In *Forgetting Aborigines* Chris Healy’s project is centred not on ‘memory as a thing’ but on ‘remembering as a process’ (8). This conceptual manoeuvre enables Healy to examine the dynamic interplay of remembering and forgetting in such diverse areas of Australian life as ‘personal testimony and witnessing, writing and film, photography and television, painting and museum exhibitions, teaching and celebration, mourning and commemoration’ (8). Healy argues that it has been all too easy for modern non-Indigenous Australians to forget Aborigines, and to forget the fact of their forgetting (203).

From his vantage point as a non-Indigenous Australian, Healy wonders how it has been possible for this to occur. Reflecting on his own actions connected with remembering and forgetting, Healy frames his consideration in part around Marcia Langton’s observation that there is a ‘disparity between the actual life circumstances of indigenous people and the ‘cultural and textual construction of things “Aboriginal”’ (5). In considering these disparities, Healy locates what he describes as the ‘tides of remembering and forgetting’ with reference to the cycles of politics in Australia (203).

Healy offers five essays in which he explores how the concept of Aboriginality has been constructed throughout the twentieth century. In the first of these, he demonstrates how changing notions of Aboriginality have proved unsettling for non-Indigenous Australians by outlining the responses to a 1940s board game called *Corroboree*. He describes how some of his friends are offended by the game’s simplistic depictions of Indigenous people with spears or boomerangs, while others are concerned that the images, and their apparent commodification, may be disrespectful to Indigenous people. Many ‘look away’ literally and, importantly for Healy, symbolically. He argues that to conceal the images of the *Corroboree* board game ‘is also to hide from the past in the present. It is to make Aborigines disappear. It is to forget’ (4). His analysis here points to the dynamism contained in the process of remembering and forgetting as well as to the tension that exists between the two. It also suggests the iterative nature of
the process he is examining, and its inherent instability, reinforcing his point that there is value in understanding the discourses at play rather than the memory itself.

His contemplation of the 1960s television series *Alcheringa* draws attention to the ‘restaging of an imagined precolonial Aboriginal world’ that he argues produced ‘strange patterns of amnesia in the contact zones between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians’ (37). Healy suggests that while *Alcheringa* portrayed fixed and primitive constructions of indigeneity that attempted to forget the existence of Indigenous Australians in contemporary society (46), it relied on performances from Indigenous actors. For Healy this kind of internal contradiction or conundrum is at the heart of the process of remembering and forgetting. The cultural and textual constructions work to elide the lived circumstances of Indigenous Australians because within the non-Indigenous population, the will to remember is in tension with the capacity to forget (18). Healy’s interest in the discursive positioning of *Alcheringa* highlights the role this televised series played in forgetting that Indigenous Australians continue to be part of modern Australian society.

In his exploration of the relationship between Indigenous Australians and the production of Indigenous art and other intellectual property, Healy suggests that throughout the mid twentieth century the predominance of assimilationist political policies enabled the cultural heritage and history of Indigenous people to be forgotten systematically. According to Henry Reynolds, assimilationist policies were designed both to ensure that ‘full-blood’ Indigenous people were segregated from the wider population, and to encourage ‘half-castes’ to ‘raise their status’ so that they would be absorbed into the white population (Reynolds 207). Healy’s contention is that these racialised policies of assimilation were being played out in the cultural as well as the political and social spheres. He argues that incorporating Indigenous art into non-Indigenous cultural spaces, and constructing a non-Indigenous frame through which this art is presented, necessarily involves a repeated forgetting of earlier Indigenous achievement and cultural history. His argument traverses the impact of Geoffrey Bardon on the inception of the Papunya Tula art movement in the 1970s (69-78), American dancer Beth Dean’s production of the ballet *Corroboree* in 1954 (87-89), and the popular fascination with so-called ‘Abo art’ that involved kitsch representations of Indigenous Australians (80).

Healy turns attention in *Forgetting Aborigines* to the ‘institutional practices of memory’ (113) with particular reference to the period following the 1988 Bicentenary celebrations which he describes as relying on ‘an irredeemably white and narrowly national history’ (130). Healy argues that the official discourse connected with the Bicentenary attempted to silence the displaced or suppressed cultural identities and rituals of Indigenous people (127). He
explores several other case studies in the late twentieth century, including the discourses connected with the Mabo and Wik judgments as well as the *Bringing Them Home Report*, noting that this report was important in validating Indigenous memory and history. Healy is concerned about how ‘the rhetorical erasure of Aborigines has flourished at the same time as it has been flatly contradicted by the persistence of indigenous being’ (10) and calls for acknowledgement of ‘history in the present’ (117). An example of this process in action was Prime Minister John Howard’s address at Corroboree 2000 about the Stolen Generations, when he asked that the audience not ‘forget or ignore or fail to express sorrow or regret for the pain of the past’ (Howard). Despite this plea, his use of ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘them’ and ‘their’ throughout his speech worked to exclude Indigenous Australians from the notions of citizenship and nationhood he espoused, something in contrast to Prime Minister Rudd’s direct and specific language during the Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008 (Watson). This contributed directly to a discourse that demonstrated the moment of forgetting Indigenous Australians even as it purported to be part of an occasion about remembering. Mick Dodson drew attention to this particular form of forgetting when he compared his life and family with a similar chronology for Howard, highlighting that the people Howard was forgetting were the same people he remembered specifically and clearly (Dodson). This example of history in the present demonstrates the dynamic tension of remembering and forgetting, as well as the capacity for the lived experiences of Indigenous Australians to disrupt the forgetfulness of non-Indigenous Australians that Healy identifies.

In his earlier work, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory* (1997), Healy addressed himself in part to the role of museums in social memory, something he again analyses in *Forgetting Aborigines*. His discussion of breastplates shows how the double narratives connected with them enable a reading ‘across the grain’ (139) to interrogate the processes connected with collection and curatorial practices. Healy explores the emerging relationships between Indigenous people and two museums, the Melbourne Museum and the National Museum of Australia, to suggest that collections of Indigenous artefacts are no longer simply ‘a mirror to colonialism’. Instead he argues that they are engaged in a more ‘dynamic process of remembering’ (160). This reinforces one of his central concerns, namely that remembering is never complete, but is ‘a shifting, heterogeneous, partial and repetitive assemblage of acts, utterances and artefacts’ (9).

For Healy Aboriginal cultural tourism is the result of a complex set of factors including the international leisure market, regional economies, government funding, global television, travel writing and the actions of Indigenous Australians. Healy suggests that the Lurujarri Trail, established near Broome in Western Australia by local Indigenous people such as Paddy Roe, is an
example of ‘aesthetic tourism’ which is ‘profoundly forgetful’ of ‘the colonising that produced the space and the postcolonial relationships that enable its existence’ (186). As an exercise in cultural consumption, Healy’s participation in the Lurujarri Trail produced some unexpected moments that disrupted this aesthetic by bringing the past and present into an ironic conjunction. One activity provided on the Trail was boomerang making. Although Healy found a suitable elbow of wood, he prevaricated in making a boomerang. When Roe came over to him, Healy indicated he would get started on the task of chipping away at the wood, as the other participants were doing. Contrary to Healy’s expectations, Roe suggested that a better option would be to slice the elbow of wood into four planks with a chainsaw, thus enabling four boomerangs to be made. Healy observed that while he had been ‘casting Paddy as someone who could commune with the spirit of the boomerang wood … he was replying with rational and mechanised efficiency’ (189). Healy’s example, and his reflection on his personal cultural aesthetic in which Roe had been constructed romantically within a paradigm of ‘authentic’ indigeneity, shows how pervasive the process of forgetting Aborigines can be.

Healy’s work points to the importance of asserting a distinctive Australian perspective on memory and cultural studies. In Forgetting Aborigines he offers a mode of understanding the Australian cultural ‘contact zones’ (37) in which the moments of forgetting and remembering occur, and this focus on the relationship between artefacts, actions and social practice provides a valuable insight into twentieth century Australia. Healy observes that in the early years of the twenty-first century ‘there was a lot of forgetting around’ (21). Forgetting Aborigines provides a way to remember this forgetting.

Christine McPaul has recently completed her PhD at the Australian National University. Her current research projects centre on the cultural history of non-Indigenous responses to corroboree. Christine has published previously on Australian Women’s Self Representation, and on the performativity of Helen Demidenko-Darville.

Works cited

