TIME PERSPECTIVE IN ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN CULTURE:
TWO APPROACHES TO THE ORIGIN OF SUBSECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In the title I do homage to a paper by Edward Sapir (1916). I make this reference not because I have any ambition to match the scope, originality and brilliance of Sapir's essay, but because the intellectual position with which I want to take issue has parallels to the position with which Sapir took issue. The method which I want to expound is also in the same tradition as the method which Sapir expounded.

The field in which both my argument and Sapir's have their place is that of culture history (or prehistory). In the case of the present paper, the focus is in particular on the contribution of linguistics to culture history, which was also a major concern of Sapir.

Unlike Sapir's wide-ranging selection of examples, this paper takes as its subject one particular question, the origin and diffusion of subsections, a type of social classification into eight named units known locally as 'skins', which, as far as I know, is unique to Northern Australia. Two recent contributions to the literature on the origin and history of subsections

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1 The discussion of the field I am entering is somewhat hampered by irrelevant terminological distinctions, as well as by the kind of prejudices mentioned below. Thus 'Aboriginal History' is generally taken to mean the history of contact between Aborigines and Whites, excluding the many thousands of years which preceded this period, and even, as in the case of the diffusion of subsections, developments which were occurring while Europeans were on the continent, but unobserved by them. The former is the province of Prehistory which is quite firmly associated with the theory and practice of the Archeology of material artefacts. The 'prehistory' of ideas and institutions in the recent period is a kind of disciplinary no-man's land in the present academic configuration. However the history of Aboriginal non-material culture in the period preceding the European invasion and immediately following it could arguably be just as important to Aboriginal people's consciousness of themselves today, as the (for them) by and large tragic history of the invasion and settlement, which constitutes the field of 'Aboriginal History' today. There are several myths associated with the field of culture history which conspire to discourage people examining it: (i) that there was no history before the Whites arrived i.e. that Aboriginal society was in some way static; (ii) even if there was history, the Aboriginal people do not believe that there was; and (iii) that any such history is inaccessible, anyway. None of these points is really valid, but I do not intend to mount an extensive argument on this here. The evidence on the origin of subsections is one small indication that such culture history can be accessible, given the right methods.
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(von Brandenstein 1982 and McConvell 1985) have arrived at quite different conclusions about their origins. Although both rely heavily on comparative linguistic evidence to argue their case, there is a great difference in the method employed by each author, and that is to be the main burden of the discussion here.

I shall argue here that von Brandenstein’s conclusions are wrong mainly because his methods are wrong, and on the other hand, my conclusions are right (or at least vastly more probable than von Brandenstein’s) mainly because my methods are right. Von Brandenstein is employing a method (with his own idiosyncrasies, to be sure) somewhat similar to the method Sapir was breaking away from in 1916, whereas I am following the more modern tradition established by Sapir.

If Sapir’s battle was fought and decisively won in 1916, why does it have to be fought again in a different continent? There are at least three circumstances which compel me to recycle the debate in this way. One is that von Brandenstein’s work is being published by a reputable publisher, and is receiving good reviews (e.g. Heath 1984, Yengoyan 1984) which scarcely mention the numerous and glaring deficiencies in his method. The second is that there is the possibility of further productive work based on the results and method of McConvell (1985), but that reliance on the results or methods of von Brandenstein would only lead other researchers into blind alleys. The third circumstance is that Aboriginal cultural prehistory (other than that based on archeological material evidence), and in particular work based on comparative linguistic evidence, does not seem to enjoy a good name in Australia. There seems to be a prejudice amongst anthropologists against ‘speculation’, a word which calls to mind the methods of earlier anthropologists such as Frazer, Morgan etc. Practically any cultural prehistory (other than archaeology) can be dismissed as ‘speculation’, apparently without consideration of whether the methods of the particular study are sound or not. Like other modern anthropologists, Sapir struggled against the earlier speculative anthropologists, but not to abolish historical speculation or banish history, but to give culture history and the linguistic contribution to it a sounder, more rigorous methodology.

Unfortunately, although the early history of both anthropological and linguistic studies of Australia abounds with wild speculation about the origins of cultural and linguistic traits, there have not been many examples of the use of the more restrained and rigorous methods in Australian Aboriginal culture history since that period. Understandably, anthropologists and linguists have devoted their time largely to the recording of the remaining traditional Aboriginal societies and languages, and to synchronic analyses of them. The main figure who has been publishing work on Aboriginal culture history based substantially on linguistic data recently is von Brandenstein, who repeats many of the mistakes of nineteenth-century specu-

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2 My original paper on the origin of subsections was written in 1977, and presented at the Australian Anthropological Society conference in Canberra in 1981. Data on subsection terms presented in this paper comes from McConvell 1985, and results from my own fieldwork, unless otherwise stated. The orthography is the standard Warlpiri/Walmajarri orthography, except for the Yolngu Matha (North East Arnhem Land) terms in which voiced/voiceless distinctions are made. Where the orthography of original sources is inconsistent or obscure, I have made some small changes in accordance with the best available information. Space has unfortunately not permitted a description of the structure and functions of subsection systems to be included here; a brief description is included in McConvell 1985, which also gives references to other relevant works, such as Meggitt 1962 and Scheffler 1977.
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lation and adds a few of his own. With this as the sole example of culture history as informed by linguistics currently on view, it is not surprising that reactions to the field in general are not very positive.

It is my intention here, by distinguishing between good and bad methods, to rescue the field of linguistic culture history in Aboriginal Australia from its present lowly position of 'conjecture' and 'speculation' in the eyes of many, and to show that it can make valuable contributions to our knowledge of Aboriginal culture, past and present.

As well as arguing the advantages of the method exemplified by my work (McConvell 1985) and the disadvantages of the method of von Brandenstein (1982) I wish to present briefly the results of the enquiry into the origin of subsections in McConvell (1985), some of which are summarised on the map below, and some possible further extensions of this enquiry. These extensions include further working out of the detail of the origin and diffusion of subsections, and more generally, the gathering of evidence to support a relative chronology of cultural diffusion using the operation of phonological rules on terms for significant cultural items in Northern Australia. Finally I shall briefly discuss how the results of such historical investigation can affect our view of present-day institutions and social change in general.

Map: The diffusion of Subsections.
SAPIR’S METHODOLOGY.

Sapir was among the first to make a clean break with what he called the ‘speculative school of anthropology’. Early in his career he wrote in a review of Lowie’s Primitive Society (quoted in Mandelbaum ed. 1949):

The ready generalisers on social origins, the rapid readers of many monographic works on primitive societies in pursuit of the one unifying idea have had it very largely their own way.

He clearly intended to change that picture. He castigated those anthropologists for whom:

... the form [of primitive society] and its cultural content alike are but the ordained reflexes of certain supposed traits of primitive mentality.

In the Australian field he was critical of Schmidt who:

frequently abandons normal genetic methods in favor of arbitrarily applied typological criteria in order to demonstrate a literal agreement between his Sprachenkreise and Kulturkreise.

Yet Sapir was by no means an opponent of historical enquiry into cultural history using inferences from the present distribution and form of cultural and linguistic items. The ‘time perspective’ of the title of his essay (1916) derives from the metaphor of a third dimension read into the:

flat surface of American culture as we read space perspective into the flat surface of a photograph.

The enhanced perspective afforded by this type of study is only truly revealing if the methods of the enquiry are correct. One of the basic principles constantly ignored by the ‘speculative anthropologists’ whom Sapir attacks is that cultural phenomena:

must be worked out historically, that is, in terms of actual happenings, however inferred, that are conceived to have a specific sequence, a specific localisation and specific relations among themselves.

Sapir (1916) goes on to detail numerous methodological principles in relation to the type of historical hypotheses that can legitimately be derived from different types of cultural and linguistic evidence. Most of these principles also have one or more cautions attached to them, so that the whole methodology is a finely balanced structure of positive and negative points associated with different types of evidence.

VON BRANDENSTEIN’S AIMS AND ASSUMPTIONS.

Much of the criticism levelled by Sapir at the ‘speculative anthropologists’ can be repeated almost word for word in relation to the work of von Brandenstein. The remarks about the subordination of method to the pursuit of the ‘one unifying idea’ and the treatment of various widely separated systems as ‘ordained reflexes of a supposed trait of [Aboriginal] mentality’ cannot fail to remind the reader of von Brandenstein’s approach to subsections. It is his clearly stated aim to show that ‘substance’ of the subsection systems is the same throughout the ambit of such systems in Northern Australia, and that this meaning resides in the division of temperaments, somewhat similar to the ‘humours’ of earlier European philosophy.

It is not my intention to take issue with von Brandenstein’s ascription of a symbolic meaning to the Kariiera section system, from which he claims the subsection system arose, involving four temperamental qualities. His description and analysis of this system is a major
contribution to our knowledge, and this contribution is duly acknowledged in McConvell (1985, Note 6) where a slightly different interpretation of the facts is offered. I also concur with von Brandenstein in tracing the origin of four of the subsection terms to the Pilbara, close to the region of the Kariera.

The fatal flaw in von Brandenstein's approach, however, is the ascription of similar meanings to the subsection terms of all groups to whom the system was diffused, and in order to establish this, the use of a comparative method which is so undisciplined that it could undoubtedly 'prove' just about anything one might wish about the origins of ideas.

Von Brandenstein is frank about his aims, and makes no apologies for the fact that his approach is out of tune with most of his colleagues. His book of subsections (1982:5) begins with the statement of a methodological principle which would be anathema to just about all modern anthropologists or historians:

If a superstructure of highest philosophical order is found to have existed in one Australian region and to have ruled a particular socio-cultural practice there, it must also be involved in other regions where similar or identical socio-cultural practices can be observed.

I cannot consider in detail what is meant by 'highest philosophical order' or the question of the sense in which a 'superstructure' of this kind can 'rule' a socio-cultural practice, mainly because von Brandenstein's thinking on these points is not made very explicit. The 'superstructure' in this case is the classification into temperamental qualities.

If the substance of the Kariera section system is complex classification by opposed temperamental qualities, similar systems in other areas of Australia must likewise be based on the same contrast.

Even if one is prepared to accept that such a classification played a role in the early development of sections, the type of conditional statement presented above is unacceptable in general as well as being inapplicable to the case of subsections in particular.

It is a matter of common knowledge that cultural forms and practices may be diffused from one group to another without necessarily bringing with them the 'philosophical' or ideological underpinnings of the practices in the source community. Counterexamples to the principle that the original 'philosophical superstructure' of a practice is retained along with its 'manifestations' are so abundant that this principle cannot even be considered a tendency. Moreover arguably such a principle could not work, since the 'philosophical' ideas associated with a practice in one group may contradict ideas current in the group adopting the practice. This could result either in the automatic rejection of the new practice, the automatic total replacement of the indigenous ideas by the borrowed ones, or the uncontrolled proliferation of contradictory ideas in the borrowing group, if von Brandenstein's principle were followed.

None of these results is attested or likely: what is commonly attested is the partial borrowing or adaptation of some aspects of the ideas associated with a practice, and their subsequent partial (and sometimes eventually total) assimilation into the ideological structure of the borrowing group.

It is the latter partial and selective character of cultural diffusion which affords us one of the most valuable tools for inferring cultural historical processes, just as the partial assimilation of diffused linguistic elements provides powerful evidence in historical linguistics. Sapir brilliantly used this property of relative firmness or coherence of elements in complexes and the stages between the 'lack of capability of analysis and absolute transparency' to propose hypotheses about the relative age of cultural and linguistic elements. Recognising that
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cultural complexes are neither self contained and 'ruled' by an idea, as the extreme idealists like von Brandenstein would argue, nor necessarily completely integrated in a harmonious social system as extreme functionalists propose, frees us to see cultural complexes as the sites of contradictions between new and old elements which are more or less acute, and which work themselves out in definable historical steps. In von Brandenstein's 'all-or-nothing' approach to diffusion, this historical approach to the various 'substances' of sections and subsections in their development is disallowed by the assumption of a ruling idea which pre-empts other hypotheses.

In fact there is very little evidence of the occurrence of this 'ruling idea' of temperamental classification anywhere among present day Aborigines (as Heath 1984 also notes), and von Brandenstein has to resort to very dubious kinds of support for his shaky edifice. The fact that the evidence is as scant and weak as it is (consisting largely of single words that are said to bear some resemblance to or have some connection with subsection terms) itself contradicts the principle that the 'ruling idea' maintains its connection with the practice, since this connection is clearly not a conscious part of Aboriginal culture, in most places. In the case of subsections, it can be guaranteed that if any present day Aboriginals from Fitzroy Crossing to Yirrkala 3 were asked about the 'substance' of subsections, they might talk of kinship, marriage rules, perhaps ceremonial relationships, but none would mention temperament. There is no evidence either that temperamental classification was involved in subsections in these areas in earlier times. Apart from the 'linguistic evidence' (whose value I dispute below) there is no good anthropological data offered to support the claim of an underlying system of temperamental classification associated with any subsection system.

Two cases which purport to offer such support are the Murinbata and the Aranda (1982: 21-23). Since von Brandenstein (correctly, in my view) traces the origin of four of the subsections to the Pilbara, where they did embody symbolic oppositions, and since, in order to conform to his own principle, he must show that the entire system of eight subsections is based on the same or similar oppositions, he introduces the idea that the other four subsections are a 'side set' embodying the meaning flat or small as opposed to the original round or big set. 4 The 'evidence' for this thesis from the Murinbata is a gross misrepresentation of Falkenberg's data. It is stated that ngulu is a term for 'subsection totem'. In fact ngurlu is a term for matrilineal social totem (Stanner); this is also admitted by von Brandenstein (1982: 170), but not in relation to the Murinbata. The matrilineal social totems in this area do

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3 There is said to be a belief about an association between physical appearance and moiety in North-East Arnhem Land (von Brandenstein, 1982:84, quoting Thomson), although one might assume that this is but one of a wide range of symbolic associations of the moieties, as widely reported for this region. Since it is fairly clear that patrimoieties were present in the area before subsections arrived, and in the absence of other evidence, we need not infer any special connection between physical appearance and subsection.

4 As I have shown in McConvell 1985 the four terms which were added to what I call the Northwestern section terms were not simply added as a 'side set', but themselves originally constituted a separate section system (the Northcentral system). The mechanism of the combination of the two systems was primarily built on a particular type of marriage alliance, I argue, not on a symbolic opposition. It may have been that the relationship of the two sets (which I call Divisions 1 and 2, in McConvell 1985) was accorded some symbolic significance at that time other than the fact that they originated in different places. To my knowledge, however, these Divisions are not named or otherwise symbolically recognised at present, except perhaps in the area of the Gulf of Carpentaria where semi-moieties are used.
have some ideological association with physical appearance (skin and hair colour etc.) not temperament, but these associations cannot be attributed to subsections. Von Brandenstein blithely ‘corrects’ the data obtained by Falkenberg, and tells us ‘what was meant by the informants’. Needless to say, Falkenberg’s data are correct, and follow the matrilineal principle of *ngurlu* (see also von Brandenstein 1982:170-172 and Stanner 1979:94-96; the latter explains how contradictory beliefs come to be present in the area).

The second case, of the Aranda as reported by Strehlow, has more substance: it clearly relates to a belief about some aspects of the physical appearance of people in different subsections. It must be borne in mind that only the Northern Aranda had subsections and had acquired these only in the living memory of Spencer’s informants from the Warlpiri to the north; the other Aranda had sections, the terms for which were very close to Pilbara section terms, and which they had probably acquired directly from the Pilbara. The associations of subsections with physical appearance among the Northern Aranda could well be an extension of similar beliefs about sections acquired from the south or west, and nothing to do with the bulk of groups who have had subsections for much longer periods, and who do not share such beliefs.

**Von Brandenstein’s Linguistic Methods.**

The concluding remarks of Sapir’s essay (1916:462) emphasise:

the danger of tearing a cultural element loose from its psychological and geographical (i.e. distributional) setting. No feeling of historical perspective can be gained for any cultural element without careful reference to these settings. Another way of bringing out this point is to emphasize the necessity of historically evaluating or weighting a culture element or linguistic datum before it is employed for comparative purposes. The failure adequately to weight ethnological and linguistic data, but to rely largely on the counting of noses, is to an equal extent responsible for the historical vagaries of a Frazerian evolutionist or for those of his counterpart, the Graebnerian diffusionist.

Von Brandenstein is certainly guilty of ‘the counting of noses’: linguistic forms that suit his purpose are produced from a very deep hat, usually with no reference to setting or the weighting which Sapir saw as essential in this type of work. When this method fails, von Brandenstein can resort to the ‘etymological method’ and ‘phonosemantics’. The latter two methods allow him to (1) disregard actual recorded forms of words in favour of supposed earlier forms reconstructed often with the flimsiest of evidence, and (2) to break words into smaller parts or syllables irrespective of whether these are morphemes in the language, and to impute a meaning to these on the basis of some other word, often in some other language with no proven connection with the original language.

This method is not only the antithesis of the careful and constrained method advocated by Sapir in the handling of linguistic evidence, but in its laxity also even goes far beyond the methods used by most nineteenth-century comparative philologists. Sapir found linguistic evidence among the most helpful in constructing hypotheses about cultural history since on its basis research is able to proceed to a positive conclusion that a word or form has been borrowed from a particular language, and thereby ‘gain some idea of the sequence in which the element was assimilated by the different tribes of the region’ (1916:445). Von Brandenstein turns this proposition on its head by gathering words and bits of words from far and
wide without any real attempt to establish actual borrowings between specific languages, arbitrarily distorting phonetics and linking disparate meanings, and introducing circularity by etymologising from words that have already been subjected to etymological 'adjustment'. Dispensing with the tried and true methods of comparative linguistics, he appeals to 'sound rules common in Australian linguistics and comparison with names from other systems' to justify his method, without spelling out what these 'common rules' might be, or whether they can in fact be proved to apply in particular instances where he uses them. Thus from among the most reliable techniques available to the cultural historian, in von Brandenstein's hands linguistic evidence becomes one of the least reliable.

The main aim of von Brandenstein's elaborate but misguided work of etymology is to establish a series of links between subsection terms, totemic species and other vocabulary items in many languages throughout Australia, which purport to show consistent strands of meaning based on the temperamental classification. As we have already seen the aim is misguided because there is no such guiding principle which rules the pattern of classification systems throughout the continent. There may be significant patterns in local areas which could be revealed by painstaking work: but this is not part of von Brandenstein's method. Sapir insists that 'the greater the geographical distance, the stronger do we have a right to demand the evidence to be a historical connexion — that is, the more rigidly do we apply our criteria' (1916:422) but von Brandenstein exercises no such caution. He casts his net widely, and neither genetic relationship of languages nor actual connection of groups through contiguity or trade route need be invoked to justify the positing of a relationship between linguistic forms. Since he operates with the very broadest semantic categories which constitute his bundles of temperamental characteristics, the most tenuous of shared semantic features suffices to establish a link.

In comparing phonetic forms, von Brandenstein's method give the investigator a lot of leeway. One of his favourite techniques is the insertion of an unattested liquid (usually r) into words. I have already drawn attention to this predilection (McConvell, 1984) in the case of the widespread Western Desert word wangka, which von Brandenstein persistently transcribes warngga, for no good reason. In the book being discussed here (von Brandenstein, 1982) the Arnhem Land subsection terms Waamut, Wakaj and Gojok are rendered Warmut, Wartgatj, and Kuiditjurk, respectively. In the case of Waamut, he even goes so far as to star the attested form, as unattested. These insertions make it easier for him to draw certain etymological conclusions, which are nonetheless still doubtful e.g. Heath (1984) points out that Nunggubuyu kurriddijitjurk 'chicken-hawk', which is linked by von Brandenstein to the subsection term Kuiditjurk (sic) is in fact unconnected, as the former is a local onomatopoeia. Other similar etymological speculations about bird names are likely to be ill-founded as such names are commonly based on the bird's call e.g. the Long Billed Corella kurrragitj supposedly linked to kurrk 'light and warm blood’ (sic) in Western Victoria (1982:10). Other gratuitous, and in the light of the evidence in McConvell (1985), unjustified insertions include the initial k in Kambadjina (claimed to be the original stem of the subsection term Jampijina and similar forms) which allows a link to be made to the unconnected Nyungic verb stem kamba — 'burn, cook'. Sometimes the errant pathways of etymology seem to be followed in several different directions at once, covering an incredible amount of country in between, as when the term Kungwarraji which is said to be the etymon of terms like Jungurra which is on the one hand claimed to be related to Tjaru kunggu ‘blood’, and on the other hand to be related to the Arnhem Land term Ngarrtj, which is in turn supposedly related to a term of an
Anyone familiar with von Brandenstein’s earlier work (e.g. 1970) will already be aware of the advantages of ‘phonosemantics’ to anyone who wants to ‘prove’ what they like with very slim evidence, and its disadvantages for anyone wanting to make real progress in culture history. Such analyses of meaning as *Paltjarri* as ‘one who lets himself be bent’ < *pal* ‘bent’ + causative *tja rri* ‘expressive of the middle voice’ are reprinted in the new work, with such new ones as the derivation of the subsection term *Pangardi* from the supposed Warlbiri word *panga*, ‘scratch and itch’, linked to the Corella *pangarra*.

Many more instances could be cited in which von Brandenstein’s inferences about linguistic connections are either plainly false, or improbable in the extreme, but it would be tedious to continue with the catalogue. In fact, given von Brandenstein’s methods, one must arrive at results whose probability of correctness is extremely low. Much of his linguistic evidence is coincidence, dressed up as historical connection, and it may be that his concept of ‘coincidence’ is faulty. He writes, for instance (1982:58):

> It cannot be a coincidence that, on the one hand, *Middinj* and *Pullanj* are names of the rainbow and its serpent and that, on the other hand, *tjiMidd(ja) tjiMii tj* and *Pullanj* are names for one subsection.

Not only can this be a coincidence, but, in the light of the evidence of the origin of the two subsection terms in question in the area immediately south of Darwin presented in McConvell (1985), is virtually certain to be one. First, the names of the rainbow and its serpent are reported from the Karajarri, a Pama-Nyungan language spoken over 2000 km from the source languages of the two subsection terms, which are not Pama-Nyungan and would share very few cognates with Karajarri. Secondly, there has been the familiar tampering with the attested forms of the terms (although it is far less serious here than in other cases): the lengthening of the vowel i and the consonant l (in fact this is retroflex in the subsection term, not geminate). Third, purported proof on grounds of meaning, both that *miitj* signifies ‘iridescent’ and *pullanj* (sic) ‘double’ and also that both these meanings are related to the Rainbow Serpent, lacks credibility in its individual steps, let alone when the whole is considered together, and completely lacks the features of historical specificity and weighting of evidence that Sapir saw as vital.

The two kinds of approaches to linguistic evidence (the mainstream tradition of Sapir and McConvell, and that of von Brandenstein) have gross differences, in terms of probability and therefore also in terms of credibility. The chances that, other things being equal, a typical word form in one Aboriginal language will have the same meaning as the same or a very similar word in another Aboriginal language are very low indeed. If we find such a case, therefore, we have good reason to think that this may not be a coincidence, particularly if we have evidence that there is either a genetic connection between the languages, or that they have been in contact and therefore borrowed words from each other.

In a method such as that proposed by Sapir, the existence of the latter type of evidence, particularly where geographical distance between the languages is great, is a strict requirement for consideration of forms as being related. The number of languages from which evidence of this type may legitimately be drawn would in such a method be very restricted by these requirements. In von Brandenstein’s method, on the other hand, there appears to be little or no restriction on the languages from which items can be drawn for purposes of comparison.
Since we know that both word forms and meanings can change over time, we must allow for some discrepancy between the two matched form-meaning pairs. This must also be subject to principled limitations. Among the most strict of these would be to require that sound changes conform to the known operation of certain sound laws. In the absence of detailed knowledge of such laws in Australian linguistics, we may sometimes have to content ourselves with judgments about the ‘naturalness’ of certain phonetic changes (about which there is a fair degree of unanimity) and of certain semantic changes (the theory of which is less well developed).

Contrast the probabilities implied by the von Brandenstein approach: his method allows firstly at least the tolerance of the more rigorous method in regard to variation in phonetic form. However the option available in his method of altering phonetic form on the basis of supposed etymological evidence, before comparison is made, would at least double the probability of finding a match. If we then add the very powerful device of ‘phonosemantics’, the odds shorten considerably once again, since instead of words one can deal in the supposed meanings of parts of words or syllables. Finally von Brandenstein’s method allows semantic links to be proposed between very diverse items, on the basis of the items sharing some very abstract or ill-defined temperamental or symbolic quality, or on the basis of quite long chains of such connections.

The increase in probability of ‘matching’ a form-meaning pair in another language entailed by these processes is vastly more than that brought about by the more cautious method of semantic comparison above. In sum, using von Brandenstein’s methods the probability of a match being a pure coincidence ends up at least as high as the probability that the supposed resemblance results from an actual historical connection, which is an unacceptable basis for serious historical hypotheses. Even if one were able to pick which of the comparisons has some significance, the lack of historically specific hypotheses about the borrowing of particular items and the circumstances under which this may have happened makes the whole exercise somewhat empty.

**VON BRANDENSTEIN’S THEORY OF THE ORIGIN OF SUBSECTIONS.**

Although his method still deserves a great deal of criticism, it is true that von Brandenstein has recognised some of his earlier mistakes, and has rectified somewhat his view of the diffusion of sections and subsections. In the earlier work (e.g. 1970) the role of subsections in diffusing the section terminology was hardly even acknowledged, and the only question of origin that was at stake was that of sections, one system of which he rightly claimed to have had its starting point in the Pilbara. In his more recent work (1982), subsections have come to dominate his investigation, and he has admitted (1982:72) that the Western Queensland section systems borrowed subsection terms, rather than having the Northwestern section terms diffused into their area directly.

Despite these advances, von Brandenstein has not in latest work even come close to discovering the point of origin of subsections, as I indicated in 1977 (a paper now published as McConvell 1985). One reason for this is that he failed to grasp two points which proved crucial in my argument:

1. Although Spencer (1914) appears in the References of von Brandenstein (1982), there is no discussion of the description of the Awarai (Warrai) Northcentral section system which I (1985) showed was the source of the Division 2 terms which augmented the Division 1
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terms which came from the west, to form the new subsection system;
(2) Von Brandenstein completely misjudges the significance of the masculine and feminine prefixes ja-/na- which provided the other major clue to locating the origin of the subsection system.

The first point above may have merely resulted from an oversight on von Brandenstein’s part, which may or may not indicate that his preoccupation with the idea (1982:57) of: the brilliant Aboriginal mind who conceived of the extension of the four section system by adding a side set to it had got the better of his alertness in looking for alternative explanations of origins. It is a curious fact that everyone who has investigated the origin of subsections, to my knowledge, (e.g. Durkheim 1904, Scheffler 1977) has assumed that they must have arisen by an extension of the system from four to eight categories by an act of will internally within a single group, without even considering the possibility that they could have sprung from a particular type of relationship between two groups, which was in fact the case between the possessors of the Northwestern section system and the possessors of the Northcentral section system. Again Sapir has something apt to say of this type of case (1916:473) when he speaks of the thesis: that the only conceivable type of culture origin is the association into a functional unit of cultural elements already in existence in unassociated form

This thesis would tend to encourage investigators to seek out the pre-existing forms of both elements of a new cultural complex, not to simply explain the new form as a brilliant extension of an original more partial institution.

The second point above perhaps reflects more directly on von Brandenstein’s method. In relation to the gender prefixes in what is called in McConvell 1985 the Southwestern group of subsection systems, he says (1982:53):

Two main reasons are responsible for a number of changes in the word form: the tendency to retain and restore the 3-syllable rhythm of the names and the well observed sound rule that medial k becomes 0 or initial k is dropped or replaced by w; this is the rule in song language.

This is all very vague and does not even approximate to being an explanation for the widespread prefixes ja-/na- found only on subsection terms in languages which have not, and never had, any other prefixes. The approach advocated by Sapir would urge the investigator to search out a particular historical origin and particular path of diffusion of these particular prefixes, as McConvell (1985) has done. Von Brandenstein’s approach contents itself with letting such crucial pieces of the puzzle go unsolved, while the collection of vaguely interesting cultural bric-a-brac, which neither proves nor disproves anything, is given priority.

Three variants of a hypothesis about the place of origin of subsections are advanced by von Brandenstein. All these share the idea that the subsection system arose close to the origin point of sections, in the Pilbara area of Western Australia, i.e. much further west than the points of origin proposed by Elkin (1970) and McConvell (1985). It is worth quoting von Brandenstein’s exposition of the origin at length because it illustrates how far astray his method can lead him (von Brandenstein 1982:70):

the place of origin of the new system branched off from the original section system of the Kariera not along the coast but along a feasible line east of the sand dunes of the Great Sandy Desert. It involves the Mangarla and the Warnman in the first place, the Walmatjarri and Kugadja in the second place, with the Tjaru as a third possibility, supposing an originally more easterly position of these
‘tribes’. The Mangarla and Wanman had taken on and maintained the section system until recently. For the possibility of a more easterly origin of the subsection system, we realise that the Warlbiri, including the Ngardi, affirm that the system reached them from the west. We may assume that the ingenious person or persons who enlarged the section system must have lived close to the Mangarla, who provided the original CQF name *Kungguira* and close as well to the linguistic scenery in which the words *muṯiṯj* ‘multi-coloured’, *panga-* ‘scratch’ and *kamba-* ‘to cook and be hot’ occurred together.

Two further alternative hypotheses are presented: (1) that the new system originated among the Karierra at Depuch Island (i.e. in the same area in which the Northwestern section system originated) and spread to the area described above; and (2) that the ‘designers of the subsection system’ lived around Percival Lakes and (1982:71): felt the need to join the rainbow dualistic concept as a side set to the main set, and thereby improved the social value of the new system, in particular accounting for the prohibition of certain types of marriage. (Problems of kinship are not discussed in this study). The innovated system was then diffused farther east, where the section system had not yet spread, the most likely places being the former tribal grounds of the Walmatjarri and Kugadja, or some of the smaller groups in their neighbourhood.

The latter supposition gains in probability when our assumption expressed above is interpolated, namely that the *ṯja-/na-* prefixation of the subsection names originated at the border of the section and subsection areas east of the Great Sandy Desert i.e. between the Mangarla and the Warnman on the western and the Walmatjarri and Kugadja on the eastern side.

There are some odd features in this picture of the origin of subsections. Three of the groups credited with involvement with the origin of subsections, Warnman, Mangarla and Karierra do not have subsections, but sections, and there is no record of them having had subsections. I presume von Brandenstein is proposing that they had subsections, then changed back to sections, although no evidence worthy of the name is offered for this proposition. The Kugadja (Kukaja) are also implicated in the origin, but it is quite plain that they and other eastern groups of the Western Desert acquired subsections this century from the Warlpiri. Here some weight is placed on the alleged statement by Warlpiri that they acquired subsections from the West, for which no reference is given. If they did receive subsections from the West, it would have been from the North-West, and not from the Western Desert; nor would it have happened this century.

Even more puzzling is the statement that the presence of the *ja-/na-* gender prefixes supports the inclusion of the Mangarla and Warnman in the group originating subsections. I would take this to mean that there is some evidence that at an earlier stage these languages possessed gender prefixes of this type. However von Brandenstein offers no such evidence, and given that neither gender nor prefixes are known in these languages or any of the languages closely related to them, the possibility seems indeed remote.

The actual ‘linguistic evidence’ for the area of origin proposed amounts to the existence of the four stems *kungguira, panga-, muṯiṯj, and kamba-* of diverse meanings, scattered in different parts of a very broad area of the north of the Western Desert. The supposed connections between these and four of the subsection stems are in fact all coincidental and should be rejected as invalid for reasons of the type set out in the preceding section.
As far as anthropological evidence for the place and nature of the transition to subsections is concerned, von Brandenstein is not very forthcoming. Although he apparently inclines to the common, but as yet unproven, view that the change to subsections reflected a change in marriage rules, he states that his volume is not concerned with 'kinship', a remarkable feat for a book about subsections. Perhaps this is the reason why he makes no reference to Durkheim's hypothesis about the origin of subsections (1904) nor to Elkin's quite reasonable placement of the point of origin of subsections (1970). He is however willing to speculate about the specific cults that were in operation at the time of the origin of the new system, and how the 'brilliant mind' of the inventor or inventors used features of these to devise the new system — all without a scrap of solid evidence.

McConvell's Aims and Method.

Von Brandenstein pursues his aim of uncovering the 'substance' of subsections mainly by presenting putative connections between subsection terms and other vocabulary items in a wide range of languages. Such connections are also used as part of the method of establishing connections between terms. By contrast, in my work I do not aim to unearth such common cores of meaning in the subsection terms, nor do such meanings play any role in my historical method. If the terms could be shown to have connotations other than those of kinship and marriage, these could be used but only in a way restricted to the particular historical circumstance in which they could be shown to play a role, not generalised wholesale through time and space. In fact such connotations are so limited that a productive enquiry can be mounted without any major reference to them either in the aim or method. Two of my aims in McConvell (1985) are therefore more modest than those of von Brandenstein: I hope to show:

(1) that the area of origin of the subsection system can be located fairly precisely on the basis of linguistic evidence in the area just north of the lower Victoria River, Northern Territory;
(2) that the eight subsection terms most generally used arose through the amalgamation of the two sets of four terms of two pre-existing section systems, one originating in the Pilbara district of Western Australia (which I shall call the Northwestern section system), and the other originating in the so-called 'Top End' of the Northern Territory, south of Darwin (which I shall call the North-central section system);

The third aim is more ambitious than those of von Brandenstein in that it makes a serious attempt to describe the actual social process which led to the new system:

(3) I also speculate that the amalgamation of the two section systems into a new and qualitatively different subsection system could have taken place in the first instance through the practice of a type of marriage exchange whereby men of only one equivalent patrimoiet in each of the groups possessing the Western and North-central section systems married women of the opposite moiety of the other group, while men of the other moiety continued for some time to marry women of the same group (i.e. the group possessing the same section terms). It will be shown that this arrangement produced all the main features of a subsection system, which was then adopted as a classification system generally irrespective of the form of marriage exchange practised.

My methods in providing evidence for the first two propositions in the article from which
I am quoting above (McConvell 1985:1-2) rely heavily on the accepted methods of historical linguistics. A large number of section and subsection terms are compared, and hypotheses concerning the diffusion of these terms are advanced. The bulk of the evidence consists of making connections between individual terms, and between the structures of the whole subsection systems of which they are part. No resort is made to putative connections between the terms and other vocabulary items. Each link between a pair of terms is justified on the basis that any discrepancy between them can be shown to result from sound changes which are otherwise known to operate in the particular area where diffusion took place. As Sapir insisted, each connection is related to a definable close historical and geographical linkage: in most cases the connection is one of contiguity and shared cultural patterns between the two groups between which terms are claimed to have been diffused. The only significant changes of ‘meaning’ involved are when there is a lack of fit between pragmatic equivalence and linguistic relatedness, as in much of Arnhem Land. In such cases well defined structural transformations are proposed which explain the changes.

McCONVELL’S LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE.

In order to discuss the paths of diffusion in a more structured way, I divide the subsection systems into two groups, the Southwestern and Northeastern (see Map). The terms of the Southwestern group are characterised by:

1. a fairly high degree of similarity between the stems of the subsection terms in different languages;
2. the presence in most cases of reflexes of the gender prefixes ja- masculine, na- feminine to denote male and female members of subsections respectively; and
3. the fact that terms which are historically related are also pragmatically equivalent, i.e. used by different peoples to designate the same actual subsection in practice.

The terms of the Northeastern group also contain terms linguistically related to terms of the Southwestern group, but these are generally fewer in number, and decrease as one moves further north-east. In contrast to the terms of the Southwestern group, the Northeastern group displays:

1. a smaller number of linguistically related terms in different languages, although certain terms are widespread;
2. the absence of gender prefixes on the terms, or the presence of gender prefixes drawn from the indigenous noun-class system of the language concerned or its near neighbours, not borrowed from a distant and obscure source as in the case of the Southwestern ja/na-;
3. in some cases, a lack of ‘fit’ between the linguistic relationship of the terms and the social relationship of recognition by two peoples that two terms are pragmatically equivalent (i.e. if term x is linguistically related to term x’, it does not necessarily follow in this area that x and x’ will be recognised as ‘the same’ subsection, but may on the contrary be assigned different positions in the correlated systems). This type of variation also occurs in some areas between different section systems.

Following detailed comparison of individual terms and sets of terms in the two groups, I go on to reconstruct a set of terms for each group. The reconstructions of the Southwestern set of terms are as in Table 1 below. Consideration of the Northcentral section terms (Table 4) leads to the positing of earlier forms of A2 *-wimij or *-yimij and C2 *-jampij(in).
TIME PERSPECTIVE: ORIGIN OF SUBSECTIONS

TABLE 1: Reconstructed Southwestern Proto-Subsection Terms.
Prefixes *ja- masculine; *na- feminine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stems</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1 * -panangka</td>
<td>B1 *  -purrurla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 * -imij (North)</td>
<td>B2 * -ngala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ngurrayi (South)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1 * -kamarra</td>
<td>D1 * -palyirri (North)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-paljarri (South)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2 * -mpijin</td>
<td>D2 * -pangarti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2: Warlpiri Subsection Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIm japanangka</th>
<th>BIm jupurrurla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f ma] amamgla</td>
<td>f napurrurla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2m jungarrayi</td>
<td>B2m jangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f nungarrayi</td>
<td>f nangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1m jakamarra</td>
<td>D1m japaljarri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f nakamarra</td>
<td>f napaljarri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2m jampijinpa</td>
<td>D2m japangardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f nampijinpa</td>
<td>f napangardi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3: Jaminjung Subsection Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIm janama</th>
<th>BIm julama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f nanaku</td>
<td>f nawula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2m jimij</td>
<td>B2m jangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f namij</td>
<td>f nangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1m jamirra</td>
<td>D1m jalyirri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f namirra</td>
<td>f nalyirri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2m japijin</td>
<td>D2m jangari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f napijin</td>
<td>f nangari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that the reconstructed Southwestern subsection terms are very similar to the stems of Warlpiri (Table 2), but this does not mean that the subsections of this group originated among the Warlpiri or even close to their territory. The conservatism of the Warlpiri forms is largely attributable to the lack of a Lenition rule in Warlpiri. Lenition occurs as a general synchronic phonological rule to different degrees, and can be shown to have operated historically on stems, in a number of neighbouring languages, including the Ngumbin group (e.g. Gurindji and Djaru), the Djamindjungan group (e.g. Jaminjung, Table 3 above), the Djeragan group in the East Kimberley (e.g. Kija, Table 12) and a number of languages with terms in the Northeastern group such as Wartaman (Table 4).

The effect of Lenition on subsection terms in these languages is to substitute a glide w for the stops p or k and the glide y for the stop j where the stop is immediately preceded by a vowel-final prefix, such as the gender prefix in subsection terms, or where the stop is initial in a suffix, preceded by a vowel-final stem. Thus *jupurrurla in the northern languages became *juwurrurla; *japanangka > *jawanangka; *nakamarra > *nawamarra etc. Subsequently Glide Deletion and Vowel Shortening replaced uwu and awa with u and a respectively, as in *jurrurla, *janangka, *namarra. Forms close to these starred forms are found in the
East Kimberleys but in the exemplified languages different forms occur due to the operation of other changes analysed in McConvell (1985).

The recognition of the sound change produced by the Lenition rule is of prime importance in the understanding of the detail of the diffusion of the subsection system, and could yield more valuable data on this and other processes of culture history (see further below). This kind of application of data on the results of 'phonetic laws' was considered by Sapir of great value to cultural historiography. One type of evidence to be gained from this was the demonstration that a borrowed word does not show the influence of such phonetic laws as operated before their adoption, or, in the opposite case (Sapir 1916:450):

A borrowed word may happen to have come into use at a period prior to the operation of all such phonetic laws as are capable of affecting it, in which case it exhibits all the phonetic characteristics of words belonging to the oldest ascertainable stratum of the language.

This property of borrowed words is of great chronological value, because it gives us:

- a minimum age, in terms of relatively datable phonetic laws, for [the] adoption [of the borrowed words], for their adoption and that of the concepts associated with them.
- It 'renders great service to the stratification of the borrowed culture words of a language'. Sapir gives the example of two words borrowed from Greek into Anglo-Saxon, one of which can be shown to predate the other because of the differential operation of the sound change $k > h$. The word for 'hemp', Greek $kannabis$ arrived in the pre-Christian period and subsequently underwent the sound change, giving $hcEnap$, whereas Greek $kyriake 'church'$ was adopted later and retained its initial $k$ in Anglo-Saxon $cyrice$.

In the case of the subsection terms it can be shown that they were diffused into the Djamindjungan languages, Gurindji and Kija areas before the start of the operation of Lenition, since these languages show the effects of Lenition on the terms, and that they were diffused beyond this area to Walmajarri and Warlpiri also before the operation of the rule, since the latter two languages have adopted the unlenited forms and themselves do not possess the relevant Lenition rules. This process is shown on the Map, indicating how chronological inferences can be drawn from this type of evidence.

Having provided a strong hypothesis about the diffusion of the stems of the Southwestern subsection terms, I had to try to trace the origin of the gender prefixes $ja$-/na-. The proposed diffusion paths of the Southwestern stems themselves pointed to an area of origin in the North-east of the Southwestern group. In the South-western group (leaving aside the Daly River/Port Keats area where diffusion of subsections is known to be very recent; see Stanner 1934), the vast majority of languages have no grammatical gender and no noun-class prefixes, in fact most have no prefixes of any kind. Yet nearly all these languages have subsections which have the gender prefixes $ja$- masculine, $na$- feminine, or reflexes of these prefixes. Sapir stressed the importance for historical enquiry of cases where the productivity of grammatical processes in words of cultural reference was limited, or where morphological irregularity may indicate foreign origin. In this case it seemed highly likely that borrowing of the terms along with foreign prefixes was the cause of the morphological anomaly in so many languages.

Only one of the families of languages within the Southwestern group which have used the subsection terms for any considerable length of time have noun-class prefixes: the Djamindjungan family. Of these only Nungali to my knowledge has segmentable, grammatically
productive, noun-class prefixes in the modern language. The Nungali noun class prefixes are as follows (Bolt, Hoddinott and Kofod):

Gender Prefixes on adjectives: m. ti-, tiya-; f. nya-, nyana-;
Possessives: m. -ya-; f. -na-

  e.g. ni-ya-nungkuru ‘his arm’; ni-na-nungkuru ‘her arm’.

The initial syllables of the masculine and feminine prefixes here (ti- and nya- respectively) do not show any close resemblance to ja-/na- although the second syllable in the alternate forms (-ya- and -na- respectively) do. The alternative forms tiya- and nyana- do show -ya- as a masculine marker and -na- as a feminine marker, respectively.

Note too the ‘possessive’ forms of the masculine and feminine gender prefixes in Nungali. These are used as follows: if a noun of classes three or four takes a class prefix, the gender of the ‘possessor’ is marked by an infix -ya-(m) -na-(f), following the class 3 or 4 prefix like ni- above. Intervocalic Lenition is a feature of Nungali and the Djamindjungan languages generally, as can be seen from the pair of words for ‘bird’: Ngaliwurru julak and Nungali ti-yulak, where Nungali has a masculine class prefix which conditions the change j>y intervocally. Hence the ‘possessive’ forms of the prefixes can be reconstructed as *ja-(m)/ *na-(f) i.e. identical to the Southwestern subsection gender prefixes. The same pair of infixes -ya-(m)/-na-(f) also occurs as part of the class concord prefixes on adjectives. A similar alternation is found in the Nungali subsection terms in comparison to the neighbouring languages. For instance, where Jaminjung has the subsection terms janama and nanaku, Nungali has tiyanama and nyananaku.

I show in McConvell (1985) that reflexes of the gender prefixes *ja-/*na- are still present in Nungali with a limited function, and that it is these which provided the prefixes for the Southwestern subsection terms. The position of the Djamindjungan languages between the Warrai/Uwinymirr area, which I also show to be the source of four of the Southwestern subsection terms (see below), and the proposed route of the spread of the Northwestern section terms from the west into the south and east Kimberleys also adds weight to the idea that the subsection terms originated in the Djamindjungan area.

Moving to the Northeastern subsection systems, the Wartaman terms provide a point of contact between the two groups of systems as the Wartaman live next to the Jaminjung and Mudbura of the Southwestern group and had a high level of contact with them in pre-European times. The Wartaman terms display the following features:

(a) the stems of the terms are generally similar to those of the Southwestern group, although the prefixes differ;
(b) the terms which are cognate with the Southwestern terms are also pragmatically equivalent to them; and
(c) it can probably be stated with some assurance that the Wartaman have possessed subsections longer than the peoples to the north and east, and it is well known that the subsection system was still diffusing into Northern and Eastern Arnhem Land this century (Elkin 1970).

The prefixes of the Wartaman terms are yi- masculine, and yi + nasal, feminine. The starred form yangala was in fact recorded by Spencer and Gillen (1914). Only the C2 forms are devoid of prefixes. The reconstructed stem for Wartaman are the stems of the feminine forms which follow the prefixes in the Table above, minus the suffix -ani in the case of A2. These reconstructed forms are all closely related to the equivalent proto-Southwestern stems in Table 1.
TABLE 4: Wartaman Subsection terms (Merlan, p.c. 1976).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1m</td>
<td>yi-warnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>yim-parnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2m</td>
<td>yi-mit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>yi-mitani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1m</td>
<td>y-anymirra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>yin-kanymirra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2m</td>
<td>japijin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>yin-palyarri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blm</td>
<td>y-urrwarla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>yim-purrwarla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2m</td>
<td>jangala (*y-angala)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>ying-kangala</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Northeastern group systems which I studied (McConvell 1985) have at least three terms whose stems are shared with the Southwestern group: B2 *(ka)ngala, C1 *kamarra, and D2 *pangarti, and most of the southern members of the Northeastern group have in addition D1 *paly(j)arri. Even closer to the Southwestern group, the number of related forms increases, until in Wartaman (Table 4) all the stems are related to Southwestern forms. The reconstructed forms for the Northeastern group as a whole are given in Table 5 below, together with one example of this group, the Gupapuyngu of the ‘Yolngu’ or ‘Murngin’ group of North-east Arnhem Land. Here changes in pragmatic equivalence of the terms have obscured the relationship with the proto-forms, but if the following transformations are noted, the linguistic relationship becomes obvious: A>B; B>A; C>D; D>C; 1>2 and 2>1 in B and C only.

TABLE 5: Reconstruction of the proto-Northeastern subsection terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stems</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1 *</td>
<td>ngarrij(palan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1 *</td>
<td>wakaj (North)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>purrala (South)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 *</td>
<td>purlany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2 *</td>
<td>kangila (West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>palang (East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1 *</td>
<td>kamarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1 *</td>
<td>kojok (North)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>palyarri (South)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2 *</td>
<td>wamut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2 *</td>
<td>pangarti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 6: Gupapuyngu Subsection terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1m</td>
<td>burralang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>galitjan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2m</td>
<td>balang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>bilinytjan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1m</td>
<td>gadjak/gudjuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>gutjan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2m</td>
<td>bangardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>bangarditjan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Northeastern group of subsections the subsections either have no gender marking, have gender suffixes as in Table 6 above, or the gender prefixes attached to the subsection stems are the gender (noun-class) prefix of the indigenous language, or those of near neighbours from whom the term was borrowed.
The same eight stems that formed the basis of the Southwestern terms were also adopted by the immediate eastern neighbour of Djamindjungan, Wartaman, which supplied the terms with its own gender prefixes yi- (m) and yin- (f). Slightly to the north, Ngalkbon, Mayali and others formed their own sets of terms, using some of the Northwestern section terms, but also more different terms probably originating in some more easterly variants of the North-central section terms. The Northeastern subsection terms then spread further into Arnhem Land, and east to the Gulf of Capentaria.

**McConvell’s Theory of the Origin of Subsections.**

Simply on the basis of the subsection terms themselves, then, I was able to construct a fairly detailed picture of where the subsections originated, and how they spread. Using data about section systems, I was then able to confirm the area of origin, show in detail how two section systems merged to form the new system, and proceed to develop hypotheses about the social process involved in the transition highly constrained by the nature of the linguistic evidence presented. It has already been mentioned that four of the stems of the Northern Aranda, Warlpiri and the reconstructed proto-Southwestern subsection stems generally are closely related to the four section terms of Southern Aranda. The related subsection terms are A1, B1, C1 and D1, and will be referred to below as Division 1 terms, in contrast to Division 2 terms (A2, B2, C2, D2). It can be shown that at least three and possibly all of the Southern Aranda section terms are cognate with, and very similar to, the section terms of the Ngarluma and other groups in the Pilbara, 1600 kilometres to the west.

This connection with the Northwestern section system has been known for some time (Meggitt 1962, von Brandenstein 1970). Strangely the source of the Division 2 terms had not to my knowledge been discovered before my work, although the nature of the diffusion evidence above provides clear signposts to the region that needs to be investigated and the relevant data on the pre-existing Northcentral section system is very accessible in Spencer (1914). The reasons for this failure to grasp the true origins of the subsection system before probably results from factors already discussed: the failure to apply a systematic linguistic method to these problems and the assumption of the ‘extension’ of the section system within one group.

Of the section system discovered among the Warrai, Spencer (1914:54) had this to say: the organisation is closely similar to that of the Southern Arunta, where there are only four class names.

Spencer went on to remark:

> it is somewhat remarkable to find two tribes, each with the four, named inter­marring groups, one at each end of the long stretch of country, a thousand miles in all, that lies between the southernmost Arunta and the Warrai in the north. In all these tribes the organisation is fundamentally identical, but it is only at the extreme northern and southern limits that we find only four class names, elsewhere there are always eight.

Even more remarkable is the fact that the eight (subsection) names are essentially drawn from the four section names which appear in the south among the Aranda, combined with the four different section names in the north, of which we have only two examples, the Warrai and their southern neighbours, the Uwinymirr (data from recent fieldwork by Mark Harvey, p.c.).
In Tables 7, 8 and 9 below I show the Aranda and Kariera terms of the Northwestern section system, and the Warai (Awarai) terms of the Northcentral section system, drawn from McConvell (1985). If we compare the terms of the Northwestern section system to the stems of Division 1 (A1, B1, C1, D1) terms of the reconstructed Southwestern subsection terms (Table 1) or of Warlpiri (Table 2) the relationship is obvious (with the possible exception of Kariera purungu). If we then compare the stems of the Northcentral section terms (disregarding the a- and al- prefixes) to the stems of the Jaminjung (Table 3) and Wartaman (Table 4) terms, the relationships between the A, C and D terms and the A2, C2 and D2 subsection terms is again obvious. The Northcentral B section term does not appear to relate to any Southwestern subsection term directly, although if we note that the Uwinymirr equivalent is pularang (Harvey, p.c.) we could propose that this may be related to the widespread Northeastern B2 subsection stem palang (cf. Gupapuyngu balang). An alternative Northeastern section B proto-stem kangala/kangila probably existed which provided the B2 section terms in the Southwestern subsection systems and the more westerly Northeastern subsection systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northwestern Section System</th>
<th>Northcentral Section System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TABLE 7: Kariera</strong></td>
<td><strong>TABLE 9: Warai (Spencer 1914)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A  panaka</td>
<td>Am a-winnij</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B  purungu</td>
<td>Bm a-pularan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C  karimarra</td>
<td>f al-winnij</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D  palyarri</td>
<td>f al-pularan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **TABLE 8: Southern Aranda (Hale 1973)** |
| A  pinangka                  | Am a-winnij                |
| B  pirrurla                  | Bm a-pularan               |
| C  kimarra                   | f al-winnij                |
| D  paltharra                 | f al-pularan               |

The two sets of subsection terms, Division 1 which comes from the Northwestern section system, and Division 2 which comes from the Northcentral section system must have combined to form the subsection system somewhere between the Warrai and Uwinymirr south of Darwin, and the Northwestern section system advancing to meet it from the west. As far as the Southwestern subsection terms are concerned, we can pinpoint their origin more accurately than this, on the basis of linguistic evidence, as discussed above. On the basis of the preceding evidence I proposed (McConvell 1985) that the Southwestern subsection system originated in the Djamindjungan family of languages around the lower Victoria River Basin, and subsequently spread south into Central Australia and west into the Kimberleys. Four of the terms used (Division 1) came from the west and four (Division 2) from the area to the north.

Having reached this level of understanding of the specific historical nature of the combination of two section systems, hypotheses about the origin of subsections based on the symmetrical augmentation of each section within one group, such as those of Durkheim (1904), Scheffler (1977) and von Brandenstein (1982) must now be discarded. In McConvell (1985) I go on to build a new hypothesis on the new understanding arrived at by the use of a careful and systematic linguistic method.

The key feature of the transition which has been revealed by the discovery of the merging of the two section systems concerns the patrimoeties, which in the area concerned are today
called Wedge-Tailed Eagle and White-faced Heron. In the merging of systems, the major asymmetry apparent is the fact that children of men of one patrimoiety were assigned subsection terms from the same section system as their father, whereas children of men of the other patrimoiety were assigned terms of the other system from that of their father, of the two section systems which originally combined to create the new system of subsections. It is this feature for which an explanatory hypothesis is offered.

The model I propose incorporates the idea that between the two groups (Northwestern and Northcentral) Heron clans exclusively or predominantly gave women to Eagle clans, whereas within the groups Eagle clans exclusively or predominantly gave women to Heron clans. (I use the terms Eagle and Heron here to indicate patrilineal moieties of the same composition as Eagle and Heron moieties today, not to imply that Eagle and Heron were the moiety terms in use at the time).

This means that while such an alliance system was in operation, Heron men married Eagle women of their own group and their children were naturally assigned section names also from their own group. On the other hand Eagle men married Heron women of the other group. By the rule of section and subsection assignment which is the most common in the case of ‘wrong’ marriages in Australia (when the father and mother are not in a ‘straight’ marriage relationship) the child receives the section or subsection appropriate to it as its mother’s child, disregarding the father. This case is somewhat different, in that the marriage here is not ‘wrong’, but into a different group with a different set of terms. Nevertheless, similar considerations may have been at work. Other factors which may have encouraged the assignment to the child of a Northwestern-Northcentral marriage of a term from his mother’s group include:

(a) the fact that the mother with whom the child had its closest bond in its early years would in all probability call it by her group’s term; and

(b) the possible presence of matrilineal social totemic organisation alongside sections in the area. This organisation (the totemic groups are usually known as ngurlu) is present today in the Victoria River area, and may have supported an identification of the child with its mother’s group.

Finally, the marriage pairs of the original section systems were reinstated, probably because in most cases the wife would have moved to live with her husband’s group and would have been called by the term current in his group. All the essential features of the new system having been established, it then diffused to the south, west and east.

In the final part of my paper (McConvell 1985) I go beyond the use of linguistic evidence to include social and cultural data of relevance to the argument. Sapir supported the use of this kind of data in conjunction with linguistic evidence in cultural history, as long as the main principle of the weighting of different types of evidence was adhered to. In my speculations it is always made clear what kind of probability can be assigned to each piece of evidence. Sapir was also concerned not to be overly zealous in excluding certain types of evidence. Writing of what he calls ‘native testimony’ (1916:396), he says:

‘Native testimony’ includes myths and legends, for Sapir. To support my hypothesis about the social process involved in the origin of subsections, I use the structure of the myth about the struggle between Eagle and Heron, founders of the two patrimoieties. There are notable parallels between the structure of this myth and the social process involved in the
origin of subsections. Despite the scepticism of many anthropologists about the value of myth in the reconstruction of history, it seems to me a resource that should not lightly be ignored, providing due caution is exercised in recognising that myth involves multi-layered symbolism rather than any literal rendering of historical events. While not necessarily endorsing all the conclusions of Dumézil, it seems that his use of myth in the reconstruction of previous social and ideological systems has proved of some worth, and could be at least tried out in Australia (Littleton 1966).

**Implications of McConvell's Theory of the Origin of Subsections.**

It has been argued here that von Brandenstein's method in cultural history is in error, and that this leads him to erroneous conclusions about the origin of subsections. McConvell's method belongs to the more scientific tradition of Sapir, and hence provides us not only with much more reliable conclusions about the area of origin and paths of diffusion of subsections, but also with useful tools to make further discoveries in Australian Aboriginal history.

One of the extensions of McConvell's initial findings is in the detailing of the social process involved in the innovation of subsections, discussed above. Many possible lines of enquiry open up, but I cannot do more than mention a few here: the role of the interpretation of myth, the possible role of matrilineal totemic organisation in the transition, the relationship of subsection systems to marriage rules and further work on the little-known Northcentral section system.

Now that some definite landmarks have been established in the history of diffusion of subsections, work on building a relative chronology of culture history can begin in earnest. The importance of the lenition sound change in the Southwestern subsection area, illustrated on the Map, has already been stressed, but what has been described so far is only a very general picture of the situation in regard to one set of cultural items. What is needed now is a deepening of the examination of the detail of lenition and other phonological rules as they affect particular languages, and the broadening of the sample to include other cultural items which may have been borrowed before or after such rules applied. Certainly there is evidence in the operation of sound changes in the languages of the west of the Northern Territory and the East Kimberleys which can provide clues to the culture historian. Even within single languages, lenited and unlenited forms of certain items may be found. Sapir bids us pay attention to place names in order to capture archaisms in the language, and this approach seems certain to bear fruit in this area. For instance the place names Mapunkuj and Pakarrji in the Northern Tanami Desert have alternatives Mawunkuj and Paarrji with lenition of p>w and k>w>∅ respectively; through this, mapun is revealed as an earlier form of the word mawun ‘initiated man’. Morphological elements can be suspected of being recently borrowed on the grounds that they do not undergo normal phonological rules. For instance the suffix -kari ‘other’ in Gurindji could well have been borrowed from Warlpiri as it does not become *-wari following a vowel, whereas the equivalent morpheme in Jaru does (kariny>wariny) so is likely to be either an earlier borrowing or to have descended from a common ancestral stock shared with Warlpiri.

With regard to the borrowing of cultural items, whether or not lenition affects them could be a good guide to the relative chronology of the diffusion of ideas and artefacts in this area. For instance the terms wirika for axe and wiriki for hook boomerang do not
exhibit lenition of k in Gurindji (cf. *jalka > jalwa ‘heron’) so may have arrived along with a new type of axe and boomerang, respectively. The term kaja for a short fighting spear shows no lenition of j > y (cf. *mangkaja > mangkaya ‘bark shelter’) and no lenition of k > w in its reduplicated form kajakaja ‘spurs’. It appears likely from the testimony of local people that this type of spear was in fact imported into the Gurindji and Mudbura area from farther south relatively recently. If any of the hypotheses about these artefacts is correct, then it puts the date of diffusion of subsections to the Gurindji before the diffusion of these items to them. We have other independent means of ascertaining the spread of artefacts: historical records, the study of trade routes (as in Mulvaney 1976), archeology and rock art studies, at least. Together with the linguistic evidence of the type described, this puts a powerful tool for the construction of culture history chronology in our hands. As individual examples and patterns multiply, the more precise can we expect our chronologies and hypothesised cultural diffusion paths to become.

A further application of the chronological principle inherent in sound changes concerns the initial-dropping change which is known to have taken place in the Arandic languages. Since we know that four of the Northern Aranda subsection terms (Division 2 in Table 10 below) were borrowed in the nineteenth century from the Warlpiri (Spencer and Gillen 1936), the fact that they appear today without the initial j- and n- of the Warlpiri terms indicates that they were borrowed before initial-dropping ceased to operate in Aranda. The other four terms of the northern Aranda system are almost identical to the Southern Aranda section system which, it is probable, was borrowed from the area of origin of the section system in the Pilbara. Although the difference has been levelled in recent times, when Spencer and Gillen recorded the terms the Division 2 terms, unlike the Division 1 terms, retained an initial vowel indicating their lesser age in the language and their different source. The differential treatment of *j (retained in C2, but > th in D1) also points to this age difference in the two Divisions of terms (as pointed out to me by David Wilkins; see McConvell 1985, Note 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 10: Northern Aranda Subsection Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Spencer and Gillen 1936)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1  panangka  B1  purrurla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2  akngwarriya  B2  angala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1  kamarra  D1  paltharra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2  ampijana  D2  apangarta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contention is that the Aranda section terms arrived directly from the Pilbara, whereas the Warlpiri Division 1 subsection terms arrived after having travelled across the Kimberleys from the Pilbara, having been involved in the origin of subsections around the lower Victoria River then having been diffused south across the Tanami Desert. If this is true, then the Warlpiri stems have retained a remarkable resemblance to the original section terms despite their long journey. This would tend to persuade one to the view that this original diffusion of sections and subsections was rather rapid, as indeed the diffusion of subsections in this century is known to have been. The diffusion cannot have been very recent, however, certainly not in the last century as Meggitt (1962) proposes, as this would not leave enough time for lenition to have had such profound effects in the northern languages, let alone for initial-dropping to have affected the borrowed terms in Aranda as well.

Many such problems of chronology will no doubt be cleared up with more careful and
detailed work using the methods outlined. Even in the form of the Southwestern subsection terms there remain problems to be explained. I present the possible beginnings of an explanation of one such lacuna; like many of these points, a solution would not only fill a single gap, but contribute to the weaving of the whole pattern of culture history in northern Australia. In McConvell (1985) I had no explanation for the occurrence of nya- as an alternative to na- as a feminine prefix in some subsection terms. This occurs only in the most westerly subsection systems of the Southwestern group, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. I give below two examples of systems with some nya- feminine forms, in Kija and Walmajarri:

### TABLE 11: Kija Subsection Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1m jawan</td>
<td>B1m juwurr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f jungurra</td>
<td>B2m jangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clm jakarra</td>
<td>D1m jawalyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2m jampin</td>
<td>D2m jaangari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 12: Walmajarri Subsection Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1m jawanti</td>
<td>B1m jupurru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f jungkurra</td>
<td>B2m jangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clm jakarra</td>
<td>D1m japalyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2m jampiyirnti</td>
<td>D2m jangkarti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two systems above are clearly closely related. The most important difference in the terms is the replacement of intervocalic p in the Walmajarri terms with w, an example of the process of lenition which has already been mentioned in relation to the difference between the Jaminjung and Gurindji terms, on the one hand, and the Warlpiri terms on the other. In terms of the model of diffusion of subsection terms in McConvell (1985), the unlenited forms spread out from the lower Victoria River Basin to the Warlpiri and Walmajarri via the Jaminjung, Gurindji, Kija etc. Subsequently an areal phenomenon of lenition of intervocalic stops began to effect the latter languages which were the first to receive subsections in the Southwestern group, but affected Walmajarri in a less profound way and Warlpiri not at all.

The most noticeable difference between the Kija and Walmajarri terms on the one hand and the Jaminjung, Gurindji and Warlpiri terms on the other is the presence of nya- as the feminine prefix of the A1, B1 and C1 terms in the former westerly languages, contrasting with the feminine prefix na- (with occasional variants nu-, ni-) in all forms in the latter easterly languages. The geographical extent of these two features (lenition of p following gender prefixes, and some nya- versus all na-) is shown on the Map.

It is my contention (McConvell 1985) that the ancestors of the present day Djamindjungan languages were involved in the early development and diffusion of the subsection system,
and contributed the typical *ja-*/*na-* prefixes to the forms which subsequent diffused throughout the Southwestern group. The forms *ja-* and *na-* are not the prime gender prefixes in any living language of the region but Nungali has *-ya-* and *-na-* as infixes denoting the gender of the person, following other noun class suffixes, which I have shown are descended from earlier masculine and feminine prefixes, *ja-* and *na-* respectively. The change *ya-* < *ja is quite justifiable given the abundant evidence of j>y Lenition in Djamindjungan both historically and synchronically.5

The three terms which take the feminine prefix *nya-* in the extreme western subsection terms are all in Division 1. Recall that Division 1 is made up of A1, B1, C1, D1, which in the Southwestern group of subsection systems are the four terms which are descended from the original four section terms which arrived in the Victoria Basin from the Pilbara to the west. They could well have entered the area of the ancestors of the present-day Djamindjungan family after Division 2 terms, which may have been present as section terms in the area before the transition to subsections had begun. Even if both Divisions of terms were used in the Djamindjungan area before the transition, Division 1 would have probably been used by more westerly groups than Division 2. Thus the prefix *nya-* could have been either a later development affecting the later arriving terms, as the existence of *nya-* as a more recent feminine prefix in Nungali suggests, or a more westerly variant, or both. Further clarification of these questions using the methods outlined will help to refine our model of the origin of subsections.

Outside the immediate area which we have been examining, the general method of the disciplined use of related linguistic forms to contribute to historical reconstruction has great potential. One fertile area for this type of work would be the Gulf of Carpentaria. Particularly dramatic phonological changes have affected many of the languages of this area sufficiently recently and with sufficient local variation to make the nature of the changes relatively accessible to us today (see Klokeid 1976, Black 1980). One such dramatic change is the group of Truncation processes that have affected Lardil (Hale 1973, Klokeid 1976, McConvell 1981) and to a lesser extent, Kayardilt (Evans 1983). This is the obverse of Arandic Initial dropping in that it involves loss of final segments and syllables of words. These phonological changes have had profound effects on the grammar of the languages, so that a relative chronology of a chain of changes and their consequences and hypotheses about the stages of differentiation of the ancestral Tangic language can be built up. In addition to this there is quite probably a complex interaction between these changes and the changes of sea level in the Gulf which has been responsible for rendering various islands inaccessible during certain

5 It has been shown by Chadwick (1984) that the Jingulu language of the Elliott/Newcastle Waters area and the Djamindjungan languages are distantly related, although they are today separated by the Ngumbin group of Pama-Nyungan languages which are very much more distantly (if at all) genetically related to either Jingulu or Jaminjungan. Amid other evidence he cites the gender prefixes *ja-* and *ya-* (which he reconstructs as *ja-, like me) and *nya-* and *na-* of Nungali as being related to the Jingulu masculine prefix *ja-* and the feminine prefix *nya-*/*na-, respectively. These latter occur only with the following: jamanı (m); nyamanı (f) 'that'; and jangka (m); nangkirni (f) 'other' and derivatives. Although the limited use of these prefixes gives us very little evidence to form a judgement about the environmental conditioning of the allomorphs of the feminine prefixes here, it might be noted that *nya-* occurs before m, and *nya-* also occurs before a bilabial, *p, in the westerly subsection terms. *nya-* only occurs in the environment of a following (reconstructed) bilabial in some of the terms, but not in the Division 2 terms A2 naminjyilli, cA* nampifin or D2 *napangar(t)i.
periods, and at other times uninhabitable due to the salinity of water supply. These changes can be studied through various geological techniques of investigation. Furthermore the contact and lack of contact implied by the water level changes on the one hand and linguistic evidence on the other is also reflected in blood-group differentiation and other genetic data (Simmons, Tindale and Birdsell 1962). Local legends, carefully handled, could also yield relevant evidence. In all, the potential for constructing a quite detailed chronological framework for this part of the Gulf of Carpentaria is great, without even carrying out archeological work.

Aside from these opportunities to develop a more accurate conception of hitherto little understood developments in Aboriginal history, the method and the conclusions presented here also challenge the theoretical preconceptions of anthropologists in the face of historical questions. Stanner has been hailed as a pioneer because he described and analysed a process of rapid social change which took place as the subsection system first began to spread into the Daly River/Port Keats area, entailing various phases of adaptations of local beliefs and practices (Stanner 1936a, 1979). Radical change of this kind is clearly not confined to the period of Aboriginal history involving contact with Europeans, and observed by Europeans. The spread of section systems, the invention of subsections and their subsequent diffusion are examples of major changes in the social practices of Aboriginal people which took place in earlier times.

An essential tool for the understanding of such changes is the concept of contradiction between relatively autonomous social and ideological systems, such as between new and old social classifications. Any social investigator who ignores this and attempts to reduce all social phenomena to the manifestations of a single ruling principle, or a mere function of an integrated social whole, is ultimately fated to follow von Brandenstein into the wasteland of what Sapir called 'merely conceptual abstractions' divorced from historical actuality. Thus

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6 Stanner's report on fieldwork in 1934-35 (1979), which only came to my notice after I had completed this article, anticipates a number of points made in this article in addressing the question of the origin of subsections, although Stanner does not offer any substantive hypothesis of their actual origin:

(1) He accepts the idea of diffusion of subsection terms accompanied by 'conventionalisation' (loss of original, possibly totemic, meanings) (1979:98);

(2) He accepts the selectivity inherent in absorbing the new system since 'cultures absorb only compatible traits' (1979:101);

(3) He rejects ideas of the 'invention' of the system by a 'hypothetical wise old man' (1979:100) — an idea recapitulated by von Brandenstein (1982);

(4) He rejects a completely kinship-dominated explanation of subsections, such as that in Scheffler (1977): 'neither moieties, sections nor sub-sections can be regarded as basically kinship groupings' (1979:100);

(5) Most significantly, he sees the possibility of origin in the interaction of systems: 'nor should we overlook the possibility ... that it may be the mutilated survival of several impinging types of totemism' (1979:101).

The latter three points mark Stanner off as in advance of those whom I have characterised as participating in a paradigm which assumes that ideological production and innovation take place within the boundaries of a single system or a single 'society'. He saw the origin of subsections as perhaps being a totemic system which combines (1) matrilineal descent; (2) apparently indirectly matrilineal descent; and (3) a social, rather than cult character. Although the ngurlu system has two of these features, in 1935 Stanner was still looking for a group which possessed the three features and hoping to find such a group in the Central Desert. In fact, ngurlu and similar matrilineal features attenuate and disappear in that area.
those social anthropologists like Scheffler who wish to show that subsections and similar classifications are merely 'superclasses' derived from kinship systems are running the risk of producing only a mirror image of the speculative anthropology whose theories of the primacy of the social classification systems they claim to oppose. It is the same error, shared by functionalists and their seeming opponents like von Brandenstein, which leads to the unwarranted assumption that new social systems must be 'extensions' of pre-existing systems or ideas already present in one social group. As we have seen, important changes like the transition to subsections can equally arise from the contradiction and interaction of two systems in neighbouring groups, and it is the gradual working out of the contradiction in historical stages that leaves its trace in the language and culture and makes that history accessible to us today.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


