

# Introduction

The subjects of ethnographies, it should never be forgotten, are always more interesting than their authors.

—R.J. Smith (1990)

In the autumn of 2016, I met with two Arrernte men, Shaun and Martin, who had flown from the remote township of Alice Springs, in the center of Australia, to meet with me at my office in the Melbourne Museum. The purpose of their visit was to discuss the potential return of sacred ritual objects to central Australia. I had known both of these men for a number of years, but Shaun and I had a particularly long association. We had worked together at an Aboriginal youth service in Alice Springs over a decade earlier, and as we struck up a friendship he had taken me on a hunting trip for kangaroo on his homelands at Arewengkwerte. Our paths had diverged over the years, but we had once again come together as professionals in the Indigenous museum and heritage sector. Shaun now worked as a researcher at the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs, and I had returned to my home city of Melbourne where I worked in the museum's Indigenous Cultures Department.

Over a number of days, Shaun and I looked into the history of these sacred objects, with Shaun's uncle Martin providing prudent counsel, pondering how they came to be in the possession of a museum 2,300 kilometers from their place of origin. Our research and discussions meandered along a path that eventually led us back to questions about the degree of agency exhibited by central Australian men in the production of collections such as this. The assumption that collectors and anthropologists had dragooned or tricked these men into handing over their treasured possessions and knowledge proved to be a far too simplistic explanation.

I believed, like so many of the Arrernte and Anmatyerr men with whom I have discussed this history over the past decade, that things were rather different. The Aboriginal informants to Australian ethnographers had not been supplicants or dupes, but rather extraordinary figures who were integral to the story of how ethnographic collections were made. Some even saw their ancestors as visionaries who, knowing the rapid pace of cultural change, had enabled anthropologists to film and record their most secretive ceremonial performances with future generations in mind (Angeles, 2016). Although the reasoning and motivations of these past generations were often unexplained in official histories and anthropological monographs, it was the unearthing of *their* stories that mattered to most central Australian Aboriginal men. What was the nature of their relationship with ethnographers? Why did so many share their most treasured and secretive ritual content? What were they hoping to achieve from these interactions? I also wondered, if we accept the agency and intent of these informants, how does it change the way we understand these collections, and what would it mean for their ongoing and future relevancy?

It is via the collection of one of Australia's most well-known and controversial ethnographers, Theodor George Henry (T.G.H.) Strehlow (1908–1978), and the agency of his predominantly Arrernte and Anmatyerr informants, that these and other questions are addressed in *Ceremony Men*. Although T.G.H. Strehlow's personal biography and his work on Arrernte men's sacred traditions have been well canvassed in the literature, exactly how the interests and motivations of his informants shaped his ethnographic practice, and what these men and their descendants make of his work today, has not been adequately considered. Having spoken with some of the men who performed in front of Strehlow's recording devices or saw him at work, I knew that their side of the story could be told. These men not only had their own particular take on this history but had strong views about the relevancy and value of ethnographic collections.

Almost all research on Strehlow has focused on his relationships with the Arrernte, the group of central Australian Aboriginal people with whom he spent most of his time, but this research had failed to explore his larger presence across the region. My discussions with various Anmatyerr people over the years had alerted me to Strehlow's little-known work with the northern neighbors to the Arrernte, the Anmatyerr. In fact, the richness of Strehlow's ethnography became apparent to me only after I was prompted by Anmatyerr people to look more closely at his collection. As a cultural and linguistic group with deep affinities with the Arrernte, but possessing

a distinct identity of their own, the Anmatyerr bring a new perspective to a well-worn historical narrative. For the Anmatyerr, Strehlow and the men he worked with were all “*Urrempel men*” or “*Ceremony men*,” a cohort of men actively pursuing, demonstrating, and sharing in ritual knowledge. It is the Anmatyerr views on the Strehlow collection and their attitudes toward his collection that fundamentally concerns this thesis.

Anmatyerr men told me many of the same *Anengkerr* (Dreaming) stories that they had revealed to Strehlow. Defined as the narratives of eternal beings that originated at the beginning of creation, the *Anengkerr* concept (like its Arrernte equivalent, *Altyerre*) occupies a central place in Anmatyerr ontologies. These ancestors formed and persist in the landscape, and knowledge of their presence and their actions is expressed in song, storytelling, ritual dance, and artistic design. Although the suitability of “Dreaming” to refer to this concept has been contested because it is seen to diminish and reduce complex Aboriginal belief to something “unreal” (Wolfe, 1991; 1997) the glossing of *Anengkerr* as “Dreamtime” or “Dreaming” does have a salience to contemporary speakers and a firm basis in the semantics of the language (Morphy, 1996; Green, 2012). In time, I came to realize that Strehlow had recorded many of the same songs and stories that people had explained to me, and that I had been taken to many of the same *Anengkerr* sites shown to Strehlow decades earlier.

This inadvertent “shadowing” of Strehlow and his interlocutors became what anthropologist Michael Jackson (2006) has described as a useful “mode of discovery” in the course of bridging historical events and contemporary interpretations. This process was further aided by the fact that I could take digital copies of the audio recordings made of these songs and the films of their associated ceremonial performances into the field with me. This was the first time that this highly restricted body of knowledge had left the confines of archives and museums and had been allowed to be shared with people in remote Aboriginal communities. Collaboratively unpacking Strehlow’s corpus, Anmatyerr perspectives have helped me produce an *historical* and *ethnographic* critique that decouples its contents from the confines of T.G.H. Strehlow’s biography.

### The Ethnographer T.G.H. Strehlow

To write about T.G.H. or “Ted” Strehlow is in many respects to go over old ground. Subject to two biographies (Hill, 2003; McNally, 1981), often

referenced in the history of Australian anthropology and linguistics (Morton, 1995; 2004; Moore, 2008), cited in works of literary and cultural studies (Morrison, 2017; Watson, 2017), and noted in the broader history of “race relations” in Australia (Rowse, 1999; Inglis, 2002), Strehlow’s story is relatively well known. Born to German parents at the remote Lutheran mission of Hermannsburg in the Northern Territory in 1908, he was raised learning the language of the predominant Western Arrernte population. His father, the Lutheran Reverend Carl Strehlow, had been stationed at the mission since 1894 and had become an excellent ethnographer and linguist (see Kenny, 2013; Veit, 2004). Strehlow’s mother, Frieda, also spoke Arrernte and dedicated herself to the welfare of the mission inhabitants (Strehlow, 2011). In addition to learning the Arrernte language, T.G.H. was also schooled in German and English and came to possess an admirable ability with languages, later completing studies in English Literature, Latin, Greek, and classical studies.

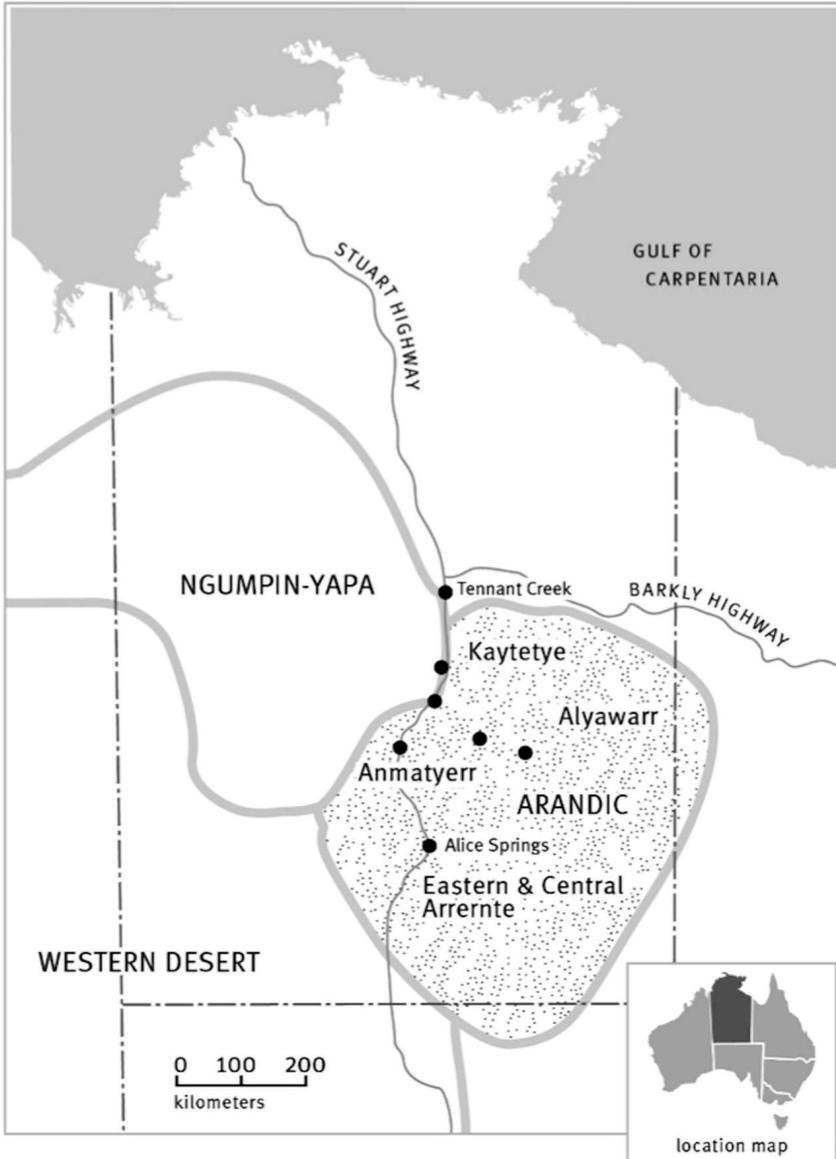
Although young Ted’s feet were firmly planted in the traditions of the Old World, in the eyes of his academic mentors it was his fluency in an Aboriginal language that offered him most potential as a scholar (Jones, 2004). He was encouraged to return to central Australia where he, first, put his language skills to use in order to survey the extent and variety of the Arandic languages (of which Anmatyerr was one) (see map 2) and, second, began recording the mythological traditions of the people in this region. To some extent building on his father’s earlier work on the Arrernte and Luritja, Strehlow spent close to four decades recording place names, songs, myths, genealogies, and closed men’s ceremonies (Strehlow, 1907a). The collection he amassed is not only voluminous but visually and aurally compelling. It contains over twenty-six hours of raw 16mm film footage, depicting over eight hundred unique ceremonies, approximately 150 hours of song recordings, and over eight thousand still photographs of ceremony and landscape. Forty-four meticulously kept and extremely detailed field diaries, as well as over twelve hundred artifacts (mostly sacred objects and ritual paraphernalia), make this the most complete collection of cultural material of any Indigenous people in Australia, and perhaps the world.

Strehlow’s approach to ethnography was largely empirical, and he possessed a general distrust of overly theoretical agendas (Gibson, 2017; Austin-Broos, 1997). Although he never read their works, his style resembled the type of linguistically minded, salvage anthropology pioneered by seminal ethnographers in the American tradition, Franz Boas and

Edward Sapir (see Adams, 2016; Hester, 1968; Gruber, 1970). The practice of salvage ethnography had begun in earnest in Australia with the arrival of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition team, led by Alfred Cort Haddon to the Torres Strait in 1898 and was extended by Walter Baldwin Spencer and Francis James Gillen's during their expedition across Central Australia in 1901 (Haddon et al., 1901; Spencer and Gillen, 1904). Premised on the widely held idea that Indigenous Australians were set to decline upon contact with European society, these expeditions pioneered the use of audio and filmic documentation to record as best they could the unique cultural practices of the people. Strehlow took up the mantle of salvage ethnographer with gusto and, like most of his contemporaries, persistently made the case that urgent research was required before the languages and cultures of Australia completely perished in the face of colonization. In his view, central Australia was becoming increasingly "empty and silent" of song and ritual, and it was his role to save "the last scraps of the local traditions before complete oblivion settled down upon them" (1968a, p. 92).

Strehlow's personal commitment to this project was remarkable. His published outputs revealed a poetic and "literary" quality to Aboriginal culture that had hitherto been imperceptible to the wider public. In the later stages of his career, however, he became ruthlessly proprietorial over his collection and was blinkered to the rights and wishes of contemporary central Australian Aboriginal men. Unlike his counterpart in Australian anthropology, Ronald Berndt, who could see the potential of rich ethnographic collections like this as a source of "social meaning and emotional stability" for Arandic peoples, Strehlow regarded the material as his personal inheritance (Berndt, 1979a, p. 88). The inadvertent publication of a selection of his photographs of secret-sacred ceremonies in a popular Australian magazine and his repeated claims to being the only appropriate heir to Arandic ceremonial traditions almost completely overshadowed his decades of work. Strehlow's collection, as others have noted, became well known "for all the wrong reasons" (Peterson, Allen, and Hamby, 2008a, p. 6).

After Strehlow's death in 1978, the controversies around his collection continued. The extensive compendium of artifacts, recordings, and manuscripts were passed on to his second wife, Kathleen, and their young son Carl. But the great cultural wealth of the material meant that it became the subject of numerous disputes of ownership involving government agencies and Aboriginal organizations (Smith, 2009;



Map I.1. Approximate distribution of Arandic languages of central Australia.

Hugo, 1997). Kathleen covetously guarded the collection as her own and planned to move it overseas. After protracted negotiations, the Northern Territory Government eventually managed to purchase the collection for an undisclosed sum and established a new home for the corpus, back in central Australia, at the purpose-built Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs. Since that time, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and community members have been able to access the collection, though far more needs to be done in terms of engaging with Aboriginal expertise and understanding the untold story of Aboriginal participation in its creation.

### Agency in the Archive

Remarkably few serious attempts have been made to record the perspectives of Aboriginal informants in the making of this ethnographic corpus. Those who have chosen to investigate the degree of Aboriginal agency in this history have tended to look back through Strehlow's accounts for snippets of evidence, while others have simply concluded that it is simply too difficult to fathom their "original intentions" (Kimber, 2004; Morton, 1995, p. 56). None had attempted to significantly reshape their analysis of either the history or the content of the collection via the interpretations and evaluations of contemporary Aboriginal people. Bringing these perspectives to the fore, I take Ann Stoler's advice and cast the Strehlow corpus not as a receptacle of objective knowledge or anthropological fact, but as a site where ethnographic knowledge was, and continues to be, produced (2010). And while I have permitted the *non-archived* evidence of ethnographic experience to inform my analyses, I have constantly returned to Strehlow's collection looking for balance and contrast. As Stoler contends, it is important that we do not move too "quickly and confidently" to readings "against the grain" without moving first *along the grain* and becoming familiar with the archival evidence (2006, p. 100).

The archive offers multiple possibilities for inquiry: for biographical study, for understanding the development of anthropological theorization and methodological practice, and for a critical analysis of the formation of the archive itself. Strehlow's archive is thus treated as a critical starting point to the analysis. Other analyses of colonial archives have demonstrated the process by which the native voices, meanings, and histories were appropriated or erased by "colonial forms and logics of knowledge," and

these silences, or omissions, are now widely recognized as a significant evidential source in the making of histories and epistemes (Dirks, 1993, p. 310; see also Sider and Smith, 1997; Trouillot, 1995). These silences occur for a number of reasons. There may simply be a gap in the knowledge being conveyed, a deliberate act of concealment may have occurred, or even more interesting, these silences might involve a strategic concealment by the less powerful hoping to avoid detection or scrutiny (Scott, 1990). Reading the interrelationships of “native informants” and settler-colonial ethnographers back into these histories requires a deeper appreciation of the archive—not so much as a source of anthropological fact, but—as an assemblage of traces waiting for the right question to be put to them.

In this case, where Anmatyerr and Arrernte perspectives on the Strehlow legacy are possible, I tuck between the archival/historical and the ethnographic/contemporary to draw out a deeper appreciation of both. Finding evidence of Indigenous agency amongst the archives of colonialism is now a growing area of study. Older ethnographic auction catalogues, explorer’s journals, museum and archival sources, as well as early anthropological works are being scoured by scholars looking for evidence of Indigenous accomplishment, presence, or motivation (Torrence and Clarke, 2011; Konishi, Nugent, and Shellam, 2015; Malaurie, 2003; Driver and Jones, 2009; Harrison, Byrne, and Clarke, 2013). Seeking to uncover similar creative responses from Indigenous people to colonial interests and agendas, this work too develops evidence to counter conventional emphases on the achievements of a singular, “heroic,” “white” protagonist. By acknowledging the activity of *all* of the participants, I regard ethnographic collections such as Strehlow’s as fundamentally co-productions. These assemblages are not simply *found* in the field, but are *made* by agents (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 2). Scholarly disciplines and regimes of “collecting, ordering, governing” certainly shape these collections at a structural level (Bennett et al., 2017), but I contend that they are equally representative of the *individuals* and the *relationships* that made them.

The significance of this researcher/researched interrelationships has been of particular concern to anthropology for some time now (Hymes, 1972; Tedlock, 1979; Fabian, 1983), although few have used this dynamic to examine the history and interpretation of an anthropological collection. Beginning with Tedlock and Mannheim’s assertion that all ethnography (including Strehlow’s and indeed my own) ought to be recognized as an “intercultural phenomenon, produced, reproduced and revised in dialogues between fieldworkers and their subjects” (1995, p. 1), I go further

in insisting that the knowledge produced is fundamentally a product of the differential relations *between* the perceiver (anthropologist) and the perceived (informant). Neither are separate entities at all, but “*relations between two coordinates . . . each serving to differentiate the other*” (Holquist, 2000, p. 26). The knowledge produced in the archive or the museum collection, then, cannot be embodied exclusively in either of these categories—researcher or researched—but is a property of their relation.

### Introducing Anmatyerr People

In teasing out these relationships I have tried to balance an appreciation of “the archive” against the recollections, commentaries, opinions, memories, and critiques of Anmatyerr people. This involved fieldwork across seven Anmatyerr communities and discussions with over forty men spanning three generations. The majority of these men had neither seen, heard, or read any of the Strehlow materials before, though two of them, Harold Payne and Ken Tilmouth, had acted as informants to Strehlow in the late 1960s and 1970s. Like many of the other men from across the region, they generously offered their explanations of the ceremonies and songs that had been recorded and their views of the present and future value of this material.

The process of eliciting Anmatyerr and Arrernte testimony, as well as documenting the manner in which these people understood and utilized this collection, marks a significant intervention into the narrative of cultural decline propagated by Strehlow and others. In the absence of any ethnographic evidence, most have either assumed that there were “not many senior men” with authoritative knowledge of material collected by Strehlow to provide useful commentary or that the collection is now so “*mysterious*” to Aboriginal people that they “*themselves are unsure of who may see what*” (Cohen, 2001a, p. 133; Smith, 2009, pp. 85–86, my emphasis). The Anmatyerr and Arrernte responses to the elements of the collection examined in *Ceremony Men* demonstrate just how inaccurate this view is.

While attenuation of ritual knowledge is certainly evident, these presumptions are far too fatalistic and fail to appreciate the different ways that *Anengkerr* (Dreaming), song, ceremony, and place continue to animate the lifeworlds of Anmatyerr people. Senior men, albeit in small numbers, have considerable confidence in song and ritual knowledge,

and when given the opportunity, they and others across the generations have been able to illuminate this collection with surprising adroitness. As well as this continuity, though, there are also important sociocultural changes and ontological shifts that have occurred since the mid-twentieth century (chapter 8) that need to be understood not simply as deficiencies but as creative adjustments made during the tumultuous times of colonial Australia in the twentieth century.

It is important to point out, however, that these Anmatyerr perspectives and experiences are not necessarily shared by the Arrernte. The distinctive histories and experiences of the two groups make their interpretations and interests in the collection quite distinct from one another. Unlike Arrernte populations who have had to grapple with two competing Christian missions (Catholic in the east and Lutheran in the west) and the expanding township of Alice Springs (in the center of Arrernte territory), the Anmatyerr have suffered comparatively less settler intervention in their region. Anmatyerr traditional lands have never hosted a sizeable township, mission, or government settlement, and their interactions with *alhernter* (Europeans) have been shaped almost solely by a long-term engagement with pastoralism. The Anmatyerr have also received far less attention from ethnographers than have the Arrernte, who are recognized as one of the most closely studied Aboriginal groups in Australia. They would later feature in Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1915) and to a lesser extent in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913).

Given these links and the geographical proximity of the Anmatyerr to the Arrernte, as well as their significant ties in ritual, language, and kin, it is unsurprising that Strehlow was drawn into their territory. As a result, he filmed seventy-two separate ceremonial performances (what he labeled as "acts") between 1953 and 1965 and recorded thirty Anmatyerr songs. He traveled across the length and breadth of their traditional lands twice (first in 1932 and again in 1968), and also made a number of brief forays into their region over the years, mapping a large number of significant sites associated with the songs and mythologies. There are also a number of Anmatyerr-specific "family trees" detailing the names and totemic affiliations of 370 individuals. Over fifty Anmatyerr men helped Strehlow compile this material, and it now stands as the most extensive ethnography of the Anmatyerr people produced prior to introduction of land rights anthropology in the late 1970s (which was used to establish Aboriginal rights to land under Australian law).

This concentration on Anmatyerr experiences should not, however, suggest that I have altogether disregarded the perspectives of Arrernte people. Senior men like Ken Tilmouth Penangk and Paddy Kemarr repeatedly told me that “Arrernte and Anmatyerr are the same” and that the linguistic, kin, and cultural connections between the two groups was extensive. Tired of these orthodox categories, which position individuals as representatives of a particular “tribe” or “language group,” some people looked for alternatives. When pressed on the issue, Paddy, for example, would describe himself as being *Kal ntheyelkwer*, making reference to the “old language” spoken by people from the western Anmatyerr region, while others used “*Artety unanth*,” an ethnonym referring to the “mulga scrub” environment of the central and northern Anmatyerr area. Leaving the limitations of classification to one side, contemporary speakers of Anmatyerr nonetheless agree that they do have a distinct identity.

There are now well-entrenched attitudes and opinions about the Strehlow collection among the Arrernte community. Some Arrernte people argue that Strehlow was a duplicitous or even corrupt character that dispossessed them of their cultural heritage. Others speak of him with great fondness. Regardless, most will admit that the Strehlow collection is an important cultural resource for future generations as they rediscover details about their traditions and family histories and use the material as evidence in land claims (see Malbunka, 2004; Wilmot and Morgan, 2010; Kenny, 2013, pp. 187–193). To the Anmatyerr, though, Strehlow is a marginal historical figure of little significance to their cultural history or future. As their communities are located hundreds of kilometers from Alice Springs, where the Strehlow Research Centre is located, and their interactions with Strehlow were far fewer to begin with, their utilization of this collection has been much less frequent and far less political. Their distance from the controversial, and at times politicized, discourse surrounding this material gives Anmatyerr perspectives a distinctive freshness and invites innovative thinking about the value of such a collection.

### Belonging to Men

There is an obvious absence of female perspectives in this research, but this omission is not accidental. Strehlow’s collection is almost exclusively focused on the song and ritual practices of men and is commonly

understood as being utterly forbidden to women. One of the hallmarks of Central Australian Aboriginal society is the particularly strong divisions between male and female roles and responsibilities (Collmann, 1988). These gendered domains are evident in everyday interactions, but are particularly strong when it comes to the ritual sphere, where men and women generally have their own songs, dances, rituals, and mythological descriptions (Spencer and Gillen, 1899; Elkin, 1935; Berndt, 1974). While these gendered domains share a great deal and will at times intermingle, men's ritual in Central Australia is generally demarcated as "men's business," or in Anmatyerr as "*artwekenh*," literally "belonging to men." This male sphere is highly secretive and its contents closely guarded by men with the requisite ritual knowledge and social standing (Myers, 2014; Jones, 1995a).

The lives of Central Australian Aboriginal women, children, and the uninitiated were largely cordoned off in Strehlow's ethnography, as were the everyday, mundane aspects of social life. His ethnography was in no way expansive and never attempted to describe the heterogeneous nature of Arandic being or domestic community life. Myopically focused on male ritual and myth, women barely figure in his broader ethnographic scheme and are only cursorily noted (1971a, pp. 650–653). Like most of his contemporaries, Strehlow accepted that female song and ceremony was secondary in a religious domain seemingly controlled by men (Bell, 1984; Elkin, 1935, p. 197). Subsequent research has of course shown just how much women participate in ceremonial life, how they maintain their own song and ceremonial traditions, and how they may also be privy to some of the song and ceremonial traditions of men (Moyle, 1986, pp. 76–127; Bell, 1985; Bradley and Yanyuwa Families, 2010, pp. 173–177). But for Strehlow these concerns lay far beyond his interests.

Strehlow's close proximity and involvement in the secretive male ritual world has made it very difficult for him to cross over into the female domain. To do so would have almost certainly caused suspicion among his male informants and raised anxieties about what he might inadvertently reveal to women. Mick Werlaty Pengart, one of Strehlow's most important Anmatyerr informants in the 1960s, for example, explained that Strehlow's Land Rover "was known everywhere as a sort of travelling 'sacred cave' (*maka maka*) and that no women could normally approach it or even look in its direction" (T.G.H. Strehlow, 1964a, p. xx). Arrernte men today similarly recall that when they saw Strehlow's car arrive in their communities, women and children knew to keep well clear. Martin

McMillan Kemarr was a young boy when he remembered seeing Strehlow arrive at the Santa Teresa Mission:

I saw it from a long way . . . Didn't interfere or anything . . . That's when all the kids were running around everywhere. And we said "Hey, there is a stranger over there!" . . . I was hiding you know. I didn't know what was going on. I thought that must be *akiw* (men's ceremony camp) or something. So, we sneaked away and hid ourself . . . didn't say anything after that, nothing.

The secrecy and restrictions associated with men's ceremonial matters continue to be taken extremely seriously by Arrernte and Anmatyerr people. The Strehlow Research Centre building, widely understood by the local Aboriginal populace of Alice Springs as a place of "men's business," is often described as being "*amek-amek*" (restricted or off-limits) (see chapter 9). Only the "family trees" (genealogies) and a small number of nonceremonial photographs are ever accessed by women, and even in these cases some women approach the building with a degree of caution and will often send in other researchers or friends to collect information on their behalf. Female perspectives and analyses of this collection—while not impossible as the work of both Anna Kenny (2014) and Dianne Austin-Broos (2009) have shown—is nonetheless incredibly difficult when the ceremonial content of the collection is being considered.

While it is conceivable that some senior women will have knowledge of aspects of these songs and ceremonies, this cannot, as Eric Michaels has observed, be confused with the right to speak publicly about these matters (1985, p. 508). I was therefore careful not to elicit or invite the views of women during the course of this research out of respect for their responsibilities in this predicament. Moreover, I wanted to ensure that my own reputation among the male Arrernte and Anmatyerr community was not jeopardized. As the ceremonies and songs discussed herein continue to be treated with extreme sensitivity and secretiveness, serious limitations have been placed on how I present and discuss this material. Strehlow's methodical explanations and translations of song texts, and his detailed descriptions of ceremonies as well as visual evidence of the ceremonies, cannot be reproduced here. Accordingly, the deeper clarifications and explanations of the ritual or mythological proffered by the men I spoke

with have been deliberately truncated, rendered with intentional ambiguity, or excluded. To be doubly sure of the acceptability of the information presented in this book, an iterative process of writing was also adopted whereby interview transcripts and extracts were discussed with the relevant people prior to submission.

### The Relational, History, and Ethnography

In devising an analytical framework, *Ceremony Men* draws on several disciplines, including sociocultural anthropology, history, and museum studies. Ultimately an empirically driven study, unbound by any specific theoretical model/s, I have sought to understand the making of this archive and its interpretation today through a conceptual approach that resonates with strands of thinking associated with dialogical, phenomenological, and existentialist anthropology (Jackson, 1996; Desjarlais and Throop, 2011; Dastur, 2010; Ram and Houston, 2015; Jackson and Piette, 2015; Jackson, 2005; 2013). At the heart of this approach is an emphasis on the relationships between informants and ethnographers and the production of ethnographic knowledge. Michael Jackson's prioritizing of "radically empirical" research that honors the sites of lived social experience where "meanings are made, will is exercised, and reflection takes place" has been particularly influential (1996, p. 22).

Understanding the social world in this way means that if we are to appreciate what the Strehlow collection means to people today, as well as appreciate its history, we can best deliver this via fieldwork and shared practical activity. Expressed in another way, I have written this book in a manner that stresses the perceptions and experiences of people and their social contexts first and foremost, even where historical material is the original impetus. Interpretation of the collection and its history is conducted from this vantage point rather than via recourse to conceptual abstractions like the "Indigenous" and "non-Indigenous" binaries or through the lens of historically determined and structural relationships. Chris Anderson, a museum anthropologist with wide-ranging experience in the repatriation of culturally significant objects across Australia, has called for similar particularistic and local analyses:

The focus on gross structural relations in Australian history has precluded or ignored micro-ethnographic and historical accounts of what actually happened on the ground. Also in

the re-telling (reinvention?) of colonial encounter, social action has been all but left out. The battle lines have been too sharply drawn. (Anderson, 1995a, p. 1)

I have therefore tried to write close to the contents of local history and experience in a way that potentially unsettles some of the binaries that now commonly circulate these politicized histories. Even though I adopt a decidedly less politicized language than the “subaltern studies” of postcolonial theory, I do nevertheless share their deep concern with non-Western, subjective experiences, memories, and personal journeys (Gandhi, 1998; Spivak, 1988; Chandra, 2015). Challenging the well-established epistemological divisions in Western scholarship that mark off the world of the “objective” European intellect from the world of the “irrational” or “authentic” Indigene, I try to gain a better appreciation of ethnographies as being sites of encounter and exchange (Sahlins, 1995; Povinelli, 2002; Merlan, 2006; Hinkson, 2005). Accepting that such categories are mutually constituting, historically contingent, and ultimately too porous to be definitively bounded, I use the term “intercultural” to again draw attention to this relationality (Myers, 2002; Merlan, 2005; 2013; Smith and Hinkson, 2005; Sullivan, 2006; Abercrombie, 1998; Ottosson, 2016). Rather than developing a narrative that pits Strehlow, the “non-Indigenous” linguist-ethnographer, against the “Indigenous” Anmatyerr and Arrernte, I chose to look for the ways in which cultural differences are mediated, intermingled, and interrelated.

The theme of relationality is further explored as I investigate the relationship between historical material and contemporary lives. Here I have tried, as Austin-Broos (2009) does in her exploration of Arrernte cultural identity and its connections with the past, to use my own experience as means of developing an interpretive understanding. Away from the Australia deserts, anthropological explorations of Indigenous people’s reactions and interpretations of archival and museum objects have also proven equally motivating. Haidy Geismar’s (2009) collaborative return of early twentieth-century photography to the Indigenous people of Vanuatu and Orin Starn’s (2004) collaborative research with the Indigenous peoples in northern California into the fate of Ishi, the so-called “last” of the Yahi people, each highlight the value of shared discovery. The chapters in this book expose my interactions with people to varying degrees. These are woven into the narrative so as to illustrate how ethnographic understanding is never arrived at in a neutral or disengaged manner but is negotiated and tested in relationship with others.

Though not losing sight of the historically conditioned inequalities that underpin the physical, political, and legal structures in settler colonial states such as Australia, I use descriptions of the relational, experiential, and local to guide my analysis. Structural issues are not discarded in discussions of historical or present interactions, but neither do they take on a primacy. Jackson puts it this way:

What is critical about experience is that it is at once determined by historically located or socially constituted pre-understandings and at the same time never entirely reducible to such pre-givens. (Jackson, 2015, p. 294)

As chapters 3, 4, and 5 in this book demonstrate, changing historical, colonial, and economic contexts, including the early period of colonial violence in the Northern Territory of Australia, undoubtedly set the tone of relationships with ethnographers and settlers more generally. Many Central Australian Aboriginal people also came to know T.G.H. Strehlow either via his work with colonial authorities in “Native Affairs” or through his scholarly research, which was generally enabled by significant university and government funding and aided by local pastoralists. In chapters 6 and 7, Anmatyerr men explain the interactions with Strehlow with reference to some of these larger historical, socioeconomic considerations. These descriptions allow for issues of power to enter the analysis, as they are constituted in personal or group experiences, rather than emanating from theoretical models.

As such, I have tried to avoid reducing these complex interactions between people and groups to an interplay between powerful colonial apparatuses and “anticolonial responses” (Veracini, 2011, p. 3). To do so would leave little space for the somewhat “unexpected” political, social, or religious ensembles that emerge during “moments of colonial stress” (Clifford, 2001, p. 478). As Gardener and McConvell (2015) have shown in their analysis of some of the earliest anthropological investigations, colonial expectations often struggle to “contain” the interdependent and personal relationships that arise amid ethnographic work. Strehlow’s regular participation and inclusion in ceremonial events (chapter 5 and 6) and the way in which Anmatyerr people now encourage institutions like museums to adopt their own systems of managing this collection (chapter 9) speak to the type of interrelation that has been a characteristic of collections as “contact zones” (Clifford, 1997, pp. 188–219). Contrary to the view that

ethnographies and their collections are simply powerful instruments of Western dominance, these collections can become important arenas where “different cultures intersect, interact and are mutually influenced by the encounter” (Clifford, quoted in McCarthy, 2016, p. 5).

Working at the intersection between ethnographic and historical methodologies, I embrace a view of the past that incorporates and welcomes social memory and orality. While some of the more “historical” chapters presented early on (chapters 3, 4, and 5) are based on archival sources, they are too at times mingled with insights derived from my fieldwork. The more “ethnographic” chapters that follow (chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9) are similarly balanced by responding to the contents of the historical archive, although they emphasize Anmatyerr remembrances and versions of events.

Like so many other minority and colonized peoples, the local histories of the Anmatyerr have never been well documented, and their “reserves of memory” have been granted “little or no historical capital” (Nora, 1989, pp. 7–8). Listening to Anmatyerr oral memories was, however, crucial to not only permitting more actors, and more stories, upon the stage of this history, but allowed for my ethnographic experience to function as an interpretive guide to the overall research. I took the phenomenological view that “History” can only ever be understood in response to the changing social contexts of those that interpret and remember it and is thus produced in a dialectical relationship with the present (Jones and Russell, 2012, pp. 270–271; Ram and Houston 2015, p. 18). As such, neither *speaking* nor *writing* is held up here as being a lone purveyor of “historical truth” (Platt and Quisbert, 2007, p. 123). It was through the weighing-up of orally transmitted “Indigenous histories” in the “present” and the histories of Indigenous people written from a “European point of view” that insights were gained.

Despite the sincere efforts of some historians who have striven for a more anthropological understanding of colonial encounter (e.g., Dening, 1980; 2004; Clendinnen, 2005), the discipline of history has rarely consulted ethnographies as a path to interpreting the experiences of Indigenous peoples. Fewer historians still have actually carried out fieldwork of their own among these communities to write in a way that reflects the different epistemologies and ontologies of non-Western peoples. Minoru Hokari’s work stands out as one of few attempts to delineate a specific “mode of historical practice” of an Indigenous group, although this has been a concern in anthropology for some time (Hokari, 2005; for previous anthropological exploration on this topic, see Sutton, 1988; Kolig, 2000). In a similar vein,

this book emphasizes the manner in which Anmatyerr people's sense of the past is a lived experience, created and maintained through a complex web of relationships between people and Ancestral beings and significant places. These "histories" are often produced via performative acts such as storytelling, singing, and traveling, and are almost always contextualized in terms of specific local experiences and worldviews.

Among the *artety nwanth* (mulga expanse) of Anmatyerr country and the hubbub of life in remote Aboriginal communities, the history of Strehlow's archive really came to life. The songs and ceremonies, recorded long ago with men who are now deceased, produced keen demonstrations of present personal relationships (chapter 7) and evoked the eternal and unchanging presence of *Anengkerr* ancestor beings and their associated stories and places. Field-diary extracts and genealogies likewise invited in-depth discussions of local histories (chapter 6) and led to investigations into the intermingling forces of literacy and orality in these communities, as well as the apparently shifting ontologies of Anmatyerr people (chapter 8). These fuller explications of the collection were not simply "historical" but referred to a present and ongoing value for people across time and space.

## Chapter Overview

This book is structured in such a way that explanations of the ethnographic and historical context are first examined, followed by an in-depth, collaborative examination of the different facets of the Strehlow collection. Mindful that all social research is inherently implicated in subjective and intersubjective concerns, chapter 1 begins by laying bare the foundations to my own research endeavor before venturing into a critique of someone else's. This reflexive account addresses some of the issues I encountered as a person of urban-Australian, Scottish-English heritage conducting research with Aboriginal people today. Deeply aware of my own position as someone granted a relatively rare opportunity to work in the often-closed world of central Australian ceremonial content, I focus on some of the issues confronted.

The various archival challenges of working with Strehlow's complex collection are also explained in this chapter. The unpublished field diaries that form the foundation of Strehlow's collection brim with extraordinary detail, but in order to understand their full significance they must be read with reference to his extensive collection of audio, film, map, and artifacts.

Readers must also possess a degree of linguistic and cultural familiarity. One of the primary arguments made here is that collections such as this are almost always best examined in a collaborative manner, by those who possess expertise in the relevant languages, cultural practices, and local histories.

The historical context of Anmatyerr engagements with settler society, and specifically their interactions with ethnographers, is canvassed in chapter 2. In this chapter, the history of these relationships, from the arrival of colonial settlers in the region in the 1870s to the period when Strehlow began his research in the early 1930s, is sketched out. These historical intricacies, where Anmatyerr and *alhernter* people would meet, grapple with each other's worldviews, and enter into zones of cultural translation, were nonetheless carried out within asymmetrical relations of socioeconomic power. Understanding these past engagements (particularly those between ethnographers and Anmatyerr people in the early twentieth century) provides important background to the manner in which people later interacted with Strehlow.

Chapter 3 follows on from this by providing a detailed examination of Strehlow's contributions in the field of ethnography. As the bulk of the literature on Strehlow to date has concentrated on his life story, this chapter instead places far greater emphasis on the substance of his ethnography. Bringing an interest in the classics, literature, and the universality of the human condition with him into the field, Strehlow assumed a unique place among his contemporaries. Beginning with an epistemological critique of Strehlow's rhetoric, this chapter serves as a starting point from which we can better appreciate the way in which he portrayed Indigenous agency in his field diaries and publications.

The relatively unexplored career of Strehlow as a fieldworker is interrogated in chapter 4. Zeroing in on his work with the Anmatyerr, this chapter reveals how methodologies in ethnographic practice underwent considerable changes during the mid- to late twentieth century. Strehlow's fieldwork methods changed considerably over the years, from conducting surveys of language and myth early on, to hosting "ceremonial festivals" for the purposes of documentation, through to intensive mapping of sites in the later period. Using Strehlow's diarized accounts of this history, we examine the intense relationship that developed between a large community of Aboriginal men and this singular character. His frequent presence at ceremonies afforded him the fitting epithet of *Akiwarenye* (a denizen of the ceremonial ground), but as his informants gained greater social and

economic freedoms during the social changes of the 1960s, the ageing ethnographer came to feel “disowned.”

Anmatyerr remembrances and evaluations of Strehlow are presented in chapter 5. Here, Anmatyerr men reveal their memories of what these exchanges signified and some of the reasons they and their forefathers decided to share their ceremonial patrimony. As in the previous chapter, the narrative of the “extraordinary” anthropologist/ethnographer is challenged and greater emphasis placed on the many Aboriginal men who planned recording events and chose to permit the documentation of their cultural inheritance. These men reworked their own cultural categories to facilitate their sharing with Strehlow and saw his obsessive “following” of mythological narratives (“songlines”) as analogous to their own “*urrempe*” or “ceremony” men. In this respect, Strehlow was not unique. He resembled an existing cohort of men who actively sought out an expansive knowledge of song and ceremony.

The impressive collection of ceremonial films and song recordings are closely examined by Anmatyerr men in chapter 6. Seen as not only substantiations of the past but also confirmations of the present, these recordings are shown to be immediately relevant to the lives of present-day Anmatyerr people. Severely disrupting the assumption that loss of ritual knowledge has reduced people’s capacity to speak authoritatively for this material, these discussions often reveal an intimate degree of understanding. Despite a noted reduction in a deeper, more involved ceremonial patrimony, the ongoing utilization of song and ceremony, particularly in initiation contexts, has facilitated the retention of much of this knowledge among a handful of senior central Australian Aboriginal ritual experts. Younger generations, too, although less skilled in singing or performing these rites, demonstrate knowledge of the way in which places, mythologies, and people interrelate with the material and make it meaningful.

Contemporary interpretations of the collection are further explored in chapter 7, where particular attention is paid to the collection’s manuscript materials. Strehlow’s field diaries, maps, and genealogical materials are closely scrutinized via a number of case studies that focus on individual life stories. The analysis is framed by the intersection between social memory in a predominantly oral society and the influences of the written archive. Despite slightly differing opinions among generations on the value of the “written down story,” people generally read and decipher this material with direct reference (and deference) to the social memory held by elders. For