

REMEMBRANCE

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'How deprived we would have been if we had been willing to let things stay as they were. We would have survived, but not as a whole people. We would never have known our place.' (Morgan 1987)

Sally Morgan's account of her search for her family's story focuses on her attempts to locate her self with respect to relevant others in the past, the present, and the future. Rejecting the 'soft lie of nostalgia'¹, she provides an exploration of place - historical, geographical, social, cultural, spiritual. Within her own narrative she embeds other stories in a way that allows past and present mutually to influence each other and the future.

Her book is both a link to, and a significant departure from, related issues in a number of different fields. The rising interest in historical fiction, the increasing use of anthropological models in historical analysis, new histories aimed at including those categories of people who have formerly been denied visibility, anthropologists' increasing attention to history, and the growing body of autobiographical (life history) accounts are convergent. At the place where these issues meet the concern is to undermine the authority of histories constructed around class, category, and national interests, and to link lived experience with the social and cultural processes which temper those experiences. While not all such attempts are equally successful, they indicate a process of reclaiming social and cultural identity through an appropriation of the moment in which lived experience is symbiotically linked with time and others.

This is potentially a social revolution of immense consequence. It arises from a particular paradox of the late twentieth century. Our lives are suspended between the twin poles of individual identity, often reduced to psychology, and national identity, often fuelled by the interests of a select minority and almost invariably focussed on the collective. Such reductions and immensities elide the fact that each individual's lived experience is both personal and shared; each person's past is both unique and collective. Stranded in an isolation we are increasingly unwilling to tolerate, we assert our position in the processes of which we are products, and reclaim our right to produce.

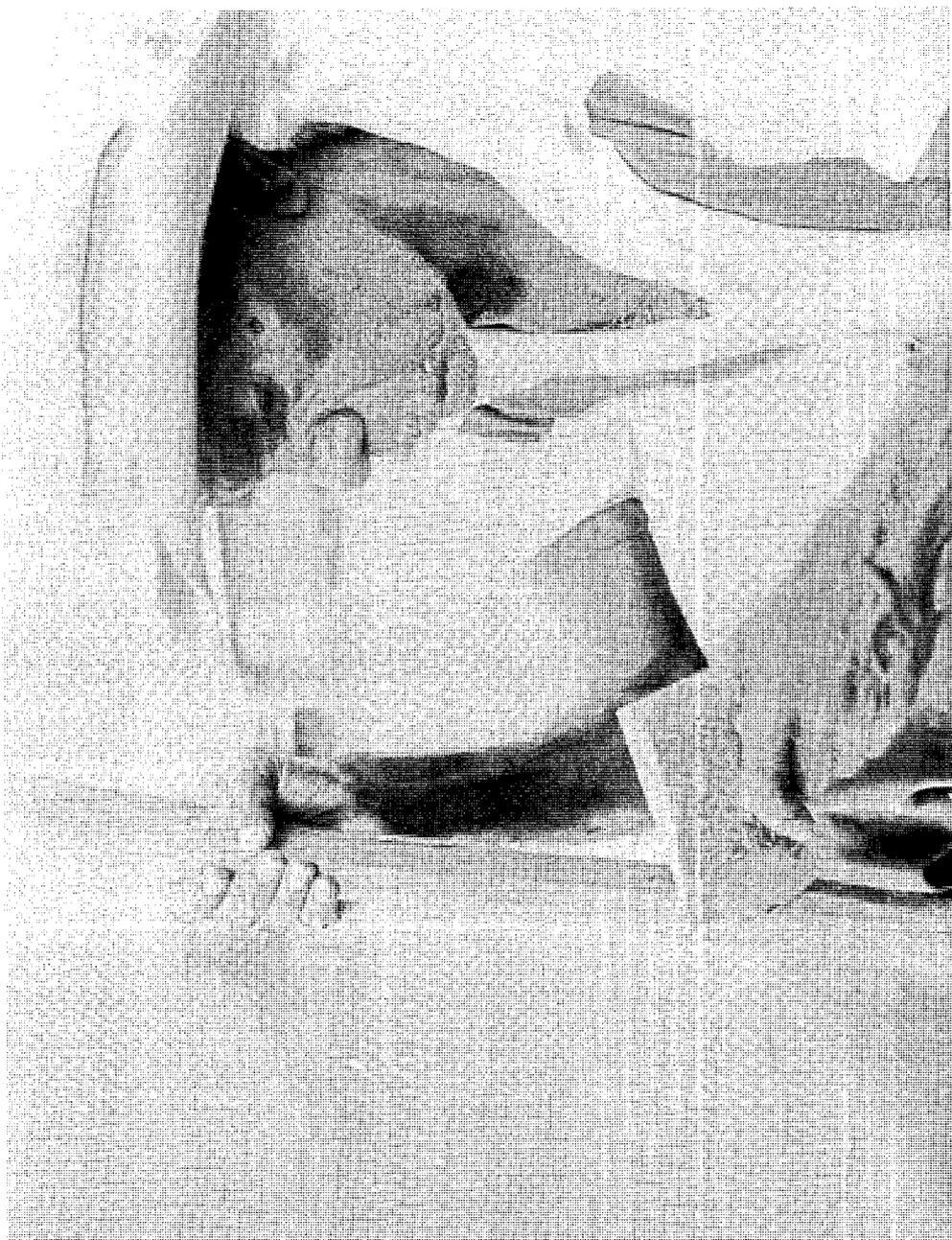
My argument here is parallel to that made by Ricoeur (1985) in his analysis of time consciousness. Defining the now as that which is 'constituted by the very transition and transaction between expectation, memory, and attention',² Ricoeur notes the peculiar paradox which our modern conceptions of time pose for us:

the inexorable expansion of the time-scale far beyond the traditional 6,000-year barrier makes the span of the human life-time appear ever more insignificant - whereas this same human life-time remains the very source of significance.

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1 Settle 1988.

2 Ricoeur 1985:16.



Hobbles Daniyarri, 1982. [Photograph by Darrell Lewis]

REMEMBRANCE

Put differently, the most insignificant segment of time, in terms of the modern time-scale, is the very place where the question of significance can be raised.³

I suggest that this same paradox is central to the relationship between individuals and history. Class and national histories pose a tyranny of the immense, threatening to engulf individuals in a flood of overdetermined processes. The genius of Morgan's book is that through her exploration of her own life and the lives of her mother, grandmother, and other relatives, she makes the links between broad social processes and their effects on individuals and families. One of the major keys to her work is remembrance. Family is foregrounded as the basis in which the individual's lived experience is both personal and collective, and the family is shown to be the product both of social processes it does not control, and of its own agency. Morgan thus moves toward empowerment: not drowning, but signalling that here is a site we can occupy with the strength of knowing that the place is truly one's own.

In this essay I draw on Aboriginal Australian oral narratives as a case study in remembrance. I will examine a short narrative which links past, present, and future, and will draw some conclusions about the value of remembrance. These issues have a particular poignance in the year of Australia's bicentennial celebrations. For many European Australians, remembrance has been raised to the status of a national obsession, and it is becoming increasingly clear that identity founded in pride derived from the past carries with it an unwanted but inescapable under-side: remembrance with guilt. Deprived of the honest and compassionate understandings which empower, many people founder between hubris and despair.⁴

Histories

For the past few years I have been working with Aboriginal oral traditions. Between 1980 and 1982 I lived in the Aboriginal community of Yarralin (Victoria River District, Northern Territory) carrying out research into cultural identity. Most of the older people with whom I worked frequently told me stories about their own lives and those of their immediate forebears; events, actions, and consequences.

European invasion of the Victoria River District began in earnest in 1883 when the major cattle stations in the area were taken up. Warfare continued for the next few decades as Aboriginal people, from the preserves of sandstone fortresses, resisted. By about 1930 the majority of the survivors lived on cattle stations more or less permanently; there was an interaction between the bush and the station which continued for at least the next twenty years. As an unpaid labour force in the cattle industry, living in appalling conditions, Aboriginal people tried to survive.⁵ In 1970 the people who now live at Yarralin and Lingara (an outstation) went on strike and joined the Gurindji strikers at Daguragu. Yarralin was offered to them as an inducement to return and work for Victoria River Downs station. Most of the stories I was told referred to these periods: resistance, working years, and the strike. Some stories, more like sagas in their narrative power, brought these periods together in a single frame of reference.

One particularly strong and articulate story teller was Hobbles Danayari. Hobbles used the vehicle of the Captain Cook saga to tell the whole history of European invasion and

³ Ibid:17.

⁴ This essay gained shape and energy through discussions with Kevin Keffe and benefitted greatly from his critical reading. Several other people read drafts and offered helpful comments. I am grateful for the sharing that went into its production.

⁵ See Berndt and Berndt 1987.

settlement, focussing on Yarralin peoples' experience of the process. His narratives are a bridge between external social processes and lived experience. Hobbles was not the only person in Yarralin who spoke of Captain Cook, and similar narratives are told throughout the Victoria River District and the Kimberley.⁶ In Arnhem Land stories about Captain Cook have a somewhat different significance,⁷ although they too deal with invasion and its consequences.

Stories, as Yarralin people told them, are predominantly local. They refer primarily to events in which the teller had been a participant, or events which persons known to the teller had witnessed. Frequently, accounts of the particular were told with the clear intent of illustrating processes which were more general, and of commenting on events of the present. Stories generate meaning through their very openness. They are told by people who have particular interests and expertise with respect to the issues involved; they draw on shared memories; they construct continuities between past, present, and future; they link specific events to broader processes; they show the options available for determining the meaning of events, and they do so with respect to local understandings. There is no collective Yarralin view of the event articulated by a single spokesperson. There are stories: many voices joining together. Often the voices are in agreement, but consensus is not a necessary condition to telling strong stories.

I have chosen to analyse one of Hobbles' Captain Cook stories because it is short (and thus feasible), because it demonstrates the issues quite clearly, and because it is intended for a non-Aboriginal audience. This brief story was taped in October 1980. A friend who was writing a book asked me to contribute something about my field work, and I thought that this would be an opportunity to make some of Hobbles' words available to a broader audience. I discussed the proposition with him, and he taped this message for an anthropology textbook. The transcription presented here is in partial conformity to criteria suggested by Muecke, Rumsey, and Wirrunmarra (1985). The intention is to render an oral text in a way that will allow it to be performed in something approximating its original form. Each line break indicates a pause in speech; a slash indicates an intentionally longer pause. Where Hobbles hesitated over words, and clearly did not intend the pause to mark a significance, that hesitation is indicated by a hyphen.

Right /
 Well, I'm speaking today /
 I'm named - Hobbles Danayari
 and I got a bit of troubling /
 Long way back beginning, I think
 right back beginning.
 I don't know but
 this the biggest troubling /
 Ah
 when that Captain Cook been come from big England
 and come through
 down to Sydney Harbour.
 And lot of - Aboriginal people, I don't know, but
 people been down to Sydney Harbour

⁶ See Kolig 1980, Rose 1984.

⁷ Mackinolty and Wainburranga 1988.

REMEMBRANCE

Aboriginal people./
And when that Captain Cook been come
through
down to Sydney Harbour /
well he's the one been hit the - Sydney Harbour.
Should have askem him
one of these boss for Sydney
Aboriginal people.
People been up there
Aboriginal people
he should have come up and - "hello", you know, "hello".
Now asking him
for his place
to come through
because Aboriginal land./
Because Captain Cook didn't give him fair go
to - tell him to "good day"
or "hello"
you know
givem a people fair go.
We all men.
Because Captain Cook got his land
big England
and Aboriginal people got the Northern Territory./
Now Captain Cook didn't - givem fair go people
all over Australia today./
That before
he should have give him a fair go
askem people, Aboriginal people.
They own the Northern Territory.
Because Captain Cook should give them fair go whether he say "good day"
whether he say "hello"
that's be all right.
But my people
my people Aboriginal people they been fright for Captain Cook, he's a whitefellow /
He's a whitefellow and they been frighten, you know.
They been frighten and really
he should have been give him time
makem him - you know
quiet and askem him quiet time when him
want to try and askem him
whether he can
ask him for the - country
or - cross to see another people
Aboriginal people.
You know, he should have give it him a fair go.
Right /
Captain Cook been start to - "Ah
this the wild one people"

he reckon.

He's not the wild one but
he's the boss for the land /
He's the boss for the land, the Aboriginal people.
Well, Captain Cook should ask him, make sure
you know
and make that - my people - settle down
make it quiet.

And he got - more troubling.
Aboriginal people got more troubling
you know he should have tell him Captain Cook
other way round.

Because that's not his place to come to the Northern Territory
because that's just for the Aboriginal people.

Now when he been start to
knock [kill] my people up in the Sydney
that means he been start to clean [eradicate] my people.
Because Captain Cook
him been come very cheeky
you know.

He don't - he don't askem, make sure
or quieten him

You know
make it right.

And when that
Captain Cook been start and shootem from Sydney
right up,
right up to Darwin Harbour,
all over Australia,
see?

That's wrong.

That's Captain Cook been do wrong.

He should tell them
to ask them fair go
whether - whether that Captain Cook listen to my people.
You know?

Well

when him been start
to go down to that - Darwin
got that his boat
got that fly [sail; tarpaulin] on
and start to look around that Darwin Harbour
and when he been come out - through that Mindil beach,
they only got a little bit of a pocket - down to Darwin.
And come into that Mindil beach pocket
and him - been makem bit of a jetty up there.
And there the Captain Cook been get off from boat
and have a look around Darwin Harbour.
Because nother - nother people been down to Darwin

REMEMBRANCE

they're Aboriginal people, same thing
down in Sydney, same thing in Darwin.
Because people been all over - the Northern Territory.
No whitefellow, no
it's just for the Aboriginal people.
When him been start up come in
put him boat
into the Mindil beach pocket
and been get off.
And have a look around
see a couple of men there, Aboriginal people, old people.
And it start.
Two my people been look, "Oh, that's whitefellow".
They been frighten really
you know.
But if him been come, Captain Cook /
"hello" him
"good day" him
you know
and calm him down
till him - till him been want to get quiet
you know
my people, and he should have askem them.
Because
you can't hunt him like a dog.
No.
Because
that's the land for the Aboriginal people.
Because people on the Northern Territory
Aboriginal people.
Because I know
Captain Cook didn't give them a fair go for them my people.
You know
if your Captain Cook been trying - to - ask and make sure
you know
whether he can - whether he can take it
from Aboriginal - people.
This is the one we're looking at
this is the one
you know.
Because
he's the bloke who started
kill my people
up in the Northern Territory.
This is the biggest country
not a little country but biggest country.
You know
we own the one -
and now Captain - Cook - didn't

you know, say something to my people.
If him been say, "all right"
we been - you know
we been start to make it.
Make it
my people should have make it
old people.
But he got lot of more important one
up in the Darwin /
more important for the people
for the Aboriginal people
more important for the - Sydney Harbour/
you know.
Oh, lot of ceremony, lot of secrets, and all that thing.
Because he lost - he lost a lot of it.
Lot of white men
because Captain Cook started,
not my people, you know.
Now I'm talking again, over.
Right
now - till we can have a friend
friend together now.
I'm speaking on now.
We're friends together -
because we own Australia
every one of them
no matter who
white and black.
We come together join in
whether we can
you know - take it mijelb [ourselves]
love mijelb [each other] one another
and cross-ways marriage
no matter what kind of marriage we can have them
because we own Australia
today
every one of them.
That be all right.
Make it more better
out of the,
out of that big trouble.
You know before
Captain Cook been making lot of cruel
you know.
Now
these days
these days we'll be friendly
we'll be love mijelb
we'll be mates

REMEMBRANCE

that be better
better for make that trouble.
Now we'll be come - join in
no matter who white and black or yellow
as far as there.

Hobbles identifies Captain Cook as the persona of invasion. Although his account is at odds with western knowledge of Captain Cook's journeys, the more interesting point is that this difference is irrelevant in a fundamental sense. Invasion did happen, people did get shot, they did have their lands stolen. Hobbles' purpose is primarily to tell us about relationships between Aborigines and Europeans. Different constructions of Captain Cook only matter if we make them matter.

In the first part of the story Hobbles establishes the fact that early Europeans did not ask Aborigines for permission to come into their country, and did not acknowledge Aboriginal peoples' ownership of the country. They killed the people and stole the land. Hobbles establishes that this set of actions constituted a wrong from an Aboriginal point of view. The 'lot of ceremony, lot of secrets, and all that thing' is an index to the systemic organisation of knowledge and place through which Aboriginal people demonstrate their rights to land to each other, to non-Aboriginal people, and to the cosmos at large.

In addition to stating the wrong in Aboriginal terms, Hobbles also specifies it quite clearly in European terms. Drawing on the European Australian concept of a 'fair go', Hobbles illuminates Captain Cook's actions against a background of Australian ideals.

Hobbles' statement that 'we are all men' [human beings] serves a most important function in bridging Aboriginal and European culture. That is, Captain Cook witnessed people behaving in ways that should have told him that they were responsible land owners,⁸ but even if he failed to grasp the significance of Aboriginal messages, he ought to have understood that within the terms of his own culture he was dealing with people who deserved a fair go.

The term 'fair go' carries the essential denotation of 'the elementary fair treatment to which anyone must be entitled'.⁹ 'Fair go' is a basic element in mateship, and thus is essential to a whole set of Australian characteristics based on ideals of social equality. While mateship and fair go have been used in a variety of ways,¹⁰ Hobbles intends the term to evoke the ideal of resistance to domination expressed by Henry Lawson in 1894: 'when the ideal of "mateship" is realised, the monopolists will not be able to hold the land from us'.¹¹

The point is, of course, that Aborigines have not had a fair go. White Australians, Hobbles suggests, would do well to pay attention to their own values. It is important to add here that Hobbles was well aware of the dark side of mateship: its use as a means of exclusion.¹² Many stories develop the distinction between moral and immoral uses of 'mateship', telling of the 'Union Mob' and the 'American boss'. Such stories identify 'moral Europeans' - those who seek to engage with Aborigines through equitable social

8 See Rose 1984.

9 Wilkes 1978:138.

10 Ward 1970; Altman 1987.

11 Wilkes, *ibid*:215.

12 Altman, *ibid*:171.

relationships.¹³ Hobbles encountered both kinds of Europeans - moral and immoral - in his life; his words emerge from lived experience and assert his understanding that there are people who will want to listen to him and will respond favourably to what he has to say.

He divides his Captain Cook story into an account of the past and an account of a possible future; the transition is effected by his phrase 'Now.... I'm speaking on now.' The concept of a fair go links these two segments. Hobbles tells people, in the last segment, how a fair go could be implemented. The basis for a better future lies most succinctly in Hobbles' statement of friendship/mateship.¹⁴

In Aboriginal usage, and perhaps in European ideal usage as well, the term 'mate' links past, present and future in denoting relationships which endure through time. The broader connotation of the term suggests that mateship can be extended across social boundaries in order to construct a better future. This idea is signalled in the words: 'Right now... we can have a friend, friend together now'. Here again, Hobbles brings together Aboriginal and European concepts of equality. The means of implementation he offers are, however, quintessentially Aboriginal: land and marriage.

Aboriginal land ownership has been the subject of vast debate, but it is clearly understood that localised social/cultural identity authorises a person to engage with others. Locality is both an identifier of the person and that which enables the person to enter into social relationships which are initiated and sustained by equitable exchanges with other persons/places. To be located, for Yarralin people is to have a ground from which to know, to speak, to act, to invite and deny, to share and to ask. Myers makes the excellent point that the right to be asked is given greater priority than the right to exclude.¹⁵ To paraphrase Turner, through reciprocal exchange part of one place is located in another place, and vice versa, without loss of integrity of either.¹⁶ Turner defines this exchange process as 'accommodation':

Opposition, then, is thus successfully subordinated to complementarity and the cause of revolutionary upheaval in society vanishes. Instead of confrontation over territory and resources there is accommodation in economic interdependence out of mutual respect for exclusive, abstract, jurisdiction, an exclusiveness that in this context actually promotes peace.¹⁷

¹³ Burridge 1960:247-83.

¹⁴ In Yarralin people's usage, connotations associated with the term 'mate' are removed from considerations of gender exclusivity and of national identity. In most contexts it is equivalent to the term 'friend'. As two or more people are defined as 'mates', the term indicates shared experiences which form the basis of a mutuality of shared interests, loyalty, and consideration among people who are social equals or equivalents. It can be used to refer to alternate generations of males, but most frequently it is detached from kinship or social category domains. It can be used to refer to age sets - people who grew up together; men who went through initiations together; women who worked together; men and women who have had and continue to have common purposes in life. In my experience, it is never used to designate persons who stand in cross-sex avoidance relationships. The term 'friend' is often a gloss for a partner in an extra-marital affair. Context determines the meaning, and in this narrative it may be possible that both meanings are intended.

¹⁵ Myers 1986:184.

¹⁶ Turner 1987:62.

¹⁷ Ibid:62.

REMEMBRANCE

One of the most important means of achieving accommodation - a portion of each placed in the other - is through marriage. Physical being, itself conceived as part of place, is mutually exchanged, as are objects, responsibilities, and knowledge. Integrity of place/person is sustained through systematic and regular exchanges. Unlike most western systems with which many of us are all too familiar, in which the effort to resolve contradiction generates ever more serious contradictions, the genius of Aboriginal systems is to use paradox as a principle of organisation.

This brief diversion allows us to hear more clearly what Hobbles is saying in the final portion of the narrative. First, he says that we all own Australia now. What he doesn't say, because for him it is so obvious, is that Europeans have already taken most of the country and ought therefore to be more equitable. They ought, in fact, to allow more opportunities for Aborigines to control land. What I find notable here is Hobbles' acceptance of the past. Rather than indulge in the belligerent denial, false pride, or soul-destroying guilt that have been so characteristic of European discourse in the bicentenary year, he takes the past as a condition of the present and shows how it can be transformed. His implied suggestion that Aborigines should have more land (under European land tenure systems) offers Europeans a form of accommodation. It is also based on the point made in the previous section: that although Aboriginal people were not initially given an opportunity to meet threat with accommodation, the situation is rectifiable. In more extensive narratives Hobbles says that the years during which people worked on cattle stations, offering their labour to pastoralists,¹⁸ ought to be understood as an attempt at accommodation to which Europeans have yet to respond.

Finally, he suggests that there could be more marriages. Hobbles' concern, which comes out more clearly in longer narratives, is that marriage, like land relationships, has been misused by Europeans. He notes two points in particular. The first is the fact that white men married or consorted with black women and that black men had few opportunities to reciprocate. The second is that mixed descent children were taken away from their families. In Hobbles' view, the most oppressive wrong in taking children away was that they were kept from their culture. The whole point of marriage as a system of accommodation is that a new generation shares in the place/identity of both parents; European practices of sexual exploitation and policies of assimilation effectively disabled this system. Hobbles asserts that marriage, descent, and land ownership can be tied together in ways that give everyone a fair go.

Hobbles' genius was to 'intervene in a situation and tell a story which can change the conventions for understanding things'.¹⁹ In this brief narrative he offers a set of profound gifts to a non-Aboriginal audience: an acceptance of the conditions of the past as the basis from which we will build our future; some means of transforming the wrongs of the past into more equitable relationships. Flesh and blood, earth and water are offered as media through which Aboriginal and European Australians can be truly at home together in this continent. Hobbles may not have realised that beyond his overt statements he was also offering other gifts; his narratives point to a theory and practice of managing difference, and of generating structures which empower, rather than diminish, people. Like Morgan's written words, his stories stand as journeys to a place in which confusion, alienation, and powerlessness can be put aside.

¹⁸ Danayari in Rose 1984.

¹⁹ Benterrak, Muecke and Roe 1984:173.

Strong Stories

Hobbles Danayari died in April, 1988. My sense of loss has stimulated many memories of the time we shared, and forced me to examine the value of remembrance. As Hobbles and I worked through the tapes he made, discussed ideas, and explored a great range of issues, we became close friends and mutual informants. It is sometimes difficult for me now to be certain of whether the voice I use is my own or Hobbles'; the same may occasionally have been true for him. Hobbles would not have seen this mingling of voices as a problem; rather, if it was apparent to him, it would have been the self-evident expression of friendship and sympathy. The following discussion is undoubtedly my own, but had I never known Hobbles I would never have addressed these issues in this way.

I want to return to my basic contention that stories, as they are managed by Yarralin people, construct temporal and social relationships which European Australians and others whose culture is essentially western have difficulty perceiving. One of the lessons to be gained from this analysis is that by listening very attentively we could learn something about engaging with our own past and future, our own personal and collective histories. And where one set of peoples' past and present intersect with that of another people, the abilities to listen, to link, and to construct equitably are crucial. This is not an argument for appropriation; it is quite an opposing argument for listening.

Oral narratives show how to reclaim the past in order to liberate the future. They contrast forcibly with national histories which place us under the tyranny of the immense, depriving us of lived temporal connections. In part, the question is one of power and privilege. Many western histories construct the past according to certain class views, or according to national priorities. Some historians resist, and aim to provide the histories of those who have been ignored. Yet, rather paradoxically, it seems that insofar as the intention to reclaim a voice focusses on class, gender, or other immensities, such histories render us powerless. This apparent paradox is best understood in light of Berger's analysis of war photographs. He contends that such photos stimulate a sense of personal moral inadequacy which effectively vitiates a constructive response. Confronted with such photos one:

Either...shrugs off this sense of inadequacy as being only too familiar, or else...thinks of performing a kind of penance.... In both cases, the issue of the war which has caused that moment is effectively depoliticised. The picture becomes evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody.²⁰

Special purpose histories, I believe, have a similiar effect - producing our anonymity and inadequacy in the very fact of denying it.

There is also the tyranny of written 'facts'. As they are construed in many literate cultures, facts tend to reduce us to insignificance. They are given a privilege, which is greater than our own lived experience. Facts tell us what the past was really all about, regardless of our memories, our knowledge derived from older people, our experience of how things work. Wielded by the powerful, facts tell us what matters, rather than allowing us to decide what matters.

I do not want to reify facts. They are, after all, only transformed into information through human agency. If history depends upon reliance upon facts, and if facts are construed primarily as written documentation, then we must always suffer a certain obscure inadequacy. How are we to construct the real histories which are those which we sense, we partially remember, and we need? O'Neill puts the case superbly: 'Remembrance is the

²⁰ Berger 1980:40.

REMEMBRANCE

bodily infrastructure of political knowledge and action. It holds injustice to account and sustains the utopian hope that underlies the will to freedom and equality.²¹ One of the beauties of Yarralin peoples' stories which Hobbles demonstrated most eloquently is that they require 'facts' to be subservient to a more powerful truth.

Yarralin people do not recount the history of Aborigines in Australia. They tell their own histories. There is no Yarralin history, as such; there are stories. There are stories that belong to people because they were witness to the events recounted, because their parents or other forebears were witnesses and passed the knowledge on to them. Stories are true because the ways in which they account for the particular are proved through experience. If stories fail to provide the required understandings, they do not survive. All these stories intersect. The past is kept accountable to the needs of the present because there is no single instance of present authority, and because there is no illusion of a-contextual privilege.

We are located in the ever-changing present which is the link between the past and the future. As Ricoeur says, the now is constituted through the play of memory, attention, and expectation. Without memory, we are incomplete, our attention adrift, and our expectations constrained. Insofar as our collective memories are incomplete, so too must all our collective action in the shared present be incomplete. Indeed, how are we even to know what possibilities are open to us, in the absence of remembrance?

I have used written words to argue the case for listening. Hobbles used European Australian ideals as a cultural bridge, constructing his message in terms that resonate with his audience's own experience. In contrast to western scientific discourse, for which 'human time is turned outwards towards what it can demand of the future without any care for what it has made of the past'²² Hobbles speaks the words which situate time and persons dialogically. Passion, sculpted from intellect, experience, remembrance, and the desire to engage with others, is offered in gifts of stories.

How deprived we would be if we failed to hear.

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21 Cf. Morphy and Morphy 1984:461-2.

22 O'Neill, *ibid.*: 2.

ABORIGINAL HISTORY 1989 13:2

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