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INDIGENOUS PRESENCES AND NATIONAL NARRATIVES IN AUSTRALASIAN MUSEUMS

This paper takes up the much debated issue of the entry of indigenous artifacts and art into western museums and galleries. I try to see this in a new way by suggesting that the 'decontextualization' involved is not necessarily bad. Putting indigenous and western pieces together does not necessarily impose a universal aesthetic; it may rather draw attention to the incommensurable differences between things, and the history that lies behind such differences.

It's become something of an axiom in discussions of the collection of indigenous people's artifacts that the abstraction of things from ritual activities or everyday uses for sale in the tribal art market, and for storage or display in private collectors' cabinets and public museums, is an operation of decontextualization. And in a sense it surely is: the space of the specimen is often not a mere vacancy or absence, but a non-space of a singular and radical kind. The unnatural isolation of the displayed object appears to be especially poignant now, given that mainstream audiences have become increasingly aware of the singular values that indigenous objects once had within the fabric of sociality, and still retain from an indigenous perspective: these are not simply tools or art works, but—to use the Maori word—taonga or inalienable possessions. That understanding is part of a broader re-imagining of the histories of Australasian white settler societies. I have picked that awkward and dated geographic label to remind us that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when magazines such as The Australasian Sketcher made the term current, both countries were highly conscious of the singular character of their antipodean coloniality, as, in a different way, we are today. National histories are re-presented with the best of intentions, which means that indigenous presences are to be acknowledged. It is the awkward character of that acknowledgement, the ways in which it has worked and not worked, that I explore in this essay, through discussion of two recent exhibitions in national institutions.

Let me begin by going back to decontextualization. The grievous abstraction of indigenous things from indigenous lives is not an operation that 'western' institutions have performed exclusively upon the artifacts of non-western or tribal peoples. Rather, it mirrors what is understood as the key attribute of the modern
art museum: that is, the displacement of painting and sculpture from religious and aristocratic situations into a space in which things seem defined by an absolute function-lessness, by a similar evacuation of private significance, exchange value, use, and context. Certainly, modernists and contemporary artists may produce particularly for the museum, but our galleries include many works ranging from religious icons to far more recent pieces of so-called craft or decorative art that were made with churches or dining tables rather than display cases in mind. One of my starting points is that this familiar and obvious point—that things in museums are decontextualized—is a bad assumption to begin with, if we are concerned with the meanings and politics of museums and exhibitions. My purpose is not to deny that indigenous artifacts were removed from community uses, and too often stolen; I am not questioning the desirability of repatriating material or otherwise restoring the rights of the groups from whom things were taken. The point is rather that exhibited things are not 'decontextualized', but contextualized in special and powerful ways. Equally importantly, these 'contexts' are not simply social or institutional relations that are external to objects and exhibits: context is projected and defined, to some degree, by content.

Perhaps I can make this clearer by drawing attention to another sort of apparent 'decontextualization' that's very familiar. We often see racks of disembodied clothes and footless shoes, together with many other objects isolated from their functions, in department stores and other shops. Although there are some analogies between the presentation of these commodities and the exhibition of museum specimens, the objects don't seem strangely isolated, because we know that they're being displayed for sale. At other levels, they are there to make class and subcultural distinctions visible in material form; and they could be seen, ideally, to empower consumers by enabling them to imagine themselves variously in the terms suggested by fashionable clothes, books, health foods, or exercise equipment. Arrays of things in the market may thus be abstracted from their most obvious and specific uses, but in fact they do all kinds of things; perhaps most importantly, they teach us not only to desire specific objects, but to invest our efforts of self-definition in that desire.

By the same token, museum objects may be removed from their primary intended uses—the mask floats headlessly, the jug is sadly without wine—but they are nevertheless making themselves useful, busily and perhaps in too many ways. The context is quite different to that of the market, but also similar to it, in the sense that objects have specific meanings, but also more general and implicit effects, in teaching habits of viewing and registers of aesthetic and historical recognition. Exhibitions may present particular bodies of art work, convey information about fields of natural
history, or specific arguments concerning history and nationhood; their pedagogy may be disguised as entertainment or aesthetic stimulation, but they also convey attitudes toward art, heritage, and technology, ethics of self-refinement, and perceptions of citizenship. With respect to the last, I am not suggesting that either art galleries or museums of natural history have generally been directly concerned with civics education in a narrow sense, but it is obvious that many institutions present the natural environment, histories of military experience, and artistic traditions alike, from a specifically national point of view, encouraging viewers to imagine themselves as Australians or New Zealanders, at once intimately and collectively connected with a natural and cultural heritage, that may be presented in certain terms with certain implications. The museum proffers both particular memories, and a habit of memory that is nationalized; just as it suggests that art works do not cohere merely as the products of individual artists, local milieux, or aesthetic movements, but also, and in more powerful and embracing terms, in national canons. In suggesting that galleries and museums convey habits of collective and national consciousness, I am only restating a point that has become familiar: these institutions, like schools, health services, and censuses, are very much part of the business of government that interested Foucault in his later work.

To appreciate a connection between an individual's aesthetic responses and the efforts of a dispersed modern bureaucracy to socialize a population, is not however to suggest that the museum should now be understood as an instrument of surveillance or discipline in any strong or repressive sense. Museums may make vigorous efforts to define their audiences and present them with certain understandings of history and culture, but their aspirations are often more powerful than their accomplishments. Confusion and contention may be endemic features in public representations of nationality, but there is perhaps a special reason why the rhetoric of many exhibitions is not grasped, or not accepted, by their audiences. Artifacts and art works are objects that can be ordered and captioned and presented in ways that suggest a story, but their material characteristics, and the objectified intelligence that they carry, may undermine or conflict with whatever larger narrative is implied or expressed.

Let me illustrate this briefly through reference to an exhibition that took place in Sydney in 1941, that at the same time gets me back to the theme I have drifted away from, that of the relation between indigenous presences and national narratives in the settler societies of Australia and New Zealand. I mentioned earlier that I wanted to draw attention to the fundamental similarity between the cultural logic of colonization in the two countries, which sometimes simply excluded indigenous people, or denigrated them, yet also
frequently celebrated indigenous folklore and art, and argued that indigenous reference provided the means for Australians or New Zealanders—writers, composers, artists, and designers—to fashion their own distinctive national cultures that would not simply be impoverished and displaced versions of British tradition. As Margaret Preston put it, with characteristic urgency, 'The attention of Australian people must be drawn to the fact that [Aboriginal art] is great art and the foundation of a national culture for this country.' Affirmation and appropriation thus went hand in hand.

Early in 1941, staff at the Australian Museum began to prepare an exhibition of Aboriginal art, together with material that demonstrated its potential as a stimulus for modern china, fabric, architecture, and design; the enthusiasm of arts and crafts practitioners to provide work meant that the show expanded rapidly, with the result that it ended up taking place at the David Jones auditorium, rather than in the more limited space available at the Museum (cover, fig. 1). (It's tempting to talk further about the hybrid gallery-department store space, especially because there's been a long tradition of displaying pieces of tribal art in the middle of the fashion departments in that particular store; nothing complements a Perri Cutten suit quite so well, it seems, as a Sepik mask). One might have anticipated that the anthropology curator, Frederick McCarthy, who otherwise wrote extensively on Aboriginal art and archaeology, might have been using the designers' interests as a vehicle for the promotion of the indigenous forms in their own right. Though the Aboriginal work itself only constituted one section
of the exhibition, Museum staff went to considerable lengths to obtain photographs of rock paintings and engravings, and loans of 'weapons, utensils, sacred objects and ornaments' from collections in Melbourne and Adelaide as well as around Sydney. In the event, however, the claims McCarthy made for Aboriginal art in a press release, and in an article in the Museum's magazine, were not only modest but broadly consistent with a primitivist settler-nationalism, that saw Aborigines providing the new nation with a singular prehistory and a set of distinctive motifs that would have a future, not in new expressions of indigenous culture, but in craft produced by white settlers for white settlers. As he wrote,

It is not contended that aboriginal art equals the abstract and imaginative qualities, or the richness of design, of the art of many other primitive peoples, nor that it approaches the magnificence of the art of the classical civilizations, but it may be claimed that the variety and simplicity of the wide range of motifs and equally numerous techniques... give it a character sufficiently distinctive to identify it with the people, and for this reason it may be said to represent a definite phase of art in Australia. Adapted with intelligence and taste, aboriginal art can make a unique contribution to modern Australian craft work... In addition, the myths and legends, daily life and art motifs, form an inspiration that may give rise to a national decorative element in Australian architecture.  

Given the hesitancy of this assessment of Aboriginal art, it's striking that the critics of the day were ambivalent about the white 'applications', rather than their indigenous sources. One reviewer was circumspect, noting that while the barks showed 'the aboriginal to be a sensitive artist with a true feeling for design' the paintings 'should be compared with the crude decoration they have inspired on the glassware on view nearby.' Another was much more categorical:

Best exhibits by far were the aboriginal bark-paintings... The aboriginal stuff was swell, but all the modern application wasn't. (Glaring examples of the unswell were of the china and glass, and that gay little frieze. All horrible beyond belief...). And this in a magazine, Ure Smith's National Journal, that had featured these 'applications' a good deal in its own pages. Paradoxically, then, in this case, the effort to assimilate indigenous culture to a distinctively national school of design had underlined the incommensurability of indigenous and settler forms, and hardly sustained the idea that a transition from one to the other, from an aboriginal prehistory to a settler future, represented any kind of cultural progress. In this case, content could be seen to have contradicted context, or at least to have unsettled both the particular agenda of the exhibition and the larger idea of national cultural development that it manifested.

It is, of course, this understanding of national history, from indigenous prehistory through pioneer accomplishment to the expansiveness of antipodean modernity, that is no longer unashamedly
embraced, either officially or in public perceptions, in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. I do not want to go into the similarities and contrasts between indigenous experience and debates about race relations in the two countries, and am merely concerned with the point that a history of indigenous activism, together with shifts in the dominant settler population's attitudes, have prompted governments to take the project of redressing dispossession and discrimination more seriously; over the same period, museums have become theatres for the renegotiation of the national histories that they showcase. (Ideas of nationality have also, of course, been challenged by non-British and non-white migrants, but I do not discuss the significance of their cultural affirmations here).

The *Voices* exhibition at the Museum of New Zealand, which was opened about the beginning of 1993, has perhaps been the most unsuccessful of recent attempts to display an inclusive and democratic account of national history in a major public institution. *Voices*, so named for its emphasis on sound and recorded commentary, is of some importance because it was presented as a kind of trial for approaches that might be implemented in the museum's new harbourside building scheduled to open in 1998, which will quite appropriately be organized around the understanding of the country as a bicultural nation that has been officially adopted in fits and starts over the last decade. The exhibition followed from much consultation and was certainly well-intentioned. It not only emphasized the Maori presence (figure 3), but also incorporated a good deal of environmental history, and foregrounded women's experiences of events that had conventionally been seen almost exclusively from a male perspective. Unfortunately this was done in too heavy-handed a way, and one journalist—a woman, as it happens—observed rather archly that you could leave the exhibition with the sense that men had played no part at all in the second world war. Reports in the media suggested that many older Pakeha visitors were put out by what they saw as the belittling of the accomplishments of pioneers, who were charged with wholesale deforestation. What was remarkable, though, was that the show appeared to offend absolutely everybody, in the sense that Maori were equally dissatisfied.

The artist and art historian Brett Graham wrote that he'd looked forward eagerly to the exhibition, but found the mock bush
lifeless and petrified, and other sections 'strangely spiritless'. He was struck by the fact that the story of Polynesian canoe voyaging and colonization—which retains fascination for audiences remote from the Pacific—was 'relegated to a tiny corner' when 'the most dominant and perhaps least successful feature... was a mock galley of a sailing ship, celebrating European arrival' (p. 14; figure 4). This was a point that had occurred to me, when I first walked through the exhibit: if curators had really wanted to challenge the 'master narrative that has provided our historical perspective up to the present', as one had expressed the aims, sawing up a lot of timber to create an awkward immobile replica of one of Cook's ships seemed a curious way to go about it—though it's perhaps inadvertently interesting, because this is the kind of thing that cargo cult followers in Melanesia are always supposed to have done. Maybe we have more affinities with our Pacific neighbours than we generally imagine.

I suggested earlier that artifacts sometimes overwhelmed the narratives that curators attempted to frame them with, and perhaps this is what occurred here: it was too easy to pass over the texts that...
aimed to engender ambivalence about early discovery and settlement, and simply be overwhelmed by the monumental size of the ship, which seemed to diminish all the indigenous pieces that came before it. It could also be suggested that the installation failed on technical grounds, in the sense that the plurality of voices produced a cacophony. Brett Graham had written that 'the best speakers on the marae choose their words... wisely, economically. Here the voices seemed to scream in competition until I felt uncomfortable, claustrophobic' (p. 14).

The value of inclusive plurality, in other words, could be seen to contradict the values of the indigenous tradition that the curators sought to include.

Though the curatorial group was divided evenly between Maori and Pakeha, as between men and women, it is possible also that Maori preferences concerning the presentation of taonga were overlooked. Many conversations have suggested to me that a relatively conventional mode of museum presentation, which remains the approach in other sections of the Museum of New Zealand, and in other institutions in the country, in which artifacts are isolated on walls or pedestals and spot-lit, in fact seems wholly appropriate to many Maori, because the presence and power of their atua and tupuna or ancestors, together with the mana of sacred heirlooms, are emphasized. Placing these things 'in context' by associating them with everyday traditional subsistence activities, by surrounding them with images and words, distracts the viewer from the sheer power of the things themselves, and in that sense may paradoxically effect a more invidious decontextualization than the artifact's isolation in the space of the specimen.

I do not want to speculate further about, or speak for, Maori responses, and instead comment upon what seems to me to have been the most significant underlying flaw of Voices. This is that the values rather than the form of the national narrative were altered; adjustments that seemed to be required by the idea of bicultural nationhood were made, but a certain kind of history remained intact. That history began in a particular natural setting; it had an indigenous opening chapter, that was followed by white discovery, settlement, and twentieth-century experience, which was marked particularly by the great wars. This is the basic story that virtually all of us, I imagine, had at school. Altering the customary assessments of these moments—such that Cook et. al. are disparaged rather than celebrated—does not so much empower Maori, as deprive anybody and everybody of the opportunity to engage with the complexities of eighteenth-century exploration, of the promises and the risks of enlightenment on the beaches, of the uncertainty around 'discoveries' that were regarded as morally problematic at the time.

More importantly, it fails to identify or articulate an autonomous indigenous history in which nature, prehistory and
Cook would not, self-evidently, have defined the chapters. By gesturing toward the incorporation of a Maori perspective within a national history, the exhibition forestalled the possibility that incompatibile histories might be presented in tension. The laudable idea that everybody should be included seemed to presuppose, in this case, the terms on which people and stories might be included. The point is not that people have different versions of histories, like bosses' and workers' accounts of a strike: some might not have histories that belong to this birth-and-development of a nation model. A Maori counterpoint to a Pakeha history might take the form of an exhibit with no chronological sequence at all, that instead presented ancestors who embodied both past and future in principle, as they both commemorated and anticipated a plethora of more particular accomplishments and transactions. I am not putting this forward as a utopian projection of how a genuinely postcolonial exhibit might look, at some point in the future, but rather suggesting that this is one way in which Maori and others can respond to exhibits that may otherwise appear to be conventionally ethnological. Almost inadvertently, that old museology empowered the objects that it encased, and created scope for indigenous people to empower themselves by reclaiming the objects—mainly in a symbolic and political sense rather than through physical reappropriation—which led to the objects being re-empowered in turn. Most visitors to museums in Aotearoa New Zealand are impressed not only by the aesthetic dynamism of the Maori pieces they encounter, but also by the Maori mana that dynamism seems to exemplify. In this case, surely, the content of museums has helped shape their context.

If this is so, the appropriate course of action must be to validate these indigenous perceptions of indigenous objects. This must mean curatorial control and the continuing liaison with indigenous communities that I imagine most in the museum world would now support in principle. The Voices exhibition looks more and more like an extension of the social or popular history strategy from the less privileged groups within white society into the domain of settler-indigenous relations; the strategy comes to pieces in that context because it is not a question of differing perspectives or retelling a history from below, as I already noted, but a more fundamental matter of acknowledging profound cultural differences that extend to constructions of history itself. But if I have argued that these differences can be better addressed by exhibitions that foreground the intelligence of indigenous artifacts themselves—and the kinds of historical imagining those artifacts suggest—that can surely only be a partial solution. It would be partial because indigenous cultures are not, of course, wholly autonomous of the national narratives that white settlers lurch between celebrating and lamenting. How can
museums and exhibitions mark this interplay, and the conflict of colonization, without according indigenous people a marginal role within an inevitably larger national history, without, in effect, assimilating them?

This brings me to the National Gallery of Australia. The rehang of the Australian galleries there, unveiled in June 1994, was generally commended and not much debated. One critique, however, was contained within an otherwise mainly positive review by Humphrey McQueen, whose objections focussed upon the inclusion of mid-nineteenth century Aboriginal artifacts in the rooms containing paintings of the same period (figure 4). McQueen wrote,

The meanings of those Aboriginal pieces are... being expropriated as surely as was the country of the peoples who made them. The juxtaposition of cane baskets with marble busts has the opposite effect of the one intended. Instead of highlighting Aboriginal creativity, the display is an inversion of Batman's offer of beads and blankets in exchange for the Port Phillip district. In the NGA's context, the artefacts are not even tokens, but trinkets.?

Much as I respect Humphrey McQueen as a cultural historian, I don’t find this assessment of these galleries persuasive. His argument is really that a naive effort to affirm Aboriginal creativity led curators to place baskets with paintings as though they exhibited artistic qualities of the same order; yet this strategy, he suggests, can only obscure the meanings of the Aboriginal pieces, and most partic-

ularly the fact that they are not art works in any European sense. He goes on to stress that ‘to say that the products of 19th-century Aboriginal communities were not Art is not to devalue their design qualities, but rather to appreciate how different those cultures were from industrial capitalism.’

This strikes me as more valid as a critique of an earlier exhibition of global masterpieces that occupied the large gallery immediately off the NGA's entrance, which included the famous Lake Sentani double figure and the Gallery's paintings by Rubens and Tiepolo. The approach here was similar to that of the Sainsbury Centre at the University of East Anglia, where Jacob Epstein and Francis Bacon rub shoulders with dazzling inlaid shields from the Solomon Islands, and many other African, Oceanic, and native American pieces. All of these works are put forward as works of fine art, and the old evolutionist ranking of cultures is neutralized on a relativist level plain. Most curatorial strategies of course entail both gain and loss, and it is perhaps important to see this affirmation of the products of non-European cultures as retaining some value, especially when ‘the western canon’ understood in exclusive terms, retains eloquent proponents. But the drawbacks of this relativism are perhaps more conspicuous. It insists on a general equivalence of value while obscuring the particular ground from which various aesthetic expressions emerge. It removes an invidious principle of linear progress
FIGURE 4
The Australian Galleries, courtesy National Gallery of Australia, Canberra 1997
but treats cultures as so many discrete systems, rather than as milieux that have become mutually entangled through exchange and colonization. Hence the overall form of this exhibit conveys no sense of any specific relation between the people of Lake Sentani and those of Europe, even though this particular piece is said to have been submerged in a lake to avoid destruction at the hands of missionaries, and though it, like a number of other Oceanic pieces, has been widely reproduced as much because it was once in the collection of a well-known modernist artist as for its own interest. If facts of this kind, together with the power of the carving itself, make up an uneasy amalgam of meaning, they have no significance in the context of its juxtaposition with Tiepolo or Rubens. Even if we go into the histories of each of these pieces, the gaps are extreme, and we are left simply with a set of powerful yet disconnected works of art.

I find the effect of the Australian galleries to be very different. This is not because the works are more aesthetically proximate. In some ways they are less so: whereas the double Lake Sentani figure can immediately be categorized as a piece of sculpture broadly comparable to western figurations of the human body, the pieces in the case in the centre of the room seem absolutely non-representational; their intricate and powerful patterns can be regarded as the decorated surfaces of utilitarian objects, that strike us immediately as being fundamentally different from the canvases decorated by von Guerard, Chevalier, and others, on the surrounding walls. Surely it would be difficult to find human products more categorically different than these fighting shields and baskets from eastern Australia, and the antipodean expressions of the tradition of romantic landscape painting. Yet in another sense these works are close. We could even say that they are locked together, in a sense in which the Tiepolo and the west Papuan carving are not.

And this is because of a fact that most visitors to those Australian galleries will be conscious of. Von Guerard and others were documenting a process of colonization, and the fact that the accomplishments of pioneers were closely linked with the marginalization of Aboriginal people is sometimes made explicit in their works, that, in a general sense, image the same ground as the artifacts emerge from. Aboriginal and colonial-settler societies were certainly becoming entangled, but it would not be true to say that Europeans and Aborigines shared a history in any meaningful sense. I am not really concerned with the curators' intentions, but I take this exhibition not to fail, in 'highlighting Aboriginal creativity', but to succeed, in underlining an incommensurable difference between the aesthetic practices of colonizers and colonized, which marks wider differences between ways of life, relations to place, and perceptions of history in this period. One body of work depicts the land: the
other reflects subsistence practice intimately connected with country, and tribal conflict that may have been occasioned by dispute over it, or may have had quite different causes: how can we know? I am suggesting, then, certainly, that the juxtaposition of these pieces allows viewers to engage with the distinctive creativities of the various producers, but more immediately and powerfully compels them to reflect upon the paradox of their difference and their connection.

The implication surely goes beyond any notion that there might be 'two sides' to the story of the settlement of Australia—a narrative of resistance that would balance the narrative of accomplishment. The latter is charted out by the galleries' progression from Cook voyage artists through Glover and Duterrau through to the Heidelberg school and beyond, but there is no sense that Aboriginal experience either simply precedes, or parallels this, in some negative version of the pastoral myth. What we have, rather, are simply a number of implements. Several are intricately patterned, and one, one of the so-called fighting shields, bears a dynamic zigzag. Because of my interest in the optical vigour and complexity of many Pacific art forms, I am inclined to assume that this visual energy complemented, and was taken to exemplify, the energy of the bearer; the fighter's physical prowess, in other words, was augmented by aesthetic brilliance manifest in these kinds of artifacts, and surely in body paint. The fact that this must be speculation, and that the viewer does not know whether the geometric patterns are actually iconographic and meaningful as well as merely optically compelling, marks the decontextualization that McQueen referred to, yet I would see this abstraction from place and practice as being painfully evident (and in some sense unavoidable for all viewers, rather than apparent only to a sophisticated minority peculiarly mindful of the politics of curatorial presentation). It's worth stressing that this exhibition is one in which the choice of an art historian or even a cultural historian rather than simply a connoisseur is conspicuous: Duterrau's effort to image a grand reconciliation between the Tasmanian Aborigines and the colonial state in the person of George Augustus Robinson is nothing to write home about, as a painting, but is rightly included as an attempt to grapple with the issue of national narrative and indigenous presence that we all know is with us still (figure 5).

In this context, it is the very decontextualization of the so-called artifacts that speaks loudest.

The implication is not only that indigenous ways of life in southeastern Australia were radically disrupted. It is that no smooth assimilation of this history within national narrative is possible. We are left with a sense that there are other histories and other practices, perhaps in a condition of enduring estrangement, rather than on the point of some happy cultural
and political synthesis. In some larger sense, the gallery may aim to image such a synthesis, or at least may aspire to value white and indigenous Australian art equally, and present the stories of both. That is the sort of thing we expect such institutions to do; but in this case the array of content seems in the end to resist any unitary narrative, and if this is so, it is only true and appropriate to the disorderly and contradictory character of history and art history in a cross-cultural, settler-colonial situation.

Nicholas Thomas
Nicholas Thomas is Professor and Director of the Centre for Cross-cultural Research.

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MINORITY HISTORIES, SUBALTERN PASTS

'...perhaps Abraham simply didn’t do what the story says, perhaps in the context of his times what he did was something quite different. Then let’s forget him, for why bother remembering a past that cannot be made into a present?’ Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling (1843).

Recent debates on multiculturalism in the Western democracies have often fuelled discussions of minority histories. As the writing of history has increasingly become entangled with the so-called ‘politics and production of identity’ after the Second World War, the question has arisen in all democracies of including in the history of the nation the histories of groups previously left out from it. In the 1960s, this list usually contained names of subaltern social groups and classes—viz., former slaves, working-classes, convicts, women, etc. This came to be known in the seventies as ‘history from below.’ Under pressure from the debates on multiculturalism, this list was expanded in the seventies and eighties to include the so-called ethnic groups, the indigenous peoples, children, the old and gays and lesbians. The expression ‘minority histories’ would thus now refer to all those pasts on whose behalf democratically-minded historians have fought the exclusions and omissions of mainstream narratives of the nation. The last ten years, as a result, have seen the flourishing of almost a cult of pluralism in matters pertaining to history or memory. Official or officially-blessed accounts of the nation’s past have been challenged in many countries by the champions of minority-histories. Postmodern critiques of ‘grand narratives’ have been used as ammunition in the process to argue that the nation cannot have just one standardized narrative, that the nation is always a contingent result of many contesting narratives. Minority histories, one may say, express the struggle for inclusion and representation that are characteristic of liberal and representative democracies.

Conceived in this way, ‘minority histories’ are oppositional chiefly in the early part of their careers. They are oppositional in so far as they are excluded from mainstream historical narratives; as soon as they are ‘in’, the oppositional stance becomes redundant (or its continuation would be seen as a sign of ingratitude if not something in bad taste). Begun in an oppositional mode, ‘minority histories’ end up being additional instances of ‘good history.’ They expand our vista and make the subject-matter of history more representative of society as a whole. One
can ask legitimate Foucauldian questions about who has the authority to define what 'good' history is or what relationships between power and knowledge are invested in such definitions, but let us put them aside for the moment.

The transformation of oppositional, minority histories into 'good' histories illustrates how the mechanism of incorporation works in the discipline of history. History is a subject primarily concerned with the crafting of narratives. Any account of the past can be absorbed into, and thus made to enrich, the mainstream of historical discourse if two questions could be answered in the positive: Can the story be told/crafted? And does it allow for a rationally-defensible point of view or position from which to tell the story? The point about the authorial position being rationally defensible is important. It can be an ideology, a moral position, a political philosophy but, as we shall see, the choices here are not unlimited. A mad man's narrative is not history. Nor can a preference that is arbitrary or just personal—something based on taste, say—give us rationally-defensible principles for narration (at best it will count as fiction and not history). I will return to the issue of rationality. The other question of crafting, however, is what has enriched the discipline for a long time by challenging historians to be imaginative and creative both in their research and narrative strategies. How do you write the histories of suppressed groups? How do you construct a narrative of a group or class that has not left its own sources?

It is questions of this kind that often stimulate innovation in historians' practices, and these questions, taken together, constitute what I call 'the question of crafting.'

I give two instances to show, therefore, that so long as these two questions—can the story be told? And does it allow for a rationally-defensible position in public life from which to tell the story?—can be answered in the positive, the discipline has no serious problems incorporating into itself, or even making central to itself, what once occupied a marginal or minority position. 'Minority histories', as such, do not have to be subversive in the long run.

My first case is that of British social-democratic, history or so-called 'history from below.' Consider for a moment what the results have been of incorporating into the discourse of history the pasts of majority-minor groups such as the working classes and women. History has not been the same ever since a Thompson or a Hobsbawm took up his pen to make the working classes look like major actors in society, or since the time feminist historians made us realize the importance of gender-relations and of the contributions of women to critical social processes. So to the question as to whether or not such incorporation changes the nature of historical discourse itself, the answer is simple: of course, it does. But the answer to the
question. Did such incorporation call the
discipline into any kind of crisis? would
have to be, No. To be able to tell the story
of group hitherto overlooked, to be able
to master the problems of crafting such
narratives—particularly under circum-
stances where the usual archives do not
exist—is how the discipline of history
renews and maintains itself. For this
inclusion appeals to the sense of democ-

racy that impels the discipline ever
outward from its core. Both conditions of
history-writing were met in the tradition
of 'history from below': the stories could
be told provided one were creative and
enterprising in one's research, and they
could be told from a position (liberalism
or Marxism) rationally-defensible in
public life.

The point about historical narratives
requiring a certain minimum investment
in rationality has recently been made in
the discussion of postmodernism in the
book *Telling the Truth About History.*
The question of the relationship between
minority histories and post-war democ-
racies is at the heart of this book
authored jointly by three leading femi-
nist historians of the U.S. To the extent
that the authors read postmodernism as
allowing for multiple narratives—the
possibility of many narratives and multi-
ple ways of crafting these
narratives—they welcome the influence
of postmodernism and thus align them-
selves with the democratic cause of
minority histories. The idea of multiple
narratives challenging any one dominant
meta-narrative of the nation is easily
accepted in the book which promotes the
message popular now with most histori-
ans with a liberal conscience: Let us have
many narratives and hear groups whose
histories have not been previously heard,
let there not be only the story of Euro-
centric America as the grand narrative of
the nation. Where the book registers a
much stronger degree of discomfiture,
however, is where it encounters argu-
ments that in effect use the idea of
multiplicity of narratives to question any
idea of truth or facts. For here the idea of
a rationally-defensible position in public
life from which to craft even a multi-
vocal narrative, is brought into question.
If 'minority histories' go to the extent of
questioning the very idea of fact or
evience, then, the authors ask, how
would you find ways of adjudicating
between competing claims in public life?
Would not the absence of a certain mini-

mum agreement about what constitutes
fact and evidence seriously fragment the
body politic in the United States of
America and would not that seriously
impair the capacity of the nation to func-
tion as a whole? Hence the authors
recommend that a pragmatic idea of
'workable truths'—based on a shared,
rational understanding of historical facts
and evidence—must be maintained in
order for institutions and groups to be
able to adjudicate between conflicting
stories/interpretations and for the nation
to function effectively even while
eschewing any claims to a superior, over-
arching grand narrative.\textsuperscript{2} What Appleby and her colleagues see as postmodern resistance to the idea of facticity does not thus meet the second condition for incorporation into the discipline of history of other narratives about the past: Can the story be told on the basis of a rationally-defensible principle in public life? The book makes clear that citizenly practices require a certain minimum agreement on such principles as otherwise the clamour of contesting narrative—based on completely arbitrary ideas of historical evidence—would reduce public life in American democracy to a chaos.

I am not criticizing \textit{Telling the Truth About History} nor is it my purpose to defend what the book identifies as postmodern positions. The book is important in that it shows the continuing relevance of the two questions about crafting and connections to public life in any situation where the discipline of history hears calls to renew itself. I am simply saying that so long as the two conditions can be met 'minority histories' can change the discourse of the discipline without having to practice any principle of permanent revolution. Successful instances of 'minority histories' are like yesterday’s revolutionaries become today’s gentlemen. Their success helps routinize innovation.

The debate about minority histories, however, allows for another understanding of the expression 'minority', one that produces a more enduring sense of discomfort among many professional historians. Minority and majority are, after all, no natural entities; they are constructions, as I said at the outset, of identities made in very particular historical conditions and circumstances. The popular meaning of the words 'majority' and 'minority' are statistical. But the semantic fields of the words contain another idea: of being a 'minor' or a 'major' figure in a given context. For example, the Europeans, numerically speaking, are a minority in the total pool of humanity today and have been so for a while, yet their colonialism in the nineteenth century was based on certain ideas about being 'major' and 'minor': the idea, for example, that it was their histories which contained the majority instances of norms that every other human society should aspire to, or that compared to them others were the still the 'minors' for whom they, the 'adults' of the world, had to take charge. So numerical advantage by itself is no guarantor of a major/majority status. Sometimes, you can be a larger group than the dominant one, but your history could still qualify as 'minor/majority history.' The problem of 'minority histories' thus leads us, one could say, to the question of what may be called the 'minority' of some particular pasts, i.e. constructions and experiences of the past that stay 'minor' in the sense that their very incorporation into historical narratives converts them into pasts 'of lesser importance' vis-a-vis dominant understandings of what constitutes fact
and evidence (and hence the underlying principle of rationality itself) in the practices of professional history. Such 'minor' pasts, one might say, are those experiences of the past which have to be always made inferior as they are translated back into the historian's language, that is to say, as they are translated back into the phenomenal world the historian—as a historian, that is, in his or her professional capacity—inhabits. These are pasts that, to use Kant's expression from his essay 'What is Enlightenment?,' are treated as instances of 'immaturity' on the part of the historical agent, pasts which do not prepare us for either democracy or citizenly practices because they are not based on the deployment of reason in public life.3

Let me call these histories subordinated or 'subaltern' pasts. They are not marginalized because anyone consciously intends to marginalise them but because they represent moments or points at which the very archive that the historian of a (marginalized) group mines in order to bring the history of that group into a relationship with a larger narrative (of class, of the nation, etc.), develops a degree of intractability with respect to the historian's project. In other words, these are pasts that resist historicization just as there may be moments in ethnographic research that resist the doing of ethnography.

'Subaltern pasts,' in my sense of the term, do not belong exclusively to socially-subordinate or subaltern groups, nor to 'minority' identities alone. Elite and dominant groups can also have subaltern pasts. Being a historian, however, I argue from a particular instance of it. My example comes from Subaltern Studies, the group with which I am associated, and from an essay by the founder of the group, Ranajit Guha. Since Guha and the group have been my teachers in many ways, I offer my remarks not in a hostile spirit of criticism but in a spirit of self-understanding, for my aim is to understand what 'historicizing' the past does and does not do. With that caveat, let me proceed to the instance.

Subaltern Studies is a series of publications in Indian history that was begun under the general editorship of Ranajit Guha in the early 1980s. Its explicit aim was to write the subaltern classes into the history of nationalism and the nation and to combat all elitist biases in the writing of history. To make the subaltern the sovereign subject of history, to stage them as the agents in the process of history, to listen to their voices, to take their experiences and thought (and not just their material circumstances) seriously—these were goals we had deliberately and publicly set ourselves. These ambitions and the desire to enact them are political, they are connected to modern understandings of democratic public life; they do not necessarily come from the lives of the subaltern classes themselves. That is why the early intellectual moves made in Subaltern Studies had much in common with the British social-
democratic tradition of writing 'history from below.' Looking back, however, I see the problem of 'subaltern pasts' dogging the enterprise of Subaltern Studies from the very outset and, indeed it is arguable that what differentiates the Subaltern Studies project from the older tradition of 'history from below' is the self-critical awareness of this problem in the writings of the historians associated with this group.

Let me explain this with the help of Ranajit Guha's justly celebrated and brilliant essay, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,' published in an early volume of Subaltern Studies and now considered a classic of the genre. A certain paradox that results precisely from the historian's attempt to bring the histories of the subaltern classes into the mainstream of the discourse of history in India, it seems to me, haunts the very exercise Guha undertakes in this essay. The paradox consists in this. A principal aim of Guha's essay is to use the Santal rebellion of 1855 in order to make the insurgent peasant's consciousness the mainstay of a narrative about rebellion. As Guha put it in words that capture the spirit of Subaltern Studies:

Yet this consciousness [the consciousness of the rebellious peasant] seems to have received little notice in the literature on the subject. Historiography has been content to deal with the peasant rebel merely as an empirical person or a member of a class, but not as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion. ... insurgency is regarded as external to the peasant's consciousness and Cause is made to stand in as a phantom surrogate for Reason, the logic of that consciousness.4

The critical phrase is the 'logic of that consciousness' which marks the distance Guha has to take as a historian from the object of his research which is this consciousness itself. For in pursuing the history of the Santal rebellion of 1855—the Santals are a 'tribal' group inhabiting large areas of what is today Bengal and Bihar—Guha, unsurprisingly, comes across statements by peasant-leaders which explain the rebellion in 'supernatural' terms, as an act carried out at the behest of the Santal god 'Thakur.' Guha himself draws our attention to the evidence and underscores how important this understanding was to the rebels themselves. Quoting statements made by the leaders of the rebellion, Sidhu and Kanu, to military interrogators wherein they explained their own actions as flowing from instructions they had received from their god (Thakur) who had also assured them that British bullets would not harm the devotee-rebels, Guha takes care to avoid any instrumental or elitist reading of these statements. He writes:

These were not public pronouncements meant to impress their followers... these were words of captives facing execution. Addressed to hostile interrogators in military encampments they could have little use as propaganda. Uttered by men of a tribe which, according to all accounts had not yet learnt to lie, these represented the truth and nothing but the truth for their speakers.5
A tension inherent in the project of Subaltern Studies becomes palpable here in Guha's analysis. His phrase 'logic of consciousness' or his idea of a truth which is only 'truth for their speakers' are all acts of taking critical distance from that which he is trying to understand. Taken literally, the rebel peasants' statement show the subaltern himself as declining agency or subjecthood in action. 'I rebelled', he says, 'because Thakur made an appearance and told me to rebel.' In their own words, as reported by the colonial scribe: 'Kanoo and Sedoo Manjee are not fighting. The Thacoor himself will fight.' In his own telling, then, the subaltern is not necessarily the subject of his history but in the history of Subaltern Studies or in any democratically-minded history, s/he is. What does it then mean when we both take the subaltern's views seriously—the subaltern ascribes the agency for their rebellion to some god—and want to confer on the subaltern agency or subjecthood in their own history, a status the subaltern's statement denies?

Guha's strategy for negotiating this dilemma unfolds in the following manner. His first move, against liberal or standard Marxist historiography, is to resist analyses that see religion simply as the non-rational expression of a secular-rational non-religious entity, relationship (class, power, economy, etc.) or consciousness:

Religiosity was, by all accounts, central to the hool (rebellion). The notion of power which inspired it ...[was] explicitly religious in character. It was not that power was a content wrapped up in a form external to it called religion...Hence the attribution of the rising to a divine command rather than to any particular grievance; the enactment of rituals both before (eg. propitiatory ceremonies to ward off the apocalypse of the Primeval Serpents...) and during the uprising (worshipping the goddess Durga, bathing in the Ganges, etc.); the generation and circulation of myth is its characteristic vehicle—rumour.

But in spite of his desire to listen to the rebel voice seriously, Guha cannot take it seriously enough, for there is no principle in an 'event' involving the divine or the supernatural that can give us a narrative-strategy that is rationally-defensible in the modern understanding of what constitutes public life. The Santal's own understanding does not directly serve the cause of democracy or citizenship or socialism. It needs to be reinterpreted. Clearly, in the narrative of the rebels, the Event (the rebellion) was not secular; in our language, it included the supernatural. The supernatural was part of what constituted public life for the non-modern Santals of the nineteenth century. This, however, simply cannot be the past in the language of professional history in which the idea of historical evidence, like evidence allowed in the court of law, cannot admit of the supernatural except as part of the non-rational (i.e. somebody's belief-system).

Fundamentally, the Santal's statement that God was the main instigator of the
rebellion has to be anthropologized (i.e. converted into somebody's belief) before it finds a place in the historian's narrative. Guha's position with respect to the Santal's own understanding of the event becomes a combination of the anthropologist's politeness—'I respect your beliefs but they are not mine'—and a Marxist (or modern) sense of frustration with the intrusion of the supernatural into public life. [I]n sum', he writes, 'it is not possible to speak of insurgency in this case except as a religious consciousness', and yet hastens to add:

-except that is, as a massive demonstration of self-estrangement (to borrow Marx's term for the very essence of religiosity) which made the rebel look upon their project as predicated on a will other than their own. 7

Here is a case of what I have called 'subaltern pasts', pasts that cannot enter history ever as belonging to the historian's own position. One can these days devise strategies of multivocal histories in which we hear Sidhu and Kanu more clearly than we or Guha did in the early phase of Subaltern Studies. One may even refrain from assimilating these different voices to any one voice and deliberately leave loose ends in one's narrative (as does Shahid Amin in his Events, Memory, Metaphor). But the point is the historian, as historian, and unlike the Santal, cannot invoke the supernatural in explaining/describing an event.

In other words, the act of championing 'minority histories' has resulted in many cases in discoveries of subaltern pasts, constructions of historicity that help us see the limits to the mode of viewing embodied in the practices of the discipline of history. Why? Because, it has been argued by many (from Greg Dening to David Cohen in recent times), that the discipline of history is only one particular way of remembering the past. It is one amongst many. The resistance that the 'historical evidence' offers in Guha's essay to the historian's reading of the past—a Santal god, Thakur, stands between the democratic-Marxist historian and the Santals in the matter of deciding who is the subject of history—is what produces 'minor' or 'subaltern' pasts in the very process of the weaving of modern historical narratives. Subaltern pasts are like stubborn knots that break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric. Between the insistence of the Subaltern Studies historian that the Santal is the agent or the subject of his own action and the Santals' insistence that it was to their god Thakur that such sovereignty belonged, remains a hiatus separating two radically different experiences of historicity, a hiatus that cannot be bridged by an exercise that simply studies the Santal's statement as evidence for anthropology. When we do 'minority histories' within the democratic project of including all groups and peoples within mainstream history, we both hear and then anthropologize the Santal. We treat their beliefs as just that, 'their beliefs.' We cannot write history from
within those beliefs. We thus produce 'good', not subversive, histories. However, historians of Pacific islands, of African peoples, of indigenous peoples throughout the world have reminded us that the so-called societies 'without histories' — the object of contempt for European philosophers of history in the nineteenth century — cannot be thought of as societies without memories. They remember their pasts differently, differently, that is, to the way we recall the past in the history departments. Why must one privilege the ways in which the discipline of history authorizes its knowledge? This is not a rhetorical question. It is a question being asked seriously by many historians today.10

This fact has an important implication: it suggests that the kind of disciplinary consensus around the historian's methods that was once — say, in the sixties — represented (in Anglo-American universities at least) by 'theory' or 'methods' courses which dished out Collingwood or Carr or Bloch as staple for historians working on any area of the world, has now broken down. This does not necessarily mean methodological anarchy (though some feel insecure enough to fear this) or that Collingwood et al. have become irrelevant but it does mean that E H Carr's question 'What is History?' needs to be asked again for our own times. The pressure of plurality inherent in the languages and moves of minority histories — which, as I have argued, is really the pressure that debates about multi-culturalism puts on official or nationalist histories in the Western democracies — has resulted in methodological and epistemological questioning of what the very business of writing history is all about. Only the future will tell how these questions will resolve themselves but one thing is clear: that the question of including 'minorities' in the history of the nation has turned out to be a much more complex problem than a simple operation of applying some already-settled methods to a new set of archives and adding the results to the existing collective wisdom of historiography. The additive, 'building-block' view of knowledge has broken down. What has become an open question is: Can the discipline of history speak for any kind of experience of the past? Are there experiences of the pasts that cannot be captured by the methods of the discipline or which at least show the limits of discipline?

Fears that such questioning will lead to a breakout of irrationalism, that some kind of postmodern madness will spread like a dark death-inducing disease through Historyland, seem extreme, for the discipline is still securely tied to the positivist impulses of modern bureaucracies, judiciary and to the instruments of governmentality. Minority histories, if they are going to be about inserting hitherto neglected identities into the game of social justice, must also be good, and not subversive, histories, for history here speaks to forms of representative democracy.
and social justice that liberalism or Marxism have already made familiar.

Attending to the limits of history is about another realization: that the task of producing 'minority' histories has, under the pressure precisely of a deepening demand for democracy, become a double task. I may put it thus: 'good' minority history is about expanding the scope of social justice and representative democracy, but the talk about the 'limits of history', on the other hand, is about fighting for forms of democracy that we cannot not yet either completely understand or envisage. This is so because in the mode of being attentive to the 'minor-ity' of subaltern pasts, we stay with heterogeneity without seeking to reduce it to any overarching principle that speaks for an already-given whole. There is no third voice which can assimilate into itself the two different voices of Guha and the Santal leader, we have to stay with both, with the gap between them that signals an irreducible plurality in our own experiences of historicity.

This is the way I understand the question of heterogeneity here. We can—and we do usually in writing history—treat the Santal of the nineteenth century to doses of historicism and anthropology. We can, in other words, treat him as a signifier of other times and societies. This gesture maintains a subject-object relationship between the historian and his evidence. In this gesture, the past remains genuinely dead; the historian brings it 'alive' by his or her telling of the story.

But the Santal with his statement 'I did as my god told me to do' also faces us a way of being in this world, and we could ask ourselves: Is that way of being a possibility for our lives and for what we define our present? Does the Santal help us to understand a principle by which we also live in certain instances? This question does not historicize or anthropologize the Santal, for the illustrative power of the Santal as an example of a present possibility does not depend on the particular period or society from which the example is drawn. In this mode of understanding the Santal stands as our contemporary and the subject-object relationship that normally defines the historian's relationship to his/her archives is dissolved in this gesture. This gesture is akin to the one Kierkegaard developed in critiquing explanations that looked on the Biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac either through psychology or as a metaphor or allegory but never as a possibility for action open to him/her who had faith. 'Why bother to remember a past,' asked Kierkegaard, 'that cannot be made into a present?'

To stay with the heterogeneity of the moment when Guha the historian meets with the Santal, the peasant, is then to stay with the difference between these two gestures: that of historicizing the Santal in the interest of a history of social justice and democracy, the other of refusing to historicize and of seeing the Santal instead as throwing light on a possibility for the present. When seen as the latter,
the Santal puts us in touch with the heterogeneities, the plural ways of being, that make up our own present. The archives thus help bring to view the disjointed nature of our own times. That is the function of subaltern pasts: a necessary penumbra of shadow to the area of the past that the method of history successfully illuminates, they make visible what historicizing does and what it cannot do.

Attending to this heterogeneity could take many different forms. Some scholars now perform the limits of history by fictionalizing the past, by experimenting to see how films and history might intersect in the new discipline of cultural studies, by studying memory rather than just history, by playing around with forms of writing, and by similar other means. While such experiments are welcome, let me conclude with a point about how the fact that there are subaltern pasts, unassimilable to the secular narratives of the historian, allows us to see the complex understanding of time—treated as invisible in most historian’s writing—that must underlie and indeed make possible the secular chronology of historical narratives, the construction of before-after relationships without which there cannot be any historical explanation. Let me elucidate.

The broad statement that the Santal had a past in which events could belong to the order of the supernatural does not appear as something completely beyond our own experience—it is not something like a possible statement from a Martian. Why? Because the principle is not completely strange to us. We have a pre-theoretical, everyday understanding of it precisely because the supernatural or the divine, as principles, have not disappeared from the life of the modern. We are not the same as the nineteenth-century Santal. One could even easily assume that the Santal today would be very different from what they were in the nineteenth century, that they would inhabit a very different set of social circumstances. The modern Santal would have the benefit of secular education and may even produce their own professional historians. No one would deny these historical changes. But the astrological columns in the newspapers (in spite of Adorno’s frustrations with them), the practices of ‘superstition’ that surround the lives and activities of sportsfans, for example, practices we are too embarrassed to admit in public—not to speak of all the deliberately ‘cultic’ expressions of religiosity that have never gone away—go to show that we are all, in principle, capable of participating in supernatural events and the sense of the past they help create. The nineteenth-century Santal—and indeed, if my argument is right, humans from any other period and regions—are thus in a peculiar way our contemporaries: that, I would argue, would have to be the condition under which they become intelligible to us. Thus the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a
discontinuity of the present with itself. Making visible this discontinuity is what 'subaltern pasts' allow us to do.

An argument such as this is actually at the heart of modern historiography itself. One could argue, for instance, that the writing of 'medieval history' for Europe depends on this assumed contemporaneity of the medieval, or what is the same thing, the non-contemporaneity of the present with itself. The medieval in Europe is often strongly associated with the supernatural and the magical. But what makes the historicizing of it at all possible is the fact that its basic characteristics are not completely foreign to us as moderns (which is not to deny the historical changes that separate the two). Historians of medieval Europe do not always consciously or explicitly make this point but it is not difficult to see this operating as an assumption in their method (in the same way as anthropologists may refer to examples more familiar to their readers in order to explain that which seems strange at first).

In the writings of Aron Gurevich, for example, the modern makes its pact with the medieval through the use of anthropology—that is, in the use of contemporary anthropological evidence from outside of Europe to make sense of the past of Europe. The strict separation of the medieval from the modern is here belied by their contemporaneity suggested by anthropology. Peter Burke comments on this intellectual traffic between medieval Europe and contemporary anthropological evidence in introducing Gurevich's work. Gurevich, writes Burke, 'could already have been described in the 1960s as a historical anthropologist, and he did indeed draw inspiration from anthropology, most obviously from the economic anthropology of Bronislaw Malinowski and Marcel Mauss, who had begun his famous essay on the gift with a quotation from a medieval Scandinavian poem, the *Edda*.'

Similar double moves—both of historicizing the medieval and of seeing it at the same time as contemporary with the present—can be seen at work in the following lines from Jacques Le Goff. Le Goff is seeking to explain here an aspect of the European-medieval:

> People today, even those who consult seers and fortune-tellers, call spirits to floating tables, or participate in black masses, recognize a frontier between the visible and the invisible, the natural and the supernatural. This was not true of medieval man. Not only was the visible for him merely the trace of the invisible; the supernatural overflowed into daily life at every turn.

This is a complex passage. On the surface of it, it is about what is separates the medieval from the modern. Yet the difference is what makes the medieval an ever-present possibility that haunts the practices of the modern—if only we, the moderns, could forget the 'frontier' between the visible and the invisible in Le Goff's description, we would be on the other side of that frontier. The people
who consult seers today are modern in spite of themselves, for they engage in ‘medieval’ practices but are not able to overcome the habits of the modern. Yet the opening expression ‘even today’ contains a reference to the sense of surprise one feels at their anachronism, as if we did not expect to find such practices today, as if the very existence of these practices today opens up a hiatus in the continuity of that present by inserting into it something that is medieval-like and yet not quite so. It makes the present look like as though it were non-contemporaneous with itself. Le Goff rescues the present by saying that even in the practice of these people, something irreducibly modern lingers—their distinction between the visible and the invisible. But it lingers only as a border, as something that defines the difference between the medieval and the modern. And since difference is always the name of a relationship, for it separates just as much as it connects as indeed does a border, one could argue that alongside the present or the modern the medieval must linger as well if only as that which exists as the limit or the border to activities that define the modern.

Subaltern pasts are signposts of this border. With them we reach the limits of the discourse of history. The reason for this, as I have said, is that subaltern pasts do not give the historian any principle of narration that can be rationally-defended in modern public life. Going a step further, one can see that this requirement for a rational principle, in turn, marks the deep connections that exist between modern constructions of public life and projects of social justice. That is why a Marxist scholar like Fredric Jameson begins his book The Political Unconscious with the injunction: ‘Always historicize!’ This slogan, writes Jameson, ‘the one absolute and we may even say “transhistorical” imperative of all dialectical thought—will unsurprisingly turn out to be the moral of The Political Unconscious as well.’ If my point is right, then historicizing is not the problematic part of the injunction, the troubling term is ‘always’. For the assumption of a continuous, homogeneous, infinitely-stretched out time which makes possible the imagination of an ‘always’, is put to question by subaltern pasts that makes the present, as Derrida says, ‘out of joint’, non-continuous with itself. One historicizes only in so far as one belongs to a mode of being in the world which is aligned with the principle of ‘disenchantment of the universe’ that underlies knowledge in the social sciences (and I distinguish knowledge from practices). It is not accidental that a Marxist would exhort us to ‘always historicize’, for historicizing is tied to the search for justice in public life. This is why one welcomes ‘minority histories’, be they of ethnic groups, gay-rights activists, or of subaltern social classes. Here the historical discipline enriches itself by incorporating these histories but
its very methodological dominations create what I have called subaltern pasts.

For the 'disenchantment of the world' is not the only principle by which we world the earth. There are other modes of being in the world—and they are not necessarily private, the superstitious acts of sportsfans, for example, being often public. The supernatural can inhabit the world in these other modes and not always as a problem or result of belief; the supernatural or the divine can be brought into presence by our practices. Here I am reminded of the story of the old Irish woman who allegedly, once while asked by Yeats whether or not she believed in fairies, insisted that while she did not believe in them, her disbelief did not stop them from existing—"They are there Mr Yeats, they are there." These other worlds are not without questions of power or justice but these questions are raised—to the extent modern public institutions allow them—on terms other than those of the political-modern.

However,—and I want to conclude by pointing this out—the relation between what I have called 'subaltern pasts' and the practice of historicizing (that the Marxist in us recommends) is not one of mutual exclusion. It is because we always already have experience of that which makes the present non-contemporaneous with itself that we can actually historicize. Thus what allows medievalist historians to historicize the medieval or the ancient is the very fact these worlds are never completely lost. It is because we live in time-knots that we can undertake the exercise of straightening out some part of the knot (which is what a chronology is). Subaltern pasts—aspects of these time-knots—thus act as a supplement to the historian's pasts and in fact aid our capacity to historicize. They are supplementary in a Derridean sense—they enable history, the discipline, to be what it is and at the same time help to show forth what its limits are. But in calling attention to the limits of historicizing, they help us distance ourselves from the imperious instincts of the discipline—the idea (of Haldane's for example) that everything can be historicized or that one should always historicize—and returns us to a sense of the limited good that the modern historical consciousness is. Gadamar once put the point well in the course of discussing Heidegger's philosophy. Let me give him the last word: 'The experience of history, which we ourselves have, is ... covered only to a small degree by that which we would name historical consciousness.' Subaltern pasts persistently remind us of the truth of this statement.

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the annual conference of the American Historical Association in January 1997. I acknowledge with gratitude the criticisms and comments I received there. A subsequent presentation at the University of Colorado at Boulder at the invitation of my co-panelist Patricia Limerick also benefited
from the criticisms of those present. I thank Sandria Freitag for her original invitation prodding me to think this topic and Anne Hardgrove and Uday Mehta for more recent conversations on the subject. All errors remain mine.

REFERENCES

1 Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, Telling the Truth About History (New York, 1994).

2 Cf. Georg G. Iggers, Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge, (Hanover and London, 1997), p.145: 'Peter Novick has in my opinion rightly maintained that objectivity is unattainable in history; the historian can hope for nothing more than plausibility. But plausibility obviously rests not on the arbitrary invention of an historical account but involved rational strategies of determining what in fact is plausible.' Emphasis added.


5 Ibid., p.80.

6 Ibid., p.78.

7 Ibid., p.78.

8 Shahid Amin's book Events, Memory, Metaphor (Berkeley, 1995) is an excellent illustration of the points being made in this essay and shows a self-conscious appreciation of the problems of translating the subaltern's voice into a modern political project (without giving up the socially-necessary attempt to translate).


10 A sensitivity to the question of alternative pasts is increasingly becoming visible in the work of many historians: my very personal and random list of such scholars would include Klaus Neumann, Stephen Muecke, Christopher Healy, Patricia Limerick, Ajay Skaria, Saurabh Dube, Sumathi Ramaswamy, Iain McCalman and others.


16 I owe this story to David Lloyd.

17 I owe the conception of time-knots to Ranajit Guha.

It is my honour and my privilege to have been invited by this University to be Adjunct Professor in the Centre of Cross-cultural Research. I am most appreciative of the warm welcome and care for our needs by the administrative staff of the centre: Julie Gorrell, Anne-Maree O'Brien and Jenny Newell. My first association with the ANU was in 1964 when Jim Davidson and Harry Maude offered me a position as research fellow in Pacific history. But it was forty years ago almost to the day that I began my work in cross-cultural history under the tutelage of John Mulvaney at the University of Melbourne. Since that day the concerns of cross-cultural studies have been my life.

I have a reflection this evening on two icons of cross-cultural research: the Endeavour replica, here in a place the original Endeavour had never been, Port Phillip Bay, Victoria. And Hokule'a, the replica of an Hawaiian voyaging canoe, here undergoing sea-trials in 1975 off the north shore of Oahu in the Hawaiian islands.

My reflection is about re-enactment histories, the sort of social memory
evoked by these replicas. I won't be focusing so much on their history, the accuracy or otherwise of their replication, so much as their theatre. Social memory, I will be wanting to say is as much about the present as the past. Social memory enlarges the continuities between past and present. Social memory is, in that word of Aristotle of the theatre, catharsis, getting the plot, seeing the meaning of things.

Let me say first that I am not much for re-enactments. I remember when my prejudices about re-enactments were born. It was at a meeting of the American Historical Association in New York in the 1960s. I attended a session on 'New Historical Methods' with high expectations only to discover that it was about the advantages for historical realism in wearing Napoleon's hat while taking hallucinegetic drugs at the same time.

That's what I tend to think. The danger in re-enactments is that they tend to hallucinate us into seeing the past as us in funny clothes. But the past is its totality—its postures, its smells and dirt, its tones and accents. The past in its totality is different, as different if you like, as another culture, another country as David Lowenthal has said. All history in that sense is cross-cultural. But difference is the hardest thing to see. Difference is the hardest thing to accept. To see difference we have to give a little of ourselves: old to young, young to old, male to female, female to male, black to white, white to black. That is the first thing to be said about cross-cultural research, I think. It always begins with a little giving, whatever way one crosses. 

*Endeavour* and *Hokule'a*. Where's the giving in that? That is what I wanted to lecture about.

The *Endeavour* replica. Perhaps you have seen her. I confess I had a lump in my throat when I first saw her. Much of my work has been concerned with the poetics of space on an eighteenth century naval vessel: the rituals of the quarter-deck that were the theatre of Bligh's command; how important were the divisions between private and public space and how dangerous it was to blur their boundary; how the proper order of that space was turned upside down in the reverse world of skylarking and sailors' baptism rituals; how a ship was energized by the tempo and rhythm of sailors' bodies. It was not by chance that the ship's most skilled seamen were also the ship's best dancers. There was much choreography in a sailing ship.

That space had a language, too, to describe it, as precise and inventive as any science. Sailors' lives depended on the speed with which they could comprehend an order. Precision, economy and distinctiveness were the marks of sailors' language. For any landsman pressed into His Majesty's service, his first months were a language school. Joseph Conrad called that language 'a flawless thing for its purpose'. On the *Endeavour* replica, this language world was materialized for
me: sheets, bowlines, chewlines, buntlines, reeflines, brails, gaskets, halliards, staysails, shrouds. I discovered when I saw her first what was a mainmast heart and why it was seized around the bowsprit. I won’t fool you I know. I’ve done all my sailing in the library. I do all my reading in ships logs with a plan of ships rigging beside me. When Cook or Bligh write in their logs that a ‘severe gale’ abated into a ‘mere storm’, I reach anachronistically for my Beaufort Wind Scales to understand what it might mean and what are the signs in the sea to determine it.

It is in the props of re-enactment that the realism of its theatre is created. Of course there are many compromises. There are engines now on the Endeavour and a propellor. Desalinization plants, and toilets (Cook once flogged a drunken marine down in the Arctic Circle because he pissed on the sails in their locker rather than from the heads out amid the ice and snow. The marine, presumably drunk again, was lost overboard later doing it from the heads). There are metal fittings now, and artificial materials in the sails. Instead of oak, elm and spruce, there are WA jarrah and other Australian hardwoods. And much hidden symbolism. The tallow wood hanging tree supporting the weather beams came from trees near Port Macquarie, old enough for Cook to have seen, but logged because of the widening of the Pacific Highway.

I suppose the most magical moment of all for me on the Endeavour replica was when I first saw the Great Cabin. I haven’t got a slide of it. This will have to do. It did not seem possible that so much could come out of such a cramped space. Where could Joseph Banks, let alone his dogs, spread himself out, Sydney Parkinson paint, Daniel Solander catalogue. And Cook! Where did he find room in his tiny quarters on the side of the Great Cabin or on that elaborate fold-away table, to make his maps, to write his log.

Now that I have these spaces re-shaped in my mind, why don’t I try a little re-enactment of my own. Let me take you to a part of the Endeavour’s voyage that gets perhaps only a line in most histories. It’s the passage from New Zealand and the sighting of the East Coast of Australia at Point Hicks. This passage took place in the first nineteen days of April, 1770. You’ll be able to re-enact the weather for yourselves.

There was a warm and expansive feeling among Cook and his companions in the Great Cabin as they left Cape Farewell. They felt that they had done well circumnavigating the two islands of New Zealand, proving it to be no part of a Southern Continent. They collected to decide what they would do now. They had three options. One, to run to the east and Cape Horn below latitude 40 degrees. That would determine finally whether there was a Southern Continent. Already they had narrowed the possibility of a Southern Continent to a small part of the Pacific deep to the south of Tahiti. But
their rigging and their sails were already in such poor shape that they doubted whether they could complete a voyage in these high latitudes.

The second option was to sail westward, south of Van Diemen’s Land to the Cape of Good Hope. There was no discoverer’s joy in that, nothing new to be seen. What’s more they were too well supplied. They had six months supplies left. The thought of having to throw out or give back what had been so hardly earned galled them too much for that.

They voted unanimously therefore for the third option which was to sail westward slightly north of 38 degrees latitude so that they would come upon the northern extension of Van Diemen’s Land, follow the coast northward or wherever it took them, and come across, if they were there, de Quiros’s Solomon Islands.

It was a reasonably easy run, although that old cat-built collier griped into the breeze all the way and drove herself uncomfortably upwind. *Endeavour* was near perfect for her discovery tasks, but a little unforgiving in hard weather. Cook used to say her best sailing was with square sails set, a fore topmast staysail and a breeze on her port quarter. The night watches, without Cook looking over their shoulders in these safer waters, would let the *Endeavour* edge more northerly and say it was the current that did it. They hankered for warmer climates.

Cook drove a hard ship. Halfway between Cape Farewell and Point Hicks, he gave Jonathan Bowles, marine, twelve lashes for refusing to do his duty. The marines were the men most frequently flogged by Cook and every other voyaging captain. Marines had too little to do. If they happened to be Irish and younger than 25 years, God help them.

Cook grew in status every day of this first voyage. But he was peeking over the shoulders of the ‘experimental gentlemen’ in the Great Cabin as well as his helmsman. He was an auto-didact and he learned from them what it was to be a discoverer. He searched their books. He began to form large thoughts. For most of the voyage he had felt that his best discoveries were his knowing where he was at every minute. Accurate navigation was his obsession.

But now he was beginning to reflect on what the place the things he was doing...
would have in a larger scheme of things. He was scornful of discoverers who thought that they saw signs of new lands but would not follow their clues. But he knew what people would say if prudence dictated to him that he had gone far enough, and there was still places to discover. While Joseph Banks still favoured—rather guiltily—the idea of a Great Southern Continent, Cook was sure that there was none. And while he was not prepared to say there was none until he had seen for himself, he is nonetheless sure. In any case, he was already planning the second voyage.

He had on board a Tahitian priest, Tupaia. He was taking Tupaia back to England with him to meet King George. Joseph Banks had said in Tahiti that other men doing their Grand Tours brought back tigers and the like. Why couldn't he bring back a noble savage at less expense? As it happened, Tupaia would not survive the fevers of Batavia, but he helped Cook wonderfully in his navigation and his encounters with native peoples. Tupaia, the priest, was also the holder of Tahitian navigation lore. Tupaia knew of all the islands the Tahitians knew of. Tupaia the navigator drew Cook a map of the Central Pacific. There were 140 islands on that map. Cook knew that these island names made a great circle some 6000 km in diameter. Tupaia was with them now pointing out all the signs of land to the east, that they did not see until he pointed them out. Tupaia taught Cook how he might be a discoverer in the Pacific—by asking islanders where to go. Cook was finding in this part of his voyaging that in cross-cultural matters he had to give a little in respect to the navigating abilities of islanders who had preceded him everywhere he was to go in the Pacific. Respect too in a little while for Australian aborigines who didn't seem to need his civilizing influences. He would muse in his journal about his doubts at how they would benefit by it.

The nineteen April days of this leg were easy sailing, but rather slow. They were forever cannibalizing old sails for patches in less ragged ones, leaving their better sails for when they might need them most. They were a little bewildered at sudden changes of temperatures—warm one minute, cool the next. Banks slowed them down, insisting on taking out the small boat to collect birds and fish and whatever there was to be seen in the sea. He shot Wandering Albatross, Black Browed Albatross, Grey Headed Albatross and petrels in even greater variety. He fished sea anemone and Portuguese men-o'-war and took them back to the Great Cabin where Solander described them and Sydney Parkinson painted them.

Out on the water there was great and innocent scientific excitement. It lived in their minds their whole lives long.
Dolphins were around them all the time, leaping out of the water like salmon. They even thought they saw a butterfly.

Then at first daylight on the 19th, Zachary Hicks made his name. He saw land—sloping hills covered with trees and bushes, interspersed with large tracts of sand. The land they saw ran away to the southwest and to the northeast. They came pretty much to Point Hicks on a north south line.

By noon they had passed the point and had gone on to a remarkable point of land which Cook named Ramshead after the point in Plymouth Sound. Between 1.00 and 3.00pm they saw three or four water spouts—columns of water rising to a cloud, transparent like a tube of glass, Banks said, contracting and dilating, curving with the wind. Two of the spouts joined and gradually contracted up into a cloud. By evening they were off Cape Howe and its island we call Gabo—some say from the aboriginal pronunciation of Cape Howe.

It was not until the next day that they saw signs of inhabitants, or at least smoke in the day and fires at night. North of Bateman’s Bay through their spy glasses they saw their first aborigines. Banks says he saw five of them ‘enormously black’.

But to do him justice for his sense of the ways in which others shaped his images, he added: ‘so far did the prejudices we had built on Dampier’s account influence us that we could see the colours when we could scarce distinguish whether or not they were men’.

They had, of course, the whole of the east coast of Australia to go. All the time, Cook would be at his brilliant best, mapping, surveying, commanding, keeping the expedition safe.

There’s my re-enactment. There is theatre in it of course. I the story-teller want you to have what Aristotle said was necessary in good theatre. I want you to get the plot, experience catharsis. I want you to leave my theatre saying what the story meant. I am hoping that you will say that I told a story about Cook’s personal discovery of what it meant to be a discoverer. How he was beginning to discover that he was to discoverer to somebody as well as the discoverer of some place and how complicated that was beginning to make his life.

My more general point which I must let lie rather baldly for want of time is about the theatre of encounter with this most perfect Endeavour replica. Its catharsis is to join us to a man of whom Charles Darwin said ‘added a hemisphere to the civilized world’. The speeches at its launching said that the Endeavour replica was a living creature imbued with Cook’s presence. Cook, they said, was the ‘most moderate, humane, gentle circumnavigator who ever went upon discovery’. The Endeavour replica was seen to be a symbol of courage, tenacity, skills endurance and leadership and of the Australian credo of ‘Have-a-go’.

I am not really setting up that to laugh at it. I merely want to point out the sort of
realism that a near perfect, five million dollar replica effects. It lends authenticity to our perceptions of our present humanistic, scientific selves. Cook is us in our better moments.

I've written about the authenticating effect of theatrical realism before. When this famous painting of the Apotheosis of Captain Cook, with Cook looking rather nervously at both Britannia and Fame, floated down on to the stage at the end of a pantomime in 1797, the audience joined the chorus with gusto:

*The hero of Macedon ran o'er the world*
*Yet nothing but death could he give*
*Twas George's command and the sail was unfur'd*
*And Cook taught mankind how to live*
*He came and he saw, not to conquer but to save.*
*The Caesar of Britain was he*
*Who scorned the conditions of making a slave*
*While Britons themselves are so free*
*Now the Genius of Britain forbids us to grieve*
*Since Cook ever honour'd immortal shall live.*

The realism of a brilliant stage designer, Philippe de Loutherbourg, and a brilliant painter, John Webber, authenticated their catharsis, made the hyperbole seem true. It is the same with the *Endeavour* replica.

Of course, off a NSW coast where there were Aboriginal eyes to see the *Endeavour* replica, and not in Port Phillip Bay, in the Bay of Islands where there were Maori eyes to see it, there was another form of catharsis. With aboriginal and Maori eyes to see it, the realism of the replica was leached of its humanism and science. What was left was the theatre of violence that Cook did in Tonga, Hawaii, Aotorea and wherever he put foot on land he did not own. Then the theatre of re-enactment is about the resistance indigenous ancestors would have made had they known the history to follow.

Forty years ago our cross-cultural research was characterized by a sort of intellectual innocence. Our excitement was sparked as much as anything by a famous re-enactment voyage—Thor Heyerdahl's Kontiki raft voyage from the Peruvian coast to the great thousand kilometre arc of atolls northeast of Tahiti, the Tuamotus. The Pacific peoples, specifically the Polynesians, came from the Americas, Heyerdahl had argued. We scoured everything botanical, linguistic, genetic, material, mythological, historical, anthropological, archaeological to prove him wrong.

We locked horns too with another famous but more curmudgeon scholar of the day—this is 1956–57–58—Andrew Sharp. His *Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific* scoffed at the notion of Pacific Vikings wandering vast ocean spaces freely. They were blown hither and yon, he wrote. Traditions to the contrary were just myths.

My first academic publication was a review essay on *Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific* in *Historical Studies*. I ghost wrote it for Mulvaney's Pacific Prehistory class. I still have Sharp's stinging rebuke in my
files. The faded blue aerogramme is a sort of scout's badge of adversarial academia. I keep it proudly because I knew I was right.

Do you want know how I knew I was right? One day I was reading in the glow of a lamp in the gloom of the Great Reading Room of the State Library of Victoria, on a green leather desk carved with the message that 'Too had been there', with a bucket behind me into which rain water dripped from a vast height, with a smelly, sleeping drunk beside me—I used to wear a clerical collar in those days, and half the homeless men in Melbourne used to sit beside me in the library because they thought that they would not be thrown out if they did—in this act of historical research which I re-enact for you right now in a sentence that clearly is never going to end—I read Harold Gatty's survival pamphlet for crashed airmen during the Second World War. It was full of the lore Gatty had learned from islanders about all the signposts to be found at sea—ocean swells and the shadows islands made in them, clouds and the colour of the lagoons reflected in them, birds, migrating or returning to land to roost, orienting stars. It was an enlightening moment for me in cross-cultural history. It was a moment of solidarity with experiences I had never had, a moment of trust and imagination, if you want. Anyone engaged in cross-cultural research will know that it is not the mountains of texts of the encounter between indigenous peoples and intruding strangers that are the problem. It is the depth of the silences. Translating silences is the hardest thing in cross-cultural research. Anyone in cross-cultural research will have to have trust and imagination to hear what is said in that silence.

Two other scholars were making their very first contribution to Pacific cross-cultural research in those years. Marshall Sahlins and Ben Finney. I felt jealous, I have to confess, of them both. Sahlins wrote 'Esoteric Efflorescence on Easter Island' in the American Anthropologist. It was part of his library—rather than field orientation of his doctoral dissertation on the Social Stratification of Polynesia. I was jealous of him because he was reading everything that I was reading but reading it differently and more creatively, —wrongly, but creatively. I decided that anthropology helped him do it. So I went off to do anthropology to get those reading skills.

But it is Finney I want to talk about. He had just written an article in one of Finland's prime academic journals on ancient surf-board riding in Hawaii. For many years there has been a deep interest in the tropical Pacific in Finland—no doubt there is plenty of trust and imagination in that. I was a little jealous of Finney because I thought that surf-board research was a pretty good lurk to get you out of the library and onto the beach. But it was the beginning for him of a career in which he has wedded theoretical
knowledge with practical skill. He calls it 'experimental archaeology' these days.

Finney was about to reconstruct a Hawaiian double canoe, a replica of King Kamehameha III's royal canoe. There was a precise plan of it in a French explorer's publications. Finney's purpose was modest: to test whether shallow rounded hulls would give resistance to leeway and whether the inverted triangular 'crab-claw' sail would drive the canoe into the wind. It was skepticism on these two points that drove, among other things, Heyerdahl's and Sharps arguments about the possibilities of Polynesian deliberate voyaging.

When Finney brought the canoe to Hawaii from California where he had done his tests, Mary Pakena Pukui, one of Hawaii's traditional scholars, called the canoe *Nahelia*, 'The Skilled Ones'—for the way in which the hulls gracefully rode the swells and into the wind. Already the project was getting larger than itself. The admiration caught in the name *Nahelia* was a sign of deeper cultural and political forces beginning to be focused in the question of how the Hawaiians, Tahitians, Maoris and Samoans encompassed Oceania, 'The Sea of Islands'.

In Oceania, the silences in cross-cultural research have been deep: the silences of victims; the silence of powerlessness; the silences of banal evil; the silences of what cannot be seen in any encounter with otherness. The voicelessness of an indigenous past and an indigenous present has been almost a presumption in Oceanic studies. 'The Fatal Impact' was Alan Moorhead's famous metaphor for it.

But all around the world, not just in the Pacific, there has been some resurrection found amid so much death. Histories now are of resistance. Not just of the open resistance that was crushed mercilessly by empires, but of that hidden resistance that preserved native identities in a new cultural idiom. 'Re-invented tradition' has been the phrase used to describe it, but that has been spurned by indigenous peoples as suggesting political opportunism and insincerity. I have not a phrase that would satisfy them yet. In my own mind I see it as creative aboriginality: the ability to see, despite all the transformations, the continuities that connect an indigenous past with an indigenous present. Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha in their subaltern studies have shown how it is done. It is done by imagination. Not fantasy. Imagination. The imagination of those many silence-breakers—poets, novelists, painters, carvers, dancers, filmmakers... I wish I had my time again. I can see my own dyslexia. My reading skills have to be enlarged.

Finney in 1975, now supported by and eventually relieved of his leading role by native-born Hawaiians, turned to the construction of an ocean-going canoe, *Hokule'a*. *Hokule'a* means 'Star of Joy', Arcturus, the zenith star, the homing star in Hawaii's celestial latitude. The overriding ambition of all *Hokule'a*'s great
These voyages have been an extraordinary achievement. There is no point in being romantic about them. The thirty years of this odyssey have had their pain and conflict, their tragedies and failures, their political machinations, their greed, their absurdities. But they also have been courageous over-all triumphs, tapping well-springs of cultural pride in a sense of continuity with a voyaging tradition. This has not just been in Hawaii, but in Tahiti, Samoa, Aotorea as well. Everywhere where she has gone it has been the same. The landfall has been a theatre of who island peoples are, who they have been.

This University has long made creative contributions to the question of Pacific peoples voyaging. Gerard Ward directed the first computer simulations. David Lewis initiated the experimental archaeology of voyaging and began the tapping of living traditions of navigation. So let me bypass all the debates on prehistoric exploration and proceed to a re-enactment of my own.

It begins with an insight of a New Zealand archaeologist, Geoffrey Irwin. His is also a sailor’s insight. Puzzling over the fact that most of the expansion eastward into the Pacific was against prevailing weather conditions, he suggests that the chief worry for a sailor was getting home. Prevailing and contrary weather conditions are not a disincentive for exploration. They are an incentive for it. Prevailing and contrary weather conditions will get a sailor home. He further suggests that the big jumps, east, north and south in the Pacific seemed to occur after about five hundred years localization in a region. Five hundred years is a long time to create a knowledge-bank of homing signs for a way finder.

Let me pick up the homecoming voyage of Hokule‘a from Tahiti to Hawaii in June 1980. It begins in Matavai Bay, Tahiti and ends 32 days later on the Big Island of Hawaii. Nainoa, a young man of Hawaiian birth, 25 years old, was the navigator.

Nainoa had apprenticed himself to Mau Piailug, the Micronesian navigator who
had taken *Hokule‘a* to Tahiti in 1976. Mau had given David Lewis much of his navigator’s lore, too. Nainoa has not got a Hawaiian tradition of navigation to call upon. That’s gone, or rather, too deeply imbedded in mythology and the language of the environment to be of much use. Nainoa had virtually to invent his system. He does not do it by learning western celestial navigation. He avoids that. But he has the Bishop Museum Planetarium in Honolulu to set in his mind the night skies. He can simulate the rising and setting of the stars for all seasons in Hawaii and for different latitudes. He creates for himself a star compass and sets it in his mind as in all systems of oral memory, with a metaphor. His metaphor for *Hokule‘a* is *manu*, a bird with outstretched wings. He has not just a star compass in his mind—different from the ones we know of in Micronesia—but a directional compass in his mind as well of 32 settings, or ‘houses’ as he calls them, more regular than the traditional settings. He sets himself to remember the rising and setting of stars, sun and moon in these houses. He also sets himself to calibrate his hand to the two great determinants of his Hawaiian latitudes, the North Star and the Southern Cross. When he is not in the Planetarium he is in the seas around Hawaii, experiencing the swells made by the dominant weather patterns and their seasons, the seas created by the changing winds and the movements made by the backlash of the sea against island shores and in the island shadows. His navigational lines, latitudinally, north and south in his system are relatively easy. But his movements east and west along a longitudinal line are far more complex, involving dead reckoning of miles sailed and the relativizing of theorizing and settings in his star compass. That will be the greatest anxiety of his navigation. He has to make landfall upwind of his destination, northeast of Tahiti, south east of Hawaii. Downwind, if he ends up there, will require tacking.

Let’s join him on the last three days of the voyage from Tahiti to Hawaii, May-June.
1980. He is tired and anxious. He sleeps hardly at all at night and not more than an hour at a time in the day. For ten days, high clouds had obscured the stars. He had steered mainly with the sun and the moon. The moon in its crescent carries the sun's shadow vertically near the equator, then more angled as they move north. The full moon on the horizon gave them a steering target. Dawn was the most important time, not just for the compass point of the sun's rising, but because the angle of the sun made reading swells and seas and the weather of the day to come easier. Mau, the Micronesian navigator, had thousands of dawns at sea in his mind. The Southern Cross as it moved lower and to the west brought him the judgement on that third last day that they were 550 miles SE of Hawaii. But they saw a land dove during the day. How could it have flown that distance between dawn and dusk?

They had passed through the equatorial doldrums. They had passed through that part of the ocean where the NW swell of the northern hemisphere passed over the SE swell of the southern and had given the distinctive pitch and roll movement of the canoe Nainoa had learned to feel these different motions of the canoe from Mau Piaulug—by lying prone on the decking. Now they were at the most anxious time of their voyage, wondering whether they should trust their calculations and turn westward in the Hawaiian latitudes. In way-finding—

the term they preferred to use rather than navigation—each day and night is a new calculation, a new assessment.

It is important to note that. What seemed undeniable in Sharp's argument was that errors were cumulative and once committed drove canoes into oblivion. But the discovery over all of Hokule’a’s voyage was that errors were random and tended to counter one another. But that did not relieve the tension at moments of critical commitment.

**FIGURE 7**

Tahiti to Hawai‘i in 1980, showing the actual track of Hokule’a, the reference course, and Nainoa’s dead reckoning (DR) positions estimated at sunrise (marked by ‘a’ following the date) and sunset (marked by ‘b’)
Tropic birds are plenty, but these are no sure sign of the direction of land. But there are *manu ku*, land doves too. They knew land was near. They caught the angle of the North Star against the horizon and got a clear sighting of the Southern Cross. These convinced them that their latitude calculations were right. On the second to last day Nainoa said they were 210 miles from the Big Island, but nervously changed his calculations to 300 miles.

All day on the last day, the clouds on the horizon seemed stationary. Clouds at sea moved. Clouds over land stayed still. There was something different about the setting sun. They couldn't say what, its colouring perhaps, as it caught the air around and above Hawaii. They alter their course a little in its direction. It is in the right house of Nainoa's compass for land.

Then a stationary white cloud opens up and reveals the long gentle slope of Mauna Kea on Hawaii. Nainoa says to himself: 'The way-finding at this moment seems to be out of my hands and beyond my control. I'm the one given the opportunity of feeling the emotions of way-finding, not yet ready to have a complete understanding of what is happening. It is a moment of self-perspective, of one person in a vast ocean given an opportunity of looking through a window into my heritage'.

I think he is correct. All over Polynesia, island peoples saw themselves in their canoes—in the canoe's making, in its parts, in its launching, in its voyaging. The canoe was an icon of all sorts of continuities of identity, an icon of a conjoining past and present. I don't have difficulty in believing that island peoples can recognise themselves in *Hokule'a* and embroider that recognition with all sorts of re-births of traditional arts and crafts, with dance, poetry and song. Whatever the transformations of modernity that masquerade as discontinuities—religion, science, politics—the theatre of *Hokule'a*'s re-enactment is directed to that recognition.
ART INTO LANDSCAPES:
NEW AUSTRALIAN IMAGES THROUGH
BRITISH EYES

"The anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than
with time. Time probably appears to us only as one of the various distributive operations that
are possible for the elements that are spread out in space."

(Michael Foucault, 1967, Berlin lectures)

The Honourable Walter J. James, Lord Northbourne, devoted the inaugural
Charlton Lecture, delivered in October 1919, to tracing the emergence of the
modern landscape tradition in European art. He argued that

'Landscape in its wider sense appeals in
some degree to most people, and probably
affects all, whether they be aware of it or
not, yet as a subject for representation or
interpretation by the artist it comes
chronologically, comparatively late into
its own, and the pictorial treatment appears
to be the product of advancing civilization.
In all European art the depiction of land-
scape remains comparatively primitive
long after the artists have attained to a high
degree of skill in their treatment of the
human figure'

James argued, a landscape could occupy
the background where with 'charm due
principally to naivety and childlike
simplicity' it complemented the sophis-
ticated figurative compositions of the
foreground. It was only when the land-
scape became the subject of the
foreground space 'as a product of
advancing civilization', that in James's
categories we could speak of true
landscape art.

Both the physical landscape and land-
scape art can be described as being
structured by history. Eric Hirsch,
approaching the landscape from an
anthropological perspective, draws a
distinction between a 'foreground', as
designating the here and now, an actual-
ity of place, and a 'background', which
falls into the realm of potentiality, the
horizon and the more abstract under-
standing of space. The duality within
the landscape can also be related to the
historian Paul Carter's notion of spatial
history. This can be interpreted as a process of claiming through the use of language the foreground actuality and relating it to the background potentiality. Carter writes 'In the seventy years or so after the First Fleet's arrival, the Australian landscape was mapped—even discovered, since it was not until Flinders circumnavigated Australia in 1801-2 that it was established as a discrete and single land mass; the Australian interior was explored, its map-made emptiness written over, criss-crossed with explorer's tracks, gradually inhabited with a network of names; the Australian coastal strip, especially between the Great Divide and the sea, was progressively furrowed and blazed with boundaries, its estuaries and riverine flats pegged out for towns. The discoverers, explorers and settlers—and they were often one and the same person—were making spatial history. They were choosing directions, applying names, imagining goals, inhabiting the country.'

Like the discoverers, explorers and settlers, early Australian landscape artists, (again they were frequently either the same people as the explorers or at least travelled with them), claimed the landscape by visually recording it. The Anglo-Australian artist, S.T. Gill, who had arrived in South Australia from Plymouth in 1839, travelled with the John Ainsworth Horrocks expedition in 1846 in search of suitable grazing land in the Lake Torrens region. He published his account in the same year in the South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register under the title 'Progress of Discovery—'

**FIGURE 1**

S.T. Gill, 'Spencer's Gulf from Flinders Range, August 10, 1846, watercolour, 184 x 314 mm

*Expedition to the north-west*. On the eve of his departure he explained that he was travelling 'as an amateur [explorer] for the purpose of filling his note book' and on his return he wished 'to give a full, true and accurate report of his adventures with... faithful scenic representations.'

Gill's faithful scenic representations almost invariably cast the human activities within the foreground space of actuality and these are shown against a distant background of largely unexplored potentiality. In the foreground space we are presented with the mechanics of exploration—scenes of making camp, of explorers seated around a campfire, of surveying the terrain, of meetings with the natives and with the exploits of hunting. The depictions are all annotated with detail inscriptions which chart the exact location of each scene and with the precise date. These are also cross-referenced to the written diary accounts. The foreground space is an actuality which is given specificity through word and image, the words record that the image
was done, while the image frequently records the veracity of the words. We are presented with the visual evidence of Horrocks shown in the act of exploring and on several occasions the artist depicts himself in the act of taking the views. The background deals with the unknown and the unknowable, it is the space outside the known and claimed foreground. It is interesting to note that when Gill recreated these scenes in the 1850s, after he had shifted to Melbourne, the foreground narratives remained essentially fixed and unaltered, it was tangible reality with its own historical narrative, while the background was something fluid and pointed to the realm of the imagination.

While much of the contemporary written account of this exploration deals with encounters with 'hostile natives', it was in fact the combination of two props brought along by the explorers themselves, the camel to carry supplies and a shot gun, which lead to fatal unravelling of the expedition. Horrocks decided to shoot a bird as a specimen and while loading his gun for this purpose, the camel lurched unexpectedly and the weapon accidentally discharged, wounding the explorer fatally. In the three weeks which Horrocks spent dying, amongst his final words he uttered '[Gill] has taken several sketches of this country which will show those interested how very impossible it is that any stations can be made to the west of Lake Torrens.'

Despite the truth and accurateness of the depictions, not only did Gill's imagery have a specific political agenda, but the landscape conventions of painting which he employed, the picturesque, itself carried with it a considerable ideological baggage. The landscape which was recorded in words and in images was historically structured and engaged a whole series of competing discourses.

Social geographers have long argued that 'while the contents of landscapes and places may be unique, they are nonetheless the products of common cultural and symbolic systems. Intersubjective intentions and experiences may be thought of as embodied in the physical environment, and interpretable through a sympathetic reading of its cultural landscape.' In a similar way, a painted landscape is essentially a cultural image 'a pictorial way of representing or symbolizing surroundings.' With painted landscapes the intersubjective intentions also compete with the discourse of the formal requirements of the pictorial conventions employed by the artist. In nineteenth-century Australian landscape painting, notions of the picturesque or of the sublime carried with them their own repertoire of painted strategies.

The pluralism of artistic strategies in recent twentieth century art has generally shifted the emphasis from the representation of the landscape to an analysis of the beholder's perception of landscape and the analysis of this perceptual process. If in the nineteenth century
the perception of the physical landscape became predicated on the viewer recognizing it as such from painted examples, in much of landscape art of the second half of the twentieth century, this representational nexus is broken. The landscape architect Gina Crandell notes 'modern artists no longer produce illusions that attempt to convince us they are natural views. Instead they demand that traditional pictorial conventions be measured against the actual experiences of the landscape. The focus of modern painting is blurred, their subject has changed: it is no longer the view 'out there'; instead, it is the perceptual experience of the spectators themselves. The emphasis is on seeing rather than on what is seen.'

Once the requirements of the mimetic role of landscape art had loosened, increasingly the artistic focus shifted to the unexplored background potentiality which could then be shaped as an armature to carry a host of personal anxieties. In British art, Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland and David Bomberg used this landscape of anxiety through which to graft formal elements drawn from Surrealism onto recognizable landscape elements. In the Australian experience, the apocalyptic landscapes of early Arthur Boyd, Peter Purves Smith and Russell Drysdale, also employed a recognizable Australian setting to express personal, as well as broader social anxieties.

Contemporary British-born artists, who trained in Britain and who tackle the Australian landscape, unlike their predecessors, are no longer constrained by the strict representational function of landscape art. Three such artists, David Blackburn, Mary Husted and John Wolseley, while all rejecting literalness of depiction as an end in itself, can be viewed as exploring three different directions in landscape art within essentially a postmodernist context. David Blackburn, who for the past twenty-five years has divided his time between Yorkshire and Australia, has found in the Australian landscape a metaphor for an inner spiritual life, an escape into a visionary landscape tradition. Details found within a foreground space are taken out of a fixed actuality and are projected into the background distance giving them the quality of a changing dream caught within a constant process of metamorphosis. John Wolseley, who settled in Australia in 1976, has set out to systematically study the workings of nature, the mind of the environment. Through a precise empirical investigation of the processes of nature, he has sought to comment on global changes. Mary Husted, a Welsh artist, is a relatively recent visitor to Australia, who in her constructions and installations sets out to create her own personal spatial geography of the Australian landscape.

The visionary tradition of landscape painting, associated with the work of David Blackburn, may be interpreted as one largely preoccupied with a background potentiality, where anxiety points
to a path of spiritual escape. While the paintings of late Turner, William Blake and Samuel Palmer all contain elements of this landscape vision, and ultimately its general origins may be traced back to the Northern European Romantic tradition of landscape painting and printmaking, the visionary landscape moved in a new direction in the twentieth century when the mandatory links with a representational reality had largely disappeared.

David Blackburn, an Anglo-Australian artist, recalled recently: 'I was born in Huddersfield and remember as a child living alongside engineering works which I perceived as grim, grey and ugly, and yet one could gaze at fields and woods intensely green across the valley.' In a sense this can be interpreted as an awareness and conscious rejection of the foreground actuality and the search for an escape in the potentiality of the background vision. Just before his twenty-fourth birthday, in June 1962, David Blackburn arrived in Australia for the first time. He had behind him a thorough and somewhat traditional training from the Huddersfield School of Art and from London's Royal College of Art. Earlier he had met the Austrian expressionist artist Gerhardt Frank who had introduced him to pastels, a medium to which he subsequently devoted virtually all of his creative energies.

The three years and a bit which David Blackburn spent in Australia during his first visit were devoted to matching pictorial schema which he brought with him from Britain with the experience of the Australian reality. At the time, his letters back home were permeated with a euphoric enthusiasm for the Australian landscape and expressed an admiration for the exotic scenery and the new qualities of light and colour. Although he found the new quality of light a revelation and was struck by the scenery he encountered in Central Australia, on the Nullarbor, in the west and in Queensland, the drawings and prints which he made during this period reflected little of this and were essentially dark and almost monochromatic. It was as if he was overwhelmed by the vastness of the background potentiality and working primarily in black chalk, he concentrated on biomorphic studies taken from small precise elements in the very foreground space of nature. The gnarled shape of roots, designs which grasses made on sand, the bark on trees and the brittle
broken pattern of leaves made up a major part of the iconography of his first Australian exhibition. The focus was on minute details which disguised both the sense of scale and their relationship to the whole.

The single major series of work to emerge from the three-year period which David Blackburn spent in Australia was the black pastel twenty-one panel *The Creation* series. In a way this was a juvenile work of high Romanticism, rich in literary allusions and drawing on visual sources as diverse as Leonardo's drawing of man as the measure of all things and William Blake's haunting image of *The Ancient of Days*. It was also a series which grappled with several of the central concerns in his oeuvre, that of metamorphosis, polarities of light and darkness, and the question concerning the passage of time. In terms of the Australian landscape, it, more than anything else, marked his inability to come to terms with the new forms and the new light which he encountered and which so much fascinated him. As was the case with so many of his fellow countrymen, on his first visit to Australia, David Blackburn was an Englishman in search of a familiar setting, but unlike them he did not seek out to translate his surroundings into the terms of an English reality, but sought out details through which he felt he could uncover the secret workings of nature in the Antipodes. The painters to whom he turned were essentially the Anglo-

Australian and European masters, particularly John Glover, Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts, Conrad Martens and Louis Buvelot, who themselves were caught in the process of interpreting the Australian landscape in terms of European visual paradigms including the Claudian vision, Barbizon naturalism and the 'glare aesthetics' of Orientalism.

When David Blackburn returned to Australia five years later in 1971, he found a path through which he could reapproach the Australian landscape. The crucial factor was his meeting with Fred Williams, the Australian landscape painter who in his practice introduced the cubist structuring of pictorial space to the Australian landscape. Williams deconstructed the individual elements in nature—rocks, trees, stumps, hillsides and shrubs; divorced them from the European conventions of constructed perspectival space, and then reintroduced them in startlingly new configurations on a totally flattened picture plane which rejected the traditional divisions between the foreground and the background. Within this process he also rejected notions of European Picturesque compositions with their scenic focal point and created a reading of the Australian landscape which was fundamentally featureless, which had a randomness and a breathing ease, and one which had a strong sense of site-specific authenticity. Although a number of David Blackburn's Australian works of 1971–72 reflect closely his fascination...
with Fred Williams's vision, this was essentially a liberating, rather than a cloning experience.

David Blackburn's most recent visit to Australia in 1995–96, involved his first serious encounter with Aboriginal art. Almost as if in a logical progression, if Williams for Blackburn appeared to strip the Australian landscape of its visual irrelevancies and expose its formal structural elements which could be reassembled in accordance with a new artistic schema, Australian Aboriginal artists exposed the bones of the landscape, those elements which were created at the time of the Dreaming and which are not subject to change through ephemeral elements such as surface vegetation or the changing seasons. For Blackburn's work the most significant Aboriginal artist was Rover Thomas, who with his fields of rich subdued colour and crisp articulated surfaces, created an authentic and convincing reading of the Australian landscape. Blackburn's visionary landscapes over the past decade have absorbed the actuality of the foreground space into a rich metaphoric vision which nevertheless retains the quality of a sense of place, but one enriched through a personal spirituality.

Earlier this year he noted 'I try to use the landscape as a metaphor for feelings, to use the recognizable outer world as a means of giving form to my inner life—my visions, fantasies, sense of the spiritual. The fact is that an object or a landscape can have several realities. For instance, a drawing may suggest a cliff or a quarry, a flower-head or an oriental bowl, or an estuary seen from the air. The forms dissolve into each other like images in a film. I am trying to allude to many things rather than simply to describe one particular reality. The drawings develop as much from each other as from the landscape itself so that the reality comes as much from my own internal landscape as from any external topography.'

If David Blackburn was born essentially into a family with no artistic connections or pretentious and then found his own path into the visionary landscape tradition, John Wolseley was born in England in 1938 into a family steeped in artistic traditions and has spent much of his life in attempting to repudiate this heritage. His father, Garnet Ruskin Wolseley, was a tonal realist painter, a prize-winning Slade School artist, who was part of the Newlyn artists' colony, and who was an amateur archaeologist who championed the ideas of John Ruskin and was generally hostile to most manifestations of modernism. John Wolseley, after a traditional training at Byam Shaw and then at the St Martin's School of Art in London, turned his back on tonal realism and immersed himself in post-war modernism in Paris where he worked for eighteen months with the English modernist printmaker, S.W. Hayter at Atelier 17. What he shared in common with his father was an enormous visual curiosity, a nomadic predisposition and the habits of a data-gathering magpie.
In an attitude to art most clearly expressed in the writings of Leonardo da Vinci, the landscape and nature are not considered as static entities which simply exist, but they are viewed as part of a process which is constantly in a state of change and the role of the artist is to try to decipher this process. Leonardo, for example, writing notes to himself about observing sand dunes, noted: 'Describe the mountains of 'flexible dry things'. Treat that is of the formation of the waves of sand borne by the wind, and of its hillocks and hills as it occurs in Libya; you may see examples in the great sand banks of the Po and the Ticino and other large rivers.' In another place he noted 'If the earth of the antipodes which sustains the ocean rose up and stood uncovered far out of this sea but being almost flat, how in process of time could mountains, valleys and rocks with their different strata be created? The mud or sand from which the water drains off when they are left uncovered after the floods of the rivers supplies an answer to this question...'

Exactly five hundred years later, John Wolseley was to revisit similar themes. In 1993 he observed: 'I have been trying to understand sand dunes—their layering, their rhythms and movements and their cyclic developments which have the structure and elegance of a complex mathematical theory. Often I have been camped in the swale of some huge longitudinal dune and during the night, the wind from some unusual quarter has quarried down through several strata of sand and revealed hidden layers of great antiquity—say a thousand year old camp of the Wanganuru people. Or revealed the geography of an older dune system which in turn may cover the fossilized remains of a Pleistocene forest. I have been looking upon these layered 'archaeologies', these gold and red piles of different histories and systems as a metaphor for the human psyche; the way each of us could be seen as a walking many-layered world of passions, ancestral memories, neuroses, genetic patterns and ancient archetypes.'

The American geographer, John Kirtland Wright, coined the term 'Geopiety' which married the Greek root for 'earth' with the Latin 'piety', as an expression of reverence for the earth and the planet. Yi-Fu Tuan has extended this meaning to include 'the compassionate urge to protect the fragile beauty and goodness of life against its enemies, not the least of which is time.' John Wolseley's attitude
to the environment can be seen to fall within the broad parameters of geopiety. He seeks not only to empirically observe and record the landscape, but also to actively interact with it. He noted recently 'When leaving a favourite place I have been in the habit of making a drawing and burying it by my camp... I will usually return a year or two later. One half of the drawing is still preserved pristine in my portfolio, but the part I exhume may be changed in the most varied and mysterious ways according to the habitat. Waves of colour, stains, crystalline mosaics, specklings, dapplings, all hint at unknown agencies. There are traces of unseen movements and events which fall through the sand above the drawing as it lies in its silent resting place.'

In the last few years John Wolseley has been concerned with tracing the break-up of the supercontinent of Gondwana as it drifted apart into the continents of Australia, South America, Antarctica, Africa and India. By examining in great detail the tiny spores, pollen, seedpods and lichen in Tasmania and Patagonia, he establishes, what Paul Carter refers to in his essay 'The Anxiety of Clearings', the feeling that of 'an uncanny sense of having been here before.' The details of the foreground space, gathered with an empirical accuracy, form a microcosm through which to tackle the potentiality of the macrocosm. While tracing the movement of continents based on evidence left within a fragile environ-ment, John Wolseley's art engages with conservation issues and tackles the forestry industry giants and their senseless destruction of the Australian native forests. Although his work celebrates the timeless scribblings of glaciers, it also refers to the anxiety of vanishing spaces. He writes in a catalogue 'I have several times returned to a site to finish a painting and found my gaze meets earth ravaged and denuded. Often there are rows of partly burnt debris and the area has been scorched, ploughed or ripped.'

When Mary Husted first came to Australia in 1989, it was not so much with a feeling that she had been here before, but with an overwhelming sensation that she had arrived into a landscape which she could traverse and claim as a personal topography, a landscape through which she could establish her own identity. Born in Leicester in England in 1944, as the second of two twins, her mother died at childbirth apparently having seen the first daughter, Roma, but not Mary. Questions of her identity, her relationship to her mother, whom she never knew, and to her aunt who brought her up, and to her Welsh and English ancestry, have been central to her life and art. Like David Blackburn and John Wolseley, the natural landscape, ever since her childhood, has been a place of refuge and escape, a place where one could both lose oneself and find oneself.

Her constructed black boxes of landscape, like little islands of spatial anxiety surrounded by mirrors, convert the
viewer into a voyeur, who is invited to peer into ambiguous spaces which are loaded with visual clues. No matter how persistent the inquirer, the palimpsest which she builds up in her work does not permit a rational decipherment, the enigma of identity and questions concerning the nature of the landscape experience are forever present and remain unanswered. She creates a labyrinth of associations and a series of physical visual hurdles which the beholder needs to overcome to enter into her constructed landscape spaces.

After the world at large was convinced that the artist had retired from active art making, Marcel Duchamp, somewhat secretively, in a studio loft in New York spent the last two decades of his life, from 1946 to 1966, working on an installation landscape to which he gave the title 'Étant Donnés: 1) la chute d'eau, 2) le gaz d'éclairage...') Now housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, it is one of the most famous and enigmatic works in the entire history of twentieth-century art. No matter how closely one peers through the pair of holes in the weathered wooden Spanish door, framed by a brick archway, the image remains mysterious and partly concealed. In the background there is a flowering garden of fecundity which is reproduced in the slightly garish colours resembling a cheap 1930s picture postcard. The focal point of the background is a kinetic waterfall, which appears almost like an
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abstracted and unattainable image of a heavenly utopia. It is a landscape of fantasies and potentiality. In the foreground, seen through a gap crudely punched out of a brick wall, lies a naked woman's torso with erotically splayed out legs. She is cast against an autumnal setting, which is barren and desolate, the branches are bare and prickly. The potential for the voyeuristic pleasure of the experience is subverted by the sensation that we are witnessing a scene of violence and violation. Yet no matter how intently we peer through the tiny apertures, we can never catch a glimpse of the woman's face, the sole clue as to her identity is the lock of blond hair which somewhat carelessly lies near her bosom. The reading of this foreground space, the traditional specificity of the here and now actuality, as a scene of carnage or human sacrifice, is complicated by the fact that the nude is shown holding a burning lantern which illuminates the space, almost in a gesture of triumph or defiance. Duchamp casts a set of clues which automatically engage the beholder, but which in their nature are irreconcilable.

Mary Husted's small installed landscapes conceptually relate to the formal strategies employed by Duchamp, however their intent and purpose are different. Her boxes of memory create a deceptive space (where the sense of ambiguity is heightened through the use of mirrors) and where the cryptic clues refuse to point to accessible solutions. However, unlike Duchamp who claimed that there was no solution as there was no problem, Mary Husted's compositions point to a set of questions and propose solutions, but in each instance vital elements in this jigsaw are missing. The landscape which she constructs is both real and tangible, but it is encoded as a personal topography. Within this landscape she has created her own spatial forms and idiosyncratic fantasies, through this symbolizing both her surroundings and her imagined place within them.

Photographic images of herself as a child, her sister, mother and aunt, in some pieces are collaged into the darkened surfaces and are combined with trophies from nature, leaves, twigs and feathers, themselves encoded symbols of a mysterious landscape.

Physical landscapes, landscapes of the mind and landscapes in art are all structured by history, are all, in one sense or another, cultural images which represent and symbolize their surroundings.

SASHA GRISHIN

Sasha Grishin is a Reader in the Department of Art History, ANU and is curator of the exhibition New Australian Images through British Eyes: David Blackburn, Mary Husted and John Wolseley which will open at the ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra on September 4 and will continue until October 5, 1997.
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2 Ibid., p 13


4 Paul Carter, The Road to Botany Bay: An essay in spatial history, Faber and Faber, London 1987, pp xx–xxi

5 Keith Macrae Bowden, Samuel Thomas Gill: Artist, Hedges and Bell, Maryborough 1971, p114


7 Bowden, op. cit., p 17


10 S. Daniels and D. Cosgrove (eds.), The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on symbolic representation, design and use of past environments, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, p 1


15 David Blackburn was born in Huddersfield in Yorkshire in 1939 and has lived for seven prolonged periods in Australia between 1963–66; 1971–72; 1973–74; 1977–78; 1980–81; 1984 and 1995–96. He is included as an Australian artist in all editions of McCulloch’s Encyclopedia of Australian Art. See for example Alan

16 David Blackburn, artist's statement April 1997.

17 Gerhardt Frankl (1901–65)


21 David Blackburn, artist's statement, April 1997.


23 John Wolseley, artist's statement in catalogue *Paintings, Lithographs and Sedimentary Prints from the Simpson Desert by John Wolseley*, Rex Irwin, Sydney 1993 np.


26 John Wolseley, artist's statement in *To the Surface: Contemporary landscape*, Plimsoll Gallery Centre for the Arts, Hobart 1993, p. 29.


28 John Wolseley, 'Endnote ... and a conclusion? A conversation between John Wolseley and Tim Cadman', in Ibid., np.

29 In English: 'Given: 1) the waterfall, 2) the illuminating gas...'