

# Never giving up: Negotiating, culture-making, and the infinity of the archive

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## Abstract

Archival returns are a significant issue of concern for Indigenous peoples in many settler-colonial contexts. This chapter focuses on one example from Central Australia, Ara Irititja, to reflect on how an archive might simultaneously preserve 'culture' and also reflect, accommodate, and inspire cultural change. We feature the words of an Anangu 'senior law woman', Janet Inyika (affectionately known as Mrs Never-Give-Up), and our co-authorship is consistent with this community archive's commitment to co-production, yet also extends Inyika's social justice work into the future. Together, we argue that a collaborative, intercultural approach to archiving, in conjunction with the affordances of digital media, facilitate negotiations that are culturally appropriate, and not threatening. Ara Irititja is inspiring the production of a new genre of archival metadata: advance directives on what to do with representations of a person upon his/her death. These words are urging a shift in protocols for the correct treatment of photographs, asserting new domains of individual authority, and establishing the archive as the proper medium through which these should occur. The archive is also a site through which culture-making is never complete, always ongoing – indeed, infinite.

**Keywords:** Central Australian Indigenous people, digital media, intercultural productions, access protocols, archives

## Reimagining archives, extending returns<sup>1</sup>

Ara Irititja is an archive built to manage photographic and other media collections in Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, and Yankunytjatjara (NPY) speaking communities in Central Australia. The archive originated in the early 1990s as an extension of land rights activism in the region in the 1970s–1980s: elders were becoming increasingly aware of the existence of photographs, taken by missionaries, teachers, visiting doctors and nurses, and others, and then taken away to be stored elsewhere. Two men, Peter Nyangu and Colin Tjapiya, enlisted the help of an anthropologist (Ushma Scales), an archivist (John Dallwitz), and information technology (IT) professionals (Martin Hughes and, later, Douglas Mann) to seek their return. These efforts were grounded in growing political activism across Australia to reinstate Indigenous peoples' control over their own lives and representations.

Photographs, in the context of Ara Irititja and its origins, are objectifications of Anangu knowledge, culture, relationships, custodianship of and responsibility for land, community, and personhood.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, they are things with a unique status. In this chapter, we suggest that negotiations over their 'return', including keeping them 'open' to or 'closed' from viewing, preserving analogue originals, and circulating digital replicas, are ongoing and offer a particularly rich view into contemporary culture-making (Myers 1994).

Photographs are both iconic and indexical, re-presenting a moment in time and also, always, standing in for multiple (hi)stories. Photographs have a long history in Australia. Photographic technologies arrived on the continent in the 1840s: the oldest extant photograph of Aboriginal people is from 1847; and images have been used both in colonial discourses to represent Indigenous people as 'others' and taken up to recontextualise and redress those histories (Edwards 2001; Lydon 2005; Pinney & Peterson 2003).<sup>3</sup> Once they enter the digital archive, photographs – unlike their analogue form – are also infinitely replicable without any loss of quality or fidelity to an original.

For a group of people who sought the return of photographs as a reclamation of control over their own lives, infinite replicability poses a great challenge: who is in control on the ground? How is control negotiated and renegotiated over time? What does control look and/or feel like? Who has responsibility for what? Ara Irititja is a digital archive, a term that stands for both an infrastructure developed and maintained to facilitate this control, and a mechanism for the preservation of its contents for an imagined perpetuity into an indefinite future. Via Ara

1 As co-authors, we have given much thought to how best to acknowledge our respective contributions to this piece. Sabra Thorner has taken the lead on the academic argument. Linda Rive has worked with Anangu since 1980, has done extensive oral history and translation work for Ara Irititja, and has generously translated, clarified, and/or contextualised uses of the Pitjantjatjara language throughout this chapter. John Dallwitz, the manager of Ara Irititja from the beginning, is deeply committed to the power of culturally responsive archival practice. Janet Inyika – 'Mrs Never-Give-Up' – is quoted at length below, and we recognise her words, in pursuit of social change, as shared authorship. We – Sabra, Linda, and John – write in honour of Janet, and in so doing seek to follow her urging to keep her work alive beyond her lifetime.

2 Anangu is the Pitjantjatjara term for 'person' or 'people'.

3 There were earlier representations – watercolour paintings, engravings, and drawings from the late 18th century (see Smith 1988: 133–158; Donaldson & Donaldson 1985). These are important precursors in establishing visual media as significant in producing knowledge about Australian Indigenous peoples.

Irititja, photographs have become a significant medium of Anangu cultural reproduction, including both the reinforcement of traditional norms and their continuous reinvention.

From its earliest days, Ara Irititja has been both an archive in the conventional sense – an apparatus storing knowledge – and a reflexive attempt to expand this orthodox institution from one of state control and surveillance via the preservation and retrieval of texts (Stoler 2009) into a permeable place and a dynamic process where knowledge could be produced, activated, and transmitted in multiple media and by multiple (and multiply-situated) actors (Derrida 1998; Anderson 2004). This has been ongoing, intercultural work over almost three decades and across several generations of digital technologies: to build infrastructures that reflect and facilitate Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing things (Martin & Miraboopa 2003), and to accommodate the specific material conditions and cultural requirements of remote-living Aboriginal people.

In Australia's central Western Desert, these conditions include pervasive sand and dust, intense heat, persistent pests, limited infrastructure in and between small communities across vast distances, and inconsistent and/or unreliable internet services. There is little personal ownership of computers; desktops and laptops tend to be held in schools, libraries, community offices, art centres, and other communal spaces, and used in small groups. This is starting to shift, as the last several years have seen a rapid proliferation of smartphones and tablets, and the rollout of 4G mobile coverage to APY communities in early 2018.<sup>4</sup> Yet challenges to access remain, as mobile data becomes a significant personal expense, so that WiFi passwords or locations of unsecured WiFi networks are eagerly sought. Those who can afford to maintain a phone line and internet (ADSL) service also face high demand from relatives (in a way not dissimilar to demand for transport).

Ara Irititja has been available on mobile devices since 2015. There is also a downloadable app called Ara Winki (launched in 2017), which contains a selection of archive content that can be accessed offline, and serves as a gateway through which users might enter the full archive if they wish to know more about a particular archive item.

While Anangu are often fluent in multiple languages, they might not be literate in English or comfortable sitting in front of a computer screen, typing on a keyboard, or manipulating a mouse. Eye health remains a major concern (Kaplan-Myrth 2004). The built-from-scratch home for 'returned' photographs had to overcome what Michael Christie (2004: 6) has called the "tyranny of text" and the linearity of search and retrieval of conventional databases. The Ara Irititja founders sought a different structure and approach for preserving and activating things with such cultural importance.

The 'returns' upon which Ara Irititja was founded have never been simply about the relocation of physical objects from elsewhere back to their sites of origin. The archival drive

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4 The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (or APY) Lands are a semi-autonomous region, as delineated in the *Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act* (1981). The Ara Irititja project began in these Lands in the far northwest corner of the state of South Australia, with the network growing to neighbouring communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, including predominantly Ngaanyatjarra speakers. Quite apart from modern administrative boundaries, the region has always been united as a speech community of mutually intelligible dialects of the Western Desert languages; Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, and Yankunytjatjara (NPY) speakers also share many cultural ties.

(Derrida 1998) here has also been motivated by a political commitment to expanding what an archive could be and could do. Archives tend to be premised on the preservation of knowledge, usually objectified in the form of text-based media (such as letters, documents, files, or books), in the interest of extending the power of a centralised authority, usually the state. This authority is intertwined with notions of a definitive history, and the everyday work of an archive is propelled by the value invested in comprehensiveness and finitude. In contrast, the founders of *Ara Irititja* wanted to enable ways for *Anangu* to transmit knowledge, pushing the ‘archive’ to allow for multiple coexisting voices and perspectives, to be always revisable, and therefore infinite. Photographs had to be connected to the stories they inspired.

Anthropologist Fred Myers writes of “the fundamental condition that Indigenous people in Australia, as in other places, have been compelled to live through the representations of others ... this [is a] defining problem of Indigenous life” (Myers 2006: 252). The existence and persistence of *Ara Irititja* are reflexive, recursive responses to this condition – that Aboriginal people have had to live their lives through the representations of others. This archive was forged to preserve and activate Indigenous ways of knowing, as an alternative to the archive as an instrument of colonial power relations. At the same time as it extends the striving for more *Anangu* control and autonomy into a new medium, *Ara Irititja* is also a profoundly intercultural production (Myers 2004), an ongoing process of collaboration with non-Indigenous co-producers. This is a paradox exemplified in our writing together.

## Returning photographs

In the early 1990s, as Dallwitz and others searched for and discovered photographic collections relevant to *Anangu* interests, it was quickly decided that the return of the analogue media was impractical. The climate and lack of infrastructure in the Central Australian desert are not conducive to conventional archival preservation in the form of the temperature- and humidity-control standards of galleries, libraries, museums, and other kinds of archives. More importantly, too many people had claims to the photographs. Photographs are not objects in the conventional sense of property, a tangible thing with a singular owner that can be alienated from that person.<sup>5</sup> Instead, photographs inspire stories, extend rights to self-determination, and affirm connections between people, kin, and their significant places.<sup>6</sup>

Why and how have photographs come to enjoy this special status? Before *Ara Irititja*, *Anangu* had little or no visual access to representations of themselves. Viewing brings people joy. Digitisation was a strategy to allow visual access to photographs to be as expansive as possible, enabling people to see and feel connected to kin, country, and the practices of the past (rituals, songs, dances, stories) that are repeated in the present to maintain cultural life.

As Haidy Geismar asserts, digitising inherently involves multiple levels of translation: images, words, sounds, and objects are translated into binary code, and code is in turn (re)

5 Our argument is here inspired by Myers (1989), a powerful account of how, for Central Australian Aboriginal people, land is inalienable.

6 Our thinking is grounded in the efforts to rigorously rethink how objects are understood, especially with the advent and proliferation of digital technologies; see Myers (2004); Edwards, Gosden & Phillips (2006); Salmond (2012); Bell, Christen & Turin (2013).

translated into representational effects and outputs (Geismar 2013: 256). Translation is itself an anthropological metaphor, as Sue Gal chronicles, including a family of productive processes in which text (or object, or practice) changes form but is also imagined to, somehow, simultaneously, stay the same (Gal 2015: 226). In the case of Aṛa Irititja, digitising photographs (and making them accessible via a network of computer workstations) allows them to be reincorporated into Aṇangu cultural lives and political aims. Women sing along with digital video (tapping their feet and moving their hands in time with their filmic selves); and when the Aṛa Irititja archive is in use, laughter and shout-outs to anyone in earshot abound: *Come, see your sister! Ha ha, look how young you were!*

The digital object is not equal to the analogue object, nor is the former a surrogate or replacement for the latter. Jim Enote, former director of the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center at Zuni (New Mexico), is critical of digital repatriation initiatives, provocatively asking, “If digital surrogates were so good ... why didn’t the institutions, researchers, and scholars keep them, and return the original, non-digitised, analog object to the community themselves?” (Bell, Christen & Turin 2013: 7–8). Enote insists on acknowledging the responsibility embedded in transmitting Indigenous knowledge: “when information comes back ... whether images, songs or materials come back to a museum or library in a native community ... it becomes a beacon, a catalyst for communities for revising, for cultural change, for social change” (Bell, Christen & Turin 2013: 8). Digitised photographs in Aṛa Irititja allow for and inspire new kinds of activities, new utterances, and new social relations that are part of contemporary culture-making. The archive is generative.

In the case of Aṛa Irititja, the return of photographs has been inextricable from larger political claims to Indigenous peoples’ right to represent themselves, to control their own knowledge and lives, and to have the autonomy and freedom to continue to transmit knowledge in media that are culturally appropriate. As an increasingly rich literature is demonstrating, return is only the beginning of a shift in power relations between Indigenous peoples and the institutions holding their cultural materials.<sup>7</sup> Further, we must all reckon with ontologies in which objects are not inanimate. As Aaron Glass argues, objects both represent the past and “become expressions of revitalized cultural identity” (Glass 2004: 126). Photographs, in Central Australia, are being mobilised in this way, incorporated into vibrant and ongoing cultural work.

From its inception, Aṛa Irititja has accommodated annotations to photographs in text (typing into predefined database fields) and audiovisual recording features in which stories become part of the archive in real time. Photographs inspire storytelling (see Thorner & Dallwitz 2015). Photographs and the stories they inspire are valued as Indigenous knowledge, and therefore are in need of preservation for the future. Also, knowledge is treated holistically; photographs and stories are presumed to belong together, and much archival labour is invested in shaping digital tools to approximate, replicate, extend, and honour this. Haidy Geismar, mobilising classical anthropological theory (Mauss 1990; Strathern 1988) to “define

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7 See Bell, Christen & Turin (2013), the introductory article to a special issue of *Museum Anthropology Review*, which includes many wonderful examples. See also Peers & Brown (2003); Glass (2004); Kramer (2004); Brown & Peers (2006); Krmpotich & Peers (2014).

the digital,” suggests that the “blurring nature of persons and things ... in which objects and voices, information, experience, knowledge, images, and sounds become part of the same ‘thing’” (Geismar 2013: 258) long preceded the advent of digital technologies. In her fieldwork in Vanuatu, a relational database to manage museum objects fitted into “a preexisting understanding of how materiality and sociality are mutually constitutive” (Geismar 2013: 258).

For Anangu, who has access to what knowledge is strictly controlled by gender, seniority, initiation status, and kinship group. The maintenance of men’s-only and women’s-only archives and the treatment of photographs of the deceased are two ways in which Ara Irititja has worked to enact and replicate Indigenous protocols in digital form (Thorner 2010, 2013). ‘Protocols’ are guidelines for culturally correct, ethically good behavior that are not necessarily confined to or constrained by Western legal regimes (see Anderson 2008, 2011; Anderson & Younging 2015; also Morphy 2015). As with culture itself, protocols are dynamic and negotiated in ongoing culture-making processes.

The next section focuses on an example of one senior law woman’s words about what to do with her photographs after her death.<sup>8</sup> As a reflection upon the mission explored in this volume, this example provides one glimpse into what archival returns look like in Central Australia. We use an extended quote to draw out the stakes of this work – the repatriation, reactivation, and re-narrativisation of photographs – and to illustrate why it’s so urgent and important for contemporary Anangu. Aaron Glass has noted that:

[t]here is a huge diversity of terms used in the discourses of object return, all of which address the undoing of some past deed through use of the common prefix ‘re’: repatriation, restitution, reparation, restoration, recovery, reinstatement, re-emplacement, reunification, reconstitution, revitalization, recapture, rejuvenation, revival, remuneration, rehabilitation, relief. All have different inflections and legal ramifications. (Glass 2004: 118)

In implicitly invoking the undoing of the harms of the colonial past (and often-interventionist present), these action words also imply re-doing, that is, doing again, differently. These terms suggest the possibility that in the re-doing is some restorative justice. As we elaborate below, critically reflecting on Ara Irititja and how it is being used in remote communities is an opportunity to consider the challenges of an archive preserving ‘culture’ yet also reflecting, accommodating, and inspiring change in social lives.

## Shifting protocols

As noted briefly above, the Ara Irititja Anangu Community Archive accommodates cultural restrictions on ‘sorrow’ through protocols for handling media (photographs, video/audio recordings, and metadata about them) of those recently deceased. These norms have been adapted from linguistic taboos against pronouncing such people’s names. When someone dies, his or her name is avoided, in favour of epithets like ‘the old bushranger’, or descriptive phrases such as ‘that one’s father’, coupled with facial gestures towards the deceased’s

8 ‘Senior law woman’ is the English term used to denote a respected female elder holding much cultural knowledge; such a person is also considered responsible for transmitting knowledge to younger generations.

relative. People with the same or similar-sounding names to the deceased person are called by the substitution word *Kunmaṅara* ‘one whose name cannot be mentioned’. It is the sound of the name that creates the greatest sadness and, in fact, there are many linguistic strategies to obliquely talk about the deceased. Things with similar-sounding names might be called *kunmaṅu*; for example, ‘key’ became *kunmaṅu* after Keith died. There are other creative substitutions: after Jack died, car-jacks became *katulpai* ‘thing to lift/raise up’; following the death of a person called Dan, ‘ten’ was called ‘blue one’ after the colour of the 10-dollar note in Australian currency.

Aṅangu grieving practices also include avoiding seeing or coming into contact with other traces of the deceased: the burning of his/her possessions and camp, moving away from the site of the death, and avoiding hunting grounds frequented together. These practices are both to avoid the spirit of the dead person making mischief on the living and to manage the pain of being reminded of a loss.

In the archive, the treatment of photographs of the recently deceased emerged from these linguistic taboos and cultural practices. When an Aboriginal person dies, print photographs are usually tucked away, out of sight, for a period of time. In Ara Irititja, when someone begins to access the online archive, a warning appears (with the option to also click on an audio file stating the same warning) in Pitjantjatjara and in English: “Be careful! Ara Irititja contains pictures and voices of Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people who have passed away.” People are advised to proceed with caution, a convention designed to help users avoid deep offence or sadness. Many books, films, and television programs with Indigenous content now often begin with a page or a screen with similar kinds of warnings, and in museums and cultural centres, photographs of people who have recently died are often physically covered.

When someone in the Ara Irititja network is known to have died, archivists in Adelaide reclassify the person within the database: the person is ‘hidden’ (in Pitjantjatjara, *pai* ‘shut’, as opposed to *uti* ‘open’) in a ‘sorrow’ category that requires an extra layer of security to enter. The metadata and the media in which the person is ‘tagged’ become visually inaccessible to everyday users of the archive, and users with administrative access can elect to show or hide ‘restricted content’. In this context, digital photographs become like the deceased’s personal effects, effaced from the unrestricted or daily-use space of the archive. Yet the analogy is not complete; such images are brought back into the open-access archive after a period of mourning has ended.<sup>9</sup> In this context, digital photographs are less like objects (permanently destroyed or abandoned after a death) and more like names that eventually come back into social life. They are hybrid things with a status that is continuously negotiated: durable like analogue artifacts, yet infinitely replicable (more like spoken utterances).

Indeed, as noted above, for Aṅangu, photographs must not be thought of as inanimate; rather they wield a fundamental essence of the person(s) pictured. Elizabeth Edwards eloquently argues that photographs – because they are often of people – tend to blur “the distinction between person and thing, subject and object” (Edwards 2012: 222). This blurriness between

9 The period of restriction is indefinite and unpredictable, depending on the family’s preferences, and often on the circumstances of the death. For example, if a person led a significant, full life that the family feels should be celebrated, the sorrow restriction might apply for several months. However, in the case of a sudden or traumatic death of a young person, the sorrow restriction might be as long as 15 years.

subject and object has been considered in depth in accounts of Indigenous Australia (e.g. Munn 1970; Myers 1986). Social persons come into being via their relationships to ‘country’, and the named places for which they bear responsibility are themselves “objectification[s] of ancestral action and potency” (Myers 2001: 23–24) (See Figure 1). How, then, to think about photographs in this context? They are too painful to encounter in the first stages of grief, and yet too important (to individual memory-work, social constitutions of relatedness, political activism) to be permanently destroyed. This remains true even as the medium has shifted from print to pixels, in the transition from analogue to digital. Photographs extend claims to justice via land rights; photographs also inspire contemporary cultural and language revitalisation work. Yet they are not just “vehicles of meaning” (Keane 2003: 411). In the example below we are most interested in how meaning is negotiated, especially as the materialities of digital media offer new affordances.

Practices are always changing. Rather than avoiding photographs because of the pain that seeing them might cause, some people now seek them out as a source of comfort – as Jennifer Deger has written, “to remember, to feel him close” (Deger 2006: 122). Anangu have also come to rely on the easy replicability of prints from the digital archive: as project coordinator John Dallwitz wrote in 2018, “Ara Irititja always supplies photographs for the funeral booklets, and digital images for memorial services. This is normal practice now” (Dallwitz, Dallwitz & Rive 2018: 4). Photographs from the archive have become a resource for both private grieving and public remembering, incorporated into contemporary rituals of making sense of a death.



Figure 1. Young women crossing a flooded creek near Amata, Janet Inyika’s home community, c. 1964–1966. From left: Yanyi Bandicha, Tjimpayi Presley, Mayana Burton, Wanatjura Lewis, and Janet Inyika (photo: collection of Margaret and David Hewitt. Reproduced courtesy of Ara Irititja AI-0000198)

## ‘Mrs Never-Give-Up’

In the last few years, there have been several advance directives, in which people choose the photographs for their own funeral services and/or instruct others on how to use their

photos after their deaths. On 23 November 2011, elder Janet Inyika recorded a living will in an interview with Aṛa Irititja oral historian Linda Rive. Linda explains Janet's significance:

Janet was an important person to the NPY [Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara] Women's Council,<sup>10</sup> and to Aṛa Irititja, because of her ability to understand where she stood in history, and because she had a strong drive to make the world a better place. She was a tireless activist, campaigning to stop drug and alcohol abuse. She earned the fond nickname Mrs Never-Give-Up (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).



Figure 2. An adult education class held at Pukatja (Ernabella), November 1952. Oral historian Linda Rive speaks with affection for this photograph, taken the year Janet Inyika was born: "It seems like Janet has been attending women's meetings her whole life!" The baby on the left is Janet. (photo: collection of Hamilton Aikin. Reproduced courtesy of Aṛa Irititja AI-0051360)

10 NPY Women's Council (NPYWC) was founded in 1980 because Aṅangu women felt excluded from important land rights discussions being handled by the Pitjantjatjara Council (an organisation established in 1976 to fight for Aṅangu rights to land and to provide much-needed services to remote-living people and their communities in Central Australia). A group of senior women established their own administrative structure to oversee the protection of sacred sites important to them. Women were a strong force in the establishment of Aṛa Irititja during the 1990s, and, in 2001, a dedicated Aṛa Irititja stand-alone computer was installed in the NPYWC office in Alice Springs. Over the following years, NPYWC assumed a leading role in the Aṛa Irititja *Minymaku Kutju* (Women's Only) project, and policies and future directions were formally endorsed at an NPYWC Executive Meeting in 2006.



Figure 3. Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council meeting at Mimili, May 1998. Janet Inyika is pictured reading something on NPYWC letterhead. Swags and tarps for camping are visible behind the women (photo: Liza Balmer, collection of NPY Women's Council. Reproduced courtesy of Aṛa Irititja AI-0021898)



Figure 4. Janet Inyika's last NPY Women's Council meeting, at Ngururrpila, September 2016 (photo: Angela Lynch. Reproduced courtesy of Aṛa Irititja AI-0184159)

In 2016, Janet herself explained her nickname:

I was given the name Mrs Never-Give-Up because I am *tungunpungkupai*.<sup>11</sup> This means I am determined and perseverant against all odds to reach the goals that we women desire, which is for our families to live a happy, peaceful, and prosperous life. I never give up any

11 Translation note: *tungunpunganyi* is a verb that means 'to stand firm against pressure'. See Goddard (2006) for further discussion of Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara words.



Figure 5. Janet Inyika, with interpreter Linda Rive, launching the new Opal unleaded petrol at the BP Terminal in Largs Bay, South Australia, February 2005, together with the then Federal Minister for Health, Tony Abbott (not in the photo). Janet was proud that petrol-sniffing declined greatly following the introduction of this fuel (photo: Mark Brake. Reproduced courtesy of Aṛa Irititja AI-0147593)

of my campaigns, be it fighting to close down bottle shops and alcohol outlets, opening remote area renal dialysis units, or demanding a total roll out of low-octane petrol, in order to combat the scourge of petrol-sniffing (see Figure 5).

Janet's insistence, persistence, and resistance, her reflexive awareness of herself as an important figure, and her faith in Aṛa Irititja as crucial to her causes make her living will an exemplary text and, in featuring Janet, her words and her work here, we honour and acknowledge her advocacy. Janet Inyika's living will was spoken, in conversation with Linda Rive in Alice Springs, while Janet was still healthy. She died five years later, on 30 December 2016.<sup>12</sup>

I have my own ideas about what will happen after my death. This is what I have been thinking about – when I have my funeral, I do not want images of me deleted [from Aṛa Irititja]. *Ngayuku kurantja wiyangku wantintjaku. Munu paintja.*<sup>13</sup>

12 This extended quote is an extract from Aṛa Irititja, and is reproduced here with permission from archive manager John Dallwitz and oral historian Linda Rive.

13 Translation notes: *Ngayuku* 'anything pertaining to me'. *Kura*, the root of *kurantja*, means 'bad/not good' and has been adapted by Aṅangu users of Aṛa Irititja to mean 'delete, erase, or reject'. *Wiyangku wantintjaku* is a commanding statement akin to 'never do!' The sentence might be translated as an imperative: 'Never delete representations of me.' Linda explains that Janet is asking for permanent non-deletion – permanent visibility – of material pertaining to her. *Munu paintja wiya* is another way of saying 'and do not demand that I be banished', which is what would have traditionally happened. *Paini* is what one does when shouting at dogs to go away: 'Pai!' It is quite a strong statement.

I am saying this for my daughters and my grandsons and granddaughters, for them to see and hear. You see, I have done a lot of things, and I have been thinking about that.

I am addressing my family here. These words are directed towards my family now.

Listen, in the future, when I pass away, I do not want any of you to destroy or delete any images of me on television, nor destroy any photographs you may have of me.

Other family members of mine, when you get together, I want you to continue listening to my voice and hear what I have to say and please do not delete those sounds or anything about me.

I started working a long time ago ... working for Women's Council *warka palyakatinyi*, *wangkakatinyi*,<sup>14</sup> working on projects and speaking up about certain subjects on a regular basis, to assist in the lives of *ngaltutjara tjutaku*.<sup>15</sup> It is because of this that I have been thinking a lot about what might happen in the future.

In the future, when the time comes ... when the plane lands at Amata airstrip with me in my coffin, I want the Women's Council to film it with a camera, starting from the airstrip and going into Amata, to the ceremony. I want my coffin to be filmed as it takes that final journey to the songs that will be sung. But all of you, sometime in the future, you may hear my voice again, even after I have long passed away ... I want you to remember that those recordings were made a long time ago. Perhaps other people will have photographs of trips that I have been on, for instance when I went to Adelaide with my friend here [Linda Rive, see Figure 5], when I spoke up for the benefit of all, and photographs were taken of me – I do not want any of you, my family members, to destroy those images. Please do not do that.

I am saying these words particularly for my daughter[s] ... my niece ... and my son ... and any Anangu, for that matter, who may be my kin.<sup>16</sup> You are my kin and I want you to honour my words and do not banish images or sounds of mine, please.

I want my picture to remain, which I want you to show people. Pictures of me, when, say, I went to Sydney [for the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games], and all good pictures of me, I want you to keep looking at those pictures.

If you want to see pictures of me, well please go right ahead, and do not grieve or be sad for me. Don't say that you don't like it, because this is what I want. I have made this plan for my own children. *Palya?* 'Okay'?

In this extended quote, Janet externalises her desires for what should happen to representations of her after her death. Her words communicate a deep understanding of what the archive is and how it works: recording her wishes within Ara Irititja will ensure that her immediate kin will access them. Janet was the first, but since then others (Yanyi Bandicha, Anyupa Yuminiya

14 *Warka* is derived from English 'work'; *palyakatinyi* can be translated as 'creating, working, making things happen over a period of time', and *wangkakatinyi*, similarly, 'working hard over (or talking about for) a long period of time'.

15 *Ngaltutjara* 'ones deserving of sympathy, compassion, and/or assistance'. *Tjutaku* 'on behalf of all of those'. Here Janet is referring to clients of the NPY Women's Council, specifically women who have sought support and/or help with mental health problems and drug addictions, and those suffering domestic violence and poverty.

16 Names have been omitted here, at the suggestion of Linda Rive and John Dallwitz.



Figure 6. Janet Inyika (far right) and Ilawanti Ken (far left) teaching children *inma* for the 25th anniversary celebration of Pitjantjatjara Land Rights in 2006 (Photo: collection of the Pitjantjatjara Council [no photographer recorded]. Reproduced courtesy of Aṛa Irititja AI-0096630)

Ken) have asked oral historian Linda Rive to record their wills into the archive.<sup>17</sup> John Dallwitz states that “This is one of the many functions that Aṅangu have found for Aṛa Irititja that were never imagined when we first started in 1994” (Dallwitz, Dallwitz & Rive 2018: 3–4). Through these utterances, respected elders, the managing archivist, and the translator/interpreter all acknowledge and create the archive as dynamic and flexible, able to change over time. Moreover, these women are putting the archive to work for them in unanticipated ways, incorporating the medium into their own drives for change in their communities. Aṛa Irititja also becomes a holding place for each woman’s struggle against her own mortality, the finitude of their capacity to fight, the fragility of their knowledge, and the precarity of their wisdom, experience, and achievements. The archive becomes an instrument that they imagine will keep their work going after they’re gone (for example, see Figure 6).

Janet “was a great supporter and valued adviser to Aṛa Irititja ... Her cultural and historical knowledge was often sought” (Aṛa Irititja 2017: 7). Janet herself said “*Nyangatja Aṛa Irititja tjukurpa mulapa*. Aṛa Irititja is the main one for Aṅangu. It holds our true record” (Dallwitz, Dallwitz & Rive 2018: 12).<sup>18</sup> Linda interprets this as Janet saying that there is nothing more

17 Yani was the first to respond to Janet’s living will and recorded a brief statement on 2 March 2012, and further extended it just after Janet’s funeral, on 2 February 2017. On the same day in February 2017, Janet’s good friend Anyupa lodged her own wishes for her death and burial, including instructions regarding photographs of herself and her work. These are held in their profiles in Aṛa Irititja. At the time of writing, both Yani and Anyupa are alive and well, living at Ernabella.

18 Translation notes: *Nyangatja* ‘this that is before you’ reinforces the emphasis in the phrase. *Tjukurpa* ‘law, stories, and Dreaming’ simultaneously invokes Aṅangu cosmologies (the Dreaming), a modality of cultural transmission (stories), and the accepted rules for appropriate social behaviour (law). *Mulapa* ‘true’ has two different possible valences: ‘real and/or genuine’, in the sense of ‘not false’, and also ‘really/very’, in the sense of ‘emphasising for the sake of persuading’. Linda explains that “Janet ... was saying this was her true word. Aṅangu say ‘my word is my truth’.”

weighty than this: the archive is a custodian of histories and a resource for contemporary cultural work in Central Australia.

Janet mobilises the archive as a vehicle of direct and multimodal communication to her kin: “I am saying this for my daughters and my grandsons and granddaughters, for them to see and hear ... I am addressing my family here, these words are directed towards my family now” and later “you are my kin and I want you to honour my words.” This repetitive demand carries a kind of warning that listeners should pay attention; indeed it is consistent with a genre of public speaking, *alpiri*, which involves warnings, directives, and harangues. A style of oratory used by old people, it is used to put pressure on people who are behaving incorrectly, and to voice grievances. Janet confidently presumes that her recorded words will urge her family to act in specific ways.

Janet’s invocation of two senses (sight and hearing) emphasises multiple pathways of knowledge transmission (and implicitly communicates her understanding that the archive holds both the audio of her original voice recording, and its transcription and translation into text). The archive is linguistically effaced in Janet’s words; she implicitly constructs it as an unmediated and ongoing pathway of communication between a deeply respected, knowledgeable old woman and her descendants. In other words, she is mobilising the affordances of the digital archive to connect her words with those who are not co-present (and even beyond her lifetime). Simultaneously, Janet also imagined the archive as having agency: Linda notes that Janet trusted Aṛa Irititja to “continue her fight for her.”

For Janet, the archive is a technology that preserves her ongoing presence, a way for her to live on after her physical death. She is directive: do not destroy photographs, continue listening to my voice, film the final journey of my coffin and the songs that will be sung, honour my words. She is also repetitive: do not banish images or sounds of mine, I want my picture to remain, I want you to keep looking at those pictures. The repetition coupled with the penultimate phrase, “Don’t say that you don’t like it, because this is what I want,” implies that Janet anticipates some resistance, that she knew she was suggesting – and hoping to usher in – a change in protocols. Janet insists that showing and looking at pictures after her death are good things to do; these are actions that honour her and allow the work she’s done to continue.

Indeed, Janet is proud of her work, and much of the motivation behind her living will is to insist that her work live on.<sup>19</sup> Her persistence and repetition, insisting that any representations of her remain visible, audible, and unrestricted, communicate a tension between existing cultural protocols and personal choice: can the archive accommodate both? Is it up to her to decide what happens to photos (and videos and other representations) of her after her death? Who wields what responsibility here: the deceased person, the archive, the surviving kin? ‘The archive’ and ‘Aṅangu’ culture and identity are not equal, and must not be conflated, as tempting as it may be to imagine complete transformation of the digital according to a cultural vernacular.<sup>20</sup>

19 See Bell (1981) and Dussart (2000) for more on the labour and creativity involved in asserting the value of women’s work in Central Australia.

20 See Thorner (2010) on Aṛa Irititja ‘Indigenising’ digital technologies. The phrase “cultural vernacular” comes from Coleman (2010). Thorner has stepped away from ‘Indigenising’ as a frame for her scholarship, dissatisfied with its implication that Indigenous cultures and digital technologies are, *a priori*, separate and/or incompatible. Instead, she prefers to think in terms of ‘interface’ and ‘intercultural production’ as framing devices and helpful metaphors.

## Never giving up: On negotiations

With Janet as an instigator, the archive becomes a vehicle for change in cultural practices. Yet Janet's words also forecast that such change may be hard and/or slow. Linda recounts:

After her death, some of her closest family members came into Alice Springs to see me to prepare for her funeral and memorial booklet. As instructed by Janet, I played the voice recording to them. "Brace yourselves. Are you ready?" They said yes, they were ready. I played it to them. Wide-eyed, they stood to attention and listened to it right through to the end, nodded and said, "Yes, we will obey her wishes."

I played it to a number of other women, including Yanyi and Anyupa, and this is why Anyupa was so forthright in giving her instructions. When she saw how well Janet's instructions were received and obeyed, it gave her more authority to make her own demands.

All of the media and metadata in which Janet is tagged are *uti* 'open' and visible, not restricted, *pati* 'closed'. This is a great shift from the practices of the recent past, preceding the advent of the archive, in which photographs were torn out of the pages of books, or prints were burned,<sup>21</sup> actions that people have come to regret.<sup>22</sup> Kinyin McKenzie says:

In the past, people would never look at photos of deceased people. Even now, people are very sensitive about it. We may make a funeral booklet and a funeral slideshow and everyone may watch it. But after that, we do not look at those pictures. We stop looking after the funeral.

Having said that, we still want the photos kept on Aṛa Irititja, kept hidden, so we can look at them in the future. But pictures of deceased people must be closed. The decision to reopen the pictures must be made by more than one family member – younger siblings or parents, for instance.

*Kumpilpa kanyinytjaku* – keep them, but keep them hidden.<sup>23</sup>

When photographs or other media go into 'sorrow', those with administrative logins can choose to view or hide the restricted content; all other users proceed into archive contents without visual access.<sup>24</sup> 'Sorrow' restricts images and media but doesn't restrict the written

21 Maria Stewart, pers. comm. to Linda Rive, 27 September 2011. See Michaels (1994: 1–18) and Peterson (2003) for more on the development of protocols in the 1970s–1980s to regulate the unfettered circulation of images of Central Australian Indigenous people.

22 Both Dallwitz and Stewart mention retrospective sadness – contemporary feelings of regret – among Anangu over photographs that were permanently destroyed in the past (John Dallwitz, pers. comm. to Sabra Thorner, 21 January 2019; Maria Stewart, pers. comm. to Linda Rive, 27 September 2011).

23 Pers. comm. to Linda Rive, 26 September 2012.

24 If a user doesn't have access but wishes to see, hear, or visit with these archive items (see Thorner 2016 for more on 'visiting with' photographs; this a vernacular shorthand that animates viewing into a process involving dynamic emotional and social work), usually it is easy enough to ask someone with administrative access to change the settings for the one session of use. This is a system that protects those who might be hurt by viewing such media, and simultaneously allows pathways for viewing for those who wish, instead, to see. This flexibility is one of Aṛa Irititja's most remarkable and innovative features as a database.

word; if a person is ‘in sorrow’, you can still search and find that person by name. John Dallwitz notes that “it’s the voice, the saying of the name that’s painful, so this is what’s limited by sorrow, and less so the name in print.”

Janet’s living will remains exceptional, unprecedented, in the context of *Ara Irititja*. Her instructions, and her family’s decision to follow them, offer a new possibility for the role of photographs in mourning practices, yet do not indicate a wholesale rejection of, or departure from, ‘sorrow’ as a category through which photographs move. A counter-example will illustrate. Nganyinytja was another senior law woman who didn’t want herself put into sorrow after her death, and yet, in 2007, when she died, as John states:

[I]t was a massive loss. We all agreed: we didn’t care what she asked. Just over a month, while the funeral was going on, out of respect for the whole process, she was put into sorrow ... then at the end, you know, she’d always wanted us to keep her open [and so her records were ‘opened’ again] ... The processes of *Ara Irititja* and the decision-making of the families overruled Nganyinytja for a short time. (Pers. comm., 21 January 2019)

In discussing both Janet and Nganyinytja’s wishes together, John further clarifies:

Janet’s not saying there should be no such thing as ‘sorrow’. She’s saying: I want my story to keep going, and I don’t want you to destroy it because of a tradition. I want you to do this for me. What I have to say now is still going to be important into the future, I want you to keep this in front of you into the future. She’s using *Ara Irititja* to keep her message alive.

Cultural protocols are continuously negotiated, these negotiations are crucial to culture (not detrimental to it),<sup>25</sup> and photographs, via the digital archive, are the media through which this is occurring. The archive can hold Janet’s photographs and Nganyinytja’s, and treat them differently; the platform has been designed with the infrastructural flexibility to withstand and sustain different desires. Moreover, *Ara Irititja* has become an impetus for ongoing discussions about correct behaviour after the death of significant people; it is this that keeps culture alive, dynamic, present. The flexibility of this archive – the fact that negotiation is productive and not destabilising – makes *Ara Irititja* quite different from conventional archives.

Janet may have been wishing to usher in an enduring change in how photographs are handled when *Anangu* die, to be celebrated as enduring objectifications of a person’s good work(s), instead of hidden away as tangible reminders of the deceased that are too painful to bear. Perhaps more importantly, her living will has inspired ongoing conversation about what good or right behaviour is. Other women followed Janet’s lead, imagining photographs as affirmations of their knowledge, experience, and status as elders. Janet’s never-giving-up hasn’t ended with her death; rather, her significance lives on via the conversations and processes she set in motion (see Figure 7). The photograph – once an interface between Indigenous cultural practices and Western colonial imagining, collecting, archiving, and viewing practices, an object to be recontextualised – becomes, too, the medium through which protocols are

25 Negotiation over who is responsible for stories, objects, and rituals is crucial in Central Australian Indigenous claims (and counterclaims) to country, autonomy, and relatedness; see Myers (1989); Dussart (2000).



Figure 7. Linda carried out Janet Inyika's instructions and filmed the arrival of Janet's coffin at Amata airstrip, January 2017 (photo: Linda Rive, collection of NPY Women's Council. Reproduced courtesy of Aṛa Irititja AI-0190944)

negotiated. The legacy Janet leaves, then, is best understood not by (potentially) changing the status of the object, but by (implicitly) insisting that negotiating the status of the object reinforces Anangu values (such as autonomy over such objects and collections, collective decision-making, and appropriate remembering and honouring of a person upon her death).

## Forms of translation

There is a multiplicity in the knowledge the archive holds. In order to (re)present the quote above, we have copied and pasted the English text from Janet's profile in Aṛa Irititja.<sup>26</sup> Linda translated and transcribed this text from an original audio recording of the conversation between her and Janet, also held in Aṛa Irititja (classified under the category 'NPY Language').<sup>27</sup> Of course, the text transcription and the audio file are not the same thing. In the audio version, Linda speaks mostly in English, though also a bit in Pitjantjatjara; Janet speaks mostly in Pitjantjatjara and a bit in English. In addition to the voices, the audio includes a dog barking in the distance and other ambient sounds. Listening affords a fuller sense of being there than the text on screen (or printed on these pages).

The one-time event of the recorded conversation between Janet and Linda is accessible, in an archival sense, in multiple ways. The audio recording is a more Anangu way of transmitting knowledge and also preserves spoken language, whereas the text makes the utterance more accessible to people who don't speak Pitjantjatjara as a first language, and/or who are more comfortable with text as a form of knowledge transmission. Different pathways of using the archive lead users to arrive at these different records, the audio recording and the translated

26 Profiles in Aṛa Irititja are 'entity records' in IT jargon; these are the foundational units of data in Aṛa Irititja's 'Keeping Culture' software. They contain information about people (additional names, language group(s), places of birth and death) written in text, and with the possibility of video and audio annotations.

27 The sound recording is item # AI-0108322.

transcription, though all are interconnected to photographs of Janet, newspaper articles about her and her work, her funeral booklet, and many other materials. The archive provides a sense of the full and important life Janet lived, and how she imagined herself, her work, and her legacy. It offers a glimpse of how she wanted to be remembered. There is also a sense of the ontological shifts she sought to usher in: to change the way people who are gone might be remembered, and to change how media get archived: preserved, accessed, taken up in new ways. The archive is always incomplete, and the labour of archiving, infinite.

We have called Janet's words above a 'living will', and it is that, in the sense of a set of formalised instructions about the kind of death a person wants, an instrument that allows a dying person to have some control over his/her end of life care. It is also suggestive of a conventional will, a legal document that delineates what should happen to a person's assets after death. In imagining her death, Janet sets forth funerary and grieving practices, kinship responsibilities for remembering and honouring the deceased person, and the correct treatment of representations of that person. Photographs, here, are both like and unlike property. Discussing her recorded words as a will implicitly constructs photographs (and other media featuring Janet) as a kind of legacy. Discussing her recorded words as a *living* will implies that Janet's wishes should hold the weight of biomedical choices at the end of life. Both of these terms emphasise honouring the final wishes of a dying person and imply that following her instructions is a pathway to preserving the dignity of someone grappling with her own mortality. Linda poignantly suggests that Janet, perhaps, "saw her life's work as her estate. She had little else to leave behind, apart from her artworks."

## Concluding thoughts

In this chapter, we strive to write in a way that is multivocal – including Thorner's arguments as developed through, with and alongside the words of archive co-creator John Dallwitz, oral historian Linda Rive, and Anangu senior law woman Janet Inyika. This is a narrative strategy we have forged to reflect the work of Aṛa Irititja, an ongoing and dynamic intercultural production (Myers 2004), and especially to honour Janet's work and extend it into the future. The archive, here, is a site of negotiation, an infrastructure that holds culturally significant materials and enables and inspires the collaborative work of culture-making.

As Fred Myers argues (1986: 127–158), negotiation is a form of cultural production, and a culturally appropriate pathway of initiating change and incorporating it into social lives. Negotiating is productive, not threatening. Janet's words, quoted at length in this chapter, are directive, repetitive, even corrective in tone; they seem to be both anticipating and initiating the negotiations over what might happen to photographs (and other media) of her after her death. They may also be an expression of new assertions and new domains of individual authority, and evidence of a desire to inscribe that authority into the archive. In this sense, Janet's living will forges a new genre of metadata, and the archive is increasingly driven by the purposeful desire to produce new records that define correct conduct in more individuated terms.

That the status of photographs ('open', or 'closed' in sorrow) can be changed, and that different people's photographs (and other media) can be handled differently are important ways in which Aṛa Irititja responds to and objectifies the desires of Anangu. This is an archive

dedicated to continuing and recursive innovation and reinvention. The ongoing negotiations over what to do with photographs are significant and signal one way in which photographs are being continuously integrated into Aboriginal storytelling. In other words, what is done with photographs – whether and how they are ‘returned’ from elsewhere; how access to them can be customised and dynamic in using a digital tool – must be considered on a case-by-case basis, and always alongside the discussions and decision-making over how or if they should be circulated.

The return of Indigenous cultural records, thus, is neither an ending nor a resolution. Instead, via the archive, return is a beginning, an opening-up. The work of archiving – in the sense of ongoing negotiation, and negotiation as culture-making – doesn’t end, isn’t supposed to end; rather, it remains ongoing. As the examples presented and analysed here indicate, this is a field that includes Indigenous people and non-Indigenous allies, colonial institutions, and decolonising ambitions. Aṛa Irititja provides an infrastructure for more Indigenous control and autonomy – the longstanding goal of land rights activism in Central Australia – yet also inspires the debate that keeps culture alive, vibrant, contemporary, and transmitted to the next generations. Writing together, we suggest that these processes of collaborating and negotiating are producing the contemporary archive, keeping it dynamic and instrumental in Aṇangu imaginings of their selves, socialities, and futures.

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