Management Association had first been established. There had been no attempt in those initial machinations to observe the technology needs of the circumstance or to meet the branded circumstance now operating in the district, merely a wish to sustain existing local power structures. In this regard, the selection of neither the first catchment coordinator nor the initial administrative officer at the Catchment Management Association (7.2, 7.6) had been accidental, but had exercised highly functional local purposes. The installation of the Shire Engineer as Catchment Management Association chairman might have been an initial attempt by State agencies
to change this circumstance, but it had led to no really significant improvement apart from the employment of more technically confident people (ie people with brand knowledge) (40.6).

The outcome of this general governmental approach appeared at the meeting of the Catchment Management Association Committee (Report 54) and its smaller Executive Committee (Report A9). In the first instance, the local people (still not convincingly representing the district population as a whole) endeavoured to grapple with the administrative phalanx they faced. The main part of the meeting was occupied with reports from members and attending officers on the dealings of government agencies, their processes, their offshoots (54.4-54.13) and their shortcomings (54.14). None of these reports indicated any input towards action in either practical or administrative terms; rather, they indicated obscurity and perhaps prevarication on the government side (54.36). A further significant fraction of the meeting’s time was consumed by the presentation made by the State agency representative at that meeting. Both the spoken words and the pictures used in that presentation seemed to me (reasonably experienced in regional planning presentations from the decentralization experience) to be mind numbing (54.23-54.29).

The Committee discussion about its own actions, reactions and intentions occupied only about one-third of the meeting time I witnessed (probably the entire effective portion - 54.42). It gave no impression of progress, especially in terms of autonomous action, except on minor Town Common practicalities (54.15). Its efforts seemed almost entirely preoccupied with its administrative environment. The weed presentation at the end seemed to come as a welcome and familiar real-world relief to most of those in the room (54.41).

The same comment about preoccupation with the external administrative environment applies to the meeting of the Association’s Executive Committee a year later. By that time at least one committee member had apparently become aware that the agencies may have had more self-interested agendas in mind (A9.2). The external administrative context
again governed the first half of the meeting (A9.4) in a grotesque way, namely in the water quality officer's inability to retrieve her own data from the distant agency. The Committee seemed powerless to deal with this problem. A kind of division appeared dimly between the agency representatives present at the meeting, the practically oriented approach of the junior officer not conforming with the more political and generalized orientation of his senior. The episode seemed somewhat similar to the incident in which the regional senior had told the local junior to do nothing at the Community Reference Panel Meeting (51.102). An internal and almost trivial administrative concern filled in the rest of the morning.

6.4  Formal State Governance

In this section I explore the ways in which power was expressed in the formal meeting reports included in the fieldwork outcomes, sometimes using the term whites as a synonym for white culture. In other words, the perspective I take does not exclude blacks whose acculturation into the white culture may be high enough for them to follow essentially white mores and practices.

The centralisation of power that applied in other parts of the Basin through the medium of the Murray Darling Basin Commission did not reach into the district (14.61). Only the States provided the fully formal face of power in this place. The remoteness of central governance and its attitudes towards localised interests were ironically depicted in the brief encounter with the bureaucrat in Canberra (Report 37). The bureaucrat saw statistics as the only way to approach a social problem (37.4), believing that more direct encounters at the local level could be easily resolved through an unempathetic one-way communication process that was (presumably) unintentional.

The Community Reference Panel meeting reports (Reports 50 and 51) presented the most vivid exposure of governmental attitude towards the affairs of the district, in the blunt
State contradiction of water users' expectations (51.26, 51.27). This action was a clear sign that government was not prepared to countenance user interference in its regulation of water distribution. The apparent irreversibility of the policy officer's statement was signified by his lack of emotion or remorse at this massive breakdown of trust from the water users' viewpoint (51.27), even though he might have been one of its authors.

AA had used the phrase "Community Reference Panel" in his assertions that the Town operated in a fully democratic way (14.110) but, once sighted, the Panel seemed misnamed. The word "Community" hardly applied in a reasonably representative sense to the non-government people present at the meeting, who were generally members of economic vested interest groups, water users and graziers. They greatly outnumbered the representatives of organisations such as the Australian Conservation Foundation who, in any case, could not claim unequivocally to represent the whole of the national or State population, let alone that of the district (50.8). Elders represented the Aboriginals, an arrangement that might have been satisfactory to black people still intimately involved with the Aboriginal culture, but was not necessarily so for those who may have moved towards the white culture.

A question also arises about the meaning of the word "Reference". To the water users it seemed to mean involvement in decision-making, but this was not the case as far as the government was concerned. The agencies appeared to think it meant merely "inform" or, a little more broadly, "inform with reasons". The water users, at least on the face of it, were heavily outgunned by the weight of the government representation, not least in terms of the various senior departmental offices who sat with me as observers at the rear table and occasionally intervened in the discussion.

Power showed itself at several levels during the Community Reference Panel Meeting: between the States, between senior and junior officers within the same agency, between agencies within the same State, and between State agencies and water users. The forms of direct power on view ranged from the setting of the agenda by the States, through relatively direct verbal repression of the conservation and Aboriginal representatives'
views, to very direct confrontation between the largest agency and the water users. However, indirect power in the form of the setting of the overall climate might not have lain within the agencies’ grasp, but in another arena to which the water users still held access.

The explicit practices of governance appeared a second time at the water agency workshop a day or two later. This meeting was less formally constituted, with a number of people from Landcare groups added to the Community Reference Panel audience (53.1). There were still no members of the broader community present, and agency officers sat scattered and participating throughout the audience.

The purpose of the meeting was ostensibly for those present to suggest the best support for community development (not further defined), within a context of natural resource management (53.4.2, 53.5). It was apparently meant to be a form of community input into a reformulation of public participation processes that had been mentioned at the Community Reference Panel meeting (51.91).

Whatever its expressed purpose, control was seized at the outset by the agency facilitator who immediately imposed a SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) procedure (53.6). SWOT is an administrative quasi-technological form of participation, in this instance selected without audience participation in the choice. The language used by the facilitator was disciplinary (53.6, 53.14), brisk (53.7), and sometimes unfortunately expressed to my mind (53.8.6). No other people in the room showed any reaction to this form of address at the time (53.25), but one participant later expressed cynicism about the whole exercise (54.1). An old grazier was another person to voice dissension explicitly during the meeting, but under his breath (53.9). The only other expression of dissent, an implicit one but nevertheless significant in my view, was the passing of worksheets to me (53.9).

The issue of language reappeared at the CSIRO meeting (Report 62), this time as the central purpose for assembly. It was again embedded in a technological framework, on
this occasion more biophysical than administrative but possibly with professional marketing/agricultural economics overtones (62.5). The scientists who called the meeting seemed unaware that they were dealing with two communication interfaces, the expressed one between extension workers and farmers and a less obvious one between themselves and the extension workers (62.11). The solution suggested by the scientists, a board game, was an attempt to interest the farmers at the presumed level of the latter's mental (lifeworld) engagement with reality, through a system of signs enfolded within the structure of the game. However, the scientific people themselves acknowledged that they had experienced trouble with this approach (62.14), even though the extension workers (with only minor reservations) said they thought it was a good idea (62.13). Less direct responses from the extension workers (62.8, 62.9, 62.15, 62.16) indicated that the scientists' understanding of farmer psychology still seemed misconceived.

Again the meeting had a disciplinary and deterministic tone, though far less intrusive than at the agency workshop (62.9, 62.11). Intra-meeting language complications seemed to enter the proceedings on several occasions (62.9 - 62.11, 62.13 0.1, 62.6). The feedback from extension workers to scientists seemed to be random (62.17), and the extent to which the latter might become better informed about the extension worker-farmer interface in a systematic way remained unclear. In sum, I concluded that the encounter had little chance of producing a successful contribution towards a solution to the problem it had been summoned to address. The purpose of extension worker-farmer contact in general was not clearly decided (62.11, 62.15), and aspects of its practice were questioned (62. 16.5, 62. 16.6, 62.18, 62.9.7). Audience and presenters were all from biophysical backgrounds (62.7), both sides attempting to deal with an essentially sociological/psychological/linguistic problem for which they were fundamentally unequipped.

6.5 Intimations of Neo-Liberalism

A possible interpretation of the agency position in all formal encounters is that the politicians and agencies all operated from a condition of self-generated confusion rather
than a consciously orchestrated stance. In other words, the problem had arisen from a blunder, not a conspiracy. The confusion may have arisen from differences between political parties, States or levels of seniority in individual agencies, each factor acting singly or in co-operation with others. The weight of the evidence drawn thus far from the field reports supports the confusion viewpoint, and provides no support for the conspiracy notion: even the Canberra bureaucrat seemed to be merely misguided, not instructed to delude regional residents (37.6).

The fieldwork evidence indicates to me that the State agencies were fully confident in their roles as manifestations of a managerial State. They determined the nature of the meetings to be called, controlled the meeting timetables, wrote the agendas, and summoned the non-government participants, who obligingly attended.

The continuation of the Public Water debate into the Aftermath period highlighted the administrative engulfment of which Gottfried spoke. Attempts at the manipulation of terminology showed up in the Community Reference Panel difficulty in agreeing on the final press release, but it seemed to me that this was not the end of the language issue. I suspect that the language misunderstandings in the agency/Community Reference Panel debate (51.21, 51.35, 51.59) might have been as convenient a strategic tool for the agencies as the reported difficulties of model formation and data collection (A10.119). Certainly the patronising language of the junior agency representatives (applicable also, though somewhat differently, to extension workers: see Report 62) seemed to accord with the section 5.8 view that, under neo-liberalism, enforced "community" is to be delivered through sensitised (sic) administrators.

Other fieldwork evidence further related local managerial attitudes to the neo-liberal framework described by Gottfried. Respondent BE adopted a dismissive tone towards distant agencies (32.3, 39.20), insisting superficially on the preference for individualism expressed in the local newspaper. The target may have changed but an underlying rationale, of trying to free the individual from centralised, seemingly absolutist, power
seemed unaltered. The managerial state, or perhaps more specifically the welfare state, was the danger in BE's eyes.

In the light of these remarks it seems to me that the Community Reference Panel-agency conflict is a symbol of a concern within the neo-liberal camp as to whether social managerial control of the district populace water should sit locally or distantly. One of the two States insisted on it sitting distantly, and the other lent towards locally under a veneer of operating somewhat distantly; but the latter also seemed to find this middle ground unsustainable.

On another middle ground, the Village, the Aboriginal aides at the school expressed interest in co-ordination of State agencies (64.2). This interest seemed to me to resonate with a remark by Gottfried (1999, p.132) that “only newly arrived immigrants, perhaps grateful to a government that admits them in the face of popular opposition, holds a more positive view” on neo-liberalism. The comment seems to hold if the Aboriginal people are considered as prospective or actual immigrants into the white culture despite their earlier history. Under this view, the Village emerges as a holding centre for approved migrants, and the Hamlet as a kind of holding centre in which a fester of residual unacceptable behaviour might be contained. There it was allowed to play itself out without further intervention, to whatever therapeutic/discharge end might eventuate.

The original attempted intervention by the investigator of the Hamlet conditions, his second attempt ten years later, and the final intervention by the Premier himself at a later stage, all constituted efforts to bypass a kind of “stamping-out” urge I perceived in the bulk of the local white populace. These efforts, except the last on which the jury is still out, failed because local formal agencies also seem infected by the stamping-out urge. According to Hage (1998, p.232), this urge is interpretable directly as a territorial phenomenon, continuing the history of the district in an almost unchanged fashion since the first third of the nineteenth century.
At the further end of the black-white spectrum, the senior aboriginal respondent CK entered the Aboriginal Reference Panel meeting on a totally dissonant note. At the time this respondent's action seemed to me quite impromptu; it was only later that I wondered whether it indicated, purposely or otherwise, a strategic stance under which the white agency view was not to be allowed into the Aboriginal discourse at all. If this was the case, it might even have been that the elder was engaged in a dispute over social management that might reflect the similar issue concerning the Community Reference Panel.

As a concluding remark, it seems to me that the neo-liberal mindset described by Gottfried was applicable to the district as a general description of the essential stances within it, but was not applicable to the extent of placing social management with the agencies. The wrangle was over the location, not the intrinsic nature, of social power.

6.6 Conclusion

In the interpretive process to this point, attention has moved from a moment of very high intimacy with the Second Shopkeeper, through a meeting of high intimacy with the two Village groups, thence to the low intimacy of the Offer Meeting and other direct encounters between government and elements of the district populace. I did not select this sequence consciously during the fieldwork. The flow of the interpretive narrative simply moved in that direction intuitively for me. The interpretive narrative flow in this form may thus contain a meaning of its own, based on the contrasts emerging as the stream proceeds.

The review at the first encounter level (section 6.2) indicates that a pervasive sense of alienation was abroad in the district. Although I encountered the various respondents at random, without any pessimistic pre-selection, pessimism kept asserting itself. It is possible that my opening question turned the discussions in that direction but I doubt it, if only because the unofficial survey described in section 4.12.5 was disconnected from it.
The alienation apparently felt was an alienation against oneself, in the sense that most individuals seemed out of contact with their inner Selves. Only the Second Shopkeeper's statement stood out in contrast, through its uniqueness in the narrative reports. She could not flee to other places, as the more well-to-do were apparently able to do for occasional respite (19.23, 20.17), but faced her existential difficulty squarely.

In general, to live in the district was to live in a kind of a fog, free to move around but knowing that out there were forces that were unknown in kind as well as invisible. These forces might strike arbitrarily to disrupt one’s patterns of satisfaction or quiet enjoyment. The social landscape was as alienated and alienating as the physical. For the young, one was pushed into the fog, however unwilling one might be, unless one fled. Like the older people, they knew the risks of following “freedom” in a fog, but could only be uncomplaining victims led towards a future they could not even describe. That is because it contained not a particular threat but the constant gnawing of anxiety itself, sometimes conscious sometimes not, and always present. Unless one was a rarity like the Second Shopkeeper, confident in her own capabilities and natural knowledge of herself and prepared to step out unflinchingly, one became the anxiety itself. In turn, this anxiety might become, or be easily converted into, a general “Otherness anxiety” in which strangers were viewed as prima facie potential threats.

The first local encounters with governance revealed the recent history of government interventions in the district. As far as the fieldwork evidence takes it, the story of remediation in the Murray Darling has been essentially one of counter-intervention, in which a programme has been introduced to modulate or reverse a trend seen as ultimately inappropriate. The responses to counter-intervention in the three settlements in the district have been different, perhaps unsurprisingly since each is quite different to the others in character and mores. The general situation in the Village may be viewed as a laboratory circumstance in which everything remained constant except the introduction of the weir. Little social change appeared to occur there. From all the observations I made at the Club Night (Report 65) and at the Village Residents Group meeting (Report 16), it appeared to operate close to Tönnies’ Gemeinschaft model, with natural will as the prevailing
condition for its non-transient inhabitants. The nature of private property was more loosely interpreted, to the dismay of the police sergeant (29.8) and the Town real estate agent (41.3). Yet in contexts where there was no point in prevarication, I encountered a number of residents who told me that life was peaceful at the domestic level (41.6, 78.2). Even a resident policewoman apparently enjoyed that circumstance (29.2). The outside world passed through noisily in the form of constant highway traffic, but that seemed no impingement because it was a constant state rather than an irregular disturbing event, and the community appeared to have accepted that constancy as part of its natural world. Then a single intervention occurred in the form of the construction of the weir.

The First Village Group took no action against the intervention inflicted on it. It felt itself to be, and actually was, helpless in the social fog mentioned earlier in this section. The Residents Group took action and succeeded, all participants escaping without too much apparent damage. The manner of its succeeding is worth comparison with the way that the Town coped with other interventions counter to its prevailing but different state of will and mores. In my view, the Village's success came firstly from the emergence of the Residents Group's Deputy President who, like the Second Shopkeeper, was also prepared to step out to face what comes, confident in his own natural knowledge, this time of physical processes. Secondly that stepping-out produced an irrational turn with which the "rational" agencies failed to cope. This failure was a first sign of officer ineptitude, i.e. tactical weakness, at the local level.

At levels of lower intimacy, governance in a local context appeared in two guises. The informal guise was clearly exercised by the local establishment, mainly entrepreneurial water users and other economic beneficiaries of the district. At the district level it appeared to have long put paid to any social or communal leadership ambitions that might have been held by local forms of statutory governance. The district entrepreneurial group, represented primarily in these pages by the senior water user representative, showed itself keen to support technology and technological innovation. It appeared as the major champion of brandedness in the district, and it drew much of its influence from this posture.
At the broader level, the political figures and agency representatives talked to groups of people selected to listen, in effect by the representatives themselves. Meetings occurred under the semblance of joint interest, with the exchange of views intended to lead to better combinations of action in the future. But these meetings called by government showed a consistent pattern of attempts at action through forceful “downwards” (from governing to governed) pressures.

The primary vehicles for these pressures were technological and administrative, both areas in which the bureaucracy would normally be thought to have the upper hand. But the officers’ efforts in fact produced nothing but confusion, especially in their execution and explanation of their technology preferences. The apparent strength of their strategic position was again frittered away in tactical social ineptitude. That confusion presented difficulties that were sometimes struggled with, sometimes passed over unrecognised, but not overcome in either instance.

In describing and commenting on the meetings reviewed to this point, it is difficult to avoid writing other than in terms of “sides”. It seemed always to be a matter of “us” and “them”. By the end of the Aftermath Reports, the position had moved to a further phase, the neutralisation of the Catchment Management Association as a whole (i.e. its destruction as a brand name).

In all, this Chapter presents a picture of an alienated populace under a riven form of governance in which distant external forces competed with local dominant group desires for local social managerial dominance. Both the alienation and the governance issues were considerable in their own rights. However in my view, taking into account the postulate stated in section 5.7 that effective remediation is only achievable if the other three elements in Figure 4 interlock with it and between themselves satisfactorily, the main point emerging from this chapter is the gulf, seemingly unbridgeable, between the “populace in general” and the “remediation industry”.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1 I also saw her later on two other occasions unreported in the narratives. In the first other women of her own age and status who seemed to be a combination of customers and helpers surrounded her in a vigorous and talkative display of energy and friendship. In the other, she was apparently moonlighting in the kitchen of one of the small local fish shops, again a communal setting.

2 The signified behind that sign may be the Government’s realisation that it had, some years earlier, over-allocated water rights by as much as 50 per cent of total river capacity (a term whose definition is not clear cut) in one of the States represented at the meeting.

3 I omit the High School from this consideration because CN’s plan and the high truancy rate indicated it is to a large degree uncoupled from the Village community. For similar, though not as strong, reasons, I include boys who caused mayhem in Meadow streets as a form of transient also.
CHAPTER 7

INTERPRETATION OF OPERATIONAL MILIEU EVIDENCE

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, I review the remaining worldview claims or possibilities against the fieldwork evidence, the place of neoliberalism having been considered in section 6.5. If found to apply reasonably comprehensively to the district, their presence may conceivably lead to a determined effort at community development as a means of modifying the lack-of-fit mentioned in the last section of Chapter 6.

In section 7.2 I examine the applicability of Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft ideas. In section 7.3, the Habermas project comes under the spotlight, firstly to assess whether it holds a possibility for explanations of the district circumstance, and secondly to determine whether it may further hold possibilities for improvement in the situation under the real-life conditions described in the fieldwork reports.

A similar interpretive approach, this time concerned with Giddens' ideas about Late Modernity, appears in section 7.4. Postmodern/post-structuralist possibilities for district milieu modeling come under review in section 7.5, and the chapter concludes with section 7.6.

7.2 A Tönnies Perspective

The key issues engaged in this perspective lie in the question preceding Table 1 in section 5.4: how did the actors in the district address the action orientations in that Table before acting with determinate meaning? A further question is the extent to
which natural will activity appears to have determined district life.

The earlier fieldwork seemed to indicate that Gemeinschaft had a place in the district milieu. The comments in Chapter 6 regarding the Village indicate that it appeared to be prevalent in at least this corner of the district, and many other fieldwork fragments pointed also to Community. A form of community/natural will appeared even before the Town was reached, in the semi-automatic cry of “lights” (39.4) in the settlements along the way. On arrival after that journey, I found that the Town’s main street still retained a traditional country Town collection of small traders, interpenetrated occasionally by only modest supermarkets or chain store representations (39. 21).

The Third Shopkeeper’s local millinery efforts showed personal marketing on a named basis. The Church door standing open seemed to me to be a communal sign (13.7). There was no apparent place for public anonymity (61.2).

In a sense, the basic concept of Landcare as understood in the district worked on the basis of communal linkages, not always without argument and self interest (40.11), but these too were part of the community woof and weft. The efforts of the Catchment Committee member AJ certainly seemed to be community driven (11.5), even though the contents related more to rational will concerns. The Toastmaster group, in its efforts to support its handicapped members (71.15 and 73.2), seemed to be a true form of community involvement.

Many locally-based formal institutions still showed traditional community leanings. The clubs backed the local fishing groups restocking efforts (5.8, 5.14, 73.13), as did the Town Council (5.15). A Town councillor asserted that community was more important than local Council boundaries (23.15), with which the Shire President more or less agreed (23.31). At the One Nation party meeting, the questions tended to be locally oriented (30.7). The Councils' discussions about amalgamation and the Library plaque featured parish pump tactics (Report 23). The unofficial survey appeared to flush out at least a semblance of desire for a higher level or preservation of communal association (42.22, 42.3), and many of its respondents seemed to be ill at ease with the wider world (71.11).

But the picture was not clear-cut. Respondent BF’s evidence showed the confusion
that underlay the apparently rosy Community scene (4.9, 4.12). Even in the early part of the fieldwork, notions of Community seemed to be under pressure, and evidence of rational will began to seep in. Respondent BE praised the Premier's Award man's action in improving the district's lot through saving an agricultural processing plant proposal (30.6), and also applauded him later for his personal annual distribution of Christmas presents to children (not reported in the narratives). But the processing plant was an economic instrument, and the gift-giving perhaps only a solace for the adverse effects of the year's otherwise rational calendar.

Residues of Gemeinschaft appeared to be no longer at the forefront in determining modes of district life. Further, they were losing ground, at least within the Town and in the hinterland, which, if Liepins is right, affected if not determined the Town's value system. Face-to-face interactions in general seemed more aligned to the practices operating in the pub (24.5-24.7) (one might have things if one could pay for them, but not otherwise) although the message may be delivered more gently and with a salesman's smile. In the Aftermath reports, the First Shopkeeper had gone and the new partition in the shop seemed to symbolise the spread of the rational attitude (A2.10).

Outside the world of commerce, a similar kind of transactionalism appeared to haunt even the St Vincent de Paul Society. One received help if deemed worthy, if behaviour was not too inappropriate. Only the priest seemed to see things in a different, more accepting light. His attitude resurfaced in the Toastmaster meetings, where Otherness was embraced rather than rejected, but these occasions were the only instances I encountered in the Town. The tension, if not disruption, on the family side reported by respondents BF and BG seemed more prevalent.

Gemeinschaft residues lost further strength as increased wealth entered the picture. Amongst the district entrepreneurial group, traditional community (to whatever extent it might have existed for them) may have been a closed shop (46.6). Volunteering was ostensibly community oriented but seemed to involve a sense of personal distance, remaining only a limited form of natural will not far removed from rational will (13.9, 67.3 - 67.5, 67.8). This distinction became more concrete still in the history of the Town's shopfront welfare agency, which seemed to be an offshoot of AA's
rationalized social strategies and viewpoints (14.37, 14.38, 14.77, 14.110, 14.149). The term “community” itself became suspect in AA’s hands, appearing to refer only to a vested-interest local elite (54.7). And the confusion became contagious: I could not fathom the farmer’s motives when rescuing my bogged car (19.27).

As the fieldwork progressed the movement towards modernity became more noticeable (the shopfront computer bureau (39.9), the upwardly-mobile coffee lounge (48.5), BE’s bakery redevelopment) but was not too confrontational initially. The new Medical Centre, the new library and, most significantly, the new supermarket (A2.6) were relatively out of sight, with the new collection of welfare agencies (A2.7) housed just off the main street in a blend of unobtrusiveness and accessibility. On a less physical note, the Shire Council decided to move its investment strategy out of Town (A11.4). Modernity progressed, affluence expanded, the old local government situation managed to hang on, the changes were silently evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Whatever revolutions occurred seemed to depend only on the mainstream entrepreneurial crop of the moment, as when the water users had begun their present journey about 20 years ago (14.20, 14.74), or when more distant government exercised its powers.

The advent of the water users had produced the basically Societal form of welfare provision observed in the Town. Even the less Societal forms of welfare provision, such as the St Vincent de Paul Society, were part of a regional network, not fully generated locally (13.15). In the application of rational will to the district, as expressed by the senior water user representative, the Town had moved silently away from traditional community towards less intimate forms. The population had distanced itself from whatever existential forms it might previously have accepted, as the Second Shopkeeper found and the decline of formal religion attested.

The impacts of these changes were sometimes directly personal. The fisherman respondent Bl resignedly surrendered the river of the future (21.27), the Village Land and River Care Group deputy president was told bluntly to get out of the riverbank argument (16.14), and a nominally normal communal fall-back, his Shire Council, was too far away (16.15). The initial absence of an off-centre shopping mall (39.21) was followed, it seemed almost inexorably, by its ultimate appearance (A2.6).
The abstractions of administrative paper were a source of admiration to the senior water user representative AA (14.93) who, with the new graduate mentioned in Report 61 (61.11), drew attention to the deepened entry of abstract knowledge into the most basic farming practices (61.11, 14.20). Most abstract of all was the technology over-optimistically applied to river management by all parties (14.120, 14.130, Aftermath Report A10). One of AA's abstractions was the notion of lifestyle, although the attempt to define it was weak (14.100). Certainly lifestyle as locally accepted seemed to include the kind of complaisance (14.74) shown by the younger Toastmaster women (71.7).

In sum it seems that Gemeinschaft still existed and was desired, but its existence was fragmentary and the desire without a champion. It no longer seemed to offer a clear view of the district's milieu - its time had passed for the district if things continued to follow their present "gravitational" path. A massive effort seemed to be required if it was to be regained, not least because of the strength of the active countervailing forces.

7.3 The Habermasian Project

I deal with the Habermasian perspective in this section in two ways. The first is through an assessment of the strategic action/communicative action relationship extant in the district. The second concerns the existence and strengths of factors that seem necessary for enhancement of the communicative action position. These include the availabilities of arenas for it; the presence, capabilities and willingness of effective convenors; the avenues available for suitable agenda-setting; and the capabilities for true presentations of self that may then become available.

It seems to me that Habermas' view of the dominance of strategic action applied almost overwhelmingly to the district. It was this dominance that would make the practical introduction of a Habermasian solution apparently so difficult if
conventional institutional structures and arrangements were to be maintained, as the work of Cameron et al indicated. Further, both open and latently concealed strategic action were on view in the district. The first and most evident indicator was in the Community Reference Panel and its associated suite of meetings (including the scientist/extension worker meeting (Report 62) and the Village Offer meeting (Report 55)), and the second most definitely in the Broadwater meeting (Report 75). A latent form of strategic action, concerned with the preservation of local social management and its accompanying hierarchical outlook, seemed also to underlie the persistence of the more evident local newspaper themes.

The indications of rational communicative action were few. One of the more interesting was the Toastmaster circumstance, which was described to me in an aside (not recorded in the fieldwork reports) as not typical of such events in larger centres. It presented a suitable arena, and its convener existed. The meetings were occasions of sociability, trust and even-handedness. Further, the occasions I witnessed certainly demonstrated a capacity for true presentation of Self in this non-influential environment, although no surety emerged that the President or the members had a capacity to discern the vital issues within the district, or broader ones impinging on it.

The white ex-Land Council member (section 4.13.8) seemed to offer the potential to identify these issues. He also seemed to be capable of applying a dramaturgical context (see 60.9) to social issues. Further, he might have been capable of erecting suitable barricades against potential critics of the Habermasian process as well as the content of the discussions to be held within it. But he left the district shortly after I met him, and his remaining associates did not seem equally capable. Other people showed true representation of Self in open discourse, such as the First and Second Shopkeepers but, while the latter may have been influential in her domestic context, the former certainly was not.

The Councils did not appear to be places for rational communicativeness. Both seemed bound up procedurally, and they failed to grapple effectively with either the amalgamation issue or, more significantly, the black-white racial tensions evident in the district.
The people of the Village seemed to me to hold out a degree of possibility. They manufactured their own informal arenas (outside the Post Office, on the President's back verandah on the night I met the Village Residents group, at the Club on Thursday nights). In the Deputy President of the Village Residents group they found an effective convenor in a time of trouble for at least some of them. They spoke with true presentations of Self as though they hardly knew of any other way, but they responded only to crisis. The Deputy President seemed to have an understanding of broader issues, but no capacity to raise them above the horizon for his co-residents who felt no sense of crisis about them. As one of the Town's social workers pointed out, there was no benign leader in the Village (44.16). Strategic action even seemed to have overtaken the Hamlet, with the election of the new Land Council president (Report A7).

To summarize the situation as a whole for the district, the possibilities for communicative rationality at an influential level as things stood appeared to be scant, indeed practically non-existent.

7.4 **A Late Modern Perspective**

George Clarke has pointed out that the history of the urban/rural relationship in Australia has been opposite to that in most Western nations (Clarke, 1970, p.40). Elsewhere the cities have grown out of the agrarian society dispersed across the countryside, but in Australia the cities came first. It seems to me that, in a similar inversion between practices in Australia and Giddens' England, distanciation has been a central feature of both governance and commerce in Australia since the beginnings of European settlement. Nevertheless, distanciation in this country has operated somewhat differently to the Giddens model insofar as the local elite has often actively and effectively resisted it. As the Limits of Settlement spread out from the capital cities, the capacity for centralized power to operate in distant areas such as the district I observed lessened and weakened.
Disembodied is a different issue. The growth of electronic communication technology seemed to be reasonably well-established in the district for whose who could afford it (26.1), and activity in financial derivatives seemed to be as common amongst those who might benefit from it as anywhere else. For the less well-to-do, however, the technology was not as available (15.10), and whether people in this category even had a general idea about its usefulness was questionable.

In the case of economics the "perfect" competition of commodity markets still dominated the district. The situation seemed to have improved as far as market information was concerned, allowing the more technologically sophisticated commodity growers to deal in financial derivatives as well as physical markets. However, as the Grazier evidence showed (20.16), this new allurement may have been as financially dangerous as physical farming. It seemed to present a new kind of truly uncontrollable risk from the individual farmer's standpoint. The district was riding a boom, the latest amongst many as respondent BE pointed out (section 4.4.5), but might have been more at risk. The farmer could control physical conditions surrounding development of his crop, but not the distant financial markets. The possibilities of increases in district risk levels stemmed not so much from changes in local conditions as from changes far away. As international commodity producers benefited from increased financial deregulation and innovation, a circumstance could arise in which the district, for several local reasons not applicable elsewhere in the world, could require a limited form of protection along the lines suggested by Giddens. For example, if international commodity producers persisted with untrammelled environmental resource usage, water retrieval in the district might become the entity requiring protection (not the agricultural commodity itself).

The introduction by State agencies of a retrieval water strategy was not likely to change the risk situation of the individual farmer. I presume that political pressure would have led to financial recompense (or protection payment as noted above), as it had in my initiating decentralization experience. The individual might then have survived financially and even benefited, but the district as a whole might have lost out as the new-found cash was spent elsewhere. The Shire Council's Aftermath finance decision (A11.4), in itself apparently a product of globalization, may have been a bellwether in that respect.
The situation for governance seems to have been much the same. The Federal Minister turned up to talk to the Town politician (75.9). The most concerned State agency decided it no longer needed a local water distribution manager (58.10). Senior agency officers came when it suited them, but no longer with much difficulty. They sat in on the Village Offer meeting (55.1). Pump assemblies had become more capacious than the riverbed (10.7). The police arrived promptly when the weir was trespassed upon, in response to invisible surveillance (10.5). Distant governance now appeared to be on the doorstep, able to monitor more immediately and act more punctually if it so desired. Its gaze downstream was more panoramic, and its response locally to what it saw was more direct.

Most significantly, accountability for distantly supplied resources had become more immediate, and project selection processes more subject to centralisation (11.23). The effect on local participation became palpable. The Landcare chairman gave notice of resignation, and potential grant applications were abandoned as too onerous (72.8). One of my respondents was in essence dismissed locally, but reappeared re-empowered on the local scene with new distantly supported eminence (A4.2).

A direct confrontation between agencies and the local managerial group for social management of the district was a real pressure for change in governance. The Environmental Protection Agency delay of the Broadwater scheme might have been as much an indicator of this change as the Community Reference Panel Meeting. No longer could "merinos", nineteenth-century squatters and their modern day equivalents, thumb their noses at distant State authorities, not even by going over their heads to the Federal Minister. At another level, the reaction of the primary Aboriginal elder at the Aboriginal Reference Panel meeting may have been another expression of a local reaction to the distant agency challenge; similar in kind to the agency-water user debate and basically nested within it. Both came down to who would control local land and water.

As far as water management was concerned, despite all these new activities, distant governance continued to exhibit low quality in its management practices. Its technological focus was inadequate as an aid, too slow in developing real strength. If
the Hamlet circumstance is taken as a guide (for example, to potential remediation programmes), then distant formal governance might have conducted inquiries and provide funds, but implementation continued to fail at the local level despite repeated attempts. In the parallel black case, proposed solutions at the educational level failed to take hold -- still no one seemed to understand Aboriginal motivational drivers. At the general level, the latest local appointment of the coordination consultant seemed to be heading the same way.

In summary, it seems that the mixture of old and new still evident in the Town's main streetscape (Report 3) may have constituted a reasonable metaphor for the extent of Late Modernity impacts on the district. Recent changes were in tenancies, not ownership or building construction, and were thus not yet permanent (39.9, 48.1). Late modernity had arrived, but with dampened acceleration compared with the metropolitan centres although, around the corner and out of direct view, the real forces of change seemed to be gathering (A2.7, A2.9). In a similar fashion, the foundation blocks of local social management may have been under pressure, but not yet quite ready to move. It may take another generation before they shift. The Aftermath reports indicated how slowly real change happened in the district.

7.5 Post-structuralist/Postmodernist Overview

7.5.1 Introductory Note

In the discussion of post-structuralism/postmodernism influences in Chapter 5, I presented two approaches. The first was that the postmodern perspective is essentially concerned with no metanarrative being privileged; and the second that social life is dependent on simulacra (Leitch, 1996, p125). I begin this section by identifying the metanarratives apparently on view in the fieldwork reports.
7.5.2  Apparent Metanarratives Of The District Populace

For the least advantaged group in the district, the people of the Hamlet, the main metanarrative appeared to say that the Aboriginal people had been decimated physically a hundred and sixty years ago. They had also been denied their land, their residual religious icons (the lagoon), all social welfare in any terms other than the grudgingly physical (and even that provision, such as it was, was still inadequate). They had been persecuted by minor levels of white bureaucracy, marginalized physically from urban services (including employment), and forced into an educational system designed to destroy their culture. They had been decimated again a second time, this time psychologically as well as physically, by endemic alcoholism. Their metanarrative had nevertheless remained attuned to nature, and normal white law had little if any significance.

Some of the less disadvantaged group in the district, which in my view included the residents of the Village and transient crop workers, such as the Ethiopian women I saw in the supermarket (61.4), may have been working similarly to maintain their cultural metanarratives. For the bulk of the permanent members of this group, the black and white co-residents of the Village, the metanarrative seemed to be one of regrouping centred on the principle of live and let live. No rigid formal rules applied, and hence no “leadership” seemed necessary, but the governing principle excluded the rights of others to interfere blindly in one's lifestyle, and leaders would emerge (and succeed, even if “irrationally”) if those others went too far. The Village residents thus appeared to hold to a metanarrative of rights, with the corresponding obligation understood to be the exercise of personal peacefulness towards others. By and large it seemed to work. Formal white law and regulation might have been desirable in essence, but they remained somewhat irrelevant or inconsistent in practice. The black fraction of this population abhorred the destructiveness of the errant young, but stood back. Lifestyle remained attuned to nature for the most part.

The first more advantaged group in the district, long-resident locals generally characterised by Town residence or small rural property ownership, denounced this standing back. This group worked, as respondent BE said (19.9) and the unofficial survey implied (Report 42), on the basis of the “Protestant work ethic”, encouraged
the local newspaper, which in turn may have been only a reflection of the prevailing view. Under this perspective, materialism became the way towards salvation. This group may not have adhered consciously to deep religious belief, but underlying half-forgotten religious values appeared to survive as a sustaining metanarrative, emerging in the forms of individualism and the rights of property ownership. The latter in turn required the defence of property against all comers and conditions. Nature had no real place in this metanarrative except as a source of anxiety, as something to be overcome. Formal law, ie regulation of others in an unpredictable context was supported and demanded. But while this metanarrative dominated the first more advantaged group, residues of other metanarratives still remained, albeit only in vestigial form (the Toastmasters, the Councils, the Second Shopkeeper), or as a form of yearning (for Community, for example). These restraining secondary metanarratives were usually allowed to operate when they did not conflict with the dominant metanarrative in the public context, and exceptions seemed to have been allowed to occur privately.

For the most advantaged group in the district, which I see as the entrepreneurial and managerial well-to-do (socially as well as in business management and ownership), the power of these restraining secondary metanarratives was reduced, perhaps to nothing, in the broad public context of the district. The fieldwork gave no indication of their residual strength in private life. For the most advantaged group the metanarrative was unequivocally concerned with individualism, the proper rights of property and the rule of law, but only if exercised towards others. For this group the rule of law was and may have remained arbitrary as far as its members themselves were concerned, a matter of ipse dixit, as the street parking debate with the Grazier indicated (20.13). Occasionally this attitude rebounded visibly on this group’s members, in which case the arbitrariness had to be maintained at the expense of the rebounds, at least in public. But preferably this public visibility would be controlled (the District Promotions AGM, the Broadwater meeting), and behind-the-scenes action would be undertaken to change or avoid the appearances of arbitrariness when necessary. This approach essentially contained a laissez-faire component, not the least part of which was the unassailability of the idea of local social management and control by the district entrepreneurial group.
This group worked in the midst of nature in a way superficially akin to that adopted by the less and least advantaged groups, and nature did not make it anxious. However, the lack of anxiety in this case had two causes. The Grazier believed he controlled nature directly, and respondent BE that he had enough resources (information and money) to deal with it indirectly if and when necessary.

7.5.3 Apparent Metanarratives of the Remediation Industry

The most evident members of the remediation industry were the Federal Murray Darling Basin Commission in its role as environmental guardian/remediator, other Federal departments as financial controllers, and the State agencies concerned with remediation and public participation in the district. In all cases, the agents of these organizations encountered during the fieldwork were bureaucrats, with the larger political framework being a factor in the operational milieu. The water user group was a less evident member of the remediation industry, since it too wished to impose a remediation programme, although one in which remediation in other actors' terms may have been absent.

At the time of the fieldwork program, the Basin Commission’s metanarrative seemed to assert that it had to deal with an easily malleable population that had no intrinsic participatory function, and was to be directed. Since this population was essentially an instrument, only its superficial characteristics needed to be known, enough to increase efficiency and avoid dysfunctional reactions. The metanarratives of the other departments appeared to be that either the populace was not trustworthy financially, or that administrative constraints might (be permitted to) strangle outlays, or both.

At close range the State agencies appeared to follow two metanarratives, the first being the State's responsibility to provide the greatest good for the greatest number (which identified the district's managerial group as an adversary), and the second that they could bring about a successful conclusion to their adopted programmes. This view overrode any perceptions of agency 'immorality' by locals, presumably because it was considered to be a superior morality. The content of the greatest good and the identification of the greatest number were matters they appeared to believe remained
at their discretion, or those of supervising politicians (it is not clear which). However, part of the greatest good was determinable technologically, in ways they fully controlled. Parts of the contents of greatest good and the technological issue were rightly (in their eyes) not accessible to the general public or vested interests, who were not equipped to interpret them properly. Because junior officers might be too close to the populace, they should be overridden when necessary. The decision to override resided at a suitable (immunizing?) distance, irrespective of occasional adverse consequences caused by the concentrating effects of this distancing. Operational errors were regrettable, but compensation was to be avoided where possible, and minimized when not. Private complainants who threatened to take issues into the public arena were irrational but nevertheless awkward if not fearsome adversaries (not least because of the loss of face the bureaucrats might suffer from a finding adverse to them, as described by Serangi and Slembrouck (1996, pp. 87-117)). The remediation component of this metanarrative for the water management agencies seemed to consist of a view that it should be minimal, only enough to maintain bare survival of riverine biodiversity.

To the extent that the water users were part of the remediation industry, the clash between them and the agencies presented a clear fracture in the remediation industry camp. In their own metanarrative the most immediately engaged agencies may have been as much concerned with agency survival as with the environment in its own right. However, governance as a whole was beginning to take increasing and more specific interest through environment protection agencies. A clash of metanarratives was thus dimly visible in the agency camp, but remained unresolved in the fieldwork reports.

7.5.4 Metanarratives Overview

At least four distinct metanarratives plainly appeared to exist within the populace at large. The four were at best disharmonious, and at worst held the possibilities of severely disrupting district life. Indeed, that possibility had become reality in at least one major instance (the so-called race riot incident of section 4.4.4).
Several metanarratives also appeared within the remediation industry. The main two, those of the agencies as a group and of the water users, were in strong disagreement, and many others of a lesser nature also seemed to exist within the combined agency structure itself. In a sharp example, the right intentions and capacities for effective combination of State agencies in general were challenged repeatedly in the Aboriginal general and educational narratives. There they were shown to be ineffective and/or partial in their views, sometimes to the point of dereliction of duty.

In sum, the district presented a disharmony of metanarratives that seemed to be controlled by an overriding metanarrative of hierarchical structure. In this situation, the metanarrative of the managerial group controlled and restrained that of the first more advantaged group, apparently through its acceptance of the neo-liberal aspirations of safety and material success. In turn the attitudes and behaviours of that group controlled and restrained those of the less and least advantaged groups, for whom the ‘live and let live’ principle of the less advantaged people met the family feuding of the least advantaged without effective control and restraint at the interface.

In such circumstances, the Foucaultian perspective appears at first sight to be apt in terms of metanarrative multiplicity but not in terms of them all being equal. In addition to their local dominance, the water users hollowed out the agencies' technological claims by identifying multiple errors at both detailed and panoramic levels. The agencies were forced back to the authoritarian behaviour of the agency workshop and vague claims of impossibility (e.g. access to catchment modelling in the Aftermath reports). The capacity of the agencies to bring about a successful outcome to their campaign seemed solidly based in terms of direct access of power (although widespread resistance to enforcement of rain and overland flow regulation may lead to them again being bypassed). In terms of negotiation capabilities, however, it remained only a facade.

In historical terms the powers the State agencies wished to apply stemmed from a foundational history of colonial expansion. The powers the water users assumed arose from a history, emergent from that foundation, of a “squatter” resistance to centralized government (see section 5.3) that neo-liberalism had encouraged. The powers the whites deployed against the black people continued the environmental history of
scorching the earth (tree clearing was the equivalent before excessive water usage) before plantation of a new culture, as respondent AI's evidence indicated (49.4 - 49.6).

However, despite the strong position of the water users, the agencies were not prepared to let them win out, even if the only final solution took the form of large compensatory payments as occurred in the decentralization case at Albury-Wodonga. According to Foucault, the dominance of district metanarrative by the managerial group was anomalous. All the metanarratives were hollow in his terms, artefacts of history that were no longer acceptable. This viewpoint appeared to be justified in terms of the fieldwork narratives when the stalemate between the agencies and the water users became evident (A10.119). In another sadder example within the district, the least advantaged group was caught up in a striving to become socially (not physically) what it imagined itself once to have been, and to become it once again psychologically without escaping physically. Neither direction presented anything but a mirage. The conditions that justified the past were long gone, and the present escape routes (alcohol or drugs) were toxic.

In terms of historicism more generally, local official historical evidence did not mention the dark past of the district at all, let alone in detail, but focused only on the artifacts of the modern era. It was left to others (Milliss and the ex-district resident of section 4.4.3) to revive its documentation in sufficient vividness, but their voices in general remained unheard in the district except in the memories of those for whom that past still directly impelled the present (49.7, 49.10). For the isolated small farmer, his peers were his captors, and the surveillance of the Panopticon was now internalized in his mind (40.9). The whole self-sustaining system provided significant though unrecognized reinforcement for the neo-liberalism of the local managerial group.

Derrida took the view that the whole of the Western social milieu is stalked by the revenant spectre of Marxism. No direct evidence sympathetic to that view appeared in the district. The One Nation Party's attempt to establish itself, the only fieldwork evidence of an attempt at organization of any alternative view to the reigning district's metanarrative, revealed the powers of ostracism available to the local managerial group, already in evidence in the individual case of respondent BF. On these grounds,
Derrida’s spectralization seemed to have little application to the local operational milieu, but I nevertheless do not think that it may be excluded from consideration simply on that ground. A spectre is by nature ambiguous and difficult to see.

Thus the Foucaultian position seemed to be forcing itself on the district despite any resistance to that idea harboured by individual actors. Further, certain metanarratives appeared to contain traces of Derridean simulacra, particularly those held out by State agencies and water users. The exclusiveness of the former’s rights of determination evaporated before the political access of the water users to politicians and the legal intentions (themselves illusory) of the disaffected Village landholders. In turn, the force of the water users’ power evaporated before the insistencies of the agencies. One interpretation of this situation may be that the powers of the two parties balanced out, but alternatively the powers of both may be seen as non-existent.

7.6 Conclusion

The extent of Gemeinschaft in the district was now approaching a vestigial level, to the apparent dismay of many of those not caught up in the management of the present water-using “boom”. The people did not complain about the loss of Gemeinschaft as a whole, but the loss of individual aspects of it, such as the forms of family control that Community applies, was regretted. These complaints arose only when incidents brought home the loss directly to the complainants. Gemeinschaft was now more an almost nostalgic desire on the part of the populace as a whole than a real presence.

The Habermasian project had little place, in fact none in practice, in the “outward gaze” of the district populace. Nearly all discourse appeared to be based on strategic action. No arenas for rational communicativeness existed as far as the serious business of life was concerned. No conveners for it resided in the district or, if they did, they were under pressure (self-imposed or otherwise) to leave. Schoolteachers might have provided a potential pool of conveners, but their potential to do so remained low and apparently only crisis-driven. Local Government presented no
opportunity for rational communicativeness in general, and even less in terms of significant social issues such as environmental matters. The only venue where the phenomenon seemed to occur, the Toastmaster meetings, was in the entertainment field. The entertainment field, however, may not have been as marginal as it seemed. Other real action regarding remediation came from the recreational fishermen alert to maintaining their sport, and the social motivation behind Landcare membership should also not go unnoticed. The only real hope for other forms of rational communicativeness came, it seems to me, from the occasional good offices of locally-based non-agency biophysical professionals such as individual respondents AJ, AM and the Shire Engineer. These individuals not only had the necessary technical and administrative rational will bases but seemed alert to many of the natural will aspects of the situation. But the reasons for the presence of these mixed views seemed largely accidental or contingent as far as the study evidence shows.

Late Modernity's notion of distanciation appeared in an unusual form in the district. The problem was not that distant events and powers might dominate local decisions, for it had been thus for the district since European settlement in many respects. In one important aspect, local history had differed from Gidden's idea through the more or less traditional and successful resistance of local managers to distant rulers. They had been able to develop this resistance largely through Blainey's tyranny of distance (1966), but now that phenomenon was breaking down and the expression of distanciation in local terms seemed to be the conflict for local social management. In other words, distanciation continued to be blocked locally, but much more questionably.

Disembedded was exemplified most apparently in the use of financial derivatives such as crop futures. The corporate and more sophisticated individual farmers appeared to be familiar with such practices, but their more general impact on district life passed unnoticed in the fieldwork reports, if it existed at all. There seemed to be little district economic gain or loss from its use. However, on a more local level, it appeared from the young graduate's comment (61.11) that the smaller local farmer was being reduced to labourer status, with agricultural knowledge now disembedded into the hands of urban-located agronomists.
Thus in general, Late Modernity did not seem to be prevalent in the populace's "outward perspective" for the moment, but for me the impression survived that its manifestation was tied to the increasing Gesellschaft propensity in the district, and was therefore never far away.

The final stand-off between the agencies and the local managerial group may be interpretable as a neutralization of each other's powers. These powers in combination may then become as imaginary as the ghost of Hamlet's father conjured up by Derrida (1994). The product of this neutralization has a meaning and stature of its own, not merely the sum of the meanings and statures of the two contributing elements. It seems to me that one interpretation may reside in the continued relegation of the rest of the district to a kind of comfortable, but nevertheless eventually quite disciplined, proletarianisation¹. This phenomenon may have haunted the district situation in the same unnoticed, unrecognized and unaccepted way that Derrida saw it haunting the Western world as a whole.

It seems to me fair to sum up this Chapter by saying that the operational milieu was dominated for nearly all parts of the populace by the internalization of surveillance postulated by Foucault. Late Modernity did not seem to play a significant role. Community in the Tönnies sense remained a desire, but increasingly less evident in actuality. Real prospects for local remediation remained at the local level, apparently harboured by community interests, but Community itself no longer had strong champions. Transitional pressures were overcoming it, without real resistance being raised. Prospects for the Habermasian project were practically non-existent (though not necessarily impossible). The spectre of Derrida was not visible, but then spectres seldom are until realization dawns on the observer. Certainly a kind of proletarianisation seemed to exist, together with a continuing pressure towards its increase.

In the next and final chapter, I explore the meanings of all these findings, with emphasis on the prospects they hold for remediation realities.
NOTE TO CHAPTER 7

1 Perhaps their condition was even worse. In the light of the potted history of agriculture in the district (76.9), it seems to me the local white Town inhabitants were subjected to frequent economic reconstruction.
CHAPTER 8

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter by setting down a number of raw findings that I see emerging from my inquiry. By "raw findings" I mean first level, relatively superficial findings drawn from the fieldwork data without deep reflection on my part. In general, they stem from the original mindset I described in section 1.3. They appear in section 8.2.

In section 8.3, I address the meanings of these raw findings in terms of essence. To do so, I first consider the meaning I give to the idea of "essence" itself in section 8.3.1. On the basis then established, I move to devise a statement of essence for Figure 6 in section 8.3.2, and to do the same for Figure 1 in section 8.3.3. Finally I provide my responses to the questions of section 1.4 in section 8.3.4.

In section 8.4, I reflect on the positives and negatives of the journey described in this document. In section 8.5, I describe the end of the journey as it stands at the time of thesis completion, particularly with respect to changes in my personal perspective. From that perspective, bearing in mind also the strengths of the findings set out in 8.4, I set out implications for future research and for policy and action in section 8.6 and 8.7 respectively. In section 8.7, I also expand on a "nexor" concept developed earlier in that section.

Finally, I draw the thesis to a conclusion in section 8.8.
8.2 Raw Findings

I have previously mentioned that I considered fieldwork outcomes associated with the Public Race and Black stories to be relevant to the four-element conundrum. When the salient features of the Public Water story are arrayed against those of the Public Race and Black People stories, as they are in Table 6 (next page), a common pattern emerges after making allowance for an intervening 12 year period by which the Aboriginal issues seem to lead the environmental story. This Table is the justification I claim for inclusion of the Public Race and Black People Stories within the database generated by my enquiry. The significance of the Table is that the present environmental intervention still retains the possibility of not advancing remediation significantly for a further lengthy period unless additional as yet unforeseen steps eventuate.

Taking this relevance into account, my raw findings begin with a view that the broad consumer group constituted by the district populace as a whole was intrinsically alienated from the environmental debate, the general district social debate and the power discourse incorporating both. Its members viewed the world as though they were moving through a fog of events that they felt unable to select or control. I use the word "fog" because it seems to carry appropriate connotations of an obscurity of vision that isolated the individual, producing a context in which unseen forces were constantly anticipated on the basis of past experiences. These unseen forces could arrive arbitrarily and damagingly, and information about their causes or remedies was poor or non-existent. In such individually isolated circumstances, the threat of the Other seems almost a natural outcome, perhaps reinforced by the introversion and physical isolation of the district.

I detail these views in the following raw findings related directly to the thesis topic:

1. Traces of historical violence towards a generalized Other (mainly but not only black people) seemed to persist, though far less evidently than before (being now socially repressed);
TABLE 6
COMPARISON OF PUBLIC WATER AND BLACK STORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>PUBLIC WATER STORY</th>
<th>BLACK STORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Time relationship</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Twelve years earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Participants</td>
<td>• Government agencies; and</td>
<td>• Black residents of hamlet; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Water users (representatives of community in economic terms).</td>
<td>• Bureaucratic structure as a whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. First outcome of mediation approach</td>
<td>No action, and delay.</td>
<td>No action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. First response to first outcome of mediation approach (5)</td>
<td>Attempt at blunt use of political power.</td>
<td>Repeated complaints by investigator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Second outcome, (to first response (6))</td>
<td>Effort to circumvent bureaucrats by water users.</td>
<td>Limited physical rectification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Second response</td>
<td>Effectively at impasse, but grudging and gradual remediation seemed to be slowly occurring.</td>
<td>Limited appreciation of physical elements by black people, but no change in transference to white values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Third outcome (to second response (8))</td>
<td>• No significant physical remediation action, only minor actions by interested locals pursuing recreational goals.</td>
<td>• Intervention at highest possible political level, following newspaper disclosures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Implied and sometimes even explicit promises of large expenditures to meet water user claims of economic disadvantage, but situation still under negotiation.</td>
<td>• High-level coordinator of government agencies introduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Negotiation positions apparently dependent on other unrelated events (e.g. sale of Telstra).</td>
<td>• At last sight, competence of coordinator possibly under challenge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. The local newspaper, a major avenue for representation of the district populace to itself, seemed to contribute to district introversion and isolated forms of individualism;

3. Individual opinions about the river generally did not perceive it with any great strength and tended to swap specificity for environmental conventionalities, even platitudes;

4. Given its parallels to government intervention in the Black People and Public Race stories, the prospects of success of government action in the environmental remediation field appears to be remote unless extremely strong ("sledgehammer") intervention occurs, such as large monetary injections;

5. Neoliberal values and attitudes appear to feature strongly in the behavioural patterns of the agricultural entrepreneurial group and the agency representatives, but were not understood or accepted enough throughout the whole district to be taken as a worldview of the entire district situation;

6. The practical expressions of the concepts of Community and Society in the district were in tension but not equilibrium. The changing balance and its pace of change appeared to divide, or reflect a division of, the district populace into two relatively non-mixing groups;

7. Habermasian processes appeared to have little to no place in district considerations, and institutional arrangements through which they might operate may be difficult to establish, at least partly as a consequence of the preceding two findings;

8. A Giddensian Late Modernity template seemed to fit the district situation reasonably comfortably, possibly in concordance with the neoliberal finding (Finding 5) and the transitional tense state of the Tönnies relationship (Finding 6);

9. The identification of metanarratives amongst the district populace produced a disharmonious array when I considered the district populace as a hierarchy of groups at different levels of socio-economic advantage and participation in the local social and power discourses;
10. The agencies concerned with water management in the Basin also pursued a disharmony of metanarratives, apparently tied to the distances of various agency hierarchy levels from the district;

11. The ubiquity of hidden power and surveillance throughout the district seemed to accord with Foucault's notions more strongly than I had anticipated;

12. Overall, the district situation seemed to be one of confusion in which anxiety and lack of broadly diffused reliable information were significant agents of obfuscation;

13. While I did not find Derrida's concepts of spectralization and simulacra explicitly or actively present in the region, their very intangibility leaves their presence still possible and potentially influential;

14. The only effective remediation efforts appeared to arise on a local, near-personal basis.

In Finding 6, I note the changing nature of the tension that appeared to exist between Community and Society. The important aspect of this finding is the change rather than the tension itself, and the personal instabilities and uncertainties that it may induce individually and collectively in the district population. A second issue of importance in this finding relates to the distinction I draw between the groups of people who appear to favour and induce the tension changes, and the groups of people who do not enjoy them. This distinction seems to me to be so sharp as to effectively divide the community population into two layers. The two layers appear to stream alongside each other immiscibly, without much mixing even at the interface.

Several metanarratives appeared to exist disharmoniously amongst the populace/consumer group, underlying the alienation mentioned above. Similarly, the set of metanarratives apparently followed by government agencies and their individual officers appeared to be disharmonious within itself. Since neither form of disharmony seemed to be overtly recognised at the time of the fieldwork program, the prospect for the design and development of a practically successful remediation program appears remote. The actual delays flowing from the stalemate between the agencies and agricultural
entrepreneurs meant in the end that the only practical field applications of any remediation ideas seemed to occur at the individual local level, where Community rather than Society forms of support seemed to be available and operable. These initiatives were driven mainly by the individual self-interest of local individuals, most notably those of a recreational nature.

With respect to Finding 14, the active remediation mode existed only at the local level, where the degree of support needed in terms of information, understanding and resources appeared to be weak and weakening. A suitable response to this problem may lie in the establishment and support of local providers of information and resource gatherers, able to present countermeasures to current ineffective linkages between the local and the distant and to act as permanent champions for environmental interests. My term for these link people is "nexors", and I discuss them in detail in section 8.7.

Other findings, relating to methodology, are:

a) I no longer take my original unconscious assumption about Figure 1 (that all the elements of the initial map were equivalent in nature, i.e. independent) to be unequivocally correct. At least one element, remediation (insofar as it may actually occur), seems to me now to be dependent on the other three variables. I consider the other three to be independent, but only on an interim basis subject to further examination beyond the confines of this thesis.

b) Figure 1, the form of the initial "map" through which I expressed the original conundrum generically, did not lend itself to structuralist or phenomenological interpretive techniques.

c) I found an apparently more useful model for the three-independent/one-dependent variable situation in a commercial framework used for product market development. The three independent variables in this model are the remediating industry, the consumer group, and the operational milieu. Design of a remediation product capable of successful implementation depends on the natures and interactions of the three independent variables.


d) Different interpretive approaches seemed to be required for different parts of the interpretive pathway.

8.3 Essential Meanings of Raw Findings

8.3.1 The Idea of Essence

Prior to this point I have implied but not formally presented a definition for the term "essence" insofar as I use it in this thesis.

The existence of essences in social situations has been disputed by writers such as Foucault and Derrida. As noted earlier, Foucault opposed the ideas of governing metanarratives, and Derrida warned against social preoccupations with simulacra. On the other hand, Husserl's work depended on a presumption that essence may be identified, although the process for doing so may not be clear.

I do not seek to resolve this conflict in these pages. I adopt the stance that the issue is best resolved in the context of my inquiry by accepting the existence of essence if "essential words and phrases" may be found. In other words, I am allowing the existence of a conceptual bridge such as that suggested by Mohanty (Mohanty, 1997, p. 8), through which the perceptual difficulties involved with essence avoid incommunicability by converting the idea of essence into "meaning" through the mediation of language. By essential words or phrases I mean textual elements that carry the meaning of the essence concisely in their unwritten as well as evident connotations, sufficiently to impart the essential features of the situation efficiently and convincingly to a general audience.

In the practical context I am addressing in this thesis, the essence of a situation remains for me something perceived but not always directly sighted. It involves silences as much as words. Illustrations arise in the field narratives of the First and Second Shopkeepers included in sections 4.12.1 and 4.12.2. The essence of each situation relates to the values
expressed by the principal individual I observed in each case, and the values are expressed in their actions. In the First Shopkeeper case, the relevant actions are both verbal and physical. The verbal actions are the offer of coffee and the uninhibited questioning of the policeman about the accident. I call these verbal expressions "actions" because they directly convey, without surplus verbiage, a basic value. They are not descriptions of values, or assertions that such values are possessed, but implicit expressions of values in succinct terms. The physical action, of pushing past me to reach the accident, is to me a purer form of value-expression, since even the verbal expressions just referred to could have been inauthentic, their apparent authenticity being ultimately a matter of observer subjectivity. But the primitivity behind them, supported by the context (including tone and accompanying body language) left me with little room to doubt them.

In the Second Shopkeeper case the key elemental value was expressed by the words, "They don't know the meaning of life and death." Here there is no statement of what the meaning of life and death may be, but the expression of its inexpressibility (the "silence") contained within the sentence seems unmistakable to me. The value expressed in this case is that things exist which are inexpressible, that they truly exist despite their inexpressibility, that they must be accepted on that basis alone, and that reliance on dubious externalities (e.g. miracles) is not reasonable.

Hence in attempts to explain the essence of Figure 6, and thereafter of Figure 1, I look for key actions, physical and verbal, of a level of artlessness and primitivity through which the essence may be discerned.

Further, in order to deal thoroughly with the issue, it seems appropriate to ask the following questions:

1. Is discernment of essence an appropriate goal for the work or not; i.e., is it permissible and/or proper to claim that essences exist for Figure 1 or 2 at all?
2. If the answer to 1 is yes, then what is the emerging essence of Figure 6?
3. Is that essence transformable into the essence of Figure 1?
4. What then are the essence-based responses to the two questions of section 1.4.2?
5. If the answer to question 1 above is no, what if anything can be said about Figure 6?
6. What if anything may be said about Figure 1 if the answer to question 1 is no?
7. What if anything may be said about "answers" to the two section 1.4.2 questions if
   the answer to question 1 is no?

I address these questions in the next three sections.

8.3.2 The Essential Meaning of Figure 6

In the context of the more formal engagement between the agencies and the local
agricultural entrepreneurs, the would-be producers of new products see only one potential
remediation avenue, namely the reduction of water usage by the entrepreneurs. Since this
reduction appears to threaten the finances of the agricultural entrepreneurs (and thus
perhaps their psychic vitality as well), it is unacceptable to them. There is also the basic
ambiguity accompanying the role of the Community Representative Panel. To the
entrepreneurs this Panel was a place for joint decision-making, but to the agencies it was
a place where decisions were handed down for massaged acceptance. The ambiguity
ultimately revealed itself fully (which means it no longer remained an ambiguity) when
the agencies displayed the "bombshell" slide mentioned in section 4.7.2.

At the same time, the non-local agencies showed little understanding or acceptance of the
non-agricultural entrepreneurial portion of the community. The non-local agency people
did not contribute significantly to the local fish replenishment program. They did not
inform the locals about, or even take care with, the management of the weir. They
enforced accountability of such severity on the Landcare groups that well-intentioned
participants backed away. They met the locals (the Village Resident group) forthrightly
only when forced to do so by public opinion or threat of legal action -- and even then
overtones of inauthenticity still lingered.
In this light, the essence of the Figure 6 situation might be expressed as a lack of trust exercised in both directions, but the situation runs deeper than that. Senior agency personnel and the political masters were as caught up in the operational milieu as the local people, but whereas the locals saw the milieu as an incomprehensible mixture of the "standardized" lifeworlds I have considered, the government people were more attuned to Late Modernity conditions. In that situation, they saw the entrepreneurs clearly as neoliberals and reacted with regulatory action. They did not see the non-agricultural entrepreneurs clearly, and failed to realize that those people were in a postmodern or pre-modern state. They may not have been equipped to deal with such a situation in any case.

There is a long history of this kind of mistrust in Australian rural matters. It has always arisen from different worldviews. In earlier times these differing worldviews may have been specified in Roman versus Greek terms, as Kendall (1997) has indicated.

The Figure 6 situation is essentially one of proposed social change. In it, a part of the population (the changers) seek to draw the people they wish to affect (the responders) into a discussion to change the latter's mindset from negative to positive with respect to the changers' proposed plan. The changers do not wish their plan to be significantly or substantially altered in the process, but only to see the responders' mindset fundamentally modified. They propose a mechanism for doing so that is called "participation", but it is not a participation of equals in any intellectual, political or economic sense. The changers are not to be dissuaded from the core of their intent, but equally the responders they deal with are not inclined to change their contrary mindset.

Only the organized, i.e. institutionalized, responders are invited into the so-called participation process. No other responders exist for the changers. They have no interest in disorganized responders, who are not relevant on the grounds of organizational inaccessibility and perceived political weakness if nothing else. It may even be that restriction of the changers' interest to the organized responders and the ensuing stalemate
may present advantages to these two confronting forces. For the agencies, it continues and may even expand the demand for their present range of services, and for the entrepreneurs it means at least a short-term persistence of the status quo without draconian change (although they may be concerned about gradual erosion of their position).

The Figure 6 situation also essentially presents a circumstance where the remediating industry is so divided that it can at best present only are a "lowest common denominator" product to the consumer group. But the consumer group is also divided. In addition, a significant part of the operational milieu is characterized by rationalized notions of hierarchical power within the remediation industry, so entrenched that the consumer group labours under a condition of virtual surveillance that it resents.

That being so, the probability of the emergence of a successful remediation program is low. It would almost be accidental if it actually occurred. The consumer group accepts the remedies proposed by the proximate strategic forces (the remediation industry) but only nominally. It does not see itself as having any freedom to do otherwise. Exceptions arise only when crises inflicted by the power situation threaten individuals directly. Then consumer responses become "arbitrary" ("irrational", "chaotic") in the eyes of the power hierarchies, an unexpected fracturing of the discourse structure. However, that fracturing holds the key to any ultimate consumer success.

Figure 6, however valid it may be as a construct for commercial activities, produces no outcome in the context of the conundrum I pursue here. It represents a circumstance that is too fractured and brittle to be workable. In that sense it verges on representing a simulacrum, a will-of-the-wisp that seems attractive but does not function in any real sense.

I stress that this picture of the essence of the Figure 6 situation is how I see it in the absence of major interventions such as massive fund injections. The "keywords" applicable to the Figure are division, fracture, institutionalized unresolved tensions,
pervasive virtual surveillance, anxiety, alienation, and arbitrariness as an irremovable component of success. The last is probably the most significant aspect of the essence of the Figure 6 situation. No product launch in the commercial world could hope to cope with such confusion.

Under all these circumstances, the answer to question 1 in section 8.3.1 is evidently "yes" in the present context. I am able to indentify suitable values and describe them through key words or phrases. Questions 5 to 7 inclusive do not apply.

8.3.3 The Essence of Figure 1

From the raw findings, the essence of Figure 1 seems to emerge as a state of organised stalemate. Participation is given little significance if it is taken to mean fully participative debate of the forms proposed by Habermas. Remediation is almost stillborn. The remediation product ultimately offered is a trickle, not a flood. Remediation remains only an economic value, not a social or cultural one. Cultural value content (involving the representation of oneself as one currently is to oneself) remains static. Any broader "cosmological" notion such as spiritual value is entirely absent. The district remains locked in introverted considerations.

Figure 6 gives a lead to viewing this situation as representing another simulacrum. According to Derrida, Marx' enigma concerned the transformation occurring at the moment use-value supposedly became transformed into commodity value as it came onto the stage of the market. My enigma is that public participation, notionally an expression of democracy, appears to undergo a similarly mysterious transformation when it enters onto the stage of public governance. (An alternative but seemingly not tenable formulation could be that governance undergoes a transformation when it enters onto the market place stage of democracy. It seems untenable because the agencies repeatedly retreat into a non-consultative position when they wish.) The Derridian view was that no such transformation occurs, the idea is too mysterious, a spectre. According to Derrida,
the reality was that the prior state (in this case democracy) always contained a hauntingy, an embryonic potential for, the later state (in this case governance, the expression of
power). For my enigma, the prior state of democracy always contained the embryonic
potential of governance (with all its pursuant commodification/objectification of the
person).

The essence of the Figure 1 situation may be expressed through the following keywords
and phrases: evanescent relationships, unreality, empirical facadeism. The conclusion I
draw is that the arena I originally saw as established by the four elements of Figure 1 has
no real existence. Its instability in terms of real definability conceals a shifting game of
relationships with evanescent qualities capable of mutation almost at whim. But it is not
a vacuum, nor is its shifting nature a reason for saying it has no essence. It remains a
simulacrum, a presence that denies the vacuum. Even if it had been a vacuum, it seems
to me that it could still have an essence ("nothingness"), and as a vacuum might have
been fillable more easily than now, since the simulacrum is seen by many as a reality.

These statements are not intended to accuse individuals or place blame on any participant
or group of participants. I doubt that the Figure 1 situation could persist if it was merely
dependent on human error or venality, although these two features may exist to take
advantage of the systemic weakness of the situation. It seems to me that Figure 1
signifies a system that is simply inappropriate to the needs of the overall circumstance.
The inappropriateness may arise simply from its historical overwroughtness, as Exhibit 6
in section 5.5 implies.

8.3.4 Answers to Section 1.4 Questions

The stalemate situation developing out of the agency-agricultural entrepreneurs situation
involves the State governments. The Federal government is not so directly involved, the
Murray Darling Basin Commission being a coordinating rather than directive entity. This
lack of direct access to the situation, i.e. ability to influence local or even more broadly
based events, leaves few policy tools in Federal hands. Its only lever on State action is ultimately its superior funding capacity. Any wish it may have to expedite environmental remediation is therefore exercisable only through monetary avenues. Under these circumstances, it seems to me that the stalemate is the cause, stemming from which the "great waste of public money" mentioned in the first question of section 1.4.2 is the effect.

At a deeper level, the propensity to stalemate demonstrated by the States in the environmental case I have examined (and it seems to me the decentralisation case as well) appears to be the core of the matter as far as the first question is concerned. It may be that this propensity arises from the more instrumental role allocated to the States under the Federal-State system in this country. While the distancing entailed in the policy-setting role allocated to the Federal Government has evident advantages, it tends to remove that government's actions from the intricacies of application. The States, caught up in these intricacies, have little option but to pursue technology to its limits or face charges of irresponsibility. The delays entailed in applications of these technological procedures, coupled with their often arcane natures which may not be communicable to confronting parties, hold great potential for stalemate development. The great waste of public money may therefore constitute the basically occasional and seemingly random high costs associated with this aspect of Federal-State relationships. For that reason it seems to remain unnoticed and unconsidered in power discourses.

The matter of access to these power discourses seems to lie at the heart of the answer to the second question: "why does the community at large allow these great wastes to pass uncriticised?" I have already indicated that, at least in the context of the district I examined, many inhabitants lack both information about means of access to these discourses, sometimes to the point of not even knowing whether and where they exist. The extrapolation of this finding to the broader State or national populace seems to me to provide part of the answer to the second question, although the unreliability of extrapolation on this scale leaves me unable to preclude other reasons.
8.4 Adequacies and Inadequacies

8.4.1 Subjectivity as an Issue

In this section, I consider the quality of the data I have drawn upon to reach the conclusions set out in section 8.3, and hence the strength with which they may be asserted.

As already mentioned in section 5.1, an initial major purpose of this thesis was to approach the Figure 1 situation from as ab initio a viewpoint as possible. A danger associated with this approach was that material presented by respondents or perceived by me in the context of witnessed events might be accepted on too prima facie a basis.

While the great majority of the Chapter 4 material may be mundane and unremarkable, certain components may seem to be matters of opinion expressed either by respondents or myself. In such cases, I have taken care not to move beyond the boundaries of the data collected during the fieldwork period by imposing a suitable criterion to control expressions of opinion.

The test I apply when dealing with questionable issues is to consider the data soft when proposed by only one source, either a respondent or myself. I consider data to be relatively hard when supplied from by two independent proponents speaking in different circumstances. However, I consider data proposed by two proponents who have a common involvement issue, if it was contentious, to fall somewhere between soft and relatively hard points on this quality scale. For example, I asked two social workers whether domestic violence was significant in the town. Both answered vaguely to the effect that it was (4.9, 44.4). I consider that domestic violence may be part of the current professional mores of social workers, a topic to which they may be particularly attuned. For many social workers, particularly those not fully professionally trained, it may form a
substantial part of their overall interest in social work. Under the circumstances I find it difficult to contend wholeheartedly that domestic violence was indeed a significant issue in the district. It was unfortunate that I did not raise this matter with the district hospital, where harder data based on presentation of domestic violence victims may have been available.

On the whole, despite these concerns about subjectivity, I expect that most of the information contained within the stories in Chapter 4 (and in the raw fieldwork narratives behind them) will not surprise people who are active in relevant fields, and such people will not find them difficult to accept.

8.4.2 Further Considerations

Three omissions are evident in my inquiry. Firstly, it addresses only one geographical circumstance, a small district in the very large area known as the Murray Darling Basin. Secondly, since I take the view that qualitative analysis is a complement to, not a substitute for, quantitative forms of research, my inquiry lacks statistical analysis. Its strength lies in its emphasis on the capture of qualitative aspects of district life that tend to fall between elements of quantitative research. Thirdly, my degree of immersion in the community was short and fragmented. A deeper or different picture may have emerged if my stays had been longer or more connected. I address the implications of these omissions in section 8.6.

On a more fundamental level, I comment below on the various milestones passed in the cause of my inquiry, and the efficacy of each in turn.

The first milestone, the conversion of the two section 1.4.2 questions into the generic form underlining Figure 1, seems to me to be well justified by the disparate nature of the two initiating experiences. This diversity seems to indicate clearly the presence of some more general phenomena underlying both. The second milestone, the representation of
the generic form in a diagrammatic structure as Figure 1, is more problematical because diagrams are symbols that may be more intensive than text and, through the apparent integrity they display, may exercise a power to influence subsequent thinking unduly.

The third milestone was the hypothesis that the generic form contained an essence. One of the ways of producing inappropriate thinking may lie in the supposition that the situation expressed in diagrammatic form in fact has an essence. The mere integrity of the symbol may lead to this conclusion, because essence is a matter of integrity. I have already addressed this issue in section 8.3 to show that is no longer problematical, but it was at the beginning of my inquiry.

Given the uncertainty initially surrounding this matter, the decision to pursue an unstructured fieldwork program, the fourth milestone, now attains a higher level of justification than the one I offered in Chapter 3, namely the deficiencies of established disciplines. The fieldwork specification required broadening to encompass the notion that the very inquiry to which it is directed was itself questionable at the time of specification, and could only be substantiated if fieldwork outcomes based on an ab initio approach showed it to be proper.

The ensuing melange, coupled with the fundamental nature of the search for essence that motivated me in my inquiry, presented considerable interpretive difficulties. The fifth milestone, the choice of the phenomenological approach dependent on the existence of an essence, selected a process that ultimately showed itself to be overly theoretical and not practical enough. The same comment may be made about the Barthesian approach, at least in the format I understand it, because Barthes spoke of text as analogous to music (Barthes, 1977, pp. 162-163), another overly-theoretical approach in my experience.

That realization constituted the sixth milestone, with the seventh milestone being the recasting of the initial diagram into a new form. At face value, the initial and new forms appear to be reasonably compatible, because three of the four elements of one seemed to be reasonably transformable into three elements of the other (governance into
remediation industry, people into consumer group, remediation into remediation program). However, the fourth Figure 1 element, "participation", does not provide a strong sense of a parallel with the phrase "operational milieu". The consequence is that a discernment of the essence of Figure 6 might not have led directly back to a discernment of the essence of Figure 1, at least in the sense of one-to-one correspondence. The transformation I have chosen may therefore be considered suspect, but I note here that one-to-one correspondence may be a criterion that holds no meaning in the present instance. I consider one-to-one correspondence is always unlikely to be found in a sociopolitical inquiry, with the best to be hoped for being an aid to discernment.

With respect to interpretation, I ultimately employed several techniques in parallel, including inspection through a phenomenological lens, a search for absence, straightforward inspection without a lens, discernment of metanarratives and a search for simulacra. The choices have been made to suit the circumstances rather than for any more fundamental reason. Arising out of the intensity of focus I had applied during my first failed interpretive attempts, the choice of transformed diagram contained considerable elements of subjectivity and randomness, as already noted, but it does not necessarily follow that the interpretive techniques to be applied to it should be similarly subjective and random. The eighth milestone, constituted by the choice of a variety of techniques, cannot be justified on that ground. Its justification lies elsewhere in that, prior to embarking on the phenomenological interpretive, I faced a choice as to whether to follow a phenomenological, anthropological or ethnological interpretive procedure. I chose the phenomenological method because its focus was on essence, the goal of my inquiry, but a degree of arbitrariness still remains in that choice. No strong "causal" link is available to justify it. The only degree of justification for my overall approach appears to come from J van Maanan, who seems to mingle the notions of ethnological interpretation and phenomenological thought fairly readily (van Maanan, 1988, pp. 34-35), finally accepting on an impressionistic approach as a reasonable possibility (p. 133).

One outcome of this process was a positing of brandedness as a revealing way of explaining the field evidence relating to the people (consumers) and their relationship to
governance. The degree of acceptable brandedness may be a measure applicable across the intervening spectrum between the apparent poles of Society and Community\textsuperscript{1}. People in the Village produced their own brand-name (the Club), but apparently without knowing it. The Deputy President of the Village Land and River Care group produced and successfully employed a temporary brand name, drawing into its ambit a brand adjunct of legal perseverance that eventually resolved the issue facing his group. Elsewhere, the inability to ascribe a brand-name broke down interpersonal communicative possibilities, sometimes resulting in name calling, in an attempt to force a brand-name (for example, the water users as a "mafia" (Report 10)) when none fell naturally to hand. Where once an artist such as Banjo Paterson (author of the poem appearing in Report 17) might have filled the gap (his poem revolves around brand-names), current district artists cannot or will not.

Taking all the above into account, I consider that the approach taken in this thesis may be unusual, but is not thereby unreasonable as a whole. Certain aspects may seem to be less justifiable, in which case apparent findings dependent on should be treated cautiously, as I have already noted. In the next section, I progress this note of caution by outlining further research needs and possibilities, but also pursue more certain outcomes from the inquiry into implications for policy and action programs.

8.5 End of the Journey?

In this section I outline the changes in personal mindset that I see as having occurred through the course of the inquiry.

As described in section 5.4, my efforts to pursue Barthesian and phenomenological methods were not successful. The processes uncovered riches in nuances in the fieldwork reports that I had not noticed during my initial cursory readings of them, but this richness
became a source of confusion. In particular, I seemed to lose the capacity to discern significance.

However, these experiments produced significant outcomes. The first was a re-examination of the basic understanding I had regarding the nature of social inquiry. In section 1.3 I described the particular view I held of society and its exploration at the start of the work. Later, during early literature reading and the conduct of the interpretive experiments, I came to understand that this initial perspective was far from present-day thinking on both topics.

I now realize more completely that the natural scientist views part of the world (but only part) with great clarity. That crystal-clear view allows him/her to describe the world in both static and dynamic terms, though perhaps with more difficulty in the latter case. The success of such views in biophysical fields is apparent everywhere in the modern-day world.

The social scientist following a quantitative (or sometimes a single discipline) approach tends to pursue a similar path, but society does not present the same picture as the natural world. The opportunity for crystal-clear vision does not exist, because all contact between the observed social world and the observer occurs through the clouded medium of language. Further, the external social observer is faced with a situation where reflexivity is available to the observing subject, and their social responses become correspondingly unpredictable. The social investigator may improve his/her viewpoint by joining the observed group, in the hope of understanding its reflexivity characteristics, which is the reason I stayed in the Basin district for three months. But, however useful that length of stay may have been, it was not enough. Even the residents recognized (perhaps excessively) that full cognition of the district’s characteristics (some of which no doubt show themselves quite subtly) required several years’ residence (15.15).

The second significant outcome from the experiments only emerged later. I have noted the adverse conclusion I drew from initial attempts at phenomenological interpretation. I realized that I had been trying to apply it to the full narrative set as though I could grasp
the whole of an exceedingly complex situation involving many points of view held by a wide variety of people with a concise statement conveying a single idea of essence. It seems to me that a central aspect of the essence of the situation itself is that it defies such one-dimensionality and permanence.

8.6 Implications for Future Research

In many respects, the work I have done has accomplished no more than the opening of a door on a new way of looking at polity issues inherent in the ideas of Murray Darling remediation. I have already remarked that my inquiry contains three omissions: it addresses only one geographical circumstance; it lacks statistical analysis; and my degree of immersion in the community was short and fragmented.

The first topics to consider for further research stem from these omissions, which provide self-evident and straightforward directions. The most obvious outstanding work program comprises an extension of the limited geographical span of my fieldwork into other parts of the Murray Darling Basin. The Basin cannot be presumed to be homogeneous in its social and economic characteristics. At the very least, since two large Basin rivers dominate the catchment pattern, a similar fieldwork program should be carried out on the other main river that I did not explore. Further, substantial tributaries also drain the Basin, some presenting ecosystems quite different from those of the district I examined, and a broader work program should encompass a selection from these different regions.

Qualitative research can no more claim to be a comprehensive method for examining the complexities of a sociopolitical circumstance than quantitative research. Both the district I examined and those other districts towards which I believe work should now be directed should continue to be examined through quantitative as well as qualitative techniques.
However, this is not to say that qualitative research should not be expanded into the new districts yet to be investigated. In these new locations, the periods of immersion should be less fragmented and longer. My work in the district I examined should serve as a suitable pilot. The period of immersion may range as high as one year for a stranger to a target district, but may be shorter if other more localized observers and investigators take to the field.

It seems to me that the desirability of greater immersion may hold the key to deeper, expanded and more insightful versions of the "essential words and phrases" mentioned in section 8.3.2. I borrow comments ascribed to Blum who said about Levinas' thought that it may "not develop through a series of carefully reasoned arguments but rather by semi-poetic, rhapsodic and grammatically elusive meditations around certain central intuitions and metaphors" (quoted in Matthews, 1996, p. 164). Selection of these somewhat extreme forms of representation may seem irrational, but only because they stand outside the boundaries of conventional methods of description. In the same way as the findings in section 8.3.1 suggest that "irrationality" may prove more effective than rationality in actual remediation programs, so the less rational research formats may prove more ultimately effective than the too-rational approach that may be said to characterize my inquiry.

I also consider that an intermediary step prior to design of further work would be a carrying out of one or more Kelly's Repertory Grid surveys (Fransella and Bannister, 1977) in the district I examined. This second form of inquiry, conducted after the quasi-anthropological style of investigation I have carried out, would determine the issues of interest to residents more specifically and systematically.

The three directions indicated above are self evident and straightforward openings for additional research. However, the issue is not as simple as they may indicate. They may extend the breadth of inquiry and understanding, but do not sufficiently address the dimension of depth. The methodological question still remains substantially unresolved, in at least two regards. Firstly, the use of Figures 1 and 6 and the transformation process
joining them should be explored and justified more substantially than I have done. Further, the presence or otherwise of Derrida’s concepts in the operating milieu remains unresolved, and should be probed more deeply.

8.7 Implications for Policy and Action

8.7.1 New Intermediations

Notwithstanding the needs for further research outlined above, my inquiry program indicates clearly the need for immediate policy action conforming with the findings in sections 8.2 and 8.3. Clearly remediation work on the Basin should not await the outcome of a protracted research program, if only because such a program may repeat the procrastinations observed in the case of the district hydrological investigations.

The proposals for greater immersion set out in section 8.6 seems to me to align with several of the raw findings appearing in section 8.2, namely Findings 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12. From Finding 2, I draw a need for additional forms of representation of the district populace to itself, in more dispassionate ways that may diminish introversion and avoid undue emphasis on individualism. From Finding 6, I draw a need for a calming of the tension between Community and Society pressures in the district. It seems to me that this tension may only be relaxed by the presence of intermediaries with more substantive leadership abilities, a point I develop further in the next two sections. Finding 7 highlights the absence of Habermasian processes, and the filling of this gap also seems to me to require the intermediaries just mentioned. Through the introduction of Habermasian discourse and the relaxation of Community/Society tension, the metanarrative disharmonies of the district identified in Finding 9 may be mollified. And finally, the problems of overall confusion, anxiety and lack of diffused information may be appropriately resolved. These suggestions extend the idea of immersion for improved
observation and interpretation into a new direction. A new emphasis arises for greater and longer exposition of the essence of the district situation to its residents.

I coalesce all of these ideas into an expression of the desirability of identifying and encouraging people of appropriate calibre in the Murray Darling Basin to carry out the functions emerging from the raw findings I have just mentioned. I term these people "nexors", and move to further discussion on their role and characteristics in the next two sections.

8.7.2 The Contextual Role of Nexors

The first comment I make is that nexors may or may not be employed agents of governance. Several people observed to be successful nexors in the field worked for government, but the agencies they came from held some idea of social advocacy as a central feature of their function, at least intrinsically. For example, the various drug, alcohol and parole workers mentioned in the field narratives were so employed. On the other hand, the activities of officers from biophysical agencies directly involved in controversial river flow matters sometimes appeared inappropriate, and on occasion even disruptive. On some of these occasions the roles may even have been intended to disrupt, for example in the case of the State policy-maker (51.27), but on the whole other disruptive influences seemed inadvertent.

For these reasons, evident in the Aboriginal as well as environmental discourses, it seems that direct agency participation and distant policy formulation should be limited and controlled. Nexors may occasionally seek "expert" advice, but final decisions on the usefulness or application of this advice should be left in the hands of the locally based nexor rather than the expert.
It also seems evident that the nostalgia expressed for Community is clearly a topic for nexors to face quickly, which introduces a general question as to the desirable characteristics that nexors should possess.

8.5.2 Characteristics Appropriate to Nexors

It may appear that nexors may hold similar roles to community development workers. Certainly the role specification for general community workers holds elements that appear desirable for nexors. Ife (1995) lists several roles for the former, in groups he labels facilitative, educational, representational and technical. Amongst the facilitative roles he includes social animation (the ability to interest and stimulate), mediation and negotiation, support of people involved in community structures and activities, the building of consensus, effective group facilitation, identification and use of the skills and resources of others, and organization. He describes the appropriate individual as "being the person who ‘makes things happen’" (Ife 1995, pp.203 - 209).

Amongst the educational roles he lists consciousness raising, informing, confronting and training. His representational roles include obtaining resources, advocacy, ability to use the media, skills and public relations and networking, and sharing knowledge and experience. His technical roles include data collection and analysis, computer familiarity, and abilities in verbal and written presentation, management and financial control. Finally, he adds needs assessment and evaluation.

Ife sets up a similar list for skills that includes analysis, awareness, experience, capacity to learn from others, intuition, and other attributes flowing directly from the roles already mentioned earlier.

I have little doubt that all these factors are relevant to nexor tasks, but Ife himself points out that checklists such as that just given do not add together to produce a community development person. Further, I doubt whether the exemplars identifiable in the fieldwork
narratives would lay claim to all or perhaps even most of them, assuming they were made aware of their social advocacy capabilities. I also doubt whether formal education in any or all of the features Ife describes is necessarily desirable, for such formal education normally takes the nature of rational will when natural will may be a more desirable attribute in the district context. Neither the Town-based drug and alcohol worker nor the Toastmaster President held formal qualifications for their roles. Additionally, since tertiary-educated people are rare in the district and often only short-term residents in any case, a requirement for formal education levels may even inhibit advocacy emergence.

Further examination of the parts played by the last two examples mentioned, and the possibility of bringing about Habermasian communicative rationality in the district, lead me to propose that the key criteria for local environmental advocacy are firstly skills in arranging formal and informal encounters where the central topics are environmental concern and remediation, and secondly the enthusiasm to maintain programs in these fields. The second basic requirement is both the wish and the capacity to stimulate people to reduce their internal unnamed anxieties. There should be no language thresholds of either of the two kinds exhibited at the scientist/extension worker meeting. The role should be long-term, perhaps seven to ten years after an appropriate probation period, in accordance with the idea of generational timelines mentioned by the Catchment Committee member AJ (section 4.9.2).

With respect to financial resources, external funding for nexor support should be limited to levels where rigid accountability is no longer a serious issue. I acknowledge that the scale of the Basin is such that small district-based amounts may aggregate into a considerable sum nationally, but the diversity of expenditure points and the costs of accountability should be considered in assessing overall risk profiles.

I propose that nexors should be, or quickly become, embedded deeply into community life, but note that the obstacles faced by nexors may be considerable. For this reason, the people concerned should be robust in terms of their own inner calmness, able to tolerate and manage the threats of ostracism the district is capable of projecting, sufficiently
communicative to impart inner calmness to others, and informed enough to convey the
meanings of their work in an environmental context. Since no individual is likely to be a
paragon in these terms, and since burnout is always possible, strong support and respite
facilities appear to me to be an essential part of a social or environmental advocacy
program. Many of the characteristics I have mentioned amount to the attainment of an
active and intrinsically interested maturity level in the individual, which should not be
confused with age. For example, the white convener of the Aboriginal Reference Panel
seemed to lack this characteristic, but the much younger water quality officer present at
that meeting did not (52.11).

8.8 Concluding Remarks

In this thesis I have drawn attention to conundrum that I believe to be of substantial
significance in the context of the Murray Darling Basin, and perhaps even in a broader
national context as well. It is clear that the work described in this thesis constitutes no
more than the beginnings of an exploration program of the situation that has concerned
me. It does not offer a comprehensive description of the essence that I have sought to
discern, nor comprehensive answers to the questions posed in section 1.4. However, it
has opened up the topic in general, considered some of the questions associated with
methodology, and outlined an array of possible feature research activities that may
contribute to a wider understanding of the fundamental issues I have raised.

NOTE TO CHAPTER 8

1 I have already acknowledged that Tönnies was insistent that they did not constitute poles.
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